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“Revolutionary Claims: Transatlantic Agency in the Fictions of Godwin, Brown, and  
Irving”

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Doctor of Philosophy

Comparative Literature

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B.A., DePaul University, 2000

Advisor: Dr. Deborah Elise White

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## Abstract

### “Revolutionary Claims: Transatlantic Agency in the Fictions of Godwin, Brown, and Irving”

By Jessica Demetra Sellountos

While the revolutions in America and France began with different goals and ended with different results, the people of the eighteenth century who felt their influence in Britain and America shared a common experience: a loss of social tradition and order caused or greatly accelerated by the experience of political and social upheaval. Anglophone literatures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century responded to this crisis in works reflecting on the shift from monarchy to democracy in which subjects found themselves without a king, lord, or sovereign. I argue that William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* offers a model for early American Gothic, captivity narratives of Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving as they stage the emergence of an uncertain, revolutionary subject suspended between feudal and democratic orders. But Godwin is not merely an influence on Brown and Irving: rather the revolutionary subject at stake in their work is necessarily transatlantic--not engendered by any particular nation per se but rather by the phenomenon of revolution experienced as a suspended event occurring across continents in the eighteenth century.

Godwin, Brown and Irving use the motifs of curiosity, indecision, and paralyzing uncertainty to allegorize the emergence of this revolutionary subjectivity but also to show its failure to found itself as an authoritative agency with a claim to direct representation. As a number of critics have shown, revolution creates a paradox by founding the very conditions that are necessary to give it political legitimacy. The problem for the subject of democracy then, as these transatlantic authors show, becomes the need to receive legitimacy as agents from the very sovereigns they had severed themselves from. The protagonists in these texts remain uncertain, as they repeatedly encounter the aporetic impossibility of their revolutionary claim and become caught in the political and moral dilemmas of saving or eradicating the monarchs who have ruled over them.

Godwin, Brown and Irving present this uncertainty as a repeated interruption disturbing their protagonists' testimonies of tyranny and disrupting their ability to control their revolutionary impulses for violence and compulsive self-analysis. These interruptions appear in the literary texts as ellipses, anachronisms and scenes of suspended consciousness; they paralyze the construction of a coherent, reliable narrative and narrator. Ultimately, the protagonists of these narratives simultaneously construct and deconstruct their subjectivities by their unsuccessful attempts to claim autonomy through the act of narrative. Revolutionary subjectivity is never completely attainable, and thus becomes the basis for a larger, transnational allegory questioning whether national narratives and national identities are themselves completely attainable.

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*Introduction*

## 1. Revolutionary Claims: Transatlantic Agency in the Fictions of Godwin, Brown, and Irving

“The novelist, he [Godwin] contended, must dominate his reader, hold him by a very powerful interest, even terrorize him. The novel must have a moral purpose and the reader must be *changed* because of his reading”  
(Pattee xxxv; emphasis mine).

At a time when the humanities are under threat in the twenty-first century, asserting the utility of literature is paramount. The time to return to literature and reexamine its political function has never been more critical. Historically, literature’s unique contribution has been its capacity not only to witness but also to testify to political events in ways that existing discourses have either failed to accurately comprehend or bluntly articulate. In modernity, postcolonial literatures implicitly held a constitutive relationship to politics because of the inception of empire in the last few centuries. For example, American literature always had a relationship to politics because of its inception as a Spanish and English hybrid colonial discourse detailing the discovery and plunder of North America. Having been first conceived in the context of the extension of the Spanish or British Empire, American literature took its own political evolution as its object—even before the advent of the American Revolution.<sup>1</sup> After the revolution, the need for literature to articulate the dramatic social and political shifts was great, and writers across the Atlantic responded to anxieties about what identity, authority and form the new republic would assume.

Specifically, the eighteenth century inaugurated a series of revolutions that resulted in the emergence of a new political subjectivity, whose origin and literary figuration in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Anglophone literatures is the topic of this dissertation. The revolutions in America and France began with different

goals and ended with different results.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, they share certain key themes and experiences: life in a “post-feudal social order” dominated by the struggle between coexisting, post-revolutionary and “feudal or monarchic” logics.<sup>3</sup> This crisis was experienced not only as an uncertainty of both moral and political authority, but also as the desacralization of feudal custom and societies, the “loss” of social “tradition” (Arendt 117), order and end of chivalry. Radical ideas of political autonomy, direct representation and individual rights followed the figural and literal coupé of Kings. People were suddenly faced with a new crisis, owing to the revolutionary act of severing themselves from their sovereign and issuing forth the creation of a new, political, *revolutionary* subject--one left without a feudal lord, King or God. In this dissertation, I examine how Anglophone literatures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries responded to this crisis as though it were a question--namely, ‘Who is the *subject* of revolution?.’<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation argues that American and British literary texts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries anticipate the emergence of a radical and autonomous, self-ruling revolutionary subject. As such, my research inquiry questions the self-definition of such eighteenth-century figures as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s in “Letters from an American Farmer” (1782) in which he asks, “‘What is an American?’” (Crèvecoeur, qtd. in E. White 18) and finds that “‘an American’, as described by Crèvecoeur, is actually the Pennsylvanian” (18) and the “land speculator” (19) or “merchant” (21). Rather than attempt to identify a revolutionary subject by nation or land, I argue that the identification of a subject should be made by experience--in this case, the experience of the “event” (Arendt 37) of revolution.

The transatlantic events of revolution in the eighteenth century engendered a “revolutionary subjectivity” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 421) that cannot be reduced to any American *national* identity or production but is rather characteristic of the tumultuous and shared experience of revolution across nations even as it may take on specific features in different settings. This revolutionary event was not peculiar to any nation, but rather experienced across continents as a “transatlantic democratic revolution” (Daniel 394). As such, I argue that--in their attempts to define, characterize and make sense of the contradictions inherent in revolution, both British and American authors allegorize the emergence of a new, transatlantic, revolutionary subjectivity in their literary texts.

In particular, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the circulation of political and philosophical ideas between disintegrating and newly forming nations having proximity to the Atlantic ocean: while one American nation reeled fresh from its break from its sovereign monarch, across the shores, another revolution raged in France. And in between was Britain--struggling to cope with revolution threatening to pervade its borders, whether from America, France, or its explosive and subjugated colonies in Ireland and Scotland. Ironically, while Britain avoided its own revolution owing at least in part to the Anti-Jacobin policies of William Pitt, and thus did not experience revolution directly, Britain did in fact, experience it indirectly.<sup>5</sup> As the delirious hub of intellectual and political exchanges--both public and private--on the events of revolution either still smoldering in America or erupting in Europe, Britain became the locus of hundreds of pamphlets, treatises and books published on revolution,

the debated event *par excellence* of its time.<sup>6</sup> This hotbed of transatlantic ideas had readership in America, France and England.<sup>7</sup> American and French writers crisscrossed the Atlantic to document their own reflections on revolution, which were thematized in sentimental novels in late-eighteenth-century America depicting immoral mistresses hiding copies of Paine under their pillows.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, French authors allegorized the catastrophic fall of the *ancien régime* as a symptom of male “impotence” (Waller 141).

Britain was right to be nervous: revolution in the eighteenth century threatened to affect everyone everywhere. One need not have seen revolution firsthand to experience it. As Tennenhouse explains, “no author writing fiction in English from North America could write outside a transatlantic system of exchange, even if he or she wanted to do so” (12). Authors like Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, and Fenimore Cooper, for example, were influenced by their experiences across the Atlantic, where America was viewed as what Anne McClintock called a “pornotropics” that enacted the “fears” and anxieties of Europe (McClintock, qtd. in Giles 254). To these writers “nation was a complicated and slippery term in the eighteenth century . . . its dominant practical association at the time was with Native Americans—that is, with the Nation as ‘the Other’” (E. White 13). Examining these texts allows the reader to see how a call for a transatlantic mode of reading is implicitly produced by the transatlantic intertextuality of the texts themselves.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. A Transatlantic and Transnational Approach: Framing the Project within American Studies and Comparative Literature

This dissertation adopts a transnational and transatlantic, comparative reading approach. In this section I briefly address transnationalism, what it is and how it relates to the broader picture of Comparative Literature and American Studies, and finally, the varying transnational reading strategies I employ in my textual analysis, to propose that Godwin, Brown and Irving produce a class of transatlantic, revolutionary--and not explicitly national--literature.

The problem with “comparative approaches” to American and British literature, as Giles diagnoses it, is that they “tend . . . to reinforce existing identities by . . . playing off national mythologies against each other” (Giles, *Virtual Americas* 4). From D. H. Lawrence, to Malcolm Bradbury, to Northrop Frye, “American literature” has been viewed “as harboring an oppositional romanticism” to British romanticism (4), and the “area studies model endorsed” by “American studies” views American spaces, such as the “nation,” states and cities in the U.S., “as emblematic” of a unifying national “identity” (7) espousing either hegemonic liberation, liberalism, pastoralism, capitalism, or transcendentalism, etc. (14). I argue, that rather than make up a national narrative (and establish a relationship between literature and national identity), the works addressed in this dissertation act to destabilize this relationship, and any other subsequent narrative of liberalism and continuity, and that this act of destabilization is part of what constitutes their revolutionary character.

The effort to examine American literature without seeking traits of its universal ‘Americanness’ is not new. Recent reconsiderations of the “binary” view of American literature (as “oppositional romanticism”) (4) by critics such as Paul Giles and David

Damrosch attempt to engage the overlapping current theoretical efforts in both American and British studies, which they see as exploring an “ideology of exchange” that can reveal “estranged perspectives” on both “cultures” (5). For Giles, “[t]o reconsider American literature” “in a transnational context” is “to reimagine” nationalism “as a virtual construction”--“a residual narrative rather than a unifying social power” (20). In addition, “[t]o virtualize literary and cultural texts is to subject them to the kind of ‘reversible process’ that is characteristic of digital technology” (Giles 17). Moreover, “[v]irtual domains create . . . ‘a *crisis of boundaries* . . . between time zones and . . . spaces” (18)--as, for example, the mountain domain performs in “Rip Van Winkle.” This is the method that Giles undertakes, and the primary method I adopt in this dissertation.

As Giles notes, Julia Kristeva defines transnationalism as working “to reveal the circumference of national formations and thus to empty out their peremptory claims to legitimacy” (17). This “differs from the older critical” angles of “comparative literature,” which were predicated “on the notion of . . . transcending national cultures,” which it “viewed as parochial and intellectually irrelevant” (17). Giles adds “[b]y contrast,” “Transnationalism” “positions itself at a point of intersection . . . where the coercive aspects of imagined communities are turned back on themselves . . . or mirrored, so that their covert presuppositions and ideological inflections become apparent” (17). I argue that Brown and Irving provide an example of Giles’ virtualization “process” (17). For these “American” authors in their revisionary relationship to Godwin, one finds--much as Giles finds for Douglass: “the boundary between Britain and America operated as a

mirror within which each culture could hold up for examination the power structures and presumptions of the other” (16).

My transnational critical endeavor thus explicitly adopts the approaches of Giles and Paul Jay. As Giles notes, “[i]nteraction between transnationalism and national identity” is a “complex historical phenomenon” (16). “Rather than seeking” “to transcend national boundaries in the name of a universalist humanism” or “multiculturalism,” Giles is “interested in what happens when different national formations collide or intersect each other” (5). Quoting Jay “[i]n an essay on the ‘globalization’ of literary studies,” Giles seems to agree with Jay’s suggestion that “we might ‘usefully complicate our nation-based approach to the study of English, not by dropping the nation-state paradigm, but by foregrounding its history and its function *for* the nation-state,’ to examine ways literature has been instrumental in consolidating or interrogating forms of national identity” (Jay, qtd. in Giles 5; original emphasis).

More specifically, I consider ways in which William Godwin, Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving wrote fiction through the perspective of alterity rather than identity and thus denaturalized what was “supposedly familiar” to the American or British reader, and consequently revealed the strange “components” that made up “formations of the ‘national psyche’” (3). By “reconsidering national formations from a position of estrangement”--in part, precisely by taking Godwin as such a crucial model--American writers like Brown “situate themselves to illuminate the nation’s unconscious assumptions, boundaries, and prescribed areas” (Giles 3).<sup>10</sup> I argue that Brown and Irving engage in this activity, and allegorize these “assumptions” (3) by playing on different

states of the unconscious even as Godwin does in what may be taken as a kind of primal transatlantic text, *Caleb Williams*.

In doing so, I borrow ideas by Shirley Samuels, in particular, from her seminal work, *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (1996). Samuels' insights inform my analyses of these literary texts, which feature the "family" as an "analogy" for "revolution" ("an upheaval in the social order") (Samuels 13). Samuels argues that, historically, the family was caught in the violent negotiation between the "historical" "move from patriarchy," and "hierarchy" "to fraternalism" and egalitarianism (13). She contends this "struggle for power" was "often figured" in literature as "competition over a woman" (13) and played out in a "family romance" (Hunt, qtd. in Samuels 13).

But while I borrow some methods and reading strategies from Samuels, I do not explicitly follow her in tracing how "gender implicates race and nation in signifying relations of power" (12). Instead, I argue that Godwin, Brown, and Irving's literary texts do not stage the "seduction" of a woman (9), but rather the seduction of *reason*. None of their protagonists can control their impulses or compulsion for self-analysis, and their insistence on finding reason or truth leads them to transgress and violate the controlled confines of their property and captivity (26).<sup>11</sup> The plot in all three literary texts comprises the following paradigm or formula: a) the seduction of reason leads the male protagonists to secrets, b) which allows them to be held captive by (more powerful) males (who represent the dying structures of monarchy), c) which ultimately leads them to be freed by their testimonies of their (and other's) captivities, d) enabling their survival

as a new kind of subject even as they remain excluded from society as legitimate subjects.

In this sense, while I do not analyze the “family romance” (Samuels 76) as Samuels does, I adopt her theorization of the family as an allegory that functioned for the state or “model for the nation” (21). In particular, the family was seen as a “separate” (18) “haven” from the dangers of the “outside world” (49).<sup>12</sup> As Samuels contends, late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century fiction emphasized this “separation,” by maintaining an “opposition” “between the ‘home’ and the ‘world’” (18); this “separation” served to “make the home a part of that sphere to which it” was “opposed” (18). Novels problematized the “uneasy” boundaries and reversibility of “home and world” (or “‘inside and outside’”) (19), by making the source of the family’s “disorder” (17) appear to come from the outside--when it originated from the inside (21).<sup>13</sup> Novelists expressed what everyone feared: that dangers to the new republic did not come from the “outside” (19) but were bred from the republican “family” “within” (20-21). I argue Godwin, Brown and Irving stage this breakdown of the family as a result of the seduction of reason, and the effort of its protagonists or “family” members to identify and contain the revolutionary “violence within” (49).<sup>14</sup>

For my dissertation what is at stake is not, as in Samuels’ work, the authors’ attempts to found a new “family” (64), but their attempt to found a new revolutionary subjectivity. These literary texts narrative the revolutionary “founding” (64) of the nation in all of its denaturalized, transatlantic complexity. In a sense I seek to translate Samuels’ contention that the “family romance” is interrupted by dangerous and violent,

transatlantic historico-political events, and argue that Godwin, Brown, and Irving's efforts to found a revolutionary subject and narrative are similarly interrupted by seemingly unstoppable violent phenomena, and the "failure" of government to respond to these events (Samuels 31).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, all three literary texts I discuss feature protagonists who remain disinherited, illegitimate bachelors at the end, and any hope for a child of the post-monarchical republic is aborted.

Godwin, Brown and Irving's texts respond to the violence of revolution, and thus participate in literature's effort to restore order (32) and interiorize this transatlantic experience: the protagonists suffer from a form of hysteria, and become unreliable narrators. It is *precisely* because the violence originates from "within" (21) that the authors examine their nations through the eyes of an alien or alterity, i.e. in a transatlantic manner. This literary motif has transatlantic origins, in that rather than succeed in its intention in producing a republic as a contained event, the American Revolution exceeded both its goals and its physical boundaries.<sup>16</sup> Witnessing the unstoppable force of the French Revolution, "writers of the period," Samuels suggests, "worked to keep the notion of Revolution contained politically, and even metaphorically as a 'family affair,' a process that became linked with the desire to confine and institutionalize the family" (26).

This effort is clear in Godwin, Brown and Irving's literary texts: all the protagonists hail from failed families, and are either institutionalized or narrowly escape being institutionalized. For example, Caleb, Rip, Edgar and Clithero experience family disinheritance and are orphans (with Clithero hailing from a contaminated French and

Irish family) and, while Caleb becomes institutionalized in one of the two endings to *Caleb Williams*, Clithero avoids institutionalization by suicide; finally, Rip remains a hysteric confined to the margins of society. In this way these literary texts document both the rise and failure of institutions to contain the contagions of revolution as it was experienced across continents, and allegorize the protagonists' impossibility of claiming self-autonomy.<sup>17</sup> This effort to draw a line “between paternalism and self-reliance” (Forgie, qtd. in Samuels 62) occurs in *Caleb Williams* and is picked up by each American text, where it becomes one of the characteristic features of the transatlantic, revolutionary subject. Ultimately, the subjectivity in question is uncertain, and as I argue in all three chapters, is simultaneously constructed and deconstructed by each text's encounter with the agency of its narrator.

### 3. Why These Authors, Why These Texts and Why Now?

This dissertation does not argue that these authors were necessarily in favor or opposed to revolution, but rather that their works record--in whatever figurative language that best captured the tensions and crisis of the revolutionary age--the abrupt changes in custom, economy, politics, family and identity that revolution caused, and affected them, their colleagues or the imagined communities across the Atlantic. I have selected Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Brown's *Edgar Huntly* and Irving's “Rip Van Winkle” for several reasons. First, each work acts to represent a chronology of revolution: for example, while *Caleb Williams* was “set in the period after the 1688 Revolution” (Clemit 49), it was written in 1794, the last year of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, and

twenty-three years after Brown was born (1771); *Edgar Huntly* was published in 1799, one year after the Alien and Seditions Act was passed, and four years after Brown “proclaimed himself a Godwinian [in 1795]” (Kafer 66); Washington Irving, named after George Washington, published “Rip Van Winkle” in *The Sketch-Book* in 1819, the year of the Panic of 1819--America’s first great financial crisis since the dawn of the new republic.

Second, I have selected these authors not only for the similarity of political ideas that they could be read to share--hints of Rousseau, Locke, Price and Priestly twinkle in the background like distant stars--but also because they participate in a Gothic tradition of allegorizing political events begun by Godwin.<sup>18</sup> That is, Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving provide insight into the difficult emergence of the subject of revolution theorized by William Godwin in his controversial novel, *Caleb Williams*. Written in 1794, *Caleb Williams* responded to the politico-philosophical claims of Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine, and was part of the English political scene haunted by the problem of order and revolution raised by the French Revolution and in the wake of the American Revolution. As Pamela Clemit notes, *Caleb Williams* was seen as a “narrative” of “Burke’s classic presentation of the French Revolution as a parricidal drama” (130).

As such, the authors that I have selected for study represent three seminal points in this revolutionary age--the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the newly emerging capitalist nations in the nineteenth century--whose novels chronicle the tensions between conservative and radical viewpoints of revolution and, perhaps even

more fundamentally, question whether documenting revolutionary events is possible.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, my third and most important reason for selecting these authors and these works is because they raise the question of whether a revolutionary subjectivity is itself finally possible. If “history is a narrative” (Tennenhouse 1), these texts create narrators who then try to legitimate their narratives, and by extension their subjectivities--in the same way the American nation does--by replicating the disjointed process of revolutionary founding, a process I explore in all three chapters of the dissertation.

My fourth reason for selecting these authors is because, in questioning whether a revolutionary subject is possible, they also raise the question of whether any national narrative is possible or, more directly, whether a *nation* is possible. The issue is necessarily most acute in Brown and Irving. Specifically, Brown and Irving seem to parody an attempt to unify a colonial and postcolonial (or national) American literature as one coherent story. Rather, their transatlantic presentation of America evokes a disjointed, colonial and postcolonial entity that never entirely coheres as one or the other.<sup>20</sup>

These works imagine the concept of a nation as a site of transatlantic exchange, by participating in a “network of exchanges capable of producing any number of surprising hybrids” (Tennenhouse 11). As such, one could say they produce a transatlantic hybrid: “in every case characters either gather information from places in Europe, the Caribbean, and the trans-Caucuses, or carry information to such locations after it has circulated in the United States” (11). Their texts imagine a hybrid, revolutionary space as “a cluster of local sites of exchange” (14). As Tennenhouse explains, our most American “roots,” are in fact, transatlantic: our American “model for our self-description” and

“culture” came from Britain (11). This “network” is a “rhizome” (11). Additionally, through shared figures of “undecidability” (Derrida 9) and uncertainty, these texts actually allegorize the impossibility of a closed nation--and closed reading of a text. The texts, like the American nation, remain uncertain, open and unresolved. They reflect the true historical motives of an open nation, in so far as the “United States of America was not *intended* to to be a ‘national union’”:

The label ‘United States of America’ cannot be retrospectively explained with reference to the constitutional federalism of the 1780s; nor can it . . . be ascribed to the existence of multiple colonies. Rather its roots are to be found in the colonial concept of the indigenous nation and the imperiographies that envisioned an imperial rather than national union in the decades before the revolution. (E. White 21)

These texts show that writing a unifying national narrative was not actually possible: while the thirteen states did, in fact, need a narrative to unify their varying “settlement and demographic patterns, economic structures, education systems and religious emphases, and languages” (Emerson 3), these authors responded as comparatists, and questioned whether a history could be linearly conducted. Caught between two orders and two cultures, a dilemma already at stake in Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, these authors were comparatists, in that they made literature the dynamic mirror of the revolutionary world (Insko 617), rather than “craft coherent, morally edifying historical narratives” (Emerson 3). As Ed White explains, the United States “was to express the imperial overtones of the ‘United Kingdom’ minus the monarchical reference,

suggesting that nation-states were the constitutive units for a new imperial system eventually labeled ‘federalist’” (E. White 21). As such, I disagree with Emerson’s contention that “Brown’s novels function as experiments in the correction of history” (Emerson 2). In fact, *Edgar Huntly* demonstrates the impossibility of writing history and in doing so serves as a model for Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle.” In Irving and Brown, the nation is almost an impossible referent to construct or found. In this way my dissertation does not argue that these transatlantic subjects--or their texts--produce a national literature, but rather *rupture* the notion of a national literature, nationalism and nationhood.

Why is this dissertation project important now? The research questions that motivate this work were not only relevant in the eighteenth century, but can also be argued to be relevant today. For example, when does a story become an accepted history? How do you document an event that has no witnesses or material evidence? What are legitimate witnesses and facts? What does it require for a story to be accepted as the truth? Most readers of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century fiction would agree that the role of fiction *then*, was very similar to what it is now: fiction provides the truth in a world that will only listen to a narrative when it is presented as a *story*.<sup>21</sup> In other words, if one presents a narrative as the truth, it will likely be rejected; however, if one presents the truth as a fictional story, he or she will most likely garner an eager listener. It is the same in the world today.

Why read literature then, from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century? Because the eighteenth century engaged in modes of knowing (epistemology), and

experienced similar problems to today's world. In particular, Godwin, Brown and Irving's protagonists all experience an "epistemological crisis" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 419): they cannot "hold all knowledge in" their "heads at one time," so they "have to rely on the conclusions of others in order to form" their "own opinions"; they "cannot know things for sure" and so the best they "can do is refine approximate ideas about external reality" (Howell 62).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, their "external reality" is chaotic and uncertain. They cannot trust themselves--their own rationale--nor others. Their narratives and revisions thus become an endless--and futile--quest to gain certainty of their perception of reality.

Analogously, today's modern society is not only obsessed with practices of knowing, but is in fact *similarly* overwhelmed by the problems that new practices of acquiring knowledge has introduced. Inventions such as the internet and 'real' time technology--which allow us access to events *as* they happen, anytime, anywhere--have created a new crisis: how do we know what we know is accurate, reliable, and quantitatively enough to make judgments of truth? What drives or wills us to make judgments, actions and decisions? The same questions pervading the eighteenth century, it seems, have returned to haunt the twenty-first century.

Specifically, now that we seemingly can know everything and access every plausible source, how do we demarcate reliable from unreliable sources, and truth from fiction? What qualitatively and quantitatively defines the truth, or an event? How do we measure events, now that we have unlimited capacities to do so? In a sense, today we face the same crisis brought on by revolution, except for different reasons. In particular, now that we live in a global economy, who defines our subjectivities? Can we continue to

identify ourselves as subjects of nations or subjects of capitalism? How will we define our relation to our sovereigns, when today's empires are invisible, and when our subjectivities can be digitally constructed--and digitally erased--without a trace?

#### 4. Subjectivity as Event, Revolution as Event: The Problem of the Founding Act, Defining the Revolutionary Event, and Understanding its Connection to Subjectivity

This dissertation does not examine multiple theories of revolutionary subjectivity--but rather decodes the ways that the literary texts by Godwin, Brown and Irving theorize revolutionary subjectivity: as something fundamentally uncertain, and as being related, in some capacity, to the "performative" "act" of "founding" (Derrida 8). To understand, however, how it is that revolution and subjectivity are connected, I will briefly address what I mean by using Derrida's term, the "founding act" (8); throughout chapters 1-3, my dissertation will repeatedly touch on the "constative" and "performative" (9) aspects of revolution--which on the one hand institutes a "break" (Arendt 50), but also "constitutes" (203) and claims the "founding" (36) of "something new" (34).

My interest in the "founding act" (Derrida 8) stems from 21<sup>st</sup>-century deconstructive and psychoanalytic readings of the American and French Revolutions--in particular, Cathy Caruth's reading of Balzac's *Colonel Chabert*, a literary text that problematizes the legitimacy of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which, she argues, allows the unsolved contradictions in the French Revolution to return and interrupt the French Restoration's attempt to erase a revolutionary past.<sup>23</sup> Caruth's readings suggest that literature allegorizes what is implicit in the "founding

act” (Derrida 8)--i.e. that in the act of “founding” (Arendt 36) “something new” (34), lies the capacity and means for the founding act’s own undoing. Caruth’s readings draw from Freud’s theory of trauma, in which, implicit in the traumatic event is its return (Caruth 15). One could argue, the traumatic event bears similarities to the founding “event” (Derrida 10) of revolution. Or, rather, that the founding “event” (Arendt 37) of revolution necessarily has a traumatic character. While the plausible similarities between the traumatic event and the revolutionary event are worth pursuing for a future study, for the moment, I call attention only to one similarity between the two teased out by Caruth. Namely, the traumatic event and the revolutionary event create an excess that cannot be assimilated in consciousness: a trace. Specifically, after a “new” (Arendt 34) “event” (37) marks a “break” (50) in history--like revolution, or a traumatic event, for example--it leaves a trace that, in some sense, cannot be accounted for. This trace then returns to interrupt the transition, progress and succession of the present into the future. I read this trace, for example, as the excesses of the American and French Revolutions returning to interrupt Godwin, Brown and Irving’s protagonist’s abilities to transition into a post-revolutionary society and subjectivity.

There is a second component to the “founding act” (Derrida 8), which Miller discusses (Miller 23). Namely, implicit in a “founding act” (Derrida 8) is a “founding” claim; a “performative” claim, that like the “performative” “act” (8) of revolution, institutes a “constative” (9) “subject,” or “founds” the very “subject” (10) who supposedly *makes* the “revolutionary claim” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422).<sup>24</sup> This is a problem--as I discuss in chapter 2 of the dissertation--in that, as Miller observes, the

“founding act” (Derrida 8) of revolution institutes the very conditions that will give it legitimacy (Miller 27). Any revolutionary claim is problematic because it “founds” the “subject” (Derrida 10) that is necessary in order to make (or legitimate) the claim itself.

In Godwin, Irving, and Brown’s literary texts, I argue that the protagonists repeatedly encounter this aporetic impossibility of the revolutionary claim. More literally, they fail at making revolutionary claims, and thus, fail in their attempts to found their subjectivities. The protagonists seem to have the capacity to claim a new subjectivity “for themselves” (Derrida 9) in that they have the capacity to write. In fact, the protagonists attempt to claim their revolutionary subjectivities, precisely by writing their subjectivities into existence. As Myra Jehlen notes, in early republican America, “writing engenders not only worlds but selves” (157). America, in its hybrid character of colonial and postcolonial power, plays a distinctive, violent role in connecting the “act” of “founding” subjectivity to the “act” “of writing” (Derrida 8): when Europeans colonized America’s native civilization, they not only laid claim to a new land, but also incorporated language as part of the act of claiming--or founding. They were able to do this because they explicitly denied the existence of the Indian Natives who occupied North America. These Natives only conducted their histories orally, rather than in writing and, because they had no written culture, the colonizing Europeans viewed these “speechless” Indians as linguistically incompetent and therefore “incapable of self-possession” (Jehlen 43).

This is significant because it allows one to clarify a crucial aspect of the problem of founding: that one requires a language to claim, and that without language, one cannot lay claim to a founding--either to a nation or to a subjectivity, i.e., to oneself. Specifically,

language and the very basic claim to having the capacity for language--what Jehlen calls “self-possession” (43)--become permanently bound in the new, modern notion of founding, which is itself specific to empire building in the colonial period. The European claim to Native American land, and therefore to a founding--whether to one’s own body (a self) or one’s own property (land)--implicitly and necessarily becomes tied to the linguistic capacity to claim. As such, after this colonization, the only way one can claim one’s own subjectivity is if one can have the linguistic capacity to claim.

As Jehlen allows us to discover, the problem of the “founding act,” to borrow Derrida’s term (8), is instituted at the very moment of America’s founding as a colonial entity--i.e. *before* its “founding” (Arendt 36) as a new, independent republic. The problem can be re-articulated to explain why implicitly in acts of founding--in acts of “founding” (36) “something new” (34)--lie the capacity and means for the *undoing* of these founding acts. Founding relies on the claim; without the claim there can be no “founding act” (Derrida 8). Moreover, if “self-possession” of language, to borrow Jehlen’s term (43), is needed to claim, then when that capacity is taken away, the act of “founding” (Arendt 36), threatens to become undone. This problem has been identified by several theorists, but in this context, the linguistic capacity is not just oral but written and as such is historically bound to the Europeans’ act of colonizing or founding North America. Indeed, as I argue Godwin, Brown and Irving observe, this problem persists in the new American republic after its founding as an independent nation. In other words, the American Revolution, and similarly the French Revolution, do nothing to solve the problem. As Hannah Arendt observes, for example, the French Declaration of the Rights

of Man and of the Citizen do not “guarantee” (Arendt 149) “people” (145) the “right” to have the “capacity” (33) to lay claim (168) to the basic or “inalienable political” (45) “right” to be “human” (107). Similarly, Étienne Balibar has observed that, after the French Revolution, one must be a “citizen” to lay claim to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (40). Indeed one of the problems after the French Revolution is that one needed to own “property” to lay claim to self-representation (Balibar 42).

If the question *par excellence* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was ‘Who is allowed to claim the land of the New World?’, then perhaps one could argue the question of the eighteenth century is, ‘Who is the revolutionary subject who is allowed to claim “self-possession” (43), and by extension, lay claim to himself?’. Like the Native Americans who were (supposedly) bereft of language, and could not claim “self-possession” (43), and by extension, property and subjectivity, later Americans encountered the same problem because they were democratized by the new republic but not legitimized owing to the contradictions in the American revolutionary claim. This sense of illegitimacy haunts the protagonists of Godwin, Brown, and Irving.

How are revolution and subjectivity linked? In chapters 1-3 I show how Godwin, Brown and Irving allegorize the “founding act” (Derrida 8) of revolutionary subjectivity in their texts. The problem of the “founding act” (8) in revolutionary subjectivity emerges from a complex connection--and explicit relationship--between subjectivity and revolution that has recently been teased out by twentieth-century philosophers, in particular by Michel Foucault. Frederick Jameson reads Foucault’s analysis of revolution

and subjectivity in Foucault's *Dits et Ecrits*. In his preface to Stathis Kouvelakis' *Philosophy and Revolution: from Kant to Marx*, Jameson articulates a position that is important to this dissertation: that revolution is not just *any* event: it is an event that founds subjectivity. For Jameson, the French revolution--and I would argue, the American revolution--is not only a) an event of founding, and b) an event that founds nations, but also c) an event that founds revolutionary subjectivity.<sup>25</sup>

How is it that today, we have come to think of subject-hood, subjectivity, and revolution together? In the wake of the two Declarations (of Independence and of Rights of Man and of the Citizen) that the eighteenth-century revolutions engender and the revolutionary subjects that the two Declarations engender as well, Michel Foucault makes an explicit connection between subjectivity and revolution through readings of Immanuel Kant. First, Foucault shows that Kant is the first to use the "reflexivity of the subject as a 'sagittal' relationship to his own present [actualité]" (Jameson, qtd. in Kouvelakis 2). Perhaps this means that Kant is the first to cut the subject out of the present, and reinsert him back in, in order to divide the subject from the present. The division of the subject makes him aware of his existence as being entirely contingent on his awareness of the present, as an event that predicates his existence. By doing so, as Jameson says, Kant "poses the question of the present in its subjectivity, the question of the present as event" (2). In other words, it seems the subject can only exist if he *is* the present: his being present is in fact what makes his subjectivity an event. Using Jameson's reading of Foucault's commentary on Kant, we can then perhaps define subjectivity as an *event* in which one is 'being present'.

Jameson then follows Foucault and shows us how he takes this first finding, and connects it to revolution. As Jameson says, the event can also “be understood only as the effect of another, of the event *tout court*—that is, the revolution . . . the French Revolution” (Jameson, qtd. in Kouvelakis 2). ‘What does this mean,’ Jameson asks? In order to understand “the revolution as event,” one must understand it as a “subjective disposition to the enthusiasm that it inspires” (2). This “enthusiasm,” attests “to a possibility immanent in the human species: autonomy, or the subject’s capacity for self-development” (2). The possibility for a subject’s autonomy, or self-rule then, seems to arise out of revolution. As Jameson says, Kant discovered that revolution had a “founding . . . role in modern reflexivity”; specifically, “enthusiasm plays a constitutive role in the formation of modern consciousness” (2).

While thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard have noted Kant’s revolutionary “enthusiasm” (Lyotard, *The Differend* 165) as a “sign of history” (164) or “progress” (161), what is significant about Jameson’s reading is that he discovers the implicit connection between autonomy and subjectivity that revolution makes: “what matters is not the revolution’s content or its development as seen by those who make it, but merely its status as a *sign* or *spectacle* revealing the potential for autonomy characteristic of the human species (‘progress’ in the Kantian sense)” (Jameson, qtd. in Kouvelakis 2; original emphasis). This “potential for autonomy,” to use Jameson’s words, is precisely what I argue emerges in Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* and the subsequent American texts that follow, and what makes these works so *revolutionary*. The irony that I discover in my readings, is that even though this revolutionary subjectivity *fails* in these

texts, the fact of its very emergence--the fact that these texts allow this “potential for autonomy” (2) to emerge--actually can be read as a success. The texts succeed in what Kant would have wished: to express--literally and figuratively--this potential for self-rule. Repeatedly, the revolutionary aporia undoes its own claims: autonomy founders in indecision and undecidability. But that indecision and undecidability are precisely what Godwin, Brown, and Irving offer as the figure of revolutionary agency and (trans) national identity.

Jameson’s reading of Foucault--besides demonstrating the implicit connection between subjectivity as an event, and revolution as an event *founding* or enacting subjectivity--already articulates the problem inherent in revolutionary subjectivity that Godwin, Brown and Irving allegorize. Jameson reformulates the question that has troubled Foucault as “‘what are we to make of the will to revolution?’ and, therefore, of the Enlightenment, since ‘the revolution plainly continues and completes the basic process of the Enlightenment’” (Jameson, qtd. in Kouvelakis 2). I believe this question--of what to make of the ‘will of the revolution’--similarly confounds Godwin, Brown and Irving. These authors arguably base the trademark uncertainty of their protagonists on this question, and use this question as a motive, or will, that drives their characters’ uncertain, revolutionary agency.

The question, however--what ‘to make of the will of revolution’--is never answered. It remains open and unresolved in the literary texts. What completely destabilizes the protagonists and their narrations is that they attempt to act out ‘the will of revolution’--as an act to attain independence and legitimacy--and this act backfires. It is

because the protagonists break from the past to attain autonomy, at the same time as they require this past to legitimize their act, that they fail; specifically, they detach themselves from their sovereign to gain autonomy, only to find they need a sovereign to legitimize their act. As such, the protagonists remain paralyzed in uncertainty, and in this sense, capture what “Foucault defines as a ‘sagittal’ relation to the present: the capacity to ‘recognize the fundamental problem of our time . . . at the time and place of its first appearance’” (Jameson, qtd. in Kouvelakis 3). It seems that even though the protagonists recognize the problem, they become paralyzed by their attempt to solve it.

Indeed, the protagonists in Godwin, Brown and Irving’s texts cannot endure the “separation” (4) or final act of claiming their autonomy that is essential to constructing their revolutionary subjectivity. Jameson’s reading allows us to see how the characters’ uncertainty arises out of their confrontation with subjectivity as an event, and revolution as an event. Specifically, Jameson views the “‘perspective’ of the event” as “decisiveness in all everyday actions” (4). Jameson seems to say that, what can *allow* self-referentiality to take place is that there be a separation from the “spectator” of an event “*from* the event” itself (3; emphasis mine). Why is this finding so crucial to my project? It is important because, as Kouvelakis discovers (in his reading of German philosophical interpretations of the French revolution), the *subject* of revolution is a “*becoming-subject*” (Kouvelakis 340; emphasis mine). This means that even if the protagonists in Godwin, Brown, and Irving’s text never successfully claim subjectivity, they still embody or allegorize revolutionary subjectivity, in their attempts to become revolutionary subjects.

Moreover, this illustrates the conclusion that my dissertation comes to, which is that a revolutionary subjectivity seems destined to fail; that perhaps a revolutionary subjectivity is only this “becoming” (340), to borrow Kouvelakis’ words, and not an ‘is’. In other words, perhaps revolutionary subjectivity emerges when it is claimed, but is impossible to maintain or recuperate in society. As Kouvelakis seems to suggest in defining the event of the French Revolution: “the temporality of the Revolution is . . . pregnant . . . with . . . the future. . . . Thus it presents itself . . . as the temporality of the becoming-subject of the substance of politics . . . the ‘people’” (340-341). This would not only account for the temporal impossibility of founding a subject, but also explain its haunting capacity to return as the trace of an unassimilable event.<sup>26</sup>

Kouvelakis, like many other post-Marxist philosophers, view the eighteenth-century event of revolution as primarily “a European event” (342)--and by extension--the revolutionary claim as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. In fact, Kouvelakis’ definition of the French Revolution allows us to view both the American and French Revolutions as one, transatlantic “world” event (342).<sup>27</sup> Similarly, while thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Étienne Balibar have analyzed the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the revolutionary claim to subjectivity in a European context, recent analysis of the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America as an American revolutionary claim allows us to view both Declarations as founding an aggregate, transatlantic, revolutionary subject. While current comparative studies of both Declarations as founding a transatlantic, revolutionary subjectivity specific to the eighteenth century exist, a discussion of the revolutionary

claim concerning American literature has only recently emerged in the last twenty years, featuring critical works that explore early American literature and its relation to revolution, agency and the language of nationhood. This discussion has been spearheaded by Cathy Davidson's seminal *Revolution and the Word* (2004), and has been preceded and followed by other critical works by Paul Giles, Shirley Samuels, James E. Block, Christopher Looby, Jay Fliegelman, Jared Gardner, Paul Jay, Evan Radcliffe and Paul Downes. Though drawing on their work, I base my theory of the uncertain, revolutionary subject (as indeed several of the mentioned critics do) on Jacques Derrida's post-Marxist, deconstructive reading of the American Revolution--in particular, his claim, already briefly summarized above, that the problematic, "founding moment" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 423) of America lies in the Declaration of Independence, and its connection to the "undecidability" between "performative" and "constative" utterances (Derrida 9).

I am particularly interested in "Derrida's analysis of the structure of revolutionary founding moments" in which a "political act [the Declaration of Independence]" (Downes 422), as Ernesto Laclau finds, becomes a "contingent intervention taking place in an undecidable terrain" (Laclau, qtd. in Downes 422). As Downes explains, "the Declaration is made in the name of" what Derrida says is (quoting from the Declaration of Independence) "the good People" (Derrida 11) "and on its claim that" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) "these united Colonies are and of right ought to be *free and independent*" (Derrida 11; original emphasis). While the "claim" (Downes 422) attempted to establish the concept of a legitimate nation of "united Colonies" (Derrida 11), it did so in a way that actually introduced an

uncertainty about its legitimacy (9). Derrida describes this uncertainty inherent in the “revolutionary claim” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) as an “obscurity” (Derrida 9) that arose from the Declaration of Independence and both its “transformative mobilization of the performative” and constative “possibilities of language” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422). He adds that the uncertainty of what the revolutionary “utterance” (Derrida 9) accomplished was “essential” to the aim of the Declaration, which was to posit a “right” and a nation: “[t]his obscurity, this undecidability between . . . a performative structure and a constative structure is *required* in order to produce the sought-after effect” (9; original emphasis). Derrida explains this “undecidability” by saying “[o]ne cannot decide” “whether independence” was merely “stated or produced by this utterance” (9). Given that the very “authority” (9) that legitimized the “revolutionary claim” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) and “founding act” (Derrida 8) was simultaneously constituted, Derrida’s theory suggests to Downes that the very “tyrannical” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) “violence” it claimed to “oppose” (423) in its “progressive transformation of law” was instantly reincorporated into its structure (422-423). Rather than inaugurate democratic law, the Declaration introduced conditions that suspended “legality” (Downes 423):

‘the supposedly originary violence that must have established [legal] authority and that could not itself have been authorized by any anterior legitimacy, so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal.’ (Derrida “Force of Law” 989; qtd. in Downes 423)

Thus at the same time the Declaration spontaneously “founded” (Derrida 13) a new nation and the rights of its ‘people,’ it did so in an act that *delegitimized* the authority of the rightful and legal existence of the nation and subject. This “founding moment of the law” (Downes 423)--despite also being a moment that was bereft of the concept of “legality” it was supposed to be founded on--permanently remained, Downes says, a “structural part of the law in every moment of its operation” (423).

Downes’ deconstructionist reading of Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* suggests how early American literary texts act as allegories that restage this “founding” (423) and its subsequent “crisis” (418) of indecision. The crisis results from the participation of an arbitrary, violent “tyrannical sovereignty” in the “structure of” America’s “revolutionary founding” moment (422). Downes uses Derrida’s analysis of the Declaration to suggest that the “founding act” (Derrida 8) is allegorized in literature as an act of “gothic violence” wherein the “arbitrariness of tyrannical sovereignty” is expressed in the “revolutionary claim” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422). In particular, he calls this “gothic violence” an “encounter” (422) between a new “revolutionary” (418) ‘spirit’ and “monarchic” “order” (420). Yet, while he contends that the “violence” (422) is inherited from Godwin’s literature, Downes insists that the “encounter” (422) that expresses this “violence” originates in *Edgar Huntly* (422-424). I disagree, and instead argue that this encounter appears first in Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*--as a confrontation between feudal and revolutionary subjects--before it is restaged by Brown (and revised by Irving) as a clash between revolutionary and monarchic subjectivities attempting to overcome the crisis of the transatlantic subject of revolution. The crisis is therefore not engendered by a

national identity or production specific to a *nation* (e.g. America or France) but rather by the unique phenomenon of revolution experienced as an event *suspended* across continents.

##### 5. Godwin and the Model of Revolutionary Agency

In particular, I suggest that revolutionary subjectivity is structured like the revolutionary claim--suspended between a progressive democracy and a regressive monarchy. *Caleb Williams*--and subsequent American texts--present their version of a revolutionary subject whose constitution is uncertain. Specifically, Brown's *Edgar Huntly, Or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* and Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" model Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. While grounded on Gothic horror and sentimental seduction novels of the time, *Caleb Williams* breaks from the eighteenth-century sentimentalist love and marriage plot as the privileged form of political allegory and issues a new type of novel--the psychological novel (Uphaus 280). Like the American texts it influences, *Caleb Williams* is an antiestablishment text that refers to debates haunting the transatlantic revolutionary subject of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: arguments on tradition, chivalry, the feudal contract, class, marriage, property, slavery, labor rights and human rights (Elliott 3-4). Godwin's novel witnesses revolutionary events and transformations that democracy produces: savage into civilized, haunted into enlightened, and tyrannous into democratic. His "first-person narrative" "dramatizes narrative as a speech act," "with the sense of narrative as a social transaction" (Garrett 83), anticipating democracy and the necessity of literature in its formation.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, critic Kenneth W. Graham believes

*Caleb Williams*' original doubled title, *Caleb Williams, or Things as They Are* encourages readers to read Godwin's *Political Justice* and act in pursuit of *real* social and political reform (Graham 15).

I argue Godwin's influence prompted Brown and Irving to use multiple titles in their literary works to insinuate their novels' double sociopolitical commentary on the new republic. As Graham suggests, *Caleb Williams* is true to its original accompanying title, *Things as They Are* because it illuminates the *present*, and as such, the political, social, and religious conditions changed by revolution; at the same time, it addresses reforms and a future that will be once the feudal system is abolished. Caleb's narrative thus presents a new effort to respond to the crisis marking the end of feudalism.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, Caleb is a first-person narrator who anticipates the important shift where subjects will be able to rule themselves. Caleb represents the new, egalitarian subject who philosophizes his path to truth, and could be argued to be a European prototype for the American pilgrim, who despite being a servant independently surmounts a mass of politically and socially astute knowledge. Caleb's knowledge turns him into a revolutionary agent wishing to transcend the feudal system of rank and privilege, and his curiosity becomes the foundation for his "revolutionary impulse" (Elliott 254).

Yet unlike the political texts that influence the novel, *Caleb Williams* is not a persuasive argument warning of revolution (like Burke's) or a political treatise (like Paine's) calling for revolution, but rather a testimony of revolution itself, a secondhand account of firsthand testimonies of tyranny (Hawkins, Emily and Brightwel's narratives).<sup>30</sup> Because the novel never arrives at the abolition of the feudal system, it

reveals a symptom of the conflict faced by transatlantic subjects of revolution: the simultaneous impulse and hesitation to break away from a sovereign, and the subsequent paralysis that follows. Despite this paralysis, the message of *Caleb Williams* is clear: a revolutionary subject emerges to inspire others to succeed where Caleb fails.

Indeed, despite Caleb's failure to legitimize his revolutionary subjectivity, *Caleb Williams* provides an unprecedented, allegorical model for the historical struggle between conflicting *feudal and monarchical ideals of sovereignty*. Brown's *Edgar Huntly* and Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" *restage* this conflict as one *between revolutionary and monarchical subjectivities* failing to overcome the violent "undecidability" (Derrida 9) "structured" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 420) in the "revolutionary claim" (422). By reproducing Godwin's Gothic, Romantic style and plot, philosophical/moral premise of agency, figuration of an uncertain revolutionary hero who desires autonomy and self-rule and adaptation of a captivity/flight narrative structure, these American authors allegorize the crisis in the "founding moment" (423) of revolution as an uncertainty over how to act upon the realization of one's capacity to reason.

While Godwin's protagonist experiences this uncertainty as a struggle between breaking or preserving relations of sovereignty in a radically shifting political and economic landscape, Brown's characters experience it as a physiological suspension of consciousness that makes them sleepwalk--and thus become suspended between two moments, where they are neither sleeping nor awake.<sup>31</sup> Sleepwalking--or suspended consciousness--is infectious throughout the development of early American literature: specifically, Brown's protagonists *sleepwalk*, while Irving's *sleep* because they are

“troubled” not only “by the . . . decisive power” and “arbitrariness of tyrannical sovereignty” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) pervading democracy *but also* by what shape the new democratic Republic will take.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout all three literary texts, indecision threatens the legitimacy of the revolutionary subject and is allegorized in each narration’s attempt to begin and end a story without interruption. Doing so is necessary to allow each story to establish the narrators as both unreliable and illegitimate authors, and more importantly as illegitimate subjects. Brown and Irving allegorize this uncertainty similarly to Godwin: as a secret that threatens their protagonists’ subjectivity. They present it, like Godwin, as a narrative issue: undecidability plays out in the narrative structure of Godwin, Brown, and Irving’s texts as a narrative ellipsis that interrupts and paralyzes their narrative, narrator and characters’ narrations.<sup>33</sup>

The Gothic juxtaposition of scenes of physical and psychological violence against Romantic scenes of self-analysis in nature--for example, in the forest and the mountains--supports the notion that a revolutionary agency is constantly constructed and then deconstructed by the text’s difficulty in dramatizing the agency of its narrator.<sup>34</sup> The excessive ruminations of the narrator’s rational mind literally rupture key narratives of violent events. At crucial moments when the narrator is about to say the *verb* at stake in the narrative the word is omitted and replaced by an ellipsis. Like Godwin, Brown’s characters censor words such as ‘kill’ or ‘shot’--words that the *reader* must *posit* to preserve narrative continuity. Similarly, because the plot in Irving’s story is centered on

the protagonist's missed participation in the American Revolution, readers must also posit the revolutionary experience.<sup>35</sup>

Ultimately, the juxtaposition or omission of violent events in texts like *Caleb Williams* serve as tropes suggesting the revolutionary subject's conflicted desire to preserve an old order while also retaining the momentum and agency brought on by revolution. This raises a question: does Godwin wish his audience to find truth in his or her own political present--and thus break with the past--or diagnose the revolutionary subject as suspended interminably between a colonial past and postcolonial future, with no continuity or capability of restoring himself to the present? My theorization of the various ways the promise of a revolutionary subject--and ultimately, its failure--is figured in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literatures will not only contribute to current projects that examine the European political import of early American literature, but also open up a future, psychoanalytic project in which one may examine narrative as central to reconstituting a subject traumatized by revolution.

#### 6. Charles Brockden Brown: Deconstructing Revolutionary Subjectivity

In the last twenty years, *Edgar Huntly* deserved much of the overwhelming critical attention it received not only because it had been overshadowed by Brown's *Wieland* as a similar text disclosing revolutionary themes and insights, but also because, like forerunners Barlow, Dwight, Freneau, and Brackenridge, Brown was himself overlooked in the literary canon of early American literature: "His [Brown's] importance as a forerunner of Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville has been obscured by literary

histories that treat Emerson's *American Scholar* as the start of American letters" (Elliott 270).<sup>36</sup> Critic Emory Elliott laid the foundation for modern criticism of Brown, arguing that his use of "Gothic sensationalism" (224) and "mad" characters emphasized the connection between psychology and the "dangers of the political system" that, despite claiming equality for all, only protected the "interests of the wealthy" (225).<sup>37</sup> Traditional accounts before the 1950s interpret *Edgar Huntly* as either radicalizing "reform" propaganda or providing a tale about the psyche (Hedges, qtd. in Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 428). In contrast, recent critics read Brown as a "'conservative backlash against revolutionary ideas' in late eighteenth-century America" (Clemit; qtd. in Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 413).<sup>38</sup> Since the 1990s, critics read *Edgar Huntly* as simultaneously having both "radical" (Fliegelman; qtd. in Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 413) and conservative elements, such as Pamela Clemit, Sydney J. Krause, Will M. Verhoeven, Philip Barnard, Bryan Waterman, Justine S. Murison and Ed White.

These recent critics seem to suggest that Brown participated in crafting a history of the American nation, but one specifically of its *gaps*, and about the *impossibility* of accessing a history. In particular, Brown's "mode of fictitious history" provides a "truth about the past without narrowly adhering to an epistemology founded on observed phenomena alone" (Emerson 6). Because in the late 1790s, most could only access "region, colony, or town histories of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. . . . Brown's fictitious histories of 1798-99" provide "models for an alternate approach to historiography in which the tale teller freely applies romance wherever the facts remain insufficient" (Emerson 13).

Thus Brown's story is not just about an incomplete American history, but about someone who, like Caleb, is "*curious* about a history" and whose curiosity will not be easily satisfied, but only further aroused by his findings (14; original emphasis).<sup>39</sup> Caleb's curiosity about the past seems to ground the character of America's national story then, and becomes a motif (15).

What can a new study of Brown's *Edgar Huntly* reveal? Critics have only recently begun to touch on the unnameable radicality and revolutionary agency destabilizing cohesive, hegemonic readings of *Edgar Huntly*. Just as revolutionary America inherited and broke from its British roots, *Edgar Huntly* aptly reminds us of the many ways in which nations do not work in the way they claim, perhaps because they are products of war. *Edgar Huntly* serves as a cautionary tale: it warns of the violent consequences of violating the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, and of censoring the voices truly capable of reform. My intention in reexamining *Edgar Huntly* is not to propose that, in response to today's global capitalism and terrorism, that we build stronger, more unified nations, and in this way reconstitute a theory of American nationalism by using *Edgar Huntly* as a foundational text. Rather, I wish to suggest that *Edgar Huntly* serves as a template in which we rethink the nation as the core entity defining America and our subjectivity.

*Edgar Huntly* demonstrates how subjectivity can be characterized according to the shared experience of the revolutionary event in the eighteenth century; no other historical event galvanized the transatlantic world quite like this one and responded to the call to end tyranny and despotism. As Downes argues, Edgar's dilemmas suggest an analysis of

post-revolutionary society: his indecision over whether to believe Weymouth's story reveals a "Godwinian critique" of the Republic *as replicating the violence of monarchic order*: "I know that my claim has no legal support. . . . If this money be returned to me, it will be the impulse of spontaneous justice, and not the coercion of law to which I am indebted for it" (Brown 145).<sup>40</sup>

Echoing Caleb's flight and imprisonment, *Edgar Huntly* forges a new Irish-American captivity narrative that searches for a revolutionary agency and finds "the subject of *democracy* where the citizen repeatedly misplaces himself" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 418; original emphasis), in other words, nowhere, and in a suspended space and consciousness. Brown's narrative decisions consistently set up the rise and failure of a revolutionary subjectivity: while a post-revolutionary subjectivity emerges by way of the novel's multiple testimonies, like Godwin, Brown ruptures his own text by omitting the events that cause this emergence and punctuates only some of the novel's dialogue. These narrative ruptures allegorize the indecision inherent in a post-revolutionary subject, one that is both actively spontaneous, as well as uncertain of its political constitution.

*Edgar Huntly's* post-revolutionary subject inherits the indecision of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* as well as the undecidable legitimacy of the Declaration of Independence (Derrida 13). In the novel, this subject is represented by Edgar, who is split between a colonial and postcolonial America, opposite Clithero, who is split between monarchy and revolution. Edgar's "encounter" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) with Clithero unveils this struggle over the moral, social and political implications of making decisive actions,

where despite doing the right thing, they are--like Caleb--haunted by the agony of violating monarchical ideals via their crimes.

Like Caleb, “Edgar’s dilemma” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 415) sparks a debate about the “undecidable legality of the law” (427) and the potential violence that secrets (like Clithero’s and Waldegrave’s) can cause to national narratives. Ultimately, Edgar’s “revolutionary impulse” (Elliott 254)--which prevents Waldegrave’s secret from being revealed and Clithero’s story from being forgotten--not only undoes its own narrative effort to found a post-revolutionary subjectivity, but also reveals the paradox of revolution: the action of breaking from a monarch while preserving the monarchic structure of authority, as the failure of the new republic demonstrates.

#### 7. Washington Irving: Re-staging Ruptures in the National Consciousness

Published in 1819, Washington Irving’s story “Rip Van Winkle” refigures Godwin’s allegory of the encounter between revolutionary and “monarchic” logics, to borrow Downes’ term (420), and presents a world transitioning from an old, feudal “indolent” lifestyle before revolution to one of “realistic practicalities” in the new republic (Mengeling 646). Like *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, “Rip Van Winkle” carries the “sins” of its national “fathers” (Elliott 228) and treats the “private vice” of its characters as a “synonym” for the “corruption” of the new “polity” (Davidson 11). Unlike Brown and Godwin however, Irving’s narrator is not the protagonist, but rather the invented persona of Diedrich Knickerbocker (the author of “Rip Van Winkle”) whose story is resurrected by the fictive “Geoffrey Crayon” in his collection, *The Sketch-Book*.

Crayon parodies the difficulty of telling truthful narratives in presenting Knickerbocker's story with multiple editorial notes that hyperbolically insist on its accuracy.<sup>41</sup> The double-narrative effect serves as a literary device in the story insofar as it causes the story to collapse, and thus, deliver its message: that neither historians nor literary authors can tell accurate narratives, and that perhaps the real story is what has been effaced, forgotten or relegated to the margins in the residual aftermath of a nation's founding. Some critics identify Irving's device, without necessarily calling it deconstructive, as I do. For example, Irving's story and Crayon's comments "exert pressures in opposite directions" by presenting both the "reality" of "unreal events" and the world's "fictional character" (Rubin-Dorsky 398). This "technique of self-contradiction" (398) raises epistemological questions similarly posed by Godwin and Brown: Rip's "fable about the nature of experience" "poses the question of whether there is such a thing as true perception/knowledge" (Rubin-Dorsky 401). Indeed, the narrative of "Rip Van Winkle" acts as a figuration of Caleb and Edgar's uncertainty, and rather than asserting accuracy, pervades the story with uncertainty.

Whereas I read "Rip Van Winkle" in the shadow of *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, most critics read "Rip Van Winkle" within the context of its sister text "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" or within *The Sketch-Book*.<sup>42</sup> For example, while I agree with Rubin-Dorsky's epistemological concerns, he interprets "Rip Van Winkle" as continuing the project of *The Sketch-Book*, in which Crayon formulates an "imaginative England that always exists but never really exists" (397). Other early-twentieth-century critics take a more classical approach. They argue "Rip Van Winkle" expresses Irving's conservatism

and promotes bachelorhood by declaring Rip a new American hero triumphing over reason and marriage. For example, Henry S. Canby calls Irving the “arch-Federalist of American literature” (Canby, qtd. in Guttman 165), while Allen Guttman believes “Rip Van Winkle” heralds a return to tradition by giving a negative critique of America as a liberal country without “order” or a “sense of the past” (165-166). Other mid-twentieth-century critics pick up Guttman’s conservative thread and take his extreme position that Irving penned the “hierarchical society” and “ancestral estates” of the 1700s as “doomed by “democratic revolution” (169): Philip Young views “Rip Van Winkle” as “an archetype of separation from the world, discovery and return” turning “Rip Van Winkle” into a “cautionary” “tale” about “the evasion of responsibility” and “custom” in the Republic (Guttman 171).

Those who do read “Rip Van Winkle” as a democratic text do so almost too radically. For example, Daniel Plung identifies Crayon’s “allusion” (67) to the German myth (65) of “Peter Klaus” (68) and calls it a reversal (71) through “metempsychosis” (68), a narrative about “our national character” (65) that launches an early form of “American individualism” (80). Plung believes “Rip Van Winkle” stages the successive phases of American “pioneer” “life” (71): whereas in the story’s beginning, the “mountains” are “magical” (73), as Rip “ascends” (73) them they become “lonely” and “shagged” (Irving, qtd. in Plung 73). Irving identifies the animal-less and un-industrial mountains (Plung 74) with “acute loneliness” (71) and “starvation” (72) and the “city” as a “more suitable” (72) habitation for “man” (72). Plung reads Rip’s survival of his village’s mis-recognition as revealing that Rip is a pre-Emersonian (Plung 77)

because he courageously practices “self-reliance” (77) and achieves “solitude” and an “ideal condition” (79) in a chaotic, urban environment (77) that has preserved pre-revolutionary forces (77; 79). While I agree with Plung that Rip returns to find both pre- and post-revolutionary “forces” (80) at play, I disagree with his conclusion that Rip is “representative of the American individual” (78) because he ignores his local “politicians” (80) and builds an “undisputed empire” (Irving, qtd. in Plung 78).

Rip’s return is not a triumphant example of the emergence of a democratic subject or “personification of American individualism” (Plung 80), as so many critics contend. While Rip has, as Irving says, “freed himself from . . . ‘petticoat government’” (80) the story does not support Plung’s theory that Rip is “self-reliant” (79) *nor* “loyal” (80) to the King. Lacking a tone of liberation or celebration, the story is tense and muted: Plung translates Rip’s lack of concern as a form of “self-reliant” (79) “individualism” (80), while I argue that Rip’s “individualism” (80) is as superficial as the post-revolutionary transformations in society.

Except for Insko, Plung and Warner, most critics analyze “Rip Van Winkle” in a formalist manner, echoing the very archaisms Irving seems to parody. I argue they have yet to fully examine the narrative function the main character, “Rip,” performs in the text. Rip’s function is both tropological and historical: he represents the class of indecisive mercenaries who fought without political allegiance in the American Revolution. Neither a revolutionary hero nor a British loyalist, Rip has no doctrine to preach to readers: a nobody in the beginning--called “lazy” and submissive by Knickerbocker and Rip’s critics--he resembles his double, “Rip Jr.,” and rather than participate in labor, local

elections or national politics, remains a non-agent at the story's end. Instead, "Rip" acts as a linguistic trope that destabilizes the text and Rip's attempt to become a legitimate subject in the new republic. "Rip" represents a gap of time in which Rip forgets his conscious experience of the American Revolution. Rip's experience of the unconscious--as signified by the gap--provokes inquiry into the allegorical role the unconscious plays in a story about political awakenings.

Indeed, Rip ruptures and lives outside the law: his deep slumber is an allegory that re-stages the ungraspable "event" (Arendt 37) of revolution as originating in the "crisis" (Downes 422) of "undecidability" the Declaration of Independence produced in its claim (Derrida 9). The same "revolutionary impulse" (Elliott 254) Caleb experiences in *Caleb Williams* is refigured in "Rip Van Winkle": it summons Rip to the mountains and is anthropomorphized as an unrecognizable voice that stages the crisis of indecision of the Declaration.<sup>43</sup> This voice calls "Rip" to come, but then echoes "Rip . . . Rip"--like a "performative" that nullifies a "constative" (Derrida 9)--insofar as it demands Rip to "rip" "rip," or 'rupture . . . rupture'. This double repetition of the voice and its echo--both literal and figural--acts as a narrative trope, to construct and then deconstruct Rip's subjectivity. Specifically, Rip is constructed and then deconstructed by the repetition of this voice that echoes his presence and produces his absence. In this way, the real source of agency cannot be found in Rip's character, but rather in the story's narrative.

I argue that Rip is a non-subject, in other words, a figure whose subjectivity is undecided, and remains, like Caleb Williams and Edgar Huntly, a liminal, post-revolutionary subject who cannot participate in society, and therefore, is relegated to the

outskirts of the new republic. Rip does not have an assimilable agency--not only because he is not a potential political subject--but also because he is a trace of a revolutionary agency that has been excluded from the new republic. An undecided subject, Rip's narrative is similarly uncertain: its persistent return acts to inform of the missing narrative of the American Revolution omitted in "Rip Van Winkle," and testify on behalf of those whose subjectivities and stories are not included in the new republic.

A product of a ruptured past whose history and narrative cannot be assimilated in pre-Revolutionary or Republican society, Rip returns--I argue--to warn readers of the republic's asynchronous state after being seduced by the myth of new beginnings. Critic Michael Warner defines this anachronism as "the contradictory apprehension of history through which Irving attempts to remediate modernity" (Warner 14). He is the only critic reading Rip's anachronistic state as political and as essential to the emergence of "agency" (Warner 27). For Warner, Rip's anachronism is a literary manifestation of Paine's theory, that future generations should not inherit the tradition and "ills" of previous ones:

[Paine's idea] frees up political agency. His [Rip's] own relation to futurity is a new kind of problem. His heirs can no longer be the vehicle of his imprint on the world, for they have been imagined as radically free. His will cannot shape posterity by entailing his descendants. (Warner 27)

While Rip's sleep has yet to be read as a trauma or allegory of America's "crisis" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) of indecision, late-twentieth-century critics have

come close: for example, Rubin-Dorsky cites William Hedges in calling Rip's confused awakening the "real" (399) "'what happened'" and "'the closest thing to terror'" (Hedges, qtd. in Rubin-Dorsky 399) and finds that Rip's "dream" "makes the events in the story" nearly "ungraspable" (Rubin-Dorsky 399). Most significantly, Giles asserts that it is "possible to see the American Revolution within the context of Irving's writing as a kind of 'fortunate fall,' a traumatic event that allows him aesthetically to negotiate that profound sense of loss which provides the poetic inspiration for his texts" (151).

I argue Rip's anachronistic narrative reveals he is a traumatized subject living outside the law.<sup>44</sup> Rip returns as a trace of a traumatized past after a missed encounter with death and his awakening and return prompt him to master this event, through the constant retelling of his experience. However, Rip cannot master an event that he hasn't experienced: thus I argue, his sleep is an allegory for the traumatic event America experienced in revolution--one whose historical rupture neither he nor the republic can master--as he proves in his new, uncanny role as folk historian.

*Chapter 1*William Godwin's Political Protest: *Caleb Williams* and the Emergence of a Post-feudal Subject

## 1. Textual Prefaces and Intertextual Uncertainties

*Caleb Williams* features characters whose interrelationships dramatize the novel's main crux: an apocalyptic encounter between an aging, monarchical tyranny and an emerging revolutionary agency that attempts to transcend its feudal, contractual bonds through independent labor, political education, and an adherence to democratic values. Godwin's villains and heroes are situated at both extremes, and their actions reveal the precarious transition between feudal and revolutionary logics.<sup>45</sup> Characters cross over from good to evil (Squire Falkland), persecute maidens (Tyrrel), exploit the underclass (Hawkins), and intimidate those seeking justice against them (Gines). Caught in this encounter is the protagonist, Caleb, who becomes a victim of conflicting feudal and monarchical ideals of sovereignty, especially after witnessing and attempting to testify to the violence of "Things as they are."<sup>46</sup>

As narrator and protagonist, the violence Caleb testifies to simultaneously addresses England's class conflicts and the American and French Revolutions.<sup>47</sup> Specifically, Caleb's narrative is a firsthand account of "things as they are"--of debates haunting the eighteenth century such as the end of chivalry and feudalism, and themes dominating the revolutionary discourse such as freedom and the rights of man and citizen.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Caleb's narrative is an account of 'things as they were'--an amalgamation of testimonies critiquing the political and social conditions that inspire revolution--in particular, the coercive aspects of the feudal contract.<sup>49</sup> This critique, as

well as literature's capacity to present this critique in ways philosophical discourse cannot, is textually allegorized in the preface, and inter-textually staged in the novel's first scene of *literary* conflict, an internal preface to the novel itself.

Withdrawn from the first edition (1794) and published later in *Fleetwood* (1805), Godwin's original preface to *Caleb Williams* allegorizes literature's capacity to disclose the novel's secret--the pursuit of truth and justice: while "philosophers" know "that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society," this "truth" is "worth" also being "communicated to persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach" (1).<sup>50</sup> Caleb's own narrative exemplifies the urgency of this pursuit, because it is stifled not only by the intrusions of "government" (1), as the withdrawal of Godwin's original preface ironically demonstrates, but also by other narratives competing for legitimacy.

Godwin's withdrawal of the preface not only dramatizes the historical battle between eighteenth-century, nonfiction narratives to explain things as they are, but also illuminates their failure to do so against the interruptive "force" of revolution.<sup>51</sup> This failure is staged in the novel's major scene of conflict in which a "conversation" at a public meeting turns into a petition for Falkland to display his "poetical talents" (25), particularly by Mr. Clare, a "poet whose works" had done "immortal honor to the county that produced him" (23):<sup>52</sup>

The reader is acquainted with his works; he has probably dwelt upon them with transport. . . . He [Mr. Clare] pointed out to men their mistakes with

frankness and unreserve: his remonstrances produced astonishment and conviction. . . . (24)

Mr. Clare's energetic (25) public performance of "An Ode to the Genius of Chivalry," brings the feud between Tyrrel and Falkland to a point of no return, and demonstrates the capacity for literature to romanticize this conflict as a duel. Indeed, Mr. Clare's authoritative voice transforms Falkland's otherwise bland poem into an affective hit, and inspires him to urge Falkland to "act up to the magnitude" of his chivalrous "destiny" (26).<sup>53</sup> This is much to the chagrin of the rustic Tyrrel who questions the utility of literature when he says, "Damnation! I should like to know what a ship-load of such stuff is good for" (26).

Mr. Clare's positive "commendations" incite Falkland to seek an oral truce with Tyrrel the next day. Prefacing his proposal for an "amicable explanation" (27) by echoing the very urgency of the situation that Godwin actually wishes to underline--the conflict between corrupt feudal structures and an aging monarchy in the face of revolution--Falkland says:

We are in a critical situation. We are upon the brink of a whirlpool which, if once it get hold of us, will render all farther deliberation impotent. . . . We neither of us wish to change roads; let us each suffer the other to pursue his own track unmolested. Be this our compact; and by mutual forbearance let us preserve mutual peace. Saying this, Mr. Falkland offered his hand to Mr. Tyrrel in token of fellowship. But the gesture was

too significant. The wayward rustic . . . taken as he was by surprise, shrunk back. (28-29)

Tyrrel's refusal to accept this oral agreement not only mocks the failure of romantic, literary narratives masked as philosophical texts (like Burke's) to solve debates, but also predicts the impasse that arises when two models of chivalry compete for narrative legitimacy in the face of revolution. Indeed, Tyrrel's refusal is followed by the decline of the literary Mr. Clare, the only buffer between Tyrrel and Falkland, whose untimely death sparks the tyrant's speedy succession of "criminal excesses" (37).<sup>54</sup> If Tyrrel's refusal demonstrates the need for a new narrative, then the death of Mr. Clare necessitates a new author, or subject (Caleb), to take his place and pen this narrative.

Mr. Clare's death not only dramatizes a historical but also a *literary* difficulty in any attempt to legitimize a post-feudal subject against the interruptive force of revolution. This interruptive force is allegorized throughout the novel as an *uncertainty*, and is arguably represented by the "or" in the novel's title: *Things as They Are; Or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams*. The "or" not only represents the novel's own uncertainty as to which kind of narrative to privilege in explaining things as they are, feudal or revolutionary, but also what kind of subject will write this narrative. Will it be a feudal "or" revolutionary subject? Or will it be one caught in between both modes--an indecisive subject--who will witness the failure of *others* to write their narratives of beginning, and thus attempt to write his own?

I argue the "or"--as representing the interruptive force of revolution--fixes undecidability as a *trope* in the novel, where it is allegorized in both an intertextual and

textual manner and is never resolved. As such, any efforts to begin a new narrative and subject are interrupted by this undecidability.<sup>55</sup> According to Michael DePorte, “recent *Caleb Williams* criticism calls attention to the curious lack of resolution in the novel” (154) with David Collings, for example, contending that Godwin “defends” an “attempt to represent an inaccessible subjectivity” (870). While DePorte and Collings’s observations are examples of the large body of secondary literature that examines subjectivity and undecidability in *Caleb Williams*, the term ‘undecidable subjectivity’ has yet to be articulated as *such* by criticism.<sup>56</sup>

I argue that Godwin figures Caleb as a revolutionary, and therefore, undecidable subject whose subjectivity is constructed and then deconstructed (or undone) by his narrative. Specifically, the trope of “or” or “undecidability” (Derrida 9) in the novel constantly intervenes to render Caleb’s subjectivity and therefore, narration, undecidable. Godwin uses Caleb’s actions and non-actions as examples of the “‘undecidable’ force” (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) of revolutionary agency that forges a subject. He allegorizes the “undecidability” (Derrida 9) in the revolutionary claim as Caleb’s indecision over how to reason, act morally, and testify to the extremes of the social scale he witnesses. The text has agency precisely because it is uncertain of what story it will tell, and the narrator has agency precisely because he is uncertain of what kind of subject he will be.

While sections 2-6 of this chapter will examine key figurations of this “undecidability” (9)--including Caleb’s “revolutionary” origins, his curiosity, the uncertainties in Godwin’s philosophy, Caleb’s crisis over whether to break his feudal

bond, and the paradox of the revolutionary claim--sections 7-10 will study the link between Caleb's figuration as an undecidable subject and unreliable narrator to show how Caleb's indecision produces symptoms of writing and revision. Along with probing a theory of a Godwinian, and specifically, revolutionary subject via a review of current psychoanalytic, literary, and politico-historical readings of *Caleb Williams*, sections 7-10 will examine the unique link between narrative and subjectivity, and the refusal of both the law *and* the novel to recognize Caleb as a legitimate subject, and thus, the author of his own story. Further complicating (and textualizing) his difficulty, is the novel's suggestion that the subject of revolution is not one who has actually witnessed a violent event *per se*, but an event of testimony which, however, he then cannot testify to, further rendering his validation as a subject *undecided*.

## 2. The Origin of (Uncertain) Agency: Subjectivity and The Revolutionary Turn

How can Caleb assert himself as a subject, and as a narrator, when he is not certain if he can arrive at either position legitimately? Christian Thorne asks a similar question. In unlocking the relationship between Caleb's "curiosity," "bent for tinkering," and obsession for narrative (324), Thorne's attempt to identify a constitutive relationship between curiosity and narrative enables an initial approach to my argument that Caleb's uncertain origins produce an uncertain narrator and subject.

Specifically, Thorne asks "how, in the final years of the eighteenth century, is it possible for a writer to claim that a knack for mechanics makes one a novel reader?" (323-324). To reframe Thorne's concerns: what is the origin of Caleb's agency?

How do we trace the origin of Caleb's agency with the confusing sequence of terms that Godwin has given us? Which is the origin of Caleb's revolutionary agency: "turn," "curiosity," or "mechanical turn"? As Thorne comments, Caleb's curiosity is not "wanton," "sadistic" or an obsessive search of knowledge about others, but rather like a "researcher's inquisitiveness," creates a drive to find the root cause of things *having to do with the self*:

Curiosity . . . nourishes an interest in causality, not caprice. . . . Godwin had in mind some hypothetical genre we would have to dub 'the Newtonian novel' . . . we are stuck with the problem: curiosity, causality, the novel. (324)

In attempting to explain how Caleb's "mechanical turn" leads to "an invincible attachment to books," Thorne suggests we view the terms "curiosity," "causality," and the "novel" in strictly Machiavellian terms: "*fortune*," "*virtue*," and "*prudence*" (325). Thorne finds that "the turn of fortune's wheel names not merely circumstance or the chance conjuncture of events" but the disruptive effects of "the commercial imperatives of colonial trade" (325). "Fortune" "marks the point where the subject's ability to make sense of the social sphere breaks down," making it impossible for the subject to "penetrate further" into governing "institutions" (325). Most importantly, fortune acts as a substitute for "causality": "when eighteenth-century characters cannot name causes, or when they mean to emphasize the implacable complexity of those causes, they invoke fortune" (326). Thorne gives the example of "the Machiavellian Prince" who scrambles to "maintain his autonomy in willful disregard of custom's strictures" and is fraught with

the question, “how do we act, how do we understand actions, when we cannot count on their appearing legitimate to others?” (326).

Thorne’s analysis of *The Prince* is useful for two reasons. First, Thorne recognizes that Godwin obscures the origin of agency in the transition from Caleb’s “mechanical turn” to “attachment to narrative” (4). In doing so, he suggests how Godwin purposefully obscures the origins of Caleb’s revolutionary agency, and as such sets the stage for Caleb’s uncertain agency and narrative. Second, Thorne articulates what I argue is the crisis of uncertainty that faces the revolutionary subject, namely, how does one act if there is no authority to recognize that action as legitimate?<sup>57</sup> To Caleb, this would be articulated as, how does one act if one is trying to eradicate the very source of authority (Falkland) that would render my action as legitimate, or an action as that of a legitimate subject?

Caleb resembles the Machiavellian Prince, a revolutionary who makes the “claim to autonomy” and simultaneously encounters “fortune,” which “lashes out to compromise that independence” (Thorne 326). A politico-economic shift occurs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to transform writers like Godwin into uncertain storytellers: “by 1700 the English social order had already been . . . transformed by capitalism” (327). As such, “eighteenth-century English writing learns . . . to tell new kinds of stories” in a ‘different’ way than “providential narratives of the seventeenth century” (327). As an eighteenth-century writer, Godwin could be one of those new storytellers, who represents “action as unsettled and open-ended” or *uncertain*:

If action becomes unstuck in the early novel, if action no longer seems to carry fixed providential meanings, it is because the modern agent must undertake action not in a traditionally oriented community . . . but precisely in ‘society’ . . . . The question . . . is, how does one conceive of action within such diffuse practices and institutions. . . . (328)

Caleb is the prototypical subject of this society who must take action, yet does not know *how*. Thorne suggests the novel is at fault for this, because it becomes “an attack on the concept of fortune, which emerges as a breach of narrative and ethical responsibility” (340). This leaves protagonists like Caleb left to their own devices in attempting, and then failing, to make decisions:

The storyteller and the moral agent have the common obligation to track causality down. With this observation, Godwin’s notion of the causal or mechanical novel begins to make a kind of sense. The causal novel is an instrument for charting the new intricacies of modern social space. (340)

Thorne’s reading sets the stage for a reconsideration of Caleb’s obsession with causation. More particularly, one needs to read closely exactly those passages in which Godwin traces the emergence of Caleb’s agency in the overlapping and yet contradictory figurations of his curiosity as inspiring his fascination with mechanical causation on the one hand and novels on the other. For Caleb is a very specific kind of Machiavellian figure, a revolutionary one whose curiosity must also be read through the lens of the eighteenth century’s preoccupation with the contradictory definitions of revolution. The

evolution of Caleb's revolutionary subjectivity begins quite literally with a revolutionary turn: having witnessed his own progress within the feudal system, a "turn" (4) in Caleb leads to a practice of reading--and much as Godwin's preface dangerously predicted--narrative begets a curiosity or "revolutionary impulse" (Elliott 254) that motivates his desire to eradicate the medieval, sovereign structure that imprisons him everywhere. This section will examine Godwin's confusing use of the terms "curiosity" and "turn" to originate Caleb's subjectivity in either an innate, mechanical desire ("curiosity") or a practice of reading ("turn") (4). Specifically, by offering readers *two* origins in the novel--"curiosity" and "turn"--Godwin not only conflates them, but makes it difficult to follow either one:

My excellence in these respects however gave a turn to my meditations. I delighted to read of feats of activity. . . . I inured myself to mechanical pursuits. . . . The spring of action which . . . characterized the whole train of my life, was curiosity. It was this that gave me my mechanical turn; I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. It was this that made me a sort of natural philosopher . . . this produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance. . . . My curiosity however was not entirely ignoble . . . my imagination must be excited; and when that was not done, my curiosity was dormant. (4)

The shift from "curiosity" to "turn" suggests the uncertainty inherent in the term "revolution." This uncertainty emerges in the confusing shift from revolution's

mechanical, *scientific* connotation to its *politico-philosophical* denotation over the course of the eighteenth century. Godwin stirs up memories of this historical shift in the meaning of “revolution” when he biographically sketches Caleb’s agency as originating in a “turn,” a “curiosity,” and then finally a “mechanical turn” (begotten from “curiosity”) which leads to his “curiosity” (of a “natural philosopher”) (4). Chronologically, these terms appear in the novel as: “turn,” “curiosity,” “mechanical turn” (4). In sketching them this way, Godwin obscures which produces which first. For example, does the turn lead to Caleb’s curiosity, or does curiosity lead to the turn? Each of the terms: “turn,” “curiosity,” and “mechanical turn,” have an important *revolutionary* character as well. Read outside the context of Caleb’s progression as a subject, the sequence of these terms seem to allegorize the evolution of the term “revolution” from a mechanical to a social, and then, politico-philosophical meaning.

Originally conceived in astronomy as “a 360, not a 180 degree rotation,” the old meaning of revolution in 1543 referred to “the rotation of bodies” and a *full* turn, or *return*: a “circular motion returning to its point of origin” (Paulson 1; 49; 50). Then, via the English Revolution of 1688, revolution took on an additional concept of moving forward with action, thus meaning both a mechanical “rotation of celestial bodies” *and* a social, “fundamental transformation of society” (74).<sup>58</sup> In the eighteenth century, “revolution” took on a new meaning. The French Revolution, in particular, contributed to changing the meaning of revolution to a political “overturning or overthrowing of an established government” (4). This new meaning or “metaphor” of “revolution” then spiraled into historical specificity when it “took on the associations of this particular

series of events” such as “the fall of the Bastille, the Terror, 9 Thermidor and 18 Brumaire” (4). By the time Godwin wrote *Caleb Williams*, the meaning of revolution “projected” “abrupt, broken and unpredictable sequences of events” (49) and meant a “sudden and radical political change” (50).

Godwin not only alludes to this shift in meaning from a scientific to a politico-philosophical interpretation of “revolution” by listing the progression of Caleb’s agency as a “turn,” “curiosity,” “mechanical turn,” “curiosity” (of a “natural philosopher”) (4), but also mimics the hermeneutical conflict over “revolution” that occupied intellectual circles in the eighteenth century. This conflict over a scientific, social and politico-philosophical interpretation of revolution came to a head in the seventeenth century--with revolution as “repetition,” a “full circle” movement, “astronomical” or “natural cycle” versus revolution as “overthrow,” a “half-circle,” “disruption,” and “irreversible change”--and affected the literatures of the eighteenth century (Paulson 50-52). For example, in Blake, Paulson observes a belief in the old meaning of revolution: “France was returning to its ancient liberties, turning its absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy” (51). In Burke’s *Reflections*, however, Paulson observes the new, not the old meaning of “revolution” being used: “the word carries the new sense of a large violent upheaval from below that brings about a restructuring of society” (51).

The novel’s sequence of “turn,” “curiosity,” and “mechanical turn” begins with the mechanical meaning of revolution (“turn”), continues with the social meaning (“curiosity”), and then ends with the political-philosophical meaning (“mechanical turn”) in so far as it produces a “curiosity” in Caleb like that of a “natural philosopher” (4).

First, Caleb's "excellence" produces "a turn" in his "meditations," leading him to read "tales" simulating his success at having overcome the challenges of his unequal conditions: "I delighted to read of feats of activity, and was particularly interested by tales in which . . . strength are the means resorted to for . . . conquering difficulties" (4). Second, this "turn" ignites a "curiosity" which Caleb calls "the spring of action which" "characterized the whole train of [my] life" (4). The "turn" resembles the mechanical meaning of revolution--the "rotation of celestial bodies"--while Caleb's "curiosity" or "spring of action" suggests the social meaning of revolution--the "fundamental transformation of society" (Paulson 74). Third, Caleb's "curiosity" is characteristic of a social revolution in that it begets a "mechanical turn," which, like the Blakean reading of revolution, spurs a 360 degree rotation in his desire to trace "the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes," finally culminating in his "curiosity" of "a natural philosopher" (*CW* 4).

Caleb's "curiosity" of a "natural philosopher" provokes one to read "mechanical turn" as a term that has a scientific meaning, in that it makes Caleb return to the root cause of things. It also, however, confuses the reader because "mechanical turn" could also reference the political character of revolution, because this 360 degree rotation could be read as a desire to overthrow things as they are in order to return to the root cause of things.<sup>59</sup> As such, this sequence of "turn," "curiosity," "mechanical turn" (4) not only may be said to invoke the referential problems that the French Revolution had given to the new political meaning of revolution, but also reveals Godwin's indecision as to which type of revolutionary subject Caleb really is.<sup>60</sup>

This indecision is suggested by the fact that Caleb's "mechanical turn" produces in him "an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance" (4).<sup>61</sup> This shift presents an indecision: no longer can one read Caleb's agency as arising out of a movement similar to revolution, but rather, as a different story--the story of a subject whose agency originates in *narrative*. This particular narrative is one that tells the story of Caleb's search for social and political equality. The juxtaposition of "turn," "curiosity," "mechanical turn" with "narrative" (4) presents readers with two alternatives: one in which an agent is poised, like the French Revolution, to overthrow or at least restructure society or, alternatively, one in which an agent will seek reform through *narrative*. The novel opens with Caleb's epistolary address, whose "history of my future life" echoes Rousseau's tragic pursuit of perfectibility in a state of inequality (4). Despite being "born of humble parents" and deprived of an "inheritance, long since lost by their unfortunate progeny," Caleb's education has superseded the norms of his society: "My improvement was greater than my condition in life afforded room to expect" (3, 4). This "progress" naturally leads him to read "tales" about other heroes, like himself, overcoming adversity. Caleb represents Godwin's vision of a prototypical subject of a government-less society, insofar as he independently accumulates political and social knowledge. This self-education, in which he traces the root cause of things, has been interpreted by critics as a compulsion to overturn everything in search of knowledge (Butler 93) and as caused by curiosity: "I read, I devoured compositions . . . my imagination must be excited; and when that was not done, my curiosity was dormant" (4). Caleb's "progress" is "observed" by Mr. Collins, whose "favourable [sic] report" of Caleb's "industry" and "genius"

inspires Falkland to hire him as a secretary, thus seeming to aid in Caleb's progress toward social equality (5).

Godwin leaves readers with two origins to Caleb's agency. One is characterized by the sequence of "turn," "curiosity," "mechanical turn" and gives us an unfolding, if still undecidable, portrait of Caleb's subjectivity. The other is characterized by a "mechanical turn" which spurs his "attachment" to "narrative" (4) and eventually leads to his autobiographical narrative--"the penning of his memoirs" (3). The problem is not that Godwin offers readers two different yet overlapping origins, neither of which entirely explain Caleb's evolution from a curious lad to enlightened agent. The problem is that the link between Caleb's subjectivity and his narrative ultimately produces a crisis. Specifically, in their encounter narrative and subjectivity construct and deconstruct one another, and in doing so, leave Caleb's status as a revolutionary subject undecided.

Caleb's narrative can be read as giving birth or spurring violent events that then destroy the very objective of his narrative, which is to establish himself as a subject. The one trajectory representing Caleb's *subjectivity* in the sequence "turn," "curiosity," "mechanical turn," is intersected by the other trajectory, his "attachment" to narrative (4), which represents Caleb's *narrative*. My interest in identifying an intersecting relationship between these two trajectories is to establish subjectivity and narrative as interdependent, or determining one another. Specifically, while Caleb attempts to construct his subjectivity by "penning" his own "memoirs" (3) in the text, the agency of his narrative undoes that subjectivity, thus making him unable to come to grips with his own agency.

In particular, Caleb's subject status is threatened by the "memoirs" that he writes, so that in attempting to save himself by recording his "memoirs" (3), Caleb single-handedly ends up destroying himself. Caleb is caught in a dilemma: on the one hand, Caleb *needs* a narrative to have his own voice and be the author of his own claim to subjectivity, and therefore be the author of his own story. As such, Caleb constructs his narrative with the objective of constructing a self and emancipating himself, and in this sense, allows his subject status to *depend* on his narrative. On the other hand, as Caleb proceeds in writing his "memoirs" (3), his narrative gives rise to violent events. These violent events threaten the construction of his identity, and act to undo his project of constructing his subjectivity.

Caleb's dependence on narrative thus poses a problem to his efforts to emancipate himself: the more Caleb writes to construct himself, the more his narrative threatens to discredit and delegitimize him. As such, while his subjectivity is dependent on a narrative to construct it, this narrative acts against his primary objective, which is to acquire an identity and literally write himself into the position of a subject. Thus, one could say that Godwin proffers a revolutionary agent that is simultaneously constructed and then deconstructed by the agency of his own narration. One example of this intersection of trajectories--subjectivity encountering and deconstructing narrative--occurs in the first few pages of the novel, in which Caleb describes how his act of reading narratives not only produces physical changes in him, but also determines his future story as either one of "happiness" or "misery":

I panted for the unraveling of an adventure, with an anxiety, perhaps almost equal to that of the man whose future happiness or misery depended on its issue. I read, I devoured compositions of this sort. They took possession of my soul; and the effects they produced, were frequently discernible in my external appearance and health. (4)

Caleb's act of reading also simultaneously produces a narrative that predicts what will happen to him in the future; as the passage reveals, Caleb expects to be--and indeed becomes--physically affected by reading: "compositions" "took possession of" his "soul," "and the effects they produced" were "discernible" in his "external appearance and health" (4). In another example in the novel, Caleb writes that his "heart bleeds at the recollection of [Falkland's] misfortunes as if they were my own"; by writing, Caleb not only narrates Falkland's misfortunes, but acts to literally make Falkland's "misfortunes" his "own" (10). Caleb even admits that his act of writing Falkland's history links Falkland's "story" to his own "existence," thus providing an example of how his own narrative "recollection" of Falkland's "story" deconstructs his subjectivity:

I shall drop the person of Collins, and assume to be myself the historian of our patron. To the reader it may appear . . . as if this detail of the preceding life of Mr. Falkland were foreign to my history. Alas, I know from bitter experience that it is otherwise. My heart bleeds at the recollection of his misfortunes as if they were my own. How can it fail to do so? To his story the whole fortune of my life was linked; because he was miserable . . . my existence [has] been irretrievably blasted. (10)

In another example, Caleb anticipates and, as it were, causes himself to get an unfair trial; specifically, his predictions become self-fulfilling prophecies insofar as Caleb does not receive a fair trial in the original ending and becomes condemned to a prison; similarly, in the revised, published ending Caleb condemns himself before the trial begins:

What chance was there, after the purgation I was now suffering, that I should come out acquitted at last? What probability was there that the trial I had endured in the house of Mr. Falkland was not just as fair as any that might be expected to follow? No, I anticipated my own condemnation.

(183)

These examples not only illustrate an indecision in both the beginning and ending of Caleb's evolution as a revolutionary subject, but also articulate Godwin's own indecision as to how to make this subject coherent.<sup>62</sup>

### 3. Curious Beginnings, Novel Turns

Godwin's act of complicating and thus obscuring the origins of Caleb's agency is a characteristic of Gothic fiction which establishes uncertainty from the beginning for both protagonist and reader.<sup>63</sup> Uncertainty may be said to generate the master trope of Caleb's story--curiosity. Caleb's curiosity leads him to his discovery of Falkland's trunk--the circumstantial, Gothic event par *excellence* which links the survival of Caleb's subject status to the survival of his narrative.<sup>64</sup> Specifically, from the moment that Caleb discovers the trunk, his future becomes uncertain: by discovering Falkland's secret, Caleb

becomes a witness to an untold story that he must then retell in order not to become a victim of it. Caleb's discovery of the trunk (and simultaneous discovery of Falkland's secret) thus literally endangers his freedom because it threatens to keep him bound to Falkland forever. In order to free himself, Caleb must tell the true version of Falkland's story; yet telling this story will change everything, and necessitate that Caleb replace Falkland as the arbiter of truth and justice.

Retelling the untold story of Falkland's secret reveals the truth of Falkland's crime, and thus has the consequence of changing the narrative of Falkland's past. It turns from a seamless tale of chivalry to a fragmented tale of murder, deceit, and injustice. As such, Caleb's discovery and subsequent opening of the trunk literally causes a break, because it necessitates that Caleb tell a *new* story, and thus take on the role of author in reconstructing a story that links his fate to Falkland's. Radcliffe supports the notion that Caleb's "sudden," "momentary impulse" causes a revolutionary break because Caleb acted "upon no plan" when he broke into Falkland's trunk: Caleb "makes his act uncharacteristic, that is, by describing it as if it were isolated and could not fit into a coherent narrative" (544). Because his action cannot be reincorporated into a coherent, existing narrative, Caleb must tell a new story in order to reestablish continuity between past and future. The story is no longer only Falkland's, but also Caleb's, in that his emancipation becomes entirely dependent on his ability to expose Falkland's dreadful secret, and recast himself as innocent. Retelling this story will necessitate that Caleb establish himself as a subject. The trunk scene is critical to Caleb's story then, because it marks the point when Caleb's subjectivity becomes literally bound to narrative. This link

between subjectivity and narrative occurs in the novel's two trunk scenes, and is allegorized in Caleb's need to write his memoirs (narrative) in order to emancipate himself (subjectivity) from Falkland.

The novel's first trunk scene is significant because it marks the point when curiosity emerges as the source of Caleb's uncertain agency:

One day when I had been about three months in the service of my patron, I went to a closet. . . . As I opened the door, I heard at the same instant a deep groan expressive of intolerable anguish. . . . I heard the lid of a trunk hastily shut, and the noise as of fastening a lock . . . at that moment a voice that seemed supernaturally tremendous exclaimed, Who is there?. . . . Villain, cried he, what has brought you here?. . . . You set yourself as a spy upon my actions. But bitterly shall you repent your insolence. (7-8)

Caleb's curiosity immediately endangers his freedom and sends him spiraling into uncertainty in his efforts to repair Falkland's perception of him as a villainous "spy" (8). Ironically, while Caleb never actually sees the contents of the trunk, his discovery of it makes him into a spy and seals his fate as a curious captive. Specifically, Falkland's suspicions only fuel Caleb's curiosity to open the trunk even more. Curiosity--generated from Caleb's initial uncertainty--becomes a source of agency that drives Caleb to the novel's second trunk scene, in which Caleb attempts to actually unlock Falkland's trunk and prove what he guesses to be its contents: (narrative) evidence directly linking Falkland to Tyrrel's murder. Sensing this impending danger, Falkland purchases Caleb's "secrecy" by placing "five guineas" into his hand:

I easily understood that secrecy was one of the things expected from me, and indeed my mind was too much disposed to meditate upon what I had heard and seen, to make it a topic of indiscriminate communication. (8)

Suspecting him of murder, Caleb's curiosity leads him to "watch" Falkland's behavior closely when he is called to participate in an unrelated murder trial of a peasant:

I conceived the possibility of rendering the incident subordinate to the great inquiry which drank up all the currents of my soul. I said, This man is arraigned of murder, and murder is the master key that wakes distemper in the mind of Mr. Falkland. I will watch him without remission. (126)

Caleb's observations of Falkland begin to strengthen his resolve that Falkland is "guilty" (130) and further drive his desire to open the trunk and confirm his suspicions:

After two or three efforts, in which the energy of uncontrollable passion was added to my bodily strength, the fastenings gave way, the trunk opened, and all that I sought was at once within my reach. (132)

This second trunk scene--meant to establish certainty--acts to only attenuate it still further, as Caleb fails to see the contents in the trunk because he is interrupted by Falkland's abrupt entrance:

I was in the act of lifting up the lid, when Mr. Falkland entered, wild, breathless, distraction in his looks! . . . He no sooner saw me, than his eyes emitted sparks of rage. He ran with eagerness to a brace of loaded pistols which hung up in the room, and, seizing one, presented it to my head . . . he changed it [his resolution] . . . and flung the pistol into the

court below . . . what was it that fate had yet in reserve for me! The insatiable vengeance of a Falkland, of a man whose hands were to my apprehension red with blood and his thoughts familiar with cruelty and murder. How great were the resources of his mind, resources henceforth to be confederated for my destruction! This was the termination of an ungoverned curiosity. . . . One short minute had effected a reverse in my situation. (132-133)

After witnessing Falkland fling his pistol out of the window (and thus stop himself from committing a violent act in front of Caleb and readers), Caleb's "ungoverned curiosity" gives way to uncertainty, when he wonders "what" "fate had yet in reserve for me" (133). Caleb's witnessing of Falkland's actions also undoes Falkland's previous reputation as a nonviolent person, moreover, serves as evidence to Caleb--and readers--that Falkland is the murderer. Intent on rectifying his endangered reputation, Falkland confesses his story to Caleb to reconstruct his character (and story), as one of (mis)fortune, conducted to "leave behind" a "spotless and illustrious name" (136), and defend his "honour [sic]":

Williams, said he, in a tone that had more in it of sorrow than resentment, I have attempted your life! I am a wretch. . . . I am the blackest of villains. I am the murderer of Tyrrel. I am the assassin of the Hawkinses. . . . All are but links of one chain. A blow! A murder! My next business was to defend myself. . . . Never was a task so harrowing and intolerable! Well: thus far

fortune favoured [sic] me. . . . This it is to be a gentleman! a man of honour [sic]! (135)

Having disclosed his secret in this confession, Falkland blackmails Caleb into preserving his false reputation by keeping his secret concealed:

If ever an unguarded word escape from your lips, if ever you excite my jealousy or suspicion, expect to pay for it by your death or worse. It is a dear bargain you have made. But it is too late to look back. (136)

Caleb's turbulent' preoccupation with curiosity--at one time "stronger" than "the love of independence" (143)--has driven him to become a "prisoner" of himself ("myself") (138). Having driven his actions up until the second trunk scene in the novel, Caleb's curiosity yields to revolutionary uncertainty as the new source of his agency; after the trunk's discovery, revolutionary agency drives his desire to claim his subjectivity and return to being his "own master":

I was but ill prepared for the servile submission Mr. Falkland demanded. In early life I had been accustomed to be much my own master. When I first entered into Mr. Falkland's service, my personal habits were checked by the novelty of my situation. . . . To novelty and its influence, curiosity had succeeded. Curiosity . . . was a principle stronger in my bosom than even the love of independence. To that I would have sacrificed my liberty or my life. . . . But the turbulence of curiosity had now subsided. (143)

As Falkland's "prisoner" (143), Caleb's enslavement inspires him to not only "adjust his interests" and choose independence over "curiosity," but also *narrate* his future resolve for agency:

I had been adventurous in the gratifications of an infantine and unreasonable curiosity, and I was resolved not to be less adventurous, if need were, in the defence [sic] of every thing [sic] that can make life a blessing. I was prepared for an amicable adjustment of interests. . . . (144)

Caleb's inability to free himself from Falkland (and his secret) not only reveals the significance of the two trunk scenes as compromising Caleb's status as a subject, but ultimately his narrative. Specifically, Caleb's uncertainty drives the mystery in the novel until the end, when it is finally solved by his realization that the secret contents (in the trunk) have all along been a "faithful narrative" of Falkland's guilt in the Hawkins and Tyrrel murders (315). By opening the trunk and succumbing to his curiosity, Caleb permanently implicates the status of his subjectivity--and narrative--with Falkland's. Falkland's aborted act of murder not only reveals the falsehood of his reputed innocence, but also necessitates that Caleb retell Falkland's story to establish Caleb's own innocence. In this way, one could say that Caleb's curiosity truly is the basis of Caleb's uncertain agency--moreover, binds subjectivity to narrative--because while telling the true story of Falkland's violent past in a new narrative will support Caleb's claim of innocence (and independence), it will also threaten him, as I will explore below. Specifically, as the novel reveals, Caleb's curiosity, and subsequent revolutionary uncertainty, leads Caleb to

become implicated in a story in which only his own retelling will determine whether he lives a free or enslaved subject.

Ingrid Horrocks and Robert W. Uphaus's observations are useful in theorizing that the link between Caleb's subjectivity and narrative is mediated by curiosity and originates in the novel's trunk scenes: Horrocks believes the trunk scenes illustrate "the novel's priority" of "concealing and revealing knowledge" in order to demonstrate "that those with power" are invested in "preventing others from gaining the knowledge they possess" (35), and Uphaus suggests the trunk "stimulates Caleb's curiosity," or specifically, "his desire to discover its meaning," "but, failing that, his need to attach meaning to it" (281).<sup>65</sup> Critics typically approach Caleb's curiosity as a desire for knowledge, perhaps led by Caleb's confession that his "offence" [sic] (his opening of the trunk) "had merely been a mistaken thirst of knowledge" (133). For example, Horrocks finds the desire for knowledge to be a "key structuring principle" in *Caleb Williams*: Caleb desires knowledge about the "direction" of his own "story" against the force of a Gothic "obscurity" which "dominates" "both within" his narrative and "in society outside" (34). While I agree that Caleb's curiosity expresses his desire for knowledge, this desire is more than just a need for general knowledge, but rather revolutionary, insofar as this knowledge awakens his desire for social change in a sublime way. For example, like the sublime, curiosity simultaneously brings fluctuations of "pleasure" and pain in its promise to unlock the unknown, and like a revolution, is founded on "turns" of "opposite principles" that make Caleb restless and indecisive:

[t]he uncertainty and restlessness of my contemplations would by no means depart from me. The fluctuating state of my mind produced a contention of opposite principles that by turns usurped dominion over my conduct. Sometimes I was influenced by the most complete veneration for my master; I placed an unreserved confidence in his integrity and his virtue. . . . At other times the confidence, which had before flowed with the most plenteous tide, began to ebb; I was, as I had already been, watchful, inquisitive, suspicious, full of a thousand conjectures as to the meaning of the most indifferent actions. . . . I had some consolation in the midst of my restlessness. Curiosity is a principle that carries its pleasures as well as its pains along with it. The mind is urged by a perpetual stimulus; it seems as if it were continually approaching to the end of its race; and, as the insatiable desire of satisfaction is its principle of conduct, so it promises itself in that satisfaction an unknown gratification. . . . (122)

The novel provides other examples supporting the notion that Caleb's curiosity is sublime, or at least leads to sublime emotions, which then lead to uncertainty and undecidability:

In the very tempest and hurricane of the passions, I seemed to enjoy the most soul-ravishing calm. I cannot better express the then state of my mind, than by saying, I was never so perfectly alive as at that moment. This state of mental elevation . . . at length subsided and gave place to more deliberate reflection. One of the first questions that then occurred

was, What shall I do with the knowledge I have been so eager to acquire?

(130)

The novel seems to suggest that Caleb's sublime curiosity leads to awakening or revolutionizing his mind, and flooding him with indecisiveness. Caleb's curiosity can be said to revolutionize his mind precisely because, like the sublime, it excites his "imagination" out of "dormant" inactivity (4). Prince supports this notion in his reading of Godwin's educational tract *The Enquirer*, which "begins" "with a philosophical exposition on curiosity" (474), a "revolutionary category" that "promised to reorient the entire discussion of educational theory and practice" (475). According to Prince, Godwin found curiosity to be revolutionary, insofar as he envisioned that "educators who placed curiosity first would seek forms that activated the youths' natural powers of emulation and inference" (475). The novel provides instances in which Caleb's curiosity excites social change or "courage" in Caleb:

The more impenetrable Mr. Falkland was determine to be, the more uncontrollable was my curiosity. . . . These reflections led gradually to a new state of my mind. . . . The story I had now heard, and the curiosity it excited, restored to me activity, eagerness and courage. (108)

If curiosity is a "revolutionary category," then curiosity could be said to produce the revolutionary agency that drives Caleb's "activated" mind to knowledge, and eventually, to social change (475).<sup>66</sup> This "origin" is the knowledge of Falkland's secret, which Franta reads as an inheritance that possesses him (703). Caleb's desire to break

away from this inheritance could be seen as revolutionary insofar as it drives him to cut off ties with his past.

Caleb's revolutionary desire to break from past narratives drives him to compose a new narrative that will emancipate him as a free agent. As such, I agree with psychoanalytic interpretations of Caleb's curiosity that support my argument that curiosity, indeed, binds Caleb as a subject to his narrative. For example, Michael DePorte reads Caleb's curiosity as an "almost" sexual "intense passion to know" and calls his "delight in spying on his master" "sadistic" (155). While I agree that his curiosity is an "intense passion" that binds him to a subject, I disagree that this subject is Falkland. Caleb has an "intense passion to know" (155), but only in order to be freed of his bondage to Falkland--*not* to be obsessively bound to him. Caleb's "passion to know" is a passion to know himself, and not others, so that he may construct an independent self. In this sense I agree with Stephen Ahern, who interprets Caleb's curiosity as a "critical self-examination" (70) or obsession for knowledge that is really intended to yield knowledge--and eventually--a narrative about the self.

While Caleb constructs a self through narrative, his "critical self-examination" (70) actually serves also to *deconstruct* this self, precisely because it disturbs the legitimacy of Caleb's subject status in its very attempt to affirm it. Caleb's curiosity is a "mark of Romanticism" that, while "emancipatory," also leads to "neurosis" if conducted in excess (70). Caleb's desire for knowledge makes him suffer and feel "more than others," and thus become a "nervous narrator":

This is the ‘nervous narrator’ whom Peter Melville Logan identifies as the paradigmatic speaking subject of the early novel, as the only one with a story to tell readers eager to access an intense subjectivity that must be expressed through the experiences of the diseased body in crisis. (71)<sup>67</sup>

Specifically, Caleb’s narration produces a subject who cannot escape the political and psychological structure of his curious compulsion to both construct and deconstruct himself:

On one hand the novel’s political imagination locates Caleb as the servant who yearns to learn the master’s secrets; on the other hand its psychological imagination locates this power struggle within the unstable transference that both sustains and entropies the Hegelian dialectic between slave and master. The public sphere of Godwinian conversation, rather than producing autonomous Romantic individuals, instead interpellates [sic] subjects (in the Althusserian sense) into the social identities they cannot resist inhabiting. (Faflak 103)

Caleb’s curious or “compulsive” relationship to narrative both determines and threatens his subject status.<sup>68</sup> Caleb’s attempt to assert his subjectivity against what I suggest is the agency of his narrative proves to be a failure precisely because his narrative works against its objectives of constructing an independent agent certain of its freedom. With only curious origins serving as the foundation of his agency, Caleb’s subject status is certain to reflect this uncertainty.

#### 4. Uncertain Subjectivity: Caleb and the Feudal Contract

The novel illustrates Caleb's hesitation to make decisions, as he seesaws between moments of certainty and uncertainty in his crisis over whether to reveal Falkland's secret. Curiosity, rather than leading to certain knowledge, binds Caleb to a practice of writing--in which he constantly constructs, and then out of uncertainty undoes his own decisions--and as such his own self. Having become hostage to Falkland's "constant state" of "suspicion," Caleb's indecision begins when he begs to be turned "out of" his employer's "service" (*CW* 120). Falkland's refusal confirms his guilt, and in "an uncontrollable" declaration overheard by Falkland, Caleb exclaims:

This is the murderer! The Hawkinses were innocent! I am sure of it! I will  
pledge my life for it! (129)

Caleb's promise to "pledge" his life for the pursuit of truth marks the beginning of a series of claims that track Caleb's uncertain evolution from bonded servant to free subject. Godwin lures readers into moments of revolutionary certainty, only to destroy them with the uncertain bond that imprisons Caleb. Godwin suggests such a revolutionary character when he describes Caleb's "involuntary exclamation" as producing a "tumult" of self-awareness in Caleb, who feels as if his "animal system had undergone a total revolution" (129):

I was solemn, yet full of rapid emotion, burning with indignation and  
energy. In the very tempest and hurricane of the passions, I seemed to  
enjoy the most soul-ravishing calm. . . . I was never so perfectly alive as at  
that moment. (130)

Like a revolution, Caleb's new "energy" produces an inexorable speech:

‘Mr. Falkland is the murderer! He is guilty! I see it! I feel it! I am sure of it!’ Thus was I hurried along by an uncontrollable destiny. (130)

Godwin then breaks this revolutionary "tumult" (129). Unprepared to embody this "energy" (130), Caleb recollects his role as subjugated servant, and censures his capacity to have a will of his own. Expressing his dilemma over whether to take action, Caleb wonders: "if it be such as would not be admitted at a criminal tribunal, am I sure it is such as I ought to admit?" (130).<sup>69</sup> This uncertainty allows Falkland to coerce him into accepting an oath of silence and shows Falkland's capacity--as sovereign turned despot--to impose contractual obligations from outside that Caleb reproduces from within. Unlike Emily, who asserts her will as the only defense in preventing a marriage without her consent, Caleb falls prey to Falkland's interior subjugation by accepting an oral oath that will torment him "with a secret" that he "must never disburthen" (138). This exemplifies the "force" of "gratitude" "in the system of 'discipline'" in the "new political anatomy" of the eighteenth century, "whose . . . end[s] are not" "relations of sovereignty" but "relations of discipline" (Sayers 51). This system "subverts the empowerment an emergent 'rights' culture might otherwise offer the underclass" (Sayers 51), thereby turning Caleb's assent into an act of consent (138). It underlies Caleb's defense of Falkland's behavior as owing to circumstances:

I still discovered new cause of admiration for my master . . . when I recollected the offence [sic] I had given, so contrary to every . . . principle of civilized society . . . so intolerable to a man of Mr. Falkland's elevation

and . . . peculiarity of circumstances, I was astonished at his forbearance. . . . If he have been criminal, that is owing to circumstances.

(137)

Caleb's "pledge" to disclose Falkland's guilt is then reversed into a pledge to honor his secret: "I will never become an informer. I will never injure my patron" (137). Caleb's crisis of indecision not only demonstrates the uncertainty that a post-feudal subject experiences in the face of revolution, but also illustrates a moral conflict central to Godwin's political philosophy:

In *Political Justice* . . . Godwin . . . developed a conception of justice in which . . . just behavior in cases of moral conflict was prefer[red] for that individual whose worth to society was . . . greatest, where worth was defined . . . [i]n terms of a contribution to cultural and intellectual development. Hence, in Godwin's famous 'fire case,' where we . . . rescue either our own mother or the philosopher Fenelon from a conflagration, we must choose the latter. (Claeys 81)

While, in theory, Caleb's decision is clear--in practice, it is more uncertain. Specifically, Caleb's indecision over whether to choose allegiance to Falkland over his own freedom reveals that, while in principle, he must choose to save Falkland, in practice he cannot, because, as Claeys says, the "contribution to cultural and intellectual development" (81) may lie in saving himself and becoming a free agent.<sup>70</sup> Godwin, however, shows us that Caleb is not ready to embrace agency and save himself over Falkland. Caleb sticks to his promise to obey his sovereign, and reveals the security he

feels in being governed by “the terror” of certain punishment through his bond to Falkland, rather than the uncertainty of freedom, which would still make him prey to Falkland’s despotism:

[h]e preferred to govern me by terror, and watch me with unceasing anxiety. . . . If I encountered him, what chance had I of victory? . . . If I were defeated, what was the penalty I had to suffer? Well then, the rest of my life must be devoted to slavish subjection? Miserable sentence! And if it were, what security had I against the injustice of a man, vigilant . . . and criminal? I envied the . . . wretch upon the scaffold. . . . They know what they have to suffer. I had only to imagine everything terrible, and then say, The fate reserved for me is worse than this! (145)

Caleb’s fear of breaking free from Falkland’s bondage gives way to a fear of permanent enslavement. Uncertain over his new resolve to quit Falkland’s service, Caleb writes a letter requesting release from his legal contract, and as such, from his oral oath of secrecy. Caleb’s letter reveals the false sense of subjectivity the contract has given him:

I have conceived the intention of quitting your service. . . . I shall then be, what it is my duty to be, master of my own actions. (152)

Caleb’s false sense of subjectivity is evident in his master/slave discourse, in which he meekly says, “I have conceived the intention of quitting your service” (152).<sup>71</sup> Godwin refers to the coercive power structure that has stopped Caleb from deciding whether he should break his contract, but also whether he can break it. Realizing he can only imprison Caleb for a real crime, Falkland frames him for robbery, and discourages

his servants from supporting Caleb's defense at his trial. Vowing "to obtain justice to myself" (161), Caleb reflects on his conflicting desire to obey the law, but not submit to an illegal coercion:

My mind seemed to undergo an entire revolution. . . . Timid . . . as I had felt myself, when I regarded Mr. Falkland as my . . . domestic foe, I now conceived that the case was entirely altered. Meet me, said I, as an open accuser; . . . I will not fear you. (160)

Caleb's seemingly concrete decision to betray Falkland's secret is short-lived because of Falkland's criminal accusation of robbery against him, and Caleb is once again sent into spiraling uncertainty. William G. Sayres examines Godwin's exploration of the "adjudication of servant gratitude in which Falkland's 'charge of ingratitude' subverts the laws completely, and sweeps aside the constraints of reason in legal process to convict" Caleb of a crime he did not commit (50).<sup>72</sup> Accused of a crime he did not commit, Caleb's appeal is rejected by feudal law, which requires a witness to testify to his innocent character, and thus prove Caleb would not have been capable of robbery.

While the despotic system paralyzes Caleb's capacity to make or act on decisions, Caleb's indecision over whether to break free or "rescue" Falkland's reputation by concealing the truth finally gives way to his decision to run away from Falkland's estate and seek refuge in the outside world. Caleb's decision to break free and run from Falkland's bondage could be explained by Godwin's philosophy, which champions the government-less, independent education of the individual as central to developing man's capacity to make just decisions for himself. Godwin's emphasis on the individual's, rather

than the state's, capacity to justly educate man could be said to underlie Caleb's official break. Indeed Caleb asserts his innocence via a declaration, that like revolution, bears the novelty of a singular action and break from the past:

New to the world, I know nothing of its affairs but what has reached me by rumour [sic], or is recorded in books. . . . I am to forfeit the friendship of every one I have hitherto known, and to be precluded from the power of acquiring that of others. I must therefore be reduced to derive my satisfaction from myself. . . . I will at least maintain the independence of my own mind. (*CW* 173)

Caleb's decision to "forfeit" his relations to the past and "maintain the independence of" his "own mind" represents not only a revolutionary moment--insofar as he cuts off from the past--but a Godwinian one since his philosophy encouraged individuals to declare autonomy in both their actions and thinking. Moreover, Caleb's declaration presents a narrative victory, in that he seeks agency without the need of Falkland's approval and without resorting to the convention of eighteenth-century romances that would otherwise keep him trapped in his master/slave relationship to Falkland:

Godwin resists the . . . pressures of the eighteenth-century romance plot, which . . . leads to the affirmation of social identity through the discovery of parents and husbands. Godwin is . . . interested in what happens when individuals break out of their prescribed social roles: in *Caleb Williams* the

pursuit between master and man cannot be resolved by familial reconciliation. (Clemit 55)

Yet what Clemit fails to recognize is that while Caleb has seemingly broken free from Falkland, this victory is only an illusion. While Caleb indeed makes a declaration of “autonomy” (Derrida 13), this declaration of independence quickly falls short as his mind deteriorates back into uncertainty:

It is true: my mind, the clearness of my spirit . . . are beyond his reach; is not my life equally so, if I please? What are the material obstacles that man never subdued? What is the undertaking so arduous that by some has not been accomplished? And, if by others, why not by me? Had they stronger motives than I? Was existence more variously endeared to them, or had they more numerous methods by which to animate and adorn it?  
(187)

Caleb’s uncertainty--which ruptures this seemingly smooth evolution from feudal to revolutionary subjectivity--may be said to originate in a flaw in Godwin’s philosophy. Peter Howell’s investigations of Godwin’s anarchism are useful to my argument that Caleb’s evolution as a revolutionary subject--structured by his curiosity and indecision after discovering Falkland’s secret--corresponds to uncertainties in Godwin’s philosophy.<sup>73</sup> While many critics treat *Caleb Williams* as an allegory for Godwin’s *Political Justice*, Howell identifies a flaw in Godwin’s anarchism, which in its attempt to erect individual autonomy in a government-less society, is compromised by Godwin’s dream of “an order in which the individual is effaced in his community and the political

actor can only imagine his identity through his responsibility to, and identification with, the other” (63).<sup>74</sup> Godwin’s “anarchism,” while “based upon the independence and autonomy of the individuated subject, becomes . . . an order ensuing from the necessary erasure of the individual” (71).

Caleb’s oscillation between revolutionary declarations and feudal resignations could be said to reflect this flaw in Godwin’s anarchism. While Godwin, like “other early 1790s radicals” sought to extract the individual out of the very “abjectness” they experienced in emptying themselves of “individuality” as a result of “procedures of contemporary society and thought,” the philosopher failed to differentiate himself from the system he critiqued, precisely because he insisted on the “giving up of individuality” (78). This contradiction could be said to produce Caleb’s signature uncertainty, wherein on the one hand, he desires to separate himself from Falkland, but on the other hand, cannot act or differentiate himself any more freely than his cohorts. Reading Howell, Godwin’s uncertain philosophy could be said to produce an uncertain subject incapable of making the necessary decisions needed to establish personal political autonomy: “Godwin attempts to reject Humean skepticism . . . and with that [failure] he loses confidence not only in institutionalized methods of conveying and sharing information, but in the ability of the individual to make political decisions” (84). Thus, while Caleb’s seemingly novel declaration is, on the one hand, revolutionary--because it is an unprecedented move by a feudal subject to seek autonomy--it is, on the other hand, exemplary of a failure to put words into action, and advance them beyond their rhetorical status.

Howell thus suggests a flaw in Godwin's philosophy that not only produces an uncertain subject, but also threatens to eliminate the subject altogether. Specifically, while Caleb expresses his "independence" of "mind" (173)--one freed from the precepts and constraints of the feudal system--this expression, in Godwin's world, is only possible through Caleb's identification with an other. If doing what is just is doing what is good for the general wellbeing of society, Caleb would then be forced to act first for the general wellbeing of his society, and then for himself. This would explain why Caleb's declaration for individuality must always be uncertain, because he remains haunted by the opposite need--the need to retract it--to save Falkland and therefore contribute to the greater good of society.

##### 5. A History of Violence: Doubles and the Failure of a Plebeian Subject

While Caleb's initial declaration of agency falls short of its intended objectives, it still represents a momentary victory in the novel. Caleb's declaration is not only unprecedented politically but literarily as well. At least it is *almost* unprecedented: Caleb's decision to break out of the confines of his master/slave relationship to Falkland can be said to be an attempt to enact and fulfill a previous declaration for independence made (unsuccessfully) in the novel by another character, Emily Melvile. Before Caleb comes into conflict with Falkland, he hears the story of Emily's refusal--and tragic fate--at having attempted to break out of her feudal bonds from Tyrrel, Falkland's adversary.

Orphaned by the death of her mother, whose ill-matched husband squandered the family fortune, Emily, despite being Tyrrel's first cousin, is ambiguously received into

Tyrrel's family as neither a tethered servant nor a blood relative. Having "never yet felt the sting of the poverty to which she was condemned," nor "reflected" on the "distance that custom has placed between the opulent and the poorer classes of the community," Emily cannot help but disagree with Tyrrel's hatred of Falkland and revere him as a "spectacle of" "justice" (44). "Her partiality" for Tyrrel's chivalrous neighbor incites Tyrrel to "wreak" a "signal revenge" by forcing her to accept the hand of Grimes, a yeoman of "scarcely human" and "course features" who is the "diametrical reverse of Mr. Falkland" (46-47).

Trapped in the "eighteenth-century" convention of literary romances which give females "social" "affirmation" through marriage (Clemit 55), Emily, like Caleb, makes an unprecedented move to break from the relationship she has with Tyrrel, and seek agency outside of parental or marital bonds that would otherwise affirm her social status (but not subjectivity) in society. Emily's revolutionary claim begins when she refuses to marry Grimes, a performative dissent that inspires Caleb to deny his bondage to Falkland. Specifically, Emily's story unfolds in the novel prior to Godwin's story of Caleb's own act of dissent, which is sparked *after* Caleb hears Collins reiterate the riveting details of Emily's tale of misfortune. Collins' testimony of Emily's dissent and revolutionary claim for her rights not only inspires Caleb to make his own claim, but also to bear witness to Emily's story.

As Collins reveals, Emily's revolutionary refusal incenses Tyrrel to "persist" in his "unaccountable persecution" of his teenage cousin, who assures herself that, as "a reasonable being" she has the "*right* to have a will of" her "own in such a thing as this"

without threat of “punishment” (57, 49; emphasis mine). Crushing this first germ of enlightenment, Tyrrel privately imprisons her under his newly assumed “right of possession” and has her arrested for a debt contracted under his family’s care. Any pleas for mercy are flatly denied by Tyrrel’s accessory, Barnes, who reminds readers of the sovereign’s power to use the law to justify his actions: “The law justifies it. What do you think laws were made for? I do nothing but right and right I will have” (82). Despite a fever, Emily is moved into a prison, and within hours expires in Falkland’s arms. Emily’s fate at having preferred “to die rather than become the wife of Grimes” (89) testifies to the promise of a revolutionary agency to come.

Indeed, Tyrrel’s attempt to force an unjust contract is matched by Emily’s performative defense. Rather than surrender to her cousin’s illegal claim, Emily experiences a revolutionary moment of agency in which she restores her natural right against a tyrant. Emily is herself a signifier for revolution, insofar as her “recognition of selfhood” via her death not only destabilizes the fragile power sharing between Tyrrel and Falkland but also more importantly, inaugurates Caleb’s “revolutionary agenda” (Ayers 33). As Elaine Ayers writes, Emily’s death “advances Godwin’s aims for social reform” and “illuminates the injustice of eighteenth-century English government and society” (39) “by demonstrating” the “disinterest politically powerful persons have in fighting on behalf of the voiceless” (41).

Caleb’s revolutionary agency is inspired by Emily’s revolutionary claim for one. Specifically, similarities in Emily’s story allow Caleb to recognize himself--not only in her story--but in *her* as well. Critics have often underlined various doublings of Caleb:

Uphaus reads Caleb and Falkland as mutually identifiable doubles who “have lived out” (285) “one epoch of mind” (289), while Scheiber calls Tyrrel an “inverted double” of Caleb, but Emily is more Caleb’s double in the novel than any of these characters. Their similarities--both with respect to their charismatic character, individual history, and socioeconomic struggle--allow the reader to witness how revolutionary agency is sparked in Caleb’s recognition of himself in Emily.

The parallels between Caleb and Emily are numerous. For example, Emily is “dependent on the benevolence” of Tyrrel, while Caleb is similarly left with little inheritance. Both are “prisoners” and “victims” of “legalized despotism” (Clemit 59), “surveillance and pursuit” (Ayers 24). Both find “surrogate parents” “within the servant community”; “Emily refers to Mrs. Jakeman as “my dear mamma” (49) and Caleb “calls Collins his father” (26). In addition, both “suffer torment from a fellow servant, with Grimes terrorizing Emily and Gines assaulting Caleb” (26). Both “have identical perceptions of isolation and thoughts of escape” and “pursue an education in spite of their limited means” (28), with Emily a “male” and Caleb a “feminine” one.<sup>75</sup> Both “enjoy” a “class permeability that their domestic counterparts do not experience . . . only Emily can confront [her] master without fear; she alone is ‘the privileged companion’” (40). Similarly, “Caleb has an access to Falkland that his peers do not share” (27). Moreover, both are in “dialectical relationships with their masters” who are “threatened” by their “open talk” (27).

The novel provides evidence to suggest Caleb is an other like Emily. Specifically, in this Godwinian world in which revolutionary reform is preferable to revolutionary

violence, Caleb mirrors the thieves' leader, in that the law precludes his "return" as an othered figure outside the law: "Those very laws, which . . . drove me to what I am, preclude my return" (*CW* 227). As a marginal figure, Caleb is unrecognizable. Escaping prison, he encounters Falkland's footman who is astonished at his haggard state; thinking that such injustice only happens outside of English law, Thomas says:

They told me what a fine thing it was to be an Englishman, and about liberty and property, and all that there; and I find it is all a flam. . . . Things are done under our very noses, and we know nothing of the matter; and a parcel of fellows with grave faces swear to us that such things never happen but in France, and other countries the like of that. (202)

The parallels between Caleb and Emily support the notion that it is not just Emily's claim for subjectivity that inspires Caleb's evolution as a revolutionary subject, but her *failure* to claim independence. Just as Wollstonecraft's death enables Godwin to "exercise an authorial position both inside and outside" her writings (Butler 94), Emily is a silent yet productive cipher whose empty vessel--that is, her dead body--allows Caleb to formulate a narrative and authorial position. Specifically, Emily's claim, and crucially, the *failure* of her claim as exposed by her death, allows Caleb to imagine himself in contrast as participating in the public sphere. Because of Emily's death, the entire community, especially Falkland, express their outrage and disapproval of Tyrrel. This "rise" of the "community" against Tyrrel, and his banishment from the rural gentry inspires Caleb, because it demonstrates that the "egalitarian promise" of justice is possible: "The text delivers retribution in terms that emphasize the power of public opinion to defeat the

privilege of status” (Jordan 260).<sup>76</sup> For example, Mrs. Hammond’s prophetic scolding of Tyrrel reveals the limits of public forgiveness, even for “rank”:

To blame?-All the world will abhor and curse you. Were you such a fool as to think, because men pay respect to wealth and rank, this would extend to such a deed? They will laugh at so barefaced a cheat. The meanest beggar will spurn and spit at you. . . . I will proclaim you to the whole world, and you will be obliged to fly the very face of a human creature! (91)

Emily’s defense against Tyrrel is also a “spirited” reproach of Tyrrel’s unjust persecution of the poor, underprivileged and therefore rightless:

Ungenerous, unmerciful man! and so it is enough for you that I have nobody to defend me! But I am not so helpless as you may imagine. You may imprison my body, but you cannot conquer my mind. . . . You are not used to have your will contradicted! When did I ever contradict it? And in a concern that is so completely my own shall my will go for nothing? . . . how dare you refuse me the privilege of a reasonable being, to live unmolested in poverty and innocence? (57)

Emily’s defiance allows Caleb to imagine the possibility of a plebeian subject (Jordan 247). Her tirade against Tyrrel, in which she warns of “public censure” as “the most threatening form of punishment” “foretells how the narrative” “continually” strives “to include the non-elite within the ranks of those who comprise public opinion” (247). Emily’s virtue in “independence” makes her more of a hero than a heroine: “Emily’s rejection of sexual politics rather than her embracing of social graces” “makes her

heroic,” so that “through her characterization, Emily becomes the embodiment of personal sovereignty” (Ayers 31). In particular, Emily’s death opens up the possibility of a subject because she declares that public opinion supports her claim as a plebeian subject.

But although Emily’s collapse and defeat initiates the arrival of revolutionary agency, it also anticipates the failure of revolutionary subjectivity. Despite being cognizant of her own choices, Emily’s “emotional infatuation with Falkland,” compromises “her previously enumerated declarations of independence” (Ayers 34). This flaw supports the notion that a revolutionary “*self*” (Derrida 10; original emphasis) can *only* be constructed when it does not rely on the recognition of another sovereign being, i.e. husband, master, lord or king. Despite recognizing that only Emily “is entitled to grant herself true legitimacy, and that conducting her life on any terms but her own is self-negation” (Ayers 36), Emily’s self-realization is more modern than the feudal system itself--and also tragically too premature, insofar as English law is not yet ready to grant any woman agency or a legal voice--and neither seemingly is Emily herself in the absence of at least the potential fantasy object of authority and hero of chivalric romance, Falkland. (At least Godwin does not, and perhaps cannot, imagine her otherwise.) A female, Emily dies because she is not supposed to have a voice or participate in the public sphere. From the moment she enters the public sphere--figured in the prison--she meets immediate death:

The health of miss Melville was materially affected by the surprise and removal she had undergone, at the very time that repose was most

necessary for her preservation. Her fever became more violent; her delirium was stronger. . . . The bloom of her countenance faded; she drew her breath with difficulty; and her eyes became fixed . . . she addressed the physician with a composed, though feeble voice. . . . She would have been contented to live . . . but she was well pleased to die rather than have become the wife of Grimes. (85-89)

Emily inspires the formative moment in which Caleb can claim his subjectivity by initiating his own revolutionary claim, but Caleb (like Emily) falls short of his task. Ayers agrees that Emily's "claims" for "personal sovereignty" prove "elusive to Caleb" (25). Caleb "fails to attain a sense of autonomy to the extent that Emily does" and "construct an independent self" (25). And yet, both may be said to exemplify the impossibility of their claims for autonomy. Like Emily, Caleb is blocked from the public sphere, though not because of his gender. While Caleb could penetrate the public sphere as a male, "his role as the champion of justice" is short lived, because his plebeian status prevents him from becoming a subject, and thus securing an audience for his "diatribes against the abuse of power and privilege" (Jordan 256).

Caleb embodies the "failure" of a plebeian subject. Caleb's inability to find an audience in the public that would support his "intolerance for mindless submission to power" may be explained by a critical fault line within the public sphere itself. As Jordan summarizes:

[T]here remained the dilemma of a public that required enlightenment before it could seek reform or use it to good purpose, although that very

enlightenment seemed dependent upon changing the political order. That particular chicken-and-egg relation, perceived with varying degrees of clarity, was enough to dampen reformers' enthusiasm for public opinion. . . . (262)

This indecision in the public sphere is reflected in the novel's two different endings, which demonstrate Godwin's "inability to imagine either a reliable or educable populace at a time when radical organizations are embracing education-driven modes of reform-resulting in a government crackdown and widespread public repudiation of the Jacobins" (Jordan 255). "Neither" of the two endings "redeems the people's role in their community," illustrating that while enlightened, Caleb was unreliable like the "populace" (255), and not quite ready to embrace reform:

Caleb initially represents an enlightened man of low status whose failure to expand the promise of popular enlightenment speaks to his creator's ambivalence regarding popular sovereignty . . . the novel is patently more concerned with tracing the evolution of Caleb's own intellect and political sensibilities than with using him as a catalyst for the enlightenment of the lower orders . . . the narrative invites readers to interpret him as a synecdoche for the people rather than as a spearhead for their edification. (262)

Caleb's inability to find an audience eager to accept reform is dramatized by the public's overwhelming support of Falkland, which makes them appear regressive rather than progressive. Even if Caleb *could* participate in the public domain, his claims would

fall on deaf ears; unwilling to convict Falkland for his heinous crimes, the public in the novel is less willing to seek justice for Caleb. Specifically, the people's failure to convict Falkland paralyzes them from being able to "recuperate their potential as agents of freedom" and thus hear Caleb's claim (265). While the existence of two endings to *Caleb Williams* signals the public's unwillingness to reform the corruption inherent in the feudal system, Caleb's attempt to speak as a plebeian subject still represents an inherent desire in the masses to break the feudal system. On the one hand, their inability to recognize or hear Caleb's claim illustrates the incapacity for plebeian subjects to unite under the cause of justice. On the other hand, their blatant ignorance dramatizes the struggle of the plebeian subject, who must garner sympathy from the reader in his attempt to make a claim for revolutionary subjectivity--against all odds.

Indeed, Caleb's plebeian status works against his need to claim a voice in the public domain. This inability of the plebeian to claim a voice in the public is historical.<sup>77</sup> Specifically, Caleb's failure to become a plebeian subject is authentically framed by the rise of the public and private domain:

Habermas and Gunn concur in their recognition of the 1790s as the phase when a plebeian public failed to establish itself in England as a decisive participant in public debate. (Jordan 249)

Moreover, Caleb would need property to advance beyond his plebeian status, and thus claim a voice in the public sphere:

As soon as privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings ceased to communicate merely about their subjectivity but rather in their capacity

as property-owners desiring to influence public power in their common interest, the humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm. (251)

As a plebeian subject, Caleb owns no property that would give him license to have a voice, and thus participate in the public domain. Whereas Emily's story suggests one failed attempt to overcome such a limitation (in her case, limitations imposed by gender), the tragic story of the Hawkins family--victims of both Tyrrel and Falkland--offers yet another lesson, illustrating the fate of people who own no property and yet still attempt to assert a voice in the public domain.

While Hawkins's story at first demonstrates the extent to which freehold farmers could stir "public debate" and "play" a "role" as "non-elites" in "local politics" (Jordan 258), as it unfolds to its grim end, it becomes a cautionary tale warning that the voice of the plebeian subject will not yet be heard by the public of the feudal system--even if it has a legal claim and is male. As Collins narrates Emily's story to Caleb, he also recounts the tale of the charismatic tenant named "Hawkins," whose victimization reveals Godwin's critique of the feudal system as failing to protect the rights of propertyless subjects. After being asked to cast his vote in a county election for a corrupt political candidate favored by his estate owner, Hawkins refuses, is forced to "quit" his rented farm, and appeals to Tyrrel (66). Acting on behalf of his interest for the opposing candidate, Tyrrel reminds the honest farmer that "tenants" normally "vote just as their landlords please" and agrees to take him on as a tenant, much to the resentment of his neighbor, Hawkins' former landlord, who sees the farmer's action as a blatant

insubordination against the “public good” (68). Soon after Hawkins earns Tyrrel’s favor and obtains “a lease of the farm” (68), Tyrrel proposes promoting Hawkins’s son into the family as a “whipper-in to his hounds” (69). Mortified by the idea of turning his “sober and industrious” son into a “surly” “servant,” Hawkins’s noble refusal soon lands both father and son in jail. Tyrrel threateningly mocks Hawkins’s intent to appeal to the law and protect his rights as a tenant:

You have a lease, have you? . . . A pretty pass things are come to, if a lease can protect such fellows as you against the lord of a manor! (71)

Determined to use his “influence and wealth,” Tyrrel succeeds, through a series of despotic acts, in ruining Hawkins and depriving him of his property, freedom, and most valued possession, his son. Forced to escape jail to avoid being contaminated by the ills of imprisonment, the son disappears with the family in poverty and obscurity, despite Falkland’s sincere attempts to abate the superfluous actions of his nemesis and “save” both the Hawkinses and Tyrrel’s “honour [sic]” (76). Later still, Falkland allows this history between Tyrrel and Hawkins to serve as evidence of Hawkins’ guilt in Tyrrel’s murder, thus making Falkland equally (or even more) complicit in the Hawkinses’ destruction.

Like Hawkins, Caleb’s subject status depends on his capacity to craft a coherent narrative that will be heard and accepted by the public. “Caleb’s self-serving private assessment of the public domain,” however, works to weaken his “narrative reliability” (Jordan 243). For example, while Caleb discovers Hawkins’s letter--persuasive material evidence that would otherwise prove Hawkins and Caleb’s

innocence--this letter remains hidden in the private realm and is never made public. The novel at least raises the possibility that, had this letter emerged in the public sphere, public opinion would have immediately turned against Falkland, moreover supported Caleb's narrative as reliable and convincing. Falkland likely conceals Hawkins's letter in order to enable his unjust exoneration, and sway public opinion against the Hawkinses. This notion is supported by the fact that "private individuals who 'communicate with each other in the public sphere in the world of letters' . . . set the agenda in the political public sphere" (qtd. in Jordan 250).

As with Emily's defiance, Hawkins's virtuous defense allows Caleb to imagine the possibility of a plebeian subject. In Hawkins's case--as in Caleb's--lack of property acts to silence his voice, even if he is legally allowed one. Hawkins's story has a different impact than Emily's story, however; while it drives Caleb's "uncontrolable [sic]" "curiosity"--Caleb ruminates on the character of Hawkins and decides "to be a spy upon Mr. Falkland"--it also generates a compassion in Caleb, who is affected or moved to seek justice for Hawkins after proving Falkland is guilty:

At first I was satisfied. . . . But the story I had heard was for ever in my thoughts. . . . I turned it a thousand ways, and examined it in every point of view . . . as I brooded over it, it gradually became mysterious. There was something strange in the character of Hawkins. So firm, so sturdily honest and just, as he appeared at first; all at once to become a murderer! . . . I could not help bitterly compassionating the honest fellow, brought to the gallows, as he was, strictly speaking, by the machinations

of that devil incarnate, Mr. Tyrrel. His son too . . . to die with him at the same tree; surely never was a story more affecting! (107)

Hawkins's story is "more affecting" to Caleb than Emily's; both are men of the same socio-economic status, wrongly committed of unjust crimes--and, as Hawkins' concealed letter to Falkland reveals--hesitant to seek justice for themselves for fear they will harm their masters: "I defy all the malice of fortune to make us do an ill thing" (115).

Hawkins's misfortune is significant to the novel because it not only inspires Caleb to seek justice for the wrongfully convicted and hanged father and son, but more importantly, illustrates how Caleb's chance for subjectivity is dependent on "the people," who are the "source" of his "potential" to be an "agent of social change" (Jordan 244). Like Hawkins, Caleb is dependent on the capacity for public opinion not only to believe his narrative, but also, consequently, recognize him as a subject: "rather than revolving around the individual," *Caleb Williams* "emphasizes the process by which public opinion stymies individual integrity and leads to the 'miscarriage of justice'" (244). Because the novel's "conflict" "between Caleb and Falkland" "hinges" (246) "on each man's capacity to win public favour [sic]," Caleb has no chance. Just as he persuaded the public to criminalize and indict the Hawkinses, Falkland successfully convinces everyone in the novel that Caleb is a lying, scheming criminal:

And so there is never to be an end of my misfortunes. What can Mr. Falkland contrive for me worse than the ill opinion and enmity of all mankind? (286)

Using Gines, Falkland blasts Caleb's reputation (305) everywhere he goes:

The employment to which this man [Gines] was hired was that of following me from place to place blasting my reputation, and preventing me from the chance, by continuing long in one residence, of acquiring a character for integrity that should give new weight to any accusation I might at a future time be induced to prefer. (304)

The result of Gines's gossip is the public manufacturing of a fake narrative of Caleb's adventures called "Kit Williams":

[T]hree or four labourers [sic] came in . . . I was surprised . . . to find them fall almost immediately into conversation about my history, whom with a slight variation of circumstances they styled the notorious housebreaker, Kit Williams. (235)

This public construction of Caleb's life is rife with rumor, uncertainty, and a hodgepodge of true events that have been altered to create the violent persona of "Kit Williams":

And so Kit Williams-Kit is a devilish cunning fellow, you may judge that from his breaking prison no less than five times,-so, I say, he threatened to bring his master to trial at the 'size all over again, and so frightened him, and got money from him at divers times. . . . Though this story was very circumstantially told and with a sufficient detail of particulars, it did not pass unquestioned. (236)

The story of "Kit Williams" soon becomes known to everyone as that of the monstrous, criminal, and inhuman "Caleb Williams":

[T]he old man rose from his seat. He was sorry that fortune had been so unpropitious to him, as for him ever to have set eyes upon me! I was a monster with whom the very earth groaned! . . . There was no criminal upon the face of the earth, no murderer, half so detestable, as the person who could prevail upon himself to utter the charges I had done by way of recrimination against so generous a master . . . it would be an abuse of words to consider me in the light of a human creature. (248-249)

With the assistance of the public's sympathy, Gines and Falkland successfully reconstruct Caleb's entire "life" as a "lie" that Caleb must now rewrite to disprove (256). Moreover, Gines's lies have forced Caleb to live a "counterfeit" "life" through multiple disguises, accents, and mannerisms to elude detection--thus further perpetuating, and in this sense, affirming his character as that of a 'liar'--and criminal:

My life was all a lie. I had a counterfeit character to support. I had counterfeit manners to assume. My gait, my gestures, my accents were all of them to be studied. I was not free to indulge, no not one, honest sally of the soul. (256)

Falkland's circulation of the pamphlet, "the most wonderful and surprising history, and miraculous adventures of Caleb Williams," works to undermine Caleb's narrative reliability and chance to have his voice heard as a plebeian subject (268). Rather than giving him a voice, the public actually censors him, by literally publishing his entire history and circulating a version of Caleb's "adventures" that is fraught with both fact and fiction--as this "hawker" publicly announces to Caleb's "astonishment":

‘Here you have the most wonderful and surprising history, and miraculous adventures of Caleb Williams; you are informed how he first robbed, and then brought false accusations against his master; as also of his attempting divers [sic] times to break out of prison, till at last he effected his escape in the most wonderful and incredible [sic] manner; as also of his traveling the kingdom in various disguises, and the robberies he committed with a most desperate and daring gang of thieves; and of his coming up to London, where it is supposed he now lies concealed; with a true and faithful copy of the hue and cry printed and published by one of his majesty’s most principal secretaries of state, offering a reward of one hundred guineas for apprehending him. All for the price of one halfpenny.’ (268-269)

This example from the novel indirectly suggests that Caleb’s failure to become a subject may be undermined by *his own* narrative status, which acts literally to deconstruct his efforts to craft a believable narrative. In this sense even Caleb’s own narrative constantly deconstructs Caleb’s subjectivity, for at the very least it fails to achieve narrative authority within the novel. Rather than accepting Caleb’s narrative, “the people”--literally--buy into the false narrative Gines circulates about Caleb’s history “for the price of one halfpenny” (269). Convinced of his criminality, the public rises against Caleb, and seeks him out in the hopes of capturing him for the reward of “one hundred guineas” (270). Caleb’s attempts to elude the public eye--rather than supporting his

efforts to disprove his criminal reputation--only incite the public's willing participation in legitimizing it as true:

Disguise was no longer of use. A numerous class of individuals, through every department, almost every house of the metropolis, would be induced to look with a suspicious eye upon every stranger, especially every solitary stranger, that fell under their observation. The prize of one hundred guineas was held out to excite their avarice, and sharpen their penetration.

It was no longer Bow-Street, it was a million of men, in arms against me.

(270)

By hiring Gines to blast Caleb's reputation instead of killing him, and as such, put a violent "end" to his "existence" (304) Falkland ruins Caleb's chance for posterity. Future readers then, will not know Caleb's (true) story; only the spurious, false narrative penned by Gines. This false history follows Caleb everywhere, and convinces everyone that it cannot be proven as false; Caleb's attempts to disprove it only further alienate his potential audience and literally destroy and undermine his claim for subjectivity:

That tale which, in its plain and unadorned state, is destructive of the character of him to whom it relates, no colouring [sic] can make an honest one. (299)

This false narrative or "falsehood" not only strips Caleb's "character"--and therefore hope for an "honest" "tale"--but also terrorizes him with uncertainty:

I sometimes supposed that it was all a delusion of the imagination; till the repetition of the sensation brought the reality too painfully home to my

apprehension. There are few things that give a greater shock to the mind than a phenomenon in the conduct of our fellow men, of great importance to our concerns, and for which we are unable to assign any plausible reason. (296)

Moreover, this false narrative figuratively kills Caleb, in that his claim for subjectivity cannot be recognized without the “sympathy and good will of mankind”:

Was there no hope that remained for me? . . . Was the odious and atrocious falsehood that had been invented against me, to follow me wherever I went, to strip me of character, to deprive me of the sympathy and good will of mankind, to wrest from me the very bread by which life must be sustained? (301)

These examples illustrate how Caleb’s capacity to become a legitimate subject is dependent on his being accepted as the legitimate author of his true history. Caleb must be able to make a claim in the public domain, and like Emily, “declare” his “right” (Derrida 9) to have rights, if he is to have a voice. If Caleb cannot make a claim for his freedom that will be convincing in the public realm--and if his narrative continues to be undermined by Falkland’s falsehoods--he cannot then tell his own story or even the story of others such as Emily or Hawkins doing the same. With his own narrative reduced to a competition with the far more powerful narrative of Gines, he can neither bear testimony of his own experience nor even to the testimonies of others.

## 6. Broken Promises: The Claim to Rights

Caleb's claim to subjectivity mirrors Emily's in that both are endangered precisely because they depend on being declared and yet all of their attempts at declaration are blocked. Caleb, like Emily, must declare his rights because neither his testimony--figured in his trial and resignation letter to Falkland--nor a character witness can voice his claim for him. Using Tom Keenan's theory, if Caleb does not declare his rights, they do not exist:

[T]he claim to a right is justified here precisely on the grounds that the site of the claim and of the right are identical . . . claiming rights is really nothing other than reclaiming or rescuing them. . . . (Keenan 38-39)

Caleb's delay in claiming his rights not only contributes to his indecision as a subject, but also reveals the crisis that a revolutionary subject faces in having to declare to another:

Why *claim* what is one's own? Why even open up the relation to the other that the linguistic act of claiming implies, when my relation to my rights is essentially a relation to myself without mediation through, or openness, to another? . . . the 'I' that claims them for itself cannot be given either but must occur only in relation with an other. . . . (39)

The crisis the revolutionary subject faces (how to forge a subject without a relation to an other--specifically, a sovereign) is similarly faced by Caleb, who, to declare his rights, must eliminate the very sovereign (Falkland) who could grant him legitimacy. While Caleb's revolutionary desire to break from and destroy his master simultaneously *disables* and destroys his claim by depriving him of a sovereign other that could

legitimize his claim to rights, Emily's failure to establish a claim as she is silenced in death confirms Lefort's theory that "rights are not simply the object of a declaration, it is their essence to be declared" (39):

[w]ithout a king or any transcendental authority, rights have no foundation, and so they come to depend on the very declaration which would seem to refer them to that missing elsewhere. (39)

A victim of feudal, contractual bonds, Emily's tragic plight not only illuminates the violent past of contract societies, but also reveals the failure of revolutionary idealism to overcome the violent indecision structured in the revolutionary claim:

Whether of rights or independence, this ungrounded-or somehow auto- ungrounding- declaration aims at producing the condition it requires as its condition (freedom of right). (40)<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, it is *uncertainty*, or "the absence of a guarantee," that makes one claim (41). This would account for Caleb's almost compulsive need to claim, and simultaneously, his hesitation to claim. Similarly, Emily shares the need to "claim" an "unfounded foundation" of subjectivity, precisely because her endangered position, like Caleb's, lacks a "guarantee" and "certainty" (41). Moreover, like Emily and Caleb, "this claim" or "demand of a subject for its rights" "does not issue from a subject," but from "the ungrounded inauguration of the right to rights" (203). Thus, as an uncertain figure whose absence of a "guarantee" makes him claim, Caleb is destined to remain indecisive in his evolution as a revolutionary subject precisely because this uncertainty is *inscribed* (Derrida 12) in the necessary conditions required of him to make a claim.

Finally, Caleb's figuration as an indecisive subject not only stages this indecision structured in the revolutionary claim, but Godwin's own criticism of rights, in which duty is preferred to right: "'Duty' is the treatment I am bound to bestow upon others; right is the treatment I am entitled to expect from them" (Marshall 75).<sup>79</sup> As Peter Marshall argues, Godwin's perspective on duty and rights governs Caleb's wavering indecision:

Godwin on utilitarian grounds argued that we have no inalienable rights. Our property, our life and our liberty are trusts which we hold on behalf of mankind, and in certain circumstances justice may require us to forfeit them for the greater good. (31)

Arguably, the one Godwinian right that Caleb inherits from Emily is the "right of private judgment," insofar as he represents the promise of a subject who will one day make "choices" for himself, without the need or coercion of a sovereign (31). As has already been discussed, the novel features many examples illustrating Caleb's indecision and uncertainty. Such indecision comes to the fore precisely when he is meditating on his rights. Thus, when Caleb declares himself to have "the privilege of an Englishman" and as such "be the sole judge and master of his own actions" (159), pages later he asks:

Why should it be in the power of man to overtake and hold me by violence? Why, when I chuse [sic] to withdraw myself, should I not be capable of eluding the most vigilant search?. . . . Thus my mind had passed through two very different stages since my imprisonment, before this means of liberation suggested itself. . . . During the period in which my mind had thus been undecided . . . the assizes . . . came on. (188-189)

Contemplating whether he has the right to make a claim Caleb asks:

Which was most meritorious, the unresisting and dastardly submission of a slave, or the enterprise and gallantry of the man who dared to assert his claims? (220)

Caleb fluctuates over whether to confess Falkland's secret repeatedly in the novel:

Though he persecuted me with bitterness, I could not help believing that he did it unwillingly . . . I said, I will convince my persecutor that I am of more value than that I should be sacrificed purely by way of precaution. . . . But this new incident gave to the subject a totally different appearance. . . . Indignation and resentment seemed now for the first time to penetrate my mind. . . . I still continued to pity, rather than hate my persecutor. (225)

Debating whether to leave the society of thieves, Caleb wonders:

What was I to do? Was I to wait the issue of this my missionary undertaking, or was I to withdraw myself immediately? When I withdrew ought that to be done privately, or with an open avowal of my design . . . ?  
(229)

After his trial is miscarried and Caleb is unexpectedly set free, Caleb reflects on the uncertainty of his "future" that dogs him constantly:

What is man? Is he thus blind to the future, thus totally unsuspecting of what is to occur in the next moment of his existence? I have somewhere read that heaven in mercy hides from us the future incidents of our life.

(279)

Falkland's actions continue to create uncertainty in Caleb's mind:

What was I to infer? What light did it throw upon the intentions of my inexorable persecutor? His animosity against me was as great as ever. . . . Yet his animosity appeared to be still tempered with the remains of humanity. . . . I knew not what portion of calamity I was fated to endure. . . . I knew not in what mode Mr. Falkland intended to exercise his vengeance against me. . . . (287-288)

After being shunned and separated from Laura, Caleb laments on the "uncertainty" that tyrannizes him in his analysis of the English language:

I knew not how soon or how abruptly I might be driven from any new situation; the appendages of the study in which I had engaged, were too cumbrous for this state of dependence and uncertainty. . . . (303)

Caleb experiences moments of indecision in whether he should assert his agency:

Why should I be harassed by the pursuit of this Gines; why, man to man, may I not by the powers of my mind attain the ascendancy over him?  
(306)

Intent on confronting Falkland and the magistrate in the revised ending to the novel, Caleb declares that he will assert his agency, at the same time he questions his resolve:

This is a moment pregnant with fate. I know-I think I know-that I will be triumphant, and crush my seemingly omnipotent foe. (314)

Facing his last chance to claim justice for himself, Caleb derails into uncertainty before he shamefully retracts his accusation:

Now or never was the time for me to redeem my future life from endless woe. But all these fine-spun reasonings vanished before the object that was now presented to me. Shall I trample upon a man thus dreadfully reduced? Shall I point my animosity against one whom the system of nature has brought down to the grave? Shall I poison with sounds the most intolerable to his ears the last moments of a man like Falkland? It is impossible. (319-320)

Admitting to “having already declared myself the author of the charge, gravely and sacredly pledged to support it,” Caleb succumbs to his anxiety and begins his defense with a question: “Why cannot I recal [sic] the four last days of my life?” (320). This admission--in which Caleb alludes to the tyrannizing anxiety of having to face his foe--illustrates the uncertainty that permeates Caleb’s mind throughout the novel. This uncertainty is most radically juxtaposed to Caleb’s determination to exonerate himself midway through the novel when Caleb encounters Brightwel and becomes convinced of his need to pursue narrative justice and claim independence.

#### 7. Truth on Trial: a Witness to the Claim and a Failure to Declare

If Emily and Hawkins’s story demonstrates the failure for subjects to produce testimonies, then Brightwel’s story reveals the failure of testimonies to make a claim for subjectivity. An honorable, royal soldier “who would have been the ornament of any

age” (191), Brightwel has been cast into the margins of society and wrongfully imprisoned in the same cell as Caleb.

The soldier, whose story I have already recorded, died, on the evening of the very day on which the judges arrived, of a disease the consequence of his confinement. Such was the justice that resulted from the laws of his country to an individual who would have been the ornament of any age, one who of all. . . . The name of this man was Brightwel. (191)

Caleb’s witnessing of Brightwel’s testimony and unjust death awakens Caleb’s cognition of Emily’s failed claim, and similarly, his own urgent need to make a claim. Like Falkland, who experiences the pain of Emily’s plight directly from Emily herself and is moved to act, Caleb is moved to act after witnessing Brightwel’s testimony. Unlike Emily’s narrative--which Caleb receives secondhand and which inspires him only to write (produce a narrative) and not act (seek out his own right to have rights)--Caleb receives Brightwel’s *firsthand*. Writing precedes action: Caleb is moved to write, “Were it possible for my pen to consecrate him to never dying fame” (191)--thus validating the wrongfulness of Brightwel’s persecution and giving a voice to his untold narrative. Caleb is subsequently moved to voice his own struggle and, because he receives Brightwel’s failure to make a claim *firsthand*, act. While Brightwel is punished and refused recognition of his rights by the very state that ostensibly validated his subjectivity, by giving voice to Brightwel’s pain, Caleb validates it and validates it as a matter of right.

Caleb's narrative of Brightwel validates his own innocence and claim as a subject as well. Despite this validation, Caleb reveals his uncertainty over whether it will ever be recognized by "posterity," which he claims will not hear him because it is "too late":

He [Brightwel] heard my story . . . with interest, he examined it with sincere impartiality . . . a frequent observation of me . . . taught him . . . to place an unreserved confidence in my innocence. He talked of the injustice of which we were mutual victims . . . and delighted to believe that the time would come when the possibility of such intolerable oppression would be extirpated. But this, he said, was a happiness reserved for posterity; it was too late for us. . . . (192)

Brightwel's failure to vindicate himself in time at first discourages Caleb, but then inspires him to seek the "happiness" of justice and usurp Brightwel's "hope for reparation" as his own:

Such were . . . the immediate reflections which the fate of this unfortunate martyr produced in my mind. Yet my intercourse with Brightwel was not . . . without its portion of comfort. I said, This man has seen through the veil of calumny that overshades me; he has understood, and has loved me. Why should I despair? May I not meet hereafter with men ingenuous like him, who shall do me justice and sympathise [sic] with my calamity?

(193)

Caleb's firsthand witnessing of Brightwel's story awakens his desire to claim what Brightwel and Emily could not: the right to have rights. Caleb's first action then to

reclaim his right and the “happiness reserved for posterity” (192) is to publish a tale of a celebrated robber being “terminated” at the “scaffold” (85). This acts to construct his “freedom” via “identification” with an “outlaw hero” (Dionne 413) in that it recreates his and Brightwel’s story in a criminal allegory; one that tells the story of a serial robber prosecuted by the law.

The fact that this allegory is situated in the just persecution of a robber, however, introduces a flaw in Caleb’s attempt to literalize both his and Brightwel’s claim for freedom. Specifically, Caleb’s decision to publicly serialize the tales of a robber makes his own narrative look uncertain and threatens the construction of his subjectivity. This is because while Caleb’s exoneration depends on the certainty of his narrative, the publication of his criminal stories--which feature the persecution of a thief who can no longer roam freely in the public sphere--foreground and stage Caleb’s own incapacity to participate in the public sphere except as positioned by conflicting and often fictive accounts not much different from his own fictions. Ultimately, Caleb’s act of writing a narrative of the self through the criminal story of the robber, contributes to his inability to be recognized legitimately in the public sphere. In particular, by writing about the scaffold, Caleb allows his audience to figuratively prosecute him before he is tried by a court of law. By writing about the scaffold, Caleb ensures that his innocence will never be distributed to readers.<sup>80</sup> If the readers represent the public sphere, then, Caleb’s publications of these crime stories allows his audience to associate him as a criminal himself; one who is legally banned from participating in the public sphere as a free agent.

Caleb's publishing of the crime allegory further endangers his freedom. This is because Caleb's story attracts the attention of Gines, who is trying to capture Caleb and imprison him for his framed crime, robbery. Gines recognizes Caleb's own story in the literary allegory and forces Caleb to give up his employment as a criminal writer and seek new employment as a mechanical watch repairer. Citing how his "mind" "always" "had the capacity to turn out tropes"--like a revolution--or "a mechanical and industrious turn," Caleb is betrayed by his new employer, Mr. Spurrel (*CW* 267). Facing confrontation, Caleb announces his name for the first time and, like a revolution, stuns his audience with his spontaneity and performative declaration:

Well, I am Caleb Williams; conduct me wherever you please! . . . I always declared . . . that I was the perpetrator of no guilt but that the guilt wholly belonged to my accuser . . . I now declare more . . . that this man is a murderer, that I detected his criminality, and that for that reason he is determined to deprive me of life . . . I suppressed the story as long as I could. I was . . . averse to be the author of . . . the death of a human being.

(272-275)

Caleb's declaration of his aversion at being the "author" of Falkland's "unhappiness" recognizes the historical significance of revolutions turning servants into authors, and authors into potential agents of freedom. Realizing that being an author of his own innocence also means acting as an agent of Falkland's demise, Caleb's threat to tell his story and--in doing so--assert his right to declare, is immediately suppressed by the law:

[a]s a magistrate . . . I can have nothing to do with your declaration . . .  
 Whether or not the felony with which you stand charged would have  
 brought us to the gallows, I will not pretend to say. But I am sure this story  
 will. (276)

The magistrate's refusal to let Caleb speak, and therefore become the agent of his own emancipation, shocks Caleb into realizing that he has not been master of himself all along:

Till now I . . . conceived that the . . . situation in which I was placed was prolonged by my own forbearance . . . it was a voluntary sacrifice . . . I applauded my . . . self-denial; . . . I pleased myself with the idea, that I had the power, though I hoped never to employ it. (276)

Further complicating his situation (76), Caleb attests to having only witnessed an *event of storytelling*, Mr. Collins's testimony, and *not* the event of murder itself:

A man under certain circumstances shall not be heard in the detection of a crime, because he has not been a participator of it! (277)<sup>81</sup>

As with Emily and Hawkins stories, Falkland's is finally known to Caleb through the testimonials of others and his own obsessive turn for drawing inferences from those testimonies. This episode thus demonstrates the existence of a Godwinian, revolutionary subject who has not actually witnessed a violent event of action (of murder, for example), but a violent event of *testimony*--violent because it perpetuates and engenders the violent powers of things as they are--and who cannot decide whether to act or testify to this testimonial event. That is, Caleb articulates the problems of witnessing a revolution or,

rather, witnessing *as* revolution, and the inherent uncertainty inscribed (Derrida 12) within it. The practical problem he faces is that society is not yet prepared for this particular revolution: “Godwin illustrates that, in the context of Caleb’s society, the believability of any narrative is independent of its truth or falsehood” (Walsh 23):

The system, built as it is upon preconceived ideas of how things are and how things should be, perpetuates itself by encouraging everyone to become an ‘author’ rather than an ‘objective witness.’ That is, it is expected that individuals pick, choose and adjust facts for representation so that they will conform to the order of ‘things as they are.’ Thus in Godwin’s eyes the system is not only corrupt, in that it is based upon prejudice rather than ‘truth,’ but it is *corrupting* as well.

(23; original emphasis)

At the same time, Caleb’s own testimony is not only a testimony of another’s testimony, but itself contaminated by the violence that inhabits all testimonies in Godwin’s novel. Testifying or acting in response to a violent event (including a violent event of testimony) involves an act of revolutionary violence itself. Godwin’s refusal to allow Caleb to perform direct action is the hallmark of a Godwinian subject. In seeking or testifying to the truth, the revolutionary subject must also commit a violence against his sovereign, who otherwise would validate that truth. This act of necessary violence places the revolutionary subject into a crisis: on the one hand, the subject requires validation by the sovereign, but on the other hand, must destroy that sovereign in order to attain truth and freedom. Godwin’s refusal to allow Caleb to perform direct action stages this crisis

that paralyzes the revolutionary subject from acting, and thus being able to fully arrive at truth and independence. In particular, Godwin stages this crisis in Caleb, who represents a revolutionary subject who has not directly experienced or witnessed a violent event *itself*, but a violent event of *testimony*. By keeping Caleb away from both committing and witnessing direct action, Godwin further perpetuates the crisis of the revolutionary subject--one who desires to commit direct action against his sovereign to emancipate himself as a subject--but who, at the same time, is afraid to destroy the very sovereign that would then legitimize his legal status as that of a freed subject. That is, Caleb is not only paralyzed before the possibility of action but even before the possibility of being a witness to action--not least because Godwin understands how, in the world he depicts, even the witness is implicated in the violence to which he testifies.

As a result, a Godwinian subject is someone who is undecided or suspended within a dialectic of two opposing modes of representation. On the one hand, the subject is suspended between becoming--like Caleb--an agent of truth, and as such, an author of his own freedom; and on the other hand, an agent of secrecy, and as such, an author of his own imprisonment. Once revealed, this secret allows Caleb to potentially become an agent of death and figuratively release a guillotine over his aging monarch's head.

While Caleb perfectly represents this crisis of the revolutionary subject, Godwin further stages this crisis by refusing to recognize Caleb's civil liberty as an individual and the legitimate author of his own story. As Caleb discovers when he does announce his identity, the agency of truth may find itself blocked even when it does take action. More broadly, this refusal to allow Caleb to become the author of his own story is allegorized

by Godwin's textual omission of *all* violent events in the novel. Indeed, Caleb's realization amplifies the readers' recognition that we have not witnessed any actual violent events in the novel. While the novel omits several events as a gesture typical of novelistic convention, such as the year of Caleb's father's death (5); the name of the jail in which Caleb is imprisoned (218); the physical origin of Caleb's criminal notice (223); Godwin also, more importantly, omits Falkland's act of murder (96) and his original ending to the novel (replaced just prior to publication) in which Caleb directly accuses Falkland of murder.

These textual and intertextual omissions reveal the limitations of the emerging, revolutionary subject, insofar as they expose the crisis that a subject encounters after having been orphaned and released from the contractual security of his master, lord, or king. Readers not only witness the limitations of Caleb's newfound agency in a world still operating under feudal custom, but also the boundaries of the novel itself, which, corresponding to Godwin's pacifist view of revolution, refuse to extend its sympathy of revolutionary agency to a sympathy for revolutionary violence.<sup>82</sup> The actual violence that the novel excludes is--in fact--Falkland's: Godwin's point seems to be that 'too' direct a witnessing of *ancién regime* violence will contaminate Caleb (by destroying and figuratively guillotining Falkland). Caleb explains how, for Falkland, death itself is preferable to the "contamination" of violence except in the context of ancient chivalric codes:

[t]here are certain persons whom it would be contamination for him to call into the open field. He [of ancient gallantry] nevertheless believes that an

indignity cannot be expiated but with blood, and is persuaded that the life of a man is a trifling consideration in comparison of the indemnification to be made to his injured honour [sic]. (11)

In other contexts, however, Falkland believes that he “must not use the advantage that accident has given” him “with an unmerciful hand” (77) and admonishes Tyrrel for staining “the institutions and regulations of society” with his violent actions (78).

Indeed, “to Mr. Falkland disgrace” is “worse than death,” a formulation that acknowledges that violence must always remain hidden. Godwin seems to maintain the imperative of secrecy by omitting Falkland’s actual murder of Tyrrel in the following passage:

One other event closed the transactions of this memorable evening. Mr. Falkland was baffled of the vengeance that yet remained to him. Mr. Tyrrel was found by some of the company dead in the street, having been murdered at the distance of a few yards from the assembly house. (96)

Godwin omits the actual event of murder in this passage, which readers can attribute to Falkland’s hands after having been publicly disgraced and humiliated by Tyrrel:

He was too deeply pervaded with the idle and groundless romances of chivalry ever to forget the situation, humiliating and dishonourable according to his ideas, in which he had been placed upon this occasion.

(97)

The only *ancién regime* violence that Falkland allows Caleb, the public, and readers to *witness* is the violence of his own narration:

Look at me. Observe me. Is it not strange that such a one as I should retain lineaments of a human creature? I am the blackest of villains. I am the murderer of Tyrrel. I am the assassin of the Hawkinses . . . What a story is mine! Insulted, disgraced, polluted in the face of hundreds. I watched my opportunity, followed Mr. Tyrrel from the rooms, seized a sharp-pointed knife that fell in my way, came behind him, and stabbed him to the heart.

(135)

By making Caleb (and readers) witness his violent story (rather than his violent act), Falkland's narrative account reveals the limits of the novel: is Godwin suggesting one should have revolutionary agency, but not go too far in employing it? Should revolutionary agency be limited to narratives (of agency), instead of direct actions? The novel seems to insinuate this, not only by replacing Falkland's act of violence with a narrative, but also by seducing both protagonist and reader into anticipating Caleb's "trial" in the published ending--the climactic event *par excellence* of the novel--only to prematurely cut off the scene. The reader is left to imagine, on his or her own, Caleb finally testifying to having witnessed material evidence of Falkland's guilt and confession. Indeed, after anxiously awaiting the date of his trial while imprisoned, Caleb arrives in court to find his prosecutors absent. Unable to have someone to whom he may tell his story, the trial is forfeited. Instead of establishing his new, inalienable rights by having his tale of injustice heard by a sovereign, Caleb experiences the terror of the

absence of the law's recognition. This moment is indeed terrifying: it seems to propose that the moment Caleb musters the courage to make a decision and act on it, there will be no sovereign to give his action recognition, and therefore legitimacy as a free agent.

A critique of the abuse of the law in the pre-revolutionary world thus becomes a critique of the absence of law in a post-revolutionary world. After being kidnapped by Gines and brought back to the town of his acquittal for a trial, Caleb confronts Falkland, who desires to save his "reputation" by insisting Caleb sign a "paper declaring" Falkland's innocence (282):

What is it that you require of me? That I should sign away my own reputation for . . . yours. Where is the equality of that? (283)<sup>83</sup>

Refusing to sign, Caleb retreats to the countryside to escape "the memory of this story" (293). Like a newly freed subject after a revolution, Caleb must break from the past to escape the haunting memory of revolutionary violence. Like a new republic that has just been given birth, Caleb writes a new narrative, and instead of looking to the future, looks to the history of narrative to erase and rewrite the past.

Caleb himself admits to Falkland's *ancien regime* "aversion to the idea of violently putting an end to" his "existence," and similarly avoids direct action by refusing to accept the consequences of his new freedom and confront "the principal *agent*" in his "history" (11; emphasis mine). And like new republics, Caleb *fails* to write over the widely-circulating rumor of his false legacy, "The Wonderful and Surprising History of Caleb Williams," circulated by Gines, whose invisible agency he traces to Falkland, its "absolute author" (296). Still unable to confront Falkland, Caleb looks to the past to

rewrite the future, and, transforming his mediating act of writing from a “pleasure” of forgetting “into a burthen” of remembering, writes his memoirs so that “posterity might be induced to do me justice” (304).

Caleb’s figuration as a promise of revolutionary agency that cannot act reveals Godwin’s uncertainty over how a post-feudal subject can seek reform. It also stages the problem of the revolutionary claim: while a revolutionary “declaration” “founds” (Derrida 8) a nation, it must also found the subject to give it legitimacy (13). *Caleb Williams* suggests it cannot overcome this crisis. Godwin’s omission of violent events is linked to the novel’s delay in allowing Caleb to declare his freedom. Despite several opportunities, by the end of the novel Caleb still cannot confront Gines: “I should have but an imperfect and mutilated story to tell” (306), because the action needed to confront the source of his terror would entail breaking the master/slave relationship. Caleb realizes that both roles are arbitrary and equally miserable:

Why should I be harassed by this pursuit of this Gines; why man to man, may I not by . . . mind attain the ascendancy over him? . . . he appears to be the persecutor and I the persecuted: is not this difference the mere creature of the imagination? It is not the persecution, but the catastrophe which is annexed to it, that makes the difference between the tyrant and the sufferer! In mere corporal exertion the hunter perhaps is upon a level with the miserable animal he pursues. (307)

Caleb experiences the difficulty of being one’s agent but not having any recognition as such. With Gines in the position of Caleb’s double as a *criminal* outcast of

society, Caleb's agency cannot be validated. The novel illustrates its inability to recognize Caleb, when for example, Caleb cannot admit that either his demise or retribution are in his control: "The actions of others, not mine!" (309). Godwin seems to suggest that even though man is capable of being an agent, he is still a product of circumstance. Indeed, the novel announces man is only at the cusp of having the rights of man; Godwin's uncertainty over the future of Caleb's emerging agency is represented in Caleb's recollection of a *failed* declaration:

I endeavored to sustain myself by the sense of my integrity, but the voice of no man upon earth echoed to the voice of my conscience. *'I called aloud; but there was none to answer:-there was none that regarded.'* To me the . . . world was as unhearing as the tempest. (308; emphasis mine)

As Walsh has remarked, "quotation marks are scarce" throughout the novel (34). This and the following example reveal the author's hesitation in giving Caleb the necessary agency to challenge both the circumstantial, uncertain nature of Godwin's philosophy and of Caleb's demise. Thus in the final encounter with his mentor Collins, Collins does not even recognize him and constantly interrupts his narrative with a rather different interpretation of Caleb's story:

How is it, said Mr. Collins gravely, that you have been reduced to this forlorn condition? Was it not the inevitable consequence of your actions? *The actions of others, not mine!* Does not your heart tell you that I am innocent? (309; emphasis mine)

The scene allegorizes the attempt for a revolutionary agency to break through against Collins' constant interruptions. Like a revolutionary promise, the declaration of Caleb's subjectivity prompts a break, as the reader observes when Collins does not recognize Caleb. While the text delays Caleb's attempt to tell a new narrative--and thus begin anew--by constantly interrupting him throughout the novel, Godwin also allegorizes the interruptive force that accompanies this revolutionary beginning. Specifically, the novelty and violence that Caleb's nominal declaration produces is staged in Collins's inability to recognize Caleb. Caleb's claim of subjectivity, like a revolution, prompts a 'shock' or break in consciousness:

*Who are you? I do not know you. My father! exclaimed I, embracing one of his knees with fervour and delight, I am your son! once your little Caleb, whom you a thousand times loaded with kindness! The unexpected repetition of my name gave a kind of shuddering emotion to my friend. . . .*

(309; emphasis mine)

The text's, as well as Collins's inability to advocate for Caleb reveals the limits a revolutionary agency experiences in its encounter with feudal and monarchical ideals of sovereignty. These limits are staged via the interruptive force of Caleb's revolutionary narrative and the interruptive force of the text, which both prevent Caleb's narrative from being told. Godwin's hesitation in giving Caleb agency may correspond to his preference of revolutionary reform over revolutionary violence yet also points to profounder problems in the very conception of revolutionary agency itself. While Collins almost seems indirectly to acknowledge the promise of a revolutionary agency to come--"I have

known you as a promising boy”--the text delays the declaration of this agency when Collins says, “I will hear you. But that must not be just now” (309).<sup>84</sup> Similarly, this limit is intertextually announced via Caleb’s own promise to declare, in which he asks not to be interrupted in asserting his right to rebel--an assertion that is to be subsumed, however, in a narrative:

Falkland! . . . I will use no daggers! I will unfold a tale-!. . . The justice of the country shall hear me! The elements of nature in universal uproar shall not interrupt me!. . . I shall not now appear to be endeavoring to remove a criminal indictment from myself, by throwing it back on its author! . . . I have a secret foreboding as if I should never again be master of myself. (314-315)

Caleb’s hesitation in “throwing” “back” the “criminal indictment” “on its author,” Falkland, establishes the precarious link between the survival of his subjectivity and the certainty of his narrative. This hesitation also foreshadows the potential for a declaration of freedom to fail if it attempts to return by beginning with the wrong narrative.

#### 8. Paranoid (Undecidable) Subjects, Nervous (Unreliable) Narratives

As if literalizing the figure of revolution, Godwin’s protagonist suffers from the revolutionary disease of *returns*, signified in his return to the site of his false accusation to begin anew. To construct himself as a revolutionary subject, Caleb’s act of writing his memoirs turns into a sickly compulsion that actually acts to efface his construction.<sup>85</sup>

Hoping to accurately represent himself in the public sphere, Caleb is faced with the necessity of constructing a narrative of himself as a political subject; this means he must first rewrite his past, to recreate the conditions that would legitimize him as a subject, born anew. While telling the story of his past is necessary to writing his memoirs, the narrative paradoxically disqualifies him from being able to tell his story. Specifically, while Caleb's subjectivity depends on telling the story of his past feudal status, telling this story at once works to *nullify* his potential to recreate himself as a political subject. Caleb's dilemma then can be seen as suspending him between two conflicting needs: the need to tell his story, at the same time coupled by his need to negate it, to recreate himself as a political subject.

Peter Melville Logan's psychological interpretation of Caleb's political dilemma shares my view that Caleb's act of constructing his subjectivity also nullifies his subjectivity. Godwin "uses the nervous body of the narrator to naturalize social criticism," so that when Caleb "complains," "[a]ll is not right within me" (313), he describes "a consequence of what is not right without" (Logan 206). These "social conditions" "make Caleb into the nervous character who narrates the story of his nervous incarnation" and thus "testif[ies]" "to the injustice of society" (206). "Linking" the "critic's narrative with the nervous body on which criticism is grounded," however, "undoes any stable subject-position from which to criticize" (207). Rather than presenting a testimony of society's injustices, the narrative becomes a "sign of nervous disorder because the nervous body had a narrative structure" which contains "the story of the social conditions that created it" (209). This "social narrative reveals" its "presence" in

the “nervous disorder, when the body acts out its preexisting nervous condition” (209).

As has already been discussed in the account of Caleb’s relation to Emily Melville, “this inscribable body is always gendered female” because her “nervous” “body” “possesses a constitutive relationship to narrative” (209). The female “has a story to tell” (211), and “in an advanced nervous state,” passes “on her weakened constitution to the male” (210). As a speaker, Caleb’s narrative is “self-canceling,” however, because his “narrator’s authority to speak is undermined by the nervous disease that the story reveals” (211). “This narrative” “identifies” Caleb as “a medical object” demanding “treatment”--not a “speaking subject” demanding “attention” (211). Thus “at the same instant” Caleb “acquires the body with a story to tell”--in this case Emily’s body--as a “nervous narrator” he is “disqualified from telling it” (211).

Specifically, Caleb’s secondhand witnessing of Emily’s testimony infects him with *both* the compulsion and inability to “tell” his story and assume authorship. While Caleb’s embodiment as a nervous narrator enables his evolution as a revolutionary subject, it also limits him because Caleb’s narrative--which tells the story of Emily’s failure to make a revolutionary claim--invalidates him (212).<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Caleb’s limitation owes much to his overt effeminization; this effeminization is unavoidable, however, because it is a “necessary condition for the production of narrative” (Logan 217). The narrative then cannot restore Caleb to a “non-nervous condition,” because it “depends on this effeminization as the basic condition of its production” (217). But unlike Logan, I question whether Godwin is merely naturalizing Caleb’s social conditions. Rather the paradoxical relationship between the feminization that enables

Caleb to speak, while preventing anything he says from being taken seriously, allegorizes the larger problem of the revolutionary subject position, in which a revolutionary subject cannot avoid the need for validation from the very monarch it must destroy to be born anew as a political subject.

Ostensibly, revolution is problematic because it creates the conditions that supposedly grant it legitimacy. Similarly, the revolutionary subject, to legitimize itself and receive recognition as a subject, requires an authoritative figure to validate it. This is impossible however, because to become emancipated as a subject, the revolutionary subject must do away with its monarch, and therefore (re)create the conditions that will grant it legitimacy. Caleb's necessary effeminization then is an extension of this crisis or paradox in the revolutionary claim, in which, on the one hand he requires effeminization to produce a narrative, yet on the other hand, must also do away with this effeminization in order not to be perceived as a "nervous narrator." While Caleb attempts to construct himself as a revolutionary subject, his very act of writing--in other words, his act of producing a narrative--undoes his goal of becoming a subject. This is because the effeminization required in his narrative production has simultaneously disqualified him from telling it. As such, becoming a subject is contingent on him being able to tell his story, and if he cannot tell his story, Caleb cannot be a subject.

Caleb's existence as a subject is therefore contingent on his capacity to produce a reliable narrative--one that will legitimize him, instead of disqualifying him as narrator. Yet to become a subject, Caleb must tell or speak his story--which both includes and strangely assimilates Emily's story. As a "speaking subject" then, Caleb must accept "a

marginalized position as the feminized figure of sensibility” “whose nervousness manifests itself in both a sickly body and a ‘sickly’ narrative” (Butler 91). This acceptance, I argue, is evident from the moment he hears of Emily’s death and becomes infected with her ‘contagious’ “excessive sensibility” or revolutionary subjectivity: “I paid the tribute of my tears to the memory of the artless miss Melvile” (106). Indeed, one can argue that Caleb’s revolutionary subjectivity *depends* on his secondhand witnessing of Emily’s destruction as a (potential) speaking subject and her failure to make a claim for rights.<sup>87</sup>

Caleb’s nervous, writing compulsion is part of what makes him an unreliable narrator.<sup>88</sup> Caleb is driven by a “mysterious” agency to write:

What mysterious cause is it, that enables me to write this, and not to perish under the horrible apprehension! (312)

Writing relieves Caleb of the feeling of terror, and is conducted in a manic-like state:

My thoughts wander from one idea of horror to another with incredible rapidity. I have had no sleep. I have scarcely remained in one posture for a minute together. It has been with the utmost difficulty that I have been able to command myself far enough to add a few pages to my story. But, uncertain as I am of the events of each succeeding hour, I determined to force myself to the performance of this task. (313)

One can understand this strange compulsiveness by returning to the split between Caleb the narrator and Caleb as the subject of his own narrative. Caleb’s act of retelling

and rewriting his narrative may be read as a result of these two opposing forces or narratives in the novel--the compulsion he feels to unify them into a single subjectivity that the narrative repeatedly disallows. While Godwin gives Caleb the role of author to construct and legitimize his subjectivity, the simultaneous production of two narratives in one--that of Caleb as a subject and Caleb as a narrator--instead works to undermine, destabilize, and deconstruct Caleb's story of his own claim for agency. Specifically, Caleb's narrative of himself acts to *deconstruct* rather than construct his subjectivity. Schieber's theory that there are "two distinct paradigms of unreliability" in the novel (264) is a formulation that similarly underlines that there are two, unreliable narratives in production in the novel. As Schieber formulates the problem:

There is no 'reliable' point of view in this novel, *only unreliable ones whose purpose is to radicalize and deconstruct one another*; the irresolvable antagonisms within the work itself serve as an implicit critique of the rationalist and positivist assumptions which underwrite the concept of 'reliability' to begin with. (265; emphasis mine)

In effect there are two narratives in production in the novel--one of Caleb as a subject, and one of Caleb as a narrator--which act to construct and "deconstruct one another" and thus undermine Caleb's "reliability" (265). The very structure of an autobiographical, first-person narrative necessitates this splitting, but what makes Godwin's version distinctive is the dizzying interplay of unreliability and mutual undoing between the narrative and the narrative *subject* the novel generates. (This interplay is of

course further complicated by the additional layering of narratives such as Gines's tale of "The Wonderful and Surprising History of Caleb Williams.")

While this 'two-in-one' narrative seems to run seamlessly smooth in the beginning, cracks in the narrative appear; these cracks demonstrate that the two narratives in production--Caleb as narrator and Caleb as subject--actually work to deconstruct each other rather than working together to form a coherent narrative. The effect of this destructive encounter is expressed by Caleb in certain instances of explosive expression, signaling to readers that Caleb's narration of Falkland's history is acting to interfere with Caleb's capacity to be both a coherent subject and narrator:

There was a tenant of Mr. Tyrrel, one Hawkins;-I cannot mention his name without recollecting the painful tragedies that are annexed to it! (66)

Caleb's act of interrupting his own narrative with his emotional outburst not only signals Caleb's gradual degeneration as a subject, but also prefigures Caleb's future evolution as a narrator. Specifically, rather than remaining the principal author of Falkland's history, as he claims to be, Caleb becomes the principal author of his own story, as he reveals in this example:

I go on with my tale. I go on to relate those incidents in which my own fate was so mysteriously involved. I lift the curtain, and bring forward the last act of the tragedy. (79)

In another example, Caleb interrupts himself to argue explicitly *for* his coherence as both narrator and subject--while, in effect, exposing the gap between them.

Two days subsequent to this conversation Mr. Falkland ordered me to be called to him. [I shall continue to speak in my narrative of the silent, as well as the articulate part of the intercourse between us . . . while I am thus employed in collecting together the scattered incidents of my history, that I shall upon some occasions annex to appearances an explanation, which I was far from possessing at the time, and was only suggested to me through the medium of subsequent events.] (118)

In another example, Caleb interrupts his narration by first switching to the mode of a subject--in calling himself a "wretch"--and then switching back to the mode of narrator--in asking "the reader" to "forgive" his emotional reference to his own fettered imprisonment and the French Revolution:

Thank God, exclaims the Englishman, we have no Bastille! Thank God, with us no man can be punished without a crime! Unthinking wretch! Is that a country of liberty where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? . . . For myself I looked round upon my walls, and forward upon the premature death I had too much reason to expect . . . and I said, This is society. This is the object, the distribution of justice, which is the end of human reason. . . . This! The reader will forgive this digression from the immediate subject of my story. If it should be said, these are general remarks; let it be remembered that they are the dear bought result of experience. (181-182)

Caleb's "reason to expect" a premature death not only comes from his own "dear bought" "experience," but also from his act of narration, whose "general remarks" predict and seal his "premature" degeneration (182). As Caleb admits pages later, his narration of his own "experience" (182) of "injustice" has acted to actually perpetuate it (194). In yet another passage, he begins with an interruption, and ends with one of his most accurate predictions--that his narrative efforts to claim his innocence have turned his "life" into a "lie," and himself into a "counterfeit character":

Here let me pause for a moment, to bring before the reader, in the way in which it was impressed upon my mind, the nature of my situation. I was born free. . . . I was not born indeed to the possession of hereditary wealth; but I had a better inheritance, an enterprising mind, an inquisitive spirit, a liberal ambition . . . I was more willing to grow, than to descend, in my individual significance . . . I was ignorant of the power which the institutions of society give to one man over others . . . I found myself subjected . . . to all the disadvantages which mankind . . . would hesitate to impose on acknowledged guilt . . . I was shut up a deserted, solitary wretch in the midst of my species. I dared not look for the consolations of friendship. . . . My life was all a lie. I had a counterfeit character to support. I had counterfeit manners to assume. (255-256)

In this example, Caleb's act of retelling his story--of which he is both the narrator and subject--literally serves to undermine his narrative reliability by suggesting that, in the circumstances of things as they are his "life" (and thus too the story of his life) cannot

be anything other than a “lie” (256). But ultimately in his final self accusations Caleb will seem to concede that his narrative has been a counterfeit or lie in a more immediate sense, that he is not Falkland’s victim after all, but his own. Facing Falkland in court, he retells his story--this time, recasting himself as a criminal instead of as an innocent victim:

Mr. Falkland! I most solemnly conjure you to recollect yourself! . . . You began in confidence; why did you not continue in confidence? The evil that resulted from my original imprudence, would then have been comparatively little. . . . Happily for me the London magistrate listened to my tale with insolent contempt. (321-322)

In retelling his story, Caleb effectively recasts his previous “tale” of innocence, as one of criminality, in which he has “happily” been forced to tell--refuting his earlier experience with the magistrate as an unhappy one (322). Caleb rewrites his story in these final pages, and literally admits making a “hateful mistake” in previously narrating himself (into) a victim in search of justice, which he now changes to recast himself as an “evil” “assailant”:

For a long time I persisted in the resolution that no emergency should convert me into the assailant. In evil hour I at last listened to my resentment and impatience, and the hateful mistake into which I fell has produced the present scene. (323)

The actual retelling of his tale changes the whole meaning of the novel, for in these passages, Caleb changes his mind and retracts his accusation against Falkland--

surrendering to instead “bless” and “applaud” Falkland rather than “accuse” him (323). Specifically, returning to retell his story has allowed Caleb to compulsively change it--from an adventurous “tale” to one that is “plain”--in order to relieve his anxiety of further persisting in his accusation of murder, which he has now turned on himself:

I have told a plain and unadulterated tale. I came hither to curse, but I remain to bless. I came to accuse, but am compelled to applaud. . . . In thus acting I have been a murderer, a cool, deliberate, unfeeling murderer.

(323)

Caleb’s change of story has the desired, persuasive effect that, as both narrator and subject, he has sought all along from his audience:

Everyone that heard me was melted into tears. They could not resist the ardour [sic] with which I praised the great qualities of Falkland; they manifested their sympathy in the tokens of my penitence. . . . Williams, said he, you have conquered! I see too late the greatness and elevation of your mind. . . . But I see that the artless and manly story you have told, has carried conviction to every hearer. (323-324)

Having now procured recognition from the public, Caleb returns to his task of writing the end of Falkland’s story, moreover, of convincing his readers of his legitimate reasons for changing his story--in which he is no longer the victim of Falkland’s “cruelty” but rather the cause of it (325). In these passages, Caleb attempts to convince his readers that, while he is Falkland’s cruel “murderer,” he is also the same “Caleb Williams” that is both narrator and subject of the previous narrative of himself:

I record the praises bestowed on me by Falkland, not because I deserve them, but because they serve to aggravate the baseness of my cruelty. He survived this dreadful scene but three days. I have been his murderer . . . execrable wretch that I have been! I wantonly inflicted on him an anguish a thousand times worse than death. . . . Alas! I am the same Caleb Williams that, so short a time ago, boasted, that, however great were the calamities I endured, I was still innocent. (325)

In rewriting his own story, Caleb acts to literally deconstruct his previous claim for subjectivity--not only by calling himself the “source” of his “errors”--but also by denouncing the value of his “self” in comparison to Falkland’s “nobler spirit”:

Why should my reflections perpetually centre upon myself? self, an overweening regard to which has been the source of my errors! Falkland, I will think only of thee. . . . A nobler spirit lived not among the sons of men. (325)

In the final lines of the novel, Caleb cancels his pursuit of agency and narrative authority: he declares he is no longer rewriting his memoirs to vindicate his “character,” but rather to renounce his aspirations to agency (326) and affirm his belief that “the pride of philosophy has taught us to treat man as an individual. He is no such thing” (303). Having “now no character” “to vindicate,” Caleb rewrites his “story” so that it “may be fully understood”--and in doing so--denounces his previous narrative as a “half-told and mangled tale” that cannot be repeated and heard by “the world”:

I began these memoirs with the idea of vindicating my character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate: but I will finish them that thy story may be fully understood; and that, if those errors of thy life be known which thou so ardently desiredst [sic] to conceal, the world may at least not hear and repeat a half-told and mangled tale. (326)

By rereading and rewriting his own text, Caleb acts constantly to destabilize any potential construction of himself as a subject.<sup>89</sup>

In effect, Caleb displaces himself as a permanent referent (Hogle 263) or ultimate subject of his story, and allows the representation of himself--his narrative--to substitute for him as a subject.<sup>90</sup> Yet this narrative is in flux because both referent and representation are mutually indecisive (263).<sup>91</sup> He relies on an image of Caleb (as a future political subject) to erase his past, and similarly, on an image of Caleb (as a past political subject) to create and legitimize a future.<sup>92</sup> Caleb thus becomes a subject that is everywhere but nowhere--an indecisive, revolutionary subject whose fixity is impossible--and thus, presumably, dependent on the ending of the novel for any possible resolution. However, one may question whether this resolution ever comes. Certainly Godwin seems to have had his doubts, for (as is well known) he wrote two radically different endings as if to allegorize the undecidability that pervades the entire text.

## 9. Uncertain Subjects, Uncertain Endings

The existence of two different endings to the novel, and in particular, the revised ending that Godwin chose for publication at the insistence of his publishers, ensures that

Caleb's subject status remains *undecided* in the end. Eliminated at the last moment, the original ending to *Caleb Williams* features Caleb's disintegration into madness and his subsequent imprisonment after his attempt to accuse Falkland is abruptly cut short and denied by the court. While Godwin wrote his original ending to stage Caleb's commitment to resist being silenced, this ending was taken out in the first publication (May, 1794). In the revised version, Falkland admits his guilt and admiration for Caleb's "elevation of mind," to which Caleb responds with wild remorse for having disgraced and symbolically murdered such a noble man (324). Regretting having returned to vindicate himself in the revised version, Caleb pens his memoirs with the hope that "the world may at least not hear or repeat a half-told and mangled tale" (326).

The revised ending featured in the first and subsequent publications of *Caleb Williams* effectively acts to undo Godwin's project of constructing a revolutionary subject. Even though Caleb as a subject seems to survive in the revised ending (in that he is not imprisoned), his embarrassing renunciation of his story, and shameful renunciation of his claim to rights, not only produces his figural death as a speaking subject, but as a narrator as well. By giving in to Falkland's request, Caleb silences himself, and effectively recasts his narrative as that of a rebelliously foolish, feudal miscreant betraying his lord, rather than as a heroic, revolutionary subject who, against all odds, struggled to emancipate himself. In this way, Caleb's renunciation of his narrative in this revised ending acts to cancel both the survival of his subjectivity and the survival of his true narrative.

Specifically, by giving in and letting Falkland claim victory, Caleb disqualifies his whole narrative, and not only surrenders his project of having his subjectivity established and recognized in the public sphere, but also the survival of his memoirs. While Horrocks contends that the original ending abandons Caleb as the “narrating subject” (44) who doubts “the efficacy of even trying to tell his story” and “disintegrates into blank”--leaving readers with no “framing narrative” to “comfort Caleb (or us)” with the possibility that his “story” of “innocence will not die with him” or that his “narrative” will not be “annihilated” by his oppressor’s narrative (40)--I disagree. I argue that it is actually the revised ending--not the original ending as Horrocks contends--that “abandons” (44) Caleb as both a subject who attempts to speak, and narrator who attempts to tell the story of this attempt. In the revised ending, as Caleb retracts his once revolutionary claims of innocence and his once unprecedented efforts to make his oppressor yield to his narrative and letting his story be heard, he empties the political meaning of his, Emily’s, Hawkins’s and Brightwel’s efforts for emancipation and renders their testimonies as mere stories of medieval horror.<sup>93</sup>

By submitting to Falkland’s persuasive remorse, Caleb sheepishly surrenders to a feudal order that will not recognize him or his narrative as independent. Moreover, by having Falkland admit to Caleb’s underestimated good character, the medieval discourse of the character-witness prevails as the source of truth and validity. The effect “is to ‘recast’ Caleb’s initial ‘nervous narrative’ into ‘a self-denunciation, and through this transformation the narrative itself is redeemed, not as a rational narrative but as a protest against its own existence (Logan 56)” (Faflak 114). This suggests that Godwin does not

envision a way to arrive at revolution figured by Caleb's recognition as a political subject, but only a revolution suspended in the undecidability of its own agency. Godwin's revised ending is a final example of how action is avoided in the novel, and how agency is a revolutionary concept in the novel that even Caleb can never achieve, as he cannot act or tell the truth of his story (or even determine what that truth would be across the division of his being). Readers must remember that at this point, Caleb has only told the story to us, the readers. In the revised ending Caleb has the opportunity to become an agent of direct action, which he foreshadows when he declares he will no longer disguise his own actions: "There was one expedient against which I was absolutely determined, disguise" (305). But he does not take this chance, marking an unexpected turn in the novel. Similarly, Falkland's confession or recognition of Caleb's will is only a character-witness recognition that reinforces the difficulty of finally breaking the feudal bonds between them.

While the courtroom scene in the revised ending spills out like a sardonic, romantic dream because Caleb and Falkland simultaneously confess their mutual remorse, this triumph is just a chimera. Caleb gives us the impression that he has managed to self-educate himself and become master of his conduct without the need for laws, yet his remorse on Falkland's behalf demonstrates that he still remains undecided about rejecting a sovereign. Whether or not Falkland's guilt is revealed, a feudal sovereign rules. In Radcliffe's words: "the novel ends with Caleb both clearing his character and also declaring himself guilty. Thus we are left with uncertainty; the

narratives of Caleb and Falkland remain vexed, and the moral knowledge that *Political Justice* seeks remains elusive” (551).

The revised ending stages the novel’s uncertainty: “the alternate endings suggest that either he [Godwin] was uncertain how he could best execute his design or was unwilling, finally, to pursue . . . his original conception” (Dumas 583-584). “Godwin assumes that people will be rational and independent individuals who recognize each other’s autonomy” (Marshall 46), but he does not model the revised ending based on this belief. Caleb suffers in the original ending because Falkland’s guilt is not legally recognized and by his descent into madness in the revised ending, he suffers just as much. Indeed, by reinforcing Falkland’s authority, he destroys himself more completely, because he does so more deliberately, than in the madness and fragmentation of the original text. In the revised version, the amalgamation of his undecided, hesitant, and self-questioning character culminates in an act of seemingly principled self-destruction while, in a sense, the burden of undecidability passes to the reader who must read this act with and against the entire preceding narrative.

Despite Godwin’s uncertainty in his revised ending, in which neither Falkland nor Caleb act as direct agents of their actions, some critics argue that the revised ending actually demonstrates Godwin’s hope that man will someday be able to rule himself. For example, Horrocks’s reading of Godwin’s preference for the revised ending makes imagining a revolutionary subject possible: “The new ending . . . is not a lapse,” as many have proposed, “into an escapist representation of ‘how things should be’, but rather a deliberate effort to leave some space for a political subject who might at least imagine

things differently (cf. Raymond Williams 148-49, Mishra 146-56)” (43).<sup>94</sup> This alternative is imagined by Clemit who writes, “Godwin shows how sincerity of utterance may triumph where revolutionary intention fails, offering a notional model for social interaction based on the operation of frankness and sympathy” (qtd. in Horrocks 43).<sup>95</sup>

In contrast to these readings by critics, I argue in the next section that it is the *original*--not the revised ending--that stages the promise of a revolutionary subject to come. By freely exercising his rational will and declaring his innocence in the original ending, Caleb breaks the feudal structure that filters responsibility and agency through others. Such an act is *unthinkable* until the French Revolution. The French Revolution is shocking precisely because its agents or authors are *visible*--not invisible and hidden in the superstructure of a feudal order. As such, Caleb’s action is unprecedented precisely because it summons the feudal system to directly bear witness to its own crimes.

#### 10. The End is the Beginning of a Revolution(ary) Tale

Omitted by Godwin for the novel’s first publication and not discovered until 1966 by D. Gilbert Dumas, the original manuscript ending to *Caleb Williams* provides another demonstration that Caleb’s survival as a subject is linked to the survival of his narrative, even as the latter constantly undoes the former for, in this version Caleb’s narrative protestations against the despotic system result with his being silenced as a speaking subject and, indeed, in his entire *collapse* as a subject. In this scene, Falkland “denies his crime” and Caleb’s “protestations” are “rudely silenced by the prejudiced magistrate” (Dumas 577). Caleb is then imprisoned by Jones (Gines) and goes mad,

saying, “I wonder, which is the man, I or my chair?” (MS. III, 116) (Dumas 592). Once he is imprisoned, Caleb declares, “True happiness lies in being like a stone-Nobody can complain of me-all day long I do nothing-am a stone-a GRAVE-STONE!-an obelisk to tell you, THERE LIES WHAT WAS ONCE A MAN!” (CW 334).

This final scene reveals how Caleb’s narrative “protestations” have endangered, and ultimately, ensured the failure of his emergence as a revolutionary subject. After being silenced by the court, Caleb questions the status of his own subjectivity by asking, “I wonder which is the man, I or my chair?” (334) indicating that he is no longer certain whether he is a subject, or an object, or being who has been reduced to abject existence. The failure for Caleb to have his claim for subjectivity heard is symbolized in him being silenced like a “GRAVE-STONE” (334). Since Caleb can no longer, as a subject, speak coherently and protest his imprisonment, he announces that what has remained is an obelisk that will tell his story and speak for him. The obelisk features the only trace of his struggle for emancipation.

Before transferring the function of narrator to the obelisk, however, Caleb makes one last declaration as narrator, announcing “*THERE* LIES WHAT WAS ONCE A MAN!” (334; emphasis mine). This declaration performs two functions in the novel’s ending. First, by saying “THERE,” Caleb makes a play on the grim self-referentiality of the grave-stone or obelisk, which instead of saying ‘*here* lies what was once a man’ writes “*THERE* LIES WHAT WAS ONCE A MAN!” (334; emphasis mine). By using “THERE” as a substitution for ‘Here’, Caleb, for one last time, performs his role as both

narrator and subject of his narration. Specifically, the “THERE” substituted for ‘Here’ indicates his role as a narrator who points “THERE” in order to talk about himself ‘Here’.

While Caleb retains his role as narrator by saying “THERE,” the fact that “THERE” substitutes for ‘Here’ also performs a division. In this sense, while the first function of Caleb’s “THERE” identifies his double role as narrator and subject of the narration, the second function acts to separate the two. Specifically, by substituting “THERE” for ‘Here’ Caleb also acts to finally eliminate himself as subject of his narration, and in this way, demonstrate the link between Caleb’s survival as a subject, and the survival of his narration.

Caleb’s final declaration in the novel demonstrates that his narration of his own story has acted to figuratively eliminate himself as a subject, and finally dissolve his duplicitous identity as narrator and subject (of his narration) by making the one alien to the other. Specifically, the “THERE” acts to transform Caleb from being a narrator of himself (‘Here lies what was once a man’) (and therefore in control of his subjectivity) to being a narrator of something else (“There lies what was once a man”) (and therefore no longer in control of his own subjectivity, and thus without agency at all). Moreover, by saying “THERE” instead of ‘here’, Caleb, as narrator, announces his own figural death as a subject. Caleb points ‘there’ to the reader to look ‘here’ at himself, no longer a subject or even a “man,” but rather a substitution or stone. This stone or “obelisk” acts as a symbol of his figural death as a subject, and as evidence that what has remained is just a scrap of a narrative, encapsulated in “THERE LIES WHAT WAS ONCE A MAN!” (334).<sup>96</sup>

What is most significant about this final scene in the manuscript ending is that--while Caleb is silenced by being imprisoned (and therefore figuratively dead as a coherent, speaking subject)--Caleb's "THERE" acts as a written testimony that he is still alive and coherent as a *narrator*. One must remember that Caleb's figural death as a subject is announced by Caleb himself, who is still playing the role of narrator when he cries out "THERE LIES WHAT WAS ONCE A MAN!" (*CW* 334). Caleb may have been imprisoned, and may no longer be in charge of his own fate as a subject, but his declaration demonstrates that he continues to narrate in however oblique a fashion.

Specifically, Caleb's (dis)articulation of "THERE" (334) makes an ironic play on the fact that that it is in fact *his* narration that has caused his figural death--that has literally aborted his attempt to emerge as a political subject with the right to speak.<sup>97</sup> Caleb admits that it is his act--in particular, his act of writing--that has acted to figuratively eliminate his subjectivity: "The narrative I have taken the pains to suggest will then only perpetuate my shame and spread more widely the persuasion of my nefarious guilt!" (332).

Caleb's confession also confirms that just telling his story, while revolutionary in rhetoric, is not enough to legally establish him as a political subject. Caleb must have an other, who will recognize him as a subject.<sup>98</sup> Without an other to recognize his claim for rights, Caleb's claim cannot enter the public sphere and be legitimized. The original manuscript does thus ensure the figural death of Caleb as a revolutionary subject, but also the survival of the narrator's (Caleb's) protestations to have the reader look "THERE" to the obelisk. In contrast, the revised ending figuratively eliminates *both* subject and

narrator. While some see Caleb's declaration in the original ending as a harrowing failure, I argue it is actually a rousing achievement, insofar as the seemingly resolute reinforcement of feudal power cannot silence Caleb as a narrator--whose inscription, "THERE LIES WHAT WAS ONCE A MAN!" (334), will remain forever in stone for posterity to read. Like Price, Caleb has conducted his sermon, sparked a debate, and most importantly, summoned the reader--and writer--to continue and bear witness to his story.

Chapter 2

Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*: Sleepwalking Subjects and Revolutionary Undoings

1. A Godwinian Inheritance

In chapter 1, I argue that William Godwin's novel, *Things as They Are; Or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* provides an allegorical model for a) the historical struggle between conflicting *feudal and monarchical ideals of sovereignty* and b) the subsequent failure of "revolutionary idealism" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 421) to overcome the violent "undecidability" (Derrida 9) structured in the revolutionary claim. This second chapter argues that Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799) also contributes to a reading of revolution as producing a post-revolutionary, quasi-colonial, democratic subject by *restaging* the conflict in Godwin's novel as one *between transatlantic 'revolutionary' and 'quasi-colonial' subjectivities* struggling to overcome the "undecidability" (Derrida 9) or indecision emerging from America's revolutionary claim for a new representative democracy.<sup>99</sup>

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has argued that *Edgar Huntly* features the "presence of a progressive critique of the self-divided, Euro-American, colonial male" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 413).<sup>100</sup> I argue that this "self-divided" "colonial male" (413) is allegorized in *Edgar Huntly* via Clithero and Edgar, whose split agency represents the indecision of the revolutionary claim. Brown's title *Edgar Huntly Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* already seems to announce Smith-Rosenberg's "colonial" (413) self-division, insofar as the "Or" suggests an indecision as to which kind of story Brown wishes to present: will it be the

narrative of a personal figure--“Edgar Huntly”--or will it be the *Memoirs* of an unnamed “Sleep-Walker”?

Specifically, I believe that although critics like Voloshin and Tompkins have addressed the anxiety of “unknown agents” permeating the novel, the concept of a split, quasi-colonial, democratic subject in *Edgar Huntly* deserves to be further examined insofar as it threatens the stability or “apparent order” (Voloshin 276) of a post-revolutionary narrative and subject of the new Republic.<sup>101</sup> Leslie Fiedler’s suggestion that one interpret Edgar’s behavior as “a transformation of the European gothic’s antiaristocratic impulses into a condemnation of the ‘irrationality of the id’” (qtd. in Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 413) also serves to suggest that a greater investigation into the function of agency in Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* needs to be conducted.

Brown allegorizes “undecidability” (Derrida 9; Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 418) or indecision similarly to Godwin: as a secret that threatens his protagonists’ subjectivity. Brown revises Godwin’s thematic treatment of the secret by presenting it as a narrative issue: this indecision plays out in the narrative structure of Brown’s text as a trope that interrupts and undoes the characters’ narrations and subjectivities. While grounded on sentimental seduction novels of the time, Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* models itself primarily on Godwin’s narrative structure and hero figure from *Caleb Williams*. In reproducing Godwin’s Gothic, romantic epistolary style, captivity plot, figuration of an indecisive, post-revolutionary agency, moral conflict, and unreliable narrator, Brown demonstrates a conflicted relationship to the post-revolutionary “crisis of authority” (Elliott 19) as it was historically experienced by subjects emerging out of the birth of the new Republic.<sup>102</sup>

Many critics would agree that this crisis was not only American, but transatlantic in nature.<sup>103</sup>

Echoing Caleb's flight and imprisonment, Brown's protagonists experience the pleasuring terror of unknown causes, and thus inherit Caleb's impulse to question the moral and rational certainty of their actions. In particular, Brown's modeling of Godwin's trope of indecision in his title, *Edgar Huntly Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* reflects the author's indecision over how to characterize the new Republic. What are the comma and "Or" in the title meant to perform?<sup>104</sup> The comma separates *Or* and *Memoirs* as though they are different, and not exchangeable, entities. Can *Edgar Huntly* be cast as two different personas or stories, as "Edgar Huntly" or as a radically different *Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*? Is "Edgar Huntly" a representation of Edgar's own memoirs, or those of Clithero? Will these *Memoirs* be about a secret revolution as concealed in Waldegrave's letters (Mary's wish), or about their erasure (Waldegrave's wish)? *Edgar Huntly's* title arguably reflects a historical indecision concerning which story to tell, and whose side to be on? Should one side with the Federalists, the Republicans, the Jacobins, the female readers left out of this "new" (Arendt 37) American Republic, or the disempowered clergy?

As in Godwin's title, *Things as They Are; Or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, the "Or" in Brown's title not only stages the novel's own uncertainty as to which kind of narrative to privilege in explaining 'things as they are', but also allegorizes the nation's aporia as to *who* will write this narrative. Will it be a revolutionary or quasi-colonial subject? Or will it be one caught between both ideals of sovereignty--and both

continents--who will acknowledge past narratives as inadequate for beginning, and thus attempt to write his own narrative as a new, post-revolutionary “subject of *democracy*” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 418; original emphasis)?<sup>105</sup>

This indecision is reflected in the preface to *Edgar Huntly*, which opens with a letter entitled “To The Public” in which Brown simultaneously articulates his Godwinian heritage and disinherits it.<sup>106</sup> On the one hand, Brown says America should open “new views” to the “moral painter” and--in a gesture that supports the notion of a transatlantic experience of revolution--uses Godwinian language to illustrate what one may assume is a comparative reference to the American and French revolutions:

That new *springs of action*, and new motives to *curiosity* should operate; that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, may be readily conceived. (*EH* 3; emphasis mine)

*Edgar Huntly*'s preface recalls the language of *Caleb Williams*: using familiar terms from the earlier novel, such as “springs of action” and “curiosity,” Brown announces that his mode of “engaging the sympathy of the reader” will not be conducted in typical superstitious fashion and by employing “gothic castles and chimeras,” but instead call forth the “passions” of the “liberal” “reader” by directly addressing “the incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness”--“incidents” (3) that can be read as the genocide of Indian tribes and “perils” of re-colonizing sacred land in the construction of the new Republic.<sup>107</sup>

*Edgar Huntly* was Brown's most widely read novel.<sup>108</sup> The story begins as a letter, composed by Edgar Huntly to his fiancé Mary Waldegrave, upon his return to his village on the occasion of the sudden death and unsolved murder of his friend and soon to be brother-in-law, Waldegrave. Waldegrave's death necessitates that Edgar decide the fate of a series of radical letters that Waldegrave has entrusted to him: destroy them (Waldegrave's wish) or assemble and publish them (Mary's wish). Edgar's "indecision" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 417) quickly gives way to his curiosity to solve Waldegrave's murder. This project leads him to pursue Clithero Edny, an unknown figure who is found loitering at the site of the murder, raising Edgar's suspicions. Having emigrated from Ireland to escape the haunting memories of his past, Clithero becomes the object of Edgar's obsession and narrative. Edgar's pursuit of Clithero leads to a series of adventures that threaten both their survival and the coherent completion of the *Memoirs*.

Like *Caleb Williams*, *Edgar Huntly* makes a short commentary on the evils of tyranny: "the vices of servitude are less hateful than those of tyranny" (38). Like *Caleb Williams*, *Edgar Huntly* features a character, Wiatte (Mrs. Lorimer's brother), who resembles Tyrrel in dishonoring his chivalrous lineage: "He was the darling and stay of an ancient and illustrious house, but his actions reflected nothing but disgrace upon his ancestry, and threatened to bring the honours [sic] of their line to a period in his person" (45). Finally, like *Caleb Williams*, *Edgar Huntly* establishes a link between subjectivity and narrative that produces a crisis that threatens the survival of both the main characters and their narratives.

Sections 2-4 of this second chapter will explore Edgar's quasi-colonial, split agency, Clithero's revolutionary origins, Edgar's uncertainty and curiosity, Edgar's crisis over whether to protect or persecute Clithero, and the problems of founding, while sections 5-7 will study the link between Edgar's figuration as an indecisive subject and as an unreliable narrator in order to demonstrate that Edgar's indecision not only produces symptoms of writing and sleepwalking but also omissions of text.<sup>109</sup> These omissions contribute to other textual evidence that will support my argument that Edgar is a transatlantic, post-revolutionary quasi-colonial subject who has not witnessed any violent events per se (even those that happen to him) but witnessed rather an event of *testimony* (Clithero's testimony). Moreover Edgar experiences the violence of giving testimony, in turn, to what he has witnessed (Clithero's testimony). Specifically, Edgar's attempt to testify to Clithero, produces violent consequences that threaten both his own survival and that of his narrative, moreover, the survival of a new, "subject of *democracy*" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 418; original emphasis).

## 2. Divided Subjects: Edgar and Clithero

The narrative structure of *Edgar Huntly* acts as an "allegory" (418) for America's need not only to rewrite the story of revolution, but also to locate a post-revolutionary subject who will assume authorship of that story. The constitution of the narrative is closely linked to the emergence of a post-revolutionary subject or agency--or rather, a subject that attempts to emerge through narrative but is undone by the agency of its narration. *Edgar Huntly* and its relationship to *Caleb Williams* incites and necessitates an

investigation into what a post-revolutionary subject or revolutionary agency might entail. For example, is it the politically spontaneous and uncertain constitution of one's self without relying on the will of others, or is it a psychological awareness of one's inability to control one's actions? I argue that Brown's treatment of Edgar as a quasi-colonial subject and Clithero as an irremediably mad revolutionary reveals a critique of the indecisive character of revolutionary agency: on the one hand, agency suggests the ability of individuals to take responsibility for their actions; on the other hand, agency ironically reveals them to be incapable of controlling their impulses to act.

This divided subjectivity is staged, both via Clithero's characterization as an irremediably mad, revolutionary émigré repeatedly conflicting with the threat of a monarchical restoration (Sarsefield) and via Edgar's characterization as a Godwinian, quasi-colonial subject who is not only plagued by a Godwinian indecision over how to act, but also how to narrate the story of this split agency.<sup>110</sup> In particular, I argue that Edgar's indecisive narrative reflects the split agency that a transatlantic, democratic subject experiences in attempting to emerge out of an encounter between revolution (Clithero) and the quasi-colonialism of the new Republic (Edgar).<sup>111</sup>

Edgar is presented in the novel as a quasi-colonial subject who not only has a colonial history, but commits colonial acts as well.<sup>112</sup> The novel suggests Edgar has a colonial family history that predates the American Revolution; he directly links his family to the colonial acts of violence committed on former Lenni Lenape land, by naming his family as the new inhabitants, and his former English colonial masters as the murderers: "The English were aliens and sojourners, who occupied the land merely by her

connivance and permission, and whom she allowed to remain on no terms but those of supplying her wants” (199). In an effort to distance himself from this colonial inheritance, Edgar calls the English “aliens and sojourners” (199).

However, colonial acts in America have become sterilized in the novel and, like Clithero’s footsteps, cannot be traced: “Not only it was probable that Clithero had fled far away, but, should he have concealed himself in some nook or cavern, within these precincts, his concealment was not to be traced. This arose from the nature of that sterile region” (91).<sup>113</sup> Despite knowing its history, Norwalk excites “wonder and alarm” in Edgar, who wonders whether the Indians were “permanent inhabitants” of the region, or were “wanderers and robbers” (164).<sup>114</sup> In an obvious denial of colonial displacement, Edgar writes:

The aboriginal inhabitants had no motives to lead them into caves like this, and ponder on the verge of such a precipice. Their successors were still less likely to have wandered hither. Since the birth of this continent, I was probably the first who had deviated thus remotely from the customary paths of men. (99)

The “aboriginal inhabitants” are the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) Indians, and their “successors” are the American colonials who have displaced them. Edgar evokes the discovery of America and its later colonization by Europeans in “the birth of this continent” (99) which preceded the Indian massacres meant to clear the land for the new, American inhabitants.

I argue that by entering Norwalk for the “first” time, Edgar reenacts the colonial takeover of the land from the Indians--but this time, as an American colonizer, not a British one. By picturing himself as the first colonizer ever--as first even before the Indians (since the “birth of this continent”) (99) he enacts a fantasy of autochthony: he becomes the real American subject--the first ever--to enter into Norwalk which promises to reveal many previously unknown truths if explored. Edgar describes Norwalk as bearing “secrecies of nature”: “I love to immerse myself in shades and dells, and hold converse with the solemnities and secrecies of nature in the rude retreats of Norwalk” (90). Edgar seems to suggest these “secrecies” have yet to be discovered: “It was probable that human feet had never before gained this recess, that human eyes had never been fixed upon these gushing waters” (99). Thus Edgar claims for himself a status prior even to Indians, as the appropriator of this land.<sup>115</sup>

Edgar’s pledge to pursue justice and truth on behalf of Clithero leads him to become bound to the secret truth of America’s colonial founding acts even as he attempts to trump them by representing his own wanderings as the scene of an ultimate democratic priority. Edgar remarks on the unprecedented nature of his journey into Norwalk, as if to imply a new democratization of the uncivilized, when really he contradictorily enacts *both* his fantasy of autochthony and of Indian colonization: “My situation was new” (96). Yet, as readers know, Edgar is not the first man known to have “haunted” Norwalk’s “spaces hitherto unvisited” (93), not even the first European man; Clithero is. This is arguably underlined by Edgar’s discovery of Clithero in Norwalk as he exclaims: “*Man! Clithero!*” (100; original emphasis). Edgar first exclaims “*Man!*” as

if underlining the human distinctiveness of the European (Clithero or himself), the supposed first man to have discovered these lands. When Edgar follows his exclamation of “*Man!*” with “*Clithero!*” it is almost as if he is initiating a new American colonial intrusion by giving a nominal distinction to Clithero’s “revolutionary subjectivity” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 421) as it claims (or reclaims) the land. Edgar thus seems to see himself as the second first man to enter Norwalk in so far as he becomes Clithero’s double by following him.<sup>116</sup>

This ambiguity serves to reinforce Edgar’s status as a quasi-colonial subject. Edgar’s ability to both embody and differentiate himself from the Indian and, ultimately, too from the ‘Alien’ Clithero are what identify him as a quasi-colonial subject.<sup>117</sup> He confirms this quasi-colonial status initially by differentiating himself and Clithero as men from the Indians, who are “Red-men”:

During former Indian wars, this rude surface was sometimes traversed by the Red-men, and they made, by means of it, frequent and destructive inroads into the heart of the English settlements. During the last war . . . a band of them had once penetrated into Norwalk, and lingered long enough to pillage and murder some of the neighboring inhabitants. (165-166)

He is presumably referring to the displacement and retaliation by Indians that occurred between 1737 and 1758 (Grabo xii).<sup>118</sup>

In recollecting the bloody scenes of Norwalk’s past, Edgar attempts to tell readers an American story of trauma, one that is--however--entangled in another unspoken

colonial tale of the killing and displacement of the Indians. This colonial trauma is, in effect, repeated when Edgar kills the Indian captors in the novel, his most obvious colonial act. Specifically, upon reaching safety after his first series of killings, Edgar realizes that the musquet he has stolen from the Indians is his own, inherited from his uncle. This discovery leads Edgar to observe that the musquet has also been used in acts of colonization in the past: “I perceived marks that were familiar to my apprehension. . . . This piece was mine. . . . This piece was of extraordinary workmanship. It was the legacy of an English officer, who died in Bengal, to Sarsefield” (178). Edgar’s chance discovery of the musquet is significant, in that it confuses him and leads him to believe that his uncle and sisters have been murdered, as such spawning his own acts of colonial slaughter. While Edgar’s observation of the musquet’s past is a mixed reference to both Native American and British Indian colonization, Edgar roots the symbolic power of his discovery back into the story of Native American colonization with his other equally powerful colonial act, his killing of the panther.<sup>119</sup>

Many critics have pointed out that the panther represents the figure of the Indian in the novel.<sup>120</sup> For example, Edgar describes the panther’s cry as resembling a “human voice” and not a threatening roar (118). Indeed, the simultaneously threatening and benign presence of the panther throughout *Edgar Huntly* represents a certain ambivalence towards the presence of the Indians in the new Republic. Like the remaining Indian survivors who sought refuge in Norwalk, the panthers seem to seek safe “refuge” in the wild “fastnesses of Norwalk” (119). Edgar oscillates between feeling sympathy or hatred for the panthers, and as such suggests an uncertainty of attitude toward the colonial

displacement and killing of the Indians. Edgar's declaration of "*Man! Clithero!*" (100; original emphasis) as indicative of human colonization is further reinforced by the notion that only Indians or panthers, and as such, animals (not men) occupied Norwalk until he (and Clithero) discovered it.

The panthers thus serve as a metaphor for the Indians in the novel, who on the one hand, are endangered, but on the other hand, must be eliminated. In this sense the panthers become, like Clithero, quasi-colonial targets for democratization, in that, like the Native Americans, they deserve inalienable rights and so must be protected, at the same time as they must be hunted for failing to meet the standards of Americanness in the new Republic.<sup>121</sup> For example, Edgar reminds readers of the colonial "duty" to exterminate the panthers whenever possible: "These I thought it no breach of duty to exterminate wherever they could be found" (119). When revealing his fear of being "rent to pieces" by "this savage" (120), Edgar's language recalls the Lenni Lenape Indian savages who by now have convinced Edgar to "never" "traverse the wilderness unfurnished with my tom-hawk" (123). Evidence supporting the notion that the panthers act as metaphors for the Indians can also be found in Edgar's reference to the past extermination of panthers, in which he arguably recalls the pre-revolutionary frontier violence and displacement of the Lenni Lenape Indians: "a long time had elapsed since these animals were supposed to have been exiled from this district" (123).<sup>122</sup>

Whereas the colonial killing of the Indians warns of the dangers of remembering past crimes, the colonial slaughter of the panther warns of the dangers of forgetting them. Both acts set the tone of perpetual lawlessness in the novel, a lawlessness that precedes

and follows the birth of the new Republic, which Edgar alludes to when he makes an ominous reference to “the evils which have returned upon us with augmented force, after having, for a moment, taken their flight” (149). This lawlessness is dramatized by the presence of Queen Mab (“Old Deb”) and Clithero in Norwalk, the site of the majority of the novel’s violence. The “persistent” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 425) presence of Queen Mab in Norwalk supports the notion that Brown’s novel attempts to open a discussion or tell the true story of the complex and controversial founding of the nation.<sup>123</sup> As Brown and Shapiro note, *Edgar Huntly* is “set in 1787, the year the U.S. constitution was ratified and thus year one of the national institution; in this sense, the novel casts a skeptical light on the founding narratives of Pennsylvania (in the Treaty Elm) and the United States (in the constitution) alike” (Bernard and Shapiro xxx). For example, Edgar’s discovery of Queen Mab’s hut incites Edgar to recollect the story of the displacement of the Lenni Lenape Indians:

This woman originally belonged to the tribe of Delawares or Lennilennapee. All these districts were once comprised within the dominions of that nation. About thirty years ago, in consequence of perpetual encroachments of the English colonists, they abandoned their ancient seats and retired to the banks of the Wabash and Muskingum.

(197-198)

In this scene Edgar describes the colonial encroachments and seizure of the Lenni Lenape land, to which Queen Mab bears witness to by insisting on remaining in Norwalk, despite her tribe having relocated elsewhere:

The village inhabited by this clan was built upon ground which now constitutes my uncle's barn yard and orchard. On the departure of her countrymen, this female burnt the empty wigwams and retired into the fastnesses of Norwalk. She selected a spot suitable for an Indian dwelling and a small plantation of maize, and in which she was seldom liable to interruption and intrusion. (198)

Edgar recounts Queen Mab's successful re-conquering of this lost field--bulldozed and cleared out by a Scottish "emigrant"--whom Edgar conjectures to have been "murdered" by "Indians":

This dwelling was of logs, and had been erected by a Scottish emigrant, who not being rich enough to purchase land . . . cleared a field in the unappropriated wilderness, and subsisted on its produce. After some time he disappeared. Various conjectures were formed as to the cause of his absence. None of them satisfactory; but that which obtained most credit was, that he had been murdered by the Indians, who, about the same period, paid their annual visit to the Queen. This conjecture acquired some force, by observing that the old woman shortly after took possession of his hut, his implements of tillage, and his corn-field. (200-201)

Later, Clithero--represented in the novel as a savage, marginalized revolutionary figure who takes refuge in Norwalk--comes to inhabit her hut, as if equating the threatening revolutionary energies he seems to embody with the threat posed by the Indians against a newly normative, democratic America.<sup>124</sup>

Edgar's colonial character is exposed in his attempt to colonize, reinterpret, and rewrite America's story of beginning. In contrast, his pursuit of justice for Clithero unveils the promise of democracy enacted by the revolutionary claim, and reinvigorates the hope for independence that Godwin's narrative of Caleb's plight inspires in *Caleb Williams*. In particular, Edgar could be viewed as Clithero's representative in the new, representative democracy of the Republic. Like Caleb Williams who could not represent himself in the feudal world, Clithero's immigrant status also renders him in need of representation.<sup>125</sup> Edgar sets out to clear Clithero's name and restore him to health and, by implication, to the American community. But in the end the threat he represents of the violence of revolution must be banished for the revolutionary American State to be secured. Thus, as Gardner writes, "if the first half of the tale describes the attempt to redeem the alien, the second half describes Edgar's own experience of and redemption from Clithero's disease and the savagery that it has brought upon him" (Gardner 443). Ironically, while Clithero represents Edgar's democratic project of redemption insofar as he is as a Godwinian, revolutionary subject who falls victim to the "obscurity" (Derrida 9) of America's founding moment and needs to be rehabilitated, his ambivalent status and characterization in the novel also mark him (in an ironic twist of the Quaker captivity narrative) as a victim or captive of Edgar's quasi-colonial pursuits.<sup>126</sup>

Lending a still more Godwinian character to the novel is both Edgar and Clithero's filial relationship to Sarsefield, who as critics have pointed out is a symbol of monarchical power in the novel (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 425).<sup>127</sup> As a paternal authority, Sarsefield represents "the democratic revolution's" repetition of

“monarchism’s . . . appropriation of divine . . . extra-legal authority” (Downes, *Democracy* 8). Because of his preoccupation with becoming a patron to Clithero, Edgar has “likely lost his final offer of inheritance” from his “new master, the entrepreneur” Sarsefield (E. Hinds 12). Thus Edgar, despite having “universal inalienable rights” (Downes, *Democracy* 9) as a democratic subject, answers to Sarsefield and not himself. As Downes argues, “the subject of universal inalienable rights is *also always* the subject of an othered-and thus displaced-monarchism” (9; emphasis mine). This ambiguous positioning is yet another way that Edgar is a quasi-colonial subject who, on the one hand, colonizes others (e.g. Indians, Clithero’s narrative), but also, on the other hand, is under Sarsefield’s authority as a colonial subject *himself*.

Sarsefield’s hold over Edgar and Clithero’s destinies effectively replicates the relationship Caleb has to Falkland and keeps Edgar in colonial servitude, while contributing to Clithero’s depiction in the novel as a mad revolutionary whose indecision and impulses mirror the character he is arguably modeled on--Caleb.<sup>128</sup> As a mad forgotten revolutionary subject, Clithero, like Caleb, repeatedly conflicts with the threat of Sarsefield’s monarchical restoration.<sup>129</sup> And Sarsefield’s characterization as a monarchical figure opposed to Clithero’s mad, revolutionary subjectivity is reinforced by Clithero’s Irishness. As Murison writes, “his madness, like his upbringing, is fundamentally that of a colonial Irish subject.”<sup>130</sup>

Clithero’s tale begins in a similar way to Caleb’s: “My misery has been greater than has fallen to the lot of mortals. Yet it is but beginning. . . . Perhaps, if my pilgrimage had been longer, I might, at some future day, have lighted upon hope” (35). Like Caleb,

the “law” of his “birth” has “doomed” him to “poverty and hardship” (78). Like Caleb, Clithero’s parents provided him with an education that peasants seldom received: “My parents were of the better sort of peasants, and were able to provide me with the rudiments of knowledge” (36). Like Caleb, an event in Clithero’s early youth, specifically, his adoption by a wealthy landowner, changes his fortune forever and allows him to climb the social ranks: Clithero admits that he would have “doubtless” “trodden” in his parent’s footsteps “if an event had not happened, which, for a long time, I regarded as the most fortunate of my life; but which I now regard as the scheme of some infernal agent and as the primary source of my calamities” (36). Like Caleb, Clithero becomes both assistant and secretary to a wealthy, virtuous landowner and patroness, Mrs. Euphemia Lorimer:

Her wealth was her only recommendation in the eyes of her husband, whose understanding was depraved by the prejudices of luxury and rank. . . . She was pleased with my vivacity and promptitude, and determined to take me under her own protection. My parents joyfully acceded to her proposal and I returned with her to the capital. (36-37)

Brown describes her virtue much as Godwin describes Falkland’s: “A casual visitant might enjoy her conversation, might applaud the rectitude of her sentiments, the richness of her elocution, and her skill in all the offices of politeness” (40).

Clithero’s filial relationship to his patroness twice replicates the relationship that Caleb and Falkland develop in *Caleb Williams*, in so far as Clithero becomes a servant to both his patroness and her symbolic son: “Her design, in relation to me, was, that I should

be educated with her child, and that an affection, in this way, might be excited in me towards my young master, which might render me, when we should attain to manhood, one of his most faithful and intelligent dependents” (37). Like Caleb, Clithero’s education improves under the tutelage of his patroness: “I had benefited by my opportunities of improvement” (37). Like Caleb, he develops affection, devotion and a sense of duty:

I fulfilled the expectation of my mistress, in one respect. I was deeply imbued with affection for her son, and reverence for herself. . . . I had devoted my life to the service of my patron. . . . I was my master’s constant attendant. . . . I deemed it my privilege, as well as my duty, to sit in judgment on his actions. . . . I knew the duty of my station. . . . My duty required me to set before him the consequences of his actions, and to give impartial and timely information to his mother. (37-38)

An intimate confidence develops between Clithero and his young male master, followed by a rift and Clithero’s separation from his male master leads to an invitation from his patroness to become a “member of her own family” and perform the “functions of a steward” (39).

Clithero is also “troubled” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 421) by the necessity of finally parting from his patroness--although unlike Caleb his motive is a need to protect her (and himself) from the socially transformative impact of his desire for her niece: “I seemed unalterably convinced of the necessity of separation, and yet could not execute my design. When I had wrought up my mind to the intention of explaining myself on the next interview, when the next interview took place my tongue was powerless” (50).

Ultimately, like Caleb, Clithero is forced to run away from his (seemingly equivocal) crimes: “I banished myself forever from my native soil” and, like Caleb, “assumes” “a beggar’s attire” to camouflage himself during his escape (83). The crucial difference is that unlike the haunted and murderous Falkland, Mrs. Lorimer remains, as it were, guiltless of any crime against her servant. He rather bears the entire burden of guilt.<sup>131</sup> Finally, and perhaps most crucially, like Caleb, Clithero becomes haunted by a secret that nearly kills him: “Till consciousness itself be extinct, the worm that gnaws me will never perish” (35). He must tell his story to be vindicated via his “only” remaining “task”: to tell a “coherent narrative” (54). Like Caleb however, Clithero recognizes the devastating effects that telling his story will produce:

I need not conceal, for all the consequences of disclosure are already experienced. I cannot endure a groundless imputation, though to free me from it, I must create and justify imputations still more atrocious. . . . If the agonies of remembrance must be awakened afresh, let me do all that in me lies to shorten them. (35-36)

Clithero’s depiction in the novel as an incurably, mad émigré from Ireland announces how revolutionary subjectivity should be seen in the novel: as something to be contained, locked up or put to death. Brown crafts a depiction of Clithero as a madman throughout his novel. Clithero appears mad because he is not literally conscious of his actions.<sup>132</sup> For example, Edgar questions Clithero’s state of consciousness when he sees him for the second time, a state which he then diagnoses as sleepwalking: “or was he maniac, or walker in his sleep?” (19). Clithero later admits to a “madness” that his

murdering of Mrs. Lorimer's evil twin brother, Wiatte, has caused: "The madness, to whose black suggestions it bore so strong a contrast, began now to make sensible approaches on my understanding" (77). When describing his second crime, the attempted murder of Mrs. Lorimer, Clithero characterizes himself as being unable to control his actions as if "possessed" by a "daemon": "It was the daemon that possessed me. My limbs were guided to the bloody office by a power foreign and superior to mine" (79). Edgar ruminates on Clithero's "upbraiding" and "scorn" as leading to a case of potential "phrenzy [sic]" or "insanity": "Perhaps they argued phrenzy [sic] rather than prejudice; but phrenzy [sic], like prejudice, was curable. Reason was no less an antidote to the illusions of insanity like his, than to the illusions of error" (91).

Sarsefield shares Edgar's view of Clithero, in characterizing Clithero's actions as stemming from a hellish "agent" in control of his "faculties": "He that could meditate a deed like this was no longer man. An agent from Hell had mastered his faculties" (266). A surgeon, Sarsefield is convinced that Clithero is incurable in a passage, that announces his very consciousness to be an illness or "malady" and sleep--or "death"--to be the "cure": "Common ills are not without a cure less than death, but here, all remedies are vain. Consciousness itself is the malady; the pest; of which he only is cured who ceases to think" (267). Sarsefield's diagnosis induces Edgar to ruminate over whether it was their "duty to rectify this error" (267) in Clithero's consciousness. In another example, Edgar reveals Sarsefield's conviction that Clithero is an incurable "maniac" "whose disease was irremediable, and whose existence could not be protracted, but to his own

misery and the misery of others” (169). By the end of the novel, Edgar is convinced of Sarsefield’s diagnosis: “Clithero is a maniac” (280).

Clithero’s characterization as an irremediably mad, revolutionary subject is also staged in the novel through his inability to control his impulses. Clithero is driven by impulses in the novel that seem to parodically echo Godwin’s concept of necessity. For example, after being cornered to make a confession, Clithero admits that he is “driven, by an irresistible necessity to comply” with Edgar’s request (34). In another example, Clithero describes his motive for killing Wiatte as an “unconscious necessity”: “I had meditated nothing. I was impelled by an unconscious necessity” (70). In explaining his decision to attempt to murder Mrs. Lorimer and save her from the distress of her brother’s death, Clithero describes a similar series of irresistible impulses: “The impulse was not to be resisted. . . . I lifted the weapon. Its point was aimed at the bosom of the sleeper. The impulse was given . . .” (78-79).

Clithero’s certainty of his guilt leads him to emigrate to America and take refuge, like a criminal, in Norwalk where he is depicted as an alien.<sup>133</sup> Like Caleb, who retreats to the forest to escape persecution, Clithero is depicted in the novel as an othered or marginalized figure who retreats for “repose” in Norwalk (84). Brown associates his retreat into the forest with an inhumanness via Clithero’s description of Norwalk as a secluded space that allows him to sleep and temporarily forget “mankind”: “Its mountainous asperities supply me with images of desolation and seclusion, and its headlong streams lull me into temporary forgetfulness of mankind” (84). Indeed, Norwalk is the site of otherness, where no civilized humans have trespassed: “These were

unvisited by human footsteps, and his bones might lie for ages in this solitude without attracting observation” (90). Clithero’s “obscure” emergence out of Norwalk causes Edgar to question his human status when he first encounters him: “A figure, robust and strange, and half naked. . . . His occupation was mysterious and obscure. Was it a grave that he was digging? Was his purpose to explore or to hide?. . . . Before my resolution was formed, he ceased to dig. . . . He seemed wrapt [sic] in meditation; but the pause was short, and succeeded by sobs . . .” (10).

As a marginalized figure or other, Clithero is presented in the novel as an “object,” “sleeper,” monster, ghost or “incoherent,” infantilized animal. For example, rather than calling the sobbing figure a “subject,” Edgar refers to him as an “object”: “An hour elapsed before my eyes lighted on the *object* of which they were in search” (17; emphasis mine). Edgar imagines Clithero to be a monster “sleeper” lurking in an “unknown” ‘abyss’: “I imagined that the sleeper was returning. . . . Whether he had been swallowed up by some of the abysses of the grotto, or lurked near the entrance, waiting my departure, or had made his exit at another and distant aperture, was unknown to me” (21). Throughout Edgar’s narrative, Clithero bursts into “sighs and lamentations” (17) and resembles a scared infant or darting animal whose fits and actions cannot be controlled: “The pit being filled, he once more sat upon the ground, and resigned himself to weeping and sighs with more vehemence than before. In a short time the fit seemed to have passed. . . . He proceeded with a few quick steps . . . but presently darted to one side and disappeared along the rocks and bushes” (11-12). Clithero’s “weeping” state of constant agony makes him appear as an infantilized victim: “It [his

discourse] was generally in the tone of expostulation, and appeared to be intreating [sic] to be saved from some great injury. Such phrases as these--“have pity”; “have mercy,” were frequently intermingled with groans, and accompanied with weeping” (26).

Brown thus reflects the lawlessness or instability of the new Republic, not only through his depiction of Clithero as an incurable, alien, revolutionary subject or “maniac” (280) that must be contained by Edgar’s quasi-colonial acts, but also in his decision--like Godwin--to make his protagonist an uncertain character and narrator.

### 3. Curiosity and Uncertainty: The Legacy of a Godwinian Crisis

Edgar, too, resembles Godwin’s Caleb Williams. Like Caleb, Edgar is an indecisive, obsessive subject who writes an uncertain narrative.<sup>134</sup> Edgar’s indecisive narrative opens with a “promise” to act or “perform” and instantly reveals his hesitation over whether his promise will be kept: “I sit down, my friend, to comply with thy request . . . the transports of my wonder permit me to recollect my promise and perform it” (5). In these opening lines, Brown’s protagonist complies with his fiancé (Mary’s) request to compose and send her a narrative of recent events. Edgar’s first words in this letter instantly reveal his uncertainty over how to act, and whether he can or cannot tell his story: “Till now, to hold a steadfast pen was impossible” (5). Edgar’s uncertainty over whether his “perturbations are sufficiently stilled” for writing reveals a link between his uncertainty over how to act and his uncertainty over how to write: “Yet am I sure that even now my perturbations are sufficiently stilled for an employment like this?” (5). Throughout the novel Edgar delays his narrative because of both of these uncertainties

(acting and writing): “I have delayed this narrative. . . . Now that I am able to hold a pen, I will hasten to terminate that uncertainty with regard to my fate” (151). Edgar prepares the reader for the theme of his narrative--his journey from uncertainty to certainty: “How sudden and enormous the transition from uncertainty to knowledge!” (6). Uncertainty blankets every scene: “This spot might be visited on the next day; but this was involved in uncertainty” (189).<sup>135</sup>

Even the moon has “uncertain rays,” despite its capacity to provide light for Edgar’s midnight forays into Norwalk (94), arguably the site par excellence of uncertainty. Norwalk serves as a site of uncertainty and, arguably, as an allegory for the wild unknown of America’s revolutionary past and democratic future. Brown’s use of Gothic, novelistic conventions establish Norwalk as a site of uncertainty:

Many of romantic structure were found within the precincts of Norwalk. . . . It seemed to be the sole end of [Clithero’s] labours [sic] to bewilder or fatigue his pursuer, to pierce into the deepest thickets, to plunge into the darkest cavities, to ascend the most difficult heights, and approach the slippery and tremulous verge of the dizziest precipices. . . . I plunged into obscurities . . . (22-23)

Edgar’s journeys into Norwalk overwhelm him with ruminations and a terror over whether he will be able to accurately perceive his uncertain past and future: “With nothing to correct my erroneous perceptions, the images of the past occurred in capricious combinations . . .” (154).<sup>136</sup>

Edgar's uncertainty over how to act is incited by his first "encounter" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) with Clithero, an important event that causes him to link his own uncertainty about his future with that of Clithero's: "This apparition was human, it was connected with the fate of Waldegrave, it led to a disclosure of the author of that fate. What was I to do?" (10). Brown links Edgar's uncertainty to Clithero's subjectivity as Edgar repeatedly questions the latter's ontological status and behavioral intentions: "I was prompted to advance nearer and hold his hand, but my uncertainty as to his characters and views . . . made me still hesitate; but though I hesitated to advance, there was nothing to hinder me from calling. *What*, ho! I said. *Who* is there? *What* are you doing?" (11; emphasis mine). Clithero's unclear actions paralyze him: "I had no power but to stand and silently gaze upon his motions" (11).<sup>137</sup>

Despite growing evidence, Edgar seems not quite certain as to whether Clithero is the "Sleep-Walker": "The sleep-walker, he who had led me through so devious a tract, was no other than Clithero. There was . . . a strong relation between this person and him who stopped at the gate" (27). Edgar's uncertainty is Godwinian, in so far as it centers on an "object" that has a "mechanical influence" on Edgar--urging him to revolve the various narrative "modes" of telling his story to Clithero--that is, his suspicion that Clithero was responsible for the death of Waldegrave: "I revolved various modes of introducing the topic, by which my mind was engaged. I passed rapidly from one to another. . . . In this state of uncertainty, so much time elapsed, that the Elm at length appeared in sight. This object had somewhat of a mechanical influence on me" (29). Edgar's uncertainty causes a "crisis" that nearly "disables" him: "This was an awful

crisis. The time had now come, that was to dissipate my uncertainty. By what means should I introduce a topic so momentous and singular? . . . I was almost disabled, by the confusion of my thoughts, to utter a word” (28).

Like Caleb, Edgar’s uncertainty generates the trope of curiosity in his narrative.<sup>138</sup> The event that leads his “curiosity” to awaken and depart from certainty is the unsolved murder of Waldegrave: “His bloody and mysterious catastrophe” (6). Edgar, like Caleb, believes his uncertainty will end once he finds the identity of the murderer. He curiously inquires “who was his assassin?” (7) and begins a series of “fruitless searches for the author of his guilt” (7). Like Caleb, Edgar also promises himself that he will find the murderer and end his “persistent” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 424) uncertainty: “From this conduct I promised myself an ultimate solution of my doubts” (15). Edgar’s uncertainty leads him to explore Norwalk to verify the identity of Waldegrave’s assassin: “I was not certain that Clithero had again retreated hither. It was requisite to explore the summit of this hill, and ascertain whether it had any inhabitant” (117). His “ungovernable curiosity” and desire for certainty impels him to “accuse” Clithero in the same way Caleb fantasizes about interrogating Falkland:

It was a dreadful charge that I was about to insinuate. I was to accuse my companion of nothing less than murder. I was to call upon him for an avowal of his guilt. I was to state the grounds of my suspicions, and desire him to confute, or confirm them. In doing this, I was principally stimulated by an ungovernable curiosity. (29)

But Clithero is no Falkland--Edgar is simply wrong--and not only because Clithero is not guilty of Waldegrave's murder. Rather, Clithero is arguably more like Caleb than Edgar because he is orphaned and self-educated (and indeed for all the reasons already discussed earlier in this chapter), even as Edgar inherits Caleb's "ungovernable curiosity." Once he learns that Clithero is innocent of Waldegrave's murder, Edgar's curiosity transfers onto Clithero himself. A desire to discover *Clithero's* secret is excited by Clithero's "tale" and its unexpected connection to Edgar's own life, in particular to Sarsefield: "But what chiefly excited my wonder was the connection of this tale with the destiny of Sarsefield" (89). Clithero's tale prompts Edgar to push the limits of his desire to seek novelty and traverse the unknown: "My rambles were productive of incessant novelty. . . . But none of these had led me wider from my customary paths than that which had taken place when in pursuit of Clithero" (93). While Edgar confesses to being led by a "lawless curiosity" in stealing back Waldegrave's letters (229), the disappearance and recovery of his future brother-in-law's memoirs foreshadows the recovery and loss of Clithero's subjectivity that Edgar's curious, epistolary narrative of Clithero's *Memoirs* produces.

Thus, just as curiosity is a source of agency in *Caleb Williams*, curiosity can similarly be seen as a source of agency in *Edgar Huntly*. Specifically, Edgar, like Caleb, is an example of a Godwinian subject whose relationship to certainty is mediated via the trope of curiosity. As in *Caleb Williams*, Edgar's curiosity leads him to the discovery of a buried trunk, a Gothic scene that links Edgar's split subjectivity to the generation of narrative.<sup>139</sup> As in *Caleb Williams*, the trunk scene is significant because, insofar as it

draws Edgar's attention away from Waldgrave's death (transforming it into his curiosity for Clithero's story), it changes the course of Edgar's narrative, and endangers his own subjectivity.

Edgar's evolution as an indecisive, Godwinian subject is, like Caleb's, structured by his curiosity and indecision after discovering Clithero's secret. Like Caleb, Edgar's curiosity to "examine" and "if possible" "open" (111) Clithero's "square box" overwhelms Edgar and leads to his uncertainty over whether to interpret Clithero's trunk as evidence for Clithero's guilt or innocence: "Clithero was guilty of no known crime, was responsible to no one for his actions . . ." (109). Edgar succumbs to his urge to open Clithero's box--an act he describes as a criminal "violence"--and is horrified when he realizes that he has left the signs of his criminality behind him. Indeed, what seems to render the act criminal is the trace of criminality that it leaves behind: "I had been tempted thus far, by the belief that my action was without witnesses, and might be forever concealed. . . . If Clithero should ever reclaim his property, he would not fail to detect the violence of which I had been guilty" (113). Having dug up Clithero's buried trunk, Edgar's "feelings were anew excited on observing that it was a manuscript," a "precious monument" of Mrs. Lorimer's "genius" and "virtue" (115).

Edgar's compulsive acts of following Clithero and breaking his trunk demonstrate that Clithero's secret has bound him to engage in obsessions and compulsions in the novel as a way of alleviating his uncertainty.<sup>140</sup> I agree, in this sense, with Voloshin, who notes that Edgar's "repetitions have the effect of making origin or cause more elusive" (qtd. in Cassuto 125).<sup>141</sup> In particular, Edgar becomes "bound to an origin" "not

his own” (Franta 703), Clithero’s secret, much as Caleb becomes bound to Falkland’s secret. This bond triggers Edgar’s endless obsessions over his own and Clithero’s actions.<sup>142</sup>

Edgar’s obsession with the past makes him compulsively urge Clithero to remember his past as well and, even more importantly, to bear witness to it before Edgar: “Recollect yourself. . . . I am no stranger to your gnawing cares. To the deep and incurable despair that haunts you, to which your waking thoughts are a prey, and from which sleep cannot secure you” (31). At first an obsession for justice for Waldegrave’s murderer, Edgar’s obsession converts into an uncertain obsession to reclaim justice for Clithero. Like Caleb who is haunted by whether he should pursue justice *against* Falkland, Edgar cannot sleep because he is constantly pestered by persistent thoughts of pursuing justice *for* Clithero.<sup>143</sup>

Edgar’s obsessive ruminations about the past as a way of attempting to understand the present draw from his obsessive need to discover Clithero’s secret as though it will romantically reveal the secret of Waldegrave’s “fate”: “my fancy has always been accustomed to derive its highest enjoyments from this spot. I found myself again . . . to recall the scene which I had witnessed during the last night, to imagine its connection with the fate of Waldegrave, and to plan the means of discovering the secret that was hidden” (16). In another example that conflates his two obsessive pursuits with romanticized uncertainty, Edgar asks, “Where, said I, is this singular career to terminate? Though occupied with these reflections, I did not slacken my pursuit” (19) and admits he “incessantly ruminated on the incidents of the last night” (22).

Edgar and Clithero's obsessive ruminations harbor a revolutionary quality, in that they precede violent, uncertain and impulsive acts conducted out of inexplicable impulses and "necessity" (171).<sup>144</sup> For example, before committing his first series of Indian murders, Edgar is uncertain as to employ the musquet: "Should I not discharge it, and, at the same moment, rush forward to secure the road which my adversary's death would open to me? . . . Yet I did hesitate. My aversion to bloodshed was not to be subdued but by the direst necessity. . . . How otherwise could I act?" (170-171). Prior to narrating his actions, Clithero similarly recollects the obsessive ruminations that preceded his actions:

It was a theme, to which, at every interval of leisure from business or discourse, I did not fail to return. At those times I employed myself in examining the subject on all sides; in supposing particular emergencies, and delineating the conduct that was proper to be observed on each. My daily thoughts were, by no means, so fear-inspiring as the meditations of the night had been. (66)

Edgar's obsessions not only take on a repetitive character, but also incite Clithero to do the same. By allusion, the figure of repetition seemingly becomes a figure for revolution suggesting the full weight of the word's double meaning as repetitive return and transformative event. Edgar laments on the "Hours" "employed in revolving these thoughts" (16) and notes that "I derived some slender consolation from reflecting, that time, in its long lapse and ceaseless revolutions, might dissipate the gloom that environed me" (132). He also hopes to obtain a final interview with Clithero and "work the most

auspicious revolutions in his feelings” (270). Specifically, he hopes to produce a “secret revolution” in Clithero through his benevolence (107).

Edgar is not only bound to Clithero’s secret but to Waldegrave’s secret as well. Waldegrave’s secret memoirs become Edgar’s inheritance, possessing him, and leading him, in turn, to his “compulsion” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 426) to verify the truth of Clithero’s secret.<sup>145</sup> Waldegrave’s secret is complex: it is not only represented in the novel as being his memoirs but, moreover, as being the radical shift to faith that Waldegrave’s letters dangerously reveal.<sup>146</sup> Edgar describes this shift in Waldegrave as a “revolution that afterwards took place in his mind” (126). Edgar’s duty to conceal and “destroy” these letters leads readers to assume that this “revolution” in Waldegrave’s “mind”--if detected and revealed--could endanger the stability of the new Federalist legislation that has usurped the story of America’s founding. This usurpation is evident in Waldegrave’s own forced conversion to a “vehement opponent of all” “he had formerly defended” (126).<sup>147</sup> Edgar recognizes Waldegrave’s intention in entrusting him his letters as intending to persuade him to convert from deism to faith as well: “The chief object of his labours [sic], in this new state of his mind, was to counteract the effect of his former reasonings on my opinions” (126).<sup>148</sup> Out of respect for Waldegrave’s fear of being remembered as an atheist, Edgar has “promised” (127) Waldegrave that no trace of his former rational sentiments will be found:

He was not only eager to subvert those opinions, which he had contributed to instil [sic] into me, but was anxious that the letters and manuscripts, which had been employed in their support, should be destroyed. . . . He

believed that the influence of former reasonings on my faith would be sufficiently eradicated by the new; but he dreaded lest these manuscripts might fall into other hands, and thus produce mischiefs which it would not be in his power to repair. (126)

Edgar never resolves his feelings of indecision regarding Waldegrave's wishes, but instead accidentally loses Waldegrave's letters in Norwalk--the site of uncertainty in which no unambiguous ideology can be securely traced.<sup>149</sup> Edgar's misplacement of the memoirs serves to represent the displacement of a founding of a post-revolutionary subject. The revolutionary intellectual inheritance erases itself--though not quite intentionally. As Downes says, "*Edgar Huntly* finds the subject of *democracy* where the citizen repeatedly misplaces himself" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 418; original emphasis). This 'mis'-placement echoes the constant displacement of subjectivity and consciousness that the concealing of an act of revolutionary founding is capable of producing.<sup>150</sup>

#### 4. Godwinian Dilemmas and the Search for a Cause

*Edgar Huntly* presents itself as an eighteenth-century captivity narrative that seeks to discover the past after it has been erased. For example, as in *Caleb Williams*, curiosity fuels Edgar to seek certainty about the past rather than the present.<sup>151</sup> Edgar's pursuit of Clithero's "past" can be seen as a gesture by Brown to reinvestigate a colonial past erased by the new Republic: "I had come hither partly in pursuit of this man, but some casual appendage of his person, something which should indicate his past rather than his present

existence, was all that I hoped to find” (100). While Edgar’s conscious (and unconscious) pursuit of Clithero takes priority over his need to identify Waldegrave’s murderer, this need still remains in Edgar’s unconscious, arguably orchestrated in Brown’s decision to have Edgar sleep in Waldegrave’s “old chamber” (109).

Edgar’s uncertainty over to “what” “to do” and, in the following example, what to “think,” leaves him in a suspended state that pits reason against impulse, and also allegorizes his literal suspension between his conflicted duty to reveal the past--i.e. tell Waldegrave’s and Clithero’s narratives--or conceal and destroy (“persecute”) their narratives in order to rewrite America’s story of beginning: “What should I think? I was suspended in astonishment. . . . My caution had forsaken me, and instead of one whom it was duty to persecute, I beheld, in this man, nothing but an object of compassion” (10-11).

Edgar’s obsessive uncertainty over how to tell his story leads him to commit acts in which he “perpetually” repeats his uncertain narrative, revealing his greater dilemma: “I traced his footsteps anew, retold my narrative, and pondered on his gestures and words. . . . My reflections, as I proceeded, perpetually revolved round a single point. These were scarcely more than a repetition, with slight variations, of a single idea” (32). Specifically, Edgar constantly speculates over whether he should be so “obsessed” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 418) with obtaining justice for Clithero.

This obsessive uncertainty--not only over his uncertain narrative but also over his uncertain obsession with Clithero--foreshadows a larger debate in the novel, discussed in this section, which is how one should act: out of an impulsive curiosity, or duty? This

obsessive uncertainty leads Edgar to the compulsion to write, and to speculate on the unknown origin of all actions. For example, the novel flirts with discussions that suggest “chance” or “fortune” to be the cause of all events and human actions: the chance “resemblance” that Wiatte bears to Waldegrave leads Clithero, for example, to repetitively frequent the Elm and consequently, encounter Edgar (84).<sup>152</sup> In another example, Mrs. Lorimer laments on the unfortunate “chance” that prevented her from being killed by Clithero’s hands: “O! cursed chance that hindered thee from killing me also!” (82). Edgar also questions the functional validity of “fortune” as causing his unprecedented adventures: “The following incidents are of a kind to which the most ardent invention has never conceived a parallel. Fortune, in her most wayward mood, could scarcely be suspected of an influence like this” (151).

In an ironic meditation that foreshadows the deadly link between Edgar’s uncertain narrative “efforts” and Clithero’s uncertain subjectivity, Edgar’s “active” mind (102) ruminates on Clithero’s potential means of suicide:

[m]y thoughts were active through the night. I carefully reviewed the situation of this hill, and was unable to conjecture by what means Clithero could place himself upon it . . . it was impossible for him to escape perishing by famine. He might intend to destroy himself by this means, and my first efforts were to be employed to overcome this fatal resolution.

(103)

Edgar mixes his uncertainty with references to “chance” and “fortune” in his uncertain narrative as being responsible for both preventing and causing violent events:

For example, Edgar says, “I had . . . by some ill chance, fallen into the pit” (156) and later attributes “fortunate incidents” as having prevented him from being murdered: “I had not foreseen this occurrence. My success hitherto had seemed to depend upon a combination of fortunate incidents . . .” (191). In a twist on the word “fortune,” Edgar likens Clithero’s “deed” to a series of “misfortunes” rather than “crimes” (258).<sup>153</sup>

Edgar’s characterization as a Godwinian, indecisive, quasi-colonial subject who is plagued by indecision over how to act and narrate the story of Clithero’s “revolutionary subjectivity” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 421) stages the crisis of the post-revolutionary subject—one who is racked with uncertainty over actions and their relation to agency. Edgar suffers the same ethical aporia and practical dilemma that preoccupies Caleb throughout *Caleb Williams*, namely, the revolutionary question of “how do we act, how do we understand actions, when we cannot count on their appearing legitimate to others?” (Thorne 326). Edgar is obsessed with this question, in particular, because he is “obsessed” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 418) with disproving the perception that Clithero intended to murder Mrs. Lorimer to destroy her, and not to save her. Through his obsessions over making Clithero’s actions appear legitimate to others, Edgar seeks to validate his own actions. For example, while Clithero is presented in the novel as being unable to name the cause of his actions, Edgar’s narrative of Clithero’s uncertainty not only attempts to reveal these causes and thereby to justify Clithero’s behavior and restore him to society.<sup>154</sup> Edgar wishes to make a coherent narrative out of events of chance, madness and misfortune; these seem fraught with meaning and yet Edgar cannot quite

make sense of them. Rather, his witnessing of Clithero's narrative seems to contaminate him with its peculiar traumatic character; most obviously, he becomes a sleepwalker.<sup>155</sup>

Edgar often speculates on the unstable conditions that determine people's actions: "How imperfect are the grounds of all our decisions?" (88). In this example, Edgar questions Godwin's theory that a good education will lead individuals to behave with moral "conduct" and make just decisions:

Was it of no use to superintend his childhood, to select his instructors and examples, to mark the operations of his principles, to see him emerging into youth, to follow him through various scenes and trying vicissitudes, and mark the uniformity of his integrity? Who would have predicted his future conduct? Who would not have affirmed the impossibility of an action like this? (88)

Brown's disillusionment with Godwin's theory of perfectibility is arguably revealed in Edgar's conclusion, where despite imagining that "Clithero was merely a victim of erroneous gratitude, slave of the errors of his education, and the prejudices of his rank" whose "understanding was deluded by phantoms in the mask of virtue and duty," he must later agree with his fiancé that Clithero is "utterly subverted" (281).

Brown's "preoccupation" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 415) with a theory of action arguably stages an attempt for a revolutionary subject to seek validation as a self-acting agent, against the text's refusal to allow a subject to perform and take "responsibility" (427) for direct action.<sup>156</sup> The novel's persecution of Clithero for crimes he did not commit demonstrates the text's uncertainty concerning direct action, as a

means for achieving agency. As in *Caleb Williams*, this crisis serves as a commentary on the impossibility for a revolutionary subject to achieve agency without first destroying the very conditions or source of authority that would grant them legitimacy.<sup>157</sup>

Struggling to determine a theory of action in the novel, Edgar speculates between the “direct” and “indirect” means of acting: “There are two modes of drawing forth the secrets of another, by open and direct means and by circuitous and indirect. Why scruple to adopt the former mode?” (17). Edgar oscillates between acting directly and indirectly in the novel. With the only exceptions being his impulsive killing of the Indians, Edgar procrastinates acting directly in the novel, such as in this example, in which he delays accusing Clithero and interrupts himself out of “necessity” (29) despite finally having procured an interview with him:

I have something to say to you. To me? answered he, with surprise. Yes, said I, let us turn down this path. . . . Is there any thing [sic] particular? said he, in a doubting accent. . . . Something, I answered, of the highest moment. Go with me down this path. We shall be in less danger of interruption. . . . This is a remarkable spot. You may wonder why I have led you to it. I ought not to keep you in suspence [sic]. There is a tale connected with it, which I am desirous of telling you. For this purpose I have brought you hither. Listen to me. (29-30)

Finally, Edgar and Clithero perform unwilling actions while sleepwalking; Edgar’s realization that they do so links his suspension of consciousness to his conviction that man, in fact, is not in control of his own actions:

Clithero had buried his treasure with his own hands as mine had been secreted by myself, but both acts had been performed during sleep. The deed was neither prompted by the will, not noticed by the senses of him, by whom it was done. Disastrous and humiliating is the state of man!

(268)<sup>158</sup>

Linking the suspension of consciousness to unwilled action, Edgar notes “actions and motives” are performed without being witnessed even by the one performing the act: “How little cognizance have men over the actions and motives of each other! How total is our blindness with regard to our own performances!” (168). In linking sleepwalking to unwilled actions that bear no witness, the novel allows us to rephrase the crisis of uncertainty that faces a revolutionary subject, which is, how does one act, if there is no witness or authority to recognize that action as legitimate? Similarly, how can one write a coherent narrative without reliably witnessing the events that make up that narrative?<sup>159</sup> Although Edgar tries to make himself into that witness for Clithero, he not only fails to do so, concluding that Clithero is a “maniac” (280) but repeats within his own actions a similar pattern of uncertainty and error.

The novel is not only indecisive whether to allow Edgar and Clithero to perform direct action, but also features them committing actions with no witnesses. As in *Caleb Williams*, in which Caleb does not witness Tyrrel’s murder firsthand, Edgar similarly does not witness Waldegrave’s murder firsthand. Instead, Edgar describes the event after it has already happened, moreover, describes witnessing the effect the event has had on others:

I heard the discharge of the pistol, I witnessed the alarm of Inglefield, I heard his calls to his servants, and saw them issue forth. . . . I beheld my friend, stretched upon the earth, ghastly with a mortal wound, alone, with no traces of the slayer visible. . . . I hung over the dying youth, whose insensibility forbade him to recognize his friend, or unfold the cause of his destruction. (7)

In another passage, Edgar speculates on the possibility of being a secondhand witness to Clithero's events, arguably a reference to the previous passage in which he is only a "second-hand [sic] spectator" or witness to Waldegrave's death: "I found that to be a distant and second-hand [sic] spectator of events was widely different from witnessing them myself and partaking in their consequences" (87). Edgar even presents himself as a "second-hand [sic]" witness to acts he directly commits. For example, after killing the last Indian captor, Edgar laments on his "task of cruel lenity": "I dropped the weapon and threw myself on the ground, overpowered by the horrors of this scene. Such are the deeds which perverse nature compels, thousands of rational beings to perform and to witness!" (193).

Similarly, Clithero admits to being an agent of "calamities" indirectly caused by him: "I am the author of thy calamities" (78). In describing his killing of Wiatte--witnessed by no one--Clithero characterizes his actions as "mechanical" and will as indirect and "passive," not intentional: "My exertions were mechanical. My will might be said to be passive, and it was only by retrospect and a contemplation of consequences, that I became fully informed of the nature of the scene" (67). Uncertain of his actions,

Clithero is also misinformed as to their consequences: “Thy lady, thy Clarice, thy friend, and thyself, are, by this act, involved in irretrievable and common ruin!” (73).

Similarly, while Edgar thinks he has killed Waldegrave’s murderer, Edgar cannot link the action to his own agency with certainty and instead speculates “justice is satisfied” because Waldegrave’s “assassin” “has himself been killed and probably by my own hand” (271). In another example, Edgar describes his killing of the three Indian captors in a passive tense and alludes to an uncontrollable impulse that led him to destroy them: “The destruction that I witnessed was vast. Three beings, full of energy and heroism, endowed with minds strenuous and lofty, poured out their lives before me. I was the instrument of their destruction. This scene of carnage and blood was laid by me. To this havock [sic] and horror was I led by such rapid foot-steps [sic]!” (85-86).<sup>160</sup> While section 6 will further examine the implications of *Edgar Huntly*’s omissions of direct actions, I argue that, in staging the hesitation of a split, post-revolutionary subject to directly assume responsibility for one’s actions, *Edgar Huntly* also represents a critique of Godwin’s theory of justice.

Specifically, Brown restages Caleb’s indecision or dilemma between “acting” on impulse “or deciding justly” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) (saving Falkland’s honor or his own) from *Caleb Williams* as a similar ethical dilemma in *Edgar Huntly*. This indecision is presented in the novel as a suspension in which Edgar is, on the one hand, suspended between whether to vindicate and save Clithero’s reputation, or, on the other hand, turn Clithero in and secure his relationship to Sarsefield. In other words, “Edgar’s

dilemma” (415) can be characterized as a Godwinian struggle between impulsive action and duty, in so far as Edgar must choose between rescuing Clithero or saving himself.

Similarly to Godwin’s protagonist (Caleb), Brown’s protagonist (Edgar) experiences indecision as a struggle between “acting or deciding justly” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) in a radically shifting political and economic landscape. This is represented in the novel via Edgar’s obsessive indecision between acting impulsively or dutifully (417). Edgar’s impulsive desire to seek justice *from* Clithero regarding Waldegrave--turns into an obsessive dilemma over how to seek justice *for* Clithero. Like Caleb, Edgar wishes to restore order and peace through achieving justice. Edgar sympathizes with Clithero’s “unjust” lot:

The spirit of Clithero was enlightened and erect, but he weakly suffered the dictates of eternal justice to be swallowed up by gratitude. The dread of unjust upbraiding hurried him to murder and to suicide, and the imputation of imaginary guilt, impelled him to the perpetration of genuine and enormous crimes. (116)

Edgar’s impulsive efforts to seek justice in the novel mirror Caleb’s determination and curiosity. He is aware of the spontaneous and dangerous nature of his impulses: “If, by any chance, I should awake and find myself immersed in darkness, I know not what act of desperation I might be suddenly impelled to commit” (151). This passage foreshadows his killing of the panther, in which readers are exposed to the capacity of Edgar’s “involuntary” impulses: “The panther was slain, not from a view to the relief of my hunger, but from the self-preserving and involuntary impulse” (161). In other

instances, Edgar experiences sudden impulses but is uncertain over whether he should act on them: “The first impulse prompted me to re-enter the cottage by this avenue, but this could not be done with certainty and expedition” (181). Edgar experiences a “pusillanimous and cowardly” “impulse” to flee his final scene of violence (193) and reveals that his impulse to steal back his future brother-in-law’s letters is “instantaneous and mechanical”: “The impulse was instantaneous and mechanical, that made me leap to the spot, and lay my hand upon it” (229).

Edgar reveals an uncertainty over whether to choose duty or act impulsively or even over whether these two choices converge. For example, in one instance, Edgar reflects on his duty to mankind: “to punish the crime was just. That to forbear inquiry or withhold punishment was to violate my duty to my God and to mankind” (8). In an argument that echoes Godwin’s theory of justice by favoring the value of Fenelon’s life over that of his servant, Edgar ruminates indecisively on the nature of Clithero’s crimes: “How was I to consider this act of Clithero?. . . His conduct was dictated by a motive allied to virtue. It was the fruit of an ardent and grateful spirit. The death of Wiatte could not be censured. The life of Clithero was unspeakably more valuable than that of his antagonist” (87). Despite Clithero’s worth, Edgar ruminates on the fact that even Clithero’s “valuable” life does not exempt him from guilt: “His intents were noble and compassionate. But this is of no avail to free him from the imputation of guilt. No remembrance of past beneficence can compensate for this crime” (88).

As if employing Godwin’s theory of justice to argue for Clithero’s worth to society, Edgar becomes convinced of Clithero’s need for vindication: “How should I

convince him [Clithero] that since the death of Wiatte was not intended, the deed was without crime; that, if it had been deliberately concerted, it was still a virtue, since his own life could, by no other means, be preserved” (106). Edgar supports his argument by claiming that Clithero’s intentions were misunderstood: “He desired to confer on her the highest and the only benefit of which he believed her capable” (106). In the end, however, it is Clithero’s “perverted reason” rather than the duty to vindicate Clithero of “the injustice of his treatment” that justifies his protracted institutionalization (285). In writing his letter to Sarsefield, Edgar’s “indecision” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 417) surrenders to another paradoxically viewed Godwinian principle: the principle that argues choosing duty for the greater good of society (represented in Sarsefield, Mrs. Lorimer, and the concealment of Waldegrave’s letters) as preferable and valuable than protecting Clithero’s right to personal freedom.

Edgar’s oscillation between impulse and duty--which prevents Waldegrave’s secret from being revealed and Clithero’s story from being forgotten--represents a wish to *sustain* an uncensored debate on the legitimacy of law. Specifically, like Caleb, Edgar’s “indecision” over whether to censor or publish Waldegrave’s letters (417) serves as a figure suggesting the revolutionary subject’s conflicted desire to preserve an old order while also retaining the momentum and agency brought on by revolution. Edgar’s “encounter” (422) with Clithero unveils this struggle over the moral, social and political implications of making decisive actions, where despite doing the right thing, he is--like Caleb--haunted by obsessions and the agony of violating traditional ideals of order (his ‘crime’). Edgar’s struggle to make the right choice becomes a life or death matter, as

exemplified in this passage: “Methought I was the victim of some tyrant who had thrust me into a dungeon of his fortress, and left me no power to determine whether he intended I should perish with famine, or linger out a long life in hopeless imprisonment” (154). Edgar’s lack of a “power to determine” is not only a confession of an uncertainty over how to make judgments in the new Republic, but also a recognition that such uncertainty is threatening to his own survival (154).

Like Caleb who is inspired to act after witnessing Brightwel’s testimony firsthand, Edgar is similarly moved to act when he witnesses Clithero’s testimony firsthand. Like Caleb, Edgar wants to give a voice to Clithero’s untold narrative, relieve Clithero of his servant’s guilt, and question his wrongful persecution. Edgar admires and wishes to vindicate Clithero. Edgar feels Clithero is worth saving, that it is just to save him; similarly Clithero relates his struggle over whether it was just to murder Wiatte. Thus, I argue, the struggle between “acting” on impulse “or deciding justly” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) is experienced by both characters in *Edgar Huntly* in a similar manner as it is experienced by Caleb and Falkland in *Caleb Williams*. Yet despite Edgar’s decision to write and legitimize Clithero’s rights, in the end, Edgar forsakes Clithero’s rights over the duty of saving himself--arguably recognition by Brown that ultimately, the new Federalist government will sacrifice its duty to protect individual rights for the sake of the greater good of the nation.

##### 5. Caught in a Dream: Suspended Subjects

The crisis inherent in the “founding moment” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 423) of revolution is staged in *Edgar Huntly* as a Godwinian uncertainty over how to act upon the realization of one’s capacity to reason. As explained in sections 3 and 4, Brown’s characters experience undecidability or indecision as a Godwinian struggle between impulse and duty; Brown’s protagonists suffer from the undecidability over man’s new capacity to reason, and thus inherit Caleb’s impulse to question the moral and rational certainty of their actions.

This indecision is not only inherited from Godwin; along with modeling indecision from *Caleb Williams*, this indecision comes from a “crisis that accompanies revolutionary idealism as a crisis of acting or deciding justly” (422). In his reading of Jacques Derrida’s examination of the Declaration of Independence, Paul Downes finds that this crisis has roots in the revolution’s founding moment. The reason post-revolutionary subjects like Edgar and Clithero might experience indecision is because of a “crisis of intentionality that is structured into the revolutionary moment” (420). As Downes suggests, Edgar and Clithero are:

[T]roubled by the exercise of decisive power and by the contamination of justice by something akin to the arbitrariness of tyrannical sovereignty. This ‘contamination’ of justice has been addressed by Derrida in his analysis of the ‘coup of force’ that participates in the structure of revolutionary founding moments. The play of this ‘undecidable’ force in the progress of democracy, suggests Derrida, is critically announced in the United States’ founding revolution. Derrida writes of the Declaration of

Independence in terms of its transformative mobilization of the performative possibilities of language and thus of the fantastic ‘obscurity’ of the revolutionary claim. (“Sleep-Walking” 422)<sup>161</sup>

Like *Caleb Williams*, *Edgar Huntly* presents a version of a post-revolutionary subject whose constitution is not only suspended between acting on impulse or duty, but as Downes suggests, suspended by a dependence on this “‘undecidable’ force” (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) resulting from (what Derrida argues) is the participation of an arbitrary, violent “tyrannical sovereignty” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) in the “structure of revolutionary founding moments” (422). As Downes explains, “the Declaration is made in the name of” what Derrida says is (quoting from the Declaration of Independence) “‘the good People’” (Derrida 11) “and on its claim that” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) “‘these united Colonies are and of right ought to be *free and independent*’” (Derrida 11; original emphasis). While this “claim” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) attempted to establish the concept of a legitimate nation of “‘united Colonies’” (Derrida 11), it did so in a way that actually introduced an uncertainty about its legitimacy (9). Derrida describes this uncertainty inherent in the “revolutionary claim” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) as an “obscurity” (Derrida 9) that arose from the Declaration of Independence and both its “transformative mobilization of the performative” and constative “possibilities of language” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422).

As J. Hillis Miller explains, “speech acts”--like the Declaration of Independence--are literally “speech that acts” or speech that “does something with words” (1). An

example of a speech act is a “promise,” “lie,” or “declaration” (1); this type of speech act doesn’t “describe” but rather performs what it says (2). For example, a promise “commits” the person who speaks it “to do what the words say” (2). The person “who promises is made different by” speaking the words, moreover, is “bound by what has been said and henceforth must be measured by whether or not the promise is fulfilled” (2-3). This type of statement is unlike a “constative” statement, which is a “statement of fact to be judged by its truth or falsity” (Miller 2).

According to Austin, a “felicitous performative must be uttered by the right persons in the right circumstances” (Miller 24). Specifically, “[t]he right words must be said, and they must be authorized by preexisting institutions with the accompanying required forms of speech” (24). Miller provides an example from Austin to illustrate the felicitous performance in “a marriage ceremony”:

Only the captain, not the purser, may for example, marry people on shipboard . . . both persons in a marriage ceremony must be human beings. The right words must be said by everyone concerned. These words are part of an already established ritual, a highly conventionalized and legalized procedure . . . ‘I pronounce you husband and wife’. The words are ‘magic’ because before they are uttered by the right person in the right circumstances, in the presence of witnesses, the couple is not married, and after the words echo in the air the couple is married, for better or for worse. (24)

Miller's reference to Austin's example highlights a problem with the Declaration of Independence, in so far as its goal was both to perform the Declaration, but also, in that performance, to institute the very "preexisting institution" (Miller 24) that would authorize the Declaration's 'declaration' of Independence. The Declaration raises the question that Miller asks: "What . . . if, in the end, 'we' cannot tell the difference between one [a performative utterance] and the other [a constative utterance]?" (17). In the Declaration's case, one does not know whether it is a performative utterance or a constative utterance (Miller 126; Derrida 9). That is, the performance occurs as if it were authorized by a prior given condition, as if those who "declared" independence "already" were independent (Derrida 10).

To give another example of the paradox that Miller finds, he offers the example of the "revolution"--a "performative" event that bears a similar problem to the Declaration of Independence, and which, unlike the marriage ceremony, is a bad example of a "felicitous performative" act (Miller 26):

A genuine revolution, one that makes a decisive break in history, cannot depend on pre-existing conventions, laws, rights, justifications, and formulations, however much it characteristically attempts to claim that it does. A revolution is a performative act of a[n] . . . anomalous kind that *creates the circumstances or conventions that validate it*, while masking as a constative statement. A revolution is groundless, or rather, by a metaleptic future anterior, it creates the grounds that justify it.

(26-27; emphasis mine).<sup>162</sup>

As Miller would say, “the illocutionary act does make something happen” (Miller 38), but in the case of the Declaration of Independence, he points out, a revolution occurs “with a considerable betrayal on which the revolution was founded” (28).

The complications extend to the problem of the revolutionary subject him or herself. Miller explains why: “[o]n the one hand, the performative depends on the intentions or sincerity of the one who speaks” (28), specifically, “[t]he first-person pronoun as well as a present indicative verb uttered by a self-conscious ego or subject is a necessary condition of the paradigmatic” or good “performative” (29). Simply put, “I must mean what I say, and must know what I mean and that I mean what I say, with no . . . unconscious motives” (29). This leads to a strange contradiction haunting the performative “utterance” (Derrida 9). Miller says that “[o]n the other hand, the performative must *not* depend on the intentions or sincerity of the one who speaks”--“the words themselves must do the work, not the secret intentions of the speaker or writer” (Miller 29; original emphasis). On the other hand, without a sincere intention, the performative nullifies itself.

Miller’s criticism of Austin is that “it would be difficult to discriminate between the monkey’s ‘go’ and my ‘I promise’, since it is the sound that matters, not the intention” (32). Miller sees that one cannot differentiate between performative or constative statements, with the danger being that such examples of “language” have the “autonomous power” “to do unforeseen things” (Miller 32). One of those dangerous “things” is the production of an “autonomous self”--much like the “we” in the Declaration of Independence--an “ego ‘I’” that suddenly is “the necessary foundation of

felicitous speech acts” (Miller 32). A problem arises with the “signature” of the Declaration, in so far as it is signed by “representatives” of the “people” (Derrida 9)--and thus includes a long list of “proper” names (12)--yet at the same time, the Declaration supposedly *creates* the existence of the very people who “sign” it and implicates them as intending subjects (9). Prior to the Declaration, there are no ‘people’ of the United States--only after (Miller 124). Thus, the signatures problematically reference a people who are really nonexistent as such prior to the signatures (Derrida 10) “instituting” them as a people (8). Their agency both is and is not present--undecidably (9)--in the revolutionary “break” (Arendt 50) from Britain. As Miller cites Derrida’s reading of the Declaration, it:

[C]reates the law by which it acts rather than depending on preexisting rules. It breaks the preexisting law rather than sustaining it. It generates the ego that utters it rather than depending on that ego’s preexistence for its felicity. Rather than leaving the surrounding circumstances, rules, conventions, and protocols as they were before the speech act was uttered, the Declaration is radically inaugural. (125-127).

Stated simply, the Declaration of Independence is a “text in which the independent people of the United States produce themselves as such” (Downes, *Democracy* 8). The subjects who are produced out of this text are not only “not subject to . . . patterns of . . . causality,” but are also not subject to any law (Downes, *Democracy* 8).<sup>163</sup> The Declaration performs a “monarchic” move, in that “it claims an authority that is not preceded by” the people’s “consent”--the very people “in whose name” it “rejects

monarchism” (Downes, *Democracy* 8). This makes the revolutionary claim appear suspended then, between the democracy it seems to produce and the monarchism it seems to reject.

Derrida’s argument, in which the Declaration of Independence, as a “performative” “act” (which can be based on no prior law) institutes itself as if it were a “constative” claim (and thus legal) (Derrida 8), suspends “legality” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 423). As Miller notes, “[f]or Derrida it is impossible to decide . . . whether the locution is constative or performative” (126). In this way, “undecidability” (Derrida 9) functions as a necessary part of the locution; undecidability makes the locution function (Miller 126), but it does so in a way that incorporates uncertainty into its structure. As Derrida reads in the case of the Declaration of Independence, “it is impossible to decide whether the text does no more than describe an act that has already occurred or whether the text itself as duly signed brings about the independence from England it names” (126).

Derrida says that the uncertainty of what the revolutionary “utterance” accomplished was “essential” to the aim of the Declaration, which was to posit a “right” and a nation: “[t]his obscurity, this undecidability between . . . a performative structure and a constative structure” was “*required* . . . to produce the sought-after effect” (Derrida 9; original emphasis). Derrida explains this “undecidability” by saying “[o]ne cannot decide . . . whether independence” was “stated or produced by this utterance” (9). Given that the very “authority” (Derrida, “Force of Law” 989; qtd. in Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 423) that legitimized the revolutionary claim and “founding act” (Derrida 8) was

simultaneously constituted, Derrida's theory suggests to Downes that the very "tyrannical" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) "violence" it claimed to "oppose" (423) in its "progressive transformation of law" was instantly re-incorporated into its structure (422-423).<sup>164</sup>

In the novel, this crisis inherent in the founding moment of revolution is allegorized as a suspension of consciousness. In particular, Brown's characters experience this crisis as an overwhelming physiological suspension of consciousness that makes them sleepwalk--and thus become suspended between two moments of consciousness, where they are neither sleeping nor awake. As Downes argues "[S]leepwalking is . . . the novel's way of theorizing the subjectivity of the post-revolutionary, post-Enlightenment citizen of democracy" (418). Sleepwalking emerges from the "contamination of justice" caused by the "tyrannical sovereignty" (422) or indecisive "coup of force" (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) expressed in the "revolutionary claim" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422). Paradoxically, this "coup of force" (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) also interrupts the sleepwalking it generates.

Both Edgar and Clithero sleepwalk throughout the novel, a phenomenon that links the uncertain status of their consciousnesses to the uncertain status of their narratives.<sup>165</sup> In particular, Edgar's "crises of responsibility . . . generate narrative by their very deferral" and "produce" "a proliferation of unconscious acts" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 427).<sup>166</sup> Responsible for keeping Clithero's secret, Edgar is prevented from being able to sleep and consistently slips into a suspended state of consciousness throughout the novel.

Edgar often describes his status as suspended: “My fate, therefore, was still in suspense” (211). Edgar recollects having slept and slipped into forgetfulness: “I have said that I slept. My memory assures me of this. . . . I remember my occasional relapses into fits of incoherent fancies, the harbingers of sleep: I remember . . . the instant when my thoughts ceased to flow, and my senses were arrested by the leaden wand of forgetfulness” (152). Edgar then describes the instance in which he began to sleepwalk: “My return to sensation and to consciousness took place in no such tranquil scene. . . . When enabled at length to attend to the information which my senses afforded, I was conscious, for a time, of nothing but existence” (152). In this mode of sleepwalking Edgar admits to a disconnection of “consciousness” or “voluntary” agency: “My thoughts were wildering and mazy, and though consciousness were present, it was disconnected with the loco-motive or voluntary power” (152). Clithero is haunted by violent memories that cause him, likewise, to become suspended between being asleep and awake: “I was not aware, for some time, of my perturbed sleep. No wonder that sleep cannot soothe miseries like mine: that I am alike infested by memory in wakefulness and slumber” (84). Edgar is the first to diagnose Clithero with sleepwalking: “the man, half-clothed and digging, was a sleeper” (13). Cognizant of his lack of “inclination” in awakening Clithero from his slumber in Norwalk, Edgar acknowledges the danger that awakening a troubled past--signified in Clithero’s sleepwalking body--could cause (107).

In effect, Brown, like Godwin, presents a version of an uncertain, post-revolutionary subject whose constitution is suspended between a “revolutionary impulse” (Elliott 254) (that desires to seek out truth and vindicate Clithero) and a quasi-

colonial duty (to censor Clithero's story in order to save himself from the violence Clithero's narrative engenders). Clithero's oscillation between wakefulness and sleep is linked to Edgar's sleepwalking; in particular, it keeps Edgar in a constant suspended state in which he endlessly ruminates on rectifying Clithero's "gloomy and disastrous perceptions: "his miseries were suspended. His slumber enabled me to pause, to ruminate on the manner by which his understanding might be most successfully addressed" (105). Edgar is fascinated by Clithero's suspended state: "There is always some significance in the actions of a sleeper" (108).

I wish to suggest that the foundation of Edgar's post-revolutionary subjectivity is structured like the revolutionary claim--suspended between a progressive democracy and a regressive monarchy. This would support the theory that both Edgar and Clithero's subjectivities are not stable, in so far as they are indecisively constituted, and as such, indecisively suspended.<sup>167</sup> This suspension, I argue, is figuratively staged in *Edgar Huntly* as a suspension between life and death in the novel's scene with the pit (154). In this scene, Edgar "awakens as if from a sleep" only to find himself both literally and physically suspended between wakefulness and sleep, a natural grave or a man-made prison, and life or death. Making a literal revolution, Edgar repeats numerous turns "round the walls" and discovers he is suspended in a pit, which marks the space of his suspension of consciousness (154). Brown characterizes this experience with certainty when Edgar says, "I existed as it were in a wakeful dream," (rather than "as *if* it were") (154). Edgar's description echoes that of a buried body coming out of a coffin: "The element which I breathed was stagnant and cold. The spot where I lay was rugged and

hard. I was neither naked nor clothed. . . . What could I infer from this scanty garb, this chilling atmosphere, this stony bed?" (153). As Edgar emerges out of his sleepwalking episode he does not know whether he is alive or dead, asleep or awake, imprisoned or free: "What dungeon or den had received me, and by whose command was I transported hither?" (154).<sup>168</sup> As Edgar attempts to proceed "irresolutely and slowly forward" he realizes he cannot go forward, and that he is literally suspended in a space: "my hands at length touched a wall. . . . I continued to explore this clue, till the suspicion occurred that I was merely going round the walls of a vast and irregular apartment" (154). Edgar imagines himself buried alive: "Methought I had fallen into seeming death and my friends had consigned me to the tomb, from which a resurrection was impossible. That in such a case, my limbs would have been confined to a coffin, and my coffin to a grave . . ." (155).<sup>169</sup>

Sleepwalking allegorizes the "'undecidable' force" (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 422) acting on the characters' subjectivities in such a way that they become suspended between consciousness and the unconscious. *Edgar Huntly* provides evidence for this particularly via Sarsefield's inability in the following passage to recognize Edgar and his demand that Edgar "speak again" and "convince him" he is not "dreaming or delirious" (239). Sarsefield's inability to recognize Edgar models itself after Collins' inability to recognize Caleb in *Caleb Williams*, underlines the uncertainty inherent in the revolutionary claim.

Sarsefield recounts a scene in which he encounters Edgar sleepwalking in Norwalk, an event that Edgar cannot remember: "I now remembered the person I had met

in Norwalk. His resemblance to your figure, his garb, which wanted hat, coat, stockings and shoes, and your absence from your bed at that hour, were remarkable coincidences” (239).<sup>170</sup> In this scene Sarsefield relays having called out to Edgar and receiving no response: “but why did you disregard my call? Your name, uttered by a voice that could not be unknown, was surely sufficient to arrest your steps” (239). Sarsefield concludes that only a sleepwalker or maniac would have ventured into the uncertain terrain of Norwalk, and ignored his “calls”: “None but a man, insane or asleep, would wander forth so slightly dressed, and none but a sleeper would have disregarded my calls” (239-240).

Edgar’s suspended lapse in “consciousness” is observed by Sarsefield, who claims that only “some internal *revolution* or outward shock would recall” Edgar to “consciousness” (240; emphasis mine). Sarsefield diagnoses Edgar with the ailment of “Noctambulation” (sleepwalking) and then reveals the crimes Edgar committed in a suspended state, among them, the concealment of Waldegrave’s letters: “he who purloined your manuscripts and the walker were the same personage. . . . Men have employed anxious months in search of that which, in a freak of Noctambulation, was hidden by their own hands” (250).

This scene demonstrates how a post-revolutionary narrator (Edgar) attempts to gain consciousness through his epistolary narrative, only to encounter a lapse of consciousness which the violence of Clithero’s confession and its lapse of consciousness appears to engender. That is, in producing symptoms of sleepwalking, Edgar’s narrative of Clithero’s story acts to undo his own objective of telling the story of the new nation.<sup>171</sup>

Specifically, Edgar's indecisive narrative, which attempts to tell the story of a new democratic nation, is undone by his simultaneous desire to tell the story of revolution (Clithero's story), or of the nation's founding. Downes similarly suggests that Edgar's narrative "writing" is linked to his sleepwalking:

Writing, as Edgar describes it, is in danger of taking on the dubious ontological status of sleep-walking. The novel's central motif is introduced here as the profile of the sleep-walker emerges out of both the sentimentalist's fear of 'imperfectly revived' incidents and motives and the authoritarian's fear of 're-awakened' emotions 'incompatible with order and coherence.' The apparently antithetical positions would seem to share a similar demon: the 'imperfectly revived' or dangerously 're-awakened' sleep-walker. ("Sleep-Walking" 418)

The "disruptive effect" (417) that sleepwalking has on Edgar's capacity to write a national narrative in *Memoirs* is dramatized in Edgar's loss of Waldegrave's memoirs and attempt to hide both Waldegrave's memoirs and himself (417-418). Entrusted with Waldegrave's letters, Edgar's sleepwalking allegorizes his Godwinian "dilemma" (415) over whether he should publish them or conceal and destroy them. As such, I argue "Edgar's dilemma" (415) throws him into suspension between a revolutionary, radical discourse and a quasi-colonial, Federalist discourse. Edgar's experience of sleepwalking and subsequent epistolary narrative reveal that he has been "asked not to *uncover* the truth in the name of justice, but to *do* justice by making decisions" (417; original emphasis). The wrong narrative or behavioral decision could land Edgar--similarly to his

friend, Waldegrave--in an unmarked (Walde) “grave” (Grabo xiv). Edgar’s attempt to describe the missing event of sleepwalking is shrouded in uncertainty, revealing the connection between lapses of consciousness and lapses in narrative coherency: “I had awakened as from sleep. What was my condition when I fell asleep? Surely it was different from the present. Then I inhabited a lightsome chamber, and was stretched upon a down bed. Now I was supine upon a rugged surface and immersed in palpable obscurity” (153-154). Edgar reveals his suspension in uncertainty: “My state was full of tumult and confusion, and my attention was incessantly divided between my painful sensations and my feverish dreams” (155). Edgar’s physical suspension mirrors his suspension of consciousness: “My excruciating sensations for a time occupied my attention. These, in combination with other causes, gradually produced a species of delirium. I existed as it were in a wakeful dream” (154).

In addition to omissions in consciousness, I argue in the next section that Brown also stages omissions of text.<sup>172</sup> For example, in addition to a repetition of ellipses, Brown omits nearly all quotations from *Edgar Huntly*--a Gothic novelistic convention that prompts one to ask: is Brown marking a new beginning to the Republic--and its narrative--by asking readers to imagine quotations, or is he suggesting that their absence signify a critique of the legitimacy of speech and written narratives in a post-revolutionary world? Moreover, do the Declaration, Waldegrave’s edited letters, and Edgar’s epistolary testimony represent the irreconcilable ruptures that written revisions of history--and thus acts of linguistic “positing” (Derrida 9)--create?

## 6. Talking Subjects, Missing Words; Violent Events, Missing Subjects

While Caleb's indecision produces symptoms of writing and revision, Edgar's indecisive acts of reading and writing in *Edgar Huntly* not only produce omissions of *consciousness*, as I explored in the last section, but also, as I will argue in this next section, omissions of *text*. Specifically, if sleepwalking *literally* delays Edgar's role as narrator to assume full consciousness, so does Brown's omission of this narration illustrate the crisis of the transatlantic subject of revolution: the impossibility of re-writing a story of beginning and locating a legitimate subject to assume authorship.

Brown inscribes this impossibility in Edgar's indecisive narrative, which causes textual omissions in a similar manner to those staged in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. In *Edgar Huntly*, readers must imagine Edgar's violent experiences amid the juxtapositions that are created by Edgar's psychological *ruminations* on his violent acts, on the one hand, and on the other hand, his passive *descriptions* of his violent acts. For example, Edgar's first series of murders of the Indians are omitted between one such rumination and description. The omission occurs between his rumination that, "The means were in my hand, and they were used. In an extremity like this, my muscles would have acted almost in defiance of my will" and his follow-up description that "The stroke was quick as lightning, and the wound mortal and deep. He had not time to descry the author of his fate" (172). Edgar never directly portrays the murderous action as his own. In another example, prior to killing the Indians and seizing the kidnapped girl, Edgar ruminates on his sense of suspension: "My life was suspended, as it were, by a spider's thread. . . . I stooped and seized the musquet and hatchet" (169). This suspension of consciousness, as

the text shows, is then abruptly broken or awoken by the violent event--the “stroke” of the hatchet--which he describes as “quick as lightning,” followed by Edgar saving the girl from Indian captivity.

The next violent event is also preceded by a rumination or suspension in thought:

We speedily [sic] reached the bottom of the hill. No fancy can conceive a scene more wild and desolate than that which now presented itself. . . . Scattered over this space were single cedars with their ragged spines and wreaths of moss, and copses of dwarf oaks, which were only new emblems of sterility. . . . No marks of habitation or culture, no traces of the foot-steps of men, were discernible. (174)

Having first paused to ruminate over the wild setting of Norwalk, Brown then resumes his violent narrative with a description of the next series of Indian killings. Like his description of the first act of Indian killing, this next description similarly features the omission of the actual violent act, which readers must imagine between the sentence saying that, “His muscles were at once exerted to withdraw his head, and to vociferate a warning to his fellow, but his movement was too slow” and the seemingly neutral descriptions telling them that “The ball entered above his ear” (183). Finally, in his last act of murder, Edgar describes his horrific action without using active verbs: “his movements would be quicker than the light; it behoved me, therefore, to repair my omission. The sound struck him with alarm” (192).

In addition to creating textual omissions that the reader must fill in, Edgar censors his own narrative by *including* textual omissions as well. For example, after Edgar finally

corners Clithero and appeals to him to “listen to me” (30), he censors his own narrative by omitting the actual story and instead recounting his act of recollection: “I then recapitulated the adventures of the two preceding nights. . . . To this narrative, I subjoined the inquiries that I had made at Inglefield’s, and the result of those inquiries” (30). Like Godwin, Brown uses the Gothic convention of omitting the violent event at hand--the murder: “Need I remind you of a late disaster? That it happened beneath the shade of this tree” (30). As in Godwin, Brown’s omission underlines uncertainty in both the characters’ narrations and subjectivities via its interruptive quality.

Specifically, Brown’s juxtaposition of physically violent scenes against the character’s psychological ruminations not only produce ruptures in the text, but also supports the notion that a transatlantic subject is constantly constructed and then deconstructed by the text’s encounter with the uncertain agency of its narrator.<sup>173</sup> These ruminations literally drown and rupture key narratives, so that each time the narrator is about to say the verb at stake in the narrative, the word is omitted and replaced by an ellipsis.<sup>174</sup> For example, Brown censors events such as the gunfire that kills Wiatte and omits the non-crime of Mrs. Lorimer’s attempted murder--events the *reader* must *imagine* to preserve narrative continuity. These ellipses that omit human *action* and interrupt thought--imply the traumatic, repetitive nature of a revolutionary past encountering the silencing presence of a renewed *quasi-colonial* democratic order.

For example, one of the most significant omissions in *Edgar Huntly* is Edgar’s violent fall and slaughter of the panther. In this scene, Edgar discovers the “Tom hawk” and describes having awoken from an instance of sleepwalking which Brown suggests to

have been violent. While the actual *event* of sleepwalking is missing, Edgar's discovery of the "Tom hawk" (154) alerts both Edgar and readers to the presence of a missed, violent event which occurred during Edgar's episode of sleep. Indeed, Brown provides evidence of a violent event having occurred in Edgar's description: "I was universally in that state to which the frame is reduced by blows of a club, mercilessly and endlessly repeated; my temples throbbed and my face was covered with clammy and cold drops . . ." (153). The "Tom hawk" foreshadows the occurrence of a real violent event (Edgar's slaying of the panther) six pages later, and provides an example of how Edgar's indecisive narrative produces omissions of text. Edgar's violent attack on the panther generates an "unspeakably rueful" "effect" from the panther's "voice," which could arguably be read as a figure for the Lenni Lenape Indians whom he goes on to slaughter. Like Edgar's event of sleepwalking--omitted in the text prior to his violent encounter with the panther--his agency in the violent attack on the panther is also obscured in the *shift* from the first person declaration that "I aimed at the middle space between these glowing orbs" to the impersonal, descriptive finality of the event: "It penetrated the skull and the animal fell . . ." (159).

Similarly, in describing his fatal encounter with Wiatte, Clithero omits his action of firing the pistol and killing Wiatte:

As it was, my sense was no sooner struck by the reflection from the blade, than my hand, as if by spontaneous energy, was thrust into my pocket. I drew forth a pistol-He lifted up his weapon to strike, but it dropped from

his powerless fingers. He fell and his groans informed me that I had managed my arms with more skill than my adversary. (67)

Clithero does not even witness his own action of firing: “The noise of this encounter soon attracted spectators. Lights were brought and my antagonist discovered bleeding at my feet. I explained, as briefly as I was able, the scene which *they* witnessed” (67; emphasis mine).

Brown’s juxtaposition of these scenes, in which the narration of a real, violent event literally *causes* its emergence, provide an allegory--not only for the “coup of force” (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) interrupting the legal constitution of the new nation, but also for Brown’s own indecision as to which narrative--and which subject--to give full consciousness to. Perhaps by obscuring Edgar’s and Clithero’s violent agency, the novel says that, if one does not confront the revolutionary narrative of the founding of the new Republic--Waldegrave’s letters, Clithero’s violence--then a post-revolutionary, democratic subject capable of committing and being responsible for direct action will never fully emerge. “Edgar’s dilemma” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 415) over what to *cancel* in his narrative restages the political problem Godwin faces in his indecision over how to end *Caleb Williams*: censoring the characters’ testimonies not only suggests the violent consequences of accepting things “as they are,” but also sparks a debate about the “undecidable legality of the law” (427) and the potential violence that secrets (like Clithero’s and Waldegrave’s) can cause to national narratives. Specifically, what I wish to demonstrate in this section is how *Edgar Huntly* both textually and intertextually stages the conflicting desires of

revolution itself via this indecision, allegorized as the desire to break and forget monarchic structure (Clithero's survival as a subject and narrator), and the desire to preserve or return to a quasi-colonial democratic structure, in order to ensure the survival of a new Republic (Edgar's survival as a subject and narrator).

Brown's indecision over which narrator or narrative to privilege for survival rests on their mutual incapacity to be coherent.<sup>175</sup> From the beginning of the novel, Edgar is not sure if he can tell a coherent narrative, asking whether "the incidents I am going to relate can be recalled and arranged without indistinctness and confusion?" (5). In this passage Edgar participates in the Enlightenment debate over whether reason or emotion will best help in telling a coherent narrative: "In proportion as I gain power over words, shall I lose dominion over sentiments" (5). Edgar is uncertain of the intelligibility and coherence of his narrative: "I am not certain however, that I shall relate [events] in an intelligible manner. One image runs into another, sensations succeed in so rapid a train, that I fear, I shall be unable to distribute and express them with sufficient perspicuity" (152). Edgar cannot even make a coherent narrative of the missing event of violence--evidenced in the "Indian Tom-hawk" that he finds on the ground (154): "I endeavored to recall the past, but the past was too much in contradiction to the present, and my intellect was too much shattered by external violence, to allow me accurately to review it" (153). Finally, the uncertain space of Norwalk--the site in which all confessions between Edgar and Clithero take place--seems to underline the uncertainty and incoherence of the testimonies offered within its precincts.

While Clithero's "subject-position" is "unstable" (207), and while Clithero's representation as a mad, criminal other would obviously mark him as an unreliable narrator, his narrative could, ironically, be argued to be more coherent than Edgar's.<sup>176</sup> While Clithero admits to being able to "scarcely believe the testimony" of his "memory that assures" him of his narrative (73) and while his "mind" is "harassed by the repetition of one idea," unlike Edgar, this repetition turns Clithero's "conjecture" "into certainty" (74). Clithero is aware of the risks of appearing as an unreliable, phrenzied narrator and assures Edgar of the coherency of this narrative: "You are startled at this declaration. It is one to which you have been little accustomed. Perhaps you regard it merely as an effusion of phrenzy [sic]. I know what I am saying" (64).

Despite Clithero's apparent narrative certainty, however, his narrative still depends on others to assume its potential to be an agent of change. A public opinion represented by Sarsefield and Mrs. Lorimer reveals, to borrow Jordan's words, his "narrative unreliability" (243-244). Thus, despite Clithero's narrative certainty, public opinion renders him (if it does not reveal him to be) an unreliable narrator who is incapable of telling his narrative, forcing him to surrender it to Edgar to rationalize or make coherent.

However, despite his seeming rationality, Edgar's obsessive writing is presented in the novel as being that of a compulsive, unreliable narrator (Clemit 62).<sup>177</sup> Edgar becomes an unreliable narrator through his narration of Clithero's nervous story, for he becomes infected by it (Cf. Logan 206, 210). Edgar observes that Clithero speaks in his sleep using an "incoherent" "discourse": "the former [Clithero] was considerably

disturbed by restlessness and talking in his sleep. His discourse was incoherent” (25-26). Like Caleb, Clithero could be read as being symptomatic of the nervous body that is “compulsively drawn towards a narrative account of its own sickness” (Butler 91). Like Caleb who inherits the nervous body of Emily, Clithero is visibly not right “within” and so must tell his story to show “what is not right without” and “testify” “to the injustice of society” (Logan 206).

While Clithero has a “story to tell,” he has been “disqualified from telling it,” and thus needs Edgar to tell the story for him (Logan 211). The way Edgar receives this illness or narrative transmission in the novel is evidenced by changes in Edgar’s physiognomy. Edgar’s weakened state prompts Clithero to ask: “What is the matter, said he, in a tone of anxiety. Are you not well?” (29). Indeed, as soon as Edgar attempts to tell Clithero’s story, he becomes affected by Clithero’s ghostlike madness. Clithero shudders and recoils at Edgar’s appearance, which resembles a “spectre”: “He [Clithero] shuddered and recoiled as from a spectre” (31). Edgar’s ill and “spectre”-like appearance supports the theory that, in addition to having inherited Clithero’s “nervous” body, he has also inherited (or been infected by) his narrative frenzy. Moreover, this contamination between the novel’s two main narrators effectively incapacitates both. As Rush might suggest, both sleepwalkers cannot coherently speak about their “disease”: “somnambulists were divided selves, unable to provide testimony about their own disease” (qtd. in Murison 248).

Like *Caleb Williams*, *Edgar Huntly* allegorizes the attempt for a revolutionary agency to break through (Clithero) against the constant “interruptions” (Downes, “Sleep-

Walking” 423) of the text, that is, Edgar’s incoherent attempts to tell Clithero’s story in a stable fashion.<sup>178</sup> Ironically, Edgar’s narrative is dependent on the coherency of Clithero, who at the end of the novel, cannot even speak. Just as Caleb’s desire to narrate constructs his revolutionary subjectivity even as his compulsion to write effaces this construction, Edgar’s desire to narrate Clithero’s “nervous” story as a way of constructing Clithero’s subjectivity, actually works *against* his objective, in that Edgar’s compulsions to write serve to undo or efface Clithero’s “revolutionary subjectivity” (421).<sup>179</sup> Like Caleb, Edgar’s epistolary narrative works at odds with what it seemingly aims to achieve: reconstructing Clithero’s “revolutionary subjectivity” (421), which would mean, ultimately, telling a coherent story of America’s founding moment.

Specifically, like Caleb’s narrative, Edgar’s narrative intends to save a revolutionary agency (Clithero’s), yet in doing so, instead it undoes subjectivity via both Edgar’s and Clithero’s inability to master the narratives they tell. Just like Caleb, Edgar usurps Clithero’s narrative, and ultimately his subjectivity. Brown seems to model this Gothic usurpation from *Caleb Williams* by having Edgar take “control (or author) the narrative of one’s life”--Clithero’s--“even to the point of extinguishing it” (Horrocks 39-40). While Edgar is an indecisive quasi-colonial subject who survives the violent events his narration or *Memoirs* engenders, the novel presents Clithero as a revolutionary subject who falls victim to the agency of his own testimony and Edgar’s obsession of turning it into a coherent narrative. But Edgar is also at once Clithero’s and his own victim. While in *Caleb Williams* the circulation of a false narrative concerning Caleb undermines his narrative efforts to vindicate himself, Edgar’s circulation of Clithero’s

narrative ironically counters his *own* efforts to vindicate Clithero. Indeed, a crisis develops when the agency of both Clithero's and Edgar's testimonies intersect, causing them to construct and deconstruct each other; the result is that Edgar's status as a post-revolutionary, democratic subject is undecided, and Clithero's revolutionary agency is silenced.

Edgar's obsessive-compulsive reproduction of Clithero's confession not only fails to erase Clithero's memory of revolution but also engenders violent events (most which occur during his sleepwalking) or what Edgar calls a "repetition of calamities": the discovery of the buried manuscript, the violent encounter with the panther, the unutterable murders of the three Indians, the Indian attacks in Solebury and Chetasco, Clithero's assumed death in his disappearance, and the death of Mrs. Lorimer's unborn infant.<sup>180</sup> But long before the final catastrophe, Edgar's narrative of Clithero's testimony and of their conversations induces a series of violent events that threaten both Edgar and Clithero's subject status. The novel's often dreamlike incoherence even works to suggest that Edgar's act of narrating Clithero's story *produces* scenes of violence. For example, in the beginning of the novel, Clithero's confession leads directly to Edgar's sleepwalking and landing after which he finds an "Indian Tom-hawk" on the ground (154). Edgar slays three Indian captors in the novel, and on his return walk to his hometown, comes across a "corse [sic] of a girl, mangled by a hatchet," surely "proof" of enemy violence:

Her head gory . . . easily explained the kind of enemies by whom she had been assailed. Here was proof that this quiet and remote habitation had been visited, in their destructive progress by the Indians. The girl had been

slain by them, and her scalp, according to their savage custom, had been torn away to be preserved as a trophy. (221)

As Edgar approaches his village, he hears locals describe the escalating violence that has spilled over from Norwalk into his hometown, Solebury: “some alarm had indeed been spread about Indians . . . that many persons had been killed by them, and that one house in Solebury had been rifled and burnt on the night before the last” (225). Frightened that the “burnt” house is his own, Edgar laments: “Whatever my chamber, my closets, my cabinets contained, my furniture, my books, the records of my own skill, the monuments of their existence whom I loved, my very cloathing [sic], were involved in indiscriminate and irretrievable destruction. Why should I survive this calamity?” (227).

In another example of the violent consequences of narrative, the explosion of “havoc” in Chetasco leads its people “to hunt out the hostile foot-steps [sic] and exact a merciless retribution” against the Indians in order “to prevent a repetition of the same calamities” (242). Finally, even Edgar’s retrieval of Waldegrave’s letters has echoes of a violent act of transgression:

The papers were mine, and were recovered. I would never part with them. But to know by whose force or by whose stratagems I had been bereaved of them thus long, was now the supreme passion of my soul . . . I could not but connect this incident with the destruction of my family. The loss of these papers had excited transports of grief. . . . Had they remained in my cabinet, they could not have escaped the destiny which overtook the house and its furniture. (230)

Edgar's narrative (which includes his narrative appropriation of Clithero's narrative--an act similar to Caleb's appropriation of Collins' narrative) not only engenders violent events as Downes suggests ("Sleep-Walking" 416) but also, I argue, ensures these events will undo the very narrative from which they seem to arise. Perhaps the novel's most significant example of this is the Indian recapturing of Edgar's musquet or "fusil"--inherited from his uncle--and ironically used by the Indians to shoot his uncle "dead" (242-243). This ironic twist reveals the repetitive nature of historical trauma, in that the same fusil used to colonize the Indians is used both to kill them and the colonizers.<sup>181</sup> In other words, the same fusil used to found the new nation, I argue, returns to undo it. Not surprisingly, Sarsefield is the one to reclaim the fusil, once used to rescue him in his colonial conquests, and now reclaimed in defense of the new nation:

The gun which was fired and thrown down was taken and examined. It had been my companion in many a toilsome expedition. It had rescued me and my friends from a thousand deaths. . . . I instantly discovered that I held in my hand the fusil which I had left with you on parting, with which your uncle had equipped himself, and which had been ravished from him by a savage. (248)

Sarsefield admits to the circuitous repetition of violent events or "doublings" in the novel: "I need not dwell upon our doublings and circuities" (247).

Finally, Mrs. Lorimer's accidental reception of Edgar's letter to Sarsefield, warning of Clithero's maniacal intentions, produces the novel's closing act of "terror," Mrs. Lorimer's miscarriage: "Terror could not assume a shape, more ghastly than this.

The effects have been what might have been easily predicted. Her own life has been imminently endangered and an untimely birth, has blasted my fondest hope. Her infant, with whose future existence so many pleasures were entwined, is dead” (284). Sarsefield’s tragic news not only reveals an indirect act of individual, accidental violence, but also proves that the silencing of a witnessed, revolutionary testimony (Clithero’s) will endanger the “future existence” of the new nation (284).

Brown prepares his readers for these violent consequences in the opening of the novel. For example, Edgar reveals an uncertainty as to the unpredictability of past “emotions” and to the implications that the telling or repetition of his narrative will stir up: “That emotions will not be re-awakened [sic] by my narrative, incompatible with order and coherence?” (5). I argue these emotions are revolutionary in so far as they are “incompatible with order and coherence” (5). Edgar warns readers of the dangers or “folly” of obsessing over past crimes: “Every man, not himself the victim of irretrievable disasters, perceives the folly of ruminating on the past, and of fostering a grief which cannot reverse or recall the decrees of an immutable necessity” (106).

Edgar’s narrative and more particularly his uncovering and narration of Clithero’s own testimony itself is directly coded throughout the novel as a exercising a kind of violence. Indeed, even Clithero remarks on Edgar’s “interference” in his story: “In consequence of your interference, I am forever debarred from it [hope]” (35).<sup>182</sup> Although Edgar claims “the source” of Clithero’s “dejection” to be “the groundless belief that he had occasioned the death of his benefactress,” Edgar’s claim reveals that “the terms of his narrative” or Clithero’s testimony, rather than his “distempered imagination,” has led to

his decline: “It was a distempered imagination both in him [Clithero] and in me, that had given birth to this opinion, since the terms of his narrative . . . were far from implying that catastrophe” (276). Edgar’s narration (and repetition) of Clithero’s testimony bears a revolutionary character, because it is “new,” “irretrievable,” and a “shock” imbued with “terror” (70). For example, in confessing his murder of Wiatte to Edgar, Clithero encounters the powerful agency of his own words: “The deed, said I, is irretrievable. I have killed the brother of my patroness, the father of my love. This suggestion was new. It instantly involved me in terror and perplexity. How shall I communicate the tidings? What effect will they produce?” (70-71). In his testimony, Clithero recollects Mrs. Lorimer’s plea to spare Wiatte’s life and experiences a shock: “My senses were shocked anew by the dreadful sounds” (72).

Evidence of the violence involved in Edgar’s narration of Clithero’s testimony is represented in the novel by the stark, physical changes that both characters undergo. The first character to physically alter is Clithero, who becomes sickened after his initial conversational exchange with Edgar, during which he promises to confess his crime to Edgar in the future. Edgar observes and narrates the astonishing “alteration” in Clithero that his promise has produced: “On my way thither, Clithero appeared in sight. His visage was pale and wan, and his form emaciated and shrunk. I was astonished at the alteration, which the lapse of a week had made in his appearance” (33). Like Falkland, who becomes visibly altered in *Caleb Williams* after confessing his crime to Caleb, Clithero’s confession to Edgar affects him both mentally and physically. Evidence that Clithero’s telling of his story affects him in these ways is found in the novel. For example, the

longer Clithero narrates his “tale,” the more inner conflict (“crisis”) and weakness he experiences: “I hasten to the crisis of my tale. I am almost dubious of my strength. The nearer I approach to it, the stronger is my aversion” (56). Clithero’s telling of his “narrative” induces him to “suffer” sick, seizure-like symptoms:

At this period of his narrative, Clithero stopped. His complexion varied from one degree of paleness to another. His brain appeared to suffer some severe constriction. He desired to be excused . . . from proceeding. In a short time he was relieved from this paroxysm, and resumed his tale with an accent tremulous at first, but acquiring stability and force as he went on. (60)

By the end of the novel, Clithero’s nearly complete physical and mental degeneration resembles Caleb’s dramatic decline into madness in the original manuscript of *Caleb Williams*. Edgar describes Clithero’s reduced, “savaged state” as “disastrous” and “humiliating”: “his condition . . . was likewise disastrous and humiliating, compared with his youthful hopes and his actual merits. For such an one to mope away his life in this unsocial and savage state, was deeply to be deplored” (276).

Just as in *Caleb Williams*, *Edgar Huntly* produces and then deconstructs a revolutionary subject (Clithero), in so far as a self is constructed and then deconstructed by the agency of its narrator, Edgar.<sup>183</sup> Yet, Clithero is not the only character to have been physically altered by Edgar’s narration. Edgar’s *Memoirs* induce physiological changes that render Edgar nearly unrecognizable as well. For example, after having murdered the Indians, Edgar’s “wild and weather-worn appearance” and “uncouthness” ‘startles’

witnesses, who gaze at him as though he is a “spectre”: “The uncouthness of my garb, my wild and weather-worn appearance, my fusil and tom-hawk, could not but startle them. The woman stopt her wheel, and gazed as if a spectre had started into view” (196). Edgar is even unrecognizable to Sarsefield, the character in *Edgar Huntly* who, in addition to resembling Falkland, could also be said to resemble Godwin’s character ‘Collins’, in so far as Edgar’s filial affection for Sarsefield appears to be modeled after Caleb’s filial tenderness for Collins.

Specifically, in this late scene in *Edgar Huntly*, Brown reunites ‘father’ and ‘son’ in a manner that models Caleb and Collins’ final exchange in *Caleb Williams*: “He who stood before me was the parent and fosterer of my mind, the companion and instructor of my youth, from whom I had been parted for years; from whom I believed myself to be forever separated;—*Sarsefield* himself!” (231). Edgar’s “tenderness” for Sarsefield is like that of a son for a “father”: “He has treated me with paternal tenderness, and insists upon the privilege of consulting for my interest, as if he were my real father” (169). Like Caleb, who becomes emotional when he sees Collins at the end of the novel, Edgar is overwhelmed by sobbing “joy” when he reunites with Sarsefield: “I held him in my arms: I wept upon his bosom, I sobbed with emotion which, had it not found passage at my eyes, would have burst my heart-strings” (232). Like Collins, who is stunned and paralyzed by Caleb’s emotional outburst, Sarsefield has an equally austere and stoic reaction to Edgar’s “heart”-felt, emotional “testimony”: “The sterner passions and habitual austerities of my companion, exempted him from pouring out this testimony of

his feelings. His feelings were indeed more allied to astonishment and incredulity than mine had been” (232).

Ultimately, Edgar’s compulsive curiosity and indecisive narrative leads, as many critics have pointed out, to the destruction of Clithero.<sup>184</sup> Clithero foreshadows the potentially deadly consequences of telling his “tale” from the beginning of the novel: “I consent to conjure up the ghost of the past, and to begin a tale that, with a fortitude like mine, I am not sure that I shall live to finish” (34). In addition, Clithero subtly accuses Edgar of bringing him an early death by virtue of his narrative curiosity: “What are the effects of your misguided zeal, and random efforts? They have brought my life to a miserable close. . . . They have put the seal to my perdition” (35). Edgar’s “misguided zeal” indeed brings Clithero’s “life to a miserable close”; specifically, Edgar’s mention of Clithero’s name to Sarsefield produces “terror and rage” in his mentor and precipitates Clithero’s destruction at the hands of Sarsefield:

My friend started at these sounds as if the earth had yawned at his feet. His countenance was equally significant of terror and rage. As soon as he regained the power of utterance, he spoke-Clithero! Curses light upon thy lips for having uttered that detested name!. . . . Is the madman here?. . . . Does he yet crawl upon the face of the earth?. . . . Unparalleled, unheard of, thankless miscreant! Has he told his execrable falsehoods here? (253)

Edgar’s efforts to vindicate Clithero’s innocence by trying to persuade Sarsefield of the “truth” of Clithero’s testimony act to further indict Clithero: “He has: He has told a tale, that had all the appearances of truth-” (253). Edgar’s earnest report prompts

Sarsefield to criminalize Clithero's victimization and "tales" as that of falsehood rather than "truth": "Out upon the villain! The truth! Truth . . . a thing for which no language has yet provided a name! He has called himself unhappy? No doubt, a victim to injustice! Overtaken by unmerited calamity. Say! Has he fooled thee with such tales?" (253).

Sarsefield's response incites Edgar to defend Clithero: "His catalogue of crimes and miseries of which he was the author and sufferer. You know not his motives, his horrors:-" (253). Like Falkland, Sarsefield rejects Edgar's defense: "His deeds were monstrous and infernal. His motives were sordid and flagitious. . . . The rebukes of justice, were shunned by a wretch conscious of his inexpiable guilt (253-254). In his determination to defend Clithero, Edgar insists on the truth of Clithero's testimony by contending Clithero has "spared himself too little in the narrative" in disclosing "all" to him (254).

Edgar seems to suggest that Clithero's act of *telling* his narrative should vindicate or expiate his crimes: Edgar says Clithero's "criminal intention has been amply expiated" (254). His declaration, however, only acts to further encourage Sarsefield to persecute Clithero, promising that he "will not occupy the same land, the same world with" Clithero (254). When Edgar finally convinces Sarsefield of Clithero's innocence by repeating "the tale which was then told," Sarsefield admits to the "injustice" expressed in Clithero's "true" "tale" (264) and confesses his own narrative and interpretation of Clithero's actions: "What could I think? . . . Kill the brother whose existence was interwoven with that of his benefactress and his friend? Then hasten to her chamber, and attempt her life?" (266). Edgar's efforts to vindicate Clithero by twice repeating his tale

however, have already sealed Clithero's fate: specifically, each of Edgar's subsequent acts of benevolence conducted in Clithero's defense only serves to alienate Clithero and weaken his already marginalized state.

For example, in the final pages of the novel, Clithero fails to recognize Edgar when he "affectionately" confronts him: "I took his hand, and affectionately pressing it, said, do you not know me? Have you so soon forgotten me who is truly your friend? He looked at me with some attention, but again withdrew his eyes . . ." (278). Edgar's indecisive repetition of Clithero's narrative only serves to "shock" Clithero and make him withdraw further:

My mind was full of the purpose that brought me hither, but I knew not in what manner to communicate my purpose. . . . At length, I said, in a confused tone-I came hither with a view to benefit a man . . . who has awakened in my breast the deepest sympathy. I know the cause and extent of his dejection. . . . He believes that, by his means, his patroness and benefactress has found an untimely death. These words produced a visible shock in my companion. (278)

Caleb's paranoiac obsession with correcting past narratives leads him to compulsively write and then efface new ones. In a similar fashion, Edgar's obsession with returning to Clithero's narrative to correct and vindicate it, not only has endangered Edgar's own subjectivity, but also precludes Clithero from being able to return to society (in that it has endangered Clithero's survival as a subject).

As Edgar retells the part of Clithero's narrative in which the news of Wiatte's death causes Mrs. Lorimer to "sink breathless at his feet," Clithero desperately contends that Edgar's retelling of his narrative only perpetuates his decline: "And come you hither, he muttered, for this end; to recount my offences, and drive me again to despair?" (279). Edgar's attempts to convince Clithero that Mrs. Lorimer is "*not dead*" by calling on "the omniscient God to witness that Euphemia Lorimer is alive" (279) only hasten Clithero's unavoidable disaster:

Thou hast ratified, beyond appeal or forgiveness, thy own doom. Thou hast once more let loose my steps, and sent me on a fearful journey. . . . I will ascertain thy falsehood with my own eyes. If she be alive then am I reserved for the performance of a new crime. . . . So saying, he darted through the door, and was gone in a moment, beyond my sight and my reach. (280)

Clithero's "doom" is indeed sealed in the final pages of the novel, in a section titled "Letter Three To Edgar Huntly" in which Sarsefield pens his intentions to institutionalize Clithero. Having received Edgar's letter warning of Clithero's intentions to seek out Mrs. Lorimer, Sarsefield obtains a court order from the state to imprison him and writes to Edgar to inform him that: "Clithero is a madman whose liberty is dangerous, and who requires to be fettered and imprisoned as the most atrocious animal" (283). Sarsefield then reveals that Clithero will be imprisoned in Pennsylvania, ironically, the birthplace of the Declaration: "New York does not afford a place of confinement for lunatics, as suitable to his case, as Pennsylvania" (283).

Sarsefield's plans to fetter and imprison Clithero's "dangerous liberty" reveal the novel's conflicted or dualistic view of how revolutionary agency should be treated. On the one hand, Clithero's potential "confinement" echoes the historical, post-revolutionary move to institutionalize "lunatics," orphans, immigrants, and other plague stricken undesirables following the chaotic aftermath of revolution, political unrest and plague. On the other hand, Sarsefield's failure to confine Clithero suggests a critique of this new, social practice; specifically, Clithero's suggested suicide not only testifies to the impossibility of containing revolutionary agency, but also represents a final attempt by a revolutionary agent to be in control of his actions, by willing his own death.

Indeed, after being arrested and detained by a legally obtained writ of imprisonment issued to Sarsefield, Clithero (the madman) "threw himself overboard" from the boat transporting him to Pennsylvania, "forced himself beneath the surface, and was seen no more" (285). Readers are left to assume that Clithero's plunge is deadly. However, Brown's use of the passive tense in claiming Clithero "was seen no more" opens the possibility for Clithero's survival, and return to the wild. More significantly however, there is no witness to have "seen" Clithero after he "forced himself beneath" the water's surface, suggesting that the certainty of one's transatlantic subjectivity critically depends on there being a witness to recognize and testify to it. Clithero can never obtain that witness; when he seems to (in Edgar) he merely perpetuates his own suspended suffering onto that other.

In the same way Godwin's quotes around Caleb's failed declaration (see chapter 1) illustrates the text's inability to give Caleb agency, Brown's textual omission of

Clithero's assumed suicide suggests the theory that the construction of a transatlantic subject is dependent on the ability to witness a violent *event*, and not merely a violent event of testimony--which is all that Edgar is able to achieve. Specifically, in the same way Caleb's firsthand witnessing of Collins' and Brightwel's testimonies acts to inspire his revolutionary agency, and ultimately, his uncertain narrative, Edgar's firsthand witnessing of Clithero's testimony culminates in Edgar's uncertain narration and Clithero's subsequent erasure as a revolutionary subject.

I argue Brown's decision to have Edgar and readers experience a violent event neither can remember not only raises questions as to what a real experience of an event of revolution would mean, but also highlights Brown's refusal to relive it. Indeed, Brown's refusal is not only allegorized by the "echoes" that are sent back to Edgar once he exerts his "voice" in the novel, but also via Edgar's inability to recognize his own "incompatible" voice (155). In this scene, Edgar first hears his echoes *before* he realizes he has spoken, indicating that already, his claim for a new Republic has been rejected. In particular, the absence of certainty in this scene, in which I argue Edgar is suspended between two incompatible spaces--that of pre-revolutionary America and that of the new Republic--is staged in Edgar's perception of his own voice *before* the event happens; in other words, before he actually exerts his own voice. Edgar's voice is belated, so that first he hears his *echo*, before hearing his own voice (that presumably produced the echo):

I listened to catch some sound. I heard an unequal and varying echo, sometimes near and sometimes distant. . . . It was unlike any thing I had before heard. . . . These tokens were incompatible with the result of

the examination I had made. . . . I was immured between walls, through which there was no avenue. I now exerted my voice, and cried as loud as my wasted strength would admit. Its echoes were sent back to me in broken and confused sounds . . . some part of that uncertainty in which I was involved, was instantly dispelled by it. (155)

In this scene, Edgar's "unequal" "echoes" are "incompatible" with his own voice; they are "sent back" to him in "broken and confused sounds" (155).<sup>185</sup> I read this incompatibility as reflecting the incompatibility that exists between the "unequal" voices in the Declaration of Independence the year it was ratified (1776)--in particular, between subjects excluded out of the Declaration, such as women, African Americans, immigrants, and Indians, and those legitimized by the Declaration, white American men. Like Edgar, whose authentic, coherent voice is literally suspended between the "walls" of his "incompatible" voice and its echoes, the only transatlantic subject capable of being founded by the "uncertainty" of the Declaration is a *suspended* one.

This scene supports my theory that the crisis of the transatlantic subject, as it is figured in eighteenth-century British and American literature, is not only the failure to accurately or consciously, coherently witness a violent event--but also the failure to *testify* to it--which accounts for both Edgar's (and Caleb's) inability to receive legitimacy as authors. This failure is arguably allegorized in Edgar's inability to assist Weymouth, a transatlantic figure in *Edgar Huntly* whose only evidence for his economic claims exists in memory, and who is thus refused legal support for his "claim" by what he names as the "coercion of law" (145).<sup>186</sup> Weymouth critiques the "coercion of law" which Derrida

refers to: “I know that my claim has no legal support: that, if this money be resigned to me, it will be the impulse of spontaneous justice, and not the coercion of law to which I am indebted for it” (145). Weymouth’s “new born claim” (147) may well operate as an allusion to the birth of the American Republic; similarly, the lack of a paper trail could be read as a critique of the Declaration’s lack of material legitimacy. As Edgar notes: “The non-appearance of any letters or papers connected with it [Weymouth’s claim] is indeed a mysterious circumstance” (149).

Like Weymouth’s missing papers, the threat of both Waldegrave and Clithero’s secrets is an excellent example of Brown’s conflicted wish to not only keep the question of the “legality” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 423) or legitimacy of the law open, but also critique the new Republic’s propensity or “secret compulsion” of keeping the heated debates about its declared formation a “compulsory secret” (427). Without a witness to testify to the events that founded the nation, a coherent narrative of its founding will never be produced, and thus, forever remain uncertain. Indeed, Edgar’s impulse to first discover and then hide the radical secret of his conflicted Quaker inheritance produces an endless necessity of re-writing a founding legacy: the danger of this rewriting is not only suggested in Edgar’s retrieval and then subsequent loss of his companion’s colonial fusil to the Indians, but also in the death of Mrs. Lorimer’s unborn child, whose subsequent miscarriage (284)--upon the reading of Edgar’s letter--ensures that the same narrative violence used in the founding of a nation will be used in its undoing.

## 7. Traumatic Returns

Edgar's act of narrating Clithero's story eventually not only serves to eliminate Clithero, but also (as I explore in this last section) the possibility of a new, post-revolutionary democratic subject to be born (Mrs. Lorimer's baby--destroyed by Edgar's last attempt to bring Clithero back into society). Specifically, while Caleb's own curiosity and indecisive narrative generates a revolutionary subject that remains undecided via the novel's two endings, Edgar's indecisive narrative and curiosity undoes both his own and Clithero's chance for survival. Unlike *Caleb Williams*, which does not guarantee the survival of a revolutionary subject but does not eliminate one either--in either of the novel's two endings--the promise of a post-revolutionary subject to come dies in *Edgar Huntly* via Clithero's uncertain suicide and the death of Mrs. Lorimer's unborn child.

Edgar's narrative *has* worked against its own objectives, by ensuring that a transatlantic, democratic subject will be prevented not only from surviving, but from ruling as well (as signified in the death of Mrs. Lorimer's baby as an effect of Edgar's narrative forays). The *Memoirs* guarantees this paradox via Edgar's letter to Sarsefield; intended to prevent a violent catastrophe from occurring, the letter nearly produces the event it was intended to foil--Mrs. Lorimer's death--and does kill her child. She accidentally receives the letter and suffers a miscarriage, a testament to the fact that, if a revolutionary subject is to die before it can participate in the new world that its violence has brought into being, the same fate will be reserved for a newly born, transatlantic democratic subject as well.

Brown's refusal to grant either the American Edgar or the Irish Clithero both narrative and conscious certainty suggests the specific character of what might be called a

“transatlantic” subject, that is, a subject who crosses over the Atlantic into America (like Clithero, Sarsefield, and Mrs. Lorimer) to escape the violent past of revolution, and like the new Republic itself, begin anew. Indeed, the characters in *Edgar Huntly* have transatlantic stories to tell: for example, Weymouth describes his recovery prior of embarking for America to find Edgar:

I gained the attention of a French gentleman, whose curiosity brought him to view the hospital. Through him, I obtained a visit from an English merchant, and finally gained the notice of a person, who formerly resided in America. . . . By their kindness I was removed from the hospital to a private house. A Scottish surgeon was summoned to my assistance, and in seven months, I was restored to my present state of health. At Oporto, I embarked, in an American ship, for New York. (140)

In this description, Weymouth references three countries affected by revolution in the eighteenth century: France, England and America. In another example, Sarsefield reveals his decision to emigrate to America and persuade Mrs. Lorimer to come with him as a means of forgetting “memorials” of “past” revolutionary calamities and Clithero’s crimes: “To promote her forgetfulness of him, I persuaded her to leave her country, which contained a thousand memorials of past calamity, and which was lapsing fast into civic broils” (267). I interpret these “thousand memorials of past calamity” to mean not only the personal violence they have suffered, but at least indirectly the actual, historical memories of revolution which haunted the transatlantic subject of the late eighteenth

century and seem to inform the domestic violence of Clithero's tale. These transatlantic journeys seem to create an experience of being perpetually suspended across the Atlantic, between chaos and order, and the past and future.<sup>187</sup>

Brown's novel imagines the political crisis of the transatlantic subject as a narrative conflict that, like *Caleb Williams*, links the survival of narrative with the survival of subjectivity. Specifically, as I have attempted to develop so far in this chapter, both Edgar and Clithero represent the two sides of a post-revolutionary agency attempting to emerge as one, transatlantic, democratic subject against the violent agency of their own narrations. Clithero and Edgar represent the two sides to a split, post-revolutionary subject, one suspended between impulse (Clithero) and duty (Edgar). Clithero is a revolutionary subject whose attempt by Edgar to normalize back into society or reconstruct by Edgar's *Memoirs* is deconstructed (undone) by Edgar's encounter with the violent agency of his own narration (the *Memoirs*) of Clithero's testimony. Similarly, Edgar is a post-revolutionary subject whose certainty as a new democratic subject is threatened or undone by his narrative attempt to normalize Clithero and reconstruct his subjectivity so that he can reintegrate and survive in a post-revolutionary world. In other words, while Clithero's "revolutionary subjectivity" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 421) is constructed and then deconstructed (undone) by Edgar's encounter with the agency of *his* own narration of Clithero's testimony, Edgar's certainty as a new, democratic subject is undone by his narrative attempt to found it.

Given Davidson's observation that the practice of "reading" in the new Republic "empowered" new democratic subjects (108-109), one could not only argue for an

implicit historical connection between the rise of subjectivity and narrative in the new Republic, but could also argue that--as part of the Old World--Edgar not only attempted to serve as a middle man to Clithero, but also failed, in the same way that Sarsefield failed to serve as an “authoritarian” “interpreter” or middle man to Edgar. Edgar fails not only as reader of novels, but also as a writer: poised to eliminate the middle man in order to assume his full agency and make a transition into the gentry, his failure to do so at the end of the novel demonstrates that only those tied to an Old World system of property can ultimately claim possession for themselves in the emerging Republic; moreover, those who cannot claim freedom for themselves are claimed by others.

Clithero’s purported death suggests a critique of the post-revolutionary Federalist government’s conservative transgressions against the newly found freedoms of its people (albeit one that Brown may not have intended). The novel stages this critique not only by having the law refuse to recognize Clithero’s civil liberty as a free individual, but also by Edgar’s usurpation of Clithero’s narrative, in which he expropriates his authority as the legitimate author of his own story. While Edgar’s usurpation reveals the limits a revolutionary agency has in the new Republic, the violence that this takeover causes reveals the dangerous consequences of such censorship, and arguably serves as a critique of the Alien and Sedition Acts, passed one year (in 1798) before the publication of *Edgar Huntly* (1799).<sup>188</sup>

However, the critique is conflicted, undecided, or duplicitous: while Clithero’s death remains uncertain at the end of the novel, his status as a captive in flight remains stable throughout the novel. As a final illustration, the last letter, “Letter Three” in *Edgar*

*Huntly*, reveals that Clithero--a revolutionary subject already marginalized and criminalized--is now *legally* prevented (by Sarsefield) from being able to return to society. This literal silencing of Clithero demonstrates that *Edgar Huntly* replicates all but one aspect of *Caleb Williams*, in that, unlike Godwin, Brown is--to borrow the phrasing from Jordan--more “concerned with tracing the evolution” of Clithero’s “intellect” than with “using him as a catalyst for the enlightenment of the lower orders” (262). For example, whereas *Caleb Williams* arguably “invites readers to interpret” Caleb as a “synecdoche for the people” (Jordan 262), *Edgar Huntly* closes this possibility by silencing Clithero. As such, readers are left with no choice but to identify with the only remaining character whose subjectivity has survived to be legally recognized and allowed to participate in the public sphere of the new world: Sarsefield.<sup>189</sup>

While readers may sympathize with Clithero’s unjust silencing in the same way Caleb sympathizes with Brightwel in *Caleb Williams*, Brightwel’s testimony serves to inspire Caleb, and readers, to bear witness. In contrast, Clithero’s (suggested) suicide at the novel sends a different message. Rather than encouraging readers to bear witness, his uncertain death sends the message that, if America’s new subjects are to have a voice in the new democracy, they must adhere to Sarsefield or face the consequences of being marginalized. While a claim for revolutionary subjectivity is made by the voice of Caleb in *Caleb Williams*, Clithero’s death not only represents the silencing of the revolutionary claim, but also its own incorporated lack of legitimacy.

Specifically, Clithero’s disappearance lacks a witness to verify its happening, and Edgar’s betrayal of him represents Edgar’s failure as an author to vindicate Clithero--and

similarly--to deliver a truthful account of America's beginning. This failure is dramatized in the final scene of the novel, in which Sarsefield reveals to Edgar that his narrative has caused the death of his unborn child.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, the fact that Edgar's letter causes Mrs. Lorimer's miscarriage reveals that the hidden, uncertain agency in America's narrative of revolutionary founding has returned to do harm and threaten the legitimacy of this beginning via its attempt to erase its revolutionary past and tell a story of monarchic order. The transatlantic subject remains an impossibly suspended one, but the birth of new fully American subject remains equally foreclosed: what remains is Edgar's complex, divided narrative--at once an expression of filial loyalty to a new federalist order and the ghostly memory of revolutionary violence.<sup>191</sup>

*Chapter 3*

Rupture in the national consciousness: the missed event of revolution in Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle"

1. National Truths and Legitimate Fictions

Since its publication in 1819, American and British literary historians and critics have enthusiastically contended "Rip Van Winkle" is a national narrative that celebrates the beginning of America's democracy.<sup>192</sup> This interpretation was canonized by critics in the early to mid-twentieth century who sought to collect and concretize several works of American literature as decisively pro-American. Following in the steps of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century readers of Irving who view *The Sketch-Book* within a transatlantic and transnational context, I seek to debunk the theory "Rip Van Winkle" celebrates the event of the American Revolution.<sup>193</sup> Rather than establishing the newly emerging American literature--and the American subject--as legitimate, "Rip Van Winkle" does the opposite, instead rupturing the image of America as a coherent unity, and the notion of a legitimate American identity.<sup>194</sup> Irving's intention to recode the uncertainty of the American nation into a legitimate, unified American discourse--one that could separate itself from British literature--has been documented by critics.<sup>195</sup> I wish to argue that "Rip Van Winkle" demonstrates that its intertextual and textual obsession with truth and certainty not only *undermines* its efforts to create a legitimate fictional American discourse, but also presents readers with a portrait of the new Republic, as it was experienced by transatlantic post-revolutionary subjects, as anything but certain.<sup>196</sup>

Like *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, "Rip Van Winkle" participates in a Gothic, transatlantic tradition of socio-political commentary (Smith 181) that tells the

story of uncertainty created by revolution: its protagonist, Rip, is caught in the shift from an old order of chivalry, feudal custom and monarchical rule, to one of capitalism, individual liberty, and democratic ideals.<sup>197</sup> Like *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, “Rip Van Winkle” could also be read as a story about a narrator persuading his reader of the truth of his story, to establish legitimacy as both an author and subject. Set in the pastoral setting of a rural Dutch colony in pre-revolutionary New York, “Rip Van Winkle” tells the story of Rip’s disappearance and twenty-year sleep in the Kaatskill Mountains during the American Revolution; upon his return to his abruptly politicized and altered village, Rip must convince others and himself of his true identity and mythic experience.<sup>198</sup> Unlike his Gothic predecessors, however, Irving’s narrator is not the protagonist himself, but rather *two* personas Irving invents to substitute his own authorial identity: “Geoffrey Crayon”--the author of Irving’s collection of short stories, *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, who decides to publish “Rip Van Winkle”--a short “Tale” by the deceased author (and second persona)--“the late Diedrich Knickerbocker” (33).<sup>199</sup>

Like Caleb and Edgar, “Knickerbocker”--the purported author of “Rip Van Winkle”--is “curious” about the “true” pasts of “men”; Crayon describes Knickerbocker’s interest in “historical researches”: “His historical researches . . . did not lay . . . among books, as among men . . . he found the old burghers . . . rich in that legendary lore, so invaluable to true history” (33). His “zeal of a bookworm” also resembles Caleb and Edgar’s habit of compulsive examination: “Whenever . . . he happened upon a genuine Dutch family . . . he . . . studied it with the zeal of a bookworm” (33).<sup>200</sup> Like the locked trunk in *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*--which discloses a hidden cache of secrets--

the Dutch house resembles a “black-letter” “volume” whose “clasps” ensured “they could be shut tightly and even locked” (33). Crayon’s *own* curiosity drives him to publish Knickerbocker’s story and emphasize his “accuracy”:

There have been various opinions as to the literary character of his work, and, to tell the truth. . . . Its chief merit is its scrupulous accuracy, which . . . was a little questioned . . . but has since been . . . established; and it is now admitted into all historical collections, as a book of unquestionable authority. (33)

Similarly to Caleb and Edgar’s stories, the circulation of Knickerbocker’s “Tale” has not only caused it to have its “authority” “questioned” but has also threatened “his memory”: “his errors and follies are remembered ‘more in sorrow . . .’ he never intended to . . . offend” (33). Knickerbocker’s damaged status (33) reveals the importance of reputation and highlights the tension between maintaining authorial legacies while disseminating national truths:

But however his memory may be appreciated by critics, it is still held dear among many folk, whose good opinion is well worth having; particularly certain biscuit bakers, who . . . imprint his likeness on their new year cakes, and have given him . . . immortality, almost equal to being stamped on a Waterloo medal, or a Queen Anne’s farthing. (33)

Crayon’s anachronistic reference to two periods that framed America’s Revolution--the Napoleonic Empire (the “Waterloo medal”) and pre-revolutionary, colonial America (“Queen Anne’s farthing”)--preface the displacement of a revolutionary

legacy which “Rip Van Winkle” stages by substituting the story of America’s Revolution with a mythical story of intoxicated sleep--an experience that, while real to Rip--cannot be remembered or witnessed by anyone.<sup>201</sup> Moreover, Crayon’s anachronistic reference also allegorizes--like *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*--the displacements that occur when false stories, and unreliable narrators, prevail over truths in constructing the nation’s memory and story of beginning.<sup>202</sup>

Like *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, the preface to “Rip Van Winkle” stages *both* narrators’ obsession with certainty and legitimacy.<sup>203</sup> In particular, the poem cited in the epigraph acts as a reference to Crayon’s own effort to maintain accuracy until the grave: “Truth is a thing that ever I will keep/ Unto thylke day in which I creep into/ My sepulchre” (34).<sup>204</sup> Knickerbocker also appeals to legitimacy, suggesting that the undisclosed story of “Rip Van Winkle” threatens the authority of existing national narratives.<sup>205</sup> After certifying that Rip’s absence is corroborated by Peter Vanderdonk, a “descendant of the historian of that name, who wrote one of the earliest accounts of the province” and who “assured the company that it was a fact, handed down from his ancestor the historian, that the Kaatskill Mountains had always been haunted by strange beings” (46), Knickerbocker’s narrative “fidelity” (48) is confirmed by Crayon:

[t]he subjoined note . . . shows that it is an absolute fact, narrated with . . . fidelity: ‘The story of Rip . . . may seem incredible to many, but nevertheless I give it my full belief, for I know the vicinity of our old Dutch settlements . . . I have heard many stranger stories than this . . . all . . . were too well authenticated to admit of a doubt. . . .’ (48)<sup>206</sup>

In this “Note,” Crayon quotes Knickerbocker as being a firsthand witness to Rip’s testimony:

‘I have even talked with Rip Van Winkle myself, who, when last I saw him, was a very venerable old man, and so perfectly rational and consistent on every other point, that I think no conscientious person could refuse to take this into the bargain;’ (48)

In this passage, Irving plays on the story’s attempts to establish truth against its supposedly mythic origins.<sup>207</sup> The juxtaposition between Knickerbocker’s and Crayon’s appeals to truth--for example, in Knickerbocker’s appeal to its legal legitimacy via a “certificate” and the “justice’s own” signature, and its hyperbolic use of words such as “beyond the possibility of doubt” followed by his initials, “D. K.”--only serve to make the story less reliable.<sup>208</sup>

In this way, “Rip Van Winkle” represents an effort to tell a *true* story, in as much as it demonstrates an attempt to tell a *fictive* story. While these juxtapositions try to establish boundaries between both narrative forces of truth and fiction, the effect of these appeals to certainty and legitimacy blur the boundaries.<sup>209</sup> Instead of establishing a clear narrator, they reveal the uncertainty--and potential illegitimacy--one encounters when one is not a firsthand witness of actual, historical *events*, but rather--like Caleb and Edgar--a firsthand witness to *stories*.<sup>210</sup>

Indeed, as much as “Rip Van Winkle” exhausts the reader in persuading her of its truth, it equally emphasizes its fictive nature and the difficulty in ascertaining the ‘truth’ of *any* story against the presence of multiple versions and interpretations. Irving plays on

this difficulty by describing the Kaatskills as “fairy mountains” (34) and casting Rip as an unreliable narrator:

He assisted at their [the children’s] sports, made their playthings, taught them to fly kites . . . and told them long stories of ghosts, witches, and Indians. Whenever he went . . . he was surrounded by a troop of them . . . playing . . . tricks on him. . . . (35)

Additionally, Rip talks with the “sages” and “philosophers” outside Nicholas Vedder’s inn--persons associated with truth--who only have “opinions” (37) with little legitimacy (“gossip”), thus making their stories better suited for entertainment than enlightenment:

[h]e used to console himself . . . by frequenting a . . . club of the sages, philosophers, and other idle personages . . . on a bench before a small inn . . . they used to sit . . . talking listlessly over village gossip, or telling endless sleepy stories about nothing. . . . (37)

When Rip does talk of truthful “events” instead of fictions--in particular, those valuable to the “public”--he does so *too late* or anachronistically, “some months after they had taken place”:

[i]t would have been worth any statesman’s money to have heard the profound discussions that sometimes took place, when . . . an old newspaper fell into their hands. . . . How solemnly they would listen to the contents . . . and how sagely they would deliberate upon public events some months after they had taken place. (37)

The “old newspaper” (37) foreshadows the story’s main anachronistic scene--the encounter between Rip and the “strange figure”--after he, like Edgar, travels into the unknown mountains: “he looked down into a deep mountain glen, wild, lonely . . . the bottom filled with fragments from the impending cliffs, and scarcely lighted by . . . sun” (39).

Like a Gothic tale, Rip’s forage into the mountains creates uncertainty as to the accuracy of his “fancy” (38) and ability to perceive reality. Uncertainty is demonstrated by the lack of human presence exaggerated by the “solitary flight” of a “crow” “across the mountain” (39). Similarly, uncertainty is triggered by the unknown source of the “cry” and by the “apprehension” Rip experiences; the alien nature of the “cry” is suggested by Wolf’s similar fearful reaction (39):

As he was about to descend, he heard a voice from a distance. . . . He thought his fancy must have deceived him . . . when he heard the same cry ring through the still evening air; ‘Rip Van Winkle! . . . -at the same time Wolf bristled up his back, and giving a low growl, skulked to his master’s side, looking fearfully down into the glen. (38-39)<sup>211</sup>

Like Brown, Irving stages a scene of autochthony: “He was surprised to see any human being in this lonely and unfrequented place, but supposing it to be some one [sic] . . . in need of his assistance, he hastened down . . .” (39). Rip is “surprised” at a human presence in the Kaatskills, a “lonely and unfrequented place” untouched by civilization (39). The “stranger” “still more” surprises Rip with his “singularity”: “He was a short square-built old fellow, with thick bushy hair . . . He bore on his shoulder a

stout keg . . . and made signs for Rip to approach and assist him . . .” (39). Similarly to Clithero, the figure is depicted as a “stranger” whose “antique Dutch” (39) dress makes the meeting seem fictitious, “new” and otherworldly (39). While calling the figure a “companion” (40), Irving emphasizes his otherness; like an uncivilized human, the figure does not speak but rather communicates through “signs” (39): “Rip and his companion had labored on in silence . . . there was something strange and incomprehensible about the unknown, that inspired awe and checked familiarity” (39).

Like Edgar, Rip follows the stranger and clammers “up a narrow gully” (39), and then down a “rugged path” “toward” a “deep ravine”: “Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheater, surrounded by perpendicular precipices, over the brinks of . . . impending trees . . .” (39). And like Clithero, the stranger leads Rip into a *gap* that functions as both a physical and temporal gap in the story--insofar as it is the setting for Rip’s twenty-year sleep. Rip’s uncertainty upon “entering the amphitheater” grows when he sees “a company” of “odd-looking personages” “playing at nine-pins”; Irving describes them as “new objects of wonder”:

They were dressed in a quaint outlandish fashion; . . . Their visages, too, were peculiar: one had a large head . . . the face of another seemed to consist entirely of nose. . . . The . . . group reminded Rip of the figures in an old Flemish painting. . . . (39-40)

Characterized as otherworldly, anachronistic and almost mythic--with their “peculiar” “piggish eyes,” “quaint outlandish fashion,” and “sugar-loaf” hats, Irving’s description--despite alluding to the human countenance in their “various” shaped and colored

“beards”--stays within the parameters of a not entirely human characterization via the allusion to “figures” in a “painting” (40).<sup>212</sup> Their otherness is further suggested when they affix their own normative “gaze” on Rip: “As Rip and his companion approached them, they . . . stared at him with such fixed statue-like gaze, and such strange, uncouth, lack-lustre countenances . . .” (40). Gradually “Rip’s awe” is replaced by curiosity, which leads him “to taste the beverage” or flagon:

He was naturally a thirsty soul, and was soon tempted to repeat the draught. One taste provoked another; and he reiterated his visits to the flagon . . . at length his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head . . . and he fell into a deep sleep. (40)

Like Edgar, whose somnambulism leads him to fall into a pit and awake in an unknown spot, after Rip wakes from his “deep sleep,” he is filled with uncertainty, as he finds he is no longer in the amphitheater, but “on the green knoll whence he had first seen the old man of the glen” (40). His first thought is to question the certainty of his experience:

‘Surely,’ thought Rip, ‘I have not slept here all night.’ He recalled the occurrences before he fell asleep. The strange man with a keg of liquor-the mountain ravine-the wild retreat among the rocks-the wobegone party of nine-pins-the flagon-‘Oh! that flagon! that wicked flagon!’ thought Rip-‘what excuse shall I make to Dame Van Winkle!’ (41)

Unable to recall any memories after drinking the flagon, Rip’s uncertainty grows:

He looked round for his gun, but in place of the clean well-oiled fowling-piece, he found an old firelock lying by him, the barrel encrusted with rust, the lock falling off, and the stock worm-eaten. He now suspected that the grave roysters of the mountain had put a trick upon him, and, having dosed him with liquor, had robbed him of his gun. (41)

Failing to locate material signs of his experience, Rip summons Wolf, but only hears his “echoes” (41). As Rip determines to “revisit the scene of the last evening’s gambol,” he discovers he is “stiff in the joints” (41); still unaware that his body has aged twenty years, he returns to the glen to gain certainty, and is surprised to find the gap filled:

With some difficulty he got down into the glen: he found the gully up which he and his companion had ascended the preceding evening; but to his astonishment a mountain stream was now foaming down it . . . and filling the glen with babbling murmurs. (41)

Eager to find the amphitheater, Rip struggles through the glen in a passage reminiscent of Edgar’s similarly “toilsome” ascension out of the pit after his slaying of the panther:

He, however, made shift to scramble up its sides, working his toilsome way through thickets of birch, sassafras . . . and sometimes tripped up or entangled by the wild grapevines that twisted their coils or tendrils from tree to tree . . . in his path. (41)

Upon arriving at the spot of the previous night's "frolic," Rip finds that there is no trace of the amphitheater; Irving seems to suggest that history has literally closed off Rip's encounter with the party--and any coherence or certainty of his experience--with an "impenetrable wall": "The rocks presented a high impenetrable wall, over which the torrent came tumbling . . . and fell into a broad, deep basin. . . ." (41). Having previously been empty, and now full--presumably not only with water, but with history as well--the gap represents a rupture not only in Rip's consciousness but in narrative as well. Specifically, what I wish to argue is that the gap--now closed off by an "impenetrable wall"--represents a closing off of cognition, created by the two narrative forces--and narrators--at play in "Rip Van Winkle": Crayon and Knickerbocker.

In this way, rather than being a national story of unity, "Rip Van Winkle" is a story of disunity--its attempt to establish legitimacy undermined by the ruptures created by Rip's uncertainty and forgetting. Sections 2-3 of this third chapter will explore how the two narrative forces of certainty and uncertainty--and similarly, the two colonial and postcolonial identities in the text--threaten the construction and coherency of Rip's subjectivity and story, while sections 4-6 will examine Rip's sleep as an allegory for revolution, the tropological function of "Rip" as rupturing Rip's subjectivity and producing a state of *infantia*--in order to suggest that Rip is a traumatized subject, and narrator, living outside the law.<sup>213</sup>

## 2. Colliding Narrative Forces: Truth Against Fiction and a Narrator's Collapse

Irving's overstated emphasis on truth and certainty--and attempt to persuade the reader of the truth of the story--comes up against the narrative force of the story's emphasis on fiction and uncertainty, and nearly comical, failed attempts to ascertain truth or narrative coherence. I suggest these two forces are pitted against each other, such that they perform an act of mutual deconstruction; in the end, one is left with an implausible story of nationhood and an illegitimate political subject as an introduction to the American literary cannon.<sup>214</sup>

The two narrative forces at play in "Rip Van Winkle"--one emphasizing truth and certainty, and the other emphasizing fiction and uncertainty--intersect throughout the story, and undo Irving's attempt to craft a coherent narrative and narrator.<sup>215</sup> In particular, Knickerbocker's appeals to truth are in sharp contrast (and provide comic relief) to Rip's hapless attempts to ascertain certainty. As Rip begins his return to his village, Knickerbocker resumes his act of asserting the truth of his narrative against the narrative of Rip's uncertainty, which the narrative seems to mock. For example, even the "idle crows" (41) "secure in their elevation, seemed to look down and scoff at the poor man's perplexities" (42). In this scene, it is as if the crows know what Rip does not know; that he has changed, and now reenters an altered world. Indeed, Rip's uncertainty only grows when, with "with a heart full of" "anxiety" he returns to his village:

[h]e met a number of people, but none whom he knew, which somewhat surprised him, for he had thought himself acquainted with every one in the country round. Their dress, too, was of a different fashion from that to which he was accustomed. (42)

Similarly, the villagers meet him with “surprise” and bewilderment: “They all stared at him with equal marks of surprise, and whenever they cast their eyes upon him, invariably stroked their chins . . .” (42). Rip’s “foot long” beard only adds to his mythic appearance, which Irving emphasizes by having “A troop of strange children” run “at his heels, hooting after him, and pointing” at him (42). Like the village, Rip is baffled by what he sees:

The dogs, too, not one of which he recognized . . . barked at him. . . . The very village was altered . . . his familiar haunts had disappeared. *Strange* names were over the doors-*strange* faces at the windows-every thing [sic] was *strange*. (42; emphasis mine)

The threefold repetition of “strange” in Irving’s description of Rip’s return (42) recalls--by association--his threefold repetition of “strange” (39-40) in Rip’s earlier encounter with the “stranger” (39) and “odd” company (40).

Rip goes on to question the reliability of his perception:

His mind now misgave him; he began to doubt whether both he and the world around him were not bewitched. Surely this was his native village, which he had left but the day before. There stood the Kaatskill mountains--there ran the silver Hudson at a distance--there was every hill and dale precisely as it had always been--Rip was sorely perplexed--‘That flagon last night,’ thought he, ‘has addled my poor head sadly!’ (42)

Against the force of this narrative of uncertainty, Knickerbocker appeals to certainty in his description of the old house, when he says, “He entered the house, which,

*to tell the truth*, Dame Van Winkle had always kept in neat order” (emphasis mine) (43). Knickerbocker then returns to his narrative of Rip’s uncertainty by describing the house as “empty, forlorn, and *apparently* abandoned” (43; emphasis mine). This uncertain narrative continues with Rip unable to recognize the “tall naked pole” whose flag, featuring “a singular assemblage of stars and stripes,” appears “strange and incomprehensible” to him (43). Similarly, the “crowd of folk about the door,” where the village inn once stood, are “none that Rip recollected” (43) while Rip’s anachronistic otherness attracts awe:

The appearance of Rip, with his long grizzled beard, his rusty fowling-piece, his uncouth dress, and an army of women and children at his heels, soon attracted the attention of the tavern politicians. They crowded round him, eyeing him . . . with great curiosity. (43)

The two narrative forces of certainty and uncertainty then intersect to create a crisis: met with a demand from a “*knowing*, self-important old gentleman” to reveal his identity (44; emphasis mine), Rip responds anachronistically that he is a “loyal subject of the king” (44). His declaration solicits accusations of criminality: “Here a general shout burst from the by-standers-‘A tory! a tory! a spy! a refugee! hustle him! away with him!’” (44). In this scene the villagers attempt to comprehend what will seem to be a *fictional* occurrence to them, even though readers know what they are witnessing is ‘real.’ In contrast, Rip’s experience of uncertainty--while seeming fictitious in the Kaatskills--becomes nightmarishly realistic in the village when he discovers that his neighbors have either died or disappeared. Indeed, Rip is not recognized because his

immediate community has vanished without a material trace: “Nicholas Vedder! why, he is dead and gone these eighteen years! . . . a wooden tombstone in the churchyard . . . used to tell all about him, but that’s . . . gone too” (44).

Without validation from his community, Rip is overwhelmed by a crisis of uncertainty:

Rip’s heart died away at hearing of these sad changes . . . and finding himself thus alone in the world. Every answer puzzled him too, by treating of such enormous lapses of time, and of matters which he could not understand: war-congress-Stony Point; he . . . cried out in despair, ‘Does nobody here know Rip Van Winkle?’ (44-45)

While Rip bears the material evidence of having lived through an experience, he has no knowledge of this experience, which readers--and to some extent, Rip--recognize is a twenty-year gap or lapse in time. The narrative’s response to this uncertainty mocks both Rip and readers; even though “two or three” acknowledge him, they misidentify him again, this time pointing to his identical son:

‘Oh, Rip Van Winkle!’ exclaimed two or three, ‘Oh, to be sure! that’s Rip Van Winkle yonder, leaning against the tree.’ Rip looked, and beheld a precise counterpart of himself, as he went up the mountain: apparently as lazy, and certainly as ragged. (45)

Here the two narrative forces of certainty and uncertainty again intersect to create a crisis, in which they arguably collapse Rip’s identity completely (“The poor fellow was now completely confounded”): on the one hand, Rip observes with *certainty* that his

double is “*certainly* as ragged,” and on the other, views with *uncertainty* that his double, the “precise counterpart of himself” is “*apparently* as lazy” (45; emphasis mine).<sup>216</sup> Knickerbocker affirms for readers that Rip experiences a crisis of self-knowledge: “He doubted his own identity, and whether he was himself or another man” (45). Indeed, the villagers’ misidentification and inquiry (“the man in the cocked hat demanded who he was, and what was his name?”) (45) makes Rip question the truth of his own identity. This self-questioning may be read as a metaphor for the crisis of uncertainty and self-knowledge that many Americans experienced at the beginning of the new Republic.<sup>217</sup>

Rip’s subjectivity or “identity” (45) crisis signifies an experience of uncertainty many encountered, in so far as they did not know who they were--revolutionaries or loyalists, colonizers or colonized, Republicans or Federalists.<sup>218</sup> Like many post-revolutionary, American subjects, Rip truly *does not know who he is*; all he knows is that he’s “not” himself (45). Rip declares that he cannot ““tell what’s [his] name”” or ““who”” he is; here Knickerbocker stages an *attempted* intersection between the two narrative forces of certainty and uncertainty:

‘God knows,’ exclaimed he, at his wit’s end; ‘I’m not myself-I’m somebody else-that’s me yonder-no-that’s somebody else got into my shoes-I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain . . . and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!’ (45)

Knickerbocker’s attempt to smoothly stage the intersection between the narrative forces of certainty and uncertainty--to produce a coherent narrative of Rip’s identity--fails. In particular, while the narrative forces seem to alternate--Rip declares with

certainty that he is “not” himself and instead “somebody else” only to then uncertainly declare “no-that’s somebody else got into my shoes” (45)--the fluid exchange is abruptly broken after the rhythmic repetition of “I’m” and “I’m” and “that’s” and “that’s” (45). Specifically, the seamless intersection between the narratives of certainty and uncertainty in these double repetitions is only a “dance” meant to provide the illusion of cognition, rather than actual narrative coherency.<sup>219</sup>

Specifically, the intermittent dashes between Rip’s words act to provide the illusion of cognition *and* make accessibility to cognition impossible: “I’m not myself-I’m somebody else-that’s me yonder-no-that’s somebody else got into my shoes-I was myself last night . . . and I can’t tell . . . who I am!” (45).<sup>220</sup> First, the repetition of dashes early throughout the passage and in between the double repetitions of “I’m” and “that’s” act to *signal* but *also* simultaneously *smooth over or elide* a lapse in information. Second, while the repetition of dashes prior to “that’s somebody . . . shoes” produces the illusion of cognition, the repetition of dashes that follow “that’s somebody . . . shoes-” break this seeming narrative coherency apart: “I’m not myself-I’m somebody else-that’s me yonder-no-that’s somebody else got into my shoes-I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and . . . I can’t tell . . . who I am!’ (45). These dashes interrupt Rip’s capacity to make a *coherent* declaration of his subjectivity *and* also interrupt cognition, in so far as they act as signifiers of absence (not substitutions of knowledge) the moment he says, “I’m not myself” (45); thus, they act to *truly* prevent Rip from knowing who he is, as his declaration reveals: “I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!” (45). This collapse of cognition is foreshadowed earlier

when, in an attempt to gain certainty, Rip refers to himself as other: ““*that’s me yonder*”” (45; emphasis mine).<sup>221</sup> It seems that, at this moment, Rip has identified himself with certainty; yet at the moment he tells others ““that’s me yonder”” (45), the implausibility of what he says interrupts him: ““that’s me yonder-*no*-”” (45; emphasis mine). Rip then begins again with ““that’s me yonder-*no*-”” and ““that’s somebody else got into my shoes-”” (45) only to be interrupted again by the sheer impossibility of what he has said: that ““somebody else”” is literally in his ““shoes”” (45).

Rip resumes his narrative in an effort to maintain coherency and seems to successfully say seven short sentence fragments without interruption: ““-I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they’ve changed my gun, and every thing’s [sic] changed, and I’m changed, and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!”” (45). Yet, even though the double repetition of ““I’m”” and ““that’s”” act to maintain the illusion of cognition, the force of their meaning is disclosed by the statement ““I was myself”” (45). This statement--““I was myself””--exposes the impossibility of Rip’s story, and renders him an unreliable narrator. Indeed, the breakdown of Rip’s coherency as a narrator is followed by the breakdown of his intelligibility as a subject: ““I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am!”” (45). As Rip resumes his narrative, he appears to be coherent because there are no dashes to interrupt his declaration. Yet, as Rip tells his story ““-I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain . . .”” (45) the unbelievable nature of his story starts to, again, not make sense to him. Specifically, as Rip attempts to establish himself as a coherent, and therefore, reliable narrator, he fails because, as he hears his own story, the coherency of his self-recognition and narrative break down: ““-I

was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they've changed my gun, and every thing's [sic] changed, and . . . I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!" (45).

The village audience cannot help him out of his difficulty. In addition to not knowing who Rip is, no one will believe his story; thus Rip's credibility as a subject and narrator are further compromised. Arguably, this, too, can be read as a metaphor for the identity of the nation put into question after revolution: who or what is, the identity of this American nation, moreover, what is the story of its birth?<sup>222</sup> Like Godwin and Brown, this episode highlights the necessity for a legitimate story of the new Republic, and a legitimate author to pen the narrative.

The *failed* intersection of the two forces of certainty and uncertainty in Rip's declaration--in so far as the two narrative forces of uncertainty and certainty meet, collide and *collapse* into one another--demonstrate the impossibility of writing a true narrative of revolution, in so far as the most clear narrative in the story--the encounter between Rip and the party--is believed by everyone to be a myth. Knickerbocker intervenes again (as narrator) to save both Rip--and the narrative--from collapsing under the weight of its comic indecision. Implying that it is not only Rip who is experiencing a crisis of certainty, but the narrative as well, Knickerbocker writes, "At this critical moment" (45) and then introduces a new character who will, it seems, dispel uncertainty:

At this critical moment a fresh comely woman pressed through the throng to get a peep at the gray-bearded man. She had a chubby child in her arms, which, frightened at his looks, began to cry. 'Hush, Rip,' cried she. . . .

The name of the child, the air of the mother, the tone of her voice, all awakened a train of recollections in his mind. (45)

Knickerbocker allays Rip's uncertainty when the sound of his daughter's voice punctures the air. Specifically, the speaking of his name by his daughter ("Hush, Rip")--someone from Rip's *own community*--acts to literally awaken Rip's certainty of himself and of his past ("all awakened a train of recollections in his mind") (45). Despite this awakening however--and the certainty of subjectivity it seems to bring to Rip--the sound of his voice is not enough for the villagers to recognize him. Even his own daughter does not recognize Rip's voice as her father's: "What is your name, my good woman?" asked he. 'Judith Gardenier.' 'And your father's name?' 'Ah, poor man, Rip Van Winkle was his name . . . I was then but a little girl'" (45).

In this passage, the narratives of uncertainty and certainty smoothly intersect: while Rip's daughter confesses the story of Rip's uncertain fate, revealing the circulation of rumors regarding Rip's fate ("its twenty years since he went away . . . and never had been heard of since . . . whether he shot himself, or was carried away by the Indians, nobody can tell")--she also tells the most certain narrative of his departure in the short story, assuring Rip and readers that "its twenty years since he went away from home with his gun" and "had" not "been heard" "twenty years since" (45). The narratives of uncertainty and certainty again intersect when, realizing that his daughter does not recognize him, Rip inquires into the fate of his wife:

'Where's your mother?' 'Oh, she too had died but a short time since; she broke a blood-vessel in a fit of passion at a New-England pedler' [sic]. . . .

The honest man could contain himself no longer. . . . ‘I am your father!’ cried he-‘Young Rip Van Winkle once-old Rip Van Winkle now!-Does nobody know poor Rip Van Winkle?’ (45-46)

Knickerbocker appeals to certainty by calling Rip an “honest man,” followed by Rip’s certain admission that he is was ““once”” ““Young Rip Van Winkle”” but is ““now”” ““old Rip Van Winkle””; Knickerbocker then allows Rip’s uncertainty to erupt when he asks if anyone recognizes ““Rip Van Winkle?”” (46). Rip’s uncertainty is met with certainty, when “an old woman”--a person from Rip’s *own community*--confirms his identity as an “old neighbor” and addresses him in turn with a question: “an old woman, tottering out from among the crowd . . . exclaimed, ‘Sure enough! it is Rip Van Winkle-it is himself!’” (46).

Rip’s daughter’s narrative and the old woman’s recognition--two persons from Rip’s own community--are the only coherent narratives of Rip’s experience that are believed and accepted by everyone. Ironically, Rip’s accessibility to these narratives is indirect--in other words, via his daughter and the old woman; similarly, the only narrative that Rip *does* have direct access to is his *own*--which is incoherent and believed by no one. This inaccessibility that Rip has to his own experience and a coherent narrative of certainty--and similarly, his accessibility to an incoherent narrative that no one believes he experienced--further seems to allegorize the experience of revolution; it also signals a failure of narrative agency, and Rip’s status as an incoherent, “unreliable witness” (Insko 625). Critics suggest that Rip cannot control his imagination; I argue that it is his failure

to directly control both his agency and his story that qualify him as an unreliable narrator and subject.

Rip's story poses a crisis of subjectivity: "He doubted his own *identity*, and whether he was *himself or another man*" (45; emphasis mine). As such, the interventions of his daughter, the old woman, Knickerbocker and Crayon become necessary to convince the villagers--and readers--of the certainty of Rip's narrative and experience. But via their hyperbolic efforts to give Rip's narrative legitimacy, Knickerbocker and Crayon actually succeed in achieving the *opposite*.<sup>223</sup> In other words, in their efforts to establish Rip's coherency as a narrator and subject, they succeed only in underlining how unreliable and incoherent Rip remains.

### 3. Sleeping Through the Revolution: Inhuman Revolutionary Agency and Textual Evidence

Like *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, the narrators' and Rip's attempt to tell a coherent story is undermined by their inability to explain the causes of events. While some agents--such as Dame Van Winkle--are clear as to the cause of events, the lack of direct revolutionary agency in "Rip Van Winkle" seems to relegate causality to fortune or the mythic unknown.<sup>224</sup> The credibility and causality in the short story come into question, as revolutionary agency is witnessed by no one except the narrator, Knickerbocker.<sup>225</sup> Indeed the credibility of Rip's own story is questioned, because he cannot corroborate his actual witnessing of his encounter in the Kaatskills. Moreover, directly witnessing the American Revolution is denied to him because of his twenty-year sleep. The cause of his sleep itself is questionable; his sleep is not a coherent experience

he can remember because it is induced by the flagon, which intoxicates him.<sup>226</sup> When Rip awakes, twenty years are completely unavailable to him and to readers, and they are, of course, omitted in the short story--much like Edgar's somnambulist, physical act of slaying the panther, and Clithero's 'unconscious' violent act of shooting Wiatte. Their occurrence is only alluded to by the events the authors describe preceding and following them. That is, like the violent events in *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, which are omitted and not directly witnessed by their agents, the violent event par excellence in the story--the American Revolution--is actually missing, and is not directly witnessed by Rip because it takes place during his suspension of consciousness, i.e. his twenty-year sleep. Like Edgar who, as Downes says, sleepwalks through the revolution (427), Rip sleeps through the revolution. Moreover, like Edgar who commits violent acts but cannot witness them nor perform them directly, Rip cannot witness nor perform the revolution directly. Finally, like Godwin and Brown, Irving both intertextually and textually suggests these violent events to have happened via his narrative both preceding and following Rip's sleep.

Irving stages the events of revolution by having the story's natural landscape tell the story of America's beginning and serve as the principle agent of revolution and causality.<sup>227</sup> In particular, Irving's descriptions of nature supports the notion that nature is endowed with a political form of agency insofar as it acts to constantly effect change in the story ("indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains" (34)), and moreover, signal America's transition from a British colony to a revolutionary nation in "Rip Van Winkle."<sup>228</sup> Indeed, Irving stages the

events leading to the American Revolution via his politicized descriptions of nature which both claim and resist a colonial identity.<sup>229</sup> For example, Irving's partisan description of the Kaatskill Mountains suggests they have separated from *their* original, colonial body: "They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country" (34).<sup>230</sup> Here the Kaatskill Mountains resemble the resisting, colonized body of America, which is a "dismembered branch," lying "west" of colonial England (34). At the same time, the Kaatskills represent colonial England--which, like a sovereign--have a "noble height" and lord "over the surrounding country" (34). They also have a regal agency, in that they are "clothed in blue and purple" and "light up like a *crown* of glory" (34; emphasis mine).

This confusion between colonizer and colonized is intentional (Davidson 22).<sup>231</sup> In addition to anthropomorphizing the mountains as though they are regal kings whose "herbage" crowns ("*crowned*") the "*brow* of a precipice" while the "*lordly* Hudson" moves ("*moving*") on a "*majestic* course, with the reflection of a *purple* cloud," Irving gives nature a colonial agency through his use of prosopopeia and personification: the "sail of a lagging bark" sleeps on its "*bosom*" (38; emphasis mine), the mountains "*throw* their long blue shadows over the valleys" (38; emphasis mine) and the "impending trees"--like guns--shoot ("*shot* their branches") "over the brinks" of the mountain "precipices" (39; emphasis mine).<sup>232</sup>

Nature is the principle agent and source for the record of politically historical events in the Kaatskills: as Knickerbocker's "Postscript" explains, Native American

“spirits” rule the mountains, where a “great stream” named “Kaaters-kill” has killed a hunter before making “its way to the Hudson” (48-49). These mountains not only have a colonial, historical agency, but also a *narrative* agency, insofar as they are represented as the source of Knickerbocker’s stories:

The Kaatsberg, or Catskill Mountains, have always been a region full of *fable*. The Indians considered them the abode of spirits, who influenced the weather, spreading sunshine or clouds . . . and sending good or bad hunting seasons. They were *ruled* by an old squaw spirit. . . . She . . . had *charge* of the doors of day and night to open. . . . She hung up new moons . . . and cut up the old ones into stars. (48; emphasis mine)

Indeed, nature seems to have both a *warring* and *storytelling* agency in “Rip Van Winkle,” in so far as it issues, conducts, and speaks (mutters):

Rip . . . heard long *rolling peals*, like distant thunder, that seemed to *issue* out of a deep ravine . . . toward which their rugged path *conducted*. He paused . . . but supposing it to be the *muttering* of one of those . . . thundershowers . . . proceeded. (39; emphasis mine)

Arguably, the sounds of “rolling peals” resemble the thunderous cannons of revolutionary war (39). In fact, it is precisely through these mountains, that Irving *tells* the story of revolutionary war in “Rip Van Winkle.” The Kaatskill Mountains become the site *par excellence* where the revolutionary war metaphorically takes place in “Rip Van Winkle.” As such, in addition to using nature to stage the events leading up to revolutionary war, Irving stages the event of the American Revolution in Rip’s encounter

with the bowling “company” in the Kaatskills. Rip’s departure signals a narrative continuation of impending revolution, insofar as he conducts it with his “gun in hand” (38).<sup>233</sup>

Irving foreshadows the upcoming revolution in the scene at the inn, when Rip’s friends discover “an old newspaper” “from some passing traveler” (37), referring to the belated arrival of town newspapers that infrequently circulated among the disconnected peasantry.<sup>234</sup> The “contents” of the “newspaper” are hermeneutically interpreted by a legitimate and “learned” voice--that of Derrick Van Bummel, the “schoolmaster”--who perhaps informs them of strained relations between Britain and its American colony (37).<sup>235</sup> That Rip’s otherwise politically uninterested circle listens “solemnly” to Bummel suggests they are speaking of political events affecting them directly, rather than their usual “sleepy stories about nothing” (37); that they “deliberate” in “sag[e]” arguments “upon public events” (37) also suggests that an important public event has taken place--perhaps the Boston tea party—pointing towards a forthcoming war. While the fact that their “opinions” are “completely controlled by Nicholas Vedder, a patriarch of the village” (37) suggests that they are supportive of freedom for the American colony, Dame Van Winkle’s sudden interruption (“break”) (37) and charge upon their “assemblage” suggests that the group--and the American colony--has been provoked to break away from its tyrannical sovereign and respond to Dame’s (Britain’s) declaration of war.<sup>236</sup>

The story further provides textual evidence to support the argument that Rip’s departure and mythic encounter stages the American revolution. Indeed, after “a long ramble” of this “kind on a fine autumnal day” Rip escapes from the “clamor of his wife”

and scrambles “to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill mountains”--arguably the site of ‘his’ revolutionary war (38). Like the sounds a soldier in war experiences, “the still solitudes had echoed and re-echoed with the reports of his gun” (38). His sudden flight leaves him “[p]anting and fatigued” and--as though engaging in an attack against the British loyalists--Rip throws “himself” “on a green knoll, covered with mountain herbage, that crowned” the “precipice”--as if in allusion to the soldiers of the British crown (38). Like a sniper, Rip can “overlook all the lower country for many a mile” “[f]rom an opening between the trees” (38) and survey the enemy; both the “lordly Hudson” and “evening”--like a marching army--that moves “on its silent but majestic course” and “gradually” advance upon him (38). Finally, prior to hearing a “voice from a distance, hallooing, ‘Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle,’” Rip “thought of encountering the terrors of Dame Van Winkle,” suggesting that Rip meditates on British tyranny before being summoned to take up arms.

The “hallooing” “cry” that issues out of the mountain addressing Rip can then be read as a revolutionary call to arms (38). This call not only produces “apprehension” in Rip but also makes him hasten “down to yield it” (39). Dressed in lieutenant-like fashion, with his “cloth jerkin strapped round the waist” and “breeches . . . decorated with rows of buttons down the sides,” the “stranger”--like a commander--“made signs for Rip to approach and assist him with the load” (39). Like a soldier, “Rip complied” and after “[p]assing through the ravine” which issued “long rolling peals” or sounds of war, Rip arrives at a “small amphitheatre” in which battle has commenced (39) and obeys “[h]is companion” “with fear and trembling” (40). The stage that Rip indirectly suggests the

hallmarks of a revolutionary scene: “[o]n a level spot in the centre was a company of odd-looking personages playing at nine-pins”--arguably a metaphor for a “company” of colonial loyalists and revolutionaries at war with one another; their mixed army dress (“some wore short doublets, others jerkins”), similar weaponry (“with long knives in their belts”), and similar weapon chambers (“most of them had enormous breeches, of similar style with that of the guide’s”) suggests that they are “doublet”-clothed loyalists intermingling with “jerkins”-clothed revolutionaries (40). Moreover, “the noise of the balls, which, whenever they were rolled, echoed along the mountains like rumbling peals of thunder” may well allude to the cannon balls used in the revolutionary war (40).

Like Godwin and Brown, Irving’s omission of the actual violent “event” (Arendt 37) of revolution is followed by descriptions showing this violent event has just taken place. As such, in addition to foreshadowing revolution prior to Rip’s sleep and allegorizing it in his mythic experience or dream, Irving both poetically suggests and (later) directly demonstrates that the revolution has, indeed, occurred after Rip’s awakening. For example, an obvious symbol of the Republic replaces the ominous symbol of colonial separation looming over the mountains during his initial ascent into the Kaatskills: specifically, the “crow” which winged “its solitary flight across the mountain” (38) as Rip entered the mountains is replaced by an “eagle,” “wheeling aloft, and breasting the pure mountain breeze” (41). Even though Irving provides no actual narrative of his experience of revolutionary war, Rip’s own participation in the war is also suggested by the “old firelock lying by him, the barrel encrusted with rust, the lock falling off, and the stock worm-eaten” (41).

The shift from pre-revolutionary, colonial America to a post-revolutionary, American Republic appears upon Rip's return to his now "larger and more populous" village, which has "altered" with its new "rows of houses" (42) and the replacement of the "village inn" by a "large rickety building" called "'The Union Hotel, by Jonathan Doolittle'"--its facade possibly worn by war with its "windows . . . broken and mended with old hats . . ." (43). Having replaced "the great tree" that 'sheltered' the "Dutch inn" is a "tall naked pole" bearing the American "flag" (Blackburn 152) and a "busy, bustling, disputatious tone" of the "people," suggesting the village's transformation into a political and economic urban center (43).

Now a world of "idle speeches" about "rights of citizens-elections-members of congress-liberty" and nominal and dated references to the American Revolutionary war ("Bunker's Hill-heroes of seventy-six"), Rip's village is overrun by "tavern politicians" (43) who crowd around him and are "restored" to "order" by a "self-important man in a cocked hat"--arguably a metaphor for Jefferson (44). Stories about Rip's old cohorts spell out revolutionary narratives: Brom Dutcher "went off to the army in the beginning of the war . . . [and] was killed . . ." while Van Bummel "went off to the wars too, was a great militia general, and is now in congress" (44).

The new world is far from stable. Staging Rip's return on the day his village is holding elections signals, as critics have suggested, that America's identity is still undecided and suspended between colonial and postcolonial identities.<sup>237</sup> Thus Irving's failure to establish certainty--in both the narrative and protagonist--is the crucial point of his tale: misunderstood as anachronistic *himself*, Irving's genius in inscribing

anachronisms in “Rip Van Winkle” reveals that being suspended between old and new world orders, was in fact, the order of the day.<sup>238</sup>

#### 4. Between Colonial and Postcolonial Identities: Suspended Certainty in Rip

Some critics argue that Irving’s decision to tell a political story via a pastoral scene suggests that *his own* view of change is mythic; in other words, that for Irving, real social and political change was only a fairytale. Irving’s varied political stance after the American Revolution suggests that he was untrusting of real political change; one *could* suggest, perhaps, that Irving stages the American Revolution in a ‘supernatural’ setting to label Jeffersonian political reform as a form of mythical idealism that was not realistically possible.<sup>239</sup> But while Irving was certainly critical of post-revolutionary Jeffersonian politics, evidence exists to support the notion that Irving was split about his political allegiance.<sup>240</sup> If this is the case then, one might suggest that he makes a dual, suspended critique in presenting Rip’s participation in revolution as an act of sleep.<sup>241</sup> In particular, Rip’s act of sleep suspends certainty, and allegorizes the suspension of stability that many post-revolutionary subjects experienced between the end of an old, colonial order and the beginning of a new, postcolonial Republic.

Literally a suspension in consciousness, Rip’s sleep--like Edgar’s sleepwalking in *Edgar Huntly*--reflects the indecision Americans felt, not only with regard to *which identity* to conform to in transitioning from a colonial to a postcolonial nation and subjectivity, but also with how to assimilate the rupture caused by revolution.<sup>242</sup> Rip’s intoxication by the flagon before sleeping suggests many Americans similarly drank the

intoxicating liquor of revolutionary idealism, before awaking to find this idealism unrealized. Moreover, Rip's incoherent experience of the American Revolution which he cannot directly witness--suggested by his mythical encounter in the Kaatskills and staged by his twenty year sleep--suggests the impossibility of telling a complete and completely accurate story of revolution in the absence of that witness.

In this way one can read Rip's act of sleep as a suspension--not only created by the story's conflicting narrative forces of uncertainty and certainty--but also between the story's colonial and postcolonial identities competing for legitimacy. Like Irving's own transatlantic seventeen year exile in England, during which he wrote *The Sketch-Book*--staging his own literal suspension between allegiance to his ancestral homeland (Britain) and his actual homeland (America)--"Rip Van Winkle" stages the post-revolutionary subject's transatlantic experience of indecisive suspension between a colonial and postcolonial world. Indecision between colonial and postcolonial identities is staged in the text through an intertextual allusion: an epigraph which invokes "Woden" or the "Norse god of war" (Magill 981)--the story both claims and resists a colonial identity, as it attempts to establish a post-revolutionary self. This colonial identity is established in the first half of the story, and makes a return in the second half as a testament to the traces of British influence that cannot be erased.

Irving seamlessly combines both British and Dutch colonial identities in his portrait of America's past as one colonial totality; critics have noted how, despite portraying the original colonialism in America as Dutch, Irving borrows political, geographical and literary elements from British colonialism in his presentation of Rip's

antiquated past (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 157). Rip's village has colonial roots and a Dutch colonial founder: "It is a little village, of great antiquity, having been founded by some of the Dutch colonists, in the early times of the province, just about the beginning of the government of the good Peter Stuyvesant" (34), the "governor of the New Netherlands colony, 1647-64" (338). The "houses of the original settlers" were "built of small yellow bricks brought from Holland," but at the same time Rip has lived in one of those houses under the "province of Great Britain" (34).

The characters in the story both lay claim to a colonial heritage and resist their colonial rule. For example, Rip is "a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant" (34). Like a colonized subject, Rip is "an obedient hen-pecked husband" (34) reluctantly submissive under the "discipline of shrews at home" or sovereign control of his wife, Dame Van Winkle (35). Seemingly, a representative of colonial British rule, Dame Van Winkle is a "termagant wife" who delivers "curtain" lectures (35) and retribution with her "tongue" ("Morning, noon, and night, her tongue was incessantly going, and every thing he said or did was sure to produce a torrent of household eloquence") (36).<sup>243</sup> Despite empathizing with Rip's plight under her tyranny ("all the good wives of the village . . . took his part in all family squabbles; and never failed . . . to lay all the blame on Dame Van Winkle" (35), the women of the village govern him ("the women of the village, too, used to employ him to run their errands") (35) and treat him as a colonized subject. Constantly under her tyranny, Rip's own son troops like a soldier under his mother's command ("He was generally seen trooping like a colt at his mother's heels") (36). Like a subservient subject,

Rip's silence only provokes "a fresh volley from his wife," forcing him to "draw off his forces" and retreat (36). Even his dog, Wolf, is "a fellow-sufferer in persecution" (38) under Dame's colonial terror: "he was as courageous an animal . . . but what courage can withstand the ever-during and all-besetting *terrors* of a woman's tongue?" (36; emphasis mine).<sup>244</sup> Her despotism is invoked in the punitive language describing Wolf's persecution: "he [Wolf] sneaked about [the house] with a *gallows* air" (36-37; emphasis mine). Like Caleb and Clithero, Rip fearfully dreads an encounter with the domestic tyranny of his sovereign: Rip "heaved a heavy sigh when he thought of encountering the terrors of Dame Van Winkle" (38). She would often "suddenly break in upon the tranquillity of the assemblage" which Rip would join at the inn (37), and like a monarch, "call the members all to naught" to stop influencing her husband's "habits of idleness" (38). When Rip returns to his village after drinking "the beverage"--which resembles a drink whose very name seems to pun on the colonial heritage ("he found [it] had much of the flavor of excellent Hollands") (40)--the colonial order of the British monarchy has been banished: "He entered the house, which . . . Dame Van Winkle had always kept in neat *order*. It was empty, forlorn, and apparently abandoned" (43; emphasis mine). Hearing only the echoes of his own "voice" (43), Rip then discovers that Dame's "termagant" (37) "tongue" (38) has been replaced by a Republican order, equally haranguing the public like the "terrible virago" of its colonial predecessor: "a lean, bilious-looking fellow . . . was haranguing vehemently about rights of citizens . . ." (43).

The symbols of monarchy that peppered the village in the first half of the story--the “rubicund portrait of His Majesty George the Third” hanging at the “small inn” (37)--return in the second half of the story as traces of a colonial past that cannot be erased:

He recognized on the sign, however, the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe; but even this was singularly metamorphosed. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was held in the hand of a sceptre, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON. (43)<sup>245</sup>

While the colonial “tyranny” of the British King has been eliminated by revolution the signs of its lingering presence--for example, in the revamped “sign” above the inn (43)--act as a commentary on the persistent practices of colonialism that many literary critics and American historians have suggested permeated the new Republic.<sup>246</sup>

In addition, the survival of “The old Dutch inhabitants” in the new Republic--and moreover, the fact that only these “Dutch inhabitants” “almost universally gave” Rip’s story “full credit” in comparison to other villagers, who sometimes “pretended to doubt the reality of it” (47)--suggests that pervading the new order was not only an old colonial identity, but also an allegiance to a pre-revolutionary, colonial narrative. This notion is supported by the ending to “Rip Van Winkle,” which reveals that whenever the old Dutch inhabitants “hear a thunder-storm of a summer afternoon about the Kaatskill . . . they say Hendrick Hudson and his crew are at their game of nine-pins” (47-48). The ending not only alludes to a colonial history that is both legitimate, but also desired, as Irving

suggests with the story's closing words: "and it is a common wish of all henpecked husbands in the neighborhood, when life hangs heavy . . . that they might have a quieting draught out of Rip Van Winkle's flagon" (48). This not only suggests a desire to return to colonialism, but perhaps Irving's fear that the instability of the new Republic would give way to a future revolution or, as some critics suggest, reinstate tyrannical aspects of monarchical rule. It also suggests an indecision within many post-revolutionary subjects over which political side to take allegiance with. In particular, the two narrators in "Rip Van Winkle" represent the conflict or indecision the post-revolutionary subject experiences--with Crayon wanting to return to an old order--and ancestral narrative--and Knickerbocker wanting to move forward in the new world--and craft a new narrative.<sup>247</sup>

The uncertainty and tension between colonial and postcolonial identities is highlighted in other ways as well. In addition to the two narratives of certainty and uncertainty that intersect, collide and undo the narrative coherency of "Rip Van Winkle," the short story's uncertainty between which identity--and which authorial voice to adopt as its own--is staged in Rip's name, "Rip".<sup>248</sup> Irving's anxious presentation is made in Rip's name, which acts like a trope that literally rips through the coherency and legitimacy of his subjectivity and narrative. Specifically, "Rip" undoes the possibility of a colonial or postcolonial narrative--in so far as it allegorizes Irving's *own*, personal uncertainty as to which literary tradition to side with.<sup>249</sup> "Rip" not only stages Irving's uncertainty over how to present a uniquely American literature--without making nationalistic claims--but more importantly, allegorizes the indecision the post-revolutionary subject experiences, just as in *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*. This crisis

of subjectivity is intertextually staged via the repetition of Rip's name--"Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle" (38). "Rip" acts as a trope that stages the rupturing effects of revolution: "Rip . . . Rip . . ." (38) not only declares and *performs* uncertainty in the narrative, but also introduces and in this sense *constitutes* uncertainty in Rip's post-revolutionary subjectivity.

On the one hand, "Rip . . . Rip . . ." (38) performs Irving's act of division by having two narrators alternate, split and rupture the text; in this way "Rip" acts as a "performative" (Derrida 9) verb that literally rips through the authority and certainty of the text. On the other hand, "Rip . . . Rip . . ." (38) constitutes that very uncertainty--between authorial identities--via its use as a noun, or constative "Rip" (38).<sup>250</sup> As such, by performing and introducing uncertainty in the text, the double repetition of the trope of "Rip" in "Rip . . . Rip . . ." (38) not only makes it *impossible* to legitimize a narration, but a subject as well. One can indeed view Rip's twenty-year lapse in consciousness as both ripping through his subjectivity and as a rip in the coherency of his narrative; the repetition of the trope "Rip" not only slices through Rip's conscious, but the nation's consciousness as well. In this way, "Rip" moves beyond simply asserting--and inserting--a rupture and uncertainty in the text in "Rip . . . Rip . . ." (38); "Rip" acts to deconstruct the very postcolonial subjectivity that the revolution--and Irving--attempts to found. Specifically, the revolutionary call that halloos for Rip to "Rip . . . Rip . . ." (38)--and break from his colonial sovereign and constitute himself as a revolutionary subject--is then undone by the *repetition* of the cry that immediately follows:

As he was about to descend, he heard a voice from a distance, hallooing, ‘Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!’ He looked round, but could see nothing but a crow . . . [he] turned again to descend, when he heard *the same cry* ring through the still evening air, ‘Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!’ (38-39; emphasis mine)

This voice issues both a constative *and* a performative call in “Rip, Rip”: the initial call to “‘Rip . . . Rip . . .’” (38) allows him to “break” (Arendt 50) (perform a “Rip”) from his colonial sovereign and become (constitute “Rip”) a revolutionary subject, while the second call to “‘Rip . . . Rip . . .’” (39) acts to immediately *undo* Rip’s revolutionary subjectivity through the performative “Rip” and constitute himself as a non-subject, or “Rip” in the Republic. In the repetition of “Rip, Rip” one not only hears the “double-tongued voice” (Eberwein, qtd. in Giles 143) that issues from the “transatlantic” narrators of Crayon and Knickerbocker, but also allows uncertainty to be inscribed in the narrative and very constitution of a post-revolutionary subjectivity.<sup>251</sup>

In particular, “Rip” also allows an uncertainty to linger as to which functions “Rip, Rip” perform. In particular, the repetition of “Rip, Rip” acts as a double play on both its constative and performative status, and in this way collapses both, arguably representing the collapse of the law in the Declaration of Independence (Downes 423). Building on Downes’ theory that Edgar’s sleepwalking acts as an allegory for the indecision of the nation’s founding moment, I wish to similarly suggest that Rip’s sleep allegorizes the “suspense of legality” (423) inherent in the Declaration--thus making him a subject who is “neither legal nor illegal” (Derrida “Force of Law” 989; qtd. in Downes

423), but rather *suspended* between the two. Like “the sleep-walker” who “argues for the effect of a constitutive undecidability . . . in the intentional experience of the modern subject” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 427), I wish to similarly suggest that Rip is a ‘sleeper’ whose sleep represents the suspension of his legitimacy as a subject and narrator. My assertion borrows from Derrida’s theory--“[t]hat which threatens law already belongs to it” (Derrida, “Force of Law” 989; qtd. in Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 423)--and is based on the assumption that the constitution of a post-revolutionary subject is structured upon the indecision between performative and constative language and is therefore dependent upon something that threatens to be undone. Stated simply, the Declaration of Independence is a “text in which the independent people of the United States produce themselves as such” (Derrida 8). The subjects who are produced out of this text are not only “not subject to . . . patterns of . . . causality,” but are also not subject to any law (Derrida 8). In this way, rather than inaugurate democratic law, the Declaration introduced conditions that suspended “legality” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 423): ““The supposedly originary violence that must have established [legal] authority and that could not itself have been authorized by any anterior legitimacy, so that, in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal”” (Derrida, “Force of Law” 989; qtd. in Downes 423).

I argue Rip is an embodiment of this “suspense of legality” (Downes 423) in which he is “neither a legal nor illegal” (Derrida, “Force of Law” 989; qtd. in Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 423) subject, but rather a suspended or *non*-subject, nullified by the “undecidability” produced by the “constative” and “performative” (Derrida 9) act of the revolutionary claim. Specifically, one could read the unrecognizable “voice” (38) that

summons Rip into the Kaatskills as an anthropomorphization of the revolutionary claim, which declares--in a simultaneously performative and constitutive act--“Rip . . . Rip . . .” (38) in order to constitute a subject, only to then hear its own echo in “Rip . . . Rip . . .” (39)--which acts to undo its subject. In this way, the *double* repetition of the voice “Rip . . . Rip . . .” (38) and its echo in “Rip . . . Rip . . .” (39) could be said to represent the revolutionary claim as suspended--between the democracy it seems to produce--and the ‘monarchism’ it seems to reject.

In effect, Rip is a non-agent or *suspended* subject, caught between two orders and two systems of law. Critics agree that Rip evades the responsibility and duty associated with a peasant or feudal “order”: “Rip was ready to attend to any body’s [sic] business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, he found it impossible” (35).<sup>252</sup> At the same time, Rip is resistant to an emerging capitalist economy; lazy and unreliable, Rip has “an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor” (35) and “would rather starve on a penny than work for a pound. If left to himself, he would have whistled life away in perfect contentment” (36). Neither wishing to claim individual ownership of his property or rent it out as a landlord--both features of the shift from peasantry to capitalism (MacFarlane 39)--Rip’s property is a burden: “he declared it was of no use to work on his farm; it was the most pestilent little piece of ground in the whole country” (35). Rip shows a lack of agency; despite having a farm, he has no control of it:

[e]very thing [sic] about it went wrong, and would go wrong, in spite of him. His fences were continually falling to pieces; his cow would either go astray, or get among the cabbages; weeds were sure to grow quicker in his

fields than anywhere else; the rain always made a point of setting in just as he had some out-door [sic] work to do; so that though his patrimonial estate had dwindled away under his management, acre by acre . . . it was the worst conditioned farm in the neighborhood. (35-36)

As a non-agent, Rip also has no control over his family (“his wife kept continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness, and the ruin he was bringing on his family”) (36), nor over himself. Like a child, Rip has a “meekness of spirit” (35) and lacks an adult voice, suggested by his absence of speech in the first half of the story. Like a child, Rip is an “incomplete human being who *does not yet speak*” (Lyotard 146; original emphasis). Critics agree that Rip is a child; not only do children listen to his stories (35) in the first half of the story, but like an impressionable child, Rip has a temper “rendered pliant and malleable in the fiery furnace of domestic tribulation” (35). But while many critics identify Rip as an ineffective child, I disagree that his infancy is a result of Rip’s happy and prolonged revelry in adolescence.<sup>253</sup> Rather than reflecting a desire to remain a child forever, Rip’s infancy demonstrates his inability to transition into a post-revolutionary subjectivity. Whereas before his sleep he is a non-agent--but nonetheless *colonial* subject--after he wakes up he is *entirely* marginalized; not colonial and not democratic either.<sup>254</sup>

While Rip is a colonial subject--under *both* Dutch and British rule (Dame and Vedder)--he has “inherited” “little of the martial character of his ancestors” (34). Like Rip, who cannot claim the colonial past (“chivalrous days”) of his “ancestors” (34), “[h]is children” “were as ragged and wild as if they belonged to nobody” (36). Irving is, in fact,

correct: Rip's children do *not* belong to anybody; without a patriarch to belong to, the Van Winkle name is doomed to inherit Rip's illegitimate past ("His son Rip, an urchin begotten in his own likeness, promised to inherit the habits, with the old clothes of his father") (36) and illegitimate future. Indeed, after the revolution, Rip remains a non-agent and passes this lack of agency to Rip Jr.: "As to Rip's son and heir, who was the ditto of himself, seen leaning against the tree, he was employed to work on the farm; but evinced an [sic] hereditary disposition to attend to any thing [sic] else but his business" (47). While Rip *does* break from his colonially despotic wife and declares after he awakens that he is a colonial subject ("I am a . . . loyal subject of the king . . .") (44)--he returns as a "bachelor" (Traister 113). Unlike Sarsefield in *Edgar Huntly*, who secures his social mobility and economic future via his marriage, Rip (like Caleb, Edgar and Clithero) does not marry to reconstitute himself as a post-revolutionary agent.<sup>255</sup>

Rip has no *real* use in his village: "Having nothing to do at home . . . idle with impunity, he took his place once more on the bench of the inn door and was revered as one of the patriarchs of the village, and a chronicle of the old times 'before the war'" (47). Rip cannot vote, nor participate in partisan local politics: "Rip . . . was no politician; the changes of states and empires made but little impression on him . . ." (47). His inability to civically participate in society signals a failure in the revolution and, as I will explore in the next section, the unassimilable nature of revolutionary subjectivity. Despite being told "he was now a free citizen of the United States" (47), Rip's status is liminal: having slept through the revolution, he awakes to find he doesn't belong in the present, and cannot be re-assimilated into a past *or* future. Because Rip's illegitimate

suspension actually *eliminates* the possibility of a subject--Rip's subjectivity is presented differently than the indecisive subjectivities in *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*. Whereas Caleb, Edgar and Clithero are indecisively constituted, Rip's subjectivity is not constituted *at all*--no one, not even Irving, can decide where he belongs.<sup>256</sup>

##### 5. State of *Infantia*: the Absence of an Other and the Exclusion of Subjectivity

Rip Van Winkle ruptures and lives outside the law: his deep slumber is an allegory that not only stages the indecision that the post-revolutionary subject experiences as it transitions from a colonial to a postcolonial identity and--arguably--causality--but also the suspension of human rights that he experiences upon his return. Critics point out that Rip's sleep occurs in a space and time that makes it impossible to maintain a linear chronology in the story.<sup>257</sup> They argue that, while Rip is outside time, his awakening and acceptance into the village means he has reinserted himself back into history.<sup>258</sup> I disagree with this popular contention that Rip re-assimilates himself into the new Republic.<sup>259</sup> I argue that while Rip indeed returns to contemporary society, he is not entirely restored.<sup>260</sup>

As "neither legal *nor* illegal" (Derrida, "Force of Law" 989; qtd. in Downes 423; emphasis mine), colonial or postcolonial, Rip is not inside an estranged temporality, but rather *outside* temporality--and society--as a figure of excess. Rip is alienated from society and experiences this exile like a death, recalling the formulation of Jean-François Lyotard: "To kill a human being is . . . to kill the human community present in him as both capacity and promise" (136).<sup>261</sup> Rip's need to find someone in his community to validate his identity is expressed in his question, "Does *nobody* here know Rip Van

Winkle?’” (Irving 45; emphasis mine). In this example Rip cannot refer to *himself* as an agent, nor a corresponding Other (“nobody”) (45), illustrating that Rip’s past community has disappeared, and that he is *excluded* from the present community.

Rip’s question reveals the *necessity* for his neighbors to validate his subjectivity; without this recognition, Rip cannot be a member of society, nor be a human being with rights. According to Hannah Arendt, “a human being has rights only if he is other than a human being. And if he is to be other than a human being, he must in addition become an other human being” (Arendt, qtd. in Lyotard 136). He lacks the likeness to his fellows and even the unlikeness that would enable him to part of their community or commonality. As Lyotard explains, “what makes human beings alike is the fact that every human being carries within him the figure of the other. The likeness that they have in common follows from the difference of each from each” (136).

As a non-agent, Rip does not carry the “figure of the other” in him: when Rip observes that his double, both *is* and *is not* him, he stages the failure to meet the conditions that would make him “other than a human being” (136), or more than human (Lyotard 136): “‘that’s me yonder-no-that’s somebody else got into my shoes- . . .’” (45). Rip denies the figure of the other in Rip Jr.; similarly he does not carry the other in *him*. Rip’s contradiction reveals the failure of the revolution, which cannot guarantee Rip the right to speak, and be recognized as “other than a human being” (Lyotard 136). As Lyotard explains, “the ‘pragmatic’ function of human language governs the formation of the figure of the other . . . every human sentence is destined to someone or something” (137); “signification” in human language is “*addressed*” (137). Moreover,

“interlocution is the relation of simultaneous similarity and disparity introduced between speakers. The instances *I* and *you* cannot merge, since while the one speaks the other speaks no longer or not yet” (Lyotard 138). If Rip had the figure of the other in him, he would be able to “alternately occupy the instance I and the instance you” and as such, have the “right”--as a “citizen”--to “address others,” and at the same time *speak*, to be addressed and “recognized by others” in society (Lyotard 139).

Simply *having* the natural capacity to speak does not guarantee the *right* to speak: “the right to interlocution is not granted to every human being”; he must first be accepted by the civic community or Greek “*politeia*” or remain excluded like the “*barbaroi*” (Lyotard 139). In contrast, a “Republic”--like the one Rip awakens into--declares that if any “human being can speak, he is a possible interlocutor” (Lyotard 139). Because “the capacity to speak to others is a human right”--if it is denied to someone--like Rip--it would “set” him “apart from the speech community of interlocutors” (Lyotard 141). In “finding himself thus alone in the world,” (44) Rip is “no longer something other,” and therefore *also* cannot have someone as “his other” (Lyotard 141). Rip cannot address someone in the community, *nor* be addressed himself; “even though he is plunged into the interlocutory community,” he is “only spoken to and spoken of” (Lyotard 146):

They crowded round him, eyeing him from head to foot with great curiosity. The orator bustled up to him, and drawing his partly aside, inquired ‘on which side he voted?’ Rip stared in vacant stupidity. Another short but busy little fellow pulled him by the arm and . . . inquired in his

ear, ‘Whether he was Federal or Democrat?’ Rip was equally at a loss to comprehend the question. . . . (Irving 43-44)

As Irving’s description demonstrates--Rip does not have “the authority to speak”; the “essence of a right” is that it is “merited” (Lyotard 141).<sup>262</sup> To receive the *right* to speak, it would have to be given or authorized; Rip has “no natural right” in existence (Lyotard 141). Moreover, “the right to speak implies a duty to announce”; if Rip’s “speech announced nothing”--as Irving illustrates--“it is doomed to repetition” and “to the conservation of existing meanings” (Lyotard 143) or a “*chronicle of the old times* ‘before the war’” (Irving 47; emphasis mine).

Rip has no “guarantee” (Derrida 11) in the Republic of his “positive right to speak” (Lyotard 143); rather, he is at “risk” (145) of being silenced by the community, and therefore harmed (141)--and more so, *wronged*: “the wrong is the harm to which the victim cannot testify, since he cannot be heard. And this is precisely the case of those to whom the right to speak to others is refused” (Lyotard 144). As Rip experiences “[i]t is the wrong which is the cause of death, since it implies the exclusion of the speaker from the speech community” (Lyotard 144): “Here a general shout burst from the bystanders-‘tory! a tory! a spy! a refugee! hustle him! away with him!’” (Irving 44; emphasis mine).

As Irving suggests in the villagers’ suspicious (even hysterical) reception of Rip, “[t]he community will not even speak of this exclusion since the victim will be unable to report it and cannot therefore defend himself or appeal” (Lyotard 144). As a “victim” (Lyotard 144), Rip does not contest this exclusion and accepts it because he has

no choice. In this way, he accepts the “wrong” as the “cause of death” (Lyotard 144), so that he can go on *living*--albeit a dead, civic life--as Caleb does in Godwin’s revised ending to *Caleb Williams*. This “wrong” stages the failure of revolutionary subjectivity, because, like Caleb, Rip survives, but does not receive legitimacy as a subject. Like Caleb and like Clithero, Rip experiences the crisis of not having anyone, including himself, available to validate his existence and his story. Like Caleb, Rip cannot present any facts to corroborate his existence, and relies on his community, which refuses to give him validation. Rip is aware of his exile: he surrenders agency to ““God”” and others (““they””), and refers to himself as outside the community--““that’s me yonder”” (Irving 45; emphasis mine). Even his own body--which presumably serves as a *material* reference of his abject existence is not really his: ““that’s me yonder-no-that’s somebody else got into my shoes- . . .”” (45). Rip’s abjection is fully established when he uses the villagers’ scrutinization of him as a *mirror* to recognize himself; his “involuntary” self-recognition produces surprise:

They all stared at him with equal marks of surprise, and whenever they cast their eyes upon him, invariably stroked their chins. The constant recurrence of this gesture induced Rip, involuntarily, to do the same, when, to his astonishment, he found his beard had grown a foot long! (42)

He can only gesture and cannot *coherently* describe “by means of interlocution the terror of what it means no longer to be destined to anyone or anything” (Lyotard 144). Like Caleb in Godwin’s *original* ending, Rip survives, but only as an abject figure: “Abjection is not merely when we are missing from speech, but when we lack language

to excess” (Lyotard 145). Indeed, even though the villagers can verify his *story*--they only verify it as an imaginative tale--not a true account.<sup>263</sup>

Rip is a supplementary figure of this excess and the “ambivalence of the abject”--or what is expressed in the “Latin *sacer (sacred)*”: “human refuse excluded from the interests of the speech community, yet a sign, perhaps, in which the Other has left its mark . . .” (Lyotard 145). Rip is like “the deportee,” who is “[n]either *I* nor *you*,” but rather “present in the language of his lords . . . only as a third person, who is to be eliminated” (145). Rip reveals his abject status in his *repetition* of his question: “Does nobody know *poor* Rip Van Winkle?” (Irving 47; emphasis mine). In this way I recode McLamore’s contention that Rip is a “supplement” of a truthful account of the region’s history (McLamore 48); rather, Rip is a fictitious, *useless* supplement: “superfluous as any speaker is superfluous in relation to the Other” (Lyotard 145). Rip’s supplementarity does not hegemonize or unify the Republic, but rather--like revolution--*ruptures* American identity.<sup>264</sup> Rip is *not* eliminated but, like Lyotard’s “deportee”--preserved--if only as an excess of the past (Lyotard 145).<sup>265</sup> Not having *any* “identification with the Other” Rip survives as he *was* before his sleep: in a state of *infantia* (Lyotard 146). Despite being “plunged into the interlocutory community,” “the statements that concern him have no value for him except as signals or gestures; they are difficult for him to decipher because they are arbitrary” (Lyotard 146):

There was a busy, bustling, disputatious tone about it, instead of the accustomed phlegm and drowsy tranquility . . . a lean, bilious-looking fellow . . . was haranguing vehemently about rights of citizens-

elections- . . . and other words, which were *a perfect babylonish jargon to the bewildered Van Winkle*. (Irving 43; emphasis mine)

Like the infant, Rip “is affected by them [the signals], but has no language in which to articulate his own affective states” (Lyotard 146): “Rip’s heart died away at hearing of these sad changes . . . he had no courage . . .” (Irving 44-45). While Rip has asked to be “authorized to enter the speech community” (Lyotard 147) his request has been denied.

The story does not end in this scene of confusion; this is why critics continue to write of his restoration to the community. His appeal “to enter the speech community” (Lyotard 147) *seems* to be granted in his dialogical exchange with his daughter. A closer inspection of the scene, however, reveals that he is denied the “right” that would “assure” him that his “request will be heard” and that he “will not be rejected into the abjection of *infantia*” (Lyotard 147). It would seem that, precisely because his daughter *is* from Rip’s original community (from the past), and not from the community of the altered village (the present), that Rip is spoken *to* and able to speak to his daughter; but this is not the case. As Lyotard explains, one can enter into conversation *only* when one has *already* been accepted into a community. As the scene reveals, Rip cannot address nor be addressed, but is rather spoken *at*: “‘What is your name, my good woman?’ asked he. ‘Judith Gardenier.’ ‘And your father’s name?’ ‘Ah, poor man, Rip Van Winkle was his name, but its twenty years since . . .’” (Irving 45).<sup>266</sup>

Despite Rip’s *physical* “reentry into the community” (Plung 77)--which seemingly enables him to enter in this conversation, the conversation that Rip enters is

one in which he enters--not as *himself*--but as a marginalized infant. Specifically, when Rip asks his daughter what her name is, he does not address her as his daughter, but rather as a stranger: ““my good woman”” (Irving 45). Moreover, Rip performs his own act of alienating himself when, instead of saying ‘And my name?’ asks her ““And your father’s name?”” (45). Her response, ““Judith Gardenier”” is not addressed to Rip--as a subject--but rather to him as an abject stranger: ““Ah, poor man . . .”” (45). When she does refer to her father--it is in the past tense--indicating his civic death in the present community: ““Rip Van Winkle *was* his name”” (45; emphasis mine).

Indeed, Judith reveals that, in effect, the community has silenced Rip: ““[he] *never has been heard of since*”” (45; emphasis mine). Moreover, she indirectly seems to touch on Rip’s ineffectuality as a speaker in the community: ““whether he shot himself . . . *nobody can tell*”” (45; emphasis mine). Rip is not restored despite his awakening: while the story claims it is his *daughter’s* voice that awakens Rip’s identity (“The name . . . the air of the mother, the tone of her voice, all awakened a train of recollections in his mind”) (45), the voice that wakes him is not Judith’s, but her baby’s: ““She had a chubby child in her arms, which, frightened at his looks, began to cry”” (45).

The baby cries because he recognizes--in his grandfather--a mutual state of *infantia*. If one reexamines the scene, one notices that it the *tone* of the baby’s cry--and not the “tone” of the mother’s voice--that awakens Rip’s “recollections in his mind” (45). Moreover, the scene may be read as if the baby cries because it recognizes Rip’s abjectness; the baby’s inarticulate cry is characteristic of *infantia*, and--while it can seemingly be heard by everyone--it can only be recognized by someone in a *similar* state

of abjection. This mutual abjection is staged when Judith silences her baby (also called ‘Rip’), and indirectly silences her father: “‘*Hush, Rip,*’ cried she, ‘*hush, you little fool; the old man won’t hurt you*’” (45; emphasis mine). Rip cannot harm anyone and can only express the “harm” of being “excluded from the speech community” (Lyotard 144). This exclusion is voiced in *his* inarticulate cry--his “faltering voice” (45)--when Rip once more attempts to gain her authorization to speak by saying, “‘I am your father!’ cried he . . .” and is met with his daughter’s lack of response.<sup>267</sup>

Critics typically read Rip’s infantilization as a metaphor for America’s young status as a nation.<sup>268</sup> One could also read Rip’s grotesque infantilization by his own village--and *his own daughter*--as staging Irving’s own personal anxiety of being rejected by the literary community.<sup>269</sup> While a case could be made that Rip may be a metaphor for Irving, what I wish to examine in this final section is how Rip stages the failure of the post-revolutionary subject to literally assimilate his traumatic experience of the American Revolution.

## 6. Traumatic Subjectivity: Bearing Witness to Revolution as a Traumatic Event

Rip’s failure to be restored as an independent--and thus authorized, speaking--agent in his village signals what might be called his traumatic subjectivity. While critics have argued that Rip’s story is reclaimed by the village as their own and assimilated into a “national memory” (Horowitz, qtd. in Wyman 219) I disagree and argue that--as an unassimilable narrative told by an unassimilable subject--Rip’s tale is a story of

forgetting.<sup>270</sup> Specifically, Rip cannot remember the American Revolution--not because he escaped the experience--but rather because he experienced it as a trauma.

Like a trauma victim, Rip has “a break in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 61). This “breach in the mind” is a result of his “lack of preparedness to take in” the “stimulus” of revolution; “[t]he shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known” (62; original emphasis). Because this experience is not assimilable it “returns to haunt” him “later on” (4). Rip’s crisis of uncertainty is similar to the “central problem of listening, of knowing, and of representing” the traumatic experience, which is “not fully assimilated as it occurs” (Caruth 5). His trauma--the revolution--“is not directly available” to his “experience” and “is suffered in the psyche” (61).<sup>271</sup> In other words, Rip seems to stage the classic question that Caruth reads as being posed by a tradition of psychoanalysis: “Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?” (7). Irving seems to stage both experiences, in what Caruth calls a “double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life” (7). Via Caruth’s formulation, one could read Rip’s encounter with the revolution as a missed encounter with death, and his unassimilable return to his village as the enactment of his missed encounter with life. Rip’s repeated testimony is a constant attempt to overcome his trauma and reenter life.

Indeed revolutionary change in “Rip Van Winkle” is allegorized as a sudden, traumatic change or lapse in consciousness. Irving describes Rip as having “had

*unconsciously* scrambled” to the Kaatskills (Irving 38; emphasis mine); like Edgar who unconsciously follows Clithero in Norwalk, Rip follows the “stranger” “up a narrow gully” (39) and then down a “rugged path” into a physical and temporal ‘abyss’--a gap: “Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheater . . .” (39). As in *Edgar Huntly*, the glen functions as the figure of a psychic gap; their “passing” is assisted by “*transient* thundershowers” (39; emphasis mine).<sup>272</sup>

Rip’s passage through the gap, culminating in his encounter with the “company,” subsequent intoxication and “deep sleep” (40) is psychically traumatic; it stages Rip’s submergence into a subconscious state, which lasts for twenty years. More specifically, his sleep allegorizes the traumatic event transatlantic subjects experienced during and after revolution.<sup>273</sup> Irving describes his passage into “sleep” as though it is hypnotic: “his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head, his head gradually declined and he fell into a deep sleep” (40). This resembles the overpowering dream-like state one enters “during” and after an experience of trauma; specifically, like the “victim of the crash” who “was never fully conscious during the accident itself,” Rip is not “fully conscious” (Caruth 17) during his traumatic experience, as indicated by his sleep and haze after waking up. Rip’s lapse or “Rip” is inaccessible to him and cannot be comprehended: “Every answer puzzled him too, by treating of such enormous lapses of time, and of matters which he could not understand: war-congress-Stony Point . . .” (Irving 44-45).

The villagers’ discourse signals that both Rip *and* the village community have failed to comprehend Rip’s revolutionary trauma. As White suggests, a trauma can only

be recognized when the person who listens to the story of the victim can actually *hear* the “particular, traumatic event, an ‘accident [*Un-fall*’ (4, 67) at the origin of the illness” (1037; original emphasis).<sup>274</sup> While Judith’s baby’s cry signifies that he has been able to “uncover the trauma,” he cannot give a voice to Rip’s trauma “and re-integrate it into [his] life story” (White 1038) because he is an infant. Not being able to comprehend that he suffered a traumatic experience--and the failure of the villagers to “hear” (White 1037) the trauma which he has literally forgotten (White 1037)--signified in the gap--Rip feels as if he has gone mad: “*His mind now misgave him*; he began to doubt whether both he and the world around him were not bewitched” (Irving 42; emphasis mine).<sup>275</sup>

Because of the rupturing effect of his traumatic experience, Rip is disabled from coherently telling his story, making him into a hysteric: “A hysteric is someone who cannot tell a story. At least, a hysteric cannot tell a *coherent* story—a story whose disparate parts hang together” (White 1035; emphasis mine). *Because* he has been disabled from telling “a coherent story” (White 1035), Rip is overwhelmed by his own *affect*--which acts to *further* transform him into a hysteric. This affect appears dangerous to *others* and as needing to be *contained*:

The by-standers began now to *look at each other, nod, wink* significantly, and *tap their fingers against their foreheads*. There was a *whisper*, also, *about securing the gun, and keeping the old fellow from doing mischief*, at the very suggestion of which the self-important man in the cocked hat retired with some precipitation. (Irving 45; emphasis mine)

The villagers' misinterpretation of Rip's incoherence as originating from madness and not from trauma has the paradoxical, ironic effect of actually making Rip *become mad* and hysterical--as a reexamination of the scene illustrates: "'God knows,' exclaimed he, *at his wit's end*; 'I'm not myself-I'm somebody else-that's me yonder-no-that's somebody else got into my shoes-I was myself last night . . . and I can't tell what's my name, or who I am!'" (45; emphasis mine).

Could Rip be a figure for the revolutionary soldier who "sees death around him" (Caruth 11) and who has a delayed response in the form of a dream? As a story of trauma, Rip's narrative is the story "of a belated experience" (Caruth 7); Rip's narrative appears incoherent precisely because his story, like his trauma, in Caruth's words again "resists simple comprehension" (6). While the village *seems* to accept his story, a closer inspection of the scene reveals that they do not recognize his narrative (or him) as legitimate. Asked, "'where have you been these twenty long years?'" (Irving 46) Rip tells the story as though it was a dream ("as one night") and is sardonically dismissed:

Rip's story was soon told, for *the whole twenty years had been to him but as one night*. The neighbors stared when they heard it; *some were seen to wink at each other, and put their tongues in their cheeks*: and the self-important man in the cocked hat . . . screwed down the corners of his mouth, and shook his head-upon which *there was a general shaking of the head throughout the assemblage*. (46; emphasis mine)

Rip's own experience and a coherent narrative of certainty remain inaccessible to him. This inaccessibility along with his *access* to an *incoherent* narrative that no one

believes represents an allegory for the traumatic experience of revolution. (It could also be argued to reflect Irving's personal traumas of family bankruptcy and the death of his fiancée.)<sup>276</sup> While Rip has returned, he is haunted by his trauma, which disables him from reentering human discourse. Certainly, the village seems to honor him by having him "reverenced as one of the patriarchs of the village" (47), but Rip lacks a substantial authorized voice because of his trauma. Irving suggests this in the village's rejection of Rip's story as a true history of the province--and also in their relegating him to repeating the same story as "a chronicle of the old times 'before the war'" (47): "Rip now *resumed his old walks and habits . . . he took his place once more on the bench at the inn door,* and was reverenced as . . . a chronicle of the old times 'before the war'" (47; emphasis mine). Rip's *seemingly* restored position as storyteller of pre-revolutionary, "old times" (47) ironically indicates that the post-revolutionary subject is unable to assimilate his new, Republican identity to his preexisting colonial identity, moreover, that a representation of the *real* American--obviously *not* Rip--has yet to be identified.

Rip's estranged position as a repetitive "chronicle" (47) also demonstrates that Irving's strategy of anachronism has backfired on him. Specifically, Irving's use of anachronism--employed as a strategic device to mock the historian's act of monopolizing truthful accounts (and revising histories to omit unsavory events such as the Indian displacements)--actually acts to mock the *literary* author as incapable of telling an accurate, true story, and thereby substituting for the historian as an important function in society. By staging a fake restoration as contingent on Rip *remaining* out of place--to show the historian's aptitude for anachronistic accounts--Irving instead relegates the

literary author to the margins. Moreover, by making Rip repeat a falsified experience of revolution, Irving sends out the following message to readers: that the *real* story of revolution has yet to be told--and will never be--as long as literary authors authorize the telling of historical events.<sup>277</sup>

Indeed, instead of showing Rip as the “anti-hero” nonconformist (Wyman 217) who rejects political participation in favor of storytelling, Irving shows that Rip is a *bad* storyteller: his inability to come up with *new* stories stages the paralysis of trauma and demonstrates the failure of the Republic to reinvent itself. Irving foreshadows his misstep in the text of “Rip Van Winkle” by calling historical events “stories” (46), and he has a descendent of a *historian* corroborate Rip’s story as factual--thereby giving authority to an “opinion” associated with a historian’s authority. Even so, Irving presents Vanderdonk as an oral historian who is more of a *literary* legacy than historian: “well versed” in folklore and local “traditions,” Vanderdonk corroborates Rip’s “story” by telling a story himself in a “satisfactory manner” (46).

It was determined . . . to take the opinion of old Peter Vanderdonk. . . . He was a descendant of the historian of that name, who wrote one of the earliest accounts of the province. Peter was the most ancient inhabitants of the village, and well versed in all the wonderful events and traditions of the neighborhood. He recollected Rip at once, and corroborated his story in the most satisfactory manner. (46)

Vanderdonk tells a story of haunting, where the “fact” of the event is actually the fact of an oral *myth* “handed down from his ancestor” (46):

He assured the company that it was a fact, handed down from his ancestor the historian, that the Kaatskill mountains had always been haunted by strange beings. That it was affirmed that the great Hendrick Hudson, the first discoverer of the river and country, kept a kind of vigil there every twenty years, with his crew of the Half-moon. . . . That his father had once seen them in their old Dutch dresses playing at nine-pins in a hollow of the mountain; and that he himself had heard, one summer afternoon, the sound of their balls, like distant peals of thunder. (46)

Moreover, Crayon's ultimate "Postscript," meant to emphasize the truth of Knickerbocker's story, does the opposite. By *correcting* Knickerbocker's reference to the "Kaatskill Mountains" as the "The Kaatsberg, or *Catskill Mountains*" (48; emphasis mine) and by affirming that they "have always been a region full of *fable*" (48; emphasis mine), Crayon gives certainty to the fact that the narrative Rip tells is *not* a 'real' history we should remember, but rather a false, mythic story. Indeed, Rip's story is just that--a story; that he *cannot* account for its validity necessitates that he repeat his story over and over (47).

Rather than telling a perfect, coherent story, Rip's story is repeated constantly precisely because it is *neither* perfect nor coherent.<sup>278</sup> Rip returns as a trace of a traumatized past after a missed encounter with death and his awakening and return prompt him to master this event, through the constant retelling of his experience. As Caruth demonstrates, the nature of trauma necessitates that Rip tell the story over and over again, so that he *himself* can "attempt to overcome the fact that it was *not*" a "direct

experience” and “master what was never fully grasped in the first place”: “For consciousness then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one’s life” (Caruth 62; original emphasis). But, the “belated effects” are “perhaps never fully mastered” (LaCapra 41). As Caruth explains, “the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it*. What one returns to in the flashback is . . . the very incomprehensibility of one’s own survival” (64; original emphasis), as a reexamination of the text illustrates:

It was some time before he could get into the regular track of gossip, or *could be made to comprehend the strange events that had taken place during his torpor*. How that there had been a revolutionary war--that the country had thrown off the yoke of old England--and that, *instead of being a subject of his Majesty George the Third, he was now a free citizen* of the United States. (Irving 47; emphasis mine)

Rip is thus doomed to constantly re-inscribe his trauma; his trauma of surviving the revolution has now become a trauma of having to *repeat* his traumatic story in the hopes that someone will hear it and validate it as a fact. As Caruth writes, “the repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be retraumatizing; if not life-threatening” (63). Rip returns as a figure of excess to rupture the Republic and bear witness to those who, like himself, have survived revolution without assimilating it or being assimilated by it. Like the George Washington sign above the inn, which Rip recognizes as “the ruby face of King George” (Irving 43), Rip “stubbornly persists in

bearing witness to some forgotten wound” (Caruth 5). Yet, as Irving’s text illustrates, Rip cannot master an event that he hasn’t *consciously* experienced: Rip varies “on some points every time . . . owing to his having so recently awaked” (Irving 47). His name--“Rip”--represents the rupture he causes because he cannot be assimilated into the past or present; his constant repetition and compulsion to correct his tale at the end of the story is his attempt to “bear witness” to his “survival”--one that has exceeded “the very claims and consciousness of the one who endures it” (Caruth 60). Rip’s “[r]epetition” demonstrates the extent to which it “is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died, but, more fundamentally . . . the very attempt *to claim one’s own survival*” (Caruth 64; original emphasis):

He used to tell his story to every stranger that arrived at Mr. Doolittle’s hotel. He was observed, at first, to vary on some points every time [sic] he told it, which was, doubtless, owing to his having so recently awaked. It at last settled down precisely to the tale I have related, and not a man, woman or child in the neighborhood, but knew it by heart. (47)

Rip’s return as a marginalized figure is characteristic of traumatic returns. Just like the American nation, Rip returns to his village to begin again.<sup>279</sup> Critics read this last scene as triumphant and hopeful. For example, Ferguson says: “It gives us hope that help will come when we ourselves are left alone to face the torments of existence” (542). I disagree and contend that it functions, just like Rip, as a compulsive attempt to claim history.<sup>280</sup> Specifically, Rip’s departure for the mountains allegorizes the nation’s “moment of beginning”--which like “the Jews, who become a true nation only in their act

of leaving captivity”--“is no longer simply a return but is rather . . . a departure” (Caruth 13).<sup>281</sup> In other words, like the Jews who make “a radical break” and, in doing so, begin anew--Rip’s return to the village is not a “literal return to freedom” (Caruth 14) but rather a return to a “nightmare”: “the trauma of the nightmare does not simply consist in the experience *within* the dream, but in *the experience of waking from it*” (Caruth 64; original emphasis). Indeed, Rip’s attempt to claim his own survival works against him; instead of establishing his subjectivity, his story calls his subjectivity into question--and repeats his experience of uncertainty in his awakening.<sup>282</sup> Rip experiences “the nightmare” of “waking” up to an altered world, and “the nightmare” of *not “knowing”* that he has “survived” (Caruth 64; original emphasis); As Caruth says, “waking *itself* . . . constitutes the surprise” (64; original emphasis). A reexamination of the scene of Rip’s return illustrates this “surprise”:

As he approached the village he met a number of people, but none whom he knew, which somewhat *surprised* him for he had thought himself acquainted with every one [sic] in the country round . . . They all stared at him with equal marks of *surprise*. . . . The very village was altered. . . . It was with some difficulty that he found the way to his own house, which he approached with *silent awe*, expecting every moment to hear the shrill voice of Dame Van Winkle. (Irving 42; emphasis mine)

Like “[t]he captivity and return” of the Jews--which is “available to them only through the experience of a trauma” (Caruth 15)--Rip’s return can *only* be understood through his trauma, as inscribed in the short story:

All stood amazed, until an old woman, tottering out from among the crowd, put her hand to her brow, and peering under it in his face for a moment, exclaimed, ‘Sure enough! it is Rip Van Winkle-it is himself! *Welcome home again*, old neighbor-Why? where have you been these twenty long years?’ (Irving 46; emphasis mine)

The fact that the old woman recognizes him but says, “Welcome home *again*” (46; emphasis mine) suggests that Rip has already returned once before.<sup>283</sup> But if he has this experience has been repressed. Caruth addresses the operation of such suppression in the traumatic history Freud teases from the Biblical history of the national emergence of the Jewish people: “what constitutes the essence of their history is the repression, and return, of the deeds of Moses” (Caruth 14). Irving seems to suggest a similar “history” of “repression” (Caruth 14) by having Vanderdonk enlighten Rip and the village with the history of Hudson’s repressed deed:

That it was affirmed that the great Hendrick Hudson, *the first discoverer of the river and country*, kept a kind of vigil there every twenty years, with his crew of the Half-moon; being permitted in this way to *revisit the scenes of his enterprise*, and keep a guardian eye upon the river, and the great city called by his name. (Irving 46; emphasis mine)

Irving seems to suggest here that Rip reenacts Hudson’s *own* repetition of witnessing his colonial “enterprise”--or scene of autochthony--every twenty years. As such, the original deed, Hudson’s colonial discovery “of the river and country,” has been repressed (46). This repression is allegorized in Rip’s experience of forgetting, thereby

necessitating the repetition of his story which *seemingly* acts to connect the past with the present: “[i]t is the trauma, the forgetting (and return) of the deeds of Moses, that constitutes the link uniting the old with the new god, the people that leave Egypt with the people that ultimately make up the nation of the Jews” (Caruth 15). Not only does his knowledge of this experience come later, but when it does, it does so “*only*” through its repetition: “The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (Caruth 17). In other words, Rip can *only* know his initial experience of trauma because he experiences it *again*; only by repeating it, as Caruth points out, does his knowledge of the previous event actually become known and thus come to exist for Rip as such. The problem is that this cognition is not knowledge of the actual event, but of its “forgetting” (Caruth 17). Indeed, Rip only remembers his sleep--not the event he slept through; ironically, he also remembers his sleep only as a forgotten event: “‘Surely’, thought Rip, ‘I have *not slept* here all night’” (Irving 41; emphasis mine).

Indeed, Rip’s constant repetition of his story acts to *retraumatize* him, because he not only retells his experience of forgetting, but also is repeatedly subjected to the exclusion of the village; as long as the reliability of his experience is doubted, so will Rip’s legitimacy as a subject: “Some *always pretended to doubt the reality of it* [his story], and *insisted that Rip had been out of his head*, and that this was one point on which *he always remained flighty*” (47; emphasis mine). Thus, Rip perpetuates a cycle in which he compulsively retells his story in order to make it coherent, and thus overcome his trauma, only to re-experience the trauma of his inability to make his experience

coherent. His trauma can *only* be overcome if it is recognized as a real, legitimate fact and not a mythical story by someone in his present community, and not the past community, as Irving says: “The old Dutch inhabitants . . . almost universally gave it full credit” (47). Thus, the village’s continual relegation of his role as storyteller--while it seemingly allows him to survive--only perpetuates the trauma of revolution, and characterizes the experience of post-revolutionary subjects in the same way that it traps Rip: as a survival in which the only experience of life is closer to death.

While Rip’s story reveals a truth about revolution, it also reveals a truth about trauma. Using White’s analysis, one could further say that the analyst’s task should be to conduct a form of *interlocution*, in which the analyst not only *hears* the gaps, as White suggests, but also pushes the victim to interpret them *himself*. Rather than interpret the affect of the traumatized victim as madness--as Rip’s village does--the interlocutor could observe the affect in the victim’s body and ask *the victim* to give a voice to these bodily signs. In this way, one could argue, the interlocutor could allow the victim to then restore agency to himself--rather than allowing the narrative to have a traumatic agency that only ruptures and destabilizes subjectivity--as Rip’s story demonstrates. In other words, by *not* filling in the gaps with the analyst’s own words or interpretation--but instead urging the victim to do so--and thus listen for “what is missing from” the victim’s “narratives” (White 1037)--the interlocutor could possibly enable the victim to tell a coherent story *himself*.

“Rip Van Winkle” thus demonstrates that a human subject--like Rip--not only needs the community to be authorized to speak, as Lyotard says, but also needs the

community to authorize his experience of trauma. Specifically, the community that must validate the trauma must be the *very* community that committed the trauma; without this particular validation, the traumatized victim remains in a permanent state of *infantia*. As a victim in a state of *infantia*, the traumatized subject--like Rip--will never be able to tell his story; at least, he will never be able to tell the true story of what happened to him--and will instead be buried alive by his own overwhelming state of affect. Without his community's recognition of the trauma, the traumatized subject, like Rip, will never recognize it himself, and be doomed to repeat the same story, over and over again, further ensuring he will never be heard, legitimized or restored as an autonomous agent.

This paradox finally reveals the implicit connection between revolution and trauma: that to *truly* be autonomous one must declare himself so. Yet this declaration requires both a break from *and* validation from of a community or sovereign--the very sovereign who has imposed the trauma. Thus a revolutionary subjectivity--in its truest sense--is perhaps not possible, in that the very break that it necessitates, is also a traumatic break that makes it impossible to claim one's agency. The call to listen to the storyteller then--is perhaps not just a call to listen to the story, and in this way detect the trauma--but rather to listen for the human subject that it issues from, and validate his experience as real and *not just* another story.

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense I disagree with the contention by Fred Louis Pattee that: “American literature . . . is as old only as the republic” (ix, Pattee).

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the differentiation between the American and French revolutions that Hannah Arendt makes in *On Revolution* (43; 134). Arendt defines “revolution” as a “new” “event” (37) in which the “liberation from oppression” (35) “aims” (91) at the “constitution of freedom” (35) and in which the “task” (39) is to find “a new absolute” (39) that will “replace” that of the “divine power” (39). Specifically, “the American Revolution” was a “war of liberation” (17) in which “the oppressed” (74) (American colonies) were situated against an oppressor (Britain). The goal of the American Revolution was a “new republican government” (24) that would “constitute a realm of its own for the ‘public happiness’ of its citizens” (133). In contrast, “the French Revolution,” as Arendt sees it, was a war of “defence [sic]” featuring the “uprising of the poor against the rich” (112). The “aim” (75) of the French Revolution was to establish a “constitutional government” (137) that would “terminate the reign of public freedom through a guarantee of civil liberties and rights” (133).

<sup>3</sup> I borrow this phrasing from an argument Paul Downes makes with respect to Charles Brockden Brown, in which he claims that the “postrevolutionary crisis” in *Edgar Huntly* is “engendered by the persistence of a feudal or monarchic logic within a post-feudal social order” (“Sleep-Walking” 420).

<sup>4</sup> Who was the subject of revolution: was he or she a witness to the collective series of spontaneous actions that generated the breaking up of a nation--for example, the public decapitation of King Louis XVI of France--or only a witness to testimonies of these events? I will argue that the transatlantic subject is a secondhand witness to violent events emerging from key moments in the American and French revolutions, such as the response to debates spurred by the Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. While this dissertation will not be able to conduct a conclusive, historico-political investigation into the nature of the eighteenth-century, revolutionary subject, my examination of a revolutionary subjectivity *as figured by Anglophone eighteenth and nineteenth-century literatures* will propose a theory for consideration.

<sup>5</sup> England did in fact experience “revolutionary violence”: “Revolutionary violence came to England on July 14, 1791-Bastille Day-when a Tory mob in Birmingham chanting ‘Church and King’ attacked and burned down two Dissenter meeting houses and the home . . . of the pro-Revolutionary Unitarian minister and scientist Joseph Priestley” (Kafer 69). Supporting the idea that Burke’s *Reflections* tries to stop a revolutionary ideology from breeding in England is De Bruyn, who describes a host of events in the early part of the eighteenth century that, if revisited, could be interpreted as a history of a new revolutionary period in England. Indeed, the events in England acted to influence the interpretation of revolutionary events abroad, as Burke’s *Reflections* demonstrates: “The central dramatic plot of the *Reflections*, the October 1789 march upon Versailles, which forms the emotional climax of Burke’s treatise, cannot be understood fully unless it is read in the context of the ritualized language of late eighteenth-century English insurrectionary behavior. He assimilates the novel and the unknown (the dizzying spectacle in France) to the known and familiar (civil affrays such as the Wilkite disturbances and the Gordon riots), and invokes potent English myths dating from the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution in a violent struggle to establish the interpretative boundaries that will govern the English response to France” (De Bruyn 275).

<sup>6</sup> As Kafer notes, “the subject of revolution occupied a central place” (59). Most memorable was Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) which responded to the political speeches and writings of Paine and Price. Burke “read Price’s sermon of 4 November 1789 in its printed form, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*, and the appendix of documents which Price added. It was now that he received a letter from Paine assuring him that ‘The Revolution in France is certainly a Forerunner to other Revolutions in Europe’ . . . Price’s sermon and Paine’s letter turned a future, hypothetical problem into an immediate, actual and domestic danger” (Clark 62-63). Price’s sermons also “provoked some twenty-one critical replies before Burke’s *Reflections*” (Clark 63). Burke specifically objected to Price for connecting England to France--in a way, one could argue, for making the revolution of 1688 a transatlantic event, much like the French Revolution became for Godwin, Brown and Irving: “What Burke mentioned first as objectionable in Price’s *Discourse* . . . was its ‘manifest design of connecting the affairs of France with those of England, by drawing us into an imitation of the conduct of the National Assembly’” (Clark 66).

<sup>7</sup> Writers like Godwin, for example, read texts from across the transatlantic, such as “Hume, Voltaire and Robertson” (Clemit 79-80). Poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth also wrote on revolution, like Brown: while Wordsworth “tended toward the pastoral” Coleridge tended “toward the exotic and sublime” in representing “visions” of “the American Revolution” (Clemit 63). The so-called first generation romantics also participated in revolutionary politics in Britain during the 1790s: “For a period, Coleridge indulged in Jacobin-edged radical politics in England and was at one point under surveillance by agents of William Pitt’s Tory Ministry” (Kafer 62).

<sup>8</sup> In her discussion of the relationship between American novels and revolutionary politics, Samuels writes: “While concentrating on gothic sensationalism and sentimental seduction, the novel in the early republic displays contemporary social and political anxiety about the stability of the family and its freedom from unfaithfulness, often figured as the contamination of the outside world” (23-24). Samuels lists the writer who was most notorious in doing this, “Parson” Weems, whose male protagonists commit acts of sexual and “religious” infidelity after being influenced by the “deist” ideas of Thomas Paine. One example is “Dr. Theodore Wilson,” who “deceives his wife” because of a disease; this “‘disease’ is not from natural causes, however: ‘this elegant young man owed his early downfall to reading ‘PAINE’S AGE OF REASON’” (146). This ‘libertine publication’ sets loose Wilson’s ‘boundless ardour for animal pleasures’ and encourages him with ‘bold slanders of the bible’” (24). As Samuels asserts, Paine was considered to be the most threatening to family order (and thus the republic): “these case histories generally, emphasize the importance of a careful upbringing, safe from the introduction of false texts and the introduction of desires that exceed the bounds of marriage and the family. . . . The most notorious deist was Thomas Paine, whose *Age of Reason* was vilified for making religious infidelity accessible” and prompted the publication of “Thirty-five replies” between 1794 and 1796, which acted to “link an ‘infidelity’ of religious thought with infidelity in the family, and, by implication, the state” (25).

<sup>9</sup> Future projects might include an examination of the circum-atlantic movement around routes between Louisiana and England; an examination of the origin point at which human agency in inscribed in American literature; an examination of the relationship between subjectivity and narrative in texts like William Wells Brown’s multiple versions of *Clotel*, in the context of how the claim for subjectivity fails in African American literary works; studies of French and Irish Literature, as participating in the transatlantic experience of revolution in the late eighteenth century as well as considerations of later American works such as Cooper’s *Wyandotté* (1842) and Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853) as allegories of revolution.

<sup>10</sup> The original example Giles gives is of Frederic Douglass. Douglass looked at his “country from the outside,” or from the eye of alterity. In Douglass’ case, he was “alienated by race” and experienced further “displacement” by associating himself with “abolitionists” in England (2).

<sup>11</sup> This was not only a time for self-rule, but also self-analysis: at the same time “the individual’s growing capacity for self-analysis . . . is linked with freedom from political and social inequality” (Clemit 82). This is allegorized in the literary texts of the time. For example, *Edgar Huntly* models “Godwin’s capacity for thoughtful entry into the feelings of another person” (Clemit 85).

<sup>12</sup> These dangers included the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia--the same year the Terror ruled in France--the association of French democracy with deism, the influx of French immigrants which led to the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1797, etc. (Samuels 20-21).

<sup>13</sup> Bour says “*Caleb Williams* combines a topical discussion of social inequality with a new kind of interest in the human psyche, an interest in the historical *development of the mind*, even more than that of society: social history is seen as indivisible from psychological interaction between individuals” (814). Clemit also identifies this “link between analysis of inner states and political reform” (49) in Godwin and Brown’s novels. Specifically, “freedom” from “tradition” can cause instability in both the psyche and society (136).

<sup>14</sup> As Samuels theorizes, the “violence within” (49) was often presented in some of the more extravagant features of the Gothic novel--a breakdown of heterosexual normativity, incest, murder, a vision of the family as a place of horror in feudal ‘house’ decaying and penetrated by strangers--that in the end, had to be abandoned.

<sup>15</sup> Samuels’s discussion of events interrupting the nation’s transition into a republican order centers on the yellow fever plague in the 1790s in Philadelphia, the French Revolution, and the introduction of Jacobin politics in the U.S. (26-49). She writes that the “emerging American inclination to see the principles imported from France as a contagious disease was supported by an odd conjunction of events: ‘Jacobinism had first appeared in the United States’, as John Miller has noted, ‘at almost the same time the country suffered its worst outbreak of yellow fever--the great epidemic of 1793’. The French Revolution and the plague equivalently represented threats to social order” (29).

<sup>16</sup> As Hannah Arendt and others have pointed out, the American Revolution was “intended” (43; 134) to be a “contained” (142) event, and great efforts were made to ensure that it stopped once the new Republic was founded (25). Historians have documented the lengths that American politicians took to ensure the American Revolution stopped at its desired result. Their nightmare was realized when the French Revolution attempted to adopt a similar model of social control (which took the form of a clearly defined family order) and undermined and destroyed this order (Samuels 26), and became an event that was seemingly “uncontainable” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 422) and unstoppable.

<sup>17</sup> In her examination of the real and literary efforts to contain the plague and revolution (20-81), Samuels reads David Rothman: “In *The Discovery of the Asylum*, David Rothman asserts that the late-eighteenth-century American fear of contamination by France was becoming a fear of contamination by anything in the ‘world’” (48). In order to legitimize the intrusion of governing committees that would sustain order in the city, the new republican government had to first convince its citizens that the family was responsible for its failure to protect its members from this contamination, thus necessitating the invention of state institutions that would supposedly contain these dangers: “Considering the city as a family that had failed to keep order, we can see how the new tutelary state apparatus, the committee that came to govern the city, prescribed new rules for the behavior of the family and maintained them by creating new institutions, such as the Bushhill hospital, the new orphanage, and public relief, to supplement the family” (36).

<sup>18</sup> Brown, like Godwin, treats “public issues through private drama” “in his commentary on the fate of the nation through family romance” (Clemit 112). Brown was a noted “true Godwinian” (Kafer 98). This relationship is (or becomes) reciprocal. For example, “in St. Leon, Godwin follows Brown in adopting a Protestant setting to explore the dangers of extremism” (Clemit 99).

<sup>19</sup> Clemit chronicles these political tensions: “The Republicans . . . wanted to see an agrarian nation based on” “man’s innate integrity” and wanted little “government interference in private affairs. By contrast the Federalists, led by John Adams . . . argued for the need for external controls to maintain law and order and to regulate the economy, and they favored a stratified society on the English model” (114).

<sup>20</sup> Recent critics observe: “‘The claim for Brown’s centrality to the literary culture of post-Revolutionary America has, in recent criticism, been less grounded in assessments of the quality of his writing than in the quality and range of his engagements with early U.S. culture—including sexuality, politics, nationalism, and race’ (Bernard, Kamrath, and Shapiro 2004)” (Waterman 2). In this sense a future project would be to reexamine Pattee’s contention that: “The term ‘Father of American literature’ belongs unquestionably to Charles Brockden Brown” (ix, Pattee) and investigate whether Brown is the father of a transatlantic American literature, or to place him in relation with other American authors that predate Brown in their transatlantic engagements with literary traditions in Europe.

<sup>21</sup> I borrow this idea from a discussion of politics and literature in John Whalen-Bridge’s seminal work, *Political Fiction and the American Self* (1998).

<sup>22</sup> Downes writes of “Edgar’s epistemological crisis” as taking place in “Norwalk” (“Sleep-Walking” 419).

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Declarations of Independence." Trans. Keenan, Tom and Tom Pepper. *New Political Science*. Vol. Number 14: Routledge, Winter 1985-86. Print. References in my text and notes hereafter cite the author of this article as “Derrida.”

<sup>24</sup> I borrow the term “revolutionary claim” from Downes (“Sleep-Walking” 422).

<sup>25</sup> Whereas I argue this event founds revolutionary subjectivity, Jameson argues that it founds “modernity”; specifically, Jameson calls “the French Revolution” “the founding moment in which . . . modernity first emerged” (qtd. in Kouvelakis 2). He also says that this “process” represents “the twofold definition of the Enlightenment as ‘singular event’ and ‘permanent process’” (qtd. in Kouvelakis 352).

<sup>26</sup> Kouvelakis seems to suggest that the revolution has built into itself the “very condition for its reactivation,” for its return as a new event (341).

<sup>27</sup> Kouvelakis’ definition of “the French Revolution” as “a European Event” could be extended to mean a transatlantic event: “the French Revolution” was “a European event that made it possible to define Europe in terms of something other than an aggregation of dynastic sovereignties or the cosmopolitanism of the Roman Catholic Church . . . coming after the establishment of American independence and the formation of ‘Atlantic’ centres of revolution, and extending in the phase of its radicalization . . . the French Revolution did not remain isolated. It took its place in a nascent movement of decolonization, and inaugurated a cycle of revolutions on a world scale. Its universality was the concrete universality of an emancipatory force that challenged the world order put in place by centuries of European expansion, colonial pillage, and the slave trade” (342).

<sup>28</sup> Godwin challenges readers: will they examine things “as They Are”--such as restrictions on the “mind”--and accept them as “irremediable,” or will they seek out change? One could rephrase this query to reflect Godwin’s own politico-philosophical readings: will the reader agree with Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, and accept the ‘unchangeable’ inequality of man as requiring a monarchical, sovereign power, or be inspired by Rousseau and overcome the natural state of inequality between men--as originating in the possession of property--and institute *The Social Contract*?

<sup>29</sup> Arguably *Caleb Williams* and the American literary texts critique the feudal system in an unprecedented way. Like the American texts, *Caleb Williams* has “moved . . . beyond straightforward political allegory” and destabilizes “the symbolic opposition of master and servant”: “his [Godwin’s] central notion of the intrusion of government into private life requires a mode of characterization unlike anything previously existing in the novel” (Clemit 45). One could argue similarly for *Edgar Huntly*, in which Sarsefield employs the government to institutionalize Clithero, and the law to disinherit Edgar. In “Rip Van Winkle” the new republican government interferes to elect officials in Rip’s village and liminalize his position.

<sup>30</sup> “In an enlightening mood, Godwin is writing against the kind of social and political organization that he sees as structuring the *ancien régime* in Europe, by comparing it, in a familiar trope, with Eastern tyranny” (Howell 73).

<sup>31</sup> “Sleep-walking is . . . the novel’s way of theorizing the subjectivity of the post-revolutionary, post-Enlightenment citizen of democracy. . . . Brown’s sleepwalkers share a discursive space with post-revolutionary visions of the political representative as a ‘puppet’ of the people (an image popular with Federalist polemicists) or as ‘monstrously’ independent of his constituents’ intentions (a radically populist cry)” (Downes 418).

<sup>32</sup> In Fenimore Cooper’s *Wyandotté: or The Huttet Knoll, A Tale* (1842) the protagonists *daydream*.

<sup>33</sup> Downes also argues that “the novel [*Edgar Huntly*] inscribes its most dislocating ellipsis” (417).

<sup>34</sup> In Cooper’s text these sublime experiences take place in the Hut.

<sup>35</sup> Cooper’s two protagonists cannot orally articulate verbs of murder or love, and present an incestuous coupling and allegory for the national and social borders revolution has transgressed.

<sup>36</sup> In fact, it is Brown’s *Wieland* that has traditionally been viewed as a revision of Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*: “Brown’s *Wieland*, a critical reworking of *Caleb Williams*,” led to “the development of the Godwin school of fiction” (Clemit 99).

<sup>37</sup> These “false promises” by the fathers of the Revolution created “social tensions” that could provoke people to “defraud the unsuspecting” and be driven wild by “despair, violence, and insanity” (Elliott 225).

<sup>38</sup> Recent Brown criticism is divided “into two camps: one that reads Brown’s work symptomatically, looking for evidence of early America’s political unconscious or Brown’s own political partisanship . . . and another camp that . . . reads him as a diagnostician of his culture more than a participant in its ideological or partisan politics” (Waterman 2). Quoting Murison, Waterman notes that Brown examines ‘the consequences of the tendency in 1790s America to make citizenship-and national identity more broadly-a state of mind.’ Rather than constructing a national allegory then, Brown dissects or diagnoses the tendency toward national allegory” (Murison, qtd. in Waterman 2).

<sup>39</sup> Like Caleb, Edgar is haunted by a “lawless curiosity” that makes him uncertain over how to choose between “spontaneous justice” and “coercion of law” (Elliott 266). *Edgar Huntly* reproduces *Caleb Williams*’ “surreal disorder of consciousness” through Gothic devices and settings that mirror Godwin’s forlorn castles and gloomy, decaying estates.

<sup>40</sup> I borrow the idea that Edgar is plagued by indecision by Downes: “Edgar imagines himself to be caught between the antagonistic poles of an impossible decision” (415). I also borrow the idea of the repetition of monarchical order from Downes: “Weymouth’s argument invokes a Godwinian critique that saw the arbitrary tyranny of monarchy repeated in the bureaucratic violence of a legal state” (417).

<sup>41</sup> Irving’s narrator has the “power to affect the reader’s perception of events and motives” “[and] raise[s] philosophical and artistic questions about the validity of historical evidence, as opposed to the deeper truths of imaginative literature” (Elliott 230). Critic Helen Lee notes the “hyperbolic insistence” (192) on its legitimacy.

<sup>42</sup> The exception to this is Insko, who conducts a brilliant reading of “Rip Van Winkle” in the context of another work by Irving, *Knickerbocker’s History of New York*.

<sup>43</sup> Here I make a play on Downes’s term “crisis of decision” (“Sleep-Walking” 418).

<sup>44</sup> In a future project, I intend to explore how trauma renders the subject exiled from the present, and any community that he or she would otherwise belong to. The traumatized subject belongs nowhere, thus fueling his or her hysteria. The only way a traumatized subject can be restored to his or her subjectivity, and by extension, his or her community, is to author his or her own narrative of trauma, and have this narrative be legitimized by the very community that inflicted the trauma.

<sup>45</sup> Godwin, William. *Caleb Williams*. Ed. David McCracken. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print. (3 vols. London, 1796). References in my text and notes hereafter cite the title of all editions as *CW*. I borrow the term “logic” from Paul Downes: “Postrevolutionary crisis is . . . engendered by the persistence of a feudal or monarchic logic within a post-feudal social order” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 420).

<sup>46</sup> “Straddling the terrible watershed of the French Revolution, Godwin’s novel evokes . . . the lost order of an . . . ideal but internally corrupt feudal past and the onset of a chaotic, individualistic and materialistic future” (Schieber 265). Caleb is “caught between an old, defunct order of sentimental beliefs and a . . . materialistic incoherence of facts” (265).

<sup>47</sup> With respect to Godwin’s fascination with the American Revolution, Clemit quotes Godwin as writing: “It was auspicious for me . . . not that a question of finances and taxes, of customs and excises, of commercial monopolies and preferences, engaged the attention at that period, but a question involving eternal principles, and question of liberty and subjugation and a question that seemed to embrace one half of the world” (14). In addition to the novel’s indirect engagement with the American and French Revolutions, critics have suggested *Caleb Williams* refers to the 1688 Revolution. For example, Clemit writes, “For Godwin as for other radicals who achieved greater prominence in the debate on the French Revolution, the question of the rights of the American colonists provided a catalyst for theoretical discussion of English liberty” (14).

<sup>48</sup> Kenneth W. Graham writes that the “dual title” of “*Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*” “suggests a conflict in intention. For the past hundred years or more, it has become almost habitual to assume that conflict to be between Godwin the novelist and Godwin the philosopher” (50). “The novel dramatizes a thesis: things are now ‘political’; there is no justice. The ‘influence’ causes the ‘adventures’” (Robinson III, 117). “‘Things As They Are’ implies a look beneath the shell or crust of human society” (Duerksen 373). “The novel suggests that weakness is a particularly powerful means of subduing others in modern times. . . . The spectacle of manly ruin maintains things as they are. Godwin’s narrative of modern power reveals the left-handed ways subjects refuse to be free” (Garofalo 243). “Godwin alludes in the preface, though without mentioning names, to the current debate over the French Revolution, a debate not only about the fate of France, but also of England and, more far-reaching, of monarchies and indeed all forms of government” (McCracken xii). “Godwin refers to the debate in England instigated by the French Revolution. The most memorable product of the debate was Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), but over one hundred books and pamphlets appeared between 1790 and 1793 contributing to the debate, largely in answer to Burke’s *Reflections*. . . . *The Reflections* was ostensibly written in answer to Richard Price’s Old Jewry Sermon of 4 November 1789, which urged each man to shun prejudice, ‘think of all things as they are, and not suffer any partial affections to blind his understanding’ while he strives for greater political freedom. . . . The pleaders of ‘reformation and change’ included Godwin, Price, Paine, Joseph Priestley, Horne Took, and the parliamentary followers of Charles James Fox” (McCracken 348).

<sup>49</sup> Godwin warned of revolution to come: “In 1787, Godwin also published *a History of the Internal Affairs of the United Provinces* which narrated the principal events of the recent Dutch Revolution. . . . The book concluded prophetically two years before the outbreak of the French Revolution that the ‘flame of liberty’ first excited in America had spread and that ‘a new republic of the purest kind is about to spring up in Europe’” (Marshall 16). “England was felt by many to be in a state of emergency. The result was the appearance of an English tyranny with censorship and suspension of habeas corpus, culminating in the treason trials of 1795. In this phase England seemed to many a reprise of the French *ancien* regime” (Paulson 39).

<sup>50</sup> “Godwin gave the novel’s original preface (suppressed by his publisher due to its polemical tone) the date of May 12, 1794, the same day on which the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, had suspended habeas corpus and launched the first of a series of preemptive arrests of prominent British radicals” (Handwerk and Markley 10).

<sup>51</sup> I borrow this idea and term from Downes (422).

<sup>52</sup> In an ironic play that casts Burke's text as more literary fragment than political treatise, Godwin dramatizes Burke--and his argument from his *Reflections*--in *Caleb Williams* as though in a play. Godwin arguably casts Burke in the role of Mr. Clare, a famous poet in the novel, whose "sublimest efforts of genius" uncannily resemble Burke in having "done immortal honour to the country that produced him": England (*CW* 23). Godwin's characterization of Mr. Clare's fame arguably refers to Burke, who is looked up to by the "gentlemen" of his country with "adoration" (24). Godwin writes of Clare: "They felt a conscious pride in recollecting that the boast of England was a native of their vicinity" (24). In one instance, Godwin seems to reference both Burke's *Reflections* and his theory of the sublime. Fludernik cites the significance of "Godwin's use of the sublime," in *Caleb Williams* and points to Marilyn Butler as being the one critic who reads the "sublime" in *Caleb Williams*. Fludernik examines the differences between Burke's theory of the sublime and Godwin's use of the terms "ardour," "enthusiasm," and "sublime" (860). For example, the praises Falkland receives create a 'sublime' affect in Tyrrel not unlike the 'terror' of the French Revolution: "He [Tyrrel] writhed with agony, his features became distorted, and his looks inspired terror" (*CW* 21). Fludernik supports the notion that Godwin references Burke in *Caleb Williams*, by noting the "encomium" that Godwin had written on Burke in 1797, "as a memorial to the late 'patriot and philanthropist'" (861). Godwin added his encomium in a footnote "to the revisions of *Political Justice* on the occasion of Burke's death": "In all that is *exalted* in talents, I regard him [Burke] as the inferior of no man that ever adorned the face of the earth: and, in the long record of *human genius*, I can find for him few equals. In subtlety of discrimination, in *magnitude* of conception, in sagacity and profoundness of judgment, he was never surpassed. (*Political Justice*, 788)" (Fludernik 861). Godwin's encomium, I wish to argue, echoes the devotion Falkland has for Mr. Clare, and his grieving sentimentality after Clare's death--thus attributing 'sublime' qualities to Mr. Clare. Fludernik supports this idea: "I contend that the one and only example of true sublimity in the novel is rendered in the character of Mr. Clare, who displays all the positive divine attributes without arrogating any of the terrible powers of divinity to himself" (868). Mr. Clare becomes a sublime 'martyr' like that of Edmund Burke: as Fludernik observes, "Falkland at the death of Mr. Clare evinces a frenzy of grief and despair, and a feeling of his own inferiority: 'Is this the end of genius, virtue and excellence?' . . . . If Clare is the character closest to ideals of human sublimity, with Falkland closely aspiring to this ideal, Tyrrel, Grimes, and Gines are situated at the opposite end of that scale" (870- 871). Fludernik adds that "Collins . . . does *not once* use the term sublime in reference to Falkland but exclusively applies the label to Mr. Clare" (869). Fludernik's observations support the notion that Mr. Clare is martyred in the novel, like Burke: according to Godwin, Burke was "one of those memorable geniuses from whom we are meant to imbibe virtue through the mediation of the sublime" (862). In another example, Fludernik notes that "Clare is an idealized picture of Edmund Burke, without Burke's characteristic rage--a feature given to Falkland in the novel. . . . When Clare reads Falkland's poem, he 'exhibits' its beauties to full advantage (26), giving ample scope to the implicitly sublime features of Falkland's composition" (870). Fludernik adds "Mr. Clare's truly sublime nature manifests itself particularly in Falkland's veneration for him" (870).

<sup>53</sup> "Romance and chivalry are used as interchangeable terms in *Caleb Williams*: both Caleb and Falkland imbibe the poison (of chivalry and curiosity) from their reading of romances which celebrate the sublime genius of great men" (Fludernik 863).

<sup>54</sup> While Fludernik views Clare's role as a 'buffer' as acting to protect Falkland from himself--"Clare ironically notes his inability to protect Falkland from the 'malignant distemper' to which he is prone" (870)--I argue Clare serves as a buffer between Tyrrel and Falkland.

<sup>55</sup> I borrow the phrasing "undecidability" from Derrida (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes 422) and "crisis" from Downes (418) who argues "Clithero's story" in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly, or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (New York: Penguin, 1988), "suggests that the crises of decision peculiar to the subject of a postrevolutionary state have a precursor in the crisis of intentionality that is structured into the revolutionary moment" (Downes 420).

<sup>56</sup> “Caleb describes his exalted state of mind on the ‘discovery of Falkland’s’ secret in heightened language that recalls Burke’s version of the sublime . . . this state leads him to try and discover the contents of Falkland’s chest. Although this action proves ultimately ironic, it introduces the possibility that the mind’s highest potential may be reached not in the exercise of rational thought, but in its *suspension*” (Clemmit 62; emphasis mine). I prefer, in this characterization of Caleb to use ‘undecidable’ rather than ‘suspended’ because Caleb’s obsessions are over whether he acts or narrates ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, a dilemma that leaves him constantly indecisive. I argue that this trait gets figured in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century American literature, to use Clemmit’s term, as a *suspension* experienced across continents by a transatlantic subject of revolution, which I will discuss in Chapters 2-4. Psychoanalytic readings of Caleb’s relationship to Falkland are performed by Alex Gold, who focuses on Caleb’s “persecution-mania and paranoia,” and Rudolf F. Storch, who follows Caleb’s transformation as “a dangerous neurotic” as a result of ‘projecting’ his “Calvinist guilt on the God-figure Falkland” (Fludernik 858). Corber examines a potential “homosexual love affair” with Falkland, while Boulton, Butler, McCracken, and Storch all contend Falkland is a “close counterpart” to the ‘rumored’, homosexual Edmund Burke (Fludernik 858). Criticism such as Klaus, Myers, Gold, Graham, Uphaus, and Wehrs have noted Caleb to be Falkland’s “alter ego” and Fludernik notes that characters are either “oppressors or victims” (Fludernik 859). “If Godwin predates many of the psychoanalysis’ claims about modern power, he represents the split between law and obscene master as complicated by the discourse of sentimentality that became so important in the period of the French Revolution” (Garofalo 240). Garofalo writes “chivalric law has actually failed” and “by ignoring this failure, Caleb . . . becomes a guardian of the very ideology he would dismantle” (240). Joel Faflak reads Godwin’s novel as ‘speaking’ “prophetically about psychoanalyses as the symptom of an Enlightenment epistemophilia without cure” (103). Isabelle Bour argues that *Caleb Williams* ‘depicts’ “how the ethical-epistemological model of sensibility has become insufficient as an account of the human mind, yet at the same time acts as a ferment for a new representation of the psyche and of man as a social being” (813). Robert W. Uphaus reveals the problems of reading the novel politically and suggests we read it psychologically instead: “To regard Caleb as a prototype of the reformist revolutionary, bent on implementing the rights of man . . . is to isolate abstract gesture and apparent social significance at the expense of the turbulent psychological experience of reading the novel. . . . *Caleb Williams* simply does not deal exclusively with social injustice . . . but rather it deals with human culpability and vulnerability” (279). For me, the problem of the subject is political, not just psychoanalytic.

<sup>57</sup> I reformulate a similar question posed by Derrida: “And the autonomy of one which both gives itself, and signs, its own law? Who signs all these authorizations to sign?” (13).

<sup>58</sup> “the ‘Glorious’ Revolution of 1688 was a revolution, indeed the English revolution, because it removed a usurping tyrant in order to restore ancient liberties, expelling James II in order to return a ‘constitutional’ monarch William III” (Paulson 50). From 1793 a Pittite “repression” (37) evolved as a response to a new idea of sovereignty introduced in the 1770s. This set the stage for a real, actual threat to England’s government--i.e. a threat to overthrow Parliament: “The associations” . . . ‘qualified’ “as a quasi-revolutionary organization because they held large meetings . . . and because their message to the ruling class was that assemblies of private individuals, forming spontaneously throughout the land, were more representative than Parliament. These meetings pretended to be truer spokesmen of the people’s wishes than Parliament and to have the power to take binding action” (45). “They introduced the issue of sovereignty, or representation of the people, which continued to be the chief one until the Reform Act of 1832. These extraparliamentary associations being formed in 1779 were self-created assemblies aimed at overruling the official legislature, or at least at overthrowing Parliament” (45). The Gordon riots of 1780 (the “ultimate association”) put all these plans to “ruin” (45).

<sup>59</sup> In this movement, Godwin arguably enacts what many historians and readers of both English and French revolutions have argued were the original intentions of both: to return to an older, more authentically original regime to transform society. “Godwin increasingly turned back in his imagination to the period of English Revolution in the seventeenth century. In four vast volumes, he narrated *The History of the Commonwealth* (1824-28)” (Marshall 23).

<sup>60</sup> Englishmen compared the French Revolution to their “Glorious Rebellion of 1688”: specifically, their shock over the following events invited a reinterpretation of the uprising of the Glorious Rebellion to be made by the “meeting of the States General in May of 1789” and the “entry of the . . . mob”, “the declaration of one “National Assembly,” “the capture and destruction of the Bastille, the peasant risings,” . . . “the crown’s inability to dismiss the new assembly,” and Reverend Price’s declaration that ‘celebrated’ “the anniversary of 4 November 1689 as an act of revolution, of state overthrow” (Paulson 38). “For all of them,” and perhaps for Godwin, “the crucial moment in English political argument was 1688, not civil war in 1642 or even the execution of the king in 1649” (Clark 39). “The Revolution of 1688 . . . provided the intellectual foundations for the Whig regime in the decades to 1789” (40). Once loyal to the Dissenters, Burke defensively responded to the Foxite Whigs to keep alive an older legacy of the Whig position on the English revolution and to disagree with the Foxite Whigs’ approval of the French Revolution. Arguably Burke’s insistence that France’s ‘ancient constitution’ was still capable of being repaired was anachronistic, even for the *monarchiens*--an observation that Godwin may be parodying in *Caleb Williams*.

<sup>61</sup> For Radcliffe, Caleb’s “ungoverned curiosity” (*CW* 133) leads him “to pursue a narrative explanation of Falkland, for his curiosity is closely connected to the fascination with narrative that he reveals” (Radcliffe 544): “the parallel he implies between scientific reasoning and narrative is unwarranted, suggesting a misplaced faith in the transparency of narrative” (545).

<sup>62</sup> Caleb reveals how his father’s untimely death has forced him to ‘dispose’ “of the little property” his father “had left” (*CW* 5). Without a “relation in the world” to which he could make “any direct claim” to, he agrees to become his squire’s secretary (5). There his curiosity is “excited by every motive of interest and novelty to study” his “master’s character” as though he were deconstructing a novel (6).

<sup>63</sup> Michael Gamer calls *Caleb Williams* “remarkable for its combination of Gothicism and radicalism” (221). While Godwin uses a Gothic motif, his novel is a Jacobin novel: “the novel of reform, (the so-called Jacobin novel), joins the gothic in the representation of tyranny and revolution. The gothic tended to be the form adopted by those who were either against or merely intrigued by the Revolution, or by problems of freedom and compulsion. The reformers William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage, and Elizabeth Inchbald are *for* the Revolution; they call their works ‘Things as they Are,’ (etc.) . . . they avoid the gothic and theatrical trappings Burke associated with the Revolution . . . their real subject was not France but forms of compulsion in England” (Paulson 227). “The successive authority figures” in *Caleb Williams* “are associated with progressive epochs of government. Tyrrel is linked to Hercules and Antaeus, primitive mythical heroes, Falkland to Alexander, Nero, and Caligula, classical kings and tyrants, and even the thief Raymond is labeled a ‘democrat.’ It is this that sets it apart from the gothic” (227). The “gothic” novel “focused” “on the *Then*”; the “sentimentalists” focused on “the *Now*” (230). “Godwin and Jacobin novelists combined the two to see the past as the source of the present. Godwin’s example introduces the idea of historicity into the novel” (230). “*Caleb Williams* . . . can be usefully characterized as part of what came to be called Jacobin fiction--‘Jacobin’ being the term used by British conservatives to discredit expressions of political critique by associating them with the most radical strand of French revolutionary politics” (Handwerk and Markley 9). “Just as Gothic plots are driven by pervasive uncertainties about characters’ motives, so the central relationship between Caleb and Falkland in Godwin’s text is defined by awkward efforts of each to fathom the character of the other” (33). “The gothic describes a situation in which no one can understand or fathom anyone else’s motives or actions . . . a logical and syntactical obscurity joins revolution and sublimity. . . . Behind all this obscurity, however, is the elaborate plot, masterminded but slipping out of control, which involves the overthrow of a property owner” (Paulson 224).

<sup>64</sup> Gary Handwerk reads Caleb’s “desire to learn Falkland’s secret” as having “revolutionary political implications” and, quoting Uphaus, identifies this as Caleb’s desire to become Falkland’s “coequal” (953).

<sup>65</sup> “Secrets must become public” in order “to defend Caleb’s obsessive attachment to the idea that all human activity is rationally accessible” (Uphaus 282). Caleb’s curiosity is thus characterized as a “pursuit of meaning” rather than as a result of “rational inquiry” (282).

<sup>66</sup> Pamela Clemit supports this notion, by reading Caleb's narrative confession as "reflecting Godwin's early belief in the power of total frankness to erode the false opinion upon which government was established" (56). Andrew Franta also supports the notion that Caleb's revolutionary agency originates in curiosity. Specifically, Franta sees Caleb's curiosity as Godwin's way of 'mounting' a "critique of Paine's originary narratives" (702), insofar as Caleb is "bound to an origin" that is "not his own" (703). Franta points out the relationship between the origin of Caleb's curiosity and narrative: "In Caleb's pursuit of [Falkland's] secret, however, Godwin's political allegory encompasses Paine as well as Burke. One of Paine's central contentions in *Rights of Man* is that Burke's *Reflections* transposes cause and effect" (702). Paine "offers a series of narratives of the origins of the revolution" as a response to Burke, because "narratives that explain origins point the way to freedom. Paine pursues origins because knowledge of origins constitutes the ground of liberty. . . . But in the novel's reversible narrative of pursuit—in volume 2, Caleb pursues Falkland's secret; in volume 3, Falkland pursues Caleb to preserve his reputation—the attempt to trace origins, 'to possess ourselves of a clear idea,' takes a gothic turn. Godwin mounts a critique of Paine's originary narratives by means of Caleb's curiosity-his central character trait-and his enlightened inquiry into Falkland's past. In describing his curiosity, '[t]he spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterized the whole train of my life,' Caleb links rational inquiry with romance reading: 'I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes . . . this produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance (4)'" (Franta 702). Franta notes that "here," "natural philosophy leads to love of romance" (702). Franta contends that this "lineage" linking Caleb to Falkland "must be traced" "further back" because when Caleb "exposes" Falkland's guilt, Caleb "repeats the pattern set by Tyrrel's persecution of Emily Melville" [sic] (703). This "doubling" and "reversal," in which Falkland's secret 'comes back' to haunt Caleb, is significant because it not only "elaborates the relationship" "between romance and enlightenment" (where Falkland is a 'figure of romance,' and Caleb a figure of 'enlightenment'), but also demonstrates the extent by which, via "Caleb's 'inquisitive mind' (3), "Godwin radicalizes Paine's claim for the past's connection to the present" (703). In attempting to return to the origin of a secret, I argue Caleb makes constant, repeated returns, precisely because that origin has been displaced.

<sup>67</sup> Butler, for example, finds that this curiosity "destroys Caleb" (93). Like Godwin, Caleb is on a "seemingly endless quest for more knowledge that will, ultimately, result in an almost obsessive need to narrate and order all he knows" (93). Ahern's reading of Joel Faflak supports the notion that curiosity--figured in *Caleb Williams* as a "compulsion" to know (75)--binds Caleb to write a narrative that both creates and threatens the construction of a self: "Faflak shows, the desire to know the other is pathological, with curiosity figured as compulsion. Sympathy for the suffering other may . . . bind us together in community, but it exerts a 'magnetical' influence on Caleb, threatening a loss of self-control that promises to be as destructive as it is transformative. . . . Faflak reads the primal scene of sympathy as a site of trauma" (75). *Caleb Williams* both constructs and deconstructs its subject through Caleb's "compulsion" to know (75) and write a narrative. Specifically, curiosity as a "compulsion" (75) leads Caleb to become bound to the activity of writing. Ahern's reading of Faflak supports my argument that this narrative activity is both "destructive as it is transformative" in its attempt to construct a self.

<sup>68</sup> Critics who examine Caleb's relationship to literature support this argument. For example, Dorothea von Mücke identifies "Caleb's attraction to the chivalric tale and his compulsion to locate himself within it" (Ayers 30), while Elaine Ayers moves a step further, suggesting that Caleb 'appeals' to "literary tradition" to "script" his "existence" (29). In particular, Caleb's "pleasure" in listening to "praise for Kit Williams" (30) fuels his obsession with his own story. Caleb's relationship to narrative determines his subject status, ultimately leading him to compulsively write himself into self-destruction: "Recognizing Caleb's desire to see himself in literary terms, Eric Daffron demonstrates the futility of Caleb's struggle for liberation and exoneration. By adhering to the modes of romantic fiction in recording his story, Caleb attempts to manipulate communal sympathy in a manner that will only undermine his search for freedom. . . . By using the . . . forum of the confessional novel to seek social reform, Caleb employs one instrument of injustice to abolish another. . . . Imitative of narrative models, his contrived writing will only perpetuate the authority that oppresses him rather than emancipate him . . . this . . . answers for Caleb's denial of his own character in the . . . revised conclusion when he surrenders to Falkland's 'goodness': 'Since . . . memories inscribe the self, Caleb . . . gives up that self for service to another, one that will apparently confirm Falkland's socially sanctioned character'. Caleb cannot uphold literary conventions without also denying his political . . . freedom" (31).

<sup>69</sup> This idea is inspired from Downes, who argues that Edgar is "caught between the appeal of order . . . and a moral commitment to full revelation" (416).

<sup>70</sup> Claeys contends that Godwin attempted to "reconcile two contradictory theories of justice": "one being 'the political view'" (83), or "needs conception of justice" (85) and the other, "'justice merely as it exists among individuals'" (83), or "benevolence conception of justice" (85). Claeys' analysis of the multiple editions of *Political Justice* probes into the "interrelationship" between Godwin's two theories of justice, where, on the one hand, "justice involves treating our neighbor solely on the basis of 'his moral worth, and his importance to the general weal,'" and, on the other hand, "justice requires that we consider our neighbor's needs," insofar as the "latter" is a "criterion for just action" (87). Claeys says that Godwin corrects this oversight in the second edition of *Political Justice*, by 'incorporating' the "benevolence and needs conception of justice" (87). This change could arguably account for the original ending of the novel, in which as Godwin writes, "positive institutions" (government) "do not afford the best means for rewarding virtue" (89).

<sup>71</sup> "To be an individual in the Godwinian sense . . . is to empty oneself of individuality, to see how one's self fits in with everyone else's self" (Howell 78). Herein lies the indecision, or contradiction in Godwin's evolving political philosophy: Howell's analysis probes deeper into this contradiction, revealing the potential absence of a revolutionary subject to 'dissolve' "all forms of government" (81). Howell writes: "Godwin destroys the politico-ontological and politico-epistemological metaphysic involved in the *ancien regime's* modes of representation; but because of his doubts over empiricism neither does he have confidence in the epistemological and communicative processes advocated by contractarians and democrats. Further, he cannot come up with communicative procedures that would produce the autonomous but transactional individuals necessary to facilitate the dissolution of all forms of government" (81). This explanation could also account for the revised ending of the novel, in which Caleb chooses to 'save' Falkland's 'virtuous' reputation over his own, and thereby demonstrate his 'fullest' capacity to do good.

<sup>72</sup> "This scenario plays out dramatically Godwin's argument in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* that gratitude perverts justice by insisting that past benefits create a claim superior to a rational determination of relative merit . . . reason is powerless to protect the oppressed against the charge of ingratitude" (Sayres 50). Burke's "Letter to a Noble Lord" "insists" "ingratitude to benefactors is the first of revolutionary virtues" (49).

<sup>73</sup> “Joel Faflak” “reads *Caleb Williams* as a pessimistic playing out of Godwin’s earlier treatise *Political Justice*, in which conversation figures as a means to develop a public sphere founded on the mutual respect of rational citizens” (Ahern 74). Gary Handwerk, in his article “Of Caleb’s Guilt and Godwin’s Truth: Ideology and Ethics in *Caleb Williams*” argues that *Caleb Williams* runs “contrary to the explicit political assumptions and expectations of *Political Justice*” (940). Perhaps in reference to Rousseau’s social contract theory, in which a multitude acts as one man, Caleb resolves to never return to such conditions which prevent him from being able to be a citizen, and therefore both sovereign and subject: “I was astonished at the folly of my species, that they did not rise up as one man, and shake off chains so ignominious . . . to hold myself disengaged from this odious scene, and never fill the part either of the oppressor or the sufferer” (CW 156).

<sup>74</sup> “The coercion of law would be replaced by the persuasion of public opinion. . . . As people became accustomed to governing themselves . . . government would give way to the spontaneously ordered society of anarchy” (Marshall 43). “He [Godwin] dreamed of the birth of a new social order, to be introduced by discussion, in which life would be ruled by principle instead of custom, a kingless, priestless world where no man would have the control of another, where punishment was abolished, where property was owned in common, where marriage and family ties no longer restricted the freedom of the individual” (Brooks v).

<sup>75</sup> Caleb has a ‘female’ education, in that his interests are “strictly limited to romantic literature,” ‘allowing’ him to “function as a narrative ‘cross-dresser’” and be seen as a “‘female reader and Gothic heroine’” (Ayers 29). Conversely, “the nurturing of Emily’s wider interests allows her spirit to flourish in a way that might be considered ‘masculine’” (29). Scott R. MacKenzie writes that “the young unmarried woman in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British fiction . . . is in fact double, or indeed multiple. She is . . . a privileged locus for the identification and examination of collective anxieties . . . and also very frequently the focus of anxiety about the poor” (681). “This discourse of poor management differs crucially from that of aristocratic and bourgeois apologists because it is not the discourse of a class in pursuit of its own prosperity or liberation but rather a supplemental effect of the competing hegemonic strategies of the other two classes” (686).

<sup>76</sup> In “Dis-Figuring Reproduction: Natural History, Community, and the 1790s novel,” Tilottama Rajan says Jean-Luc Nancy defines “community” as “being in common” (Rajan 214). Rajan states “this community, rather than the model of civil society they inherited from the Scottish Enlightenment, was what the Jacobin novelists-dissenters with a deeply anarchistic notion of *Political Justice*-seemed to seek *avant la lettre*” (214).

<sup>77</sup> Godwin seems to stage this difficulty for a plebeian subject to emerge during Caleb’s stay in London. Jordan quotes scholars Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite in their study of “Romantic sociability.” Jordan writes: “Noting how Caleb embraces his isolation within the urban anonymity of London, they observe: ‘Caleb tries to support himself financially by producing journalism in the style of ‘Addison’s Spectators,’ an index of the difference between the early eighteenth-century public sphere and its 1790s version’” (249-250).

<sup>78</sup> *Caleb Williams* presents a revolutionary subject whose constitution is “neither legal nor illegal,” (Derrida “Force of Law” 989; qtd. in Downes 423) but dependent on an “undecidable” (Derrida 9; qtd. in Downes 422) “force” resulting from what Jacques Derrida argues (in Downes’s words) is the participation of an arbitrary, violent “tyrannical sovereignty” in the “structure” of America’s “revolutionary” moment (Downes 422).

<sup>79</sup>“The ‘enthusiasm’ which overwhelms Caleb on his escape from prison—‘Sacred and indescribable moment, when man regains his rights’—alerts the reader to Godwin’s criticism of the notion of natural rights upheld by Paine and his followers” (Clemit 62-63). “It is that mode of action on the part of the individual which constitutes ‘the best possible application of his capacity to the general benefit’. . . . This duty to practice virtue has serious implications for rights” (Marshall 30).

<sup>80</sup> “in the story of murder . . . the mystery of the initial image is genuine. . . . That truth is never given and never certain; the news is a carrier of mysteries” (49) (Dionne 415).

<sup>81</sup> (Price 76).

<sup>82</sup> “Having witnessed the French Revolution turn into the Terror, during which argument was replaced by the guillotine, Godwin did not give his wholehearted support to revolution in the sense of a sudden and violent transformation of society. Revolution may be instigated by a horror against tyranny, but it can also be tyrannical in turn, especially if there is an attempt to coerce the people through the threat of punishment” (Marshall 36-37). “Godwin approved the French Revolution so long as he had to consider only the problems presented to him by Rousseau, and the reforms urged by Turgot; he shrank not only from the violence of the Terror, but even from the political associations which sought to mature possible changes before they were openly suggested, and from such healthy popular risings as the destruction of the Bastille” (Paulson 110).

<sup>83</sup> Falkland’s desire to confront Caleb could be read as a critique of the failure for the French Revolution to restore an *ancien* regime. “It is even possible that Falkland therefore equals *ancien* regime France, and Caleb the early moderate reformers of the Revolution—Lafayette and the Girondins, and in particular General Dumouriez” (Paulson 239).

<sup>84</sup> Radcliffe contends the reason why Collins does not ‘wish’ to hear Caleb is “because of the danger that Caleb’s story might ‘show . . . that there was no criterion by which vice might be prevented from being mistaken for virtue’ (*CW*, p.310), and like Laura, he prefers to remain ignorant of Caleb’s story” (Radcliffe 549).

<sup>85</sup> Many critics concur in this reading that Caleb’s revolutionary subjectivity is an ‘illness’ in which writing and its erasure are the crucial symptoms. Jon Klancher notes that the French Revolution introduced . . . a true “crisis of representation,” whereby revolutionary intellectuals faced the task of representing “the people to themselves” while also needing to efface their own role as representers. (412)

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Kenneth W. Graham in “The Gothic Unity of Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*,” calls Caleb’s “subjective narrative” a “wavering, nervous account of passion and compulsion” (49) that “ends” “enveloped by an uncertainty that extends even to his own identity” (55). “Such acknowledgments of uncertainty with regard to . . . identity, and sanity make Caleb’s narrative dubious testimony” (55).

<sup>87</sup> In a related argument, Thomas Pfau describes Logan's "nervous" subject to be simultaneously dependent on "hysteria," in that "it becomes the basic condition of speech," and threatened by it, because "hysteria" "undermines the authority to speak" (Logan, qtd. in Pfau 79). Pfau's conception of the 'paranoiac' supports my reading of Caleb as a revolutionary subject poised to recognize himself as instrumental to his political transformation: "The . . . specter of the paranoiac . . . involves finding his totalizing interpretation confirmed . . . and thus being forced not only to accept the radical transformation of a cherished order but also to recognize his own anxious . . . interpretations as . . . the means for the unraveling of that fantasy. . . . [P]aranoia is . . . a process of transition, away from the ideological fiction of a timeless past . . . embodied in Burke's nomenclature of 'custom' . . . 'tradition,' and the 'antient (sic) constitution') and toward a wholly deregulated concept of historical time. . . . The paranoid subject . . . comes to recognize its own suspicious intelligence as the . . . instrument for bringing about an outcome that it had sought to preempt by its contestation of established values (e.g., custom, habit, honor, virtue, etc.)" (Pfau 83-84). Moreover, Pfau's identification of a 'retroactive causation' model in *Caleb Williams* supports my theory that the construction of the subject is dependent on the agency of its narrator. If Caleb is caught in the dilemma of having to narrate a past that will disqualify him from having a future, then his only choice is to attempt to *rewrite* his past to legitimize himself as both narrator and subject. Godwin's "new" "overdetermined model of subjectivity"--in which "every idea that" "offers itself to the mind is modified by all the ideas that ever existed in it" (Godwin, qtd. in Pfau 121)--"aims" to 'realize' a "past that will sanction the coherence of the present narrative" (126). This new subject *must compulsively* write to 'produce' the past that it just broke from. Because this narrative features Caleb's "paranoid voice" and is thus not coherent, Caleb is not either. Pfau supports the notion that Caleb's compulsion to write is intended--not for the acquisition of knowledge--but rather to (re)-create the conditions that will give him legitimacy and 'coherency' as an author and subject: "Writing . . . is equated with surveillance [curiosity], it is so less for the purpose of ascertaining" "truth about its individual subject than in order to prove" "narrative is capable of producing" the "past that it" "posited as its hypothetical point of departure" (125). This "narrative model" in *Caleb Williams* departs from "progressive causation"--where "prose here seeks to undo 'things as they are' and . . . end the present's complicity with a past"--by embracing a model of "retroactive causation" in which "effects" produce "their own causes" (131).

<sup>88</sup> Other critics support the notion that Caleb's nervous, writing compulsion makes him an unreliable narrator. While Pfau argues that Caleb's unreliability as a narrator derives from his "shift to tracing causes from effects" (142), Pamela Clemit claims that Caleb's "rational but also compulsive" (62) narrative unreliability originates in "his first-person account," which "throws the burden" of "decision on the reader" and 'solicits' "his or her active participation" (6). One could further say that Caleb's writing is *obsessive-compulsive*, in that writing his narrative causes him an anxiety that he (unsuccessfully) attempts to relieve by further rewriting. For example, Caleb admits that reading allows him to forget his "past misfortunes": "I determined to attempt, at least for my own use, an etymological analysis of the English language. . . . I was unintermitted in my assiduity, and my collections promised to accumulate. Thus I was provided with sources both of industry and recreation, the more completely to divert my thoughts from the recollection of my past misfortunes" (295).

<sup>89</sup> Jerrold E. Hogle locates a similar failure for Caleb's narrative to stabilize subjectivity, by contending that the "novel fails" "to represent the subjects it proposes" and 'grounds' "itself primarily in the march of words" (261). Hogle explains how the style of *Caleb Williams* is "different from itself" in that "it offers nothing besides the multiplicity and the opacity of Caleb's relation to his textual Other" (269). Hogle views the existence of other characters as part of this whole rhetorical system: "As for Clare and Hawkins, they exist as spaces of writing the moment they enter the tale" (269). Caleb, for Hogle, becomes representative of multiple texts the moment he decides to become narrator: "The moment [Caleb] decides to 'drop the person of Collins' (his primary source) and to 'interweave with Mr. Collins' story various information which I afterwards received from other quarters' (*CW*, 9-10), Caleb is announcing his production as a multiple *textus*—an 'interweaving'—of words already produced. His field of endeavor is not 'what happened'; it is the plural and reversible matrix of the signifiers he faces. Even his main informant is a figure of speech, 'the person of Collins' instead of Collins himself, and Caleb appropriates the same figure ('I') as the grammatical subject for his own construction of the past. By doing so . . . he links every figure in the flashback to 'my happiness, my name, and my existence' (*CW*, 10), thereby turning them after the fact into (pre)(post) figurations of his own tale" (270). Hogle argues that because Caleb "has no presence of meaning at the core of his mind," "he cannot defend his character as more than a figuration, a 'character' in the literal sense. His 'self' is a changeable production of the textual Other and is left as such, yet a closure of meaning is attempted even if the attempt fails" (275).

<sup>90</sup> I draw this idea from Hogle's contention that "Caleb tries to create a self" "by making himself an 'I' wrapped up in textual chains that are different from him and . . . their own referents" (262).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Hogle: "On every page of the novel . . . there are four levels of discourse that . . . draw the reader into word-patterns that play by their own rules. The first level . . . enters into rhetorical systems that promise to connect Caleb with a permanent essence in the cosmos" (262).

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Hogle: "Caleb's rhetorics for maintaining 'truth' end up referring to the pure performance of signs that controls the speaker (and the writer) of the text" (262).

<sup>93</sup> Logan agrees that the "cancellation" of the "original ending" and its replacement disqualifies both Caleb and his story, suggesting: "that Godwin located a problem in the novel's central rationale. The revised ending supports this view. In it, Caleb succeeds in the trial through his triumphant speech but suddenly disavows the entire narrative. 'I began these memoirs,' Caleb says in his final words, 'with the idea of vindicating my character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate' (326). Instead of letting his story stand as a first-person narrative seeking sympathy, in the nervous form, Godwin reframes it as a documentary of Caleb's own errors. . . . the nervous narrator of the novel is recontained as an object of study rather than a subject, as one whose diseased and effeminized body speaks and who, in the act of speaking, de-authorizes the content of his speech" (Logan 217).

<sup>94</sup> Horrocks however, points out the danger of this "self-knowledge" of potentially 'vindicating' "the narrative that has oppressed Caleb throughout," making Falkland's narrative "true" (43). Horrocks sees that usurpation as taking place in the opening and closing paragraphs of the novel, where in the opening of the novel "my story" is "replaced" by "thy story" (43). Instead of 'breaking through' to "self-knowledge", this ending seems to be a "return" to "mystery" (44).

<sup>95</sup> Mitzi Myers argues similarly, reading the agency of Caleb's narrative as redeeming his potential as a revolutionary subject: "At worst, the memoirs will serve as the agent of his vengeance; his pen will stab Falkland and destroy his reputation forever. In this final numbered chapter of Caleb's memoirs, narrative time and writing time are one, just as Caleb the author and Caleb the protagonist are essentially one" (618). Myers argues that Caleb achieves subjectivity when Falkland is transformed into a "demonic monster" in the original ending, while subjectivity is converted to "sympathy" in the revised ending (624).

<sup>96</sup> Dumas argues similarly that Caleb's subjectivity has been figuratively eliminated and replaced by a stone, in contending "the final reduction of" Caleb's "independence, his identity, and his very humanity" is "symbolized in his comparison of himself first to a chair" and then to the stone (592).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. David Collings's reading of the original manuscript, in which he contends that Caleb 'discovers' "that narrative cannot fully capture who he is, that truth is found in the failures of articulation" (857).

<sup>98</sup> David Collings argues that the original ending "gives Caleb the chance to act out the fantasy that he is the solitary truth-teller in the face of a closed and total system of oppression" (856). Collings contends "the novel anticipates Lacan's theory of the subject": "As Joan Copjec argues, '[t]he fact that it is materially impossible to say the whole truth-that truth always backs away from language, that words always fall short of their goal-founds the subject'" (872).

<sup>99</sup> Brown, Charles Brockden. *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*. Ed. Grabo, Norman S. New York: Penguin Books, 1799. Print. References in my text and notes hereafter cite the title of this edition as *EH*.

<sup>100</sup> Critics vary as to what, specifically, *Edgar Huntly* critiques. For example, Bruckner reads *Edgar Huntly* as a "'critique of the 1785 Land Ordinance Act' (202)" (qtd. in Burnham). Murison notes that "scholars read *Edgar Huntly* as a national allegory in which Edgar's armed conflict with the Lenni Lenape Indians and his seemingly passive sleepwalking participate in the construction of a particularly violent and imperial-yet paradoxically inert-American identity during the early national period" (243). Dawes argues that Brown was "critically engaged with the sensationalist psychology of the late Enlightenment but that also anticipated, like the work of William James, many of the experiential principles of human emotion that would find empirical confirmation in the contemporary lexicons of the cognitive sciences" (458). Similarly, Voloshin finds that "Brown uses the gothic genre to call into question the coherence of the external world and . . . the coherence of the perceiving self" (262). Bernard and Shapiro write that *Edgar Huntly* offers a "commentary on the revolutionary and colonial struggles of the eighteenth-century, and inward to observations on how individual consciousness and forms of collective interaction are shaped by these conditions" (xvii). *Edgar Huntly* is "the first American novel to dramatize frontier violence between settlers and first peoples" (Bernard and Shapiro xix). In particular, Bernard and Shapiro claim that "Brown is critical of the patterns of imperialism, expansionism, and racialism that he depicts in *Edgar Huntly*. . . . Brown's staging of settler-Indian relations not only frames Edgar's actions within a critical account of frontier violence, but it also arguably makes this novel an implicit critique and rejection of late eighteenth-century Quaker political tracts and captivity narratives, which were written to present the Quaker community's self-interested interpretation of ongoing multiethnic frontier conflicts" (xix). Overall, Bernard and Shapiro view *Edgar Huntly* as "one of the first anti-imperialist narratives, as a story that inverts and deflates the myth that Anglo invasion is a culturally beneficial and socially progressive act" (xlii).

<sup>101</sup> As Voloshin states, "motive [in Edgar] does not seem to be easily locatable in the consciousness that theoretically comprises the self" (Voloshin 270). "The sense conveyed in *Edgar Huntly* and Brown's other novels that complicated motives and unknown agents are always threatening to overthrow an apparent order is not out of step with the tendency of other literature of the early Federal period to picture chaos coming to the cherished orders of eighteenth-century thought. . . . The power of Brown's fictions, and some of their weaknesses, derive from Brown's simultaneous commitment to ideas of order and his undermining of those very notions" (276).

<sup>102</sup> I borrow the expression "crisis of authority" from Elliott (Elliott 19) and Davidson (Davidson 71).

<sup>103</sup> Critics read the particulars of this crisis differently, but agree that it is overwhelmingly political. For example, Clemit locates this crisis within the American government: “The Republicans retained the high ideal of man’s innate integrity and wanted to see an agrarian nation based on this principle, with minimal government interference in private affairs. By contrast the Federalists, led by John Adams, were more pessimistic. They argued for the need for external controls to maintain law and order and to regulate the economy, and they favoured a stratified society on the English model” (114). Kutchen’s summary of this crisis suggests it is transatlantic in nature: “For Brown, as for the young Republic, the post-revolutionary 1790s were, fundamentally, a post-traumatic decade. The persistent and deeply anxious hypervigilance over the contagion of French radicalism and the conspiracies of Jacobins, the plagues of yellow fever that grotesquely embodied the worst nightmares of a haunted Republic, the spread of radical rationalism with the rise of Godwinism and Jeffersonian republicanism, the return of militant mobs to the streets of Philadelphia and New York City—all the sublime terror and temporal confusion of a society poised on the verge of beginning the world again were to Brown a traumatic repetition of innocence and stability lost to the violence of Whig paranoia” (Kutchen 1). Ezra Tawil also supports the notion that *Edgar Huntly* serves as a commentary on post-revolutionary transatlantic history: “‘eighteenth-century arguments for American literary nationalism were quite explicitly shaped by . . . European culture’ (105)” (qtd. in Tennenhouse 4).

<sup>104</sup> Downes reads David Waldstreicher and finds that “‘The new nation could not exist until the people spontaneously celebrated its existence, until evidence of this nationwide celebration appeared in print’ (In the Midst, 30)” (qtd. in Downes, *Democracy* 26-27). This suggests that for the American subject to exist, a publication affirming its existence would also have to spontaneously come out; hence the suggestiveness of the dual title, *Memoirs* and *Edgar Huntly*. One problem remains: if the birth of Edgar’s subjectivity can only take place at the same time as the writing of the *Memoirs*, then what does the “or” perform? The “or” could act as a trace of this rhetorical supplement that emerges at the birth of the new nation and subject. As Downes writes, “to be a subject of the American Revolution” is to ‘write’ “anonymously to your citizen-self” (*Democracy* 30). Perhaps then, one could read Edgar’s writing of *Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* as him “writing” “anonymously” to himself, to construct himself. But because of the presence of the “or” one questions whether the “sleepwalker” is really Edgar as it may also be Clithero. More broadly, the “or” could suggest the rupture Downes identifies between the people and the government, between the “body” of the “sovereign populace” and “those who speak in their name” (the representatives) (*Democracy* 30). Downes draws on Waldstreicher’s reading of Derrida’s examination of the “structure” of events: the Declaration of Independence “cites itself at the origin; it begins as a unique event and as that event’s (self-) quotation” (*Democracy* 27). Similarly, *Edgar Huntly* or *Memoirs* is attempting to cite itself even in its doubled title--to, in effect, represent itself, at the same time that “it gives birth to itself” (Derrida 10): *Memoirs* begets the subject “Edgar Huntly.” In other words, the “subject of *democracy*” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 418; original emphasis) is represented by “Edgar Huntly” but at the same time is not completely represented, which is why the title of the novel would need the *Memoirs* to support its legitimacy, or cite the origin of *Edgar Huntly*. As Downes might suggest, *Edgar Huntly*, as a subject, cannot stand alone as a represented subject--and thus requires a printed document to legitimize both [his] birth and his self-representation. The “or” then, might alert readers to the fact that neither “Edgar Huntly” nor the *Memoirs* are perfect, whole substitutions, but rather, incomplete substitutions, and incomplete constitutions of a whole subject and a whole narrative. Could “Edgar Huntly” be a sign that is cited by the *Memoirs*? Could “Edgar Huntly”--as Derrida says--be “‘put between quotation marks’ (*Limited Inc.*, 12)” (qtd. in Downes, *Democracy* 27)? Huntly could be, like Benjamin Franklin, in so far as “the self that Franklin writes (and this is a self that his *Memoirs* helped . . . to invent) is a democratic self” (Downes, *Democracy* 53). It is also possible that the “or” draws attention to the fissure on either side of its divide. Thus, Murison focuses on the split subjectivity already suggested by the title *Memoirs*: “[i]n naming *Edgar Huntly* a ‘memoir’, Brown calls explicit attention to the logical relationship between memory and first-person narrative only to undercut the trust implied in that relationship” and bring “attention to the fissures in the genre of ‘memoir’” (257).

<sup>105</sup> I borrow the idea that Edgar is caught between old and new worlds from Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (1). However, Hinds frames her argument through a financial lens rather than a political one, arguing that *Edgar Huntly* “provides an allegory of the effect of commerce on Old World expectations of inheritance based in landownership” (E. Hinds 1). I agree with her point that Brown “places *Edgar Huntly* . . . at the heart of this dilemma, longing for a position within a pseudo-feudal order” but I disagree with her contention that Edgar seeks “revenge for his lost opportunity” (1).

<sup>106</sup> “Brown’s mixed allegiance to Godwin should be seen in the light of American conservative reaction against revolutionary ideas” (Clemit 113). Critics agree that while Brown borrows from Godwin, he also questions him. Bernard and Shapiro, for example, highlight Brown’s methodical influence from “the British radical-democratic writers of the period,” in particular, the “Woldwinites (Anglo-Jacobin) writers,” which included William Godwin (Bernard and Shapiro xv). This “group explicitly rejected the Jacobin position in favor of the kind of progressive cultural politics that Brown adapts from the group” (Bernard and Shapiro xv) and believed “that individuals are shaped or conditioned by their social environments” (Bernard and Shapiro xvi). “Brown adopts their environmentalist arguments but also, as a second-wave Woldwinites, recognizes that their ideas about social construction and action are incomplete” (Bernard and Shapiro xvi). Davidson observes Brown’s ultimate rejection of Godwinism (after the publication of *Edgar Huntly*) as a move that aligned him with Federalist sympathizers: “The very decision to write a novel in the new Republic, especially a Gothic novel, constituted an ideological choice almost as definite as the decision to write a Federalist manifesto” (335). Brown published *Edgar Huntly* four years before 1803, the year he “publicly rejected *both* the novel form and his earlier Godwinism” (Davidson 335). For further discussion of Godwin’s impact on Brown, see Clemit, Verhoeven, and Emerson.

<sup>107</sup> Critics, for the most part, agree on a generalized definition of “springs of action,” with only slight variance. For example, Voloshin defines it as “motive” (274). Cahill’s definition suggests that it means the study of agency: “springs of action” is a “quasi-scientific . . . metaphor for the origin of motives and desires. The phrase was popularized in Francis Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) . . . Hutcheson’s ‘springs’ are . . . ‘instructions’ to the body, similar in form and function to the nervous system. . . . Through them, the imagination is stimulated by pleasure into both engendering ideal action and maintaining social conformity . . . [they] represent the ambivalence of psychic motivation, the central conflict of Brown’s fictional world. In his Preface to *Edgar Huntly* . . . Brown elaborates the specific implications of this conflict by nationalizing the ‘springs of action’ according to two distinct but related sources of imaginative experience--aesthetic culture and psychological disorder” (35-36). Bernard and Shapiro note that “‘Springs of action’ refers to a search for the causes and conditions of events and behaviors that are both individual and social. Brown belongs to the broad spectrum of period writers who believe the two are interlinked; he believes that if we can understand personal actions, we can also perceive the causes of social events and changes” (3).

<sup>108</sup> “*Edgar Huntly* was his [Brown’s] most popular work and went into a second edition in 1801” (Elliott 266).

<sup>109</sup> Downes argues for “Edgar’s politico-moral indecision” (417). I base my formulation of Edgar as an indecisive subject on Downes’s theory that postrevolutionary subjects suffer from “anxiety” (Downes, “Sleep-Walking” 426) indecision: “As the narrative within Edgar’s narrative, Clithero’s story also suggests that the crises of decision peculiar to the subject of a postrevolutionary state have a precursor in the crisis of intentionality that is structured into the revolutionary moment” (420).

<sup>110</sup> Gardner, among others, observes that, as a “narrator,” Edgar is a “divided self” (Gardner 429). Bellis agrees that there is a “tension within Huntly’s narration. Just as he feels impelled to both withhold and reveal the contents of the letters, he feels driven to both repress and describe the central incidents of his own story” (47).

<sup>111</sup> Critics view this split or division in Edgar's subjectivity differently. For example, Schulz finds that "the struggle between Waldegrave and Clithero" "come to represent the contradictory forces in the hero's [Edgar's] psyche" (329). Gardner views his division in nationalistic terms, in other words, as raising the question of "national" "identity" "rather than (generally) human or (particularly) individual (429). He notes that "critics have . . . suggested that the Native Americans, like the wilderness they inhabit, are finally best read as projections of Huntly's divided self and repressed guilt" (430). He reads "the tropes and metaphors of race" in *Edgar Huntly* as serving "the political and literary project of constructing national identity. Deriving its terms from the debates surrounding the Alien and Sedition Acts, *Edgar Huntly* describes how the act of exorcising from the land the alien . . . allows American identity to come into existence" (Gardner 430). Bernard and Shapiro similarly view Clithero as "trapped between mutually incompatible modes of masculinity" and as such read "his sleep-walking . . . as a metaphor for his being caught in between two states of identity" (xxxv). Fluck views the existence of a "rational self" and an "unruly self" in *Edgar Huntly*, with the unruly self threatening to destroy the rational self, but also driving the rational self to "hidden springs" of behavior: "the relation between the 'real' and the imaginary is . . . presented as a relation of doubling, in which the unruly self manifests itself in . . . somnambulism, skillful ventriloquizing, or the metamorphosis into a state of savagery and thus constantly eludes the grasp of the 'rational' self" (Fluck 32-33). "In accordance with its varying semanticizations as supernatural, invisible, or savage, this other side repeatedly threatens to destroy or manipulate the self, and yet, despite its destructive force, it remains an object of almost scientific curiosity which drives the self to ever new forays into the 'hidden springs' of human behavior" (Fluck 33).

<sup>112</sup> Smith-Rosenberg argues that both Edgar and Clithero are conflated, "colonized and colonizing subjects" (494). She locates a divided subjectivity in the "years following the American Revolution" (Smith-Rosenberg 494-495) in which "Euro-American subjectivity . . . fused two subject positions: the victorious postcolonial and the colonizer, heir to Britain's imperial venture in North America . . . Brown seems to say" that "Euro-Americans" "can never completely abandon their connection with the colonized, for to do so would be to refuse their identity as Euro-Americans. Does this mean . . . that the Euro-American can never aspire to a cohesive, unitary subjectivity? That she or he is an always divided subject? *Edgar Huntly's* refusal of rational and cohesive subjectivity suggests that the Euro-American is always a divided self" (495). Hinds also argues for Edgar's dual identity as a colonized/colonizer: Edgar is in "the 'border' condition of the Second World settler" in that he "occupies the position of both colonizer and colonized" as a "settler subject": "[a]s Edgar's family has 'relocated' the Delaware in the past, Edgar has himself been likewise dislocated, first by the death of his parents at the hands of Natives and second by his loss of inheritance during the course of the novel; the Huntly family's land is itself threatened with Delaware reoccupation in the novel's present (the 1760s)" (Hinds 334). Bernard and Shapiro also view "Edgar as the representative of an invading Anglo presence" whose actions in the novel are representative of its "anti-imperialist" message--i.e., that "the real werewolves are not the native peoples but the so-called civilized Europeans who are bestially invading and devouring aboriginal peoples' lands (whether Celtic or Delaware)" (xlii). The novel, argue Bernard and Shapiro, serves as a critique of the Quaker community, "with their complicity as they financially benefit from English imperial rule over the Pennsylvania frontier while absenting themselves from the dirty work and moral responsibility for killing and 'removing' Indians" (xlii).

<sup>113</sup> Edgar arguably attempts to rewrite his colonial past, as Gibbons might suggest. Specifically, Edgar's attempt to write his *Memoirs* could be seen as acting out a historical "determination not only to break with European prehistories but to wipe out the very notion of 'the sins of the past' that informed the American Enlightenment" (Gibbons 26). Brown is arguably able to use Clithero as a reinforcement of his Gothic project of rewriting American history as innocent. "[U]nlike his European counterparts," the Indian's "primitivism" "attested to a primordial state of nature, in keeping with the recasting of the wilderness as the setting for a new ordeal of innocence" (Gibbons 29). As such, the Indian other [and consequently, Clithero, by association] would have allowed Brown to cast the new Republic as innocent of history: "by the late eighteenth century, Americans had succeeded in drawing a veil over the European past" (29).

<sup>114</sup> Emerson makes note of Edgar's obsession with history or his "will to know the whole past, to know, perhaps, more of the past than has passed" (34).

<sup>115</sup> I build on an idea from Downes, who believes Edgar appropriates the Indians: "*Edgar Huntly's* appropriation of native American peoples and landscapes locates the threat and the force of revolutionary transformation on its uncertain borders" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 425). Gardner agrees that Edgar's "pioneering boast" is "disproved when he awakes the next day in the cavern above which he now stands and encounters his predecessors in the form of a band of Indians" (Gardner 442). Gardner suggests that Edgar's discovery of Clithero only strengthens his identification of Clithero as being like a savage native, in so far as he "proves able to negotiate the forest with an agility worthy of a native, a skill that threatens Edgar's pride" (442).

<sup>116</sup> Critics agree that Edgar becomes Clithero's "double" in the novel. For example, Smith-Rosenberg writes that "The introduction of the Irish native, Clithero, as Huntly's destabilizing twin--indeed, as his mad double--constitutes the text's ultimate destabilizing move. . . . Clithero's narrative mirrors Huntly's, while Clithero doubly doubles Huntly as an emblematic middle-class subject and as a problematized colonial subject" (Smith-Rosenberg 492). Slater argues that Clithero is "Edgar's alter ego" (206); Gardner also writes that "Edgar and Clithero . . . undergo parallel experiences, marking them as the first in a long tradition of psychological doubles out of which will be born the masterpieces of Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne. But Edgar and Clithero's doubleness is crucial primarily insofar as it makes explicit their differences" (450). J. Hinds also notes that "Clithero Edny" is Edgar's "double" (331). Cf. Bernard and Shapiro xxiii and xxiii.

<sup>117</sup> Gardner argues that the alien other is a precondition for Edgar's subjectivity, in so far as "constructing and exorcising the alien is the precondition of a national identity. Without the alien there is no American" (432). I agree and believe that Edgar's quasi-colonial efforts to rehabilitate Clithero could be because he sees himself in him (as an American). Gardner writes, "The American, in its hunt for the alien, has become the savage his narrative had made of Clithero" (444). In other words, while the precondition for Edgar's democratic subjectivity seems contingent on him constructing Clithero as an alien other, the question remains whether Edgar's survival as a subject is dependent on Clithero *remaining* an alien other. Gardner writes "[i]t is only by aggressively exorcising the Indian from the land"--and arguably, by association, Clithero too--"that Edgar will be able finally to exorcise the Indian from himself" (447). With only "his property" remaining "to mark him as distinct from the savage he had almost become," "Edgar can identify himself as an American" "through language alone" (Gardner 448-449). He must also stop attempting to redeem Clithero--an act that Sarsefield views as treasonous (Gardner 449). Gardner argues that Edgar's "misguided attempt to redeem the contagious alien" "secures" the "difference" between Edgar and Clithero, such that Edgar comes out at the end a "true defender of America" (450). Gardner suggests that Edgar colonizes or "claims ownership of the forest and the rights, skills, and qualities of the Indian, not by becoming an Indian, but by killing Indians; it is the alien Clithero--who does himself fatally *become* the Indian--who allows Edgar to achieve this feat. Aliens become Indians; Americans become Indian-killers. By "collapsing Indian and alien together and clearing both from the land, a unique national identity is born" (453).

<sup>118</sup> In describing Norwalk as “the termination of a sterile and narrow tract, which begins in the Indian country” and “continues upwards of fifty miles,” Edgar prepares readers for a brief narrative foray into “former” violent episodes of Indian displacement and retaliatory ‘destruction’ prior to the American Revolution (Kafer 165-166).

<sup>119</sup> The fusil refers to “two Indian frontiers”: “As Sarsefield’s double-barreled musket from the Bengal campaign turns up to be used by Edgar against the Delawares, Brown seems to suggest that the two Indian frontiers—one in North America, the other in South Asia—are linked because both belong to the same environment of conflicts between imperial powers mediated through native populations” (Bernard and Shapiro xxxi). Various other critics remark on the mixed, transatlantic nature of the frontier struggles presented in the novel. For example, Smith-Rosenberg finds *Edgar Huntly*’s “frontier violence” to be “undisciplined”: “the novel moves from a former site of British imperialism, Pennsylvania, to an ongoing site of British imperialism, Ireland—and back again—from the struggle of a landless Pennsylvania youth to find a secure niche in the middle classes to the struggle of a landless native Irish boy to find the same security.”(488). She agrees that the fusil acts to link both American and British continents: “It is with Sarsefield’s Indian rifle that Huntly fights and kills the Delaware warriors, thus linking Huntly’s Euro-American colonizing thrusts to Sarsefield’s Anglo-Indian/Anglo-Irish imperial ventures (a linking mirrored in the ‘real world’, where Euro-American/American Indian land treaties were modeled after British treaties with Mogul princes in India). The rifle, as symbol of British imperialism, is then doubled in its turn as Sarsefield proffers Huntly a second gift, the hand of the Anglo-Irish heiress, Clarice (who had earlier been Clithero’s fiance)” (493).

<sup>120</sup> Smith-Rosenberg calls the panther a “savage native American ‘panther’ (a misnomer evoking images of India that Brown will later build upon) and its alter ego—the savage American Indian” (489). Gardner also says that “the panther” “serves to forge the connection between Clithero and the Indian in two important ways. First, the panther points toward Abraham Panther’s popular captivity narrative . . . cited by Richard Slotkin as a source for Brown’s novel. But more important, the panther—referred to almost exclusively as the ‘savage’—has emerged from Clithero’s den, suggesting the Irishman’s transmutation into this ‘savage’ form (443). Bernard and Shapiro state that “Edgar regards panthers and Indians alike as savage others who threaten the Anglo-Quakers of Solebury” (xxxix).

<sup>121</sup> The Indians would not have ‘fit’ the description of an ‘American’ under the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798). As Brown demonstrates, “the Federalists’ anti-alien discourse was at times a racialized discourse about the dangers of French Indian-like savagery. By linking the alien and the Indian, Gardner argues, Brown and his contemporaries racialized the alien, thereby making him distinguishable from the ‘true’ white American” (Levine 97).

<sup>122</sup> After the Delaware Indians had been “defrauded of about 1,200 square miles of tribal territory in what is now northern Bucks, Lehigh, and Northampton counties in Pennsylvania” in 1737, in the “infamous Walking Purchase Treaty that was an instrument of fraud in seizing Delaware tribal lands” “[t]he forcible removal of the Delawares took several more years and was only accomplished after the Iroquois-Quaker negotiation of 1742, when Canasatego and the Iroquois declared the Delawares ‘women’ and evicted them from their lands on behalf of Anglo-Quaker interests” (Bernard and Shapiro xx).

<sup>123</sup> Critics, such as J. Hinds, argue that Queen Mab's [Deb's] presence signifies a resistance to Edgar's colonial presence. As a "colonizing" secondary narrative (J. Hinds 334) that usurps Deb's "primary" (338), Edgar's narrative suggests the coexistence of two narratives in the novel: one that tells the novel's 'story' and one that tells the story of Edgar's "act of writing" (338). In particular, "'Second-World creative texts,' Watts writes, 'very deliberately live double lives, wherein secondary narratives about the act of writing coexist with otherwise recognizable primary narratives telling a story about something else' (18)" (qtd. in J. Hinds 338). "Brown's Second World, decolonizing text layers the experience of the indigene in with the narrative of the settler subject, Edgar; such layering amounts in itself to a critique of Edgar's historiography if not his story" (J. Hinds 341). Edgar's 'Indian-hating' bespeaks a colonial desire to appropriate the history-the 'text'-of the Natives, and Deb in particular . . . *his anxiety* about her ownership of history meets and matches *her desire* for that very ownership" (J. Hinds 342). Hinds also quotes Gardner: "Federalist 'anxieties about aliens were conflated with anxieties about race' (436)" (qtd. in J. Hinds 343). Despite 'succeeding' "by virtue of his [legal] ownership of language" and of the "territory" (J. Hinds 342), Edgar cannot, it seems, control the agency of Deb's story: "Deb's hybridity strengthens the discontinuity of her intervention in Edgar's story" . . . so that "[b]y virtue of hybridity, both colonizer and colonized are transformed" (344).

<sup>124</sup> "Clithero enacts the threat the middle class posed to that [Mrs. Lorimer's] aristocracy, a threat made frighteningly explicit during the 1790's by the French Revolution and concurrent Irish nationalist uprisings" (Smith-Rosenberg 493). As I argue, too, Clithero represents *multiple* threats to the new Republic: "Clithero fuses the new middle class and the savage and irrational native (Irishman). Huntly's trusting acceptance of him, despite his violent Irish past, invokes associations with William Cobbett's tales of wild Irish conspiracies against the new American republic. . . . Clithero's murderous attack parallels American Indian attacks on oppressive and land-hungry Euro-American settlers" (Smith-Rosenberg 493).

<sup>125</sup> Clithero is arguably an "incomplete identity" "in need of supplementation" in order to be reconstituted as a subject; as Downes points out, according to Laclau, "identity" in the new Republic is "incomplete" and "'the relation of representation . . . is a supplement necessary for the constitution of identity' (Laclau 290)" (qtd. in Downes, *Democracy* 26). "Supplementation" seems to be both the "condition" of "possibility" and what stands in the way of democratic subjectivity (*Democracy* 26). In this way, however, Downes points out that representation is flawed: "The substitutive 'spell' suggests that *one* will take *another's* place only for a limited amount of time" (*Democracy* 23; emphasis mine). Could Edgar be "a real substitution or a deferral, a temporary aid to the subject" (in this case Clithero) "in order to secure his permanent occupation of a place?" (*Democracy* 23). Downes uses Hannah Pitkins' observations, where in order for representation to take place "'it must be made present in some sense while nevertheless not really being present literally or fully in fact'" (*Democracy* 23-24). "This is the paradoxical requirement of representation: 'that a thing be both present and not present at the same time' ('Commentary', 40)" (Downes, *Democracy* 24). Could this explain why, in an effort to be 'present' for Clithero, Edgar sleepwalks, and is present--yet not conscious--at the same time?

<sup>126</sup> I borrow the idea of Edgar's intent of "rehabilitation" for Clithero from Downes ("Sleep-Walking" 422) and others. For example, the fact that Clithero 'needs' to be restored to 'civilization' is reinforced by his Irishness, and the tendency of eighteenth-century Quaker captivity narratives to "portray Anglo-Quakers as the conscientious captives of uncivilized and violent Irish" (Brooks 41). Ironically, it is Edgar who becomes the savage captor, as emphasized by Gardner: "the American, in his hunt for the alien, has become the savage his narrative had made of Clithero. . . . It is the project of the second half of the novel to bring Edgar back to his rightful place in society and to demonstrate how and why he can make this journey of return while Clithero cannot" (qtd. in Brooks 43). To recall Gardner again, Edgar's desire to redeem Clithero stems from "a sentimental mode of Americanization and the deism of the Jeffersonians"; Edgar "shares Crevecoeur's belief that any man, under the influence of American soil and experience, will 'feel the effects of a . . . resurrection', casting off 'his European prejudices' to be reborn a member of 'that race now called Americans'" (449).

<sup>127</sup> I borrow the idea of Edgar being a Godwinian character from Downes. Downes writes: "Edgar would seem to be one of Brown's Godwinian heroes" ("Sleep-Walking" 415).

<sup>128</sup> Various critics acknowledge Brown's debt to *Caleb Williams*, among them, Cahill: "Brown was undoubtedly influenced by the character of Falkland in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, whose metamorphosis from aesthete to crazed murderer became a powerful gothic paradigm" (Cahill 56).

<sup>129</sup> Downes argues that the American Revolution preserved practices from the absolute monarchy it sought separation from. In particular, Downes "suggests that the American Revolution initiated a democratization of the monarchy's relationship to secrecy, duplicity, arbitrariness, and magisterial madness even as it redistributed the monarch's singular autonomy" (*Democracy* ix). "[T]he monarch provided Americans with a model of sovereign autonomy that might be reproduced on an individual level; but he also exemplified a self-dissolution and mystification that would be associated with everything the revolution had come to replace" (ix). Monarchism appears in *Edgar Huntly* through Sarsefield, in particular, his attempts to "secure" Clithero or "contain the radicalism of the revolution's transformations" (Downes, *Democracy* 6). As Downes writes, "it is in Dr. Sarsefield that he [Edgar] finds his substitute for monarchic omniscience" ("Sleep-Walking" 425). But Sarsefield is also, like Edgar, a "mad doubling of colonized and colonizer, of national and middle-class subjects" who experiences both having been colonized as an Irishman and colonizing as a new, Anglo-American: "Like Huntly and Clithero, Sarsefield also began life a poor boy in a colonized land (Ireland), and like them he seeks economic security and respectability to an Anglo-Irish heiress (Mrs. Lorimer)" (Smith-Rosenberg 493). Having been both a colonized subject and a colonizer (of British India and, now, of the new Republic) Sarsefield represents the contradictory embodiment of the American Revolution's democratization of monarchic practices that Downes speaks of.

<sup>130</sup> Other critics agree that Clithero's Irishness is negatively coded in the novel. For example, Brooks notes that *Edgar Huntly* was "crafted during a time of heightened suspicion toward the Irish, in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion of 1798 and the reactionary passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in the United States. Consequently, it is not surprising that *Edgar Huntly* employs the Irish as a proxy for Indians and as the personification of historical responsibility. The novel pursues the question of Quaker responsibility for Indian violence through the mediating figure of the Irishman Clithero Edny" (43). Clithero is an Irish descendant of "Armagh," which has revolutionary connotations, as "Armagh" was historically "the cockpit for some of the most bitter sectarian disturbances in Ireland in the 1790s, leading to the emergence of the insurgent Catholic Defender movement and the Orange Order" (Gibbons 31). Bernard and Shapiro also note that Clithero's Irishness is negatively coded: "In the aftermath of English colonialism in Ireland and massive Irish immigration to Pennsylvania, Anglo-Quakers viewed the Irish—particularly those from the same northern (Ulster) Protestant areas of Ireland as . . . Clithero—not just as a rival immigrant people, but as barbaric ethno-racial others every bit as 'savage' and threatening as Indians . . . these antagonisms were intensified yet again by the Irish revolutionary uprisings of 1796-1798 and the arrival of fresh waves of Irish revolutionaries and émigrés in both Philadelphia and the back-country frontier" (xxii-xxiii).

<sup>131</sup> "The Irish Edny, like the Indian, is the carrier of the past, the symbol of guilt, and the scapegoat. He can have no part in the trackless future, no purchase in unblemished whiteness. His death liberates Huntly from captivity to broader questions of guilt and innocence" (Brooks 44).

<sup>132</sup> Like the reader of memoirs, the sleepwalker is "freed from the controls or conscience" and "his or her moral faculties" (Murison 260). Murison's argument supports my suggestion that sleepwalking allegorizes the threat of revolution, insofar as the sleepwalker, like the revolutionary, is cut off or disinherited from both paternal and moral authority or "freed from the controls of conscience" (260); the revolutionary acts without thinking, as does the sleepwalker.

<sup>133</sup> Gibbons explains how the "Irish émigré" "acted as a crucial destabilizing medium, contravening clear boundaries between white civility and the savagery of the Native American or African American other" (25). Gibbons examines the impact of the immigrant, "'alien' other" who is different than the Native American other: "the Native American is territorially defined and seeks to retain-or regain-tribal land; the immigrant, by contrast, has forsaken the homeland and has chosen to reinvent himself or herself in the New World" (25).

<sup>134</sup> Uncertainty in Edgar's narrative is noted by many critics. For example, Emerson writes, "Since the facts cannot tell the whole story, the historiographer in Brown's theory produces truth by turning to conjecture" (29).

<sup>135</sup> Toles notes that "*everything* exists as an unknown" in *Edgar Huntly* (Toles 145).

<sup>136</sup> "The 'futurity' at which Huntly grasps is really the past (32)" (Voloshin 270).

<sup>137</sup> Similarly, Edgar's "narrative . . . begins utterly paralyzed by its task" (Gardner 440).

<sup>138</sup> Bernard and Shapiro suggest that both *Edgar Huntly* and *Caleb Williams* share the same "ambivalent meaning" of "curiosity": "[i]t [curiosity] reflects the Enlightenment desire to learn, but it can also lead to unchecked excess. This is what happens to the protagonist of William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), a key source for Brown's approach to novel writing" (3).

<sup>139</sup> Bernard and Shapiro note that "the plot device of a locked box or trunk containing precious information" "features centrally in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), an important source for Brown" (78). Cf. W. M. Verhoeven, "Opening the Text: The Locked-Trunk Motif in Late Eighteenth-Century British and American Gothic Fiction."

<sup>140</sup> Critics read Edgar's obsessive-compulsive behavior differently. For example, Cassuto believes Edgar is "driven to repeat" compulsions because of his Freudian "death drive": "Edgar's behavior is a classic example of repetition compulsion. . . . He is driven to repeat in the same way that Freud's early subjects repeated their painful war neuroses and thereby suggested the death drive to him (*Beyond*, 6). . . . To the analyst, the repetition acts as a signal flag for repressed material beneath it—in Edgar's case, the trauma surrounding his parents' death" (Cassuto 125). Schulz finds that Edgar's "search becomes compulsive" (Schulz 330) transforming him "from an active agent of his quest into the object of forces he is unable to control," thus prefiguring "the development of American quest romance in the nineteenth century" (Schulz 334). Bellis states Edgar's "narrative manifests a compulsion to repeat, and thus master, experience" (44). In particular, "rational investigation and neurotic obsession blend into one another" and so Edgar surrenders to his "irrational impulse to repeat" (45). For example, "Huntly searches out a manuscript that Clithero has buried, but in order to do so, he must again repeat Clithero's actions, digging at night and then hurriedly filling in the hole (113, 118-19).

<sup>141</sup> I also agree with Voloshin that Edgar "has been compulsively repeating his searches even before he witnesses the compulsive Clithero" (270).

<sup>142</sup> Many critics address Edgar's obsession with Clithero, among them Emerson, who suggests that Edgar's curiosity about the "history of Clithero Edny" "suggests" his "modus operandi": "Brown's fictitious historiographers report multiple, discrepant and incomplete pasts that . . . never quite satisfy the seeker but usually defers answers and thus arouse further curiosity" (34).

<sup>143</sup> Voloshin believes that "Huntly's disturbed sleep of the present . . . results from his disturbed sleep-walking into the wilderness" and "reconnects Huntly with the nightmare of his childhood" (272).

<sup>144</sup> I borrow the idea that Edgar acts out violently and impulsively from Downes: "Huntly demonstrates a capacity for impulsive violence" (415).

<sup>145</sup> Downes associates compulsion with revolution: "Revolution, Clithero's story suggests, involves an element of intentional obscurity that threatens to impel the resulting order into a compulsive (and dangerous) construction of retroactive responsibility" ("Sleep-Walking" 420).

<sup>146</sup> "The letters themselves document Waldegrave's philosophical evolution from skepticism to faith. . . . As editor of Waldegrave's history, then, Edgar plans to craft a past that can answer Mary's needs while also protecting her from the unnecessary effects that Waldegrave's youthful bout of atheism might cause" (Emerson 35). Murison agrees; reading Luciano, she notes that Waldegrave fears the effects of his atheistical arguments on Mary's principles (260). Murison argues that "Mrs. Lorimer's memoir and Waldegrave's letters, circulate in ways that Brown implies are morally and psychologically dangerous . . . both initiate sleepwalking" (259). In particular, sleepwalking poses dangers not just because "the sleepwalker is out of *conscious* control," but because he is "out of *conscientious* control, just as Waldegrave imagined would happen to a reader of his letters who did not have recourse to his altered, religious beliefs" (260). Bernard and Shapiro argue that the character of Waldegrave is based on Brown's real life friend, Elihu Hubbard Smith (1771-1798), who, "[l]ike Waldegrave . . . was an abolitionist and deist dedicated to progressive ideals; when he died prematurely . . . the deist writings he left behind were perceived as scandalous" (xii).

<sup>147</sup> Critics note the mix of liberal and non-liberal discourses that were adopted by Americans in the new Republic. For example, Smith-Rosenberg writes that “To construct their country a republic and themselves republicans, Euro-Americans turned increasingly to the ideology and rhetoric of Enlightenment liberalism, with its emphasis on the equality of all men and on the individual’s political sovereignty” (503-504). “Nevertheless,” “[T]o create a sense of national cohesion, Euro-Americans augmented and undercut their liberal ideology with a number of nonliberal, indeed antiliberal, discourses. These . . . permitted them to construct themselves true “Americans” in juxtaposition to a series of racially and sexually identified others. . . . Charles Brockden Brown fused and confused Enlightenment thought-its valorization of universal brotherhood, its incipient feminism, its incipient scientific racism-with romanticism, frontier fulminations against inhuman savages, and his own rejection of Quaker pacifism” (504).

<sup>148</sup> Murison notes that Edgar is a materialist (261) and “styles himself, on occasion, a Deist republican” (259). Voloshin states that “[i]n his letters Waldegrave had introduced Huntly to the arguments for materialism and atheism; Waldegrave did, before his death, recant these views, but Huntly did not” (272).

<sup>149</sup> I borrow Anthony Giddens’ definition of ideology, which “represents ‘the capability of dominant groups or classes to make their own sectional interests appear to others as universal’” (Davidson 103).

<sup>150</sup> Bellis links the displacement of conscious and unconscious acts to Edgar’s secret: “The conflict between these two ‘duties’-to withhold and to transcribe [Waldegrave’s letters]-leads him to decide to censor the correspondence in copying it, but his unconscious resolution of the problem is to hide the letters from himself. The world of sleep and dreams has begun to preempt the role of consciousness in determining action; both Huntly’s act and its compulsive source remain hidden from his waking consciousness” (47).

<sup>151</sup> *Edgar Huntly* could also be classified as a captivity narrative that emerged out of what Hartman identifies as the “close relationship between English providence tales and Puritan Indian captivity narratives” (Hartman 76).

<sup>152</sup> Clithero says to Edgar: “I can otherwise account for my frequenting this shade than by the distant resemblance which the death of this man bore to that of which I was the perpetrator. This resemblance occurred to me at first” (84).

<sup>153</sup> Voloshin notes that Clithero “ceases to be clearly responsible for his impulses and actions” (3).

<sup>154</sup> Brown was “fascinated” by Godwin’s “‘principle of necessary causality’, which posits the determinative connection of all human events, [and] even extends to the processes of the mind: ‘The theory of the human mind is . . . a system of mechanism . . . a regular connection of phenomena without any uncertainty of event, so that every incident requires a specific cause’ (i: 294). Necessary causality laid the groundwork for Godwin’s radical idealism by assuming that the discovery of truth would necessarily produce social reform. Brown was fascinated by Godwin’s theory, and . . . caught up in the late-century vogue of utilitarian utopianism. But he was . . . troubled by the implicit contradiction between determinism and the possibility of individual freedom and virtue. ‘If necessary causality regulated both history and the ideas of the mind toward the perpetual perfectibility of man, it seemed to do so according to an . . . essentialist moral law that subordinated the freedom of individual thought and action to the greatest good’” (Cahill 52-53). This could explain the subordination of Clithero’s freedom to the greater good of the Republic. Cahill describes how this theory could have impacted Clithero’s demise: “Before Wiatte’s death and his conviction of historical causality, Clithero’s association of ideas is marked by rational freedom and an easy negotiation of internal and external worlds. . . . But after an ‘excess of thoughts’ corrupts his associative logic, Clithero believes himself prevented by ‘confounded’ thoughts from the liberty of self-determination and ‘fettered’ by a series of ideas and actions beyond his control” (54). Cahill seems to suggest here that Brown critiques necessary causality in “Clithero’s madness” but does not necessarily reject it (55). Edgar’s transformation into his double also reinforces this critique; specifically, when Edgar tries to tell the story of Clithero’s belief in causality, he experiences an identity crisis (54).

<sup>155</sup> Dawes seems to suggest that a paradox exists in so far as Edgar becomes contaminated by violent events he does not witness (Clithero’s): “How could the observer of a danger not real nonetheless be physically stricken by it? Brown’s fictions are built upon this paradox and are, as I will argue, self-conscious about it” (438). Dawes claims that Edgar “‘catches’ the disease of sleepwalking from his too-close-reading of the somnambulist Clithero” and becomes an an ‘actor’ “without will” (Dawes 458). This, Dawes suggests, is a commentary by Brown “about what happens when we read” (458).

<sup>156</sup> Downes identifies this “crisis of responsibility” with both Edgar and Clithero in different ways: “Clithero registers his realization of this undecidability as a crisis which can only be reduced via a retroactive and self-condemnatory reclamation of full responsibility. Edgar Huntly, on the other hand, demonstrates a fervent desire to contain the obscurity of transformative . . . intervention within the . . . domain of accident or impulse. His crises are *crisis of responsibility* that generate narrative by their very deferral and which produce in their wake a proliferation of unconscious acts” (Downes 427; emphasis mine).

<sup>157</sup> As Davidson writes, “The primary issue . . . is legitimacy—who is and who is not the legitimate audience of literature and, less theoretically, who are to be the legitimate heirs of the Republic” (110).

<sup>158</sup> As Gibbons notes, “sleepwalking” is “the perfect alibi for committing a crime devoid of moral responsibility” (32).

<sup>159</sup> I formulate this question based on readings by several critics of Brown's literary characters, among them, Clemit, who reads "Clara's unreliability as a witness" in Brown's novel, *Wieland*: "Brown's use of an unreliable narrator to capture and baffle the reader's curiosity is central to his development of the Godwinian novel for conservative purposes. . . . Developing Godwin's exploration of states of mind in which 'reason had no power' (*CW* ii. 141 [I]/154), Brown foregrounds Clara's unreliability as a witness" (Clemit 126-127). Emerson also reads Huntly's problem as a historiographer as based on witnessing, in so far as "Huntly cannot quite get access to the history he needs to tell" (Emerson 31). ". . . [T]he mode of fictitious history that Brown attempts to mobilize offers insight into the nation's problem of creating a collective past in the absence of the observation or experience that might document it" (Emerson 31). Emerson adds that "fictitious history also depends on a narrator's creation of meaningful links between observed events" (31). These links would appear to be broken by Edgar's sleepwalking. Emerson names the "supplement" of the "curious" cabinet as "designed" to "hold together parts" of the historiographer's narrative "that have no necessary connection to one another" (31).

<sup>160</sup> Bellis gives another example in which Edgar describes Clithero's actions as "passive"-reflecting his own evasion of direct action: "The verbs here ['Clithero had buried his treasure'] are passive and impersonal, the actions performed by no one or by 'thy friend,' not by 'Edgar Huntly.' The first person only appears as the victim of 'phantoms too indistinct to be now recalled'" (53).

<sup>161</sup> "Driven by a revolutionary commitment to justice . . . and an Enlightenment faith in rational procedure, Huntly experiences the lack of any guarantee that the latter will *ensure* the former as a crisis of decision" ("Sleep-Walking" 418).

<sup>162</sup> "A revolution . . . is a performative event that definitely does not fit Austin's criteria for a felicitous performative" (Miller 26).

<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Edgar is not subject to a normal pattern of causality, but elusive one that he creates by attempting to trace the origins of action in the novel: "Not only is Huntly wrong in reconstructing cause and predicting consequences, but those repetitions and retracings that seem to him to be precipitating the origin and cause of the murder project Huntly into a maze of circumstances that he cannot trace, even though it repeats and reverses the past. . . . Instead of precipitating origins, Huntly's repetitions obscure the relationship of past and present and confound the clue with the maze. Huntly's repetitions produce a double movement in the narrative, in which Huntly plays the doubled roles of hunter and hunted, detective and criminal, victim of Indian attack and the attacker of Indians, the man of feeling and the creature of instinct, enlightened gentleman and outcast" (Voloshin 270).

<sup>164</sup> Downes' reading of *Edgar Huntly* suggests that the novel acts as an allegory that restages this founding and its subsequent "crisis of decision" ("Sleep-Walking" 418). Downes uses Derrida's analysis of The Declaration to suggest that the "founding act" (Derrida 8) is allegorized in literature as an act of "gothic violence" ("Sleep-Walking" 422) wherein the "arbitrariness of tyrannical sovereignty" is expressed in the "revolutionary claim" ("Sleep-Walking" 422). In particular, Downes seems to suggest this "violence" emerged "by the persistence of a feudal or monarchic logic within a post-feudal social order" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 420). Yet, while he suggests this "violence" ("Sleep-Walking" 417) is inherited from Godwin's literature, Downes insists that the encounter that expresses this "violence" originates in *Huntly*. I disagree, and instead have argued that this encounter between revolutionary and monarchic logics originates first in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (see chapter 1) before it is restaged and allegorized by Brown.

<sup>165</sup> Edgar's "sleepwalking signals his entry into a realm of unconscious repetition. And it is at this point, when his story begins to imitate Clithero's, that the form of his narration does so as well. Repetition thus comes to dominate both the diegetic and the extradiegetic levels of the text" (Bellis 46).

<sup>166</sup> Other critics write on Edgar's deferral of action, which results in a "narrative that continually strives to alter or defer its own traumatic content" (Bellis 44). As a "rational narrator" Edgar attempts to "disguise his irrational obsessions" and also "distance himself from or defer a confrontation with traumatic events" (Bellis 44).

<sup>167</sup> While some critics note Edgar and Clithero's mutual unstable subject positions, most critics prefer to discuss Clithero's instability, or view both as owing to their lack of secure land ownership. For example, Smith-Rosenberg believes "Clithero epitomizes the middle position of the middle class. His roots lie in the peasantry; he is the son-in-law (or should we say *in-the-professions*) of the landed aristocracy. His social position depends on education, talent, responsibility-and salary. Yet detached from *real* estates of land, his position is unstable, subject to change" (492).

<sup>168</sup> Critics note the link between sleepwalking and uncertainty. Bernard and Shapiro note that "sleep-walking may allegorize his [Edgar's] psychological stasis in being both alive and dead because of his inability to bring Waldegrave's death to satisfying closure" (xxvi). They add "sleep-walking" acts as a 'metaphor' "for the uncertainty of tumbling forward into a modern, postfeudal society that both requires and produces new modes of social consciousness and new forms of human interaction" (xxv). Similarly, Toles establishes a link between sleepwalking and uncertainty: "An individual's waking state, Brown repeatedly suggests, can quite easily grow indistinguishable from his sleeping state once his knowledge of things ceases to be concrete and stable and his mind becomes prey to dreams and delusions" (146).

<sup>169</sup> Many critics observe the "tomblike" nature of the "cave," among them Toles (145).

<sup>170</sup> Bellis recounts another example in the novel in which Edgar mis-remembers his actions during sleep (48).

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Emerson: "By its very definition, the somnambulism that characterizes Edgar causes him to be absent from himself, so that Edgar often ends up working at cross-purposes with his own project of rational discovery and reasonably inventive exposition. . . . Brown holds out the novel as a model for an historiography that Brown imagines capable of holding the nation together" (35). Tennenhouse similarly notes that "instead of mapping the nation as a territory," *Edgar Huntly* 'maps' the nation in a "disorderly way," by 'producing' "nodal points where characters meet, change directions, take on certain features, and leave others behind" (Tennenhouse 9). Tennenhouse seems to suggest that Edgar's narrative ends up proposing a disjointed nation because of its interruptions: "In the early novel, time rarely moves 'forward' in a manner that mirrors history, and when it does, it inevitably encounters a cause for digression. Clithero Edny bursts into Edgar Huntly's life and halts the progress of the narrative in order to provide an account of his own life in some detail from birth until the present moment-and his is just one of several narratives that similarly loop around and rejoin Huntly's. . . . This model of social relations is anything but the 'arboreal' structure that presupposes a nation with its roots in the late-eighteenth century-a model that would allow us to identify the national tree in its beginnings" (10). One could also argue that, because--as Tennenhouse points out--"in order to constitute a revolution, its discourse has to reject" "the principle of authority in one political regime and replace it with its own" (7), Edgar certainly fails in his narrative efforts (to replace it with *his* voice) because Sarsefield maintains his authority in the end.

<sup>172</sup> Bellis argues that *violence* produces omissions of consciousness and text: “Clithero’s story is characterized . . . by gaps and omissions that mark the sites of inexplicable, unnarratable violence. When Clithero kills Wiatte, for example, it is an instinctive, ‘mechanical’ act: ‘My will might be said to be passive,’ he claims; ‘I drew forth a pistol-’ (71). His ‘mechanical’, unwilled action takes place in this gap, now unnameable within Clithero’s narration as it was then beyond his consciousness. So too when he attempts to kill Mrs. Lorimer does his narrative dissolve into an ellipsis: ‘The impulse was given . . .’ (83). Such breakdowns in consciousness are reproduced in both the form and temporality of Clithero’s narration. . . . Such irregularities and breaks in narrative form are, in Clithero’s tale, attempts to repress the irrational force of memory itself, to ensure his control over both himself and his story” (46).

<sup>173</sup> Critics suggest this deconstruction of the subject (and narrative) in various ways. For example, Smith-Rosenberg writes that “by the novel’s end the Euro-American subject/narrator emerges as decentered and self-contradictory . . . as in Rowlandson’s narrative, self and other refract and fragment one another—the hunter becomes hunted; the white man, savage; the man, an animal. . . . Huntly has become indistinguishable from those he hunts—America’s ‘tawny’ and ‘terrible’ natives (192)” (491). Bellis agrees that there is agency in Edgar’s narrative that implies “the disintegration of the narrating self”: “Huntly’s text is divided against itself from the start, as he seeks both to relive events and to control and defend against them at the same time” (44) Bellis also seems to suggest that Edgar’s subjectivity goes up against the agency of his own narration or “repressed force of its own diegetic content”: “Huntly finds that the very substance of his tale continually threatens to escape representation altogether, repeatedly calling his own narrative authority and ability into question. His attempts to enclose and control his story only open up other more dangerous tales that he must struggle to rationalize and repress even as he records them. Rational extradiegetic narrative construction is always on the verge of becoming unwilled and uncontrolled repetition, always vulnerable to the repressed force of its own diegetic content. . . . His tale is not so much closed as broken off-by an eruption of unthinking, repetitive violence that signals the breakdown of narrative representation itself” (44, 53).

<sup>174</sup> Bellis notes that “After deferring any discussion of his sleepwalking-of his loss of consciousness and self-control—Huntly again tries to blur or omit as much as possible” (Bellis 53).

<sup>175</sup> Both narrative and narrator are mutually incoherent. As Voloshin notes, “in Huntly’s affective narrative theory, the coherence and indeed the very possibility of the tale are intimately associated with the coherence of the consciousness that constitutes the self. From the affective point of view that Huntly initially adopts and to which he returns, the tale—and in a sense the teller, too—are thus virtually uncomposable. But if the re-experienced extremity of the story can be bracketed . . . so that causes and consequences are shown, then the experience would emerge as a narrative, and this in turn would confirm the identity of the teller. Yet this sort of composition, which attends to sequence and causal relation, is equally problematic, for precisely what eludes Huntly is a sense of causal relation. Apparent gaps in causality . . . generate the mystery plot. . . . Repetition or tracing is Huntly’s typical mechanism for searching out cause, but his repetitions have the effect of making origin or cause more elusive, finally drawing Huntly’s own motives into this web of lost causes and thus calling into question the coherence of the self” (268).

<sup>176</sup> For example, Voloshin states that “[w]hile Clithero’s actions become legible to the reader by reference to past desire and repression, Huntly’s actions and motives do not gain a similar legibility” (271).

<sup>177</sup> Many critics characterize Edgar as an unreliable narrator: “he’s [Edgar] an unreliable narrator of the most extreme sort: he even sleepwalks through part of his story, leaving himself (and his readers) to infer what happens to him during his somnabulistic [sic] state” (Cassuto 118).

<sup>178</sup> Emerson notes that because Edgar solicits “a history from a character” and therefore shows his “curiosity about a curiosity,” the result of his narrative efforts leads him to produce a “fragmentary, unanchored tale” (33). Edgar’s narrative mirrors the “broken chest” in that it has “No content and a broken form: Edgar’s efforts to fit events and people, acts and motivation, fact and conjecture, into what he proposes Mary will be a narrative of ‘order and coherence’ (5) have come to naught” (34).

<sup>179</sup> “Edgar’s ‘impetuous’ curiosity . . . actually impedes his efforts to get a complete story from Clithero” (Emerson 35).

<sup>180</sup> I borrow this idea from Downes, who argues: “It is Clithero’s story (embedded in Edgar’s) that fascinates the novel’s narrator and seems to speed his anxious and violent trajectory” (“Sleep-Walking” 419).

<sup>181</sup> Many critics read this trauma as personal to Brown, in other words, as resulting from his “traumatic childhood” (Cassuto 119). Cf. Kafer.

<sup>182</sup> Dawes agrees that Edgar’s “lawless curiosity” “drives” him “to intervene wantonly in the lives of others. The ‘pleasure’ Edgar derives from bringing to light all the details of Clithero’s jealously guarded story (reading private correspondence, breaking into locked chests) is narcissistic and finally murderous. By forcing Clithero to play the role of reader’s pathetic object despite his pleas to be left alone, Edgar forces him to relive his past and thus initiates the repetition of a bizarre psychotic breakdown” (444).

<sup>183</sup> Various critics allude to the deconstructive relationship between Edgar’s narrative and self. For example, Voloshin asserts: “Huntly’s narrative itself more disarmingly undermines the notion of the continuity and coherence of the perceiving self” (262). In particular, Edgar’s story acts to deconstruct his self: “If Clithero’s self-identity is progressively unfixed through repetition, Huntly’s narrative begins with a series of repetitions intended to compose a tale and compose the self, but this play of repetition disperses its elements even as it attempts to organize them” (267).

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Schulz: “[i]n his attempt to save Clithero from pining away in remorse and melancholy, Huntly actually precipitates his death” (328).

<sup>185</sup> Bellis says that Edgar’s “divided voice” is a sign of “the dissolution of identity” or “division of self” which “cannot be reliably narrated”: “it is the echo of his own voice, its belated simulacrum, that he recognizes as resembling an echo heard at a point in his earlier rambles (163). This divided voice, Huntly’s inability to remember his earlier self, his belief that ‘the author of my distresses . . . [is] incomprehensible’ (164)-all are signs of the dissolution of identity, the division of the self into mutually unrecognizable elements. It is a scene that cannot be reliably narrated, for the rational, narrating aspect of the self is precisely what is excluded from and threatened by it” (50).

<sup>186</sup> “Weymouth, a shadowy figure not associated with family or Huntly Farm, has come from the world outside this self-enclosed estate to take from Edgar the capital Edgar had hoped to transfer into inheritance. . . . Weymouth’s claim . . . does bring home to Edgar afresh the loss of his parents, his economic loss, and his consequent inability to marry” (E. Hinds 11).

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Tennenhouse on the transatlantic roots of American narrative: “The early American novel assumes that citizens of the United States travel widely, that the boundaries of the new nation are extremely porous, and that its networks intersect or overlap with those of Western Europe” (11). The process of writing is transatlantic in nature (and therefore not ‘exceptional’ as Americanists might contend): “To tell the story of the American novel . . . literary scholars select certain knots of arborescence (the realist or gothic traditions, for example) and retrospectively construct an indigenous tradition where there is in fact a network of exchanges . . . no author writing fiction in English from North America could write outside a transatlantic system of exchange, even if he or she wanted to do so” (12-13). Ellison agrees, in so far as she sees *Edgar Huntly* as embodying “‘a more broadly shared transatlantic idiom’ in which aimless men (that one finds in Byron and Wordsworth) wander a ‘geography of masculine sensibility’ in ‘disorientation and hypermobility’ (149)” (qtd. in Gould 334).

<sup>188</sup> The symbolic “implication” of Edgar’s “descent into darkness” after coming into “contact with an unhinged Irish immigrant” is “clear” to Gibbons: “the fears expressed by proponents of the Alien and Sedition Acts—that the immigrant other, particularly of Irish or French origins, threatened to pollute the American body politic—were well founded, and among the most prominent pamphleteers against alien influences was Charles Brockden Brown” (35). As Davidson notes “[t]he Alien and Sedition Act created a picture of an embattled new Republic cowering under the threat of British imperial power and dangerous French revolutionaries abroad, and the dangers of populist insurrections, Indian attacks, and slave revolts within its borders. The more immediate thrust of the Alien and Sedition Acts, however, was to ensure the destruction of Thomas Jefferson’s Republican Party. The Republicans, after all, had expressed sympathy for the French revolutionaries—which is no doubt why the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Sedition Act on July 14 (Bastille Day)” (17).

<sup>189</sup> I agree with E. Hinds’ reading of Edgar as stuck in the “private sphere” and an “Old World, land-based economy”: “As a result, he cannot make room for a new economy of entrepreneurial activity. His center of activity . . . has been Huntly Farm, a home space in which private values hold sway—in which the public demands of the marketplace seem to have no value. Edgar inhabits only a private sphere, described in another context by Habermas as a realm of activity centered on the home and supported by the illusion of ‘an inner realm, following its own laws’, untouched by ‘extrinsic purposes of any sort’” (47). “What Edgar fails to . . . recognize, is the public sphere wherein lie the capitalist economic realities of men like Weymouth and Sarsefield, for an accounting of this realm would necessitate interaction, both economic and legal, with others” (E. Hinds 12).

<sup>190</sup> Bellis finds that “[t]hese final letters are all attempts to close the book on Clithero, but they only demonstrate the impossibility of closure. Huntly has earlier recognized the narrative distance required to give a tale its shape; now, however, he has been forced to write *in media res*, in order to affect events instead of describe them. As the gap between narration and action disappears, diegesis swallows up the extradiegetic completely. Huntly’s letters can no longer control the action of the story they tell—they are caught up in that action, with effects that he cannot anticipate and that only confirm his ultimate powerlessness” (Bellis 54).

<sup>191</sup> I borrow the term “revolutionary violence” from Downes (“Sleep-Walking” 419).

<sup>192</sup> Irving, Washington. “Rip Van Winkle.” *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* Ed. Manning, Susan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print. References in my text and notes hereafter cite the author of this edition as “Irving.”

<sup>193</sup> For example Giles writes: “Irving aesthetically refracts the American Revolution into a topsy-turvy narrative of revisionist history, where what appears normal turns out to be deviant and vice versa” (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 156). Giles reads Irving’s work as “burlesque,” “through which assumptions of authorial integrity and national identity are deliberately deflated and parodically negotiated. Irving is perhaps the best example of an American author whose stature is diminished by any forced affiliation with agendas of literary nationalism, but whose subtleties can be appreciated more readily once he is situated within a transnational context” (Giles 142). Wyman also similarly asserts: “this first American myth is hardly an innocent folktale. Indeed, the author implicitly questions the value of the American Revolution at a historical moment when the country was asserting itself against European hegemony and dealing with its own internal woes and growing pains” (Wyman 216).

<sup>194</sup> Wyman notes the irony of Irving’s story being viewed as America’s premiere story of American identity: “Irving’s tale, often called our nation’s first great story, treats the power and necessity of narration to consolidate and define American identity, yet does so with a large dose of irony” (Wyman 219).

<sup>195</sup> McLamore documents the popular doubt that America could produce a great literature: “Three years before his withering dismissal of American literature, Sydney Smith, doubting that America would develop political stability or great literature within five hundred years, concludes, ‘Prairies, steam-boats, grist-mills, are their natural objects for centuries to come’” (McLamore 38). Irving, McLamore contends, was aware of this uncertainty and sought to respond to it via his *Sketch-Book* which forges an uncertain, double relation of appropriation and inheritance to British literature: “Such discourse [English anti-emigration discourse], writes Irving, denies the U.S. claim to being ‘placed in the most important and delicate relations’ with England (45). . . . Thus linking eventual American political superiority to English decline . . . Irving suggests that for the United States to repudiate English culture would mean abandoning the ‘moral’ rather than political sources ‘which give force and sustained energy to the character of the a people’ (45) . . . the ghost-stories, dream-visions, and strategies of quotation that link the American short stories with each other *and* with the English sketches imply a more unorthodox way of appropriating a cultural heritage. . . . Read in the context of cultural anxiety and disputed heritage that conditions *The Sketch Book*, these epigraphs and other quotations display an interest in cultural appropriation beyond a simple antiquarian nostalgia for ‘the grace and splendor of old traditions and old ways’” (McLamore 38-39). Pollard also notes the instability of American publishing and notes Irving’s awareness of the stakes for the future of American literature implied in America’s uncertain political climate: “In the absence of an international copyright act, the American book market was swamped by cheap reprints of British publications. American publishers were reluctant to take risks in publishing homegrown works. It was also thwarted by a problem of identity, in other words the state of an American literature was rather similar to the state of the city of Washington. A reliance remained on British and European themes and forms. It was not clear what was a proper American subject or how it might be expressed. That is a key strand in the history of American literature, and it is illuminated by Irving” (Pollard 82). Although Pollard specifically focuses on Irving’s *History of New York* as ‘encapsulating’ “the problem of the unfinished nation” by presenting “a subversive history of the early American Republic” (Pollard 83), I would argue that *The Sketch-Book* does the same. I do so based on Rubin-Dorsky’s examination of Irving’s “sketch” as implying “a preliminary study or a representation of a work of art intended for elaboration . . . it connotes hastiness and incompleteness” (Rubin-Dorsky 519). Based on Rubin-Dorsky’s examination one could view *The Sketch Book* as a metaphor for the incomplete story of the Republic.

<sup>196</sup> Uncertainty about the new Republic, McLamore seems to suggest, was actually a *transatlantic* experience, shared by Americans and Britons alike: “As Irving composed *The Sketch Book* from 1817 through 1819, debates about the American character pitted a nascent empire against one afraid of collapse. . . . Travelers to the United States obsessively weighed England’s ‘shadows of uncertainty’ against the ‘future destinies’ of America (47)” (McLamore 37). Pollard also diagnoses the American Republic as divided and argues that Irving’s *History of New York* (1809) was a response to Jefferson’s attempts to present it as unified: “America might be economically prosperous and geographically expansive, though these apparent successes would provoke fierce political argument, over trading relations with war-torn Europe and the Louisiana Purchase. It was certainly not united, as deep tensions remained between states and federal government, between segments of white male society, and between that society and those excluded from power, most notably (from Irving’s perspective), the Amer-Indians. . . . Jefferson, aware of the tension, had chosen in his Inaugural to gloss over it, emphasizing a continuum of progress, despite the change in political leadership. Irving was incapable of such deception, and the concern drove him first to an exposé of the flawed nation, in the *History of New York* (1809), then to a gradual literary silence within America, and finally to physical exile outside it . . .” (Pollard 82).

<sup>197</sup> Ringe notes this shift from chivalry to capitalism, and reads Rip as a figure who ‘measures’ “change”: “The quiet village has been destroyed in a social revolution that has a strong New England accent, and little of its earlier nature remains. Rip, of course, is the only character upon whom the change has its full effect, for only he has missed the invasion and gradual destruction of the community. One function he serves in the story, therefore, is to provide a measuring stick for change . . . Rip himself also represents to some extent the view of life that is rapidly being supplanted. Hence, what happens to him in the story may be taken as a symbolic account of the fate of such a man in a society where only success matters” (Ringe 464). Ringe views this shift as represented by the difference between Dutch New Yorkers and the Connecticut Yankees: “The symbolic weight he gives to the traditional, rural communities in both tales clearly indicates the value he places upon a stable society strongly oriented toward the security, hospitality, neighborliness, and good-fellowship of a long established community life. Two views of life, therefore, come face to face when New Yorker and Yankee meet, and Irving abhors the kind of society-disputations, money oriented, and constantly changing-which, he believed, could result only from a New England victory. . . . He [Irving] does suggest, however, that important values are lost when men prefer change to stability and are ready to sacrifice everything-even the homes of their fathers-to speculation in land and material progress” (Ringe 466).

<sup>198</sup> I borrow this idea from Martin: “Irving has had Rip sleep through the American Revolution, through what we might call the birth pangs of our country, and return to a ‘busy, bustling, disputatious’, self-consciously adult United States of America. There his uncompetitive spirit, his predisposition to idleness, his inclination to imaginative indulgence are badly out of place” (Martin 142). Martin identifies “Rip Van Winkle” as a tale about the “loss of identity”: “the tale dramatizes Rip’s loss of identity, and, by inference, the loss of identity of the imaginative function” (Martin 142).

<sup>199</sup> “Irving’s satire depends on a degree of distance, perpetrated by the triple persona through which he spins his tale” (Wyman 220). Pollard reads the three narrators as “competing”: “Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., the work’s alleged author, representing Irving’s expedition to Europe as he might have wished it, free to view its glories rather than enslaved to attend to family miseries; Diedrich Knickerbocker, the supposed author of the *History*; and Irving himself, whose actual experiences and situation occasionally break through these masks. None of them has a secure control of the narrative, and the fates of the two personae are suggestive” (Pollard 88). Pollard contends that the competition between the three narrators is rooted in Irving’s biography: “The contention that these conflicted authorial personae were connected to Irving’s actual situation is corroborated by aspects of his correspondence following his arrival in Europe” (Pollard 88).

<sup>200</sup> Whereas most critics don't demarcate a principle or authoritative narrator, Giles names Irving's principle narrator as Geoffrey Crayon, and calls him "self-absorbed" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 157).

<sup>201</sup> Irving's penchant for both inscribing and presenting "literary anachronisms" has been documented since the mid-nineteenth century, as McLamore observes, beginning with William Hazlitt, who cites Rip's "feeling of displacement (McLamore 32): "Mr. Irvine's [sic] writings are literary *anachronisms*. . . . Instead of tracing the changes that have taken place in society . . . he transcribes their account in a different hand-writing, and thus keeps us stationary. . . . This is a . . . mode of turning fiction into history and history into fiction; and we should scarcely know . . . that it bears the date of 1820 . . ." (Hazlitt, qtd. in McLamore 31). McLamore finds that Irving's use of "epigraphs, quotations and descriptions demonstrate a vital claim to English culture" at the same time as are "narrative strategies" that seem to "claim" an "anachronistic heritage": "Quotation and allusion, as narrative strategies of Geoffrey Crayon . . . are also the means by which Irving sets up a contrast between natural and spiritual metaphors of cultural transmission and inheritance. The miscellany thus traces how Crayon learns to read beyond the boundaries of a national English culture and claim the heritage Hazlitt deems anachronistic" (McLamore 32-33). Other critics read Rip as "anachronistic": see Ferguson, 541.

<sup>202</sup> McLamore reads the cakes as demonstrating that Knickerbocker's tales have taken on "popular and politicized forms of cultural currency" (McLamore 36). As McLamore states, Knickerbocker is accustomed to promoting the idea of America as culturally legitimate: "Attuned to the people, landscape, and spirits of the Hudson River valley, Knickerbocker's tales refute English assertions of American cultural inadequacy. . . . As evidenced by the Knickerbocker 'new year cakes' (28), the enchanting spirit of Knickerbocker's tales, like those of Shakespeare, grant him a cultural 'immortality' and currency coined *by* the people, as opposed to the political or economic values imposed *upon* them" (McLamore 46).

<sup>203</sup> This 'hyper' emphasis on legitimacy is described by several critics as a 'comedic' device. For example, Giles notes that "Rip Van Winkle" is "discursively 'framed' by prefaces and postscripts commenting sardonically on" its own "veracity" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 147). Wyman also notes the irony of Irving's emphasis on accuracy: "Despite the questionable evolution of the layered reportage, the fantasy elements, and themes of mistaken memory and misrecognition, the text ironically insists on its own 'scrupulous accuracy' and 'unquestionable authority' (25). The voice of Geoffrey Crayon assures us that, 'The story . . . is beyond the possibility of doubt' (40)" (Wyman 220).

<sup>204</sup> Critics view this epigraph differently. For example, Ferguson reads the "epigraph" as alerting readers to a hermeneutic truth: "All is truth, but all is also fabrication and decay on one level of meaning. The task of the reader is to see the truth while understanding, enjoying, and, in the end, coping through fabrication with the merciless march of life" (Ferguson 542).

<sup>205</sup> Knickerbocker also appeals to legitimacy when he says, “In that same village, and in one of these very houses, (which, to tell the precise truth, was sadly time-worn and weather-beaten), there lived . . . Rip Van Winkle” (34) and admits being forced to reveal “the precise truth” of Rip’s “sadly time-worn and weather-beaten” home (34). To authorize certainty, he explains that he has drawn his account from his own observation: “I have observed that he was a simple good-natured man” (34). He follows this with “Certain it is, that he was a great favorite among all the good wives of the village” (35), and “In fact, he declared it was no use to work on his farm” (35), as well as “he was fain to . . . take to the outside of the house—the only side which, in truth, belongs to a henpecked husband” (36). Knickerbocker continues to pepper his narrative with appeals to ‘truth’ and ‘certainty’: for example, he writes, “*True* it is . . . he [Wolf] was as courageous an animal as ever scoured the woods” (36; emphasis mine) and “neighbors could tell the hour by his [Nicholas Vedder’s] movements as accurately as by a sun-dial. *It is true* he was rarely heard to speak. . . . His adherents, however . . . perfectly understood him . . .” (37; emphasis mine). Knickerbocker interrupts these appeals to certainty when Rip wanders into the mountains and experiences his intoxicated sleep; he resumes his appeals to truth when Rip returns from the mountains and recognizes his daughter. At this critical point in the story, Knickerbocker calls Rip an “*honest man*” (46; emphasis mine).

<sup>206</sup> Knickerbocker adds that Vanderdonk “*affirmed* that the great Hendrick Hudson, the first discoverer of the river and country, kept a kind of vigil there every twenty years, with his crew of the Half-moon” (46; emphasis mine). Ferguson notes that the historian “introduces the legend of Hendrick Hudson to authenticate Rip’s story” (Ferguson 539).

<sup>207</sup> These ‘mythic’ origins have been explored more in-depth by some critics; for example, Winchell notes Phillip Young’s research, which “traces the legend of the Enchanted Sleeper back through more than a millennium of European culture” and Fiedler’s observation that “Irving added” “the introduction of Dame Van Winkle, the battle of the sexes, and the ultimate flight from petticoat government” “to the European myth of the Enchanted Sleeper” (Winchell 407).

<sup>208</sup> Crayon quotes Knickerbocker: “‘nay, I have seen a certificate on the subject taken before a country justice, and signed with a cross, in the justice’s own hand-writing. The story, therefore, is beyond the possibility of doubt. D.K.’” (48). Giles argues that Irving’s emphasis on legal documents was intended to comically satire their failure to be “objective”: “Irving follows Schlegel’s assumption that the terrestrial world exists in an inherently duplicitous condition which can be described appropriately only through the self-canceling tropes of paradox and contradiction. This is why every kind of legalistic document and practice tends to be given short shrift in Irving’s writing: encumbered by a pedantic and dogmatic manner designed to eradicate all traces of irony, such legal forms mistake their own rhetorical prowess for an objective account of the world” (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 150).

<sup>209</sup> I borrow the idea of blurred boundaries from Pollard, who locates a confusion between narrator and subject in *The Sketch-Book* (Pollard 83).

<sup>210</sup> One could argue that Rip inherits Caleb and Edgar's penchant for curiosity, uncertainty and unreliability resulting from not having directly witnessed historical events of violence. Martin provides some evidence to suggest that Rip exhibits all three traits: "The typical locus of creation in Irving's work is that in which a protagonist confronts the mysterious and unknown: if the protagonist lacks vision and reason he becomes a comic figure and goes down to some kind of defeat—for example Ichabod Crane . . . Irving's imaginatively created protagonists are childish, primitive images of what America could not assimilate into the national self-image; his historical protagonists, on the other hand, are images of exactly what made America what it wanted to be. Between the two types of protagonist there could be no valid traffic: Irving could not historicize Rip and Ichabod nor could he fictionalize Christopher Columbus and George Washington" (Martin 148). What Martin's observation suggests is that only a historical figure, like George Washington, for example, would have had directly witnessed historical events, and therefore could be narrativized as a 'real' historical subject--which indeed Irving does in his monumental biography of Washington. As Martin says, "Irving sees Washington as a man whose life, molded by 'fact and doctrine', epitomized adult, public existence" (Martin 147). This means that Rip, in contrast to Washington, would be seen as an "imaginatively created" protagonist, to borrow Martin's terms (Martin 148). As such, the events Rip witnesses would be seen as imaginative not historical; moreover, his imaginative subjectivity would make him incapable of actually witnessing historical events. In this way, I argue, Rip could be perceived as an unreliable subject and narrator, because--not only can he does not directly witness historical events--but he cannot directly transmit a narrative of these events, or as Martin might suggest, assimilate them into America's image of what it wanted to be as a nation. Therefore, if as Martin suggests, Irving cannot "historicize Rip" (Martin 148), then that means that Rip cannot be assimilated in a narrative that tells an accurate story of the history of the American nation--which is what I argue in this chapter.

<sup>211</sup> Wyman similarly suggests that "The canine Wolf mimics . . . his [master's] fearful feelings upon encountering Henry Hudson's crew" (Wyman 219). Blackburn reads the dog as a "seeming clone of Rip's wolf" whose 'growl' is "a sign of the more Hobbesian world since the Yankee accession" (Blackburn 145).

<sup>212</sup> I borrow the term “mythic” from Blackburn, who cites the mythic intertextuality that is not only inscribed but historicized in “Rip Van Winkle”: “Intertextual in its very origin, Irving’s ‘Rip Van Winkle’ is based on Johan Otmar’s ‘Peter Klaus’, a German story with strong folk and mythic elements; its own pronounced echoes of the *Odyssey* include a return home after twenty years, a dog incident upon arrival and reunion with a family member” (Blackburn 142). Critics tend to differ on the terms they assign to Irving’s presentation of this scene. Smith notes, for example, that it is common to perceive ghosts as the agents of disaster (Smith 182), and as such use terms that invoke the supernatural. For example, Ringe calls the stranger “the phantom bowler” (Ringe 465). Wyman also refers to the Dutch company Rip “encounters” as “the ghosts of Henrick (Henry) Hudson’s *Half Moon* crew” (Wyman 216). She also opposes myth from ‘the real’ in different terms, as “appearance vs. reality” (Wyman 219). Ferguson identifies two different oppositions, “the fantastic against the real” and “imaginary” versus “the actual” (Ferguson 531). The reason why I choose not to use “appearance,” “imaginary,” “fantastic” or “supernatural” and instead refer to Blackburn’s presentations of these scenes as mythic is because I read, like Blackburn, “Rip Van Winkle” within the context of the preambles and postscripts that Crayon has framed the text with. Specifically, the references that the two narrators (Knickerbocker and Crayon) make to the myths of “Peter Klaus” (in the preface) and Indian myths (in the postscript) suggest that the fictive story has mythic origins (see Blackburn 142; Winchell 407), and is *not* a product of Rip’s imagination--or of Irving’s for that matter. Another reason I prefer to use Blackburn’s term “mythic” to “supernatural” or “marvelous” (Smith 179) is to emphasize that Rip’s mythic experiences are not otherworldly, but rather have roots in real, historical events. As such, I prefer to use one of Ferguson’s terms--“the real”--instead of ‘the actual’ because the real represents Irving’s subjective view of a post-revolutionary society and reality, as he perceived it, and not as it appeared or actually was--which is, I believe, precisely one of Irving’s points: the actual experience of revolution is not available to us or perhaps difficult to objectively account for. Irving presents us *his* view of post-revolutionary America, read through the guise of his transatlantic travels and in-depth history of New York.

<sup>213</sup> I am inspired by the idea of “Rip Van Winkle” as being an allegory for revolution from Downes, who argues that *Edgar Huntly* is “an allegory of revolution (of the founding of a new, emancipated order)” (418).

<sup>214</sup> Giles notes the “irony” of Irving’s status as “America’s first professional author achieving success by undermining his own typographical medium in order to reconstitute a simulacrum of more familiar oral genres,” and in this sense deconstructing a construction of the new American subject by appealing to antiquated forms (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 154).

<sup>215</sup> I borrow my formulation from several critics who argue parallel or dual narratives are at play in *The Sketch-Book*. For example, Giles finds that Irving's two narratives arise from his "burlesque" style, yet don't seem to collide: these "parallel narratives of high and low, convention and mockery, continue along their self-contained paths, paths that are mutually reflecting . . . but also in the end mutually exclusive" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 146). Insko also suggests that Irving uses narratives of certainty and uncertainty to cast doubt on the whole narrative and, in a sense, deconstruct it. The problem of witnessing events and accurately portraying them is touched on substantially by Insko; he writes that "Irving 'deconstructs' historical truth by questioning the very foundation upon which truth-telling in history rests: this time, the distinction between primary and secondary sources. And he does so in two ways: first he cleverly depicts Rip as an unreliable witness. The legal metaphor is especially apt, not only because of Irving's early training for a career in the law but because its rules and strictures for arriving at 'truth' served as a model for early nineteenth-century historical practice. . . . And indeed, it is the authority of the law that, for Knickerbocker, makes Rip's tale 'beyond the possibility of doubt'. . . . A second, and related strategy he employs to cast doubt on the reliability of his 'sources' is the presentation of Rip's story through a labyrinth of voices and narrators, subtly complicating our apparent direct access to the source" (Insko 625-627). Rubin-Dorsky writes that Irving "delineates the dual nature of experience (mirrored narratively in the Crayon/Irving duality) in *The Sketch Book*: a surface layer of anticipated satisfaction camouflages a subterranean level of gnawing doubt" (Rubin-Dorsky 510).

<sup>216</sup> I borrow this idea of Rip's collapsed identity and of "collapsing" narrative forces from Giles and Insko. Giles writes: "When Rip Van Winkle wakes up and sees his grown-up son, a 'precise counterpart' (781) of how the confused old fellow imagines himself to be, we are presented with a perfect image of the collapsing of supposedly natural hierarchies, the erasure of differences between generations" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 157). Giles suggests that Irving not only attempts to erase the "differences between generations" by presenting Rip with his double, Rip Jr., but more significantly that Irving also inscribes his awareness--in this scene--of how these "differences cannot be obliterated entirely: Rip Van Winkle himself enjoys an illusory, but not an actual, respite from history" (157). Insko writes: "Dissolving the border between the third-person narration and the perspective of Rip, the narration in these instances attempts to place the reader inside Rip's bewildering experience" (Insko 631).

<sup>217</sup> I borrow this idea from several sources. First I borrow the notion of Rip's 'identity' crisis from Giles, who reads this scene similarly and, most significantly, suggests that Rip experiences a crisis of subjectivity as a post-revolutionary subject: "Caught in the hinge between pre-Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary America, Rip Van Winkle experiences a sense of 'bewilderment' as his understanding of selfhood becomes fractured and doubled: 'He doubted his own identity, and whether he was himself or another man' (781)" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 156). I also borrow the idea of uncertainty from Wyman, who states that Rip's "veiled ambivalence about revolutionary ideals" is "revealed by his trouble in reading the signs around him" (Wyman 217). Wyman asserts that Rip's "mystical episode" in the Kaatskills has "robbed Rip of self-knowledge. He acts out this dilemma upon his return from the mountains, as allegorical figure of a self-estranged America" (Wyman 219).

<sup>218</sup> Giles acknowledges the conflict American post-revolutionary subjects experienced in their identities: "Irving's American contemporaries of a 'division within their identities', as Pease put it, resulting from split loyalties" to both "Britain and America, to established local customs and a new national citizenship. Such fissures were refracted also in the disjunction between a more mechanistic environment associated with the new print culture and what Christopher Looby has called 'the more passionately attached, quasi-somatically experienced nation for which many Americans longed'" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 154).

<sup>219</sup> I borrow the term and concept of the “dance” as working to conjure coherency from Caruth’s analysis of de Man’s reading of Kleist’s *Marionette Theater*, in which “de Man suggests that the puppet dance can be read as the representation of a certain aesthetic model of self-knowledge in the tradition developing out of Kant” (Caruth 80). Caruth argues that the dancing figure gives the illusion of perfection.

<sup>220</sup> Wyman reads this scene differently from me, as a scene in which Rip experiences clarity. Where as Wyman argues that “His [Rip’s] necessary remove from the present state of things, clothed in his antiquated Dutch fashions, grants him the detachment required to register these changes” (Wyman 220), I disagree, and instead argue that Rip’s staccato and interrupted declaration reveals he *cannot* comprehend the changes.

<sup>221</sup> Wyman identifies Irving’s linguistic play on cognition: “The trope of looking at but not *knowing* what one sees becomes a central theme of the tale as well as a key to the way the text exploits the tension between appearance and reality” (Wyman 216).

<sup>222</sup> Wyman suggests Rip’s crisis is linked to the crisis of identity permeating the new Republic: “By far the richest reading of Irving’s story entails the notion of history as a function of memory and forgetting, a necessary link to the past without which one cannot know the present, let alone one’s own identity. As Howard Horowitz reminds us, ‘History [is] not past events *per se* but . . . the memory of those events’ (34). Rip, then, represents the new Republic herself, waking up groggily to a world utterly reformed in terms of politics, yet still struggling with the problems of freedom, self-rule, work, and autonomy” (Wyman 217).

<sup>223</sup> Several critics believe this is a strategic device of Irving’s, intended to question the verity of (hi)story-tellers and historians. For example, Wyman writes: “Rip’s faulty self-knowledge and his mistaken reading of his transformed world raise doubts as to the authenticity of his storytelling. He delivers a surreal tale of the late-eighteenth-century Catskills that endangers truth-telling itself, because he nudges it out of the realm of innocent folktale” (Wyman 219).

<sup>224</sup> Similar to *Caleb Williams* and *Edgar Huntly*, events are sometimes indirectly linked to their suggestive agents: the “scrupulous accuracy” of Knickerbocker’s story “has since been completely established,” but no one knows by whom (33); similarly, Knickerbocker’s story opens with an anonymous address to an anonymous addressee (“WHOEVER has made a voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill mountains” and attributes his observations to an anonymous “voyager” (“the voyager may have descried”) (34); when Rip hears “a voice from a distance, hallooing, ‘Rip Van Winkle!’” (34) both Rip and the reader attribute its likely origin to “a strange figure slowly toiling up the rocks” (35); Rip’s discovery of his “foot long” “beard” is “involuntary” and owing to the villagers stroking “their chins” (“The constant recurrence of this gesture induced Rip, involuntarily, to do the same” (42); Rip refers to an anonymous plurality when looking for the cause of his absent gun (“they’ve changed my gun” (45); when “Rip’s story” is “told” its not clear whether Rip is the agent or storyteller (“Rip’s story was soon told”) (46); when Irving explains “It was determined . . . to take the opinion of old Peter Vanderdonk” (46) he refers indirectly to the villagers; Vanderdonk confirms that Rip’s story “was affirmed” but does not reveal the agent; and in the “Note” that follows “Rip Van Winkle” Crayon explains that “The foregoing Tale . . . had been suggested to Mr. Knickerbocker by a little German superstition” but does not reveal who “suggested” it (48).

<sup>225</sup> Ferguson is one of several critics who points out that causality is obscured in “Rip Van Winkle”. Insko argues this is intentional to show the “arbitrary” “role of narrative representation in history writing (615). Insko locates a similar concern in Charles Brockden Brown: “Irving was not alone in recognizing the contingency and indeterminacy of efforts to discern causes. Charles Brockden Brown began his ‘Annals of Europe and America’ (1806) by remarking that ‘[p]olitical transactions are connected together in so long and various a chain that a relater of contemporary events is frequently obliged to carry his narration somewhat backward, in order to make himself intelligible. He generally finds himself placed in the midst of things’. . . . Perhaps writers of fiction, like Brown and Irving, were more sensitive to the processes of invention by which causes are deduced or constructed—more sensitive to the fictive quality of historical causation” (617). Insko contends that Irving relied on “tautology” and not “causation, as his preferred mode of historical explanation,” being aware that “Historical events are caused, then, not by explaining their connections to prior events; they are caused by the historian’s narrative constructions” (618). He suggests that what Knickerbocker does in the *History* is what he does in *The Sketch-Book*: “competing theories, alternative narratives, are presented by Knickerbocker, not as a gradual progress toward the truth . . . but as so many fictions, each of which has a claim to truth not on the basis of its correspondence to reality, but according to the authority that underwrites it” (619). As such it becomes ironic when critics refer to Irving as anachronistic, when in fact, this was his intent. Wyman points out the irony of Irving having not been to Kaatskills himself “until 1832, thirteen years after the publication of *The Sketch Book*” (Wyman 221).

<sup>226</sup> Ferguson reads this intoxication literally: “Rip has been an alcoholic on a 20-year binge” (Ferguson 531). Because of his alcoholism, Rip’s view of the figures in the Kaatskills is ‘distorted’ and ‘exaggerated’ (533).

<sup>227</sup> Giles notes that “the narrative voice of Geoffrey Crayon tends to avoid any direct representation of the American landscape” (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 142).

<sup>228</sup> Martin reads the “magical hues” literally: “The terms ‘magical’ and ‘fairy’, apparently incidental, adjectively subordinate, invite the reader away from the ‘commonplace realities of the present’ to a region of greater imaginative latitude” (141).

<sup>229</sup> McLamore seems to suggest that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, America was caught between two colonial identities--“the status of a former colony . . . [and] an imperial maturity”--or status as a colonizing nation (35). He also suggests that Irving’s awareness of this ambivalent status is thematized in *The Sketch-Book*: “Crayon’s growing awareness that England’s experiences as an imperial and colonizing nation had changed its character in ways that called into question the U.S. commitment to the imperial path provides an essentially postcolonial thematic focus for the *Sketch Book*” (35).

<sup>230</sup> Wyman suggests a slightly different reading; he reads this separation as staging the political bipartisanship in the new Republic: “Irving put forth his tale in the face of a trend towards individualism and fragmentation as Federalists argued with Democrats and family ties disintegrated like the ‘disremembered branch of the great Appalachian family’, the mountains where he located his tale (26)” (220).

<sup>231</sup> I borrow this idea from Davidson: “Noteworthy in America’s postcolonial novels is that England is rarely a site of nostalgia or reactionary longing (even for the most socially conservative American writers). On the other hand, England is hardly ever summoned up as a metaphor for evil oppression either. When England is represented negatively, it is typically because England *mirrors* problems in the new Republic. Colonial oppressor and new national government are interchangeable, as in Washington Irving’s famous political jibe in ‘Rip Van Winkle’ (1819) at ‘King’ George Washington” (22; original emphasis).

<sup>232</sup> Plummer and Nelson conduct a slightly different reading of “bosom” in Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” where they read it as charged with a female power structure: “Irving’s conservatism subverts itself, since conservation of the existing power structure means the continuance of a female (though certainly not feminist) hierarchy. Irving’s tale is one of preservation, then, of maintenance of the feminine, and the landscape is the predominant female. Sleepy Hollow lies ‘in the bosom’ of a cove lining the Hudson (*Sketch Book* 272), the valley is ‘embosomed in the great state of New York’ (274), and the vegetating families of Sleepy Hollow are rooted in its ‘sheltered bosom’ (274)” (Plummer and Nelson 176).

<sup>233</sup> McLamore seems to suggest that Rip is a colonial figure about to fight his colonizers: “Van Winkle’s experiences seek a middle ground between the attitudes of exploitation or enslavement” (47). However, McLamore also argues that Rip’s ascent into the mountains is intended to re-colonize a narrative which belongs: “to the succession of guardian spirits of the mountain described by the town historian, Vanderdonk, and by Knickerbocker in the postscript. The postscript extends this association back to Indian tales . . . and associates Rip with a claim to cultural guardianship and possession based upon a connection with and intoxication by the spirits of a place (42)” (48). I would agree with critics who argue that Irving was critical of old narratives which justified Indian displacement (in that he did not support the Indian removals under the new Republic); thus Irving could have included the Indian myths in order to tell a story otherwise not disseminated to the public.

<sup>234</sup> Insko argues that the past before Rip’s sleep is actually not pre-revolutionary but pre-pre-revolutionary, in other words, far earlier than the mid-eighteenth-century. I agree, but would suggest that Irving elides both pre-revolutionary and ‘older’ pasts; the village’s peasant structure supports this. Specifically, according to MacFarlane’s examination of peasantry, Rip’s village has some of the features of a British, peasant society: no schools, no church, no cash monies, no markets, no individual rights to property, no land wages (with the principal source of labor being family reproduction), no rentable or purchasable land (with all land being multigenerational and having a family name), no women’s rights, no bachelors, small class differences, no mobility between social groups, no contact or only one-way contact between the town and the country, and no professional intellectuals (with the only intelligentsia resting with a priest or teacher from the town) (MacFarlane 21-30).

<sup>235</sup> Ringe reads the central conflict in “Rip Van Winkle” as “regional”: “critics have . . . [been] failing to take into account a fundamental regional conflict—the mutual hostility between New York and New England—that appears not only in these two tales, but in other of Irving’s works as well” (Ringe 455). Specifically, Ringe finds many examples in the text where the “Connecticut Yankee” culture is both “invading-and-threatening-a New York Dutch society” (455).

<sup>236</sup> Critics in the mid to late-twentieth century interpret this scene either as a historical, biographical or psychoanalytic act of “liberation”: “Americanist critics of the Cold War era, who used to idealize the virtues of ‘freedom’ at all costs, tended to equate Rip Van Winkle’s liberation from his wife with a passage into existential self-fulfillment that was analogous, conceptually, to America’s liberation from her European ‘family’” (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 146). Wyman reads this liberation biographically, as staging Irving’s own “escape” from responsibility: “Rip’s escape from his family and social responsibilities, then, seems like a reactionary, cartoony counterpoint to the sober prospect of building a new, independent Republic in the name of freedom. Irving, incidentally, spent seventeen years (1815-1832) ostensibly on the lam like Rip, living abroad in Europe, and narrating his new nation from afar” (219). Emmett and Veeder read Rip’s “flight” psychoanalytically: “Rip’s flight from his phallic wife’s tongue leads him deep into the forest of dream where repressed desire surfaces. Unlike Jane Eyre who homes in on what she needs, and Huck who at least seeks for what he needs, Rip has fled from what he can’t handle. Rather than regression in the service of the ego, Rip has practiced denial. . . . To indicate that flight from woman is no way to deal with the Terrifying Mother, Irving stages the male pleasure party within a womb” (228).

<sup>237</sup> I borrow this idea from McLamore, who reads this scene as emblematic of individual, regional identities in conflict: “Rip’s return on election day provokes a more fundamental election concerning heritage and communal identity within the new Republic, which pits the women, children, and ‘historians’ against ‘self-important’ male politicians who see Rip solely as potential vote” (37).

<sup>238</sup> I would suggest that Irving’s anachronism was symptomatic of the time, and in fact, an accurate experience of being caught between old and new orders. In other words, his suspension is indicative of what many intellectuals wrote regarding the experience of revolution; the difference is that Irving was aware, it seems, of his suspension. Moreover, Irving was aware that “literary figures are themselves always in danger of becoming outdated, of seeming anachronistic” and crafted Knickerbocker to combat it (Insko 606). Insko argues “that Irving’s ‘rhetoric of anachronism’ . . . calls into question” “the new historicist idea that texts or ideas ‘belong’ to one period rather than another” (608).

<sup>239</sup> Critics typically read Irving’s *A History of New York* as questioning Republican ideals: “Robert A. Ferguson has called *A History of New York* ‘the first American book to question directly the civic vision of the Founding Fathers’, and this may well be true” (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 152). Pollard, in particular, reads *The Sketch Book* as “in dialogue with the dominant Jeffersonian narrative of a glorious national future. It thus rediscovers Irving as a critical alternative witness to this important period” (82). Guttman notes Henry S. Canby’s early twentieth-century labeling of Irving as “‘the arch-Federalist of American literature’. Henry A. Pochmann, repeating Canby’s phrase, agreed that Irving was ‘more Federalist than the Federalists’. Stanley T. Williams’s two-volume *Life of Washington Irving* (1935) provided much information on young Irving’s predominantly Federalist environment and much evidence to substantiate earlier judgments of the anti-Jeffersonian satire in *Salmagundi* and in *Knickerbocker’s History*” (Guttman 166).

<sup>240</sup> Donna Hagensick paints a detailed portrait of Irving's complex, split political allegiances, which drew much criticism from critics who called him a "chameleon" who--like Rip--"could not decide where he belonged, or imply that he was politically naive" (Hagensick, qtd. in Aderman 178). Irving's political allegiances shifted: he was "sympathetic" to "the Federalists and Republicans" before 1815, when he left for Europe, and he was "associated" with "the Democrats and Whigs" from 1829 to 1846 (178). The specifics of Irving's Federalist conservatism entailed "endorsing the political ideas of Alexander Hamilton, while opposing those of Thomas Jefferson. More specifically it meant favoring nationalism over sectionalism; commercialism over agrarianism; and, the rights of wealth and property over the rights of the common people or mob" (181). Irving also tended to gravitate toward the party that favored "aristocracy" and "reflected the views of Hamilton: fear of the mob achieving political victory when it was ill-equipped to govern" (181); Irving feared "mobocracy" and the "election process" as giving too much power to the people (182). Even when Irving did support a Republican it was because the Federalists supported him: "Support of Aaron Burr would not necessarily mean that one was leaving the Federalists, but rather that one had discovered a new and more lethal way to attack Jefferson" (181). Yet even though Irving was anti-Jeffersonian at home, he was patriotic when in Europe: "he recognized the inherent differences between a monarchy and a Republic" (182). By the time Irving left Europe in 1832 he was a Democrat, despite not being physically present to participate in politics at home: "the Federalist party was dead" and when Irving returned in 1832 "he accepted Jacksonian democracy" primarily because he was "nationalistic" (184-185). In this way Irving could be seen as flitting wherever the Federalist party went: from its support of Burr to its dissolution and creation into the Democratic party, and then the Whig party in 1840. Hagensick's analysis allows for many parallels to be made between "Rip Van Winkle" and Irving's own life. One could, for example, interpret Rip's sleep as allegorizing "the vast changes at home during his absence" (Hagensick, qtd. in Aderman 184). Moreover, one could read Rip's trauma--and indifference to politics--as stemming from Irving's sour experiences in politics: "Only as a young man did Irving occasionally participate in political action, and for him these were traumatic experiences" (187). While I argue Rip doesn't participate in politics in the short story because he is a non-agent, one could also argue it is because politics didn't suit his interests; as Hagensick presents Irving, Irving was only interested in politics whenever it suited him financially. Irving was not an ideologue or 'idea' oriented person; as Hagensick presents him, he valued politics for its pragmatic function: i.e. as providing him with literary material and supporting his career as an author. In this way, Irving was more opportunistic--even *The Sketch-Book* was written for money: "Irving's turn from a devil-may-care scribbler to a circumspect author took place about the time he wrote the stories and essays that form *The Sketch Book*--his first book written specifically for profit" (160). Cf. Giles on the multiple sources of Irving's double, uncertain narrative and conception of a conflicted post-revolutionary subject (147).

<sup>241</sup> "Giles also suggests such a double critique which he calls Irving's "doubleness of texture": "Irving's mode is not so much that of subversion, but of perversion; his work does not radically undermine conventional values, but rather holds them in *suspension*" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 143; emphasis mine). Rather than threatening "the institutional order," Irving's "burlesque" does not take up a "voice of a popular culture that is positioned in opposition to the dominant ideology"--as one would via the "carnavalesque" (144). "Burlesque," Giles explains, "implies no such antagonism; in burlesque, the humorous counterdiscourse runs in parallel with the master narrative, revealing the arbitrariness of its construction, but implicitly supporting, rather than undermining, its established pattern" (144). Giles also explains that Irving's "burlesque" "irony" could, in fact, explain why he *looks* like he is conservative, when in actuality, he is serving a dual critique of both dominant and marginalized ideologies through his "parallel narratives": "Irving's texts . . . are subtly disorienting in the way their parallel narratives set up a series of reflecting mirrors that grinningly ape the conventions of society" (144). Cf. Wyman on Irving's ambivalence especially 218, 297.

<sup>242</sup> I formulate this idea based on Downes's reading of Sarsefield's actions: "Clithero's arrest thus compels Sarsefield to articulate an institutionalized rupture in the law's discourse of self-justification" (Downes, "Sleep-Walking" 426).

<sup>243</sup> Critics also argue that, in addition to representing the threat of British rule, Dame Van Winkle also represents the threat of the female voice. (See Davidson 11).

<sup>244</sup> Wyman agrees that "Wolf mimics his master's guilty swagger before Dame Van Winkle" (219).

<sup>245</sup> Giles notes the transatlantic practice of inscribing uncertainty and the trace of "monarchical" rule in response to revolution: "Pierre Klossowski said in relation to the representation of the French Revolution in Sade's texts that the 'revolutionary community' is always 'secretly but inwardly bound up with the moral dissolution of monarchical society, since it is through this dissolution that the members have acquired the force and energy necessary for bloody decisions'; and a similar tone of ambivalence comes through in 'Rip Van Winkle', where the new sign of George Washington is inexorably linked in the protagonist's mind with the old sign of King George III" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 156).

<sup>246</sup> Ward paints a picture of colonial constraint that set in after America declared independence: "The emergency conditions of wartime and the decision for independence tested the liberties that Americans had secured under their colonial governments and the British Constitution. . . . Congress, from the start of the war, entreated states and localities 'to arrest and secure' every person 'whose going at large . . . may . . . endanger the safety of the colony, or the liberties of America.' States required persons moving about to carry a certificate attesting to their loyalty issued by some governmental authority such as Congress. . . . Innkeepers and the like could be fined for not asking patrons to show travel certificates. . . . Typical was a Connecticut law of 1776 which provided penalties of a fine, imprisonment, or disenfranchisement for any one who wrote or spoke libeling Congress. . . . Americans discovered that among everyday frustrations, war weariness, and fractious neighbors, a slip of the tongue could result in being hailed before a magistrate, and worse, being tried for seditious speech" (49-59).

<sup>247</sup> Pollard notes "Crayon's grappling with Old and New Worlds, with hints of guilt in having abandoned the latter" (89). Guttman elaborates on Irving's nostalgia for old world Europe: "In England and Scotland Irving found what America lacked even under the Federalist administrations of Washington and Adams—a Conservative society with a sense of the past . . . Irving found in Europe the ruins of a civilization that deserved better than it received . . . we see him, in 1819, responding as a true Conservative to the European past . . . Irving's mood was consistently nostalgic" (166). Criticism during Irving's time, such as this review from Henry Brevoort, Jr in 1819, accurately pins *The Sketch-Book* as a comparison between the old and new orders: "There appears . . . to be a design to exhibit the contrast between the old provincial times, and the state of things subsequent to the American revolution" (Brevoort, Jr., quoted in Aderman 47).

<sup>248</sup> Wyman suggests a similar instability in Rip's name: "Despite the great transformations of the U.S. war of Independence, the old ways won't Rest in Peace (R. I. P.)" (216).

<sup>249</sup> In reading *The Sketch-Book* as a “postcolonial text” McLamore makes a convincing case for why Irving produced a form of literature that was itself “Euro-American,” and suspended between two nations, two identities and two literary traditions: “*The Sketch Book* may be considered a postcolonial text because it asserts a claim to colonially transmitted cultural resources . . . these resources might form images of a possible cultural identity that could transcend . . . political, economic, or cultural boundaries. Neither American nor English enough, Irving’s writing fits within neither country’s version of literary nationalism. William Hedges observes ‘half-formed, anxious attitudes toward questions of national character, heritage, and culture’” (34).

<sup>250</sup> Irving uses similar “destabilizing” tropes in his other works: “Irving’s language is predicated upon tropes of alterity, whose destabilizing principle involves a continuous process of transition between different points. *A History of New York* is self-conscious about the way its chronological narrative is embroiled within this structure of misrecognition” (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 153). One could suggest that “Rip” is similarly “self-conscious” about its “structure of misrecognition” in so far as the voice that calls Rip to “Rip” is unrecognizable and comes from a “stranger.”

<sup>251</sup> (Eberwein, qtd. in Giles 143). “Crayon prefers an evasive style of ‘playfulness’, as Jane D. Eberwein describes it, being intent upon manipulating ‘transatlantic comparisons’ in a ‘genial but frequently double-tongued voice’” (Giles 142-143).

<sup>252</sup> “Leslie Fiedler identifies him as an antihero archetype of ‘traditional evasions of domesticity and civil life’ (305)” (Wyman 217). Winchell interprets Fiedler’s reading as painting Rip as great American hero in early American literature, similar to “Cooper’s Natty Bumppo”: “we find Leslie [Fiedler] having said . . . ‘Rip . . . is the first of those escapees from what women call responsibility, the first American character shiftless enough to be loved by the audience which loves Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, Melville’s Ishmael, and Mark Twain’s Huck Finn, as well as Saul Bellow’s Henderson the Rain King and the hero of Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*’” (414). Similarly, Ferguson hails Rip as a “hero” precisely because “he is failure that succeeds. . . . That he gets away with failure is a great relief” (529). Despite being a “man who wanders into the hills [and] has refused to accept adult responsibility in his community,” and despite the fact that “Rip’s failures are evident, he manages to solve problems that we cannot solve” (529).

<sup>253</sup> Many critics interpret Rip’s childlike status differently. For example, Wyman notes that “Some say the misogynistic story is about a henpecked, emasculated man who rebels by refusing to take adult responsibility, thereby leaping from one childhood to another (Ferguson 530; Catalano 112; Fiedler 305)” (Wyman 217). Ringe reads Rip as a useless child: “Rip has played no role in the most important events of his times . . . he remains essentially a child himself to the end of his days” (466). Ferguson, in contrast, celebrates Rip’s “infancy” (530 (For further readings of Rip as a child see Blackburn 151; Catalano 112).

<sup>254</sup> I borrow the idea of Rip’s marginalization from Martin, who argues that Irving “allows him [Rip] to settle in a corner of this world, but with a function extremely limited and marginal” (Martin 142).

<sup>255</sup> Many critics note Rip (and Irving's) bachelor status as freeing while others argue it is debilitating. For example, Traister finds that "the bachelor emerges in bachelor writing of the 1820s as a trope for literary authorship, a quasi-profession stuck, as literary history has maintained for years, in a state of arrested development" (113). Rip's bachelor status confers upon him a lack of agency: "The lifelong bachelor's sexual agency . . . disqualified him as a man, and whether a bachelor chose the life of (presumptive) celibacy or had his bachelorhood conferred upon him by the trials of failed courtship, he passed through the world as incomplete, as an example of unrealized potential . . ." (114). And again, "The bachelor clearly functioned as a trope for failed and ineffectual masculinity, a theme to which Washington Irving returned to repeatedly in the middle phase of his authorial career" (116). Ironically this disqualification makes Rip qualified "for literary duties": "Irving's counternarrative of the bachelor as imaginative potential, as a trustworthy . . . detached . . . producer of American narrative" (126).

<sup>256</sup> McLamore agrees Rip belongs nowhere: "Previously displaced by his inability to adapt to the needs of a culture (and a wife) adjusting to the demands of 'profitable labour' (30), Rip and the network of relationships and customs he vaguely remembers have no place among the politicians. Because of their merciless interrogation—a wry comment on political hospitality in the early United States—Rip becomes 'completely confounded . . .' (38). No place exists within his politicized subjectivity, in other words, for Rip or the enchanting dream-vision he comes to represent" (McLamore 47).

<sup>257</sup> "Rip, unlike the reader, does not experience time logically or chronologically. From his point of view time moves not along the trajectory past-present-future, but along the axis present-past-future-present" (Insko 630).

<sup>258</sup> Insko argues Rip is "within" history: "Rip, in effect, has no place in history. But crucially, this is not the same as saying that Rip stands outside history; instead, he is momentarily lost within it. His loss of identity occurs because he can find no present which corresponds to his sense of his own . . . Situating and resituating Rip in historical time, the story represents Rip's dilemma as a problem of historicity . . . to which historical period does Rip 'belong'?" (629).

<sup>259</sup> Many critics read his narrative as believable and reliable, and acting to reinstate Rip's subjectivity. For example, Ferguson asserts that Rip "re-creates himself": "the real story takes hold. Pushed so casually out of existence, Rip must struggle to re-create himself. The present is his enemy, and he must battle against it as a phenomenon hostile to his very being" (537). Ferguson believes that the minor characters' "same chance chronology of appearance . . . encourages the unreceptive villagers to believe Rip's outlandish tale of hibernation even though it runs against every probability known to human existence . . . [Irving] stages Rip's communal metamorphosis from shunned pariah into an instant hero 'reverenced as one of the patriarchs'" (531). Similarly, Wyman uses Donald Pease to argue that Rip establishes a sense of "continuity" between the pre-revolutionary past and its post-revolutionary present: "Rip would be what Donald Pease calls a cultural *ghost* who establishes a sense of continuity with the pre-Revolutionary past (17; qtd. in Anderson 255)" (Wyman 217). Furthermore, "Rip, as the transitional figure of America, having sampled the illusory brew of freedom, finds his place back in the fold, sober with self-knowledge, and able to grant his fellow townsfolk a connection to their colonial past" (220).

<sup>260</sup> Most critics read Rip's awakening as restorative. For example Giles writes that: "there is a double discourse at work here, for while characters such as Geoffrey Crayon and Rip Van Winkle are drawn compulsively toward the alluring, Lethian rivers of narcissistic timelessness, Irving's multivalent texts box in these reveries through various forms of structural irony that displace their dream worlds and so restore sleep to wakefulness" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 158). Ferguson similarly believes that Rip is restored into the community: "Figuratively, Rip dies and miraculously comes back to life on his own terms, thwarting a community that has consigned him to oblivion" (536). Pollard writes that "Rip, unlike Loyalists and increasingly silenced Federalists, is preserved . . . once satisfied as to his identity, Rip seems to slip back into his old way of life" (91). Catalano writes that "[w]hen he emerges from his twenty-year nap having conquered the progression of time, Rip is no longer a henpecked loafer but an emancipated widower and ultimately, the village patriarch. . . . Both justice *and* time are on his side" (115). Cf. Plung 77.

<sup>261</sup> I borrow the notion that Rip is alienated from his "community" from Ringe, who reads him as having "become an alien in the community of which he had once been a valued part. Life has moved on without him" (Ringe 465).

<sup>262</sup> In other words, if I am speaking, you have earned the right to be silent while I speak, and vice versa; as Lyotard says, "the suspension of interlocution imposes a silence and that silence is good. It does not undermine the right to speak. It teaches the value of that right" (142).

<sup>263</sup> Martin explains that it was characteristic of the culture of the time to perceive Rip's story as childish or illegitimate because of his "imagination": "a more specifically American use of the idea [aesthetic primitivism] was the attempt to insist on personal adulthood by equating the imaginative and the childish. Childhood, says Gray, is the time for imaginative indulgence; adulthood brings with it a demand for fact and doctrine" (139). Martin further contends that Rip 'loses' "out" because he 'fails' "to see the the necessity of demanding 'fact and doctrine', which are at once the prerequisite for and the evidence of personal and cultural maturity" (Martin 144). I disagree that Rip fails to demand material evidence of his existence out of choice, as Martin seems to suggest. Rather, I argue that Rip's demands to his village for certainty and recognition are the *only ones* available to him as a marginalized other; the fact that he is an other is evidenced by the very lack of fact and doctrine that would otherwise corroborate his story and identity.

<sup>264</sup> "[T]here is a profound pain attached to this loss. . . . Revolution is not the painless, dreamy transformation it might appear, the seamless continuum conjured by Jefferson and Monroe" (Pollard 92).

<sup>265</sup> Rip is like the "abject or the sacred" who has been "reduced" "to transparent meanings" and "returns to us from without like an accident" (Lyotard 146). Moreover, he is the figuration of "the reverse triumphant identification with the Other which affects modern Republics at their birth"; he is "kept on the margins of interlocution, and condemned to exile" to remain in a state of *infantia*" (6). Rip's exile could reflect "Irving's own terror of being, both realistically and metaphorically, lost forever between two shores" (Rubin-Dorsky 511). Rubin-Dorsky calls Crayon an "exile" relegated to the margins: [d]espite the fact that England is the 'land' of his 'forefathers', he remains an exile, barred from the stability conferred by the conservative, aristocratic order" (512).

<sup>266</sup> In another scene, Insko notes a similar absence in an addressor but argues that because it is the "narrator" who speaks, there is an "effect" of registering "alternative temporalities, to capture the relative quality of time in the story" (632).

<sup>267</sup> Ferguson reads this scene differently: “there is Rip, the baby grandson, who cries in fear at his first encounter with the long-lost grandfather . . . the third Rip, held in his mother’s arms, functions as a catalyst to restore the first Rip to his place” (538). He further asserts that “Baby Rip cries as part of a simple and yet complicated story about men who refuse to grow up” (541).

<sup>268</sup> While some critics read Rip’s infant status as allegorizing the nation’s status of infancy, others disagree. For example, Martin argues that “Irving’s America . . . was a new nation which saw itself, fresh and innocent, as emancipated from history; concomitantly, this new nation desired to elicit confidence from within and without by assuming an immediate adulthood in the family of nations. The United States was thus a new but self-consciously adult nation” (137). America, he states, did not ‘want’ to be an infant nation: “a childish (primitive) society might legitimately take an interest in things imaginative; such a society, however, was precisely what America wanted not to be” (139).

<sup>269</sup> Rubin-Dorsky writes of Irving’s anxiety: “could he risk declaring himself a professional author and succeed where no American previously had?” (500). Critics, among them, Giles note the ironic plunge in popularity that Irving’s texts took in America, especially in the years following the civil war, where Irving was viewed as less “committed” an American author to American readers; “Irving’s work became marginalized later in the nineteenth century . . . [and] appeared less than fully committed to the romantic, exceptionalist idea of America as inherently different from other countries” (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 145). Irving’s character “Rip” could be staging multiple anxieties that Irving had: which country to live in, which tradition to borrow from, and which literary tradition to represent. Early reviewers of Irving’s work “failed to see that Irving had combined the same cultural insecurity they shared with his own personal tensions and projected them onto Geoffrey Crayon and that this displacement created a persona to narrate a very American book” (Rubin-Dorsky 509).

<sup>270</sup> Most critics contend that Rip’s narrative is re-assimilated back into a national narrative. Wyman agrees with Howard Horowitz that the “cohesion” of Rip’s story reflects his role as a “figure of the new American”: “As Horowitz explains, ‘As solution to the restlessness, competitiveness, artificiality, and social estrangement that arbiters of culture like [President James] Monroe and [Richard Henry] Dana diagnosed, ‘Rip Van Winkle’ offers . . . through the figure of Rip, national memory as a principle of attachment or communion’ (37). Rip, reified in story, becomes the local-color tale the villagers retell to establish their heritage and identity. Irving gathers select fragments of a decidedly white, Euro-American series of events into a text that both records and dictates history. Back home, Rip reenacts the old tradition of communal storytelling, his rapt listeners gathering round, and he becomes, then, a force for cohesion and allegiance . . .” (Wyman 219). McLamore also states that “Like Roscoe, Shakespeare, and Knickerbocker, Rip stands for an alternative heritage to that claimed by the agents of orthodox culture. By reclaiming Van Winkle and his absurd ghost story as a ‘patriarch’ and ‘chronicle’, the townspeople choose to supplement the ‘self-importance’ of political culture in the early United States with the family relationships and noncommercial heritage Rip comes to embody” (48). While I disagree with McLamore’s notion that the village reclaims Rip and his story, I agree with his contention that “the townspeople’s struggle to make sense of Rip and his tale virtually inaugurates what Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin describe as ‘the special post-colonial . . . concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place’ (*EWB*, 8-9)” (48).

<sup>271</sup> Caruth's account of trauma is central to my reading of Irving's story. As she writes, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4); "[i]n its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11).

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Martin's related but different reading of the glen as "the American equivalent for the 'shadowy grandeurs' of the past" (141).

<sup>273</sup> Giles suggests that *The Sketch-Book* stages the trauma experienced by many after the American Revolution: "The narratives of Washington Irving" 'reflect' "the suppressed trauma of internecine conflict in the first generation after the American Revolution" (Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections* 142). Giles suggests that Irving's double narrative allows readers to understand the American Revolution as a "trauma": "since Irving's transgressive rhetoric also emerges as an aesthetic permutation and repercussion of the American Revolution, in whose aftermath conceptions of national and personal identity were folding in upon themselves in a particularly disorienting manner. It might, in fact, be possible to see the American Revolution within the context of Irving's writing as a kind of 'fortunate fall', a traumatic event that allows him aesthetically to negotiate that profound sense of loss which provides the poetic inspiration for his texts" (151).

<sup>274</sup> As White explains, the task of analyst is to "work with them [hysterics] to restore coherence to their narratives, listening to each '*Leidengeschichte*' with an ear towards what is missing from it" (1037; original emphasis). The task of "analysis" then, is to "uncover the trauma and re-integrate it into her life story" (White 1038).

<sup>275</sup> I view the gap as similar to the hole La Capra refers to in his definition of trauma: "[t]rauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered" (41).

<sup>276</sup> I borrow this idea from Rubin-Dorsky, who quotes Stanley Williams: "'the horrible ordeal of bankruptcy' did traumatize Irving. . . . With the crumbling of his economic foundation he would, at thirty-three, for the first time in his life, have to depend solely on his own resources" (501-502). Rubin-Dorsky identifies a link between Irving's trauma and *The Sketch-Book*: "Irving derived the techniques, tone, and texture of *The Sketch Book* from the very traumas that threatened to debilitate him" (506).

<sup>277</sup> The story "ends with the telling of a story we already know": "The irony, of course, is that by that time, the story has *already* been told-and retold: first by Rip to the villagers, then by Rip to Diedrich Knickerbocker, and then by Diedrich Knickerbocker (via Geoffrey Crayon), who tells it to us, we learn in the tale's last paragraph, 'precisely' as Rip related to him (784)" (Insko 632).

<sup>278</sup> I therefore disagree with critics who allege that that Rip "gets the account of his own life story right" (Ferguson 534). For example, Ferguson reads his repetition of his tale as a success: "Admittedly, it takes awhile for this to happen. Rip is 'observed at first to vary on some points, every time he told it', but, with calculation, his repetitions 'at last settled down precisely to the tale' that we hear" (534).

<sup>279</sup> I borrow this idea from Martin, who writes that America "was beginning history again": "if America did not want to be very young, neither of course did it want to be very old. As a nation which lacked a past, which was beginning history again in a better way, America had to shrug off as it were the implications of history" (139).

<sup>280</sup> Psychoanalytic critics Emmett and Veeder read this compulsion differently, as coming from Rip's audience: "They [the villagers] relisten compulsively to Rip's unexamined narrative, rather than risking the talking cure and eventually hearing their own truth" (228). One would argue that such compulsion is reflected in the writing and production of the theatrical play "Rip Van Winkle," which "emerged . . . almost immediately after publication of Irving's story (Blackburn 143). In this sense, one might further argue that Rip's unreliable narrative continued to have a legacy as a satire--not just for fictive but for *real* audiences--who preferred to see it as a comedic tale rather than as a work of historical truth.

<sup>281</sup> "The exodus from Egypt, which shapes the meaning of the Jewish past, is a departure that is both a radical break and the establishment of a history. . . . For after the Egyptian Moses led the Hebrews from Egypt, Freud claims, they murdered him in a rebellion; repressed the deed; and in the passing of two generations assimilated the liberated acts of Moses to the acts of another man, the priest of Yahweh (also named Moses), who was separated from the first in time and place. The most significant moment in Jewish history is this . . . not the literal return to freedom, but the repression of an murder and its effects" (Caruth 14).

<sup>282</sup> "At the beginning of the drive, Freud suggests, it not the traumatic imposition of death but rather the traumatic 'awakening' to life. Life itself, Freud says, is an awakening out of a 'death' for which there was no preparation. The origin of the drive is thus precisely the experience of having passed beyond death without knowing it" (Caruth 65).

<sup>283</sup> Insko suggests this: "Rip has what amounts to the same experience twice, though in opposite temporal directions. Irving carefully constructs a parallel structure between Rip's experience in the mountain-when he steps into the past-and his experience upon returning to the village-when he leaps into (what is for him) the future, as himself a figure from the past . . . Rip's sojourn into the mountains, rather than an escape from a particular place into a magical realm outside of history, is actually a journey deeper into history, into an estranging past" (628). Insko argues that Rip's "return" is a "repetition": "Rip's 'return' to the village is not a return at all. Rather, it is a repetition; or it is a return only in the sense that he returns to his earlier bewildering experience" (629).