

The Paper of the Year Award

From the Private to the Public: Solitude in Brockden Brown's *Wieland*

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In his ruminations on American democracy and individualism in *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), Alexis de Tocqueville notes: “Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants, and separates his contemporaries, from him; it throws him back for ever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart” (Tocqueville 448). Viewing Americans hazardously sequestered in individualistic solitude, Tocqueville here identifies the concept of “solitude” negatively, implying it as threatening and confining. His celebration of burgeoning American democracy is constantly subverted by recurrent expressions of a fear that it may give rise to anarchy. Unfettered by external authority, American individualism, when pushed to its extreme, might lead to what he calls “tyranny of the majority” (209). To check such “excesses of democracy” (222), Tocqueville suggests that some form of authority is necessary.

Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), written in post-revolutionary America and set in the pre-revolutionary era, also explores this dangerous corollary to the state of solitude in a nascent democratic society of the new Republic. More specifically, Brown's novel examines the issue of (mis)interpretation resulting from solitude. The tragedies in *Wieland* almost invariably stem from the characters' misinterpretation in their solitary state, in which they must test the veracity of Frank Carwin's ventriloquized voice without the guidance of any external authority. The characters are frequently presented as judges: Theodore and Pleyel both stand as “judge[s]” (88) of Clara's innocence; and Clara judges Carwin's vindication of his malevolence in using his ventriloquism (148–65). Unassisted by external authorities to mediate their judgment, however, these characters' individual understandings of Carwin's voices lead to disastrous consequences, most notably, Theodore's murder of his entire family.

To understand the concept of solitude as represented in *Wieland*, this essay examines how communication operates in relation to the solitude in which the characters are entrapped. More specifically, my inquiry addresses less the characters' engagements with communications media, such as newspapers and pamphlets in the then-flourishing print culture, than the very *absence* of such engagements. By viewing the fictional world of *Wieland* as dictated by the economy of non-circulation and non-exchange, the present essay seeks to delineate the novel's trajectory from the narrative of private communication to one of public communication. This shift from the private to the public necessitates a violent removal of solitude in which we see the Wielands hermetically contained at the outset of *Wieland*. Brockden Brown, I will conclude, sought to promote the civic virtue of novels in the public arena in an age hostile to fiction writing at large—on the one hand, by highlighting the negative aspects of solitude that confines the characters, and on the other, by representing his own novel as a vehicle of communication for the public good.

“Solitude Imposes Least Restraint upon the Fancy”

In many ways, *Wieland* revolves around the problematics of interpretation, the most striking and disastrous example of which is Theodore Wieland. He expresses his desire to directly communicate with God: “The blissful privilege of direct communication with thee, and of listening to the audible enunciation of thy pleasure!” (128). In response to this supplication, Theodore hears what he believes to be God's command: “Thy prayers are heard. In proof of thy faith, render me thy wife. This is the victim I chuse. Call her hither, and here let her fall” (129). At this instance, it is significant that Theodore hears this voice in his solitude and blindly obeys the command. Direct communication—that is, without any mediation—conflicts with how things operate in the public realm, where news and commodities are mediated through various modes of public mediation such as newspapers and the marketplace. What Theodore experiences in solitude is precisely this mode of communication, in which his private and subjective views dictate his judgment.

In addition to God's command whose origin is left unattributable to any source, Carwin's ventriloquized voice is invariably heard and interpreted by the characters in their solitude. In a most salient instance, Pleyel is also deceived by Carwin's voice into believing that his lover has died. Pleyel is vulnerable to Carwin's deception because he is without any means of verifying the authenticity of what he hears. The consistent absence of letters from his lover makes him even more susceptible to Carwin's duplicitous voice: “Two days before a packet had arrived from Hamburg,

by which he had flattered himself with the expectation of receiving letters, but no letters had arrived" (37). Situated thus as being unable to obtain a written message, Pleyel happens to hear Carwin's voice, which erroneously convinces him of his lover's death: "The seal of death is on her lips. Her silence is the silence of the tomb" (41). To ascertain these mysterious tidings ventriloquized by Carwin, Pleyel again makes an effort to elicit a letter from his lover: "His gaiety had flown, and every passion was absorbed in eagerness to procure tidings from Saxony. . . . He immediately went on board, but found no letters directed to him" (43). Thus excluded from a communications circuit, Pleyel rushes to the conclusion that his lover is dead—though she is actually alive—predicating his conviction purely on the mysterious voice he heard. As one critic rightly notes, Pleyel "withdraws into a *Wielandesque* moody solitude where fancy can begin the erosion of his vaunted logic" (Kreyling 47).

In inquiring into the issue of misinterpretation in solitude, "fancy" becomes a keyword, a word that recurs throughout *Wieland*, implying an unrestrained, irrational mode of thinking that stands antithetical to the Enlightenment's belief in reason. Clara Wieland is cognizant of the danger of fancy, and she associates the word specifically with the state of solitude. Alone in her bedroom, she tries to open the closet to procure her father's manuscript deposited therein. While attempting to do so, she is assailed by a terrible shriek from the closet: "Hold! Hold!" (71). Alarmed at this mysterious voice, Clara seeks to put her distempered thoughts into order by cautioning herself against solitude and fancy: "Solitude imposes least restraint upon the fancy. . . . I was alone, and the walls were chequered by shadowy forms" (71). Solitude thus feeds on human irrationality. This irrationality caused by fancy can also be described as anarchy or chaos. Carwin's voices consistently throw the characters' rational reasoning into an anarchic state, and they try to restore order to their "distempered imagination" (93) and "distempered fancy" (148). For instance, confronted by the deranged Theodore, who is intent on sacrificing her to God, Clara states: "[M]y thoughts rushed again into anarchy" (170). Furthermore, after reading the transcript of Theodore's statement in the courtroom, Clara's mind is thrown into "chaos": "The images impressed upon my mind by this fatal paper were somewhat effaced by my malady. They were obscure and disjointed like the parts of a dream. I was desirous of freeing my imagination from this chaos" (133). Concurrently with the frequent appearance of anarchy and chaos, its antinomy, "order," recurs throughout the text: "Order could not readily be introduced into my [Clara's] thoughts" (77). This pattern, in which the characters are thrown into anarchy and then seek to regain order, is one of the structural hallmarks of this novel. Considering all the examples

given above, Frank Shuffelton is accurate in noting that “each of the other characters [in *Wieland*] falls into his confusions because he or she fails to consult with others, fails to act as other than a solitary reader” (Shuffelton 102).

The Importance of Not-Circulating

The principal reason why the characters in *Wieland* are so susceptible to solitary and erroneous interpretations is attributable to what critics view as the isolated status of the Wielands in terms of both their geographic setting and class status (Weldon 4, Ringe 28, Samuels 45, and Hinds 99). Roberta Weldon succinctly recapitulates this issue:

[T]he kind of insularity the Wielands embrace can lead to a dangerous myopia. . . . The Wielands isolate themselves in a somewhat remote area of Pennsylvania, and, except for the companionship of Pleyel, they are not dependent upon or desirous of outside relationships. They apparently flourish in the rarefied atmosphere of each other's company, enjoying intellectual advancement and personal enrichment as the result of their intercourse. (Weldon 4)

Indeed, there is a geographical distance that separates the Wielands from the public realm: “For a while he [Clara's father] relinquished his purpose, and purchasing a farm on Schuylkill, within a few miles of the city, set himself down to the cultivation of it. . . . The character of my mother was no less devout; but her education had habituated her to a different mode of worship. The loneliness of their dwelling prevented her from joining any established congregation” (11, 13). Set within “a few miles” from the city, the Wielands' domicile is separated from the surrounding society. In effect, both Clara and Theodore have been insulated from the outside world since their infancy. Orphaned at an early stage of life, their learning was conducted independently from external authorities: “Our education had been modelled by no religious standard. We were left to the guidance of our own understanding, and the casual impressions which society might make upon us” (22). Noteworthy here is the fact that Clara uses the word “society” as the antithesis of “solitude.” Despite Clara's recurrent use of the word “society,” however, her understanding of the concept is very limited: “It was not till the addition of Henry Pleyel, my friend's only brother, to our society, that his [Theodore's] passion for Roman eloquence was countenanced and fostered by a sympathy of tastes. . . . We were frequently reminded how much happiness depends upon society” (24-25). Her world of “society” is thus confined to

this small group of intimates, and throughout the novel, it seems as if Clara's version of society is synonymous with social isolation because Clara's circle of society is distanced from the world beyond Mettingen, the Wielands' estate.

Physical distance from society equals an imagined distance from it. Clara emphasizes the psychological distance from the contemporary socio-cultural tribulations, especially the French and Indian War, which occurs during the timeframe of the novel. In other words, the Wielands are insulated from the present temporality. Clara states: "The sound of war had been heard, but it was at such a distance as to enhance our enjoyment by affording objects of comparison. . . . Revolutions and battles, however calamitous to those who occupied the scene, contributed in some sort to our happiness, by agitating our minds with curiosity" (26). This passage reflects the Wielands' psychological distance not only from the present temporality but also from the public realm, because it signals their indifference to the political affairs that preoccupied the public in colonial America. Their "curiosity" about the war notwithstanding, their minds are directed more at their own private "enjoyment" than at serious engagement with public affairs. Noteworthy in this context is that, despite the emerging print culture in the revolutionary era described by Larzer Ziff, Michael Warner, and Cathy N. Davidson in their influential studies on the subject, no mention is made at Mettingen of public communications media, such as newspapers or political pamphlets, the staple platforms for disseminating political news and views in the era.¹ Mettingen thus constitutes an insulated topos in *Wieland*, both geographic and imaginary.

To probe further the concept of solitude in *Wieland*, I would like to situate the solitary status of the Wielands specifically as being devoid of circulation and exchange in the public arena. Jane Tompkins has famously described Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* as a novel of "circulation," a novel in which "exchange is the process by which both nations and individuals assume identity, attain their majority, become viable; obeying the rules of exchange is the process by which *Arthur Mervyn* exemplifies benevolence in its most inclusive form" (Tompkins 69). Unlike *Arthur Mervyn*, the universe of *Wieland* is typified by a lack of circulation and exchange. As Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds notes, "Brown's *Wieland* family, out on its country estate, has turned in on itself as it has turned its back on a public world of exchange" (Hinds 99). Hinds further observes that "the *Wieland* family is torn asunder at least in part because its insular class structure implodes the family in on itself" (Hinds 119). Their privileged

¹ See Ziff's *Writing in the New Nation*, Warner's *The Letters of the Republic*, and Davidson's *Revolution and the Word*.

financial status exempts the Wielands from the logic of the marketplace, thereby distancing them from the city, which is just a few miles away from Mettingen.

Furthermore, the fact that it is only in the city that communication media are available is also important to consider the solitary status of the Wielands. In the city, Pleyel receives a packet of letters from Germany (104), he happens to read a newspaper describing Carwin's criminal past (102), and he goes to a printer to confirm the information about Carwin he gained from the newspaper (103). The distance from the city indexes a lack of access to the public arena, in which information is circulated through various print media. *Wieland* is distinctive in Brown's oeuvre as it is set specifically in the rural countryside, quite unlike his novels that follow *Wieland*, *Ormond* and *Arthur Mervyn*, both of which are set mainly in the city. Unlike Constantia Dudley in *Ormond*, who undergoes a substantive transformation through her intimate intercourse with cosmopolitans such as Ormond and Martinette, the character of the solitary Clara remains unchanged almost until the end of the novel, largely because of the lack of external stimuli that might otherwise affect her psyche. Brown, an author who resided in cities such as Philadelphia and New York during his lifetime and who imbibed their cosmopolitan atmosphere, set Clara specifically in the isolated rural countryside of Mettingen to measure the detrimental implications of solitude.

The Discovery of the Asylum

In this context of the lack of circulation and exchange at Mettingen, Clara's dwelling—or what she persistently calls “asylum”—becomes important.² In designating her domicile as an “asylum,” Clara associates the word specifically with a sense of solitude and security. After hearing voices in the closet in her bedroom, which in fact are ventriloquized by Carwin, Clara wails: “How had my ancient security vanished! That dwelling, which had hitherto been *an inviolate asylum*, was now beset with danger to my life. That solitude, formerly so dear to me, could no longer be endured” (53; italics added). Clara not only resides at insulated Mettingen but also creates multiple asylums set apart from the public realm within this locale, thereby securing a private realm immune to the encroachment of external forces. Within this asylum, she occupies her private bedroom, and further within this room, she creates another “asylum”: the closet. This closet—even more distant from the public realm—is an important space in which Clara deposits her father's manuscript

² For Clara's reference to her domicile as “asylum,” see *Wieland* 50, 53, 65, 81, 146, and 176.

as well as her own books and private journal: "The lower of these was used as a depository of household implements, the upper was a closet in which I deposited my books and papers" (51). Furthermore, this closet is usually locked (73). She harbors her father's manuscript and her own journal in this closet in a way that keeps them out of circulation.

Solitude and private feelings are intimately related in Clara's psyche. Disappointed by Pleyel's absence at their appointed meeting, Clara sheds sentimental tears in her bedroom: "I turned aside my head to conceal my tears. I fled into solitude, to give vent to my reproaches, without interruption or restraint. . . . You will hardly believe that, in obedience to this suggestion, I rose for the purpose of ordering a light, that I might instantly make this confession in a letter [to Pleyel]" (68–69). Moreover, in this contained asylum, she engages in writing a journal. What should be underscored here is the fact that Clara's act of writing, the very means of communication, lacks the economy of circulation and exchange. Clara writes her journal in "short-hand" (145), which indicates that her writing is self-directed because those unfamiliar with her shorthand would find her writing unintelligible. Despite her willingness to write a letter to Pleyel (68) and her reception of a letter from Carwin (105), Clara never manages to write a letter to anyone throughout this novel: no correspondence—no exchange of letters—occurs for her. There is a closed economy of communication at work in Clara's asylum, a mode of communication that is private, contained, and self-sufficient. In this context, it is significant that the self-sufficiency of Clara's communication finds a structural expression in the following passage describing her domicile, a passage strewn with the verb "communicate":

My habitation was a wooden edifice, consisting of two stories. In each story were two rooms, separated by an entry, or middle passage, with which they *communicated* by opposite doors. The passage, on the lower story, had doors at the two ends, and a stair-case. Windows *answered* to the doors on the upper story. Annexed to this, on the eastern side, were wings, divided, in like manner, into an upper and lower room; one of them comprized a kitchen, and chamber above it for the servant, and *communicated*, on both stories, with the parlour adjoining it below, and the chamber adjoining it above. . . . There was no window in the lower one, and in the upper, a small aperture which *communicated* light and air, but would scarcely admit the body. (50–51; italics added)

The economy of non-circulation and non-exchange that dictates Clara's mode of communication manifests itself, in a condensed way, in this description of her solitary

asylum.³

Considering this insularity that informs Clara's mode of communication, it is worth pausing to consider why the word "asylum" is consistently used in reference to her domicile. Insofar as the misinterpretations in *Wieland* invariably occur in solitude, and therefore solitude is presented in a negative light, we can also read the word "asylum" not in the positive sense of security but in the negative sense of incarceration: Clara, in her asylum, is incarcerated in her solitude. Although Clara herself associates the word with the sense of a safe haven impervious to the outside forces, according to *OED*, the word also has the following definition: "A sanctuary or inviolable place of refuge and protection for criminals and debtors, from which they cannot be forcibly removed without sacrilege" (*OED*). What is implied in this definition is that asylum means not only a safe place but also a penitentiary.

In colonial America, "asylum" used to mean a safe haven that welcomed immigrants from Europe. America "gained its reputation as the best 'poor man's country,' a place where 'everyman that had industry became opulent'" (Baseler 70).⁴ As a most salient literary example, in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur celebrates colonial America by designating it specifically as an asylum: "In this great American asylum, the poor of Europe have by some means met together, and in consequence of various causes. . . . Urged by a variety of motives, here they came. Everything has tended to regenerate them! This country, providentially intended for the general asylum of the world, will flourish by the oppression of other people" (68, 106). Despite Crèvecoeur's celebration of America as "the general asylum," however, the word's meaning was mutable as colonial America developed into an independent nation. In *The Discovery of the Asylum*, David Rothman documents the development of the American penitentiary from the colonial through the Jacksonian eras. Colonial America, Rothman argues, did not see the need for a penitentiary, instead building almshouses and jails structured according to the household and family models (Rothman 53–56). Yet, with the birth of nationhood in the wake of the Revolutionary War, the increase in population and rapid urbanization by the early nineteenth century caused the traditional and stable society of the colonial period to disintegrate. With these momentous changes, Americans began to create penitentiaries (Rothman 61). However, the United States had to wait until the Jacksonian era to see the consolidating reform movement that spread across the nation: "[T]o comprehend and control abnormal behavior promised to be the first

³ I am indebted to Lisa West Norwood's argument for highlighting this passage. See Norwood 96–97.

⁴ For a detailed account of the development of America as an asylum, see Baseler, especially 42–119.

step in establishing a new system for stabilizing the community, for binding citizens together" (Rothman 58–59). In this national effort to stabilize the nation, the "asylum" was discovered, not in Crèvecoeur's sense but in the sense of incarceration. Given this historical trajectory of the asylum, it can be argued that *Wieland* inhabits the transitional period in which the word "asylum" was on the cusp of extensive cultural changes.⁵ With this, the word "asylum" in *Wieland* begins to assume a negative meaning as a prison that incarcerates Clara in solitude.

Related to the mutation of the word "asylum" in American usage was an important historical event, the passing of the Alien and Sedition Acts. The year 1798, in which Brown's *Wieland* was published, saw the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in response to fears about an imminent war with France and the loyalty of pro-French Irish immigrants. Through these acts, the Federalists imposed tighter restrictions on foreigners and critics of their policies.⁶ Brown was quite attuned to contemporary affairs because he was "assailed by alarmist political writings in newspapers, journals, and pamphlets" (Levine 26) debating these polemical issues that divided the Federalists and the Republicans. When Brown wrote *Wieland*, the United States was panicked over the fear of foreign intrusions, which also engendered anxiety over the so-called Illuminati, "a shadowy group of radical Freemasons who were supposedly behind all contemporary revolutionary movements" (Shuffelton 97). *Wieland* was written "at the height of the Illuminati scare and respond[s] to it on several levels, most generally by foregrounding and consistently rejecting the fears of 'foreign' subversive influence that are an important dimension of the larger Illuminati myth" ("Illuminati Debates" 326). In short, the nation was insulating itself from external forces to consolidate its national foundation, just as Clara insulated herself from the public realm. A historical irony is that, the once general asylum that welcomed foreign immigrants, the new Republic came to bar these aliens through the Alien and Sedition Acts to cement its national identity.

This historical context bespeaks the discourse of an inside/outside binary prevalent at the turn of the century when *Wieland* was composed. Not surprisingly, critics have read the novel as reflective of these political tribulations of the era. For instance, Frank Shuffelton opines: "John Adams and his Federalist colleagues continually described alien-inspired trouble-makers as 'disorganizers,' and Brown's first two

⁵ At the Philadelphia prison, "convicts would avoid all contamination and follow a path to reform. Inmates remained in solitary cells. . . . Left in total solitude, separated from 'evil society . . . the progress of corruption is arrested; no additional contamination can be received or communicated'" (Rothman 85).

⁶ For an excellent recapitulation of the historical analysis of the Alien and Sedition Acts, see Stone 17–76 and Cornell 230–45.

published novels are each narrated by a woman who describes the catastrophes generated by the intrusion of an alien disorganizer into the lives of her immediate community” (Shuffelton 102). Shirley Samuels also reads *Wieland* as a novelistic response to the Alien and Sedition Acts: “For the family [the Wielands] to keep its identity as an ‘asylum,’ the outside world must be posited as a threat” (Samuels 56). Although the strand of political reading as such works to fortify the inside/outside binary in *Wieland*, it is worth calling into question this seemingly rigid dichotomy.

Broken Privacy: Clara’s Secret Journal

Tapping into the above contemporary political turbulence, Brown indeed fashioned his novel based on the then-prevalent schema that worked to create a dichotomy between inside and outside. However, he does so in ways that radically critique this binary by introducing the character of Carwin. Critics have often regarded Carwin as a dangerous figure who brings anarchy into the secure, almost pastoral world of Mettingen. What J. V. Ridgely calls “otherness” in *Wieland* (Ridgely 16) is embodied in the character of Carwin. He is certainly a disruptive figure who creates havoc within the secure world of Mettingen: he severs the romantic connection between Clara and Pleyel; he causes interpretative anarchy with his ventriloquism; and he frightens Clara by invading her private space. Carwin is indeed “an external threat, the alien” (Samuels 49) and “an alien disorganizer” (Shuffelton 102). However, against such a critical grain, I would like to locate Carwin in more positive terms, in an effort to redress the present critical view of him as a symbol of threat to Clara’s security and thereby to reinstate him as salutary agency that brings her out of hermetic solitude. What becomes central to the disruption of Clara’s solitude in her “inviolable asylum” is her journal, a body of writing that seemingly remains private in the closet, yet which, as we shall see, is subject to male characters’ secret gaze.

Despite the geographical distance Clara creates between Mettingen and the outside world, the imagined line separating the two is actually quite vulnerable to the encroachment of external forces. It is Carwin, I argue, who salvages Clara from her isolated and confined status under the guise of disrupting her sense of security. Despite critics’ trouble with the inconsistency of the entire narrative, Carwin’s behavior is consistent throughout in breaking Clara’s solitude. In the most evident example, he clandestinely relishes reading Clara’s journal. He explains to Clara the motive for perusing her journal as follows:

Your closet was usually locked, but it was once my fortune to find the key on a

bureau. I opened and found new scope for my curiosity in your books. One of these was manuscript, and written in characters which essentially agreed with a short-hand system which I had learned from a Jesuit missionary. . . . You know what you have written. You know that in this volume the key to *your inmost soul* was contained. . . . The true state of your mind with regard to Pleyel your own pen had disclosed. (155–56; italics added)

Thus, Carwin enters into Clara's "inmost soul," despite her efforts to create doubly and trebly sequestered walls from the outside.⁷

Another important yet much less obvious outsider who brings outside forces into Mettingen is Pleyel, supposedly an inside member of the limited circle of the *Wielands*. Within the closed society at Mettingen, only Pleyel is situated squarely in a communication circuit with the surrounding world. While deeply engaged with the *Wielands*, Pleyel remains distinct from them in several respects. What is distinctive about Pleyel is that his mind is constantly connected to the outside world beyond Mettingen. Before coming to the *Wielands*' estate, he had spent "some years in Europe" (24), and he desires to go outside the confines of Mettingen. After learning that Theodore is entitled to a great inheritance in Europe, Pleyel expresses his great desire to return to Europe: "His abode at Leipsig made that country appear to him like home. He was connected with this place by many social ties. . . . He now became more impatient than ever to return to Europe" (37–38). It is also in the city, not at Mettingen, that he reads a newspaper: "One idea possessed me wholly; the inexpressible importance of unveiling the designs and character of Carwin, and the utter improbability that this ever would be effected. Some instinct induced me to lay my hand upon a newspaper" (102). This is the only mention of public communications media in *Wieland*. As a public media outlet, the newspaper serves here as an external authority that stabilizes the unknown character of Carwin.⁸ Pleyel's psychological connectedness to the outside world is further evidenced by his anxious waiting for letters from Germany (43), as mentioned earlier. It does not matter whether he actually receives letters; what matters is that Pleyel's mind is directed beyond Mettingen. Pleyel is another outsider within Mettingen in terms of his desire to communicate with the outside world.

In noting the shared otherness of Carwin and Pleyel in relation to the *Wielands*, it

⁷ As if fearing the disclosure of her "inmost soul," she seeks to destroy her journal: "This manuscript, however, which contained the most secret transactions of my life, I was desirous of destroying" (145).

⁸ For a discussion on authority in *Wieland*, see Patterson 61–78.

is significant that Clara's asylum, in which solitude and privacy appear to be secured, is constantly penetrated by these two male figures in a similar manner. Just as Carwin sneaks into Clara's "inmost soul" by secretly reading her journal, Pleyel likewise sees Clara writing the journal:

I spied a light in your chamber as I approached from the outside, and on inquiring of Judith, was informed that you were writing. . . . You were in your chamber, but your employment and the time were such as to make it no infraction of decorum to follow you thither. . . . I knew that to pry into your papers was criminal; but I reflected that no sentiment of yours was of a nature which made it your interest to conceal it. . . . You hurried the paper out of sight, and seemed too anxious to discover whether I knew the contents to allow yourself to make any inquiries. (98–99)

Given their intrusions into Clara's journal and privacy, it seems that Pleyel and Carwin resemble each other. As Barnard and Shapiro note, "Pleyel's assumption that he has the right to sneak up and silently observe Clara's writing mirrors Carwin's" (Ch. XIII, n.2, 98). In clandestinely looking into Clara's journal, Pleyel is guided by his strong "curiosity" (99), a word that Carwin also uses as an excuse for his intrusion into Clara's privacy (155). Although critical focus is often on Carwin and his ventriloquism, and on the resemblance between Carwin and Theodore (Samuels 54), Pleyel is also important in terms of the impact he makes upon the hermetic nature of Clara's solitude. If Carwin represents the dark, threatening outsider, then Pleyel represents its inverse image, an attractive outsider for Clara, who is romantically drawn to him. In that sense, Pleyel and Carwin can be construed as doubles in *Wieland*. Noteworthy in this context is Shirley Samuels' and Robert S. Levine's argument that the cause of the family tragedy is constantly displaced onto Carwin, an outsider who is made a scapegoat (Samuels 55 and Levine 28). Everything that occurs at Mettingen is ascribed to this dark, unknown alien, leaving the rest free of blame. However, what has gone unnoted is the fact that Pleyel also disturbs the hermetic unity at Mettingen. In fact, it is Pleyel who invites Carwin into the circle of the Wielands (58). The boundary as assumed by Clara between Mettingen and the city, between inside and outside—the imagined boundary in the age of the Alien and Sedition Acts—is thus dismantled by these outsiders to Mettingen. What Clara has believed to be her "inviolable asylum" crumbles by virtue of the otherness these characters represent.

As if signaling the end of Clara's incarceration in solitude, after the death of Theodore, her asylum is burned down: "By neglect of the servant, some

unextinguished embers had been placed in a barrel in the cellar of the building. The barrel had caught fire; this was communicated to the beams of the lower floor, and thence to the upper part of the structure" (178). Again, the verb "communicate" is used in reference to Clara's house's structure; yet the insulated communication in this asylum terminates with its violent dismantling because the closed economy of communication is no longer possible without the hermetic structure of the house. Her private bedroom and locked closet no longer exist. This violent destruction of her asylum brings Clara out of her solitude because she, after this incident, departs for Europe with her uncle. She has lost her cherished asylum/haven, but she has been liberated from another asylum/prison that has incarcerated her. From one perspective, it can be argued that Carwin and Pleyel invade Clara's privacy; yet from another, we can see them salvaging her from solitude, whose dangerous implications the novel recurrently foregrounds.

From the Private to the Public

The foregoing discussion compels a further consideration of why *Wieland* devalorizes solitude so thoroughly and for what reason. A good starting point for this query is looking at what critics have viewed as the "happy ending" (Weldon 5) of *Wieland*. In the very last chapter which is written three years after the tragic incidents, we see Clara finally removed from her solitude: she moves to Europe, maintains correspondence with Pleyel, and they eventually get married: "Though separated so widely our correspondence was punctual and frequent, and paved the way for that union which can only end with the death of one of us" (179). Displaced from her asylum, Clara finally engages in a substantive communicative act through the exchange of letters with Pleyel. Their marriage can be seen as initiating Clara's entrance into the economy of circulation and exchange. Earlier in the novel, it is suggested that Theodore is entitled to a great inheritance in Europe: "Pleyel, on his return from Europe, brought information of considerable importance to my brother. My ancestors were noble Saxons, and possessed large domains in Lusatia. . . . [B]y the law of male-primogeniture, my brother's claims were superior to those of any other person now living" (35). Through Theodore's refusal to receive this inheritance despite Pleyel's urging, the large sum of money has remained out of circulation. The inheritance, to which Theodore was legally entitled but which he refused, can be construed as having been bequeathed to Clara, the only remaining Wieland family member. It is conjecturable that through marriage, this harbored money has been handed to Pleyel "by the law of male-primogeniture" (35). Clara's "return to society"

(Ridgely 12) or “recovery of conversation with the larger world” (Shuffelton 104) informs this happy ending.

In recognizing the novel’s final gravitation toward the economy of circulation and exchange, it is noteworthy that *Wieland* is written in an epistolary form, in the form of a letter addressed by Clara to an unknown recipient. In “Advertisement” that precedes the novel, Brockden Brown notes: “[T]his narrative is addressed, in an epistolary form, by the Lady whose story it contains, to a small number of friends” (3). However, this does not suggest that the letter is intended for private communication. At the outset of her epistle, Clara expresses a desire to make her narrative public: “I do not disdain to contribute what little I can to the benefit of mankind. . . . Make what use of the tale you shall think proper. If it be communicated to the world, it will inculcate the duty of avoiding deceit” (5). Within the terms of our discussion, by being *published*—that is, by being made *public*—the narrative enters into the world of circulation. This is a significant shift in the nature of Clara’s writing from a purely private journal to printed words open to a public readership. In her discussion of Brockden Brown’s private letters, Elizabeth Hewitt notes that in the early Republic, “The letter was the social exchange that demanded and assumed the full faith of its creditors. . . . Given the insistence on the letter as the polished version of authentic sentiment, it is no surprise that early novelists used the epistolary form as the narrative mechanism for recording interiority” (Hewitt 80).⁹ Unlike the old Clara, who clandestinely recorded her private sentiments in her journal in shorthand, she now renders her interiority visible in the public sphere by allowing an unknown recipient to publish her memoir. If there is any substantive denouement in this seemingly open-ended novel, it is Clara’s shift from a private, secluded woman to a person willing to subject her narrative to the public scrutiny by circulating her account, a shift which parallels her emergence from the solitary asylum into a wider society. In other words, it is a shift from the private to the public. The ending can be called a “happy ending” as it ends the confining solitude that has barred Clara from the public sphere of circulation and exchange.

An important anecdote accompanying the publication of *Wieland* is that, soon after its publication, Brown sent this epistolary novel attached with a letter to Thomas Jefferson, the-then Vice President of the United States—that is, a person holding an important public office. Through their exchange of letters (Jefferson sent a response

⁹ Furthermore, Michael Warner argues that in the Revolutionary era, letters played more a public than a private role: “No longer a technology of privacy underwritten by divine authority, letters have become a technology of publicity whose meaning in the last analysis is civic and emancipatory” (Warner 3).

to Brown), this novel that meditates upon the dangers of solitude counteracted the economy of non-circulation it persistently describes.¹⁰ Michael Warner, through his interpretation of Arthur Mervyn's curiosity as the will to disclose secrecy to the public sphere, understands *Arthur Mervyn* as representing a civic virtue in the new Republic (Warner 151–76). *Wieland* can also be read in a similar manner, as a novel that upholds the public over the private (Warner 169). By this nature, the novel *Wieland* represents precisely the opposite of Clara's journal, which remains out of circulation, purely private, and secreted in the closet.

What then becomes important is the role of the reader. As Cathy N. Davidson compellingly argues, Brown “articulated his ambition to adapt the novel to moralistic purposes, as did practically all of his peers, and, more exceptional, he also articulated a desire to cultivate for the novel an audience of educated readers” (Davidson 338). Viewing *Wieland* as a “highly forensic novel” (Korobkin 723), Laura H. Korobkin situates the readers of this novel as “reader-jurors” (722) responsible for judging the criminality of Carwin. Her argument is cogent in that the novel—or Clara's letter—implicates the reader in a public realm. On the subject of the reader in Brown's epistolary novels, Frank Shuffelton argues: “Epistolary novels foreground the hermeneutic gaps between letters, demanding active readerly participation and judgment, but if readers are to avoid misjudgments similar to those made by Brown's isolated, solipsistic characters, they must share their interpretations with a larger circle of readers. . . . Brown asks for the judgment of common readers participating in the public sphere” (Shuffelton 108–09). *Wieland* leaves many mysteries unresolved, which readers are urged to ponder themselves: Was Carwin really not the agent of the voice that ordered Theodore to kill his entire family? Why does Clara constantly and subconsciously fear Theodore? Is there, as several critics argue, an incestuous desire in her psyche? To what extent is Clara's narrative reliable? Despite being out in the public, does her narrative tell the whole story? Replete with these mysteries, *Wieland* urges readers to judge for themselves. Brown ends his novel not only by bringing Clara out of her solitude into the public realm but also by making use of the print media of the novel as a public forum that implicates readers in the interpretation of the novel, quite unlike the ways in which his characters in *Wieland* do in their solitude. Taking a cue from Korobkin's argument, it can be argued that readers of *Wieland* stand as a jury in the public courtroom.

If, as Warner, Tompkins, and Davidson concur in their now-classic studies on early American fiction, Brown intended his novels to inculcate in his readers

¹⁰ For the correspondence between Brown and Jefferson, see *Letters* 445–48.

republican virtues, he did so with *Wieland* by demonstrating the dangers of solitude and the urgency of being in the public realm in the new Republic.¹¹ It is important to acknowledge that *Wieland* was written in an age averse to the practice of novel reading in general, an age that regarded novels as useless and detrimental to civic virtue. To understand this cultural milieu in which novels were placed, it would suffice to reference William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), in which Mr. Holmes, a conservative reverend, offers a diatribe against novels: "Most of the Novels . . . with which our female libraries are overrun, are built on a foundation not always placed on strict morality. . . . Novels . . . appear to me totally unfit to form the minds of women" (21–24). *Wieland* specifically addresses what Mr. Holmes describes as an "inflated fancy, not restricted by judgment" (24) by continuously testing the characters' judgment by throwing their orderly reasoning into anarchy. To repeat Clara's phrase, "Solitude imposes least restraint upon the fancy" (71). As many critics have shown, the novels written in early America were intended for public edification—Brown's novels for furthering Republican virtues and seduction novels for warning female readers away from moral corruption.¹² In a similar vein, *Wieland* can read as a warning for the public against solitude, a status detrimental to the public good in the new Republic. In an age adverse to novels in general, by publishing *Wieland*, Brockden Brown promoted the public virtue of novels in the post-Revolutionary era by offering a cautionary tale about withdrawal into solitude, just as Tocqueville would several decades later about America's individualism.

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¹¹ Shapiro and Barnard argue that novels served Brown as "an instrument of progressive, educational principles in the public sphere" (*Ormond* xiv).

¹² See Warner's *The Letters of the Republic*, Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*, and Davidson's *Revolution and the Word*.

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