2 Poisoned Letters from a Gothic Frontier

Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*

Published in 1799 and set in the mid-1780s, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* speaks from a place of utter disruption. During Brown's short lifetime—he was born in 1771 and died of tuberculosis in 1810—the American, the French, and the Haitian Revolutions swept up the Atlantic world. The Declaration of Independence and the *Federalist Papers* were published. The Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance became the legal blueprints for colonizing the North American continent. The U.S. Constitution was signed, and soon thereafter Federalists and Republicans found themselves in a fierce battle over the nature of the democratic order that had just been ratified. Outside of established circles and political elites, dissatisfaction with the new order erupted in Shay's and the Whiskey Rebellions. The Fugitive Slave Law and the Alien and Sedition Acts were ratified to regulate undesired movements of non-citizens. The Napoleonic Wars broke out and produced a power vacuum that overseas tradesmen (many of them American) readily seized. The Louisiana Purchase multiplied the territory of the young nation, expanding it into parts of the continent completely unknown to its non-indigenous population, which were quickly settled due to increasing immigration.

What happened was indeed a "revolution of massive proportions" (Watts, *Romance* 3). Its perhaps profoundest effect was the breakup of a republican order that had rested on values such as the common good, the public sphere, and civil responsibility, and its replacement by a liberal-capitalist order inclined to promoting individualism, mobility, self-made success, and the private sphere.[1] For a short while, coinciding with Brown's most creative years (between 1797 and 1800), the two orders co-existed, forming a "culture of contradictions" (Hedges 107). *Edgar Huntly* responds to this situation by imagining a protagonist who falls out of his

1 Among the best historical works on this shift are those by Appleby. The republicanism-literalism debate has also become a major trajectory of scholarship on early American literature. Warner, Ziff, Gilmore, and Dillon stress the active role that the rise of the novel played in bringing about the gradual fading of the Early Republic's republican ideology and its publically oriented literary culture.

familiar life-world. After going to bed one night, he awakes in a pitch-dark cavern, barely dressed and miles away from his uncle's farm, where he has been living with his sisters since his parents were killed in an Indian raid. In one terrible instant, the world around him grows strange and unfamiliar. The shock of this "fall" haunts the tale, constituting a threshold of uncertainty, a liminal space where action—both physical and narrative—becomes imperative if life is to remain meaningful. The rehabilitation of the protagonist depends on restoring meaning and mooring, incoherence and unfamiliarity after his "fall," and he tells his story to this very end. Brown's novel bundles and personifies the need for narrative recovery in the figure of the letter-writing protagonist who must tell his story to resume his place in the world. But this protagonist is also a sleepwalker, and this means that the actions he performs to this end are in a quintessentially deviant, erring state.

The result is a letter of epic proportions. Addressed to his fiancée Mary and several hundred pages long, it tells the story of Edgar's adventures, including the trailing of a sleepwalking Irishman whom he suspects of having murdered Mary's brother and his beloved friend, killing and eating a ferocious panther, slaughtering numerous Indians, rescuing a girl from captivity, sleeping in an impressive number of beds, escaping an ambush by jumping into a river from impossible heights, and fainting several times out of exhaustion along the way. It also tells her about Edgar's encounter with a stranger named Weymouth who made credulous claims about the money that Mary had unexpectedly inherited upon her brother's premature death, urging her to return it. And eventually, it tells her that Edgar is also a sleepwalker, and that it was his sleepwalking that brought him into the wilderness and made him a stranger to himself. Loosely framed by the epistolary form, the tale is restless and inconclusive, containing stories within stories, changing narrators, characters that emerge out of nowhere, elaborate plotlines that are suddenly dropped. It is indeed "a charmingly, a maddeningly disorganized book, not so much written as dreamed" (Fiedler, *Love and Death* 157). For a long time, the lacking coherence of Brown's novels was viewed as a major weakness; the situation could hardly be more different today.[2] Brown is now widely celebrated for

2 Conjointly fixed by New Criticism's normative aesthetics and the predominantly "exceptionalist" concerns of Cold War American studies, Brown's reputation as an artistically flawed writer remained firmly in place until the early 1980s. It was not until the transnational reconfiguration of early American studies that his reception underwent a profound revision. Three major shifts undergird this development: the breakup of the consensus view of early American ideological history and its underlying assumptions about the relation between the individual and society through the republicanism-liberalism debate; the programmatic reevaluation of formerly disregarded genres such as the sentimental and the gothic, and the general expansion of the literary field in the wake of the canon debates. Ironically, by 2009 the tides had turned to such an extent that Waterman, introducing an *Early American Studies* Special Issue on Brown, wondered if 'Brown studies' had taken over the field of early American studies.

the artful "complexity of his response and exploration of key concerns and issues in early national culture," among them the intersecting debates on republicanism, nationalism, and expansionism, the rise of bourgeois liberalism and its impact on gender dynamics. And he is praised as an author whose "achievement […] lay in his ability to radically challenge both form and content of contemporary writing" (Barnard, Kamrath, and Shapiro x). In assuming that "Brown's work adequately, deliberately, and often intelligibly engages or represents a coherent early national culture," the revisionist scholarship inverts the assumptions of earlier criticism, which tended "to see Brown as a prototypical Romantic author and framed him as writing against his culture rather than typifying it" (Waterman, "Introduction" 236). In consequence, features such as the maddening incoherence and excessive sentimentality of Brown's novels are now read as historical symptoms whose "problematic" forms are artistically sound and innovative means of expressing a sense of disorientation engrained into their contemporaneity.[3]

Building on, and yet departing from these revisions, my own engagement with Brown's work does not aim at producing historical "evidence" about the larger discursive field in which it is situated and about the subject positions contained in it, nor does it seek to determine whether this novel is acting out or striving against the premises of its ideological context. Rather, in assuming that uncertain states of belonging create a need for narrative recovery that manifests itself in the realm of narrative art, this chapter traces how the novel gives voice and form to concerns with belonging at its time. Brown's fiction is, in fact, deeply entangled with the foundations and limitations of dwelling in its nook of the modern world: It quarrels with established authorities (Enlightenment ideas of reason, traditional gender roles, and the paternalistic order), and is anxious about material insecurity and moral corruption in a world mobilized by self-made success. But while all of these themes have a recurring presence in Brown's narrative universe, *Edgar Huntly* adds a new one: the frontier. In fact, the frontier enters American fiction with this novel—as a space with a guilt-ridden past that haunts all future prospects of dwelling.

3 Garbo's *Coincidental Art* was instrumental in bringing about this revaluation. His structuralist readings of Brown's major novels contended that, whatever one might think of Brown's prose style, his plots were intricately crafted rather than hastily improvised. Later critics extended this revision with the use of narrative discourse and performance theory. See, for instance, Wall Hinds, Barnard, Bellis, Downes, Hagenbüchle, and Hamelman.

Frontier Paternalism Meets Liberal Capitalism

Edgar Huntly's frontier is not the mere allegory of a disturbed psyche that a former generation of scholars has found in it. It is a "recognizable landscape" (Jehlen 162). Moreover, and crucially, this landscape is not portrayed as a "virgin land" innocently awaiting its defloration but as a site of bloodshed and dispossession.[4] Carefully modeled after the western parts of Pennsylvania at the time, *Edgar Huntly*'s frontier "provides the literal premises for the possibilities and trajectory of narrative action—inscribing, describing and circumscribing an extrapolative or speculative […] world and giving that fantasized world a significant and visibly signifying shape and temporal dimension" (Sobchack 123). It has been rightfully argued that the gothic gains psychological depth in Brown's fiction; this novel adds site-specificity. The brutal killings of Edgar's parents and infant sibling, the resulting move of the remaining Huntly children to their uncle's farm, which has been built at a site formerly occupied by a Delaware village, and the killings of Edgar's uncle and his close friend Waldegrave (a cartoon name *avant la lettre*) spring directly from the violence inflicted by settlers taking possession of their non-native land.

The troubled state of belonging engrained into this setting gains voice and form in the first-person account of a figure that becomes this story's narrator out of profound experiences of insecurity and loss. Coming to terms with this troubled state is the narrative's primary motivation, motif, and theme. Moreover, imagining the novel's setting in these concrete terms inscribes the dwelling places envisioned by it with historical remnants of betrayal and guilt that deeply trouble the ways in which these places are suitable dwelling places. It has often been pointed out how intensely *Edgar Huntly*'s depiction of frontier violence draws from historical record, most notably from the infamous Walking Purchase of 1737, a fraudulent land deal between European/Quaker settlers and a Delaware tribe, which took place precisely at the site Brown chose as the setting of his story, and which is known for having stirred a series of violent revenge raids.[5] But while the historical refer-

4 For Jehlen, the novel is "at once seminal and terminal, the first to envision a specifically American psyche and also more or less the last to represent taking possession of the continent not as destined fulfillment but […] as conquest" (161). Earlier readings had valued it primarily for its psychological dimension. Ringe was the first to praise Brown for adding a psychic dimension to the gothic genre. In fact, for him the "Americanness" of Brown's fiction was not primarily a matter of its setting but of psychologizing narrative techniques. The most influential psychological reading of the novel stems from Fiedler, for whom the protagonist's destructive desires are forces of the id, which he, in turn, interprets as a token of the conservative underpinnings genuine to American gothic fiction in general.

5 Initiated by William Penn's sons John and Thomas, the Walking Purchase resurveyed a tract of land measured on the basis of what could be walked by a man along a windy river in a day and a half. Penn's sons manipulated these conditions by previously clearing straight paths into the

ences made by the novel are strikingly accurate and complex (and contemporary readers would have been familiar with them), it is important to note that these references are *implied* rather than *explicated*. In stressing this point, I do not want to dismiss the importance of tracing and contextualizing these historical markers. However, for the narrative operations performed by the novel, their muteness is just as significant. The violence, injustice, and guilt of conquest and dispossession with which they are endowed remain silent throughout the novel. In fact, it makes sense to assume that relegating these troubled aspects of belonging in between the lines was the only way of including them in the story; that they could indeed only become part of what was narratable at the time in this muted way.

This point is further underscored by the fact that the *mise-en-scène* of the frontier is one of gradual domestication. Whenever it is described, this is done by drawing on the picturesque, an aesthetic regime that correlates and binds seemingly random and irrelevant parts together with the effect of containing the "unruly" features of its object of depiction.[6] The houses that Edgar passes on his way from the cavern back to civilization illustrate this spatial logic of domestication. Scholars have read these houses as mirroring a progression in Edgar's behavior, which is most violent at the site closest to the wilderness (Garbo 65; Slotkin 384-93), as visual markers in the frontier landscape that enhance the domesticating implications of the picturesque (Berthold 79-83) that "symbolically reiterate the social order that they host" (Wall Hinds, "Brown's Revenge" 56), or as manifesting the process of remodeling the period's notions of national identity (Faherty 56-66). What I want to add to these interpretations is that these houses, all allegories of

wilderness, hiring several walkers in particularly good shape and equipping them with support teams. What would under regular conditions have added up to a walk of about twenty-five miles was thus extended to sixty-four miles and a resulting territory of 1,200 square miles of tribal land that the Delawares then lost to the Pennsylvanian settlers. Scholars have identified "the Elm" (consistently capitalized throughout the novel), which ironically marks the site of Waldegrave's murder, as a reference to the tree at which the founding of the state was sealed in a peace treaty between Quakers, led by William Penn, and Lenni Lenape/Delaware Indians in 1782. For in-depth accounts of Brown's use of this event, see Krause, Luck, and Sivilis. Rowe discusses the Walking Purchase as a key event of the rise of U.S. imperialism, in which Brown's novels participate by providing a respective imaginary.

6 For a longer discussion on the importance of the picturesque in the visual appropriation of the North American continent, see my essay "Transatlantic Landscapes." In "Frontiers of Discourse" Wall Hinds also stresses the imaginative conquest of space thus performed, supporting Mitchell's claim that landscape can be understood as enacting the "'dreamwork' of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance" (10). For discussions of the picturesque in *Edgar Huntly,* see Bertold and Lueck.

either precarious or failed dwelling, turn the frontier into a *social* space—a space that becomes visible as produced by the "interlocking and articulating nets of social relations" (Massey, *Space, Place* 168) that exist among those who live in these houses and those who contest their presence in the frontier landscape. And this also means that the houses depicted in the novel turn the frontier into a place *formed* out of a particular set of social relations interacting at a specific locale, and *deformed* by the corrosive forces inscribed into the process of colonialization—a process that is problematized by letting the most lavish house degenerate, or by using the dwelling sites as a stage for recurring revenge violence.

Countering this *western* frontier is another, rarely acknowledged but no less foundational fiction of modern America: the *eastern* frontier of the Atlantic, embodied by the figure of the immigrant or "alien other," and imagined as an unstable contact zone of possible contagion.[7] Gibbons notes that, "[i]n terms of historical grievances and political trajectories, both frontiers represent very different presences on the political landscape: 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). And because this is so, the two frontiers provide opposing frames for imagining potential dwelling places. In the first scenario, these places are to be gained in a territorial conflict with roots in the past that haunts all possible forms of belonging with the question of where do we come from. In the second scenario, they are to be gained in a social conflict about future mobility that haunts future forms of belonging with the question of where do we go.

In *Edgar Huntly*, the two frontiers overlap and seep into each other, with the result of complicating the possibilities of belonging imagined in the novel. Three of the dwellers at the western frontier—the drunkard in the dilapidated mansion, the nameless builder of the hut on the outer edge of the province, and the murder suspect of Edgar's friend, Clithero, who lives in this hut for a while—are Irishmen, and the Native American woman who stays behind when her tribe moves west temporarily lives in the same hut, too. I will return to the indigenous character in the final section of this chapter, but now I want to take a closer look at the mysterious Irishman who most fully embodies the uncertainties associated with the eastern frontier. When "conn[ing] over the catalogue" of his neighborhood, Edgar

7 My reading is inspired by Gibbons, from whom the terms of the "eastern frontier" and the "alien other" are drawn. For further discussions of this topic, see Slotkin, Rowe, and Garner. Garner specifically elaborates on how the racializations of these multiple others (including the millions of involuntary immigrants brought from Africa as slaves) and their legal regulation through the Alien and Sedition Acts played a distinctive role in forging an American identity. Irish immigrants, whom the Alien and Sedition Act particularly targeted and who play a key role in providing mysterious, potentially evil others in Brown's novels, are employed as instrumental figures not only in forging that identity but also in threatening to destabilize it.

singles him out as "the only foreigner among us," quickly adding that, in the patriarchal scheme of his community, "this was an exception to the rule. Clithero was a stranger, whose adventures and character, previously to his coming hither, were unknown to us" (14).[8] In the paternalistic order embodied by Edgar's home community, the "alien other" without a past is an unpredictable, potentially dangerous intruder. What Edgar does not acknowledge, however, is the uncanny resemblance of Clithero's position to his own, orphaned and with no prospect of inheriting land as both of them are. But the paternalistic order is vanishing. Its mode of spatial production, which used to be the predominant mechanism of domesticating the western frontier, is doomed to fail for refusing to integrate those who—like its "native son" Edgar and the "alien other" Clithero—fall outside of the scheme of land inheritance and thus threaten the cohesion of the settler community. This is the spatial predicament of the eastern frontier. The paternalistic order fails again because it is haunted by the collective guilt of conquest and dispossession that culminates in Waldegrave's death and the course of destruction following it. This is the spatial predicament of the western frontier. Moreover, and crucially, the failing frontier paternalism does not create any nostalgic longings for its Old World predecessor. Even its modernized version, embodied by the Irish noble lady who marries the proto-Enlightenment man of reason and multiple skills (ranging from surgeon via intellectual and teacher to businessman), is doomed for failing to socially reproduce itself.

Against the vanishing "old-fashioned, even feudal" (Wood, *Radicalism* 40) economy of landownership and inheritance, the emerging order of liberal capitalism is cast. This new order is depicted as a vertically and horizontally mobile "economics of paper currency and speculation" that is run by an equally emerging entrepreneurial class (Wall Hinds, "Brown's Revenge" 52). In picking up on these issues, the novel responds to the unprecedented wealth sweeping the country at this time, substantially raising the average level of prosperity and fostering wide acceptance of the newly emerging entrepreneurial spirit—not by supporting it but by articulating the anxieties stirred by these transformations.[9] Even more so than the space of the frontier with its wild scenery in need of domestication, the space unfolding from this new order is imagined through the figures that embody it. And as these figures are strikingly mobile, the space unfolding from their relations is marked by the surprising twists and turns of individual itineraries. Weymouth

8 Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*, ed. Krause and Reid. All further references are based on this edition and given in brackets in the main text.

9 For historical work on these developments see Appleby, *Capitalism* and *Liberalism*; Watts, *Republic* and *Romance*. For work on the cultural implications of this shift, see Schmidtken, *Property*. See Wall Hinds, *Private Property* for an in-depth discussion of these issues in Brown's fiction, with a special emphasis on their implications for contemporary constructions of gender.

is the figure that embodies the liberal-capitalist order to the fullest.[10] He appears out of nowhere at the Huntly farm to ask for Edgar's help in retrieving a substantial sum of money. In a heartbreaking account of his misfortunes, he tells Edgar how he had asked Waldegrave to keep his money for him while embarking on a trade adventure across the Atlantic. In fact, he had put everything he owned into this adventure to maximize his possible gain—except for the money (a fortune substantial enough to secure his existence) that he left with Edgar's friend. Hoping to return with abundant means to provide for his old father, the wife taken during his travels, and himself, he suffers a shipwreck, imprisonment, and a life-threatening illness, and ends up losing everything—including legal proof of the money transfer—but his own life.

Edgar recounts this story in a passage stretching over several chapters, in which the other is portrayed not as a cruel capitalist but as a farsighted, responsible, and trustworthy victim of a reckless system. Weymouth's misfortune and the insecure place to which it has brought him are construed as the collateral damage of the emerging liberal order, not as the outcome of false ambition or a flawed character.

> Is such the lot of those who wander from their rustic homes in search of fortune? Our countrymen are prone to enterprise, and are scattered all over the sea and every land in pursuit of wealth which will not screen them from disease and infirmity, which is missed much oftener than found, and which, when gained, by no means compensates them for the hardships and vicissitudes endured in the pursuit. (154)

But Weymouth's fate is tragic not only for his own sake. The money that he gave to Waldegrave for safekeeping (and that Edgar promises to help restore) is the same money the Edgar's fiancée miraculously inherited upon her brother's death. The prospect of material security for her (and for Edgar) dissolves through the appearance of its "rightful owner" (154) just as unexpectedly as it materialized through Waldegrave's untimely death. In this ironic twist of fate, the future place envisioned by Edgar and Mary on the basis of Mary's inheritance turns out to be a chimera arising from the unlikely conjunction of two impossible spatial orders: the blood-drenched grounds of the paternalistic frontier and the unpredictably shifting grounds of the emerging liberal order. Their future relationship is not only bound up with Waldegrave's murder but also with Weymouth's financial wreckage. In fact, the second order proves to be equally as hazardous in this scenario: It "infects" the old, presumably stable prospect of securing one's place in the

10 In *Arthur Mervyn* (1799), Brown's skepticism concerning this newly emerging order and its representatives reaches an extreme in the figure of Welbeck. Initially coming across as generous, well-meaning and committed, behind this calculated façade hides an unscrupulous liar, manipulator, and murderer willing to do anything for his own advancement. The novel's young protagonist Arthur, who becomes a victim of the other's evil schemes, is yet another figure embodying the emerging order of liberal capitalism with irresolvable ambiguity.

world by means of inheritance with the contagious instabilities of entrepreneurial capitalism.

Epistolary Transgressions

If the world in which belonging is sought in this novel emerges from two conflicting orders and their respective modes of spatial production, both are rejected in the figure of its protagonist.[11] Edgar is excluded from the patriarchal scheme not only once but twice (first by orphanage, then by screwing up the prospect of becoming Mrs. Lorimer's heir), and he does not show any professional aspiration. His two outstanding talents—storytelling and box-making—are used for non-commercial ends only, his actions are completely devoted to leisure, and he shows no desire to change his bohemian life. Edgar's distinctive (self-)positioning *outside* of the two available orders constitutes the space of enunciation from which the story evolves. However, the yearning to belong that drives the narrative is not geared toward emplacing its teller in either one of those orders, as both of them are imagined as unsuitable for dwelling. Rather, it is geared toward asserting a sense of belonging in and through the act of narration itself.

The novel opens programmatically in this regard—by staging an allocative vertigo that generates its momentum directly from an ailing state of incoherence, so that "narration [becomes] the only viable form of 'explanation'" (Brooks, *Reading* 54).

I sit down, my friend, to comply with thy request. At length does the impetuosity of my fears, the transports of my wonder permit me to recollect my promise and perform it. At length I am somewhat

11 In construing the novel's central figure as an orphan with fluctuating figures of authority, Edgar's lacking position within the available social orders is tied to a resentment against patriarchal authorities that was not uncommon at the time of the novel's production. For Elliott, this crisis of authority is closely intertwined with the waning influence of religious, and particularly Puritan authorities. He sees the emergence of professional writers like Brown in direct response to this development. Fliegelman delineates how Lockean and Rousseauean ideas of authority unsettled traditional modes of parental care, romantic courtship, and family life. New pedagogical ideals, such as the cultivation of affective individualism, fostered a less authoritarian, more contractual understanding of social relations. The novel clearly resonates within these reframings, yet it preferably features social contracts that are canceled rather than ratified or productively altered, thereby stressing an atomization of social life and adding to the general trend of mobilization and the sense of instability and precariousness of existence conveyed by it. Sarsefield, for example, breaks with Edgar because the latter did not adhere to his advice; Edgar cancels his engagement to Mary as the financial circumstances on which it was founded change. Both relations are dissolved on the basis of a written exposition explaining the altered grounds legitimizing the termination of the "contract."

> delivered from suspense and from tremors. At length the drama is brought to an imperfect close, and the series of events that absorbed my faculties, that hurried away my attention, has termined in repose. (5)

Yet if these opening lines assert the form of a letter, *Edgar Huntly* is not an epistolary novel (unlike Brown's later novels, *Clara Howard* and *Jane Talbot*). Rather, it uses the form of the letter in artful and intricate ways, a topic virtually untouched by the abounding scholarship on this novel. In fact, it is through the epistolary form that this novel discovers some of its most effective (and potentially abusive) strategies for the narrative pursuit of belonging. The force of these dynamics is directly tied to the epistolary novel as the first popular subgenre of the novel in the mid-eighteenth century. The immense success of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774), or Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1784) is indeed so closely tied to the rise of the novel that it makes a lot of sense think of it as evolving from the epistolary form. Approaching this genealogy of modern literary forms with an interest in the narrative productivity engendered by the need to belong makes tangible some rarely acknowledged yet crucial aspects of the creative adaptation from which the novel's rise departs. The ingenious move of epistolary novel was to fictionalize a pragmatic form of writing whose *raison d'être* was to maintain a sense of belonging in an increasingly mobilized world. This move was ingenious indeed, for it emancipated the dialogic structure inherent to actual letter writing from the needs to wait and to respond. The epistolary novel turned the self-sufficiency afforded by fiction into a main source of gratification. Readers were invited to participate in an epistolary exchange without having to create their own narrative accounts. Instead, they could fully immerse themselves in the reception—and consumption—of a *narrative* exchange. In fact, replacing a real (and in this sense demanding) form of intersubjective exchange with the imagined, non-reciprocal intersubjectivity of the fictional tale was the lure of this new kind of literature.

Edgar Huntly's use of the epistolary form stages and reenacts this artistic emancipation. From its first paragraph onward, it simultaneously borrows from and bends the conventions of epistolary storytelling. Yes, the reader is directly addressed, but the formal line of address and indications of place and time that are a staple of the genre are omitted, so that we have to wait, just like in a regular novel, for further clues about characters, place, and time. And once the epistolary form has been "out-used" for the task of initiating the act of telling and establishing a basic frame for it (the narrator has experienced something so disturbing that he can only now begin to tell about it, and needs a "real" interlocutor to be able to tell his tale), the narrative becomes epic in its desire to assume a

totalizing completeness in its own right.[12] There is indeed a remarkable contraction engrained into the novel's epistolary pretensions and borrowings: It uses the epistolary form to depart from the addressee's request to stay informed about its writer's life, and ends the epic letter stemming from this request with the promise that he will visit her "as soon as [he has] seen Sarsefield" and "discuss with [her] in conversation […] [his] schemes for the future" (282). Yet despite the epic proportions of Edgar's letter to Mary and the novelistic pose of self-sufficiency it asserts (for example, through its division into chapters), the story is far from complete without the three short letters dovetailing it. This correspondence between Edgar and Sarsefield not only introduces a new interlocutor but it also grants him a voice of his own. In fact, it leaves the novel's final pages to someone who explicitly challenges the narrative authority that has ruled sovereignly so far. Making up a total of just ten pages, the final correspondence overturns many of the most vital conclusions reached in Edgar's long letter to Mary. We learn, for example, that Clithero is not on his way to recovery, but has turned into the dangerous maniac about whom Sarsefield warned Edgar all along. And that, in his obsessive desire to relieve this man from the ill-guided belief that he has murdered his former patroness (who is now Sarsefield's wife), Edgar himself has become entangled in the other's evil schemes (murdering her to set the record straight) by telling him Mrs. Lorimer's whereabouts. Now he pleads for Sarsefield's forgiveness, but the other's response shatters any hope for reconciliation. In a strikingly matter-of-fact tone (especially when read back to back with Edgar's highly sentimentalized writing mode), Sarsefield reports only basic information: that he left his home immediately upon receiving Edgar's warning about Clithero being on his way with "mysterious intentions" (283); that while supervising the latter's deportation to a psychiatric asylum, he witnessed him drowning; and that Edgar's second letter arrived in Sarsefield's absence, was read by Mrs. Lorimer, and caused the loss of the child she was carrying. The "Farewell" concluding Sarsefield's letter leaves no doubt that their relationship will not be resumed in the future.[13]

12 This silencing has a clear gender bias: None of the female characters—Mary, Mrs. Lorimer, Clarice, Shelby's wife, Old Deb/Queen Mab—are allowed to speak for themselves, and the latter is even said to speak in unintelligible tongues. For an in-depth discussion of the silenced women in Brown's fiction, see Person.

13 Luciano (7-9) reads the final correspondence as showcasing the novel's juxtaposition of Edgar's sentimental/feminized and Sarsefield's rational/masculine way of dealing with texts (both as readers and writers). Throughout the novel, not Edgar's actions but his letters/stories have the gravest effects, but as much as he is a teller, he is also a receiver of stories. The problem is that "Edgar reads like a woman" (7), meaning that he becomes so emotionally involved with his reading that his moral judgment gets impaired (precisely in the way in which he fears that Waldegrave's heretic letters would affect his sister). Echoing an Enlightenment-inflected hierarchy of reading methods, the novel employs Sarsefield's "emphatic preference of logic" (7) as an

And yet, the twists leading up to the end produce a sense of non-closure rather than a sense of an ending (in Frank Kermode's sense), with vast implications for Edgar's future prospects of belonging. The novel's hybrid mode of epistolary and conventional storytelling—one projecting a series of present moments into an open future, the other reconstructing what has happened in the past—is generated by two conflicting yearnings.[14] The retrospective parts are driven by the desire to resume a place at and through which meaning and familiarity are at least provisionally restored, while the epistolary parts are driven by a desire to keep all questions of belonging pending. The result is a narrative that simultaneously stages a yearning for recovery and its rejection. And while the retrospective mode makes up the largest part of the narrative, the most powerful moments of asserting narrative agency are spurred by the epistolary deviations from the dominant mode. But the opening paragraphs unmistakably warn their readers that this agency is impaired. Edgar's claim of finally being calm enough to give account of what has happened is soon relativized: Full recovery may eclipse the events and experiences that need accounting. The sneaky way in which narrative agency is hence at once assumed and deferred deserves a lengthy citation:

> Till now, to hold a steadfast pen was impossible; to disengage my senses from the scene that was passing or approaching; to forbear to grasp at futurity; to suffer so much thought to wander from the purpose that engrossed my fears and my hopes, could not be.

implicit critique of Edgar's sentimentalized listening and reading habits. In the final letter exchange this opposition is brought to a climax: Edgar's fateful "misreading" of Clithero's character does not do any harm in his first, brief letter, but does in the second, sentimental one, whose reading causes Mrs. Lorimer to lose her child. The final word of the novel is given to Sarsefield's rational didacticism that sharply contrasts with Edgar's voice. Yet despite the harmful effects Edgar's final letter had and the implicit judgment it casts upon his character, there is no conclusive celebration of "enlightened reasoning" as Sarsefield's authority is questioned by his possibly premature judgment that Clithero is dead. Has he forgotten that not long ago he was certain to have seen Edgar drown only to find out a bit later that he was alive and well? Sarsefield's position is further weakened by his being severely damaged by Edgar's storytelling. In fact, his superior rationality does not protect him where he is most vulnerable: in his desire for social reproduction. In a larger perspective, the weakness of his position can be read as a general weakness/absence of father/authority figures, to which several scholars have dedicated their attention. For work on this topic see Keitel, and Scheiding.

14 See McArthur for an in-depth discussion on the non-closural dynamics of the epistolary novel. For the closural drive of conventional novelistic storytelling, see Brooks and Miller. The retrospective narration of *Edgar Huntly*'s main letter has been read in terms of a "quest romance," an "epistemological novel" or a "novel of ideas," all traditions with a strong, yet usually disappointed longing for meaning and closure. See Schulz; Hamelman; Frank; Berthoff.

> Yet am I sure that even now my perturbations are sufficiently stilled for an employment like this? That the incidents I am going to relate can be recalled and arranged without indistinctness and confusion? Time may take away these headlong energies, and give me back my ancient sobriety. But this change will only be effected by weakening my remembrance of these events. In proportion as I gain power over my words, shall I lose dominion over my sentiments; in proportion as my tale is deliberate and slow, the incidents and motives which it is designed to exhibit will be imperfectly revived and obscurely pourtrayed. (5-6)

The double movement of at once claiming narrative agency and insisting on its insurmountable limitations creates a tension that pervades the narrative both formally and structurally, drawing the reader into a thick web of ambivalences and contradictions. Moreover, and crucially, realizing the limitations of his capacity to tell his story does *not* diminish the need to tell. On the contrary, Edgar knows that he *must* tell his story, not so much because he has made a promise to his fiancée, but because he needs to separate himself from a haunting experience to resume a place in the world. Alas, our narrator is caught between two equally unappealing choices: Revisiting this experience may thrust him back into confusion, while distancing himself too far from it may forever eclipse the possibility to reconstruct what has happened.[15]

In explicating this troubling state, the novel engages a kind of narrative agency that is inherent to all acts of remembering. As the narrator sets out to tell his story, he discovers a discrepancy between the object of remembrance as it *was* and his

15 For Bray, the epistolary form is particularly well-attuned to exploring this troubled state since its narrative conventions evolved side by side with eighteenth century concerns about the human mind, and hence generically incorporates the tensions between past and present selves (16). This issue harks back to last chapter's discussion about the human mind, specifically to Hume's assertion that memory and imagination cannot be distinguished with certainty. Taking up Locke's basic categorization of simple and complex ideas (simple ones being the imprint of immediate sense perception, complex ones the result of further mental reflection), he writes: "When we search for the characteristic, which distinguishes memory from the imagination, we must immediately perceive, that it cannot lie in the simple ideas it presents to us; since both these faculties borrow their simple ideas from the impressions, and can never go beyond these original perceptions. These faculties are as little distinguish'd from each other by the arrangement of their complex ideas. Since therefore the memory is known, neither by the order of its complex ideas, nor the nature of its simple ones; it follows that the difference betwixt it and the imagination lies in its superior force and vivacity. A man may indulge his fancy in feigning any past scene of adventure; nor would there be any possibility of distinguishing from a remembrance of a like kind, were not the idea of the imagination fainter and more obscure. […] We are frequently in doubt concerning the ideas of the memory, as they become very week and feeble; and are at a loss to determine whether any image proceeds from fancy or the memory, when it is not drawn in so lively colours as distinguishes that latter faculty" (85).

mental image of it now. The novel exploits this discovery—a common gap between the object and the subject of remembrance, and as such a constant site of hermeneutic inspection—as its primary narrative motor force. What makes this narrative situation so endlessly productive is the split between the experiencing self and the narrating self, one mobilizing the narrative and driving it into the future, the other contemplating this process and making sense of it through emplotment.[16] And if an essential part of creating a viable sense of belonging hinges on asserting a form of narrative agency that is able to reconcile the two selves, *Edgar Huntly*'s opening passage stages no less than a war between them. The narrator longs to tell his story, but at the same time he has the greatest difficulties to separate himself from his experience—to let the narrating self take over. The truce that is achieved between the two selves comes at the expense of drawing someone else into the conflict: the recipient of the letter. His opening words, "I sit down, my friend, to comply with thy request," draws the addressee into a binding commitment, and what she is asked to give in return is made perfectly clear: to let the narrative take possession of her.

> Thou wilt catch from my story every horror and every sympathy which it paints. Thou wilt shudder with my forboding and dissolve with my tears. As the sister of my friend, and one who honors me with her affection, thou wilt share in all my tasks and all my dangers. (6)

If one thinks (with Peter Brooks) of the desire to tell as "the desire for an interlocutor, a listener, who enters into the narrative exchange" (*Reading* 216) and expects something in return, this novel does not discover this contractual nature of storytelling as it approaches its end (as it is often the case). Rather, it *departs from* this idea, establishing a contract between teller and listener in the first paragraphs. Moreover, and crucially, it creates a teller who does everything in his power to bend the terms of the contract. He expresses a yearning to have her as his sympathetic listener, yes, but there is another desire at work in this narrative. And as the novel's long first letter progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Edgar wants to have Mary as a listener to bequeath the past while not wanting to belong to her in the future. In fact, he longs to separate himself from her once she has received his story.

16 The terms are drawn from Stanzel. Although not seamlessly compatible, the terms correspond to Roland Barthes's differentiation between a "proairetic code" (also called the "code of action") and the "hermeneutic code" (also called the "code of enigmas and answers"). See Barthes, *SZ*. In his discussion of these terms, Brooks point out that "Plot might then be best thought of as an 'overcoding' of the proairetic by the hermeneutic code, the latter structuring the discrete elements of the former into lager interpretative wholes, working out their play of meaning and significance" (*Reading* 18).

What he tells her to this end is certainly inconclusive and confusing. The mystery around Waldegrave's murderer is lost out of sight, then abruptly picked up again, and halfheartedly resolved by turning him into the victim of a random act of revenge violence. The story of the Nartive American Old Deb/Queen Mab, first elaborately built up, is resolved by having her arrested, without resistance, for her inflammatory actions. The narrator's own sleepwalking is never really reflected. More examples could easily be found. Against the backdrop of this maze of loose ends and incoherent plotlines, the future of Edgar and Mary's relationship—its end—is clearly projected. In a long passage of direct address, situated almost exactly halfway through the narrative, Edgar exploits his letter-writing agency to the fullest: He cancels their engagement. In the fabric of this utterly inconclusive narrative, this is a rare moment of closure. Interrupting the retrospective mode for four entire pages, it is by far the longest passage of direct address. The circumstances, rhetoric, and effects of this bold and abusive narrative act deserve closer scrutiny: Directly preceding this passage is the Weymouth episode, whose quintessential role for describing and rejecting the liberal order has been discussed in the previous section. Listening to the stranger convinces Edgar that he is the rightful owner of Mary's inheritance, and that she must return it to him. The situation is delicate, however, since neither legal proof nor private documentation exists to substantiate Weymouth's claim—which means that Mary has to base her decision on Edgar's retelling of the other's story. Despite the lack of "hard evidence" and in full awareness of the gravity of the consequences—returning the money would thrust her back into poverty, dissolve the financial basis of their marriage, and leave Edgar and his sisters homeless in the near future—Edgar urges her that returning the money is the right thing to do. And as if to authorize his bold advice with personal sacrifice, he stresses his own share of the burden before announcing his withdrawal from their engagement.

> I know the precariousness of my condition and that of my sisters, that our subsistence hinges on the life of an old man. My uncle's death will transfer the property to his son, who is a stranger and an enemy to us, and the first act of whose authority will unquestionably be to turn us forth from these doors. Marriage with thee was anticipated with joyous emotions, not merely on my own account or on thine, but likewise for the sake of those beloved girls, to whom that event would enable me to furnish an asylum.
>
> But wedlock is now more distant than ever. My heart bleeds to think of the sufferings which my beloved Mary is again fated to endure, but regrets are only aggravations of calamity. They are pernicious, and it is our duty to shake them off. (156-57)

The use of the substantive form—"precariousness"—stresses the severity of Edgar's concern. Yet although the first paragraph speaks about the future, the verbs are determined rather than speculative. Adding "unquestionably" amplifies the passage's closural force. And while Edgar's breakup is drenched in a rhetoric of sacrifice, the

term "wedlock" turns the prospected marriage into a mere technicality that does not seem to have anything to do with his loving feelings for her. Pitted against an impersonal legal entity, the shared sense of duty offers a vision of unity beyond their disengagement. The decisiveness of his announcement that "wedlock is now more distant than ever" makes the concluding outlook—"[t]hese considerations […] will be weighed when we meet" (156)—have a hollow ring to it.

The force of the narrative action undertaken here stems from it being at once veiled and direct: Edgar wants Mary to return the money even though this means the end of their planned union; he is indeed quite outspoken about his willingness to manipulate her to this end. "I will exert all my influence, it is not small, to induce her to restore [the money]" (144), he tells Weymouth—and thus also tells *her* since his promise to the stranger is part of his letter to Mary. But changing the contractual terms of their relationship also changes the terms of narrative transfer. Edgar does not tell this story in order to arrive at a point where they will belong together; he tells it to dissolve the prospect of belonging to her. The motive he gives for his actions is strictly moral: They cannot build their future on money that does not rightfully belong to her. But the epistolary form creates a narrative surface too opaque to offer any real insight into the narrator's psychic life. Had he only considered marrying her as long as she had money? Or had he begun to have doubts about marrying her prior to finding out that the money may not be rightfully hers, so that Weymouth's plea came as a handy excuse to cancel the wedding? In rendering these questions indeterminable, the epistolary mode employed in the passage lays open the limits of asserting stable meanings and predictable conduct with this narrative mode. For no matter how disturbed this letter-writing narrator may be, we must assume that what he says, and how he says it, is carefully weighed against the effects he hopes to produce in his correspondent. And hence the epistolary form both exposes and veils the narrator's psychic state: Stating how one feels and what one thinks lends a letter credibility for sure, but what one says and how one says it is always weighed against the anticipated response and judgment of one's correspondent. Everyday letter writing is (or was) subject to the same strategies and calculations, but being embedded in lived rather than fictional relations relativizes their potentially distorting effects through other forms of interaction beyond the lettered exchange.

Literary adaptation amplifies these effects by putting the recipient in a position in which both sides, both psyches have to be imagined with none of them being that of the reader. And if the epistolary borrowings and pretentions of the novel make it impossible to gain any definite insight into Edgar's "true" or "private" state of mind, the timing of his most decisive and brutal turn to narrative action is all the more striking: It happens right after his retells Weymouth's story—from which we not only learn that Mary will most likely be poor again, but also that she seems to be pregnant—and right before Edgar's mysterious awaking in the pitch-dark cave. In fact, the letter to his fiancée is plotted in a way in which Weymouth's visit

causes Edgar's sleepwalking into the wilderness, connecting this event directly to Edgar's transformation into the fearless Indian fighter that he becomes after this "rebirth" in the cave, and with his odyssey home, where home means not a home with Mary. Placing the termination of their engagement in between these two life-changing events assigns it with a key function in the narrative design of the novel. It separates the first part, dedicated to the search for Waldegrave's murderer, from the second, dedicated to Edgar's horrifying experience of awaking in the cave and its disconcerting aftermath, while also binding the two parts together. From this fault line within the errant plot of the novel, the narrative changes radically its course, with the effect of disrupting a no-longer-desired trajectory of belonging.

Yet there is more to this abusive and self-serving assertion of narrative agency: Cancelling his engagement with Mary is the narrator's ultimate act of dismissing any prospect of belonging through material means. And if the passage of his letter that executes this breakup exposes the degree to which any prospect of belonging depends on narrative agency, from now on it is channeled to the retrospective parts of the story, to which Edgar happily dedicates himself for the remainder of his letter. Prolonging the act of telling is indeed his most vital desire.

Belonging as *Unterhaltung*

It is no surprise to find an internal drive toward narrative mobilization in a novel in which belonging is primarily sought in prolonging the act of telling: To the extent that the possibility (or desire) of restoring the narrator's unsettled senses of place and self in actual moments of arrival or return is dismissed, the promise of recovery is shifted to the realm of imaginative self-assertion—where it is most effectively realized by means of staging and asserting the act of storytelling itself. Assuming narrative agency and testing its capacity thus becomes a practical *rite de passage* in this tale, a ritual prone to lift the narrator to a more comfortable state of belonging. But since the agency employed to this end is impaired, the consolidation pursued with it cannot aspire to mastery in any conventional sense. Rather, engaging the limits of the narratable becomes the primary means and end of narrative form-giving. In fact, belonging as narrative self-assertion is sought at these limits: in the semantic grey zone where the imagination fades and falters, and where mobilizing rather than stabilizing the narrative offers itself as a viable course of action.

Throughout the novel narrative mobilization has strikingly physical qualities. All main characters are constantly on the move, delivering, spreading and, merging their stories whenever they meet. It is hardly a coincidence, then, that Edgar's adventure begins on the road, on a walk home from a rendezvous with his correspondent. As his nocturnal journey makes him melancholic, he abandons his route to revisit the site of his friend's recent murder, not minding that "[his]

journey would, by these means, be considerably prolonged" (9). In the account that follows, Edgar barely rests. Driven by his quest to find his friend's murderer, he walks back and forth between his uncle's house and the site of the crime, pursues his sleepwalking suspect all over the countryside for nights on end, takes more long walks as he waits for the much desired interview, and even in those rare moments in which his movements are arrested, Edgar paces. So yes, physical movement is a narrative motor force, but this narrator is frequently dissociated from consciousness, through either reverie or sleepwalking. At once propelling and impairing narrative agency, these dissociated physical movements turn out to be the most effective vehicle to push against contemporary confines of belonging. I will return to this issue in the concluding section. For now, I want to consider it as part of a larger strategy of narrative mobilization. The sentimentalism that comes in tow with a letter-writing protagonist recovering from threat and terror is an enormous resource in this regard.[17] For only to the extent that his narrating self *feels* can he begin to reconnect with the experiencing self, and only if the connection *holds*, can the protagonist narrate himself back into having a place in the world. And because of this sentimental causality, his feelings function as the throbbing pulse of the narrative. They determine the intensity and direction of every action performed or accounted for, and they are the coercive force that holds together the meandering and inconclusive plot.[18] Edgar reports, for example, to have left the road home to revisit the site of the murder when his "recollections

17 The revaluation of sentimental storytelling has been a substantial part of recent revisionism of early American literature. Jane Tomkins's *Sensational Designs* was an early landmark study in this regard. Brown is one of the authors she discusses. Most recent accounts have been particularly interested in sentimentalism's concern with the body as a primary resource of imaginative mobilization. See especially Luciano; Burgett; Dillon.

18 Hedges notes about this narrative mode that "Few novelists of any stature have been so much of the time so unconcerned as him [Brown] with the sensuous reality of the life they were depicting. We sometimes have to wait for several paragraphs before getting hints of how his characters look or sound." Voloshin goes so far as to account Edgar Huntly (not Brown!) with an "affective narrative theory" that, "like his moral theory," is grounded in "late eighteenth-century aesthetics and ethics, owing of course a great deal to the Lockean emphasis on sensation as a source of knowledge and motive to response. […] the coherence and indeed the very possibility of his tale are intimately associated with the coherence of consciousness" (267-68). In Locke's words: "First, *our senses*, conversant about particular sensible objects, do *convey into the mind* several distinct *perceptions* of things, according to those various ways wherein those objects do affect them. And thus we come by those *ideas* we have of *yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet,* and all those which we call sensible qualities; which when I say the senses convey into the mind, I mean, they from external objects convey into the mind what produced there those *perceptions*. This great source of most of the *ideas* we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the understanding, I call SENSATION" (33-34; emphasis in the original).

once more plunged [him] into anguish and perplexity" (7); when arriving there, the "mighty anguish" and "heart-bursting grief" of the half-naked stranger whom he finds suspiciously digging at this site moves him so profoundly that "[e]very sentiment, at length, yield[s] into sympathy" (11).

Edgar's feelings have a strikingly physical quality in this passage and elsewhere it: They plunge, they burst, they yield. Sympathy is the feeling that guides Edgar's actions in the first half of the novel, for instance, in his nocturnal pursuit of the stranger whom he finds digging at his friend's grave through the province's western wilderness, his quest for an interview, his explorations of the cave into which the other has disappeared, and his provision of food for him. In amplifying the mediating capacities of compassion as the narrator's primary form of attachment to the world, the narrative taps into contemporary beliefs about the pedagogical merits of sentimental fiction (not without warning of the "dangers" involved).[19] In doing so, it engages David Hume's idea that "passions" are an indispensable ingredient of any mental activity: They stimulate the imagination and hence make it possible to integrate new thoughts and impressions into the realm of the already familiar. Just as in Hume's model, sense can be made when feelings intermingle with the ideas that the narrator relentlessly generates in a search for meaning that is habitually acted out across space.[20] Following this basic pattern, the narrator's

19 Based on their reception of sensationalist models of the human mind, specifically those of Locke and Hume, progressive writers such as William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage, Helen Maria Williams, Thomas Paine, and Brown had come to believe that emotions can encourage moral behavior and that imaginative literature could be used with the aim of fostering a more democratic society. For further discussion, see Clemit, and Kelly.

20 For Hume, the imagination conditions all mental activity, be it directed toward external objects or toward introspection, just as it is impossible to know with certainty whether impressions or memories derive from a supposedly external object or are produced by the creative power of the mind (84-85). In one of the many passages in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1734) dedicated to this matter, he writes: "Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace [sic] our imagination to the heavens, or the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd. The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when supposed specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute them different relations, connections and durations" (67-68). In this at once enabling and veiling conception, the imagination could become a counterforce to Hume's skepticism: If all relations made by the imagination are incomprehensible, the laws of causality and principles of cognition (especially those still taken for granted by Locke) turn out to be "fictions of the mind." Hume uses the expression frequently, cf. *Treatise* 216, 220ff, 254, 259, 493. Iser points out that Hume did not mean this in any derogative way. As

physical mobility generates lists of questions that add up to entire paragraphs. Wondering whether or not to revisit the site of Waldegrave's murder, Edgar asks himself:

> What could I expect to find? Had it [the site] not been a hundred times examined? Had I not extended my search to the neighboring groves and precipices? Had I not pored upon the brooks, and pryed into the pits and hollows, that were adjacent to the scene of blood? (8)

The text is full of these cascading lists of questions, and this creates an air of constant speculation and uncertainty. If in the narrator's emotional economy one sentiment leads to and enforces another, his intellectual economy thrives on one question leading to another question—never to an answer. In one of these passages, Edgar steps aside to reflect upon the nature of his quest, realizing that he is not interested in revenge or any other direct action but in knowing itself.

> For what purpose shall I prosecute this search? What benefit am I to reap from this discovery? […] Curiosity, like virtue, is its own reward. Knowledge is of value for its own sake, and pleasure is annexed to the acquisition, without regard to anything beyond (15-16).

I read these lists of questions as an echo of Hume's skeptical epistemology, which was widely known in intellectual circles in the U.S. at the time. With no certainty about the external world, the narrator is in constant need to make hypotheses about this world.[21] And this also means that curiosity is not at all an end in itself, as Edgar seems to think. It is a vital strategy for bridging the gap between his inner and his outer world by means of constant speculation—which, in turn, becomes Edgar's only hope to restore his impaired sense of belonging. For while the intellectual quest for meaning is mainly retrospective, its larger objective lies in the future:

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an incomprehensible premise of cognition, "fictions of the mind" became an essential concept in what Hume critiqued as misguided epistemological postulates (*The Fictive* 175). For concise discussions of Hume's model of the human mind and his notion of the imagination, see Engell; Iser, *The Fictive*.

21 See, for instance, Armin-Paul Frank, who reads *Edgar Huntly*'s open-ended, reality-testing mode of narration as a prototypical feature of the Romance. Frank locates the emergence of the genre in Hume's speculative epistemology and argues that it can be directly related to patterns of sense-making that are paradigmatic to the American experience: "Die aus Europa in die Neue Welt gekommenen mehr oder weniger intelligenten Wesen mussten erkennen, dass sich viele der mitgebrachten Erfahrungssätze (*verites*) hart mit amerikanischen Fakten stießen. Auf die alten Automatisierungen konnte man sich nicht verlassen. Neue Deutungsmuster mussten erst aufgebaut werden. Einstweilen war der Kolonist von Fall zu Fall auf eigene interpretierenden Anstrengungen angewiesen" (63). From here it is only a small step to the means and ends oriented epistemology of pragmatism that is often regarded as the only genuinely American philosophy.

Edgar seeks to recover his senses of place and self so that his life can continue. Yet the desire of self-extension driving this intellectual quest is destined to transgress continuously what has already become familiar. And it is precisely in this vein that Edgar cultivates a habit of venturing ever deeper into the western parts of the province. In fact, his excursions connect the epistemological and geographical uncertainties of his habitual state of being-in-the-world—and likewise, the intellectual and physical dynamics of narrative mobilization—in consequential ways. Earlier trips into the wilderness undertaken with Sarsefield "chiefly consisted in moralizing narratives and synthetical reasoning" and had "familiarized [him] with [the province's] outlines and the more accessible parts" (92). But after his mentor had left, Edgar kept exploring for the sole reason of expanding the realm of the familiar:

> Every new excursion indeed added somewhat to my knowledge. New tracks were pursued, new prospects detected, new summits were gained. My rambles were productive of incessant novelty, though they always terminated in the prospect of limits that could not be overleaped. (93)

The last sentence is especially telling with regard to his motivation: More than providing any certainty of knowledge about the region, Edgar's excursions incessantly assure him of—familiarize him with—the limits of his known world. Novalis's saying that "[a]ll philosophy is really homesickness, an urge to be at home anywhere" (Novalis 179; my translation) addresses precisely this double bind of post-Enlightenment modes of belonging. Edgar's quest to recover his sense of place and self can be read as an early American version of this quintessentially modern feeling of homelessness—not just in the transcendental sense of falling out of the security of religion but also in the pragmatic, geographical sense of being exposed to western wilderness beyond the frontier.

Edgar's account of his awaking in the cave maps the two senses of existential uncertainty onto one another. The utter unfamiliarity of his surroundings twisted his guts, but the despair that he felt in this situation is all the more dramatic in the absence of a God with whom to reason. Edgar's atheism is indeed closely associated with his sleepwalking habit. In the first reported incident, he hides the letters that Waldegrave had written to him during a short phase in which he was an atheist. Yet while Waldegrave soon reconverted, Edgar never did. In the second, much more disturbing incident, in which Edgar finds himself in the cave, his atheism prevents him from making sense of his incomprehensible "captivity" and the life-threatening dangers caused by it in terms of a transitory stage in a longer journey home.

> I had none but capricious and unseen fate to condemn. The author of my distress and the means he had taken to decoy my hither, were incomprehensible. Surely my senses were fettered or deprived by some spell. I was still asleep, and this was merely a tormenting vision, or madness had seized

me, and the darkness that environed me and the hunger that afflicted me, existed only in my own imagination. (164)[22]

Edgar's response to this threat is to kill with one strike and then eat the ferocious panther that suddenly emerges from the darkness of the cave—a deed that redirects his self-devouring urge "to bite the flesh of [his] arm" (164) to an object in his environment. It has often been noted that this moment marks a fundamental transformation in the novel's protagonist: his rebirth as a savage-killing American performed, in Turner-like fashion, by the wild setting of the western frontier.[23] I agree with this interpretation. However, just as striking as this transformation of character is the shift in talking about his fate. In his efforts to make sense of what has happened, the tyrant who mysteriously took him captive becomes an incomprehensible *author* of distress—a position that Edgar, in assuming narrative agency to mediate this experience, seizes for himself just as instinctively as he slays and eats the panther.

Calling the novel Edgar's "memoirs" bears testimony to this second rebirth: that as an author who to narrates himself back into having a place in the world. In fact, what the author of this memoir yearns for more than anything else is to be sustained by his capacity of telling stories. The German term *unterhalten* (entertain) has three meanings that converge in this longing: to be pleasantly diverted, comfortably supported, and engaged in a valuable exchange. In Brown's novel, the desire to retreat into a self-absorbed and self-sustaining state of *Unterhaltung*—the narrator's longing to dwell in his story—turns out to be stronger than any longing for a place in the world. The final lines of his long and self-serving letter to Mary read like a concession in this regard: "I am surprised at the length to which my story has run. I thought that a few days would suffice to complete it, but one page has insensibly been added to another till I have consumed weeks and filled volumes.

22 Many critics have pointed out the resemblances between this novel and the colonial accounts of Indian captivity that were still popular at Brown's time. See for example Slotkin, Hamelman, Rowe, and Smith-Rosenberg, "Captured Subjects." Luciano takes the argument even further when suggesting that "*Edgar Huntly* is itself a captivity narrative, though of a different sort: Although Edgar is at no point in the novel imprisoned by Indians, he is captivated by the carnal body, as much as he hopes the reader will be by his narrative" (11). For reasons that will become clear as I further unfold my own reading of the text, I would modify this argument by stressing that Edgar is captivated by his "sorely wounded" (13) mind as much as by his carnal desires.

23 To quote one of the iconic passages of Turner's seminal essay: "The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin" (2). For discussions of Edgar's transformation/rebirth upon awaking in the cave see, for instance, Luciano 13-15, and Garner 444-46.

Here I will draw to a close" (282), he announces in an abortive gesture before ending with the promise to visit her—a hollow destination by now.

The Power of Narrative and the Limits of the Narratable

Read along these lines, *Edgar Huntly* is a story about the efforts and perils of narrative recovery. It is a story about a young man who sets out to narrate himself back into having a place in the world, exploits his listeners, and ends up inhabiting the world of his story rather than the world beyond it. In the process of telling this story, he integrates, in minute detail and sympathetic elaboration, narratives of others into his own with the effect of expanding the boundaries of his textual and imaginary habitat. And while these other narratives enlarge and pluralize the body of the written text, producing idiosyncrasies that can be read as early experimentations with modernist techniques (such as multiple focalization and heteroglossia), they are also crucial for the evolution of the story and the dwelling places prospected by it. In fact, throughout the novel, narrative is portrayed as an immensely powerful agent in regulating social relations and the highly mobile space evolving from them. Time and again, it directly and vastly affects states of belonging: by moving characters to unforeseeable places, by transforming them in the act of listening, and by thrusting them out of seemingly stable social relations. More often than not, these effects are disruptive, working against the prospect to belong somewhere and to someone. And hence, the prospect of dwelling is moved from actual to imaginary places.

Clithero is the most extreme figure in this regard, and that he serves as Edgar's *doppelgänger* heightens his symbolic significance: Both are sleepwalkers, both are box-makers of extraordinary skill, both hide and nearly destroy their dearest treasure while sleepwalking. In fact, both break into their theft-proof boxes to steal from themselves, in both cases the hidden treasure is a written record of a beloved person, and as Edgar takes on more and more of the other's behavior, one cannot help but wonder if he may eventually become an equally dangerous psychopath.[24] But back to Clithero: After his crime has exiled him from the comfortable home

24 Many scholars have written on this relation, for example Luciano; Schultz; Garner; Bellis. Contrary to Luciano and Schulz, who stress the conflation of Edgar's and Clithero's identities, Garner argues that Edgar's doubling of Clithero brings out their differences. In either case, Edgar's impulse to identify with/become the "alien other" adheres to a logic of incorporating the "dangerous other" out of desire to neutralize it and with the outcome of self-transformation. The scene in which the wounded Edgar faints on top of one of the Indians he killed and thus, by implication, exchanges blood with him has regularly been interpreted as a token of this transformation. Bellis reads Edgar's increasing resemblance to Clithero psychoanalytically as a pathological/traumatized behavior of compulsive repetition.

provided by Mrs. Lorimer on her estate in Ireland, his sense of belonging hinges on his possession of her written memoir. He takes it with him—steals it—not only for its value as a talisman but also because, once abroad, this manuscript bears the only proof that he has ever had a place where he has belonged. The document—as a material object, as a mediated presence of its author, and for the narrative record that it contains—oscillates between being a (mobile) agent of (provisional) emplacement and the painful reminder of a home forever lost. Its owner's obsession with this object highlights a fundamental contradiction in the relation between property and belonging. The most treasured piece of this poor fellow's few possessions (and thus the object kept for emotional stability) is an object to which he belongs as much as it belongs to him: He is literally possessed by it. Moreover, and crucially, his final outbreak of madness is caused by a narrative interference with a barely bearable state of belonging as non-belonging. He settled on the verge of a frontier community, and for a moment he is not wallowing in his tragedy (he was forced to leave his home for having accidently killed Mrs. Lorimer's evil brother and willfully killed her to "save" her from her grief), when Edgar hunts him down and *retells* this story to him, reminding him how exclusively his livelihood is anchored in it. Clithero's fragile state of belonging hinges on his belief that he is the bearer of a metaphysical burden, and it depends on the tale that he has crafted around this belief: He is the one with the extraordinary fate of having killed the one whom he loved most, and will have to endure this fate until God relieves him. Meanwhile, he lives in an abandoned hut whose location is removed enough to deprive him of all close social bonds, and close enough to other people to constantly remind him of his lonesome destiny. His interlocking senses of place and self are defined in the ways in which he does *not* belong anywhere, to anyone, or anything *except to his story*. Telling this story in the tragic mode grants him a sense of agency—of affirmation, of choice—that is essential for his survival. What he does not know until Edgar retells his story, however, is that the second act of killing was unsuccessful; that Mrs. Lorimer lives and is well, and that she has recently moved to America. But rather than bringing relief to the tortured stranger, the revised story horrifies him by interfering with the tragic mode of emplotment and the agency gained form it. For the life of him, he cannot give the old story away! If Mrs. Lorimer is alive, this can only mean, then, that he is "reserved for the performance of a new crime. [His] evil destiny will have it so" (289). And while Edgar is not possessed by self-fulfilling prophecies, his inclination to dwell in narrative self-assertion is severely questioned by Clithero's manic precedence.

But *Edgar Huntly* is as much a novel about the limits of the narratable as it is a novel about the power of narrative. And it is a story about the ways in which these limits regulate the possibilities of belonging that its narrative operations map out. Installing a sleepwalking narrator with a tortured psyche is a consequential choice in this matter. "The incapacity of sleep denotes a mind sorely wounded" (13), Edgar remarks after finding out that the main suspect in the murder of his friend is a

sleepwalker who displays great anguish when being in this state. He waits almost until the end of his epic letter to Mary to address finally his own sleepwalking, but implicitly he also speaks about himself when saying this. The formulation used here resonates with Erasmus Darwin's then contemporary notion of sleepwalking as a mental disease: a state in which "general sensation" is disconnected from a person's bodily actions that can, in turn, engage freely in an "exertion to relieve pain" (202). And it resonates with sensational psychology's core idea that perceptions can forever form—and possibly harm and distort—a person's mind.[25] With psychoanalytical models of the unconscious still more than a century away, sleepwalking—conceived as a mode of action both purpose-driven and separated from rational conduct—offered itself as a potent vessel for exploring the limits of the narratable.

There are at least two incidents from which we can assume that Edgar's mind has indeed been "sorely wounded:" His closest friend has only recently died of violent murder in Edgar's arms, and as a child he found half of his family killed by Indians upon returning home with his two younger sisters. These events have been used as touchstones for reading the novel as a tale of traumatization, giving occasion to trace the narrative mechanisms of a compulsive desire to repeat striving against an unconscious need to forget and repress, or to decipher the

25 Darwin's ideas about sleepwalking were widely circulating as part of his influential study *Zoonomia*, to which Brown was exposed at the Friendly Club, the literary club of which he was a member. Darwin himself was heavily influenced by Lockean notions of sensational psychology, particularly their challenging of Cartesian notions of enlightened rationality by proposing that the human mind does not process innate ideas but begins its life as a *tabula rasa* on which sensory perceptions leave immediate and lasting imprints. Thus conceived, the psyche emerges from an initial incident of wounding; "from its first experience after birth, [it] becomes marked, scored, impressed, and indented" (Engell 18). The shift in thinking about the human mind in terms of a safely enclosed, self-contained entity imagined by Descartes to a genuinely vulnerable target of random impressions corresponds with an uncertain, irritated sense of belonging. It is important to add, however, that Locke pairs this vulnerability with a strong instinct of survival: Not only can the mind "repeat" the simple ideas derived from sense perception, but it has the capacity "to rearrange, to alter, and to fuse the separate elements it receives in 'an almost infinite variety'" (18). Among the most immediate effects of this rethinking was a declining belief in the virtues of authoritarian childrearing and its replacement by the pedagogical ideal of fostering an "affective individualism" (Fliegelman 12-29). Locke writes: "If the mind was not formed at birth and from this moment on safely installed with rationality, the little, and almost insensible Impressions on our tender Infancies have very important and lasting Consequences" (Axtell, *Educational Writings* 12). It might be added that Descartes's self-contained model of human rationality can be read as a prior reaction to an irritated sense of belonging, sheltering human rationality in a quasi-hermetic capsule to keep the world in order after the coercive epistemologies of the pre-Enlightenment era had lost their power.

trauma-typical inscriptions of a guilt-tortured psyche from which this imaginary effort of storytelling springs (see Bellis, and Cassuto). Traumatic experience and unconscious repression constitute very real limits of the narratable, and readings sensitive to psychic operations stirred by them do important work in delineating the resulting silences as well as the strategies of narrative deferral and delayed re-semantization. But their belated, non-contemporary assumptions about the human psyche are of limited use for the project of making tangible concerns about belonging that brush against the limits of the narratable from within the enunciative structure of the text. Then-current ideas about sleepwalking are a promising venue in this regard, for sleepwalking both produces and intensifies those gaps and uncertainties in the narrative that the narrator's emplotment efforts seek to smoothen out.[26] In fact, sleepwalking serves to stage a perceptual disjunction between the narrator's inner and outer worlds, as exemplified in Edgar's walk home in a state of reverie: Moving through a familiar environment with his perceptions completely absorbed by his mental activities, he suddenly finds himself in front of his uncle's house. Sleepwalking amplifies this split state of consciousness by casting the inner world into the (semi)darkness of sleep. As a narrative device, it pulls the psychic world inside out, mapping it onto the external world, which becomes a virtual stage for experiences entrapped in a person's "wounded mind" with no other outlet than this physical, absent-minded, and ultimately "mad" kind of "exertion." In other words, the narrative is so obsessively entangled with physical and affective mobilization because the narrator's efforts to remember are not only split along the usual lines of object/subject, past/present, experiencing/narrating self. They are further punctured within that split by movements and feelings from which—despite physically embodying them—he is irredeemably separated.

The actions performed in this split state of consciousness have real effects on the external world precisely because they are fully embodied. The novel's excessive concern with embodiment has often been noted.[27] From a perspective of belonging, this concern gains yet another dimension: The novel dramatizes the fact that the body, in naturally emplacing each individual, serves as the degree zero of dwelling. Moreover, in *Edgar Huntly*, this natural nucleus of dwelling is severely troubled since the narrator's body is marked by a painfully widened and ostensibly "pathologic" gap between inner and outer world, which the novel explores through the

26 The reader's gradual process of piecing together the scope and details of Edgar's sleepwalking is carefully laid out by the plot: Initially evoked by the novel's title, the theme is first associated with Clithero and shifted (back) to Edgar in a guilt-laden dream of Waldegrave and his discovery of the mysteriously missing letters in its immediate aftermath, dramatized in Edgar's all the more mysterious awaking in the pitch-dark cave and largely resolved in Sarsefield's counter-narrative of Edgar's adventures in the wilderness. The possibility that Edgar may have killed his friend while sleepwalking looms until the very end of Edgar's letter to Mary.

27 See, for instance Luciano, Burgett, and Dillon.

idiosyncrasies of sleepwalking. In the process of gaining awareness of this habit that his writing seeks to put into words, Edgar's body functions both as the primary site and mobile vessel of his "pain-exerting" activities and as the mute witness of all those actions performed in disjunction from the supposedly "sane" facets of his consciousness.[28] As a self-disclosing force of mobilization, Edgar's "wounded mind" and the involuntary yet willful actions "exert[ed]" by it propel, dislocate, and puncture the narrative desire to belong. The errant, deviant movements in the external world generated this way thrust the narrator's life into a continuous state of crisis, demanding to revisit the grounds traversed with a split consciousness before. But retrospective narration under the spell of sleepwalking demands repetition of an unusual kind. While technically setting out to cover the same, disturbed grounds *again* with the desire of making them meaningful, familiar, and ideally inhabitable, it actually covers some of these grounds for the first time, for they were initially traversed in the shadowy world of the sleepwalker's dreams.

Only one passage gives us insight into the narrator's dreaming psyche, and thus provides us with clues on how to read his sleepwalking actions. When telling Mary about what later becomes discernible as his first sleepwalking incident, he mentions "the image of Waldegrave […] flitting before [him]" in a state of "inquietude and anger," reminding him of having neglected "[s]ome service or duty" (130). Upon awaking, he remembers not only his pending promise to destroy a certain correspondence between the two but also his promise to Mary of a copy of this correspondence as a souvenir of her deceased brother, well aware of her being the last person on earth whom his friend would have wanted to read the letters. When looking for the letters in their theft-proof hiding place, however, he finds them missing; and learns from his uncle that someone walked around in the attic that night. The plotline drops out of sight as Weymouth visits the Huntly farm and triggers Edgar's much more spectacular sleepwalking incident—to be picked up a good hundred pages later when Sarsefield tells Edgar about having seen him on his way into the wilderness, barely dressed, no shoes on his feet, not responding to being called by his name. Sarsefield also tells Edgar about finding the missing letters in the attic of the uncle's house, proving the earlier sleepwalking incident.

28 By far the most dramatic episode in this regard is Edgar's awakening in the cave after sleepwalking into the wilderness. His alleged consciousness of "nothing but existence" (159) is a state in which his sense of embodiment is detached from any other sense of place. Yet even in this crude state, his body, not his consciousness, allows him to reconnect with the external world: by stretching out his sore limbs, feeling that he is lying on his back, noticing the rugged texture of the ground underneath him, and the striking freshness of the air in his lungs. This tactile mode of reconnection gradually expands, first into assessing the immediate space around him (walking along the wall of the cave, yelling out at the top of his lungs to estimate its size), then by providing food and drink and protecting himself against threats from the wilderness, and then by trying to get home.

Edgar's dream hence not only reminded him of his duty to destroy the letters but it also must have stirred his guilty conscience. His following action acted out the resulting pain, relieving him of his duty to copy the letters for Mary; in fact, hiding them at a place where their gradual destruction would have eventually fulfilled his promise to his deceased friend. Yet how he felt when performing these actions—was he swift or reluctant, was he grieving while engaged in them?—or why he chose this particular hiding place is "beyond recovery" as no one was consciously present when these plotted grounds were traversed for the first time.

The first sleepwalking incident also reveals, piece by piece, that no viable dwelling place can be built from this narrator's hermeneutical or imaginative work alone. His longing for other stories responds to the structural limitations of the narrative agency granted him within this storyworld. Indeed, his storytelling gravitates toward other narratives to fill the gaps in his impaired consciousness, and to compensate for the instabilities immanent to his hermeneutic efforts. Sarsefield's account of witnessing Edgar's sleepwalking is the most interesting case in this regard. For a short and happy moment, the longing for an interlocutor gives way to a conjoint act of storytelling: As Edgar and Sarsefield tell and listen to each other's stories when stumbling across one another amidst great confusion, their stories become complete, where both would have remained erring without the complementing account of the other. This triumph is soon questioned, however: Sarsefield was certain to have seen Edgar drown after his fall into the river, just as he is sure that Clithero drowned after jumping off the ship that was taking him to detention. In the first case, his flawed narrative is corrected by Edgar's account; whether or not he is also wrong in the second case is uncertain. Maybe Clithero did die after going overbroad, but the previous misinterpretation lingers, destabilizing—in not surely terminating Clithero's erring state—the prospects of future dwelling.

The narrative project of creating viable dwelling grounds is severely constrained by this narrative's eclipsed mode of recovery. It can only succeed when reconciling the narrating consciousness with the hazardous fact that it has been oblivious to its external world, absorbed with interior pains and obsessions from its past, not the present. And if sleepwalking is imagined here as being connected to unacknowledged feelings of guilt, the sleepwalking witnessed by Edgar before becoming a sleepwalker himself underscores this connection. When first seeing the sleepwalking Clithero, he is deeply moved by the other's grief and despair. The story that Clithero tells Edgar to prove that he did not kill his friend leaves no doubt that he, too, sleepwalks out of guilt. The obsessive burial of a stolen manuscript belonging to the person whom he believes to have murdered is his "pain-exerting" action. He, too, breaks into his own secret hiding place, hides and nearly destroys his most valued treasure elsewhere. In both cases, sleepwalking generates actions that are potentially harmful to the one performing them, thus turning the perpetrator into a possible victim. This leveling of distinctions between victim and perpetrator is indeed of great importance for what Brooks would call the "narrative design and

intent" of this tale and its implied prospects of dwelling in the world. In crafting a story in which sleepwalking springs from an ailing, inarticulable sense of guilt that is potentially hazardous for its bearer, it does *not* exploit the topic of guilt to teach a moral lesson. On the contrary, guilt serves to *suspend* moral judgment. Trapped between a haunted past and a rejected future, dwelling in this narratively created state of suspension is the desired way of belonging that drives the telling of this tale. And it is to this end that sleepwalking is not exploited as a stabilizing metaphor but as a metonymic trajectory, "the figure of contiguity and combination, the figure of syntagmatic relations" (Brooks, "Masterplot" 281). Its conjoint forces of driving, deferring, and punctuating the narrative align Edgar's yearning to dwell in his narrative with the yearning to dwell in a state of suspended guilt.

The suspension of guilt is most powerfully pursued through sleepwalking, but it is practically omnipresent as the motif and motivation of storytelling in this novel. When Edgar decides to reconnect with his fiancée, he knows that he has kept her waiting, possibly for an irresponsibly long time, and perhaps he has made up his mind about terminating their engagement when he starts writing his letter. Prone to feel guilty about these matters, creating a favorable frame for her inevitable judgment is of utmost concern. Similar dispositions are at work in Edgar's final letter to Sarsefield, which closes with the words: "I shall not escape your censure, but I shall likewise, gain your compassion. I have erred, not through sinister or malignant intentions, but from the impulse of misguided, indeed, but powerful benevolence" (290). The breakup passage is another example: Edgar urges Mary to return the money, confronts her with the resulting consequence while doing everything to make the end of their engagement seem inevitable, including portraying himself as a victim. And although this passage achieves a remarkable conclusive density (thus creating the strongest sense of an ending in the middle of the book), the final sentence counters the moment of closure that has just been reached with a resurging longing for suspension: "These considerations, however, will be weighted when we meet" (157), he announces before steering straight into that part of his adventure that will turn him into the greatest victim of his sleepwalking—the moment of his awakening in the cave.[29]

29 In the same passage, guilt suspension also plays out on a very different register of speech—omission—in Edgar's silence to rumors about Mary's pregnancy. Is this true? Is it Edgar's child? Is his silence based on a mutual agreement or is he imposing it? Does he want to abandon his responsibility? As if responding to this massive silence, the opening paragraph of the following chapter features the word "pregnant" that has been so thoroughly avoided when recounting Weymouth's story in what can be read as a metonymic slippage of the term. "The following incidents are of a kind to which the most ardent invention has ever conceived a parallel. […] The scene [awaking in the cave] was *pregnant* with astonishment and horror" (158; my emphasis). This proximate metonymic use of the term can be read as a hint towards an act of deferred, probably unwillful acknowledgement.

The desire for a suspension of guilt brackets and undergirds the entire narrative and again, this desire leads straight to Edgar's manic *doppelgänger*. Upon learning that Clithero has impulsively killed Mrs. Lorimer's evil brother and that, out of maddening regret, nearly killed her, Edgar defends him as having "acted in obedience to an impulse which he could not control, nor resist. Shall we impute guilt where there is no evil design?" (91) This judgment is indeed crucial, for it turns the other from being the bearer of Edgar's unbound sympathy into being the personification of suspended guilt—and hence into a powerful figure of imaginary kinship. As a result of identifying with this imaginary placeholder of guilt suspension, Edgar outgrows the desire to save the other that drives the first half of the plot, and begins to reenact or double the other's behavior. This new desire constitutes the narrative thrust in the second half of the novel. The narrator's transformation into a sleepwalker is its most evocative sign of this shift of gears, and his passionate defense of Clithero turns *him* into a major suspect in the case of his best friend's murder.[30] This suspicion is officially proven wrong at the end of his letter to Mary. The deceased, it turns out, was the random victim of a revenge-seeking Indian determined to kill "the first human being whom he should meet" (281), with Edgar crediting himself for being the likely killer of that Indian.

Even so, our narrator is not quite rehabilitated from the suspicions of having played an active role in his friend's violent death. Does the desire to destroy Waldegrave's letters acted out in his first instance of sleepwalking not hint at an even deeper desire to destroy the one who wrote them? Could this desire have something to do with the latter's return to faith while Edgar stayed an atheist, a topic passionately discussed in these letters? Had Edgar secretly wished for his friend's death because he knew about Weymouth's money, started a relation with Mary out of sheer calculation about the inheritance, and now feels so guilty that he sleepwalks into the wilderness? And what about his odd friendship with the old Delaware woman known to the region's settlers as Old Deb/Queen Mab (both, obviously, non-indigenous names given to her by her colonizers), who turns out to be the mastermind behind the outburst of revenge violence that killed both Waldegrave and Edgar's uncle? Does this relation not strongly suggest a secret complicity of the narrator with death and destruction? Once again, sleepwalking offers itself as the most productive figure of contiguity and combination to plot evidence for this looming suspicion. In this case, it connects with the second name of the old Delaware woman, Queen Mab, a famous fairy character in English folklore, in highly suggestive ways. The name stems from a Celtic legend in which its bearer

30 Having the sleepwalker turn out as the murderer was presumably the idea of an earlier work, "Somnambulism," which Brown never finished. *Edgar Huntly* toys with this suspicion, for example in the final chapter, shortly before the murderer is revealed, when Edgar ponders over his and Clithero's sleepwalking, and concludes: "How little cognizance men have over the actions and motives of each other!" (278).

is a warrior queen. Frequently evoked by poets such as Herrick, Spencer, and Shelly, the best-known version of the character goes back to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where it brings the dreams to sleepers and presides over childbirth.[31] Edgar is closely connected to the native woman known by this name: Inspired by her "pretentions to royalty" (209) and the strangeness of her appearance, it was he who gave it to her.

In Edgar's meandering tale, this act of name-giving creates the occasion to tell her story. And in telling this story, Edgar's tale absorbs an uncanny reminder of the expulsion and dispossession imposed upon the native population that reads like a token of an emerging sense of discomfort (possibly even guilt) on the side of the settler colonialists from whose position Edgar speaks. Queen Mab's tribe, he reports, once lived on the grounds now occupied by his uncle's farm. When repeated harassments drove her people away, she refused to go along with them, burnt the wigwams, and moved to a hut deep in the woods where she "conceived that by remaining behind her countrymen she succeeded in government, and retained the possession of all this region" (208). In the narrative pursuit of belonging that becomes tangible here, "[t]he English were aliens and sojourners, who occupied the land only by her connivance and permission, and who she allows to remain on no other terms but those of supplying her wants" (208-9). When retelling Queen Mab's story, Edgar spends an entire paragraph describing the constant conversation with her three wild dogs, granting her (as the only woman and the only indigenous character of the novel) a voice of her own. And yet, she does not speak directly. Refusing the language of the colonizer, her long isolation has rendered her unintelligible even in her native language. Only Edgar has studied a little of her jargon, and, as a result, she is favorably inclined to him. For Myra Jehlen, her incessant, unintelligible speech addressing wild beasts, her control over these beasts, and their strange loyalty to her "parody the rituals of domestication," making her "a creature of romance and of Romanticism, conceivably a heroine, if a perverse one" (165). Edgar directly participates in creating this heroine: by associating her with the power of fomenting weird dreams that turns her—at least in Edgar's fancy—into a possible midwife in the dream material of his own (and by extension also his community's) worst nightmares, some of which he might have already acted out while sleepwalking. But "midway through the paragraph in which this possibility suggests itself, Brown pulls back" (165), having his protagonist concede that he has gone too far in seeing "some rude analogy between this personage and her whom the poets of old-time have delighted to celebrate: thou wilt perhaps discover nothing but incongruities between them, but, be that is it may, Old Deb and

31 In *Romeo and Juliet*, the character is evoked in Mercutio's speech, Act I, scene 4. A comprehensive genealogy of this reference is given in Barnard and Shapiro's annotated edition of Brown's novel (138-39).

Queen Mab soon came indiscriminate to general use" (*Edgar Huntly* 209, quoted in Jehlen 165).

Edgar's lack of insistence in the rightness of this name strips its bearer of the magic powers she has barely seized. Does this mean (as Jehlen argues) that the novel's only potentially transgressive character falters, that history wins over romance? That it was doomed to falter since its subversive potential was too weak to be fully realized by the narrative? Not necessarily. I prefer another reading (forwarded by Paul Witherington) in which romance and history are two distinct voices, both speaking from the novel in poetically sound ways (166-69). Oscillating between these two voices, the narrative is less an expression of the narrator's personal guilt (and not a product of a tension between conscious and unconscious levels of his storytelling). Rather, it makes tangible a tension between romantic aspiration and historic qualification that the text articulates in idiosyncratic yet exemplary ways. But whether one sides with Jehlen or Witherington, the double-voicedness of the narrative that both address exposes yet another limit of the narratable, and with it, another trajectory of suspending guilt. The romantic imagination emerging at this time is not yet fully hatched, which is why it cannot assume the role of a transformative force in its own right. But historical guilt cannot be aptly expressed as long as narrative agency and narrating consciousness remain disconnected. In the absence of an artistic vision (and the respective narrative techniques) that would suture the gap between a troubling experience and its redemptive mediation, guilt is exploited for the purpose of dwelling in a state of extended suspension, in which past injustice deadlocks with future anxiety.

The novel leaves no doubt that this state corrodes the foundations of the community imagined here. It tells the story of an attempted homecoming that is structurally and morally perverted: Instead of offering closure, it embarks on a process of narrative recovery whose outcome is selfish, provisional and uncertain. I read this courting of the contingent as a poetic response to a shared sense of social unrest and uncertainty that becomes bottomless in conjunction with the faltering faith in the adequacy of both reason and religion to soothe existential doubt. In tune with the emerging romantic spirit, the yearning for a place in the world turns to the imagination, the body, and the senses. Yet in distrusting their healing powers, this mode of emplacement dwells in a haunted and self-serving state of suspension.