

Essay Abstract

This essay responds to Richard Handler's work on individual identity construction in Jane Austen's novels. Handler describes the mode of identity construction in Austen as a process of public recognition of similarity to others in society, and argues that this was the dominant mode of identity construction in Austen's time. An analysis of the Gothic novel *Wieland*, by Austen's American contemporary Charles Brockden Brown, will show, however, that through his utilisation of the Gothic trope of the mysterious wanderer, the novel is able to offer a dissident model of individual identity construction based on the private recognition of difference to others in society.

Biography

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Public Similarity or Private Difference: Genre, and the Construction of Individual Identity in Jane Austen and Charles Brockden Brown

In their fiction, Jane Austen (1775-1817) and Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) envision the identity of the individual subject as materialised through a process of recognition. In this essay, firstly, a discussion of Richard Handler's analysis of Austen's works will show that her Realistic novels posit individual identity in the *public recognition of similarity to others* in society. Secondly, an analysis of Brown's Gothic romance *Wieland* will show that contemporary to Austen an alternative mode of individual identity construction was articulated, which, through the utilization of the Gothic trope of the mysterious wanderer, was based on the *private recognition of difference* to others in society.

In his essay "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" Richard Handler states: "writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, Austen depicted a world that is closely related to our own, yet also, in certain respects, less 'individualistic'" (Handler 1994: 34). He argues, "people in Austen's world, and many people from even more distant times and places, do not use the concept of identity as we do, or at all" (ibid., 37). In fact, according to Handler, "the word [identity] is never used" (ibid., 34). Invited by the mimetic quality of Austen's work, Handler fuses Austen's historical world with Austen's fictional world. What is important here is that by using only Austen's Realistic novels about the English gentry for his analysis of how individual identity is constructed, not only in her novels, but in her time, he focuses solely on the dominant strand of late eighteenth, early-nineteenth-century western culture. Handler does

not take into account the possibility of dissidence towards the dominant society expressed through a refusal to publicly recognize similarity to others, so crucial in constructing individual identity in Austen's world.

While Handler is right in identifying in Austen's work the presence of such an ideology, the generic nature of her fiction has caused him too quickly to identify her work and her world as analogous. The creation of such an illusion is of course the prime characteristic of any dominant culture, or cultural form. In one respect, the dominance of any cultural norm, activity, custom, or artistic form, is dependent on its illusory status as natural or obvious. Granting the illusion of naturalness inherent in Austen's mimetic technique it is surprising that Handler and Daniel Segal argued in an earlier study of Austen's work that the dialogic quality that they feel defines her novels allows her to "weave together diverse perspectives" (Handler & Segal 1990: 155), "without privileging any one of them" (ibid., 146). Austen, they argue here, is "against any and all notions of a naturally grounded social order" (ibid., 15). Instead, what becomes apparent, according to Handler and Segal, is that "throughout Austen's novels characters concern themselves with the mutable fortunes of their relative social positions" (ibid., 44). They define these social positions in terms of dependence, independence and choice, and describe:

to be independent is to be governed only by one's own will; in other words, to have power as an individual to make choices and to be governed by those choices alone. By contrast, to be dependent is to be governed by the will of others – to have others either choose for one, or to be oneself the choice of others (ibid., 45).

Clearly, in this scheme, the most independent group holds the dominant position in society and decides over the legitimacy of individual as well as group identities. The different perspectives that Handler identifies are always posited within the gentry-society that peoples Austen's works. Never in her work is the perspective presented of anyone who stands wholly outside of this society. Austen's realist techniques, and her combination of various perspectives are simultaneously a selection process that determines which strands of English society get portrayed, and which strands are erased from the social fold.

It is not necessary to quote at length from Austen's work to point out that in her novels the social group that is always portrayed is the upper-middleclass society of patriarchal families headed by English gentlemen to which the gentlewomen are always trying to literally attach themselves, in order to raise their public standing. Handler's model shows that such behaviour is analogous to their sense of individual identity. Because Handler's analysis comprises only of a single strand of British society, his analysis is unable, for instance, to reconstruct the women characters as separate from the men, which leaves them well established within the dominant

social fold. As such they are imprisoned within the ideology of independence.

The omniscient narrator in *Northanger Abbey* illustrates both Handler's point and my criticism concisely with respect to Catherine Moreland's anxiety about her social position at Bath: "that General Tilney, instead of disliking, should admire her, was very delightful; and she joyfully thought, that there was not one of the family whom she need now fear to meet. – The evening had done more, much more, for her, than could have been expected (Austen 1818: 86). This quotation shows how much Catherine publicly acknowledges her dependence on General Tilney. He decides how she perceives herself. On a gender level, the textual example above, like the one quoted earlier, shows how in Austen's world the patriarchal family structure is dominant: women are inherently less individuated because they are always already subordinated to the men, due to the fact that they rely on the men's will, both father and prospective husband, with respect to the future public relations they will engage in, and thus, their similarity with the other women of their social network. It is unsurprising then to find Isabella exclaim to Catherine: "'you will be so infinitely dearer to me, my Catherine, than either Anne or Maria: I feel that I shall be so much more attached to my dear Morland's family than to my own'" (ibid., 105). Isabella is here clearly demonstrating her need to publicly recognize Catherine as her sister and equal in order to secure her marriage with Catherine's brother. So, while the identities of both Catherine and Isabella are filled out by their relationships with others in the gentry circles at bath, within the "ideology of independence," their femininity is never at stake, and clearly immutable, natural, and eternal.

However, as the quotation above illustrates, Catherine's fear about her identity extends itself only to borders of the patriarchal family circle. It is only those on the same social playing field that can possibly undermine her integrity. Later on in the novel, when she believes to be in a secret chamber at Northanger, Catherine reflects that "to be found there, even by a servant, would be unpleasant, but by the General (and he seemed always at hand when least wanted), much worse!" (ibid., 169). This statement indicates that anyone outside of the social group within which she gains her identity through publicly recognizing her similarity to them, cannot really harm her integrity. A servant's actual detection of her transgression of propriety is merely unpleasant, while the thought of Henry Tilney's possible detection leaves her initially speechless, and extracts from her an immediate confession to him of her "crime."

Clearly, as Handler argues, "when Austen's narrators or characters talk about what we would today call identity, they use such words as family, friends, connections, and relations" (Handler 1994: 34). Catherine's identity, as such, is defined through her public recognition that the servant is a harmless nuisance and that she better immediately confess to the man of the

house. Earlier on in the novel, the importance of public recognition of similarity to others is emphasised when Catherine Moreland and her guardian Mrs. Allen are described as feeling uncomfortable at “having no party to join” (Austen 1818: 20), nobody to speak to “except each other “ (ibid., 20). Having just arrived in Bath, they suffer from exactly the kind of social invisibility that undercuts their individual integrity. The link between their lack of individual identity and the lack of connections is emphasized by Mrs. Allen’s confession: “if we knew anybody we would join them directly” (ibid., 21). Their reliance on others for their own sense of individual integrity shows itself in Catherine’s outburst of panic at not being able to find a partner to dance with: “you *must* know somebody” (ibid., 21). Catherine’s panic about her integrity – emphasised by Austen’s use of italics – is strengthened by the omniscient narrator’s comment that, at the end of the ball, and only after Mr. Allen has joined them, Catherine believes that she was noticed by “two gentlemen” who she heard “pronounced her to be a very pretty girl” (ibid., 22).

This example, like those put forward by Handler, illustrates Handler’s point that in Austen’s novels “an explicit distinction is drawn between ‘what’ and ‘who’ a person is” (Handler 1994: 35). In this model, Handler explains, “the ‘what’ of a person seems to refer to characteristics of appearance, manner, mind, and situation that have been ascertained from personal experience of the person in question” (ibid., 35), while “the ‘who’ of a person clearly refers to a web of social relations that places the individual in question with respect to family, connections, and social rank” (ibid., 35). In the case of Catherine Moreland, her “what” (beauty) seems to have been picked up by the two gentlemen, only after her “who” has been established as well: she is recognised as part of *Mister* Allen’s party. The integrity of individual identity, thus, lies in continually publicly recognising one’s place within the order of society, whether that place makes one a dependent or independent constituent of the social fabric.

However, does this public recognition of similarity to others within society mean that no one in Austen’s world, or in English society at the time, had a sense of inner selfhood, and individual ontology that could be traced only to the existence of the individual subject, and not to his public relations with others? Surely, not everyone in Austen’s world was either an independent English gentleman or dependent English woman. While the world of Austen may seem indeed homogenous, and while, through its mimetic techniques, it can be read as a mirror of English society, it mirrors only one strand of that society, from which any intrusion of dissident subcultures are erased exactly because of this way in which identities are constructed through such a public recognition of similarity to others. A crucial factor in Austen’s mimetic fiction is just that: those that are different are simply not recognised and therefore, do not exist

as individuals within Austen's world, the cast no reflection in the mimetic mirror. This construction leaves all the female characters in Austen's novels ultimately unable to form a dissident culture of women, across classes, privately recognising their difference to men, and as such gaining their independence from them. Austen's method's then imply a conservative gender politics to boot.

Before discussing how Brown's Gothic romance *Wieland* offers an contemporary alternative to Austen's mode of individual identity construction, it is important to note that, with regard to the Gothic genre, Eugenia C. Delamotte has distinguished between Gothic comedy and Gothic tragedy. Delamotte explains: "the crisis of the protagonist's fortunes in Gothic comedy involves temporary imprisonment in a place one of whose prime characteristics is that it cannot be fully known" (Delamotte 1990: 52). The plot of such works generally moves as follows:

After nightmarish struggles, the hero or heroine finds –either here or in some related place – the evidence of someone else's sin. This evidence discloses the secret of his or her hereditary wrongs and the key to his or her true identity. The identity is identity in the sense of social position, and the crucial act of knowledge in Gothic comedy is a social act, in that it brings to light a crime against the social order, most often usurpation. Knowledge of the long-hidden secret exorcises evil and re-establishes social unity chiefly by making possible the marriage of hero and heroine and returning money and property to their rightful, virtuous owners (ibid., 52).

Delamotte's insight is significant to this essay in that, when the nightmarish struggles are replaced with social struggles, and the crime against the social order is perceived not in terms of sin, but social impropriety, such a plot is near identical to most of Austen's work, and as it stands, Delamotte's description almost directly describes Austen's Gothic pastiche, *Northanger Abbey*. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Delamotte referring to a similar mode of identity construction that Handler had found in Austen's work. What is significant in making the distinction between Gothic comedy, as outlined above, and Gothic tragedy, which, follows a similar plot, but which Delamotte explains, "renders a return to the daylight world meaningless" (ibid., 54) is that the Brown's novels, initially inspired by Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, and in turn an inspiration on Mary Shelley and other later British and American Gothic authors, are clearly of the tragic mould. Because Brown's texts belong to the Gothic genre that posits the impossibility of a return to the status quo, they can be read more easily as offering a dissident mode of constructing individual identity to the one Handler found prevalent in Austen's work and world, and which can also be said to work in Gothic comedy. This dissident mode of identity construction is not based on the public recognition of shared social relations that

emphasize class and gender similarities, but instead moves towards a concept of individual identity construction based primarily on a privately recognised difference to others in society.

In his book *Gothic Writing*, Robert Miles writes that within Gothic scholarship “there is broad agreement that the Gothic represents the subject in a state of deracination, of the self finding itself dispossessed in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation” (Miles 2002: 3). This focus on the central place of the fragmented subject in the Gothic heightens the potential for dissidence with respect to the way in which individual identities are constructed. This alternative model locates the individual subject not so much *wallowing in*, as struggling *against* dominant ideological forces. Miles uses the idea of “the Gothic turn,” to describe this trait of the genre, by which he means “an inner momentum to break open ideological figures, the tendency of Gothic writing to turn upwards hidden discursive seems, to reveal concealed lines of power” (ibid., 5).

Crucially, then, in opposition to the way in which identities are constructed and upheld in Austen’s Realistic novels, as well as in Gothic comedy, which posits a return to realism, the genre of the tragic Gothic that was contemporary to Austen, through its focus on the fragmented subject, torn from its roots within ideology, is able to place the individual subject outside of the socio-political and economic relations that constitute identity in Austen’s world.¹ The genre of tragic Gothic, in which the initial stability is never retrieved once it has been erased, is able to portray the individual in a continual quest to retrieve an identity ontologically freed from the fetters of social institutions and political and economic forces. While Gothic comedy, like Austen’s works, may ultimately revert back to the status quo, through the tragic Gothic novels’ failure to return to the status quo, a dissident potential comes to the fore. The dissidence, with regard to individual identity, can be identified as an engagement with individuality based on privately acknowledged difference, rather than publicly recognized similarity to others.

Pattie Cowell points out how “early North-American gothics begin with a social order grounded in stable class and gender hierarchies, hierarchies that [as in Austen’s work] may be more rigidly established in the fiction than in the fact of post-revolutionary life in the United States” (Cowell 1993: 131). In a sense, *Wieland* starts out just as Austen’s novels do. However, once the mysterious wanderer Carwin enters the estate of Mettingen, clearly a microcosm of the United States, the novel turns into a quest by the constituents of the community Theodore, Clara, Henry and Catherine, to determine the individual identity, or as they define it, the

¹ British examples of this genre are: William Godwin: *Caleb Williams* (1794), *St Leon* (1799); Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein* (1818), *The Last Man* (1826); Charles Maturin, *Melmoth, the Wanderer* (1820).

“genuine character and views” (Brown: 1798: 70) of Carwin, a quest that leads to the total annihilation of their community.

In clear opposition to Austen’s character’s Carwin is a true embodiment of the Gothic trope of the mysterious wanderer, a type Manuel Aguirre explains who “stares at a world which is fundamentally not what it should be” (Aguirre 1990: 54). Aguirre points out that the Gothic wanderer perceives the world as a prison, or labyrinth: “the basic walled-up construct is there, but now it does not only (if at all) protect,” as can be argued is the case for the “ideology of independence” that construct individual identity in Austen, “it also imprisons; from now on the world, represented as a closed space, is something to get out of – or to submit or adapt to. To be or not to be in this world becomes a fundamental issue” (ibid., 54). The wanderer functions as a figure outside of ideology as such, and is empowered with the ability to choose “to be” part of a world which is not as it should be, or “not to be” part of this world by remaining outside of the ideologies that make the individual subject visible to society. Carwin has become an invisible being, a shape-shifter, who cannot be defined along the dominant social parameters for identity construction: class, gender, occupation, and religion. He, in turn, functions as a destabilizing force to that society, as his what remains present, while his “who” eludes those to whom he presents himself. Because of his social invisibility he has become a magic mirror reflecting the true identity of the other characters, by using his power of bilquism, a cunningly constructed, allegorical, preternatural, force that allows Carwin to imitate all human voices and throw them in any direction he wishes.

Early on in the novel, Clara Wieland, the narrator, explains how the community in Mettingen is based on what Handler has called the “ideology of independence.” Her brother Theodore, a devotee of Cicero, and herself had been rationally educated and had freed themselves from their German father’s religious fanaticism.² They symbolically turn their father’s temple into a cultural space in which music was performed, plays were staged and where: “we females were busy at the needle, while my brother and Pleyel were bandying quotations and syllogisms”(Brown 1798: 28). Theodore has conveniently married Catherine Pleyel, and Henry Pleyel “the champion of intellectual liberty” who “rejected all guidance but that of his reason” (ibid., 22) has his eye on Clara, and vice versa, so that each individual, through rational judgement, is ensured the right social “who” to coincide with their “what.” As in Austen’s novels, the society has a seemingly smooth surface, and tight social structure in

² Wieland senior self-combusted during religious devotion at his temple, apparently as the result of God’s wrath after he became convinced that he had failed to fulfil his duty.

which everyone acts out the role prescribed by their gender and class. Theodore and Pleyel, in the Austen-like opening of the novel are clearly, and unsurprisingly, the most independent characters, seemingly most secure in their identity as partakers of enlightenment culture, and Catherine and Clara feel only marginally compromised in their independence because of what they themselves perceive as their “naturally” given gender role: Clara’s statement about “we females” and “needlework” linked to her portrait of the men’s interest in logic and debating, reinforces how all constituents of Mettingen seem to publicly recognize their situation within the social make up, and to be content with their identity.

It is exactly their reliance on publicly recognising their individuality that keeps the constituents of Mettingen from ever ascertaining Carwin’s since he is a mysterious stranger, whose refusal to divulge any information as to his true nationality, occupation, and religion, afforded the community’s constituents “no ground on which to build even a plausible conjecture” (ibid., 66) as to “who” he was. I turn, as soon as Carwin plays his vocal tricks on the community, mimicking both Catherine and Clara’s voices in the process, he undermines not only its rational enlightenment foundations, but he also pierces through the “ideology of independence” on which the identity of the characters seem to be built. His initial entrance into Mettingen immediately endows Clara with progressive thoughts about individual identity. On perceiving Carwin from her window she writes:

I reflected on the alliance on which commonly subsists between ignorance and the practice of agriculture, and indulged myself in airy speculations as to the influence of progressive knowledge in dissolving this alliance and embodying the dreams of the poets. I asked why the plough and the hoe might not become the trade of every human being, and how this trade might be conducive to, or, at least, consistent with acquisition of wisdom and eloquence (ibid., 47).

Carwin’s rustic, classless, and grotesquely genderless figure, leads Clara for a moment to envision a classless, genderless society, along Jeffersonian ideals. However, she shows her interpellation into the “ideology of independence” by writing: “weary of these reflections, I returned to the kitchen to perform some household office” (ibid., 47). However, Carwin appears again soon in the door opening talking to Clara’s maid in Hermetic riddles. Clearly, Carwin’s “what” has already become an unavoidable presence at Mettingen, the community must confront eventually.

Just as Carwin is able to endow Clara for the moment with progressive ideas about how to change society, Carwin’s trickery unmasks Henry Pleyel, to use Fritz Fleischmann’s words as “a patriarch of the first order” who “is neither nice nor reasonable” (Fleischmann 1983: 46). Clara is threatened with murder through Carwin’s trickery. As a consequence, Pleyel takes up

his abode in the house that had been initially Clara's own, and indulges in what he believes is his patriarchal prerogative: the protector of his wife to be, and his property. The social mobility Clara has seemingly gained through Carwin's tricks is clearly a threat to Pleyel's identity. As long as she is safely confined within the walls of her house, as the angel of that house, there is no need for Pleyel's actual presence, but as soon as these boundaries seem unable to protect her, Pleyel feels bent to protect his property. However, when Carwin's next trick makes Pleyel believe this property to be worthless, he immediately rids himself of the burden. What becomes clear is that Mettingen is a society, like Austen's world in which, to use Eve Sedgwick's words, "it is the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (Sedgwick 1985: 25-6). As such Pleyel and Theodore's friendship is based on their mutual exchange of their sisters. When Carwin concocts another scene, this time for the ears of Pleyel specifically, in which Clara is portrayed as the secret mistress of Carwin, Clara's dependence is shown to be inversely proportionate to Pleyel's independence. As soon as she seems to gain social mobility through her affair with Carwin, Pleyel immediately condemns Clara, and flees the house. Carwin's biloquial machinations leave the otherwise rational and verbally eloquent Pleyel "struggling for utterance" (Brown 1798: 95) in front of Clara, a verbal failure that leads him eventually only to turn away from her, her house, her character, and even her brother, who seems to have forfeited the exchange.

As a consequence of Carwin's biloquism, however, Clara, during the confrontation, has gained the dominant position in the relationship and exclaims impatiently: "for heaven's sake, my friend, what is the matter?" (ibid., 95) Through Carwin's tricks she has become the independent being seeking to comfort Pleyel, who, while "choked by emotion" (ibid.), can only ask Clara: "how art thou fallen! From what height fallen! A ruin so complete – so unheard of!" (ibid.). For a moment Clara privately recognises her identity through her difference to Pleyel. She shows her ultimate adherence to the dominant mode of identity construction, however, by reading into Pleyel's behaviour: "an outrage so unmanly, and so gross" (ibid., 97). His emotional breakdown and failure to verbally hold his ground have emasculated Pleyel in the eyes of Clara. Instead of holding fast to reason, Clara believes that "his imagination transformed shadows into monsters, and plunged him into these deplorable errors" (ibid., 95), a mental condition from which Clara was shown to suffer earlier on in the novel, and that had then been straightened out by Pleyel's masculine intervention. Once again, Carwin has reversed the roles, showing that it is Pleyel's adherence to "the ideology of independence" that makes him act, and Clara react as they do. From this point of view, the transformation of the subtitle can be read as referring not to a transformation within one of the characters, but to the transformation of an

American society, which is shown to rely in Brown's novel, still as much on the "ideology of independence," as is Austen's portrayal of English society, a reliance that stifles the revolutionary process. It is only Carwin's appearance and biloquial machinations that allow the "ideology of independence" to be undermined through various power-reversals. And it is Brown's choice of the Gothic that has allowed Carwin to materialise. This generic choice by Brown allows him to show up how much the rational enlightenment individuals within the community of Mettingen had based their sense of identity on an irrational belief in the naturalness of what Handler called "the ideology of independence," and to propose an alternative, lacking in Austen's fiction due to her choice of realism.

Clearly, through Carwin's machinations, Brown shows that while their national identity, as German second-generation immigrants, may have been easy to erase on the surface, by recognising their American citizenship, the wider cultural legacy of a European patriarchal model is much less easy to erase. In the ideological opposition that Carwin's machinations create between Theodore and Pleyel, Brown seems to suggest, on both an individual and national level, that in order to fully constitute their individual identity as well as their American identity, an engagement with the cultural past is necessary, an engagement with the past that focuses on recognising individual differences, rather than public similarities.

Pleyel is shown to rely to heavily on the past. In order to consolidate his identity, he needs to recognise the political and social structures of Europe as still dominant within the new American republic. After believing Clara in league with Carwin, therefore, he unsurprisingly states: "I have not arms with which to contend with so consummate, so frightful a depravity" (ibid.). The multi-voiced Carwin is, as Jane Tompkins has rightly argued, "one of the 'new men' the Federalists feared, who suddenly appeared out of nowhere" (Tompkins 1985: 52). He undermines Pleyel's dependency on patriarchal ideology that ensured his sense of self by consolidating his dominant status within society. Theodore is shown as trying to hard to artificially forget the past – his father's religious radicalism – through his surface obsession with Cicero and his Republican belief that by acknowledging his patrimony he would "degenerate into a tyrant and voluptuary" (Brown 1798: 35). His refusal to even acknowledge the reality of his family past, lead him increasingly to be "deracinated" or "dispossessed in his own house," to use Miles's terms, into a social isolation that eventually leads him to mistake Carwin's voice for the will of an omnipotent and malevolent God, who orders him to kill his children and his wife, which he does. The "Gothic turn," embodied in Carwin, has illuminated the cracks in the "ideology of independence" by showing how a break with ideology, which the American Revolution clearly was on several levels, forced the individuals who still needed to

hold fast to the old ideologies dominant in pre-revolutionary times to adopt tyrannical behaviour: whether religious fanaticism or a return towards patriarchal oppression.

By introducing the Gothic wanderer into the world of Mettingen, Brown is able to “turn upwards hidden discursive seems,” to use Miles words once more, that remained hidden in the realistic, mimetically underscored novels of Austen, in which characters outside of the ideology of independence are simply not recognised as individuals. Clara explained early on in the novel how individuals like Carwin “were seldom seen by me except on the road or in the field” (ibid., 47), but never crossed the boundaries of their estate, and clearly his entrance erases these boundaries for good. However plural the perspectives in Austen’s world, Carwin could never have entered Northanger Abbey, as the conventions of Austen’s Realistic fiction would not have allowed for such a grotesque preternatural being to visibly enter society.

Through the socially invisible Carwin, therefore, Brown is able to point out an alternative mode of constructing individual identity, grounded, not in any socio-political context, but is in fact made up of all the different voices he is able to mimic. As Carwin’s memoirs would later tell the reader, Carwin was an American citizen who had returned to Mettingen after going through a spell of continual identity transformations: he had been at one time an Irish radical, English Protestant, Spanish Catholic, Student of Hermeticism, and a wanted criminal who eventually returned to America in an attempt to escape the law. Importantly, he is the only character who is entirely in command of his own will, and therefore, independent of any ideological forces that determine his identity. He has necessarily and privately recognised that his individual integrity is not constituted by his nationality, occupation, or religion. Carwin is Carwin to himself throughout the novel. Only in the eyes of others, who adhere to the “ideology of independence” and project onto him the identities that help them to define themselves, does he become the elusive shape-shifter who threatens social stability. Carwin defines himself continually by recognising his difference from others, defined through his ability to mimic their voices. This recognition of difference is what frees him from being part of such ideological identity formation, and is what allows Carwin, eventually, to break down the community of Mettingen, forcing Clara and Pleyel to return to Europe, and leaving him to choose to embody the ideal constituent suggested by Clara’s vision early on in the novel: the individual republican farmer unfettered by ideological formations of the individual subject.

The ending of the novel, seems to allude to the socio-political situation in the United States during the 1790s, when the struggle for dominance between Federal and Republican ideologies was putting increasing pressure on the American citizens to define themselves along

partisanship with one or the other. Tompkins has suggested that *Wieland* should be read as “a political tract” (Tompkins 1985: 44), and not as novel. The republican Wieland’s as well as the Federalist Pleyel, are cancelled out by the fiercely democratic Carwin, who is able to publicly be everyone at once, male female, protestant, catholic, American and European, because he privately recognizes his difference to those individuals who rely on adherence to such socially prescribed roles for their identity. As such, Carwin may just be Brown’s paradigm for a new American character independent of the European patriarchal model and socially constructed identities, and towards a truer ideology of independence, which constituted individual identity through the recognition of difference to others.

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