

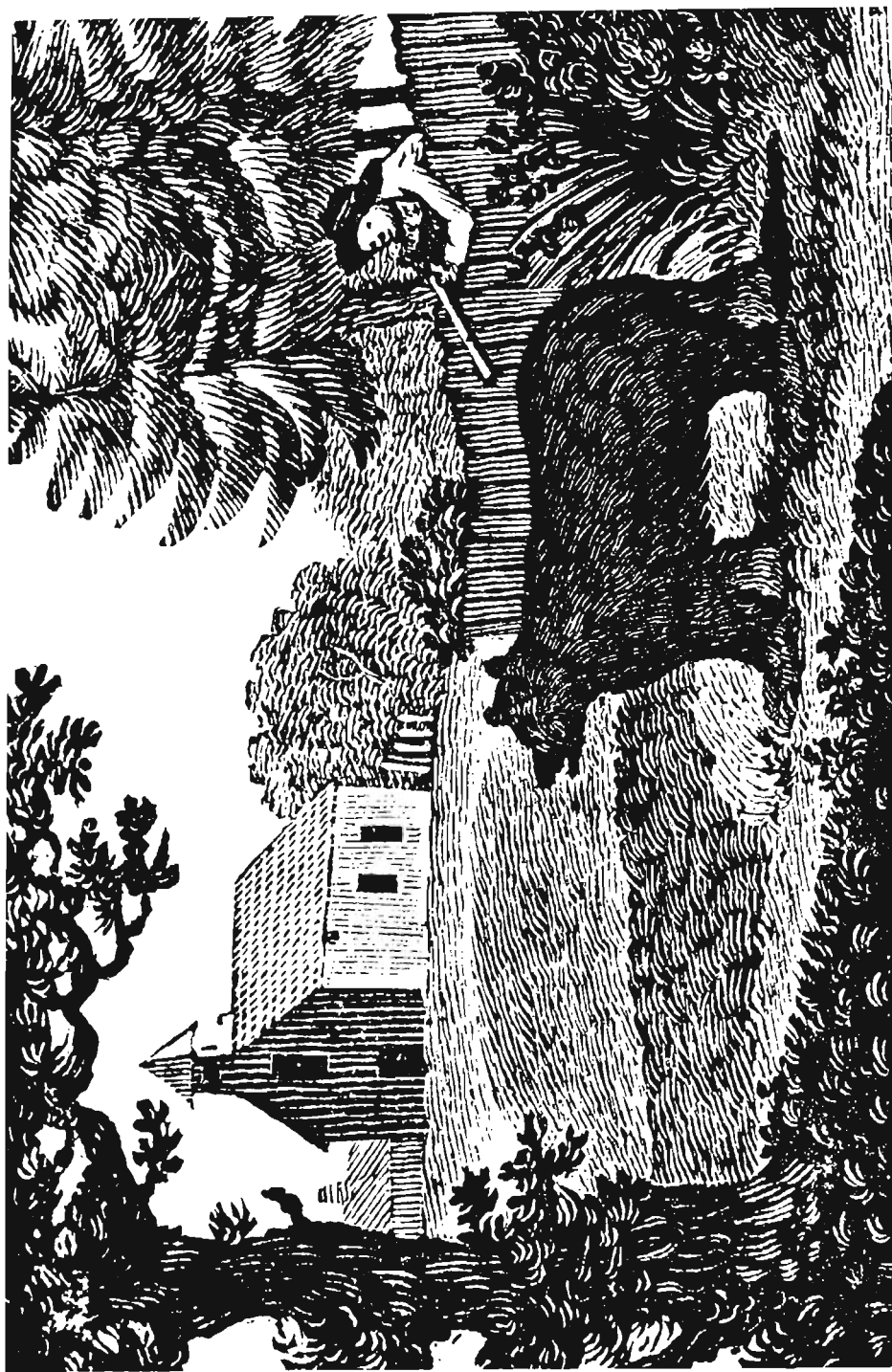
Fiction Based on “Well-Authenticated Facts”

Documenting the Birth of the American Novel

by Warren F. Broderick

Imagination is the queen of darkness: the night the season of her despotism. Daylight, by presenting a thousand objects to the eye, the hearing, and the touch, restores the empire of the senses, and, from being the sport of fancy, we become the slave of realities. — James Kirk Paulding, *Westward Ho!*, 1832

The novel arrived late on the American literary scene. Poetry, drama, diaries, sermons and other forms of literature long antedated fiction. During America's formative years, fiction was distrusted by Puritans and pragmatists alike; both found fault with its necessary detachment from reality. Before the novel could truly be accepted as a serious literary form in America, its writers needed to prove that their works were “moral tales,” and “founded on fact.” In spite of these preconditions, which may have delayed the advent of American fiction, the literary form



Anonymous woodcut from the late 1700's. Photo by Robinson Studio, Troy, N.Y.

flourished in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Gothic fiction, powerfully written and very appealing to readers, has remained ascendant since Charles Brockden Brown developed it into a serious literary genre in the 1790s.

Brown's *Wieland* (1798) and *Edgar Huntly*. (1799) were America's first major novels and are classics of the "American Gothic." They introduced readers to subjects like spontaneous combustion, ventriloquism, insanity, and sleepwalking, as well as the powerful forces at work in the subconscious mind. Why did two novels dealing with these seemingly "unreal" matters appear at that date? Were the "civilized" communities of Philadelphia and New York, where Charles Brockden Brown lived and worked, solely responsible for the creation of masterpieces of early fiction? How and why was the small rural community of Schaghticoke in upstate New York so important to the development of the American novel?

The "Schaghticoke" of the 17th and 18th centuries was located a few miles west of Rensselaer County's present Village of Schaghticoke. Consisting of a cluster of farms near the place where the Tomhannock Creek flowed into the Hoosick River, Schaghticoke was often referred to as "Tomhanick"¹ and occupied land once belonging to an Indian tribe. The so-called "Schaghticoke Indians," representatives of five New England tribes, had moved into the region in 1676. Forced to flee their native lands at the conclusion of King Philip's War, they settled along the Hoosick River just east of its confluence with the Hudson, eighteen miles northeast of Albany. New York's colonial governor, Edmond Andros, encouraged the Indian settlement and entered into a covenant with the newly formed tribe. The covenant of 1677 called for an alliance whereby the Schaghticoques were to help defend the region against the French and their Indian allies. Thereafter, the Indians played a significant role in the Colonial wars, collecting information on French and Indian activities, and on occasion participating in reconnaissance and other strategic expeditions against the common enemy, especially during Queen Anne's War (1702–1714). The tribe finally left the area for Canada in 1754.

The relationship between Schaghticoke and Albany dates from 1686, when Governor Thomas Dongan granted the capital city its Charter, including "the full liberty and license . . . to purchase from the Indians, the quantity of 500 acres . . . in Schaatecoque."² The city needed additional land for its growing population, but residents were initially hesitant to relocate to a wilderness outpost eighteen miles from the protection afforded by Albany's fortified walls. They waited

until 1707 to acquire the land from the Schaghticoke Indians, and the following year sold leases for eight fifty-acre farms to citizens who had been successful in a special lottery. Albany finally sold the last of its land in Schaghticoke in the early 1800s.

One of the original leaseholders in Schaghticoke was Daniel Kittle, who paid sixteen pounds ten shillings and yearly rent of a "just and full quantity of thirty-seven and a half bushels of good and merchantable winter wheat," first due in 1714.³ Daniel Kittle had been born in Albany in 1674, and in 1695 married Deborah Viele, the mother of his twelve children. Daniel was at times a constable, tax collector and assistant alderman in Albany, and a lieutenant in the colonial militia. He was "credited with an intimate knowledge of woodcraft . . . and the Indian language." Among Daniel's neighbors in Schaghticoke were the families of his brother David Kittle and wife Johanna (Bradt), and his sister Maria (Kittle) and her husband Johannes Bradt. The Kittles and Bradts were known to be on excellent terms with the Schaghticoke Indians—a friendship especially necessary for white settlers living in a wilderness outpost during the French Colonial Wars.

On the 20th and 21st of October, 1711, tragic events took place in Schaghticoke which would provide a pioneer writer with the subject for an important early chapter in the history of American fiction.⁴ That afternoon, enroute to the Schaghticoke Indian village, David Kittle and Johannes Bradt encountered an armed French Indian who shot and killed Captain Bradt, and fled after struggling with and wounding Lieutenant Kittle. Daniel Kittle, realizing that French Indians were in the neighborhood, sent three provincial soldiers and an Indian boy home to protect his family and set off for Albany to seek help. The bloody events which transpired during his absence were described as follows by the Commissioners of Indian Affairs:

October ye 20th Captn Johannis Bratt and David Ketlin was going from their houses, towards Skacktege, Where ye Indians live; they mett an Indian with his Gun on his Shoulder, David Ketlin spoak to him; in the Indian Language; ask't him; where he was agoing; he answered, A hunting, Ketlin Ask't him why he went alone he said his Compy was in the Woods Ketlin went towards Captn Bratt, Saying in Dutch, that he did not know that Indian, the Indian seeing him speak to Bratt, Cockt his Gun; and Shott Bratt dead on his horse, Ketlin run at the Indian as he was going to strik him with his Ax, and gott wthin the Ege of the Ax, The helve hitt him on the shoulder; he threw the Indian down, and in the fall Ketlin; gott the Ax in his left hand, the Indian told him that he must dy; for their was twenty ffrench Indians on each side of Hudsons River; Ketlin told him, that he should dye first, in shifting the ax to his right hand; the Indian gott clear Ketlin run after him, with the ax to kill

him; A Vine caught him by the foot and threw him down, so the Indian gott clear; Ketlin brought the Indian's Gun and Ax home; he got some people together, and went for the Corps, which was brought to Albany the 21 Ketlin with his family, and his Brothers wife, and two Children and three Soldiers Staid at his house that night; about 12 o'clock, he heard some body knock at his door; he askt who was there, an Indian Answered him; it is I, open the door; he askt the Indian, in ye Indian Language, Where are You come from, he Answered from the other side of the River; Ketlin said may be you will cheat me; the Indian said no, open the door Ketlin open'd his door; the Indians fired six Shot at him, As soon as he appeard, his Son a boy of Sixteen Years old; and the three Soldiers took their Arms and an Indian Boy that was in the house and ffired on the ffrench Indians, and kept them out, til the Indians sett the house on fire, which forc't them out, one of the Soldiers went out first, the Indians fired two shot at him, as he came out; And killd him; At the same time, another of the Soldiers run by; six of them pursued him, and took him prisoner; the other Soldier fired out of the door and endeavoured to get clear; they shot him dead, As he fell a Negro boy run by, the followed him and took him; Ketlins Son fired severall Shott, till he was Shott thro the shoulder; he came out and they took him Prisoner, when they was laying hold of him, the Indian Boy run out, they shot him thro the left side of his breast and thro the fleshy part of his Arm; he still run from them and made his Escape into the bushes, then the two women came out asking for Quarters, Ketlins Wife So bigg with Child that she could Scarcly walk; his Brothers Wife with a Young Child in her Arms; They took the two Women Keltins Son a Soldier and two Negroes prisoners, the sett fire to the Barn and Barricks of Corn; then went away; about a Quarter of a Mile from the house, Where they Murdered the Woman with Child and stript her naked, she had Severall Wounds, they struck her in the Neck with an Ax which cutt her head almost off; And they took her Scalp off; About a hundred Yards further; they kild the other Womans Child that was at her breast, the dasht the Childs, brains out against an Oak tree, and the hung it by the neck in the Clift of the Tree, They Scakpt the two Soldiers, part of David Ketlin's body and part of his Bros Child was found in the ashes and rubbish of the house the rest of his body being burnt Part of the body of the ffrench Indian was found in the Ashes of the Barn, And the body of another hid in the woods covered with leaves and Old Sticks, and the head of another was found

this acct of the acton we have from the Indian boy that made his Escape; and from an old Lane Indian that lived near Ketlins house; When he heard the Guns fire he Crept out of his Wigwam and gott under an old ffallentree, And heard all that past; the Account of the Corps that was found and what wounds they had we have from Captn Jacobus Skoonhoven of the half Moon who went up the next day, And buryed the two Soldiers And what part he found of Ketlins body, and brought the Corps of the Woman and Child to town; one of the Soldiers had Seven Wounds, the Corps of Capt Bratt and

Albany 22. October 1711

May it Please your Excellency

I've cant in duty omit to acquaint your Excellency that on the 20. Instant in the afternoon Capt. John Bradt and David Kettelhuyn were in the woods near Schaghticoke, who met an Indian to whom they had some discourse with him he shot Capt. Bradt (who was brought dead yesterday) and designed then to kill off Kettelhuyn with his ax, but he got the ax out of his hand. As the Indian made his escape leaving gun & ax behind him,

Just now we recd certain Intelligence that a party of Indians have this morning abt. 20 taken out of the family of J^r. Kettelhuyn his & brother's wife Prisoners & their children with him, three Soldiers of this Garrison & his negro burnt in his house. we understand that he and the men with him did fight till they were burnt out a lone Indian who was hid behind a fence hath seen all this Barbarous Threatning, who says that there were abt. 100 Indians, we sent 50 men on the first notice hereof to see whether this was true, and one of them is returned who brings us the foregoing acct he had of Don Kettelhuyn who met him by these

we understand that here are but about 40 men of 150 ordered to stay Dec. their frontiers, during your 22. that the frontiers may be well Garrisoned this winter, and that a Clause may be inserted in an act to appoint a provost marshal to Levy the fines of the Inhabitants here who are very negligent in

Doing -

This letter, written to Governor Robert Hunter in 1711, describes the Kittle murders in Schaghticoke. Courtesy of New York State Archives.

David Ketlins wife was buried together ye 24; they were own Brother and Sister, and the Child of Danll Ketlin that was hung in the Clift of the tree.

The Commissioners—Killaen Van Rensselaer, Evert Banker, Myn-dert Schuyler and Peter van Brugh—wrote to Governor Robert Hunter informing him of the atrocities and requesting that the frontier “be well garrisoned,” and that fines be levied against inhabitants “who are very negligent of doing their duty as is required of them on the night guards.”⁵ When he learned of the tragedy, Daniel Kittle immediately petitioned Governor Hunter “to give [him] liberty to go now to Canada with two or three Indians . . . and Ransome your humble Petiors [*sic*] wife they now have prisoner amongst them before our trouble approaches nearer.”⁶ His request granted, Daniel, furnished with a letter and passport from the Governor, traveled north by way of Lakes George and Champlain thirty miles to Montreal, where he ransomed his wife, sister, and nephew, returning with them to Albany in January.

Daniel Kittle later built a home on another site in Schaghticoke, where he purchased additional land in 1721 and lived out the uneventful remainder of his life. His second house was still standing as late as 1897.⁷

Ann Eliza Bleecker, one of this nation’s writers of “songs, satires and burlesque,” as well as a pioneer work of short fiction, moved to Schaghticoke with her husband John J. Bleecker during the early 1770s. Ann Eliza, born in 1752 to Dutch New York aristocrats Brandt and Margaretta (Van Wyck) Schuyler, began to write verse pieces during her comfortable and intellectual youth. She married John Bleecker in 1769 at New Rochelle, and after a short tenure in Poughkeepsie, “taking a liking to the northern parts of this State, removed to Tomhanick, a beautiful solitary little village eighteen miles above Albany.”⁸ There they constructed a residence “on a little eminence, which commanded a pleasant prospect.” Nearby, “the roaring river of Tomhanick dashed with rapidity its foaming waters among the broken rock,” clearly a reference to impressive waterfalls on the Tomhannock Creek near its junction with the Hoosic River.

The Bleeckers lived in “most peaceful tranquility” until the advent of the American Revolution in 1777, when an incident occurred which left an indelible impression on Ann Eliza’s life and may have inspired her to write *The History of Maria Kittle* two years later. Because of its strategic location, Schaghticoke had been on the edge of the frontier and in constant danger of enemy attack throughout



Reynolds Sculp

Engraving of Anna Eliza Bleecker. Courtesy of New York State Library.

the Indian Wars. Likewise during the Revolution its location made the area a target of the British and their Indian allies; "we have been often alarmed," Mrs. Bleecker wrote, "by unexpected eruptions of savages on the frontier."⁹ Once, in the summer of 1777, while her husband was in Albany, she "received intelligence that the enemy were within two miles of the village, burning and murdering all before them." "Terrified beyond description," she fled on foot and by wagon to "Stony-Arabia" (Lansingburgh), some eight miles to the south, where "at length she obtained a place in a garret of a rich old acquaintance" and wept through the night, until her husband returned in the morning from Albany.

While her "apprehensions" concerning an attack were greatly exaggerated that evening, patriot families in Schaghticoke did live in some danger, not only from British troops and their Indian allies, but from local Loyalist raiding parties, whose sympathizers included some of her neighbors. In 1781 her husband, for instance, was seized from his field by a Loyalist raiding party under the direction of one Matthew Howard of nearby Pittstown, an officer in the Loyal Rangers and a spy for the British.¹⁰ Capt. Bleecker was rescued in Bennington, Vermont, soon thereafter, but the capture of her husband forced Ann Eliza into "premature labor, and [she] was delivered of a dead child." Her health declined from the miscarriage and continued depression, and Mrs. Bleecker died in Tomhanick on the 23rd of November, 1783.¹¹ She was interred in the Reformed Dutch Burial Ground in Albany.¹²

The "impressions" the hasty flight to Lansingburgh in 1777 made on Eliza Bleecker's mind were, according to her niece, "never erased. The remembrance of every circumstance that led to it—the return of the season—the voice of an infant—or even the calm approach of a summer's evening, never failed to awaken all her sorrows; and she being naturally of a pensive turn of mind, *too* frequently indulged them."¹³ In her letters, Mrs. Bleecker continually refers to her fear from woods "infested with tories" and "apprehensions" concerning possible attacks from Indians, "roving bands" of "night destroyers."¹⁴ In this frame of mind she composed *The History of Maria Kittle*, probably the second American novel.¹⁵ It was enclosed with a letter to her half-sister, Susan Ten Eyck, in December 1779, but was not published until it appeared in five installments in *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository*, from September, 1790 through January, 1791, and in Mrs. Bleecker's *Posthumous Works*, issued in 1793.¹⁶

In her introduction to this "little *History*," Mrs. Bleecker states that it is "altogether a fact," as distinct from "fiction, in which, knowing

the subject to be fabulous, we can never be so truly interested." Quite probably because of these remonstrations most historians and critics labelled the *History of Maria Kittle* little more than a glorified captivity narrative, and lacking knowledge of the 1711 Colonial Manuscripts covering the massacre, concluded that these tragic events had occurred, as Mrs. Bleecker stated, in 1746 during King George's War.¹⁷ Although its subtitle proclaims it a "pathetic story founded on fact," *The History of Maria Kittle* is by intention a piece of fiction, and must be clearly understood as such.

The dilemma of the pioneer American novelist, namely how to write "fiction founded on fact," will be explored later in greater detail, in the examination of the work of Charles Brockden Brown. But by changing the names and dates in the Kittle terror saga, Ann Eliza Bleecker consciously signalled her entry into the world of fiction, where the author, despite having to deal with considerable public distrust of the genre itself, had the liberty to develop qualities of characters and to express subjective feelings, a liberty which mere journalism failed to provide.

The History of Maria Kittle is a horror-filled melodramatic novel of sensibility. Mrs. Bleecker's aims included interesting the "benevolent and feeling heart" of the reader and giving her "some idea of savage cruelty" and "justifying" her fears of potential raids by savage Indians and Tories. "Horror is piled upon horror," and by using this "local color" to achieve the effects of horror and mystery on the sensibilities of her readers, Ann Eliza Bleecker can truly be said to have been the creator of American Gothic fiction.¹⁸ While her *History* is far from a well-written or deeply probing piece of short fiction, it is somewhat more complex than merely a gory captivity narrative turned novel, as Roy Pearce suggests, and in the history of the American novel, it occupies a far more important niche than critics have indicated.

Ann Eliza Bleecker made significant and often misunderstood contributions to American fiction. She was responsible for introducing two stereotypes of the American Indian which would persist throughout the 19th century in still-famous novels such as Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and Simms's *The Yemassee*, and in many which have fallen into total obscurity, such as *Hobomok*, *Hope Leslie*, *The Shoshonee Valley*, *Osceola* and *The Mestico*, as well as a plethora of equally obscure short stories.¹⁹

Although the portrait of the "ignoble savage" had previously appeared in American poetry, drama, school textbooks, and journalism, it found its way from the captivity narrative to the novel through *The History of Maria Kittle*. One reason for writing her little

An original and interesting letter, by the late Mrs. ANN F. BLEECKER, to her friend Miss S. T. E. describing the sufferings of Mr. KITTLE's family, at Schoebticook, in the French and English war, prior to the last.— Several short poetical essays from the same elegant and descriptive pen, we have had the high satisfaction of presenting to the public eye in our former numbers.

HISTORY OF MARIA KITTLE.

DEAR SUSAN,

HOWEVER fond of novels and romances you may be, the unfortunate adventures of one of my neighbours, who died yesterday, will make you despise that fiction, in which, knowing the subject to be fabulous, we can never be so truly interested. While this lady was expiring, Mrs. C—— V——, her near kinswoman, related to me her unhappy history, in which I shall now take the liberty of interesting your benevolent and feeling heart.—

Maria Kittle was the only issue of her parents, who cultivated a large farm on the banks of Hudson, eighteen miles above Albany. They were persons of good natural abilities, improved by some learning; yet conscious of a deficiency in their education, they studied nothing so much as to render their little daughter truly accomplished.

Maria was born in the year 1721. Her promising infancy presaged a maturity of excellencies; every amiable quality dawned through her lisping prattle; every personal grace attended her attitudes and played over her features. As she advanced through the playful stage of childhood, she became more eminent than a Penelope for her industry; yet, soon as the sun declined, she always retired with

her books until the time of repose, by which means she soon informed her opening mind with the principles of every useful science. She was beloved by all her female companions, who, though they easily discovered her superior elegance of manners, instead of envying were excited to imitate her. As she always made one in their little parties of pleasure on festival days, it is no wonder that she soon became the reigning goddess among the swains. She was importuned to admit the addresses of numbers, whom she politely discarded, and withdrew herself a while from public observation. However, the fame of her charms attracted several gentlemen of family from Albany, who intruded on her retirement, soliciting her hand. But this happiness was reserved for a near relation of her's, one Mr. Kittle, whose merits had made an impression on her heart. He, although not handsome, was possessed of a most engaging address, while his learning and moral virtues more particularly recommended him to her esteem. Their parents soon discovered their reciprocal passion, and highly approving of it, hastened their marriage, which was celebrated under the most happy auspices.

The first page of The History of Maria Kittle, (from Posthumous Works).

History, Ann Eliza Bleecker admitted, was to “give . . . some idea of savage cruelty.” Her opinion of the American Indian is quite evident in her letters and in the “pornographic zeal” with which she describes the details of cruel Indian practices in her novel. In *Maria Kittle*, the stage is set for brutality by references to recent “horrid depredations” the “savages” had been committing on the frontier, “burning the villages and scalping the inhabitants, neither respecting age or sex.” The “horrid carnage” at the Kittle homestead follows, and Maria Kittle cries out:

“O barbarians! Surpassing devils in wickedness! . . . O Hell! are not thy flames impatient to cleave the center and engulf these wretches in thy ever burning waves? . . . no God to take notice of such Heaven defying cruelties?”

Contrary to popular belief, the other Indian, the “noble savage,” was not a character invented by Cooper, but a foil to the more prevalent image of the “ignoble savage,” and present in American fiction from its beginnings. While prone to drunkenness and some other vices, and doomed to extinction because he cannot be assimilated into the white population, the “noble savage” possesses many virtues and exists to serve the respectable white citizenry. His roots lie in Colonial accounts of Indian chiefs such as Squanto and Massasoit, and even the Schaghticoke Indians, who “ennobled” themselves by shielding the citizens of Albany against their evil brethren. In *The History of Maria Kittle*, a few savages demonstrate these ennobling qualities. The Kittle family were “almost adored by their neighbors” in Schaghticoke, “even the wild savages themselves, who . . . expressed great regard for them, and admiration of their virtues.” These “friendly savages” warned Maria of the impending danger, and tried to help defend her home against the attacking horde. Two of the local Indians, “being used to such sanguinary scenes,” recovered first from the shock of witnessing the carnage, and proceeded to cover up the mangled corpses. Even one of the raiding party befriends Maria on their long, arduous trek northward, which precipitates her comparison of the “noble savages” to

“happy animals! you have not the fatal gift of reason to embitter your pleasures . . . incapable of offending your Creator, the blessings of your existence are secured to you. . . . I envy the meanest among ye!”

Mrs. Bleecker also introduced to fiction the popular genre character of the “Indian-hater,” best known in the novels of James Hall, Timothy Flint, James K. Paulding, and Robert M. Birt. It was Hall’s Indian-hater, Colonel John Moredock, which Herman Melville so brilliantly parodied in *The Confidence Man*, (1857).²⁰ The Indian-hater

apparently fled the area in 1782; Ann Eliza Bleecker mentions in one letter that “our men . . . stormed Jackson’s house, where the tories were collected,” and two months later remarked that their “neighborhood looked solitary: Mrs. Jackson . . . and many more are all fled with their families in a clandestine manner.”²⁴

On January 7, 1782 the *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* carried the following small news item, under the heading “Fishkill”:

A few days since one James Yates, who says he was born in Westchester County, was committed to the gaol in Albany, for the willfull murder of his wife and four children; he also killed his cattle.

It must be noted that Ann Eliza Bleecker often sent copies of her writings to Fishkill, “where several of her relations lived.”²⁵ Mrs. Bleecker mentioned these murders in two of her letters, first in December of 1781:

The most tragical affair has happened here that I ever remember to have heard of. James Yates, (a son of him at Pitt’s-Town,) a few nights ago murdered his wife, four children, his horses and cow, with circumstances of cruelty too horrid to mention: by all appearance he is a religious lunatic.

The following August she noted that “the poor Mrs. F[rancisco] was lately delivered of a child who is a terror to every one that sees it. It seems she was so struck at the sight of James Yates’s murdered family, that it made too fatal an impression.”²⁶

There were no local newspapers in Schaghticoke at that time, and contemporary court records have been lost. Thus the only documentation of the details of these murders survives in “An Account of a Murder Committed by Mr. J— Y—, Upon his Family in December. A.D. 1781,” which first appeared in the *New York Weekly Magazine* on the 20th and 27th of July, 1796, and in the *Philadelphia Minerva* on the 20th and 27th of August. Evidence that this piece was from the pen of Ann Eliza Bleecker is overwhelming. Her letters reveal her knowledge of the murders; the introduction to this *Account* states that it is “drawn up by a female hand” who “knew of [Yates] himself.” The author calls this her “present essay,” suggesting that it was written by a woman, like Mrs. Bleecker, who had done some writing. The use of dashes to disguise proper names of her subjects, as well as the melodramatic style, are strongly reminiscent of her *History of Maria Kittle*. Furthermore, the author states that Yates was interrogated at the house of “Mrs. Bl[eecke]r,” and later that she had gone “with a little girl, by whom Mr. Bl[eecke]r had sent him some fruit,” to visit Yates in the Albany gaol.

Ann Eliza Bleecker’s *Account* of the Yates murders consists of an intriguing mixture of fact and fiction, the proportion of the two

ingredients remaining a mystery. Undoubtedly, it is far more factual than her fictionalized rendering of the story of the Kittle massacre because it was based on incidents of which she had immediate knowledge. Her intent seems to have been to write down for posterity the details of such a tragic event, and "the only use we can now make of our knowledge of this affair, is to be humble under a sense of human frailty to renew our petition, 'Lead us not into temptation.'" Whether Yates's actions should be pronounced "the effect of insanity," or whether he was "under a strong delusion of Satan," could only be the reader's conjecture," because the cause of the tragedy lies "beyond the conception of human beings."

The appearance in print of the Yates murder story in 1796 could have not have been more timely for America's first major professional novelist, Charles Brockden Brown. The 26-year-old Philadelphia native of Quaker upbringing had removed to New York City in 1794, where he joined some contemporary intellectuals in the "Friendly Club," who met regularly to discuss timely political, literary and social issues.²⁷ Two of the Club's members were William Dunlap, future artist, playwright, art historian and biographer of Brown himself, and Anthony Bleeker, a wit and minor poet, and coincidentally the nephew of the deceased author, Ann Eliza Bleeker.²⁸

Although Brown had yet to have a substantial work published, he was evidently experimenting with a variety of literary forms, not only poetry and drama, but even the untrodden world of the novel.²⁹ A manuscript "Outline" of Brown's, consisting of loosely organized words, phrases, and proper names, discovered among family papers held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, reveals that he was thinking about a drama or novel dealing with subjects such as murder, spontaneous combustion, seduction, and ventriloquism.³⁰

In 1797 Brown returned to Philadelphia, where he published a few small pieces and a semi-fictional dialogue on women's rights, called *Alcuin*. He also wrote an unpublished and now-lost novel entitled "Skywalk." In the early part of 1798, Brown began work on his first major novel, *Wieland*.

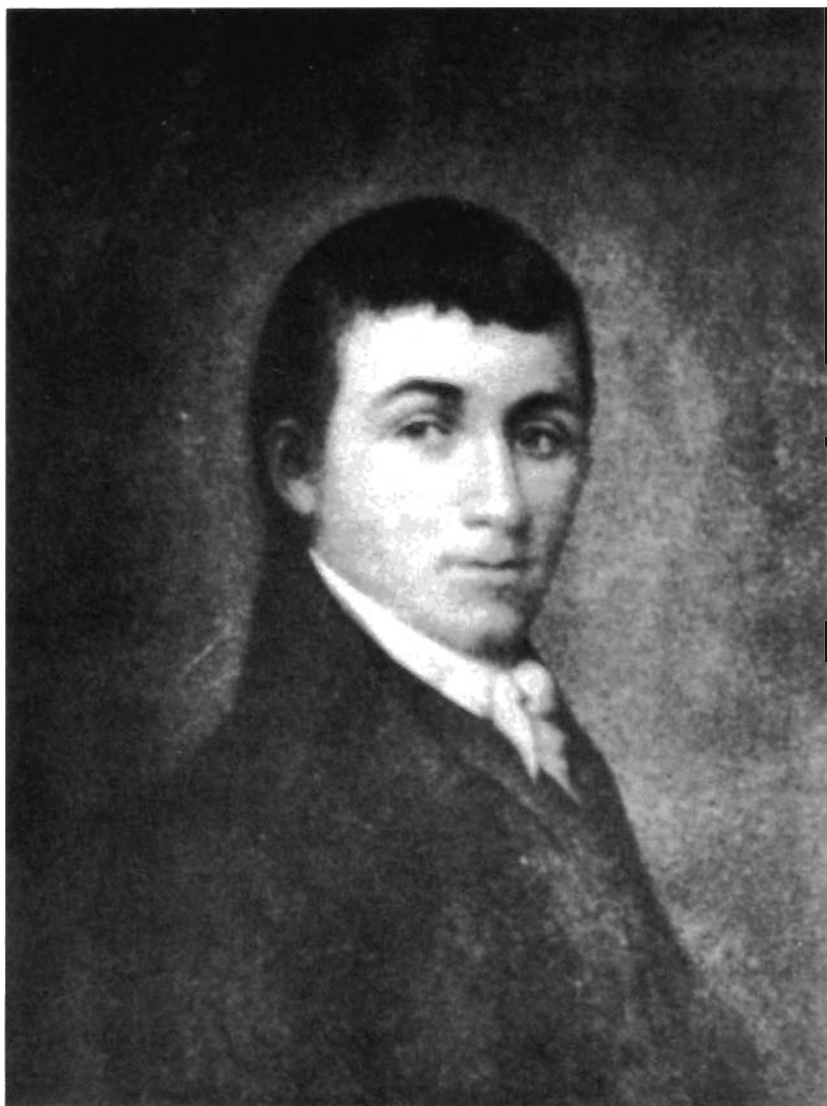
Wieland; or the Transformation. An American Tale was completed in September, 1798, and was in the hands of the printers, Thomas and James Swords, who finished the printing job for publisher Hocquet Caritat by the 14th of that month. The novel was available for sale at a dollar a copy, "handsomely bound."³¹

The plot centers around the Wieland family, consisting of the Elder Wieland and his children Theodore and Clara. The Elder Wieland is a European immigrant who, after having failed in an attempt

to convert American Indian tribes to his unique private form of religion, retires to a farm on the Schuylkill River where he lives as a recluse, and constructs an outdoor temple in which to conduct his solitary worship. One midnight, his clothes were burned by apparent spontaneous combustion, and after sinking into fever and delirium, the Elder Wieland dies. Clara and Theodore, children at the time, are mystified by their father's death, never certain whether it came from a natural or supernatural cause. As Theodore Wieland matures, although better educated and more enlightened than his father, he nonetheless becomes more and more entwined in powerful, intensely personal religious beliefs. His foil is Henry Pleyel, brother of Theodore's wife, Catherine. Pleyel is a fun-loving rationalist, unable to comprehend any action which cannot be explained by reason. Clara's mind is torn between the two streams of thought, and is further rent by the actions of a stranger named Carwin, who has mastered the art of ventriloquism and practices it to the agony of all of the principal characters.

Totally engrossed in his private religious mania, Theodore believes he hears a divine command to kill his wife and children, and completes the act of butchery believing he is a perfectly reasonable man under divine instruction. After confessing his crime, Wieland attempts to break prison to kill Clara, as another mysterious voice dictates. Still another voice causes him to stop just short of this murder, and then, in his agony, he commits suicide. Clara reels in temporary insanity, but after Carwin relents and confesses that he was the cause of some of the mysterious voices, she recovers, and after leaving for a more civilized Europe, marries Henry Pleyel, who can now understand all the traumatic events of the recent past.

The few early reviewers of *Wieland* immediately recognized the work as a superior one—set in a fresh American landscape, replete with scenes of violence and mystery, and even spontaneous combustion and ventriloquism. Over the next few decades, the novel continued to draw plaudits from critics and authors alike on two continents. Keats, Shelley and Goodwin all expressed their admiration for the powerful impressions it left in their minds, and American literati began to express an acclaim that went largely unheard by Brown prior to his death from tuberculosis in 1810. Neal, Dana, Dunlap, Poe, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Margaret Fuller all praised *Wieland* in glowing terms. E.T. Channing claimed that “no reader would leave *Wieland* unfinished” because of its unique quality of “ter-



Portrait of Charles Brockden Brown by James Sharples. Courtesy of Worcester Art Museum.

rible fascination.”³² “Brown’s fatal power is unsparing,” wrote Dana. “It wears out the heart and takes away the strength of our spirits, so that we lie helpless under it.”³³ Cooper, who had pirated much from Brown, remarked that he had read *Wieland* as a boy, and “the images it has left, still stand distinct and prominent” in his mind.³⁴ Whittier claimed “there is no more thrilling passage” in English literature than the execution scene: “The masters of the old Greek tragedy have scarcely exceeded the sublime horror of this scene from the American novelist.”³⁵

Later nineteenth-century critics, tired of Gothic romance, saw the book as less meritorious and crudely conceived, but nonetheless granted that it was an historically important development in American literature. Then, about 1920, at a time when a revival of interest in Melville’s work was also just beginning, serious interest in Brown’s life and major novels picked up. Frederick Pattee’s 1926 edition of *Wieland*, which included a fresh critical introduction, made the novel again available to readers. In 1918 the critic Dorothy Scarborough claimed that Brown’s work was “the veritable forerunner of the new psychic fiction” and that his “dark labyrinths of insanity . . . gloom-haunted passages of the human mind, are far more terrible to traverse than the midnight wanderings of Gothic dungeons.”³⁶ Harry Warfel’s *Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist* (1949) and David Lee Clark’s *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (1952) were the first biographies of Brown to be published since Dunlap’s, back in 1815.

During the past twenty years, serious critical attention has been paid to Brown’s work. The 1973 edition of *Edgar Huntly*, the first since 1928, was necessary to “correct the imbalance for the student of American literature”; its editor, David Stineback, was the first modern critic to appreciate fully the nuances of Brown’s seemingly ignoble portrayal of American Indians.³⁷ Donald Ringe has made two significant contributions to critical literature, first in his comprehensive *Charles Brockden Brown* (1964) and his insightful coverage of Brown in *American Gothic* (1982). Alan Axelrod’s *Charles Brockden Brown, An American Tale* (1983) contains the most thorough analysis of the major novels to date. Provocative analyses of Brown’s work can also be found in Norman Groab’s *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown* (1981), David Butler’s *Dissecting a Human Heart* (1978) and Arthur Kimball’s *Rational Fictions* (1968); reading the two latter works is far less difficult than locating copies of them. A number of critical articles, some of them of considerable insight and merit, have likewise appeared in recent years.

The success of *Wieland*, and in fact the power and mythological character so many authors and critics have associated with the work, depend to a great extent on Brown's clever use of three unusual Gothic devices. The villain Carwin's use of ventriloquism is not only clever and unique in Gothic fiction, but easily explained as a natural phenomenon, mastery over one's own voice. The incident of spontaneous combustion which kills the Elder Wieland seems the most incredible, but Brown cites a purportedly real occurrence, with similar details, to dispel conjectures that its cause may have been supernatural.³⁸ The murder of his family committed by an apparently rational man laboring under religious delusion was so central to the work that its authenticity had to be clearly established.

In an English Gothic novel published in 1796—Eliza Parsons' *The Mysterious Warning*—some of the mysterious voices heard by the characters have no "objective source in the real world," and were probably understood by readers to have been supernatural in origin.³⁹ Brown, by contrast, was at pains to authenticate the events in his novel. In a footnote in Chapter XX, Brown said that cases similar to Theodore Wieland's "mania mutabilis" are described in Erasmus Darwin's *Zoomania* (1796). According to Darwin, the disorder "arises from the pain of some imaginary or mistaken idea; which may be termed hallucinatio maniacalis" where "patients are liable to mistake . . . imaginations for realities."⁴⁰ Most Americans would not have been familiar with *Zoomania*, but, in 1819, E.T. Channing pointed out that Brown had used for *Wieland* "a recent event amongst ourselves . . . which is too shocking to receive any aid from exaggeration, or to lose any interest from its notoriety."⁴¹

The "recent event" mentioned by Channing took place seventeen years before the appearance of *Wieland*, but publication of the Yates murder story had occurred only two years previously. Brown might have assumed, possibly correctly, that the reading public in the East was already familiar with Ann Eliza Bleecker's sensational posthumous *Account*. While Brown did not know Mrs. Bleecker, he was undoubtedly well acquainted with her nephew, the wit and poet Anthony Bleecker, co-member of New York's Friendly Club, who would in turn have been familiar with his aunt's literary endeavors. Brown may have also been aware of Mrs. Bleecker's work through their common printer, T. & J. Swords, who had issued her *Posthumous Works* only three years before *Wieland* appeared.

In his prefatory "Advertisement" to *Wieland*, Brown noted that while "some readers may think the conduct of the younger Wieland impossible . . . if history furnishes one parallel fact, it is a sufficient

vindication of the Writer; but most readers will probably recollect an authentic case, remarkably similar to that of *Wieland*." The second convincing contemporary reference to the Yates story is found in the 1801 review of *Wieland* in *The American Review and Literary Journal*, where the anonymous reviewer states that the "principal incidents" in the novel "are founded on well-authenticated facts;" the footnote reads "See New-York Weekly Magazine, vol. ii, p: 20-28."⁴²

Critics and biographers have disagreed about the nature of Brown's connection with the *American Review and Literary Journal*, published in New York in 1800 and 1801. He was editor of a magazine which preceded it, namely the *Monthly Magazine and American Review*, published in 1799 and 1800, which not only printed a number of his reviews, but also his "Edgar Huntly: A Fragment," and an important critical piece, "The Difference Between History and Romance." He was likewise editor of the *Literary Magazine and American Register*, published in Philadelphia in eight volumes between 1803 and 1807, which contained many of his reviews and an assortment of articles on literary affairs.⁴³ That Brown had considerable involvement with the *American Review and Literary Journal* seems a logical assumption. The editor's "Preface" for the first volume echoes the theme of the need for a truly "American" culture so often expressed by Brown, and also defends the sometimes prejudicial comments which its reviewer(s) might make. These prejudices "are of a salutary kind, and favorable to the true interest . . . of mankind," and to "boast of an exemption" from such prejudices "would evince ignorance and presumption" on the part of the critic. The magazine's "Preface" is markedly defensive of the kind of often biased, but usually insightful criticism in which Brown would excel. Moreover, in July of 1802 Brown wrote to John B. Linn that "the Review is exceedingly behind hand, and my friends have imposed on me the task of reading and reviewing half a dozen books."⁴⁴

The review of *Wieland* in the *American Review and Literary Journal* of 1801, in which the Yates murder "Account" of 1796 is cited as a primary source, seems to have been penned by Brown himself. Its tone is highly defensive of the novel as a serious, moral literary form: "To wholly condemn this mode of writing, and to proscribe novels from the world, would evince more zeal than justice or good sense." The moral tale, the reviewer continues, can not only provide "relief from the tedious uniformity of common life," but "should always be favorable to the cause of virtue." The "Americanism" of *Wieland* is

likewise stressed. The author "is almost the first American who had adventured in this path of literature," presenting "the wonder-working powers of Gothic machinery" in an American setting, "more dignified and instructive than ruined castles, imaginary specters, and the monkish fiction" of European Gothic authors. The review then contains a four-page, detailed description of a documented incident of spontaneous combustion, in defense of the author's use of this seemingly unreal phenomenon in *Wieland*.

The parallels between the Yates murder *Account* and *Wieland* surfaced again in 1914 in an article, "Early American Realism," by Carl Van Doren in *Nation*. Van Doren quotes most of the Yates story, emphasizing the similarity of the "central plot" and "many details" in the novel and the narrative.⁴⁵ Van Doren's rediscovery is cited by Frederick Pattee in his introduction to the 1926 edition of *Wieland*, and in most succeeding works on Brown and his novels. In 1936, James Hendrickson, after reading Mrs. Bleecker's 1781 letters in her *Posthumous Works*, deduced that the "J— Y—" of the *Account* was indeed James Yates.⁴⁶ Thereafter, the Yates narrative is discussed in detail only in the provocative but often erroneous *The Sources and Influences of the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown* (1951) by Lulu Wiley, and finally in the best modern scholarly critical work, Alan Axelrod's *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale* (1983).

The parallels between the *Account* of the Yates murders, Brown's manuscript "Outline," and the conduct of Theodore Wieland are remarkable. In all three accounts, the men have a wife and four children. Charles, in the "Outline," "destroys some favourite inanimate object" as Yates had destroyed his sleigh and Bible, and Charles is warned by voices against "idolatry" just as one of the spirits bade Yates "destroy all" his "idols." Yates mangled his wife until he "could not distinguish one feature of her face," while Wieland mangled the corpse of his foster-daughter, Maria, so that "not a lineament remained." Both Yates and Wieland attempt to murder their respective sisters, and both completed successful escapes from prison. Both deliver passionate confessions and, without any overt expressions of guilt, claim that they acted at the command of their "Father." Yates, like Wieland, "received the admonitions . . . to pray and repent . . . with contempt . . . and ridicule," and Charles sees himself above "presumptuous man" who judges him a "criminal," and by doing so "usurp[s] the prerogative of thy creator!"

Brown, first in his sketchy but very revealing "Outline," and soon thereafter in his novel *Wieland*, drew not only many details, but one of his most important thematic issues, from Ann Eliza Bleecker's

Account of the James Yates family carnage.⁴⁷ Neither the Yates murder narrative nor *Wieland* is ostensibly concerned with American Indians; yet one somehow has the impression, after reading about the brutal “Yates-Wieland” murders and about Indians and Indian haters in *The History of Maria Kittle* and *Edgar Huntly*, that all four works are intertwined in a complex web of fact, folklore and fiction.⁴⁸ The striking characteristic of the murders committed by “Yates-Wieland” is their “savage” brutality, equal to that of the French Indians who attacked the homestead of Daniel Kittle in both fact and fiction. A 1798 reviewer of *Wieland* remarks that Theodore’s conduct makes him “worse than savage.”⁴⁹ Yates contemplated putting “all the dead in the house together, and after setting fire to it, . . . and say the Indians have done it.” Clara states that Theodore’s bloody deed “was worthy of savages trained to murder, and exulting in agonies,” and later addresses him as “thou whom fate has changed into paricide and savage!” Realizing she may also be his victim, Clara soliloquizes: “I live not in a community of savages; yet . . . I am in . . . danger of perishing . . . under the grasp of a brother.”

That “Yates-Wieland” is himself a “savage” is consistent with what Arthur Kimball calls the “ironic ambivalence” of the definition of “savage,” a human being in a state of “rudeness,” capable of either exemplary or fiendishly evil behavior.⁵⁰ Indians could be labeled either “noble” or “ignoble” savages, while the white inhabitant of the frontier might be either the upright frontiersman or the vile renegade. The irony is even greater, although merely by coincidence, when one notices the similar sounds of the name “tomahawk” and the place where all the butchery occurs, “Tomhanick,” a name whose Indian origin refers to “a place where suitable stones” for axes and tomahawks “were obtained.”⁵¹

Both Edwin Fussell and Alan Axelrod see the similarity between “Yates-Wieland” and the Indians in *The History of Maria Kittle*.⁵² The common denominator of this “savagism” seems to be the frontier where the action takes place, where, far removed from the moderating effects of civilization, the human species more easily returns to its “original barbarity.”⁵³ James Yates, of “one of the most respected families in this State,” possessing “natural gentleness . . . industry, sobriety, probity and kindness,” was “universally esteemed” until he completed his “cruel act.” Likewise intelligent and well-educated, Theodore Wieland succumbed to a belief in the supernatural, and then to savage barbarity, “usually reserved for the ignorant lower classes.”⁵⁴ From residing on the frontier, at a distance from any church, “Yates-Wieland” developed a fanatical, deadly kind of pri-

vate religion which permitted his transformation into a brutal savage, no different from the "ignoble savage" in an "atrocity-novel" of massacre, torture and captivity.⁵⁵

Brown's treatment of Indians in his other major novel, *Edgar Huntly*, (1799) merits some study of its relationship to *The History of Maria Kittle* and to the savagism of Wieland and Yates. Critics have, for the most part, misunderstood Brown's portrayal of Indians in this novel. Failing to realize that the Indians are not described by Brown himself, but rather by his guilt-ridden, irrational and semi-conscious narrator Huntly, critics have dismissed Brown's Indians as just more "cruel, crafty . . . ignoble savages."⁵⁶ Mabel Morris, writing in 1946, first remarked about the apparent contradiction between this image of the Indians and that presented by Brown in his non-fiction writings.⁵⁷ An 1804 review of Volney's *A View of the Soil and Climate of the United States of America* reveals an attitude toward the Indian more compatible with Brown's Quaker upbringing and liberal education. In negating Volney's view of Indians as universally barbarian, Brown remarks: "What a mistaken notion that cruelty prevails only among hunting tribes, and that posterity will cease to be governed by the same ferocious passions, or prompted to them by the same excesses."⁵⁸ Brown decries the use of the word "savage" to apply only to those of the Indian race, when his own fiction has shown how white men can excel at savagism.

Only Old Deb in *Edgar Huntly* is described as a "real Indian," and she does not fall neatly into the category of "noble" or "ignoble" savage. All the other Indians encountered by Huntly move about "in absolute dumbness that intensifies their terror. Brown's aboriginal shadows do not even speak. They merely threaten by their very presence, their 'gigantic forms,' 'huge limbs' and 'fantastic ornaments' representing visually the threat they embody."⁵⁹ They are, as Fiedler correctly points out, "projections of his [Huntly's] id;" as Huntly claimed, "I never looked upon or called up the image of a savage without shuddering." They are, in Kimball's terms, "foils for the savage potential of Brown's hero," whose frontier initiation through sleep-walking is marked with demonstrations of his "ruthless passions."⁶⁰ As Huntly himself explains,

I was not governed by the soul which usually regulates my conduct. I had imbibed, from the unparalleled events which had lately happened, a spirit vengeful, unrelenting, and ferocious.

Huntly typifies the white race in America, "savages . . . of fair face, who never shot arrows from a bow."⁶¹ Feeling remorse for having killed three Indians, Huntly was struck by how savage he had let himself become:

The destruction that I had witnessed was vast. Three beings, full of energy and heroism, endowed with minds strenuous and lofty, poured out their lives before me. I was the instrument of their destruction. This scene of carnage and blood was laid by me. To this havoc and horror I was led.

Modern critics have taken varied approaches to *Wieland*. The book has been analyzed in terms of its importance as a murder story, as a philosophical study, and, not surprisingly given the emphasis Brown places on the subconscious, as a psychological novel.⁶² "For psychological subtlety, for haunting horror, what is a crashing helmet or a dismembered ghost compared with Brown's *Wieland*?" asked Dorothy Scarborough as early as 1917.⁶³ In the last two decades, Freudian analysis not only of his novels, but of the mind of Brown himself, seems to have become the most popular approach. But to appreciate *Wieland's* place in early American fiction, our primary goal must be an examination of Brown's two basic themes, and why the author so stressed their importance.

Because he was introducing a new type of literature to the suspicious American reading public, Brown used his "Advertisement," occasional footnotes, and comments placed in contemporary journals to explain and even justify some of the bizarre behavior of his characters and to authenticate the apparently unbelievable events which take place in his fiction. He referred to himself as a "story-telling moralist," and to *Wieland* as a "moral tale." He begins the last paragraph of the book with the statement, "I leave you to moralize on this tale," after beginning it with the following poem:

From Virtue's blissful paths away The double-tongued are sure to stray;
Good is a forth-right journey still, And mazy paths but lead to ill.

The need to tell a "moral tale" can only be appreciated when we understand the common-sense realism and the vestiges of Puritanism common in 1798, both of which distrusted fiction as an evil distortion of reality. "Because a novel is only imagined reality, as opposed to the true actuality of God's creation," as Donald Ringe summed up contemporary thought, "the novelist is only a fallible human being, and his fictions must always be inferior to the reality he tries to imitate."⁶⁴

Brown was associated with five periodicals between 1798 and 1810, and the reviews and literary criticism he contributed to them constantly stress the novel's value as a serious literary form and the writer's obligation to produce a realistic, "moral tale." In the prospectus for "Skywalk" he claimed that the value of novels lay in their "moral tendency," and that while the popular Gothic tales imported

from England but “amuse the idle and thoughtless,” a well-wrought moral novel, containing “strains of lofty eloquence and the exhibition of powerful motives” may indeed “enchain the attention and ravish the souls of those who study and reflect.”⁶⁵ “The moral writer,” he commented in another piece, “ought to possess an ingenious candour and unaffected benignity. . . . The truths he incalculates should powerfully impress his mind, and a conviction of their importance, dictate his sentiments, . . . attended with an irresistible energy, which all the servile arts of falsehood can never possess.” He cites the “necessity to encourage moral writers of our own country, untinctured with foreign alloy,” and insists that their novels should “possess a congeniality of sentiment, which would insure them a favorable reception, and an adequate influence.”⁶⁶ In yet another article, he defends “romance” against those who have labeled it “a tissue of untruths” when compared to “history.” The historian, he contends, merely “enumerates the appearances which occur,” while the romancer “adorns these appearances with cause and effect, and traces resemblances between the past, distant, and future, with the present.” The “curiosity” of the reader “is not content with noting and recording the *actions* of men,” but “seeks to know [their] *motives*.”⁶⁷

Four articles which appeared in his *Literary Magazine and American Register* invariably echo similar themes. “Those who condemn novels,” he wrote, “are guilty of shameful absurdity and inconsistency” and are “profoundly ignorant of human nature; the brightest of whose properties is to be influenced more by example than by precept; and of human taste; the purest of whose gratifications is to view human characters and events, depicted by a vigorous and enlightened fancy. . . . Those who prate about the influence of novels to unfit us for solid and useful reading” are in error, for “a just and powerful picture of human life in which the connection between vice and misery, and between felicity and virtue is vividly portrayed, is the most solid and useful reading that a moral and social being can read.”⁶⁸ Brown claims that the “modern novel” if “well executed . . . perhaps even more perfectly than the ancient romance, certainly deserves a place among the works of genius.”⁶⁹ He notes that while “many persons are wholly adverse to novel reading,” because “the prevailing passion for novels” by youth may “greatly influence their morals through life,” that this “exclusion” extends to all novels is not “founded in reason.”⁷⁰

We have already seen how Brown documented and justified his use of ventriloquism, spontaneous combustion and insanity-inspired murders—literally by citing places where these amazing events are described in non-fiction. Brown’s challenge was to stress relevant

“moral” issues in his fiction, without limiting the scope of his work by being too simplistically didactic and sermonizing.

The clue to Brown’s “moral tale” is the novel’s subtitle, “The Transformation,” a word Brown uses three times in the work. All the major characters undergo transformations, even Henry Pleyel and the villainous Carwin. The transformation of Clara, who asks, “Was I not . . . transformed from rational and human into a creature of nameless and fearless attributes?” seems to attract much critical interest, probably because Clara is America’s first true fictional heroine. The transformation of the Elder Wieland, from an idealistic missionary to a religious recluse whose death is somehow related to his intense desire for direct communication with God, bears mention because after his bizarre death, this kind of religious mania seems to be “transformed” to his son, Theodore.

The resulting transformation of Theodore, from an “enlightened” man “into a homicidal maniac,” showing his savage potential, is indeed one of the novel’s most important themes.⁷¹ This is precisely why the Yates murder narrative is so vital, for it provided Brown with the character he needed for creating American fiction’s first classic tragic hero. Even the didactic moralist, Ann Eliza Bleecker, had a difficult time coming to a moral conclusion in the Yates story—whether the case of James Yates’s savagism was “insanity” or a “delusion of Satan” remained mere “conjecture,” leaving as the only moral of her story: “Lead us not into temptation!” The ambiguity revolving around the issue of placing blame on James Yates for his brutal acts and subjecting him to the required punishment, or looking at him instead as an object of great pity, finds its way into the moral ambiguities Brown treated in *Wieland*.

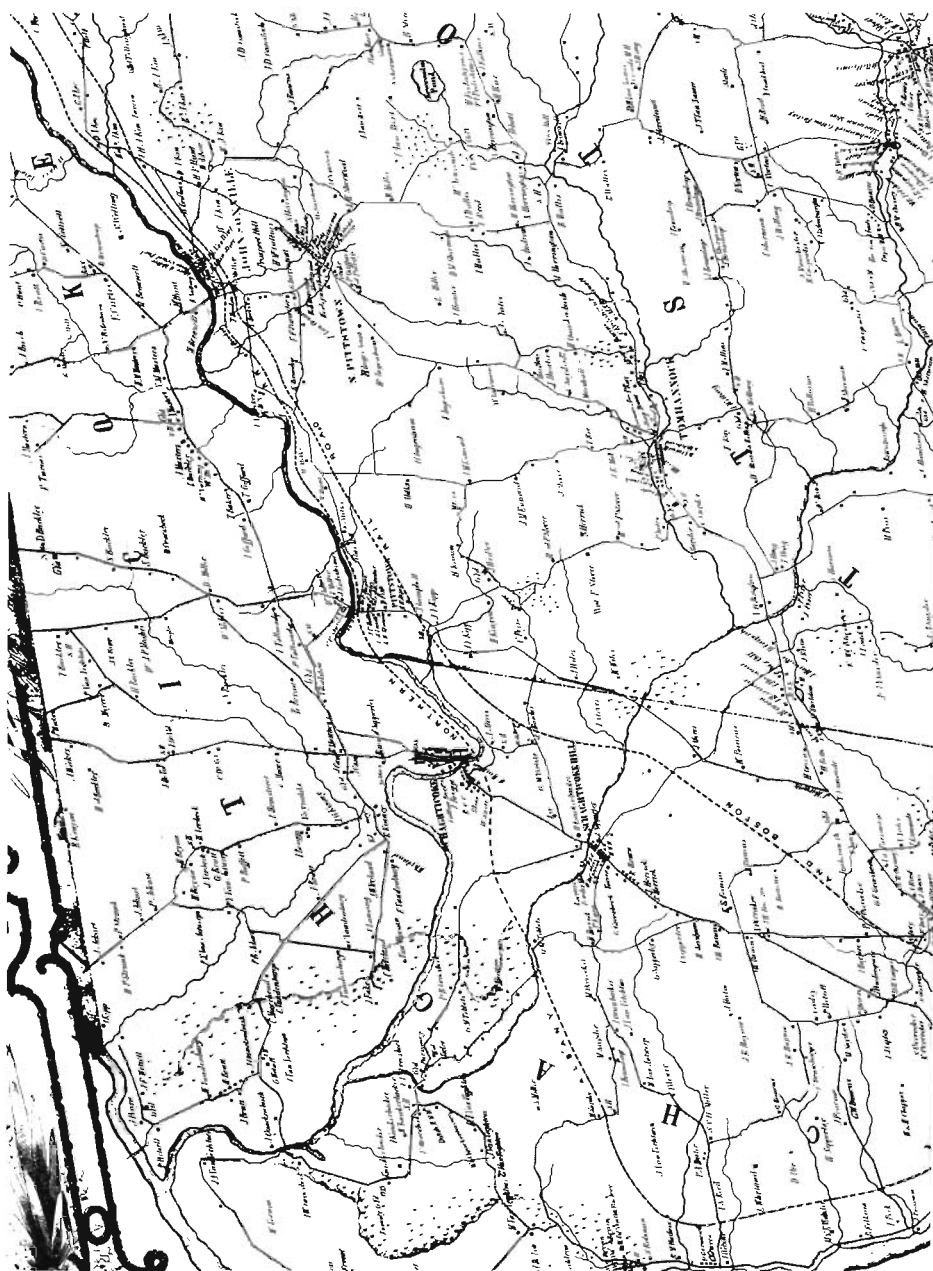
The “mazy paths” followed by Clara, Carwin, and the elder and younger Wielands “but lead to ill” as Brown’s little introductory poem suggests, but Pleyel’s straightforward rational course is equally disastrous. Theodore’s “mazy path” takes the same course as that of James Yates, for whom, ironically, too much religion leads him fatally “into temptation.” While Crèvecoeur suggested that life on the frontier, away from religious dogmas, lead to a healthy “religious indifference” among its inhabitants, Yates and Theodore Wieland demonstrated how this physical separation from normal religious life—Yates was both preacher and communicant, “as no church was near”—could be fatal. When the apparently supernatural voices tell the tragic hero to suppress his “natural feelings” and slay his own flesh and blood, he has no preacher other than himself to consult for spiritual guidance.

Alan Axelrod's discussion of Brown's hero as an "American Abraham" is worth mentioning here. Brown's obvious clue is the family surname, Wieland, and he has Clara acknowledge their "literal kinship" with the contemporary German author, Christoph Martin Wieland, whose literary efforts included *Der Geprüfte Abraham* (1754), an epic poem on the Abraham and Isaac story. The poem was translated into English, one edition being *The Trial of Abraham*, published in America in 1778. Abraham, like "Yates-Wieland," suppressed his "natural affection" in obedience to the supposed command of divine will, and was willing to commit murder as a consequence of this perverted "leap of faith."⁷² Yet, despite the important and overt parallels to the story of Abraham, the fictional Theodore Wieland is much more a tragic hero, close kin to the historical James Yates.

To a considerable degree, Clara and Theodore Wieland are led down "mazy paths" because of their inability to deal with the seemingly inexplicable phenomena they see occurring around them. The problem of perception, Ringe writes, "is of the utmost importance in *Wieland*, and the interest is sustained throughout," though "the sources of the delusion" are "as much internal as . . . externally induced."⁷³ In fact, Clara, Henry Pleyel, Theodore, and the Elder Wieland, as well as Edgar Huntly, are for various reasons often unable to perceive reality; each becomes, like the hero of the lost novel "Skywalk," "a man unknown to himself."⁷⁴ Brown understands that emotion and imagination can cause serious and complex problems, and that their solution is far from easy.

Some quality of the environment in which James Yates, Theodore Wieland (and his father) and Edgar Huntly live makes perception of reality unusually difficult. All live on the "frontier," that sort of Maginot Line where civilization and wilderness meet, and where their distinct values and priorities constantly come into conflict. Both James Yates and the father and son Wieland, isolated from the tempering effects of organized religion, developed deadly personal forms of religious zeal which remained unchecked until their fatal deeds were complete.

The second subtitle of *Wieland*, "An American Tale," echoes Brown's other important theme in the novel, a theme directly related to the "transformations" undergone by Theodore Wieland, his sister and their father. His use of American characters in a distinctly American setting gave Brown three advantages over most of his rivals: It silenced the critics who insisted that fiction was a "foreign" literary



mode; it provided subject matter to which American readers could more easily relate; and it allowed Brown to be original and imaginative as he called upon a host of fresh native materials.

For the “story telling moralist,” Brown wrote, “America is a new and untrodden field.”⁷⁵ While owing a debt to the European Gothic fiction from which his works are descended, Brown used every occasion to editorialize, claiming that his works were independent from their popular, but distrusted, European antecedents. In his preface to *Edgar Huntly*, Brown said: “That new springs of action and new motives to curiosity should operate,—that the field of investigation, opened to use by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe,—may be readily conceived. . . . Puerile superstitions and exploded manners, Gothic castles and chimeras” were the materials employed by “preceding authors” to achieve their ends. “The incidents of Indian hostility and the perils of the Western wilderness are far more suitable” for the American novel, he continues, “and for a native of America to overlook these would admit of no apology.”

Brown’s deep sense of “Americanism” is another constant theme in his literary contributions to magazines of his day. In his prospectus for “Skywalk,” Brown promises “a tale that may rival the performances of this kind which have lately been issued from the English press.” The American novelist “shall employ the European models, merely for the improvement of his taste, and adapt his fiction to all that is genuine and peculiar in the scene before him.”⁷⁶ “A Receipt for a Modern Romance,” which appeared soon thereafter, constitutes Brown’s most clever attack on the excesses of the European Gothic fiction:

Take an old castle; pull down a part of it, and allow grass to grow on the battlements, and provide the owls and bats with uninterrupted habitations among the ruins. Pour a sufficient quantity of heavy rain upon the hinges and bolts of the gates, so that when they are attempted to be opened, they may creak most fearfully. . . . Provide . . . most frightful stories of lights that appear in the . . . tower every night, and of music heard in the neighboring woods, and ghosts dressed in white who perambulate the place.⁷⁷

The “Receipt” is signed “Anti-Ghost,” and concludes with the following poem:

A novel now, says Will, is nothing more Than an old castle, and a creaking door:
A distant hovel, Clanking of chains, a gallery, a light,
Old armour, and a phantom all in white— And there’s a novel!

In “Some Reflections on the Moralists and Moral Writings,” Brown attacked the “falacious . . . hypothesis” that “moral subjects are

exhausted.”⁷⁸ In a later commentary Brown wonders why “the muse seems at present to slumber in a country eminently calculated to awaken her emotions.”⁷⁹ In one of his later critical articles, Brown censures history for dwelling on “the actions of heroes, kings and statesmen, a class of persons with which we are but little acquainted,” and those novels which, rather than dealing with “common things in an uncommon way,” were filled with “a certain proportion of murders, ghosts, clanking chains, dead bodies, skeletons, old castles and damp dungeons.”⁸⁰

Contemporary critics and biographers also emphasized Brown’s “Americanism.” The 1801 reviewer of *Wieland*, “observing the great avidity with which some popular British novels are read,” novels which “excite to the wonder-working powers of Gothic machinery,” praises Brown for being “the first American who has adventured in this path of literature.”⁸¹ Channing, in 1819, lauds Brown “for having the courage to lay the scenes of his stories at home,” even though it diminished his popularity, for “the commodious apartments of our unromantic dwellings . . . are unsuitable for the wonders and adventures which we have been accustomed to associate exclusively with mouldering castles and unfrequented regions of older countries.”⁸² Paulding, describing in 1820 the need he felt for a “National Literature,” and lamenting the “scarcity of a romantic fiction among our native writers,” praises Brown for creating “a class of fictions standing alone by themselves.”⁸³

Wieland appeared in 1798, “just at the time when a flood of Gothic novels imported from England was beginning to crest,” novels that a 1798 reviewer called the “imported *trash* of other countries.”⁸⁴ Brown certainly owed a debt to the British and German Gothic novelists, and his solitary new novel might have gone unnoticed, had it not stood out from the imports. What Brown achieved, according to Axelrod, was “precisely the balance—tension is a better word—between the Old World and the New,” the establishment of an “American identity” in a distinctly American environment.⁸⁵

The distinctly American environment where both *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly* are set is the frontier, that buffer zone where the forces of civilization and wilderness collide, and where the values of the Old World and the New came into conflict. Brown’s other major novel, *Arthur Merwyn* (1799), is unique in its Gothic depiction of the normally civilized city of Philadelphia, under the terror of the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, but this work is an exception to the chain of Gothic frontier novels which were spawned by the early efforts of Charles Brockden Brown. The frontier, where the inhabitants lived in constant fear of often imaginary attacks by Indians and wild ani-

mals, where the forces of nature were so often overwhelming, and where the terrors of solitude were so infrequently broken by social interaction, became synonymous with the "American Gothic." Even Crèvecoeur had described the frontier as a "hideous part" of the American landscape, and the pioneers who lived there as personifying a "kind of forlorn hope, preceding by ten or twelve years the respectable army of veterans which come after them."⁸⁶ The "National Literature" or "rational fictions" that Paulding called for was similarly associated with the frontier and its diverse inhabitants:

But if I mistake not, there is that in the peculiarities of their character; in the motives which produced the resolution to emigrate to the wilderness; in the courage and perseverance with which they consummated this gallant enterprise; and in the wild and terrible peculiarities of their intercourse, their adventures, and their contests with the savages, amply sufficient for all the purposes of those higher works of imagination.⁸⁷

Edwin Fussell noted that Brown "was the first American writer to suspect that the West [actually, the frontier] might [better] be defined as a condition of the soul than as a physiographical region."⁸⁸ "Wilderness," Alan Axelrod agreed, was not literally merely "the scenery of Pennsylvania back counties, but rather what this scenery meant to his imagination."⁸⁹ "Solitude and sleep," Edgar Huntly related, were "no more than the signals to summon up a tribe of ugly phantoms. Famine, and blindness, and death, and savage enemies, never fail to be conjured up by the silence and darkness of night."

The early settlers of Schaghticoke, both Indians and whites like the Kittles, were placed in great danger by the Colonial government of New York, being called on to man this strategic but isolated frontier outpost against the constant threat from French-Indian aggression. That hardship, terror and violence marked their lives was not surprising. Even when the Bleeckers lived there in the 1770s and 1780s, the common apprehensions about possible British, Loyalist and Indian raids heightened the tension of living between two worlds. These conditions wrought havoc with the delicate health of Ann Eliza Bleecker, the sensitive frontier authoress, and undoubtedly left her in a frame of mind where mystery, terror and brutality became the predominant themes in her letters, poetry and fiction. Clara's self-description in *Wieland* echoes Mrs. Bleecker's troubled emotional state:

My ideas are vivid, but my language is faint; now know I what it is to entertain incommunicable sentiments. . . . What but ambiguities,

abruptness, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters?

The Elder Wieland, with his private religious zeal, left the civilization of London behind to journey to the New World in a futile attempt to convert American Indians, but having failed, retreated into the solitude of his temple and finally succumbed. Theodore Wieland, like James Yates isolated from the social intercourse associated with religion in the civilized urban community, let religious fanaticism grow unchecked until it became fatal.

From its founding in 1676 until the close of the American Revolution, Schaghticoke was clearly a microcosm of the American frontier, an outpost of civilization at the edge of the wilderness where confrontation with savagism could not be avoided. That one of the nation's first novelists chose Schaghticoke for her home during the turbulent Revolutionary period, and that she had second-hand knowledge of one series of brutal murders, and first-hand knowledge of other bloody and tragic events, may have been coincidental, but it was portentous. It was equally fortunate that her yet unpublished pieces, a fascinating blend of fact and fiction, found their way into print during the 1790s, timely for America's first widely acclaimed novelist, Charles Brockden Brown. "The incidents of Indian hostility, the perils of the western wilderness," and "the latent springs and occasional perversions of the human mind," founded largely on stories of these Schaghticoke atrocities, gave Brown the kind of native materials needed for the first two major American novels.

Charles Brockden Brown's debt to Ann Eliza Bleecker, New York State's pioneer novelist, has been echoed often in the work of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Cooper, West, and Faulkner, and in the works of a host of other major and minor nineteenth and twentieth century American writers of fiction. If a community can indeed be granted literary landmark status, then Schaghticoke deserves to be named the birthplace of the American Gothic novel.□

Notes

¹ The colonial Tomhannick, no longer recognizable as a settlement, is not to be confused with the hamlet of "Tomhannock," located five miles to the east in the present Town of Pittstown.

² R. Beth Kloppott, "The History of the Town of Schaghticoke, New York, 1676-1855" (Ph.D. dissertation, SUNY, 1981), p. 41. This is by far the best history of early Schaghticoke.

³ Sumner E. Kittle, *The Ketel Family* (Washington, D.C.: 1946) pp. 20-28.

⁴ New York State Archives, Albany: Colonial Manuscripts, Vol. 56, pp. 131a, 131b,

139. The tragic events of that date, while sadly garbled by later historians, are carefully documented in New York's Colonial Manuscripts.

³ Colonial Manuscripts, Vol. 56, p. 131a.

⁶ Colonial Manuscripts, Vol. 56, p. 139.

⁷ Kittelle, *The Ketel Family*, p. 26.

⁸ Ann Eliza Bleeker, *Posthumous Works* (Hartford, 1793) pp. i-xviii. See also *Dictionary of American Biography* (1842-1929) Vol. 2, pp. 365-366.

⁹ Bleeker, *Posthumous Works*, p. 131.

¹⁰ Letter Oct. 4, 1779, in *Posthumous Works*, p. 131.

¹¹ Letter, August 9, 1781, in *Posthumous Works*, pp. 134-138. See also Hazel Matthews, *Frontier Spies* (Fort Myers, Florida, 1971) pp. 63-77.

¹² Bleeker, *Posthumous Works*, p. xiv. Her tombstone is now in the Albany Rural Cemetery, Menands, N.Y., where the Reformed Dutch Cemetery and other burial grounds located on State Street were removed in 1868.

¹³ Bleeker, *Posthumous Works*, p. vii.

¹⁴ Letter, October 16, 1779, in *Posthumous Works*, p. 144.

¹⁵ Although *The History of Maria Kittle* was not published until 1793, Mrs. Bleeker's letter proves that it was written as early as 1779. Lyle Wright assigns an earlier date to only one other work, Francis Hopkinson's *A Pretty Story* (1779), a 29-page prose allegory which can more accurately be labelled a political pamphlet, not a novel or even a short story. See Lyle Wright, *American Fiction, 1774-1851* (San Marino, California, 1969), p. 168, and George Hastings, *The Life and Times of Francis Hopkinson* (Chicago, 1926), pp. 193-199. The first novel written in America is now believed to have been *Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Library, 1975), written in 1770 by Philip Freneau and Hugh Henry Brackenridge.

¹⁶ *The History of Maria Kittle* was reprinted in Hartford in 1797 independently of the rest of her writings.

¹⁷ The erroneous date, taken from Mrs. Bleeker's *History*, was repeated as fact in N.B. Sylvester, *History of Rensselaer County, New York* (Philadelphia, 1880); Grace G. Niles, *The Hoosac Valley: Its Legends and History* (New York, 1912) and other local histories.

¹⁸ Roy H. Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization* (Baltimore, 1965) p. 198.

¹⁹ This stereotype, brought to the attention of the modern reader by Roy Pearce, is best delineated in Warren F. Broderick, "The Indian in the American Novel, 1779-1851" (unpublished masters thesis, Union College, 1974). William Willer, "Native Themes in American Fiction" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1944) lists and analyzes many of these elusive 19th-century short stories dealing with American Indians.

²⁰ See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, pp. 244-251; Broderick, "The Indian in the American Novel," pp. 74-77 and Hershel Parker, "The Metaphysics of Indian Hating," in Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man* (1857) (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1971), pp. 323-331.

²¹ Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, pp. 225-232.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 224; Broderick, "The Indian in the American Novel, 1779-1851," pp. 72-72, and Emerson Bennett, *The Renegade, A Historical Romance of Border Life* (Cincinnati: 1848).

²³ Bleeker, *Posthumous Works*, p. 151. See also Warren Broderick, "The Yates Murders," *The Pittstown Centinel*, Oct. 12, 1976, p. 20. The baptisms of three children of James & Elizabeth Yates appear in the records of the Gilead Lutheran Church of Brunswick, namely Isaac (1777), Joseph (1779) and Maria (1781). This Yates family

were of English descent and must not be confused with the prominent New York Dutch Yates family, which included the Schaghticoke family of Peter Yates (1727–1808), a colonel in the Albany County Militia. The sponsors at Maria's baptism were Henry and Maria Grawberger, Palatine settlers who also lived in the "Melrose" area. Henry and Maria Grawberger, along with Peter Yates, Eve Green, and Rachael Overocker, are buried in the Old Lutheran Cemetery, near Melrose, in the Town of Schaghticoke. Also buried here is George Wetzel, the "Mr. W-tz-l (a pious old Lutheran, who occasionally acted as preacher)" who attended upon the captured James Yates in Mrs. Bleecker's murder narrative.

²⁴ Bleecker, *Posthumous Works*, pp. 156-157. Land belonging to Samuel Jackson and Richard Yates was confiscated because of their Loyalist activities. See James Roberts, *New York in the Revolution* (Albany, 1904), Vol. 2, pp. 255, 258. Unfortunately, most of the records of the Commissioners of Forfeitures of the Western District, which contained detailed information on these confiscations, were burned in the 1911 State Capitol fire. Remaining fragments held by New York State Archives do not mention Yates or Jackson.

²⁵ Bleecker, *Posthumous Works*, p. xvi.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

²⁷ Alan Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown, An American Tale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983) p. 59. See also Harry Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown, American Gothic Novelist* (Gainesville, Florida, 1949); Kendal Tafi, *Minor Knickerbockers* (New York, 1947), p. 378; and Alan Ringe, *Charles Brockden Brown* (New Haven, 1966) p. 19.

²⁸ Rev. Meletiah Dwight, "Anthony Bleecker," *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, XXXIV (Oct. 1903), pp. 231-234.

²⁹ Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown*, pp. 48-57.

³⁰ Notebook No. 14, MS. 03398, Brown Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, reproduced and transcribed in Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* (Kent, Ohio, 1977) pp. 420-441.

³¹ *New York Spectator*, Sept. 15, 1798, et. seq.

³² [E.T. Channing], review of William Dunlap's *Life of Charles Brockden Brown* (1815), in *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal*, 1819. Vol 9. pp. 58-77.

³³ Richard H. Dana, "The Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," *United States Review and Literary Gazette*, August, 1827. p. 324.

³⁴ James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of The Americans . . .* (1828) (New York, 1963) Vol. 2, p. 111.

³⁵ *The Prose Works of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston, 1889) Vol. 3, p. 393.

³⁶ Dorothy Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (N.Y.: 1917) p. 39.

³⁷ Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (1799) (New Haven, 1973) pp. 7-25.

³⁸ See Frederick Pattee, "Introduction" to *Wieland* (New York, 1926) p. xxix and Alexander Cowie, "Historical Essay" in *Wieland* (Kent, Ohio, 1977), pp. 324-325 ff.

³⁹ Donald Ringe, *American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1982) pp. 37-38.

⁴⁰ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoomania: or the Laws of Organic Life* (London, 1796) Vol. 2, pp. 356-358.

⁴¹ Channing, *North American Review*, p. 69.

⁴² Anon., Review of *Wieland*, *The American Review and Literary Journal*, 1801, Vol. 1., p. 335.

⁴³ For a discussion of Brown's contributions to these literary periodicals, see Ernest Marchand, "The Literary Opinions of Charles Brockden Brown," *Studies in Philology*.

Vol. 31, 1934, pp. 541-566, and Sidney Krause, "A Census of the Works of Charles Brockden Brown," *The Serif*, Vol. 3, Dec. 1966, pp. 27-55.

⁴⁴ Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown*, pp. 188-189.

⁴⁵ Carl Van Doren, "Early American Realism," *The Nation*, Vol. 99, No. 2576 (1914), pp. 577-578.

⁴⁶ James Hendrickson, "A Note on *Wieland*," *American Literature*, Vol. 8 (1936), pp. 305-306.

⁴⁷ For the best analysis of this "Outline," see Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown*, pp. 55-61.

⁴⁸ Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown*, pp. 58-59. His reference to the "Yates-Wieland" character demonstrates the significance of the James Yates story.

⁴⁹ *New York Spectator*, Nov. 10, 1798.

⁵⁰ Arthur G. Kimball, "Savages and Savagism: Brockden Brown's Dramatic Irony," *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 6 (1967), pp. 214-225.

⁵¹ Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown*, p. 58 and Edwin Rutenber, "Indian Geographic Names," *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association*, 1906, p. 65.

⁵² Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (Princeton, 1965), p. 10.

⁵³ Charles Brockden Brown, "Thessalonica, A Roman Story," *Monthly Magazine and American Review*, 1799, Vol. 1., p. 103.

⁵⁴ Ringe, *American Gothic*, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Fussell, *Frontier*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown; Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham, N.C., 1952), p. 176. See also Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, p. 199.

⁵⁷ Mabel Morris, "Charles Brockden Brown and the American Indian," *American Literature*, Vol. 18 (1946), pp. 244-247.

⁵⁸ C. P. Volney, *A View of the Soil and Climate of the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1804), pp. 399, 402. For an accurate analysis of Brown's use of the American Indian in *Edgar Huntly*, Broderick, *The Indian in the American Novel*, pp. 86-91.

⁵⁹ Leslie Fiedler, *Love And Death In The American Novel* (New York, 1966), pp. 146-147.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148, and Kimball, "Savages and Savagism," p. 214.

⁶¹ *New Hampshire and Vermont Journal*, Feb. 21, 1797.

⁶² One of the best of these is James Russo, "The Chimeras of the Brain: Clara's Narrative in *Weiland*," in *Early American Literature*, Vol. 16 (1981), pp. 60-88. See also Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*.

⁶³ Scarborough, *The Supernatural*, p. 39.

⁶⁴ Ringe, *American Gothic*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ *Weekly Magazine*, March 17, 1798, p. 202.

⁶⁶ "Reflections on Moralists and Moral Writings," *Weekly Magazine*, March 30, 1799, pp. 355-356.

⁶⁷ "The Difference Between History and Romance," *Monthly Magazine*, April 1800, pp. 251-253.

⁶⁸ "A Student's Diary . . . Number V. Novel Reading," *Literary Magazine and American Register*, March 1804, pp. 403-405.

⁶⁹ "Novels," *Literary Magazine*, January 1805, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Review of "The Sorrows of Werter," in *Literary Magazine*, 1806, p. 451.

⁷¹ Larzer Ziff, "A Reading of *Wieland*," *Modern Language Association Publications*, Vol. 77, March 1962, p. 56.

⁷² Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown*, pp. 61 et seq.

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- ⁷³ Ringe, *American Gothic*, p. 48.
- ⁷⁴ *Weekly Magazine*, March 24, 1798, pp. 228-231.
- ⁷⁵ *Weekly Magazine*, March 17, 1798, p. 202.
- ⁷⁶ Advertisement for "Skywalk" in *Weekly Magazine*, March 17, 1798, p. 202.
- ⁷⁷ *Weekly Magazine*, June 30, 1798, p. 278.
- ⁷⁸ "Reflections on Moralists and Moral Writings." *Weekly Magazine*, March 30, 1799, pp. 355-356.
- ⁷⁹ "Notices of American Writers and Publications," *Literary Magazine and American Register*, Vol. 2, 1804, p. 345.
- ⁸⁰ "On the Cause of the Popularity of Novels." *Literary Magazine and American Register*, Vol. 7, June 1807, pp. 410-412.
- ⁸¹ Anon., "Review of *Wieland*," in *American Review*, p. 334.
- ⁸² Channing, *North American Review*, p. 64.
- ⁸³ James K. Paulding, "National Literature," *Salmagundi* Vol. 2, No. 13 (Aug. 19, 1820).
- ⁸⁴ *New York Spectator*, Nov. 10, 1798.
- ⁸⁵ Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown*, p. xix.
- ⁸⁶ Michel G. Jean de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) (New York, 1957), pp. 43, 48. See also Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970); Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World* (New York, 1968); Fussell, *Frontier*; and Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).
- ⁸⁷ Paulding, "National Literature," quoted in Taft, *Minor Knickerbockers*, p. 15.
- ⁸⁸ Fussell, *Frontier*, p. 9.
- ⁸⁹ Axelrod, *Charles Brockden Brown*, p. xix.