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The Predicaments of Radical Individualism and the Gothic Return of Paternal Legacy in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*

Sungho Lee
Chung-Ang University

[Abstract]

Scholars have read Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* in the context of early American republicanism, viewing the fall of the younger Wielands' enlightened utopia as a sobering reflection on the nascent republic, as the family tragedy sheds light on the flipside of the early American Enlightenment. The bankruptcy of the Wielands' enlightenment idealism, however, also reveals that they remain tragically bound to the gothic legacy of the first Protestant father.

Wieland dramatizes how Clara's enlightenment ends up being eclipsed by the return of the father's sins, as she unwittingly inherits his radical individualism. This paper examines how the frontier immigrant father's millennialistic fanaticism returns, leading Clara to gravitate toward an occult belief and a fatalist outlook. Indeed, Clara's attempts to counter the oppressive paternal curse with her faith in benevolent Providence flounder, emblematically demonstrating the inherent limitations of her radical individualism. Clara's descent is punctuated by her symbolic dread of her

brother Theodore, the heir to the persistent curse of their patriarchal heritage. At the same time, her fear is mediated by a mystical voice that Carwin fabricates to embody divine authority. Clara's near-blind obedience to what she imagines to be an occult agent is reminiscent of the elder Wieland's apocalyptic fervor. As Clara's moral fortitude succumbs to epistemological uncertainty and despair, the haunting shadows of her paternal lineage disrupt her rational inquiry and optimistic worldview, casting a pall over her struggle for enlightenment and self-realization.

Key Words: *Wieland*, Radical Enlightenment, The Father's Sins, Benevolent Providence, Fanaticism

I. Introduction

Critics have approached Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland: or Transformation: An American Tale*,¹⁾ a seminal work in American gothic fiction, through the historical prism of the American Revolution. This reading tends to see the degeneration of the young Wielands' enlightened American pastoral as providing a chastening lesson for the nascent republic—the family tragedy serving as an allegory of the precarious state America found itself in after achieving independence free from British rule. As Charles Bradshaw puts it, “Brown portrays the Wieland family as a microcosm of the nation at large,” given that “early American novel readers, authors, and publishers all assumed that the domestic and the public spheres were continuous” (362). As one of the eighteenth-century gothic novels, a genre commonly seen as addressing “the return of the Enlightenment's repressed,” *Wieland* provides “substantial material for exposing the dark side of the Enlightenment's most enduring product: the new

American nation” (Waterman 175-76). Critic Peter Kafer also notes that the feeling of national panic sensed in *Wieland* stems from the revolutionary terror Brown personally witnessed as a child on September 5, 1777, a date when his father and seventeen Quakers were branded as state enemies and forced into exile due to their belief in pacifism (35). If Brown’s artistic intention was to “make the picture of a single family a model from which to sketch the condition of a nation,” his radical enlightenment thesis sharply brings to focus contemporary Americans’ anxieties over the terrifying limitations of republican ideals, their dark parallel found in the Reign of Terror that swept through the French Revolution (28). *Wieland* thus reveals a profound sense of unease in the era, a fear of “the breakdown of republican reason, ambushed by a self hidden from conscious knowledge” (Judson 22).

As a political fable, *Wieland*, in particular, reveals the dark undercurrents of the new Republic—its troubled relations with its own lack of authority and establishments. According to Jane Tompkins, “the novel’s plot offers a direct refutation of the Republican faith in men’s capacity to govern themselves without the supports and constraints of an established order” (49). While the young *Wieland* siblings “abandon themselves to a naive trust in the power of reason over tradition,” such a trust is fraught with “the menace of the self accountable to no authority but its own inner light” (Bradshaw 364; Judson 24). Nigel Leask furthers this line of thought, construing the fiction’s gothic villain Francis Carwin’s beguiling ventriloquism as “a metaphor for the disembodied and manipulative voice of the new print-born energy of public opinion” (365). At the heart of *Wieland*, therefore, lies a central question of whether freedom, once unshackled, can be properly put in control by human reason, or whether it instead transforms into a shadow of reason itself, embodying the very fears and uncertainties of a nation struggling to define its identity.

One important way to understand the collapse of the Wielands' enlightenment idealism, I contend, is through raising questions about why the family remains tragically unable to break free from the paternal curse. Their distinctively American utopianism claims a radical departure from old values, including the historical bequest of the first Protestant settlers, as Clara Wieland's trust in the power of words and her embrace of benevolent providentialism symbolize a new form of enlightened modernity. In her quest to overcome religious fatalism and epistemological uncertainty, she and her Mettingen circle become "a microcosm of the bourgeois American society that by 1798 stood in defiant opposition to the Puritan past" (Gilmore 110). Although apparently opposed to each other, however, the late eighteenth-century American Enlightenment and seventeenth-century American Protestantism have a deeper parallelism, both marked by a troubling disciplinary void. Susan Manning, therefore, argues that the ghostly past in *Wieland* suggests the persistence of authoritarian and mystical institutions from the past in the enlightenment present, which, though "committed to the harmonizing principles of progress and virtue," has inherited the structures of the past as "disowned parts of the self—mad, irrational, sinful, sexual" (49). Accordingly, what *Wieland* dramatizes is how Clara's reformative efforts end up overshadowed by the return of the father's sins, as she unwittingly inherits his antinomian solipsism. Hence, Brown's portrayal of the second Wielands' downfall extends "the critique of Calvinist theology," through what Tompkins describes as "a broader attack on the naively optimistic views of human nature which would do away with the external controls" (57).

This paper examines *Wieland* in light of existing criticism that situates the work within America's early Republicanism. Yet, this analysis is anchored in a broader framework that interweaves the historical milieu with the conventions of Gothic fiction. By investigating the protagonist Clara's enlightened endeavors to break free

from the family curse and highlighting how her radical enlightenment intrinsically mirrors her father's egocentric Protestant devotion, the article shows how the heroine's enlightenment is gothicized in the face of the enduring patrilineal curse. Indeed, the frontier immigrant father's repressive heritage returns to shape Clara's life, becoming internalized in Clara as an occult belief and a fatalist outlook. Clara's struggle to combat the shadow of the oppressive Calvinist past with her reason and words flounders, emblematically demonstrating the inherent vulnerabilities and contradictions within the burgeoning ideals of her enlightenment. The recurring theme of Clara's fainting underscores the fragile nature of her reason and belief, as her desperate journey for moral clarity and radical autonomy is marred by her deep-seated fear of her own family's dark legacy. This descent into fatalism is thus punctuated by her symbolic fear of her brother Theodore Wieland, the heir to the lingering curse of patriarchal heritage. At the same time, Clara's fear of the male successor becomes mediated by a mystical voice mimicked by Carwin to embody divine authority. Clara's near-blind obedience to what she imagines to be an occult agent is reminiscent of the elder Wieland's apocalyptic fear and fanatical belief. Hence, Clara's paranormalism is matched by Theodore's fanatic submission to a fantasized divine voice—one that commands him to murder his family and propels the narrative towards a horrifying tragedy—as a twisted interplay of mysterious voices Carwin crafts drives Clara towards a grim resignation and deep pessimism about the future. Despite Clara's initial belief in benevolent Providence, indeed, she eventually becomes consumed by the fatalist outlook driven by the authoritarian voices Carwin invents, and thus her emotional and existential turmoil stands as a poignant testament to the inherent dangers and intricate moral dilemmas of self-reliance. As Clara's moral courage succumbs to epistemological uncertainty and despair, the haunting spectre of her male lineage disrupts her rational inquiry and

optimistic worldview, casting a pall over her struggle for enlightenment and self-realization.

II. God's Voice and the Voices of Man

Wieland begins by showing how the family curse was initiated by the patriarch, the elder Wieland, whose solipsistic Protestant fanaticism—a bleak blend of self-absorbed and stringent religious devotion—culminated in his enigmatic demise within the very summer house he constructed as a sanctuary of worship near the Schuylkill River. His mystical faith and strange death launched the primal theme of gothic fiction, first introduced by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, a narrative in which readers are led through the supernatural manifestation of Walpole's warning that "the sins of the fathers are visited on their children" (7). Indeed, *Wieland* gives an American expression to this gothic motif with elder Wieland's fervent Protestant zealotry and uncanny self-destruction. The elder Wieland, the family's first American settler from Europe committed to his crusading zeal, took it to be his Protestant mission to proselytize the Amerindians. But when his Evangelical task met with failure, this new world pilgrim channeled his otherworldly idealism and sense of the divine election to private worship in his summer house, becoming "a fanatic and dreamer," whose isolated, anti-communal religiosity showed a unique sense of calling (12). Consequently, the senior Wieland, with his "gloomy and morose" gothic inclinations, showcased a dangerous religious individualism in the new world, a radical belief that projected a divinely ordained spiritual quest and an apocalyptic future (7). His self-sufficient belief system, which rested wholly on personal Bible-reading and unmediated communion, epitomized "a world of the inflated self," as he became an

emblem of a lone quester, a prototype of male egotism in the early American landscape (Warren 17). After he encountered the Calvinist God's voice that chastises him for failing to fulfill a divine commandment, he becomes consumed with the dread of a divine retribution, as his mind grew fraught with fear and anticipation, leading him down a path of pathological obsession. Ultimately, he dies a mysterious death in the private church, shrouded in mystery and attributed to the bizarre phenomenon of "spontaneous combustion" (18).

The elder Wieland's single-minded, paranoiac obsession with the voice of divine warning and millenarian doom continues to haunt his descendants as a paternal curse, as his male successor Theodore, a "victim of a God of his own devising," inherits the father's religious mania, a dark obsession that incites him to murder his wife and children in a self-deluded frenzy—a tragic familicide around which the main plot of the narrative revolves (Tompkins 57). Traumatized by such inherited male madness, the story's narrator Clara Wieland also ascribes the family tragedy to "the force of early impressions" she came to have about her father's death (6). These impressions, made on her when she was just "a child of six years of age," remain indelible marks that she fears "can never be effaced," overriding the second generation's endeavors to exorcise their influences through enlightened pursuits (18). Accordingly, Clara holds a profound ambivalence towards this paternal legacy, torn between attraction and detachment. While "anxious to explain" her father's death and its "resemblance to recent events," Clara unveils a mindset teetering precariously between superstition and science (18). She ponders the medical causes, such as "the irregular expansion" of bodily fluid induced by fatigue or obsessive thinking, but she also discerns in the death the stern judgment of "the Divine Ruler," whose "vindictive and invisible hand" metes out punishment to her father for his disobedience (18). This ambiguity shapes Clara's stance towards the patriarchal inheritance, which she views both as an

object of fear and as an authority to depend on, as her character becomes “split into separate parts” that enter into “implacable contention”— a duality reflecting her rationalist commitment to “the powers of the intellect and evidence of the senses,” and her irrational beliefs in divine revelation (129; Scheiber 173).

Despite the lingering power of the cursed legacy embedded in the familial Protestant solipsism, Clara, along with Wieland and his closest friend Henry Pleyel, endeavors to dispel the Messianic zealotry of the father. They transform the summer house from “its ancient use” into a center for cultivating Enlightenment thought, where they immerse themselves in the study and practice of neoclassical rhetoric, accompanied by lively social discourse (22). Within the walls of this summer abode, thus, echoes of classical poetry and drama resound, produced in imitation of great orators of the past, such as Cicero. In this manner, this place evolves into a hub of intellectual exchange, attracting vibrant conversations filled with wisdom and joy: “we sung, and talked, and read, and occasionally banqueted. Every joyous and tender scene most dear to my memory, is connected with this edifice” (22). It’s a crucible that nurtures their friendship and empathy, enabling them to use persuasive eloquence capable of forging social unity and mutual understanding.

The public sociality Clara’s circle aspires to achieve with rhetorical cultivation, indeed, allegorically shows how, in late eighteenth-century America, a voice as a conduit to human sentiments becomes as an organizing metaphor for republican representation that is understood to be integral to the formation of American political subjectivity (Looby 158-74). The Mettingen circle’s enlightenment foregrounds man’s voice as foundational to moral agency and public rationality, as critic Barbara Judson observes: “in the late eighteenth century, [voice] became a potent symbol of the new republican order based on the citizen’s right to participate. Civic reason, the voice of the people, was enshrined by the American Revolution and helped inspire the French

Revolution" (23). Clara, in particular, works toward acquiring the voices of people from these educational gatherings, learning the importance of uninhibited self-expression and open communication in order to break away from solipsistic self-absorption that characterizes the patrilineal curse. In place of a blind, and often egoistical, submission to God's voice as a mystical revelation, the enlightened sociality Clara strives to achieve turns to speech act as public reason that could drive out the apocalyptic guilt complex, as she strives to attain a rational voice that is believed to embody God's ways.

From this edifying engagement, Clara emerges as an enlightened heroine, whose uphill ascent from her family's tragic history is carried out by her firm belief in divine benevolence, which could counter the menaces posed by the punitive, vindictive God worshiped by *Wieland* and his father. In other words, Clara turns to enlightened providentialism for an optimistic departure from the male Calvinist tradition by holding steadfastly to the belief that God's will, though mysterious and unknown, is benevolent and merciful. Accordingly, her sanguine faith serves as a beacon that illuminates a path from the dark corridors of supernatural dread to an optimistic embrace of benevolent grace, enabling her to apply "the Enlightenment epistemology" in proving "the power of human reason and the principles of divine benevolence" (Elliott 229). In the idyllic times prior to the family tragedy, for instance, her faith shines brightest through her abiding belief in God's bliss, which appears to be imparted through "the grandeur of external nature" (21). Even when challenged by the macabre mystery of Carwin's ventriloquism, one that disorients Pleyel with the news of the supposed death of his fiancée living in Europe, in fact, Clara's faith remains unshaken, heroically construing it as the work of a benign supernatural force: "Hitherto nothing had occurred to persuade me that this airy minister was busy to be evil rather than to good purposes. On the contrary, the idea

of superior virtue had always been associated in my mind with that of superior power” (42-43). This conviction later prompts her to look upon “the mysterious interposition” as “my angel,” reinforcing her faith in human “reasoning” and “action,” all guided by the hand of divine justice (135, 130).

III. Carwin’s Voice and the Fall of Clara’s Enlightenment

If Clara’s optimistic providentialism and verbal enlightenment represent “early national commitments to sincerity as a unity of meaning, and reason as the bulwark against enthusiasm,” then Carwin, whom Clara perceives to be “the enemy whose machinations had destroyed us,” embodies “the forces of misperception and subterfuge” (Emerson 135; 174). Carwin, “the quintessential child of revolution,” is a “double-tongued deceiver” who poses menaces through beguiling rhetoric—a demagogue figure who embodies an excess of imagination and morbid individualism (Tomkins 52; 223). As Christopher Looby argues, in late eighteenth-century America, a voice as a conduit to human sentiments, understood to be integral to the formation of American political subjectivity, serves as an organizing metaphor for republican representation (158-74). Carwin’s verbal tricks, therefore, emblemize the flipside of public rationality for the nascent nation, as his invented voices virtually ventriloquize those of “zealots, martyrs, and madmen,” who would transmogrify “the concept of voice, so recently emblematic of rational autonomy” into “a provocative figure of unreason” (Judson 23).

If we read Brown’s story as “a terrifying post-French Revolutionary account of the fallibility of the human mind and, by extension, of democracy itself,” Carwin’s

bilouism, then, seems to “call into question all possible faith in the republican formula *vox pouli, vox Dei*” (Fliegelman 236, 239). Carwin smoothly insinuates himself into the younger generation of the Wieland family, and his subsequent transformation into “an inestimable addition to [the Wielands’] society”—into “a kind of inmate of the house”—signals a stealthy infiltration into the American pastoral of the Wieland estate by an outsider (70). With his cunning ventriloquism, this outsider-alien looms threateningly over the Wieland family—and by extension, over the fledgling republic—while stealthily undermining Clara’s faith in the power of words and emblematically evoking wider American fears surrounding the radical Enlightenment. His linguistic deceptions illustrate how revolutionary republicanism’s turn to rhetoric as a singular source of authority could spawn moral and epistemological chaos. In a fragile national context where the allure of liberty teeters on the brink of devolving into licentious disorder and dizzying uncertainty, Carwin stands as an emblem of the tensions and anxieties defining this transformative period in American history, highlighting the fraught interplay between revolutionary liberalism and the sheer chaos it could provoke.

Representing the dark side of radical enlightenment, Carwin’s abuse of vocal trickery uncovers the inherent limitations within the enlightenment of the Wielands’ circle. The novel could be read as a narrative about “a family destroyed from within,” considering that the narrative “does not unilaterally assign guilt to Carwin as the alien intruder,” but regards with suspicion “the interior of the home itself” (Shirley 57, 52). Although Carwin’s mischievous ventriloquism sets off a chain of events that result in the Wielands’ tragedy, he is better described as “the catalyst who usefully explodes the Wielands’ placid façade,” as the seeds of the downfall should essentially be located in the moral limitations of the Wieland family, which end up perpetuating the patrilineal legacy (Galluzzo 256).

Driven by his “passion for mystery, and a species of imposture,” and confessing that his “only crime” has been to have “scrutinized everything, and pried everywhere,” Carwin, indeed, applies his verbal talent merely to test the enlightened virtues of Clara (184). Fueled by his inquisitiveness about those he perceives as models of moral rectitude, he voyeuristically infiltrates their lives, exploiting their weaknesses through the intimate knowledge gained from such intrusions. Hence, Carwin takes it upon himself to ascertain whether Clara’s courageous and benevolent nature is genuine enough. His morbid curiosity about Clara is first ignited when Judith, his secret lover and Clara’s maiden, reports that her mistress’s spiritual “fearlessness” and “courage” are “little less than divine,” enabling her to stay “tranquil and secure” even in the face of “apparitions and goblins,” which she regards with contempt (185). Indeed, Clara holds an adamant belief that “freedom of [her] mind . . . would defy the assaults of blandishments or magic,” equipped with a determination to combat “the trade of lying” and “the office of betrayer,” even as doing so involves grave dangers which “when measured by a woman’s fears, expand into gigantic dimensions” (129, 131, 134). This induces Carwin to hide in Clara’s closet to ventriloquize two men plotting her death: “Murderers lurked in my closet. They were planning the means of my destruction. One resolved to shoot, and the other menaced suffocation. Their means being chosen, they would forthwith break the door” (54). Contrary to Carwin’s expectation, however, Clara’s reaction is one of panic and eventual collapse, revealing the vulnerability of her moral fortitude. Clara escapes the house in sheer fear, headed to her brother’s door, and, succumbing to her profound anxiety, “sunk down in a fit” (54).

Indeed, Clara’s fainting starkly discloses the fragility of her enlightenment. Despite her confidence in her rhetorical prowess, her characteristic inaction in the face of deeply appalling moral dilemmas is underscored by her swooning at Carwin’s

mimicry of the murder intrigues. Undoubtedly, Clara's fainting episode carries more than just a physical collapse; it symbolically enacts her yielding to an ominous prospect, illustrating how Clara could momentarily lose her treasured ability to perceive the world rationally, to act on her own initiative, and to govern herself amid adverse circumstances. While Clara's faint can be seen as psychosomatic symptoms of her capitulation to the mystified authority of voice, Carwin's anti-enlightenment function, consequently, inheres in the very manner in which he wily disinters the vulnerabilities of the Mettingen enlightenment.

IV. Carwin's Ventriloquism and the Return of the Gothic Occultism

As Carwin's ventriloquism begins to embody a mystic authority, Clara gradually reverts to the paternal tradition. Consequently, she becomes unable to maintain the unstable balance between her competing tendencies, which results in the resurgence of her irrational beliefs traceable to her father's legacy. In the first instance of the mysterious voices, *Wieland* is under the impression that he hears his wife Catherine outside, warning him of some danger. Yet, upon arriving home, he is surprised to find her inside, having never stirred outside. In response to this voice, a verbal fabrication by Carwin, Clara, along with Theodore, attributes it to paranormal agents. Notably, she remains impervious to a rational explanation given by Carwin that it was merely a product of human contrivance, one that was created by "the power of mimicry" (69). Though acknowledging that Carwin's explanation "would commend itself as most plausible to the most sagacious minds," Clara remains stubborn in her belief that it was "real," regarding it, like her brother *Wieland*, as a "celestial

interference” (79, 69-70). This blind adherence to irrational beliefs reflects a dogged persistence of mysticism within the Wieland family, from Wieland’s fanaticism to Clara’s deference to an authority embodied by mysterious voices. Clara’s frequent leanings towards paranormalism, indeed, serve as a somber reminder of how deeply the paternal past has ingrained itself in her psyche.

Clara’s optimistic providentialism, a belief in a well-intentioned divine plan, initially led her to perceive the mysterious voice as a munificent force, an “interposition which had hitherto defended me” (129). However, this optimistic faith starts to waver, as she builds ambiguities surrounding Carwin’s voice, particularly after she “perceive[s] a shadowy resemblance between it and [her] father’s death” (32). As Clara’s uncertainty about the creator of the voices, Carwin, grows, she begins to feel ambivalent toward the supernatural agent she once believed to be beneficent. While “wholly uncertain, whether [Carwin] were an object to be dreaded or adored, and whether his power had been exerted to evil or to good,” Clara is simultaneously disoriented by the question of whether the “minister of heaven” is intent on “benign or malignant purposes” (65, 166). The voices themselves, such as one that incites Theodore’s murders, seem to be “evil spirits” enlisted by Carwin, but others including one that warns Clara away from the bloody scene where her sister-in-law was murdered appear “to counteract Carwin’s designs” and thus prove themselves as compassionate forces protecting her (165-66). Accordingly, Clara develops ambivalence toward Carwin, confounded by Carwin’s “inscrutableness of his character, and the uncertainty whether his fellowship tended to good or to evil,” as Carwin’s dual role in her perception straddles two imaginary forces, her guardian angel and satanic deluder (70). Hence, Clara’s optimistic providentialism gradually succumbs to the insidious influences of her dark foreboding.

Importantly, Clara’s conflicted assessment of Carwin and his voices turns out to

be a product of projecting her ambivalence toward Wieland, an heir to her fatherly legacy, onto an alien suspect. As Clara finds herself increasingly tormented by the familial curse, her premonition crystallizes symbolically in her terror of her brother Theodore, whom she now perceives as both a potential seducer and a harbinger of destruction. Fittingly enough, Clara develops a growing uncertainty about Wieland, questioning uncannily whether his actions are a snare or goodwill, whether they suggest an impending doom or divine providence, or ultimately whether he is a preserver or destroyer. In the summer house, Clara dreams a prophetic dream in which her brother beckons her to a bottomless pit, revealing her deep-seated, unspoken fear of him. Notably, Clara's repressed terror resurfaces in the very summer house where the siblings once engaged in neoclassical learnings—a haunting sign that her father's curse comes alive in the very site of the younger generation's enlightenment. In the dream, she was walking to her brother's home, when Wieland, standing at a distance, calls her forward with haste. At the moment when "one step more would have plunged [her] into this abyss," a mysterious voice suddenly warns her of the pit she was about to plunge into: "a voice of eagerness and terror" declaring, "Hold! hold!" (58). When Clara awakes, the voice introduces itself as "[a] friend; one come, not to injure, but to save you," urging her to shun the location and keep the warning a secret: "Avoid this spot. The snares of death encompass it. . . . Mark me further; profit by this warning, but divulge it not. If a syllable of what has passed escape you, your doom is sealed. Remember your father, and be faithful" (58).

Although Carwin concocts the voice to deter Clara from the place of his secret assignation with Judith, his mysterious warning simulates the divine voice of prophetic proscription, evocative of an Apocalyptic ban that claimed her father's life. Resonating with her unconscious phobia about the elder Wieland's dark heritage, this

warning prompts Clara to reflect on her own innermost anxieties—the once-beloved figure of her sibling morphing into a symbol of the inescapable curse that looms over her existence. While Clara’s dream gives voice to her fear of the paternal curse and its inheritance by her brother, Carwin’s purposefully misrepresented authority of voice uncannily conjures up the secret voice of the Calvinist God both the elder and young Wieland blindly obey, unearthing a mystic voice that exists only inside radically individualistic devotees. Virtually serving as a double of the Wieland male obsessions, Carwin’s mystic voice and its feigned divinity allow Clara’s subconscious fear of the patrilineal curse to return as the unspeakable. This spiraling anxiety ushers Clara into a reactionary return to traditional authority. As her love for her brother is now clouded by deep-seated anxiety, the gothic return to the enigmatic vocal authority traps her in a relentless cycle of terror.

V. Radical Individualism and Paternal Legacy

The unmasked horror that has been struck into the heart of Clara by the apparent return of the mystic voice illustrates, above all, the predicaments of her radical enlightenment. At the center of Clara’s enlightenment is, indeed, the question of whether she could “speak with the authority of God” in the face of an “authority misrepresented and authority imagined,” but Carwin’s tricks resuscitate Clara’s subconscious fear, revealing how her public rationality and verbal reasoning can be easily taken over by the very flipside of her enlightened selfhood (Fliegelman 239). As such a transformation implies her ultimate capitulation to the paternal curse, Clara’s floundering enlightenment individualism, in fact, mirrors the antinomian flaws intrinsic to her father’s worship. The senior Wieland’s initiation into his egocentric

Calvinism began after he “chanced to light upon a book written by one of the teachers of the Albigenses, or French Protestants,” which provided expositions on “the doctrine of the sect of Camissards,” the dissenting Huguenots whose worldview, characterized by a Manichean struggle between God and Satan, often emphasized apocalyptic visions (7). Driven by this newfound passion, Wieland’s beliefs evolved rapidly, as he immersed himself in the Bible on his own, relying solely on the book as an infallible guide, from which he directed his idiosyncratic understanding of religious truth.

His constructions of the [Bible] were hasty, and formed on a narrow scale. Every thing was viewed in a disconnected position. One action and one precept were not employed to illustrate and restrict the meaning of another. Hence arose a thousand scruples to which he had hitherto been a stranger. He was alternately agitated by fear and by ecstasy. He imagined himself beset by the snares of a spiritual foe, and that his security lay in ceaseless watchfulness and prayer. . . . He laboured to keep alive a sentiment of fear, and a belief of the awe-creating presence of the Deity. Ideas foreign to this were sedulously excluded. To suffer their intrusion was a crime against the Divine Majesty inexpiable but by days and weeks of the keenest agonies. (8)

The rushed, haphazard approach and the millennialistic vision the elder Wieland adopted led to a turbulent spiritual life. By interpreting the sacred text in isolation, bereft of the wider context and guidance that a community or traditional wisdom might have offered, he set himself adrift on uncertainty and guilt. Furthermore, his mind became a battleground, tormented by constant “scruples” over the possibility of moral failure and a profound “fear” of a retributive Protestant God, caught in a relentless tug-of-war between “agony” and “ecstasy,” as he contemplated the Final Judgment. As a result, his self-imposed sense of guilt and existential anxiety became

the bitter fruits of his religious individualism.

The perils inherent in the father's unbridled individualism spill over into Clara's enlightenment education, coloring her entire worldview. In the prefatory note, the retrospective narrator Clara underscores that the purpose of publishing her family tragedy is purely didactic—to enlighten the world as to “the duty of avoiding deceit,” and to warn it of the “immeasurable evils” that lie in wait for those with “an erroneous or imperfect discipline” (5). This cautionary moral serves as a clear indication that Clara and Wieland's moral development suffers from a lack of systematic guidance provided by tradition and established institutions. This conspicuous absence of principled religious education within the siblings' upbringing leaves them vulnerable and bereft of a steady moral compass.

Our education had been modelled by no religious standard. We were left to the guidance of our own understanding, and the casual impressions which society might make upon us. . . . It must not be supposed that we were without religion, but with us it was the product of lively feelings, excited by reflection on our own happiness, and by the grandeur of external nature. We sought not a basis for our faith, in the weighing of proofs, and the dissection of creeds. Our devotion was a mixed and casual sentiment, seldom verbally expressed, or solicitously sought, or carefully retained. In the midst of present enjoyment, no thought was bestowed on the future. As a consolation in calamity religion is dear. But calamity was yet at a distance, and its only tendency was to heighten enjoyments which needed not this addition to satisfy every craving. (20-21)

The siblings' spiritual beliefs are not founded on established doctrines but are rather shaped by “casual impressions” and individual reasoning, according to which, secular joy and pleasure, especially those inspired by glamour of nature, are foundational to the formation of faith (20). Due to this enlightenment approach to spirituality, the

Wielands overlook the concerns of the afterlife or moral dilemmas that riddle real-world ethics. Their moral outlook, therefore, manifests itself as a kind of vague optimism, one that renders them ill-equipped for future crises, raising questions about its depth and resilience, particularly in the face of the unforeseen challenges that may lurk just beyond their sheltered existence.

The sound of war had been heard, but it was at such a distance as to enhance our enjoyment by affording objects of comparison. The Indians were repulsed on the one side, and Canada was conquered on the other. Revolutions and battles, however calamitous to those who occupied the scene, contributed in some sort to our happiness, by agitating our minds with curiosity, and furnishing causes of patriotic exultation. (24)

With a strikingly naïve faith in their “uninterrupted happiness,” the members of the Mettingen circle isolate themselves from the external society, carving out a world that resembles a claustrophobic utopia (24): “We gradually withdrew ourselves from the society of others, and found every moment irksome that was not devoted to each other” (19). This isolation leads to their self-complacency and lack of forethought, as the family remains sheltered from real-world upheavals such as the American Revolution, their improvident idealism betraying a superficial understanding of the world beyond their idyllic confines. Naturally enough, their failure to reference historical ethos as a framework for social negotiations hints at the threat of such a free-spirited thinking, which solely rests on relationships that are unmediated by authority and constructed only through the persuasive power of words. As critic Amanda Emerson notes, the Wieland siblings are made vulnerable to fraud and deceit “by their isolated, privileged upbringing to interpret events, motivations, goals, and outcomes that lie beyond their particular brand of intellectual inquiry and polite

amusement” (137). Hence, the limitations of the Enlightenment as ideological and metaphysical constructs are brought sharply into focus, as Brown exposes potential threat of duplicitous language through Carwin’s biloquism, illustrating how Clara becomes subject to self-delusional devotion to occult voices. Protestant fanaticism and radical enlightenment begin to converge, therefore, when the father’s apocalyptic anticipation takes on a new garb in Clara’s unskeptical beliefs—when the banishing voice of the Calvinist God from the era of Enlightenment reappears in Carwin’s disorderly and malicious misrepresentations of divine voices. Unmoored from tradition and custom, her radical individualism fails to assign out-of-the-ordinary events to their proper meaning and place, as the mind’s reason, seen as the sole steering helm, is exposed as inadequate in Clara’s case. Inheriting radical individualism that precariously grounded her father’s fanatic beliefs, Clara devolves headlong from an enlightened figure to a helpless victim, underscoring the precarious nature of her supposed intellectual autonomy and the limitations of her enlightened providentialism.

VI. Conclusion

To escape from the haunting memory of her father’s dark Calvinism, Clara engages in a determined pursuit of providentialism, seeking to conquer her fear of Theodore as the next bearer of the family lineage. Equipped with moral courage, she strives to purge the family scourge through her hermeneutic efforts to create an enlightened understanding of God by which she could transcend the apocalyptic fatalism embedded in her family narrative. Hence, Clara’s uphill struggle leads her to construe the mysterious voices into a benign authority, as she considers this superior power

not so much malignant as beneficent. The mysticism of the senior and younger Wielands, which is rooted in their obsessions with the Protestant sense of election and esoteric communion, however, erects a seemingly insurmountable structure of patriarchal doom for Clara. Unable to navigate the labyrinth of epistemological confusion and moral ambiguity, Clara eventually renounces her quest for providentialism, retreating into somber thoughts on the contingencies of man's existence, as they mirror the haunting memory of her father's "turbulent life and mysterious end" (77). As Clara's resolute moral courage becomes outweighed by her occult belief in "a world of these superior beings," she is led down a path filled with deepening fatalism (42). Despite her courage and will to rise above the familial curse, therefore, she is ensnared by the same traps that entangled those before her. Clara's tragic failure to free herself from the chains of inherited doom serves as Brown's poignant commentary on the moral and existential challenges of radical individualistic thinking that characterizes both of the father's Calvinism and her own enlightenment.

Steeped in a "strange and terrible chimera," Clara is led by escalating occultism to see events as governed by adverse fortune (80). Clara's feelings of utter helplessness run high and her struggle for moral clarity dissolves into suspicion and doubt, as she finds herself prone to dark paranormalism induced by Carwin's ventriloquism. First awakened to "the role coincidence and uncertainty play in actual, lived experience," Clara realizes that "[t]he inextricable complexity of [the] deception" crafted by Carwin has now transformed into "the inauspicious concurrence of events" orchestrated by a wrathful deity (Bradshaw 370). What was once mere human contrivance has, in Clara's mind, transformed into "a coincidence of events scarcely credible"—an insight she gleans from "her lately acquired submissiveness to fate's inscrutability" (128; Hedlin 748). Accordingly, "Clara can no longer maintain her

faith in beneficent intervention,” as her faith in the inherent human goodness is called into question, as is the role played by humans in shaping reality (Voloshin 348). With a deep faith in God’s benevolence, Clara once believed herself to be a woman who could direct her actions rationally to shape her future and achieve self-sovereignty. Amidst her despair over the formidable challenge of deciphering the mystic voice’s seemingly incoherent and contradictory utterances, however, Clara traces back through on the intricate sequence of events that Carwin has orchestrated, only to realize that his performances are so perfectly aligned that it would hardly be possible to prevent the fall of herself and her family. Engulfed by a profound sense of helplessness, Clara is, indeed, drawn into the depths of a somber premonition, a foreboding reminiscent of her father’s fatalism.

Initially, Clara emerges as a gothic heroine who harnesses the power of words and moral temerity to unravel daunting mysteries and dilemmas—a woman who, thrown into moral chaos by a patriarchal curse, vindicates her virtues without resorting to traditional authority. Ensnared by Carwin’s mystifying voice, however, Clara finds herself plunging into severe emotional turmoil and experiencing a loss of confidence in the future. Reflecting on her current state, she sees shadows looming large over what was once a hopeful horizon:

The sentiment that dictates my feelings is not hope. Futurity has no power over my thoughts. To all that is to come I am perfectly indifferent. With regard to myself, I have nothing more to fear. Fate has done its worst. Henceforth, I am callous to misfortune. I address no supplication to the Deity. . . . The storm that tore up our happiness, and changed into dreariness and desert the blooming scene of our existence, is lulled into grim repose; but not until the victim was transfixed and mangled; till every obstacle was dissipated by its rage; till every remnant of good was wrested from our grasp and exterminated. (5)

The gothic return to paternal fatalism leaves Clara in a state of desolation, encapsulated by a feeling of grim resignation and a callous indifference to what the future might hold, as she becomes a victim of the curse that has consumed her existence. Once a valiant heroine, fortified by beliefs that “certain evils could never befall a being in possession of a sound mind,” and that “true virtue supplies us with energy which vice can never resist,” she now finds herself besieged by a loss of hope (80): “How was it that a sentiment like despair had now invaded me, and that I trusted to the protection of chance, or to the pity of my persecutor?” (84). Ill-prepared to dispel the gloom cast by the gothic patrilineal lineage, Clara's independent moral reckoning wavers, along with faith in enlightened providentialism. At its core, this failure stems from a disciplinary void she inherits from her father's Christian zealotry, for her unregulated self-reliance and autodidactic ideals lead her to uncritically accept the authority mysteriously embodied by Carwin's ventriloquized commands. Brown thus offers a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of unguided self-sovereignty, as Clara's efforts to banish the specter of the paternal curse through her radical enlightenment thinking become overshadowed by her descent into paranormal beliefs—a supernaturalism that characterizes the *Wieland* males' faith in revelation and apocalyptic outlook.

Notes

- 1) Hereafter, references to Brown's text will be abridged as *Wieland* and this main text will be quoted with only page numbers.

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국문초록

찰스 브룩덴 브라운의 『위랜드』 읽기:
급진적 개인주의와 아버지의 유산

이 성 호

단독 / 중앙대학교

비평가들은 찰스 브룩덴 브라운의 『위랜드』 속 클라라 위랜드와 테오도어 위랜드의 계몽주의 유토피아가 몰락하는 과정을 18세기 미국 공화주의의 내적 위기에 대한 비판적 성찰로 보아 왔다. 그러나 미국 위랜드 2세대의 문제는 18세기 계몽주의의 이면을 드러낼 뿐 아니라 아버지 위랜드의 종교적 광신주의가 후세대에 끼친 영향과도 맞닿아 있다.

클라라가 일구어낸 계몽주의의 이면을 들여다보면 아버지의 고딕적 유산이 작동하고 있음을 알 수 있는데, 클라라의 계몽적 사고와 아버지의 광신적 칼뱅주의는 급진적 개인주의의 사고를 공유하고 있기 때문이다. 본 논문은 클라라 아버지의 종말론적 종교관이 후대에 끼치는 영향, 특히 클라라의 계몽적 사고의 핵심이라 할 수 있는 자애로운 섭리주의가 무너지고 그녀가 신비주의와 비관주의적 숙명론에 빠지게 되는 과정에서 아버지의 어두운 유산이 작동하는 방식을 밝혀내고자 한다. 아버지의 죄가 후대에 대물림된다는 고딕소설의 전통적 주제 의식의 맥락 하에서 위랜드 신세대의 계몽적 사고의 한계가 표면화되는 방식을 이해하는 것이 논문의 주된 목적이다.

클라라의 자애로운 섭리주의에 대한 믿음이 붕괴되는 과정이 아버지의 저주와 직결되어 있다는 점은 그녀의 테오도어에 대한 무의식적인 두려움에서 명확하게 드러난다. 또한 이러한 두려움은 카르윈의 복화술을 통해 상징적으로 매개된다. 그의 신비화된 목소리의 명령에 클라라가 맹목적으로 따르게 되면서 그녀는 아버지의 종말론적 광신주의의 길을 뒤따르게 된다. 클라라의 계몽주의와 낙관주의적 종교관은 이러한

고딕적 저주 앞에 무너지게 되고, 아버지의 죄와 저주는 클라라의 계몽적 자아실현의 내적 한계와 모순을 드러내게 된다.

주제어: 『위랜드』, 급진적 계몽주의, 아버지의 죄, 자애로운 섭리, 광신주의

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이름: 이성호

소속: 중앙대학교 영어영문학과 조교수

이메일: pulchritude@cau.ac.kr

