In a young republic, a little rhetoric can be a dangerous thing—especially if the rhetoric is novelistic, its style Gothic, and its intended audience the young republican. The presumed perilousness of prose is nowhere more evident than in the post-Revolutionary American debates over the effects of novel reading. Antinovel campaigners insisted that imaginative fiction could have no place in a rational republic; they dismissed the novel as frivolous and unproductive at best, deeply dangerous to the reader at worst. As a writer for the Massachusetts Weekly warned in 1791, “[novels] are written with an intent to captivate the feelings, and do in fact lead many on to the path of vice.”¹ And while the genre’s defenders argued that novels provided useful moral lessons, particularly for young readers who disdained more serious study, when it came to the highly stylized Gothic romance, they conceded its potential harmfulness. Consider Joseph Dennie’s 1803 polemic against the works of “Mrs. Radcliffe and her imitators.” Although Dennie was usually friendly to fiction, he worried that the Gothic emphasis on the “dark side” of life “wantonly weaken[ed] the mind.” Dennie observed that the man of taste could easily see through these inferior performances, but, he warned, less well-ordered readers were threatened by the romance. Dennie saw the Gothic novel as most enticing, and most pernicious, to sensitive readers susceptible to captivation by its drive toward embodiment:

If I had a friend of exquisite sensibility, whose irritable nerves vibrated like the chords of music, I would lock up Mrs. Radcliffe’s novels from his morbid curiosity. I would not suffer him to turn pale.
at the thought of any of her ghosts. . . . A hypochondriac would be as much injured by the perusal of the woeful romance, as by the denial of air and exercise.²

Dennie's image of literary suffocation was echoed by the novelist Charles Brockden Brown, who complained that Gothic works "endeavor to keep the reader in a constant state of tumult and terror. . . . [F]right succeeds to fright, and danger to danger, without permitting the unhappy reader to draw his breath."³ The problem with the Gothic romance, in these accounts, was not so much that it misrepresented the real world (although both Dennie and Brown agreed it did) but that it insistently involved the body; the physically oppressive style of the Gothic rendered the reader's body unfit for productive social labor by (over)exciting it. The battered body of the hapless romance reader was the ground on which the novel's defenders and opponents could meet in agreement on a single point: Gothic prose hurt the nation.

The debate over the novel was, in a sense, one of the republic's earliest public-health campaigns; the relations between the literary, the bodily, and the political were graphically detailed in order to legitimate the imposition of public authority over the emergent nation's reading matter. The effects of novel reading were not judged merely in relation to "taste"; rather, as Cathy Davidson has pointed out, the assumption of a largely feminine audience for the novel and the assertion that novels rendered their (female) readers prone to seduction highlighted the need for public regulation for the sake of national survival.⁴ Yet while the Anglo female body was most often depicted as the one on whose behalf the debate over the novel took place, certain male readers—those of "excessive sensibility" or weak judgment—were also seen as overly susceptible and in need of mature guidance in their choice of reading matter. As Miss D—, a habitual novel reader, observes in an installment of Brown's serial feature "A Student's Diary," "boys and girls, and men and women whose judgments are no better than boys and girls," prefer the tawdiest of novels, a diversion Miss D— insists is "innocent." Yet Crito, the narrator of "A Student's Diary," turns this observation back on Miss D—, commenting, "Why, my fair critic, you are a warm and zealous advocate, and, perhaps, defend your cause with a little more eloquence than truth." This dissociation of "eloquence" from "truth" by a devoté
of the novel implies that judgment may be impaired by immaturity or personal attachment. Since even Miss D— can be carried away by eloquence, Crito insists, the exercise of individual preferences in novel consumption must always be regulated by the more enlightened and impartial critic, who will ensure that “guides to a right choice are always to be found.”

The point here is not merely that personal attachment can operate like immaturity; rather, personal attachment is immaturity insofar as it impairs rational and objective assessment of the public-health dangers of “eloquence.” It is precisely this belief that motivates Brown’s promise, in the first issue of his Literary Magazine and American Register, to take good care of the public’s taste. Having informed the reader that his “objects” in publishing the Magazine are to provide “useful information and rational amusement,” he predicts that the reader will find no “indelicacy or licentiousness” in his poetry, which, if it may be “dull,” will at least be “free from voluptuousness or sensuality,” and that “his prose, whether seconded or not by genius and knowledge, shall scrupulously aim at the promotion of public and private Virtue.”

Brown holds his moderated prose up to the public for both approbation and emulation, and he dramatizes the need for the latter by renouncing his own earlier fiction, the very sort that promised, in recognizably Gothic fashion, to “enchain” and “ravish” the reader, and that he now characterizes as embarrassingly adolescent: “time can scarcely fail of enlarging and refining the powers of a man, while the world is sure to judge of his capacities and principles at fifty, by what he has written at fifteen.” Staging his transition from ravisher to dullard as inherent in growing up, Brown invokes the chronological hierarchy that dominated the post-Enlightenment view of the relationship between pleasure and productivity: that is, the construction of “pleasure,” especially the pleasures of the body, as outside of and anterior to the properly productive realm of the social. In the rationalist view, one must relinquish the “pure,” unbounded pleasure of the body in order to participate in the social, where pleasure is treated as an instrument and channeled toward specific, socially sanctioned ends. Attachments to pleasure for its own sake—that is, pleasure not tied into an instrumentalist teleology—are dismissed as archaic, barbaric, infantile, pathological, or queer. Brown’s 1803 essay insistently enforces this normalizing chronology; the Gothic must be periodized as an adolescent style of writing in
order to transcend it, to grow out of it into a healthy-minded insistence on the instrumentality of bodies and their pleasures.  

Brown’s last Gothic novel, *Edgar Huntly*, simultaneously endorses and undermines these sanitary stylistic standards. Although its narrative ostensibly concerns the growth to maturity of a young American—revealing along the way the steps that development ought to take (steps that include renouncing the pleasures of rhetoric, submitting to patriarchal discipline, and participating, murderously if need be, in racial policing, American-style)—this telos is troubled by the novel’s inescapable drive toward embodiment. Though Edgar tries to run away from his body, carnality repeatedly catches up with him throughout the tale. Reason and virtue seem insufficient inoculation against his own appetites, which follow him around the wilderness in forms both physical (the dangerously proximate bodies of Indians) and prosaic (the insistently contagious method of his narration). Writing in a genre that was said to harm the nation, *Edgar Huntly*’s narrator does his best to show himself and his reader the many ways it could do so—and in the process tortures both nearly to death.

*Edgar Huntly* is in some ways a novel about how storytelling feels, even as it is framed by Edgar’s telling of his own story. The expressions of reluctance with which Edgar delays for several pages the beginning of his narrative foreground the problematic of storytelling itself. He apologetically informs his correspondent that he has not hitherto been able to “comply with [her] request” for the particulars of his recent traumatic experience because “[t]ill now, to hold a steadfast pen was impossible; to disengage my senses from the scene that was passing or approaching; to forbear to grasp at futurity; to suffer so much thought to wander from the purpose which engrossed my fears and hopes, could not be.”  

Edgar defers the telling of his story because he cannot separate himself from himself—he cannot stop *being*—long enough to write. Detaching himself from the present in order to relate the recent past has been unthinkable; the very verbs he employs to describe this condition are infinitive rather than past tense, and the purpose to which he will put them—withstanding that it is negation (“could not be”)—is postponed until the end of the sentence. Yet the telling—or more accurately the writing—of that story is an unavoidable exercise, not only because he has promised it to his correspondent but also because he believes he *needs* to separate himself from that experience in order to resume his place in
the world: “In proportion as I gain power over words, shall I lose dominion over sentiments. In proportion as my tale is deliberate and slow, the incidents and motives which it is designed to exhibit will be imperfectly revived and obscurely portrayed” (5). As Edgar subjects his experiences to written narration, the immediacy of their horror will be mitigated; that is, the task of making sense of his story will produce a correspondent loss in sensation. Yet Edgar, despite all that he has been through, clearly views this loss with ambivalence.

The opposition of “words” and “sentiments” in Edgar’s description foregrounds the tension between the two tendencies of the early American novel—the struggle between telling the story for the sake of its moral truth and for the reader’s private appropriation of the narrator’s experience.12 For while it is the first purpose that Edgar proclaims as the reason for telling his tale in writing (he assures his correspondent that it would be unjustifiable to keep her in ignorance of “what has happened”), his attachment to the second surfaces in his resistance to the potentially depersonalizing effects of that writing. The reluctance with which Edgar approaches this project—and the resistance that his narration poses to its completion—demonstrates his ambivalent conception of truth; for if the lessons he learns from his three days in the wilderness are “true,” so too are the experiences that he had there. Hence he wishes to produce a narration that will “revive” the whole truth; his reader should not be able simply to extract the moral lessons that his tale offers but should have to go through what he did to get to them, if indeed she can get to them at all. It is not incidental that at this point in the novel the reader possesses no information that would enable her to name, or even describe, Edgar’s correspondent; she is denied an identifiable body to interpose between her own and the physiological effects of his rhetoric. Crucially, the identity of that correspondent (Edgar’s fiancée Mary Waldegrave, the sister of his murdered friend) is given only after the narrator has predicted, “Thou wilt catch from my story every horror and sympathy that it paints. Thou wilt shudder with my forbodings and dissolve with my tears” (6). Edgar’s promise to produce a powerful physical reaction in his reader, to induce an orgasmic shudder and dissolution, seems to make little sense in the context of what he has just confessed. Although he proclaims the soul-annihilating terror of his recent experience and insists upon the need to restore himself to rationality, Edgar will tell his tale in such a way that the reader will
have no place to hide from its sensationalism. The narrative economy he has devised for his tale relies upon conversion; his experience will not be lost but reproduced through readerly absorption.

This insistence on absorption into, rather than a more distanced appraisal of, Edgar’s story mimics the effect that storytelling has on Edgar within the narrative itself—an effect of compulsory mimicry. In the section of the novel that precedes his fall into the cave-pit, Edgar listens to the life stories of both Clithero and Weymouth. While Edgar tries to play the rational reader by focusing on the “truth” these stories convey—he remarks upon the proofs of Clithero’s innocence and the validity of Weymouth’s claims on Mary Waldegrave’s fortune—the stories themselves nevertheless manage to leak into him, producing an experiential identification with the storytellers that takes place despite his stated intentions. As most critics of Edgar Huntly have observed, Edgar more or less turns into Clithero after hearing his story; his own odyssey parallels Clithero’s in a number of ways, not the least of which is that both become murderers. Weymouth’s story also has a transformative effect on Edgar. Not only does it pull the ground out from under Edgar and Mary’s feet, sending Edgar literally over the edge into somnambulism and the cave-pit, but it also occasions Edgar’s reenactment of Weymouth’s solitary trials in a remote land among hostile strangers. At the end of Edgar’s journey, Sarsefield, his former teacher, attempts to put an end to these narrative transferences by giving Edgar back his own story, albeit in a more complete and more objective form. Yet Edgar’s absorption of its truth is mitigated by his addictive attachment to his body double, Clithero.

Edgar’s inability to behave as a good republican reader should is caused by his investment in the power of sympathy, or the more “perfect” communicative abilities embodied in speech. His conviction that Weymouth is the rightful owner of the money that Mary Waldegrave has inherited, for example, arises not so much from the sense the tale makes as from the way its teller looks:

His story, had thou observed the features and guise of the relater, would have won thy implicit credit. His countenance exhibited deep traces of the afflictions he had endured and the fortitude which he had exercised. He was sallow and emaciated, but his countenance was full of seriousness and dignity. A sort of ruggedness of brow,
the token of great mental exertion and varied experience, argued a premature old age. (154)

In Edgar’s view, Weymouth’s body speaks for him, and the “arguments” it makes are at least as powerful as the points of agreement between his story and Edgar’s own knowledge of the facts of the case. Weymouth looks like a person who might have lived through the story he has told; therefore, for Edgar, he is that person. When Edgar emerges from the wilderness near the end of his story, he too looks the part, so much so that Sarsefield shrinks in fear from his “hideous guise” (241). As Edgar relates his experiences to Sarsefield, he highlights the effect of his bodily presence on the sensational aspects of the tale:

His eye strayed not a moment from my face. All my perils and forebodings, were fresh in my remembrance, they had scarcely gone by; their skirts, so to speak, were still visible. No wonder that my eloquence was vivid and pathetic; that I pourtrayed the past as if it were the present scene; and that not my tongue only, but every muscle and limb, spoke. (246)

Edgar’s vision of “eloquence” relies upon a model of speech incarnate; he assumes that Sarsefield will be convinced by the physicality of his performance. Sarsefield, however, believes in logic, not sensation. Hence he replies, “Your tale, Huntly, is true, yet, did I not see you before me, were I not acquainted with the artlessness and rectitude of your character, and, above all, had not my own experience, during the last three days, confirmed every incident, I should question its truth” (246). In endorsing Edgar’s narrative Sarsefield gives more credit to the way it fits in with his own prior knowledge than to the power of Edgar’s impassioned narration. Even his concession to Edgar’s presence “before him” is not an admission of his susceptibility to sensation but simply a confirmation that Edgar must have survived this experience because he is there to tell the story; Sarsefield, as he has just reminded Edgar, is far too rational to believe in ghosts.

Sarsefield’s emphatic preference for logic conveys an implicit critique of Edgar’s own listening and reading practices. In the Enlightenment-inflected hierarchy of reading methods the novel appears to endorse (though appearances, as Edgar’s story teaches him, can be deceiving), Edgar reads like a woman. Justifying his censorship of her
brother’s heretical letters, Edgar tells Mary Waldegrave, “Thou, like others of thy sex, are unaccustomed to metaphysical arguments. Thy religion is the growth of sensibility and not of argument” (133). Edgar here invokes Mary’s “natural” feminine inclination towards Christianity not to praise womanly virtue but to point out the susceptibility to “pollution and depravity” such a style of belief engenders.

Mary’s faith could not, he asserts, endure the rough-and-tumble world of late-eighteenth-century intellectual discourse; since nothing in her own experience would have prepared her for this style of debate, she would be unable to choose rationally between ideas on the basis of their merits and would end a “fallen” woman. Indeed, it was this very possibility—the link between the seductiveness of reading and actual seduction—that alarmed opponents of the novel in the early American republic. Yet, as Edgar reveals in his repeated assertions that Mary will sympathize with his story, he and Mary are much alike. While listening to Clithero’s story, a narration that occupies five chapters of Edgar Huntly, Edgar allows himself to be drawn into the sensational aspects of this “extraordinary” tale; afterwards, noting that nothing in his own experience helps him to interpret it, he finds his judgment “sunk into imbecility and confusion” (91). Edgar’s reaction to Clithero’s narrative seems an allegory of reading a novel such as Edgar Huntly. Indeed, Clithero’s story parallels the novel not only in its details but in the struggles that accompany its telling; like Edgar, Clithero must force himself to tell it, and he interrupts the narrative at its most horrific moments to proclaim the difficulty of saying what he knows he soon will. And Edgar is as overwhelmed by the physicality of his participation in Clithero’s narration as he hopes his reader will be by his own.

The irony is, of course, that even after his pause for reflection—his “deliberate and methodical” attempt to make sense of Clithero’s tale—Edgar still gets it wrong. He “reasons” that Clithero’s conduct was justified and acts accordingly; only after his narration to Mary has ended does he learn that he has been mistaken all along, that Clithero is indeed “a maniac” (290). This misreading, uncovered only in the novel’s epistolary epilogue, has dire consequences. If a story such as Clithero’s cannot be “sensibly” read even after its powerfully immediate images have faded, then what is to be said of Edgar Huntly? Perhaps only a reader such as Sarsefield could manage it, if he could be induced to read it at all.
But even Sarsefield cannot fully contain the contagious effects Edgar’s reading practices set in motion. Although his republican rationality accords him the status of the novel’s most mature reader, in the end Sarsefield is also absorbed into the wave of embodying identification that sweeps through the narrative. Edgar’s letter reporting the peril in which his misreading of Clithero’s character has placed Mrs. Sarsefield causes her to have a miscarriage, destroying Sarsefield’s hopes for progeny. In his response to that letter, Sarsefield chastises Edgar for putting this information in a place where his wife (as nervous a character as Joseph Dennie’s hypothetical hypochondriac) could see it and emphasizing the difficulty of keeping sensational stories from readers likely to be adversely affected by them. Crucially, it is not Edgar’s actions but his narration that does the damage, and Sarsefield’s final advice for Edgar reads as a proscription against the stylistic excesses that mark the rest of the novel. For it is not Edgar’s short, uncharacteristically reserved first letter, which contains the simple information that Clithero is en route to their home, that terrifies Mrs. Sarsefield into miscarriage, but his second, which contains a graphic and wholly characteristic description of his final encounter with the lunatic somnambulist. In contrast, Sarsefield declines to “torture [Edgar’s] sensibility” by dwelling on the details of Clithero’s arrest (293). This refusal to engage in narrative *quid pro quo* appears, at the end of the novel, to be the only remaining remedy for the plague of sensational storytelling that—in its insistence on embodying the reader/listener—has resulted in such unproductive or, more accurately, antireproductive effects.

Edgar, however, insists throughout on both the productivity of storytelling and the power of feeling. The stories that get told in the novel do produce something, but what they produce is wholly out of line with the ideal of reason. Specifically, they produce bodies: fully embodied bodies, or what I would call carnal bodies, bodies whose desires exceed the possibility of control. And despite Edgar’s most murderous efforts, these bodies cannot be contained; they return to haunt Sarsefield’s rational republican world just as the Gothic flourishes of Edgar’s narrative style continue to have effects even after his own story ends. The specter of the carnal body, unlike the “ghosts” of Radcliffe’s Gothic, cannot be explained away rationally in this novel’s denouement. It can only be (rationally) warned against.

The excess of the body and its pleasures haunts Edgar; he con-
fesses to reading novels and bodies, and the perusal of each seems to supply him with something more than he can convert to rational use. Waldegrave’s heretical letters, which describe a perilously material, even carnal philosophy, are preserved intact by Edgar, despite Waldegrave’s insistence, once he has outgrown this antifait, that Edgar destroy them:

I would not consent to this sacrifice. I did not entirely abjure the creed which had, with great copiousness and eloquence, been defended in these letters. Besides, mixed up with abstract reasonings, were numberless passages which elucidated the character and history of my friend. These were too precious to be consigned to oblivion, and to take them out of their present connection and arrangement, would be to mutilate and deform them. (133)

Edgar anthropomorphizes the letters in order to prevent their “sacrifice,” placing his attachment to Waldegrave’s copious eloquence and his “character and history” above the practical uselessness of the letters, which are, in Waldegrave’s estimate, like stored poison. Indeed, Edgar’s investment in sympathy, his fondness for verbal intercourse, and his pleasure in nature all spring, in his account, from the friendships of his formative years with Sarsefield and Waldegrave, those two exemplary pedagogues whose appearances in the stories told by Clithero and Weymouth add greatly to Edgar’s interest in them. Yet Edgar’s recollection of these youthful attachments seems, like his preservation of the letters, precisely to have missed the point that these friends urged upon him—that such exchanges were intended primarily to make him “useful to his country,” not attached to his interlocutors (151). Unmarried and unemployed, Edgar is suspended between the recent past of affectionate brotherhood and the “patriarchal scheme” that surrounds him. His refusal to move beyond this adolescent period and submit to the disciplines of adulthood—reflected in his continuing obsession, against all advice, with the cause of Waldegrave’s death—leaves him open to feeling in what becomes, ultimately, a corporeally endangering way.

This susceptibility to sentiment is highlighted in the novel’s first scene, as Edgar finds himself involuntarily attracted to a stranger. His body acts independently of his will, in direct response to the other man, who turns out to be Clithero: “Every new accent of the mourner struck upon my heart with additional force, and tears found their way
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spontaneously to my eyes” (11). This is, of course, the very model of what Edgar calls “sympathy.” He fantasizes later in the tale about the benevolent effects that returning this sympathy might have: “if words were impotent and arguments were nugatory, yet to set by him in silence, to moisten his hand with tears, to sigh in unison, to offer him the spectacle of sympathy . . . could not fail to be of benign influence” (106).

Edgar’s characteristic preference for incarnate speech is here imagined as a healing communication that relies upon the power of mingled tears and sighs. His initial, affective relation to Clithero precedes the mimicry of Clithero’s experience noted above, but it is perhaps the exchange of fluids between them that does the damage in the novel’s account. For his first encounter with Clithero is emphatically carnal; that is to say, Clithero’s body is highlighted for its own sake. Just before his involuntary outburst of affect, Edgar has remarked “the shape of a man, tall and robust” digging in the earth at the site of Waldegrave’s death (10). His description of that shape further highlights its outlines: “something like flannel was wrapt round his waist and covered his lower limbs. The rest of his frame was naked. A figure, robust and strange, and half naked, to be thus employed, at this hour and place, was calculated to rouse up my whole soul” (10). Though Edgar’s soul is presumably most aroused by the coincidence of this behavior with Waldegrave’s unsolved murder, his emphasis on the sheer bodiliness of Clithero’s body—twice robust and twice naked within a few sentences—remains in excess of this connection. Indeed, Clithero’s body appears as excess in the scene; as Edgar approaches him, he realizes that Clithero is sleepwalking—that is to say, that he is a body run away with itself.

As Edgar pursues this body in order to extract its story, he falls victim to the same condition of bodily excess. He becomes, of course, a sleepwalker, but that is the least of his problems; his story becomes the story of his own imperiled body, or rather, of his body and its accompanying perils. Many critics have noted the resemblances between Edgar Huntly and colonialist accounts of Indian captivity.14 These similarities go beyond a mere incorporation of some of the details and themes of these tales; Edgar Huntly is itself a captivity narrative, though of a different sort. Although Edgar is at no point in the novel imprisoned by Indians, he is captivated by the carnal body, much as he hopes the reader will be by his narrative. And the
referent for that body in this novel is the body of the Indian, a body that Edgar conflates with the notion of violence. After noting that four “brawny and terrific figures” lie between him and the entrance to the cave (172), Edgar reflects upon the death of his mother and father at the hands of a band of Indians: “You will not be surprized that the fate of my parents, and the sight of the body of one of the savage band, who, in the pursuit that was made after them, was overtaken and killed, should produce lasting and terrific images in my fancy. I never looked upon, or called up the image of a savage without shuddering” (173, emphasis added). The four “brawny” Indians who block Edgar’s escape do not simply stand in for the idea of violence; rather, they stand in for the body of a prior Indian that is the idea of violence in Edgar’s fancy, an idea so strong as to cause him to react physically. Thus it is no surprise that the death of his friend Waldegrave, which sets in motion the events of the novel, should in the end be ascribed to the bloodlust of a “sanguinary” Indian.

Jared Gardner has recently shown that Brown uses Edgar Huntly’s devastating depiction of Indians to demonstrate the making of proper Americans. As Gardner observes, “[t]he American Indian (and more generally, the savage) embodies here (and in the broader political discourse of the period) a whole array of threats to the nation—from the alien to, most troubling of all, the un-American American.” Yet it is crucial to recognize that in contemporary writing the Indian embodied these threats, precisely as a body, specifically as a primitively disordered and disordering body. The genealogy of this image of the Indian is a long one, extending from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts of the Indian as cannibal, profligate, and sodomite, to the “bloodthirsty savage” of the Indian wars, to the myth of the “natural man” popular with Revolutionary War writers. Brown’s contemporaries, in contrast, tended to insist upon the Indians’ “love of indolence,” their refusal to farm or to labor, and their lack of submission to any developed system of laws; at the same time, they pointed out the Indians’ exceptional physical and emotional hardening in preparation for the hunt. Most notably, they emphasized Indian excesses—the extremes of heat and cold to which they were accustomed and the supposed boundlessness of the Indian appetite for wild meat, for rum, and for prey. By the end of the century these “habitual excesses” were cast less as the result of Indian living practices than as a natural and inherent condition, anticipating the thorough racial-
ization of the body that would take place in the nineteenth century through the successive sciences of phrenology and biology.

The Anglo-American image of the Indian, then, oscillated in this period between two accounts, one of which held that the Indian had chosen the life of the body, and the other that the life of the body had chosen the Indian; both were incompatible with the rationalist demand to renounce the primal excesses of the body. Against this oscillation the figure of the Indian in *Edgar Huntly* appears as the originary source of the “pollution and depravity” that spreads across the novel—that is, carnality itself. As I have noted, Edgar’s carnal odyssey begins with the sight of Clithero’s mute, half-naked body. Clithero’s garb in this scene is apparently meant to call up the image of an Indian, but to say that Clithero is dressed like an Indian is also to say that he is “imperfectly” dressed, that his outfit highlights his body. Clithero’s somnambulistic transvestism reveals the logic of substitution at work in the novel: not only is an Irishman as good as an Indian, as Gardner points out, but also, and crucially, an Indian is as good as a body—and a body, as such, is (up to) no good.

It is also no accident that this transubstantiation (Irish immigrant into Indian into carnality itself) occurs at the site of the narrative substitution of Clithero’s story for Edgar’s. For Edgar’s initial curiosity about Clithero’s mysterious midnight activities becomes first an obsession and then a transformation; like Clithero he becomes both sleepwalker and murderer; he is, indeed, absorbed into Clithero’s story. Edgar doesn’t lack for troubles before he runs into Clithero: his friend is dead; his fiancee, that friend’s sister, appears to be pregnant; and he himself has no employment, no property, and no parents. Indeed, all he has is his own experience and a few skills—notably, box making and storytelling—and what he produces from that experience provides sufficient distraction from his troubles, converting his lack of a secure position in the social world into a prolonged engagement with male bodies, including his own. He makes of his body an absorbing story.

As Edgar frames it, he proceeds from absorbing the tales of the two strange men he meets to consuming other strange bodies. His excessive bodily needs do battle with his will throughout his three days in the wilderness, and this conflict nearly annihilates his subjectivity; he becomes, in fact, almost terminally embodied. Upon waking up in the cave, his body aching and sore, he feels a hunger so “ferocious” that
it threatens to destroy him by tempting him to "bite the flesh from [his] arm" and drink his own blood. This hunger both convinces him that his perceptions are real and compels him to murderous fantasies: "I pondered on the delight I should experience in rending some living animal to pieces, and drinking its blood and grinding its quivering fibres between my teeth" (164). Edgar's desire, conveyed in the most gruesome terms possible, is not merely for food but for the physical pleasure of consuming it; to allay it he eats his own clothing and drinks his sweat. Once his fantasies have been fulfilled and his hunger satisfied by consuming the body of the panther he has killed, he again almost dies, this time of agonizing stomach cramps. Both times, a torturous sensation originating in the very center of his body spreads outward to threaten the entire organism. Driven mad by his stomach pains, Edgar desperately wishes he could remove the source of those sensations.

Of course the desire to tear one's own insides out is not rational; yet it is precisely what rationality, in its insistence on suppressing the body, requires. Edgar manages to avoid terminal self-absorption by interposing a series of other bodies between his sensations and himself. He projects his self-destructive desire onto the bodies of the Indians he meets and murders, and after they are gone he writes the letter that tears the insides out of Mrs. Sarsefield. Rationalizing carnality is no easy business in Brown's novel, but it does give Edgar a form of employment.

Yet Edgar's management of his carnal appetites calls into question the very purpose of "nature" itself. The needs of the natural body lead him, as he laments, into some rather unnatural behavior: "My hunger had arrived at that pitch where all fastidiousness and scruples are at an end. . . . If this appetite has sometimes subdued the sentiments of nature, and compelled the mother to feed upon the flesh of her offspring, it will not excite amazement that I did not turn from the yet warm blood and reeking fibres of a brute" (167). This rationalizing explanation of his own unnatural behavior compares Edgar to a mother feeding upon the babies who "naturally" might feed off her, just as Edgar killed the panther to prevent its feeding off him—an act that would be, as he observes, simply part of the brute's nature. But the order of this filiation is called into question by Edgar's morbid, panther-flesh-induced encounter with indigestion, which agonizingly contorts his body and eventually knocks him unconscious once again.
Edgar awakens from this sleep feeling refreshed and less feeble, and he convinces himself that nature has set things in order after all. But the body he awakens into is sheerly carnal, bloodthirsty, and efficiently lethal; the panther has, in a sense, given birth to him. Edgar’s panther-fueled transubstantiation marks a violent disordering of his body, one that he insistently connects to the figure of the Indian:

I had emerged from abhorred darkness in the heart of the earth, only to endure the extremities of famine and encounter the fangs of a wild beast. From these I was delivered only to be thrown into the midst of savages, to wage an endless and hopeless war with adepts in killing; with appetites that longed to feast upon my bowels and quaff my heart’s-blood. (223–24)

His own carnal disarray is cast against the “appetites” that desire that disarray, conflating his “heart”—the seat of the sympathy in which he previously indulged—with his bowels, the site of the horrific effects of his most agonizing carnal indulgence. It seems to make little difference in Edgar’s estimation that he has by the time of this outburst won the “endless and hopeless” war in this anthropomorphized landscape simply by killing all the Indians he encountered in the cave, for his participation alone reflects a fundamental loss of order: the endless and perhaps hopeless conflict between rationality and appetite. Hence, after “piercing with a bayonet” the prostrate body of the last of that band of Indians, he throws himself on the ground, lamenting, “Such are the deeds which perverse nature compels thousands of rational beings to perform and to witness!” (202).

Edgar’s sense of disordered nature, his feeling of persecution, and the markedly anal-paranoid terms in which he casts his assessment of Indian “appetites” all mark this section of the novel as exemplary of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the “paranoid Gothic.” Indeed, the masculine intensities of the narrative’s connections—a version of what Sedgwick sees as the paranoid-Gothic’s “hypercharged relations between men”—might call into question the very nature of the “appetites” being here described. But it would be both anachronistic and reductive to assert that the “real” referent of Edgar’s carnality here is sexuality, and that “perverse” must in this context mean homosexual—anachronistic because it would entail reading into Brown’s novel a construction that would not, strictly speaking, emerge until nearly a century after its publication, and reductive because it would
limit to a single register (although sexuality, as such, is never simply singular) the range of bodily excesses that plague and pleasure Edgar throughout the narrative. Rather, the carnality that ravishes and en-chains Edgar indexes a range of indulgences that resonate against sexuality both in this period and throughout the following century, and against a corresponding range of disciplines that produced and ordered these indulgences as, successively, tendencies and typolo-
gies.\textsuperscript{19} The flexibility of the specter of the ambiguously carnal body gave it a purchase on a variety of transgressions that circulated, as did the debate over novel reading at the turn of the century, around sexuality and reproduction; but this flexibility could also be more broadly disseminated, in related discourses, over areas such as race, employment, religion, education, and partisanship.

To say that “homosexuality” is anachronistic in Brown’s era is, however, not to say that concerns about the affective and erotic in-
tensities between men were not operative at the time, or that they do not surface recognizably in the novel, for neither of these is the case. It is simply to observe that “the homosexual” as a specifiable type was not yet a category to which these terms could be affixed. What is most obviously at issue in Edgar’s character is, as I have noted, his adolescent lack of submission to the “patriarchal scheme” of hetero-
sexuality. It is useful to bear in mind here Sedgwick’s admonition about the politics of reading sexuality in the paranoid Gothic:

even motifs that might ex post facto look like homosexual thematics (the Unspeakable, the anal), even when presented in a context of intensities between men, nevertheless have as their first referent the psychology and sociology of prohibition and control. That is to say, the fact that it is about what we would today call “homo-
sexual panic” means that the paranoid Gothic is specifically not about homosexuals or the homosexual; instead, heterosexuality is by definition its subject.\textsuperscript{20}

In some ways, heterosexuality is indeed Edgar Huntly’s subject, but anything recognizable as “homosexual panic” is absent in Brown’s novel. Rather, the projection of perversity that takes place in Edgar Huntly points back to the body of the Indian, and the panic that circulates around Edgar’s uncertain relation to that body is largely racial. Even the convention of the Unspeakable, which for Sedgwick indexes by elision some nefariously unspecified (nefarious because
As Anglo-American purity, computed by plague foreshadows the way this novel; for of all the gory and disturbing encounters that Edgar details for his long-suffering correspondent, it is only the panther-eating scene that evokes narrative hesitation: “I crept to the spot. . . . I will not shock you by relating the extremes to which dire necessity had driven me. Now that it is past I look back upon it as on some hideous dream. The whole appears to be some freak of insanity” (167). Edgar’s underspecified approach to the body of this “savage” (a name that he applies equally to panther and Indian) refuses to describe a practice, eating wild meat raw, commonly imputed to Indians; it is a racial, not a sexual, transgression that he cannot bring himself to name. Yet to say that the horror of carnality is here indicated through racial panic is not to say that this panic was not closely connected to the concern over sexuality evident both in the debate about novel reading and this novel; for in some ways the racial panic that Edgar Huntly details is also about heterosexuality. As Gardner notes, concern for the proper reproduction of the Anglo-American was repeatedly cited as justification for racial policing and control throughout the century that followed. Moreover, the ethic of masculine self-management displayed in Edgar Huntly became a means through which the proper male subject demonstrated not only his masculinity but also his whiteness, his industry, his purity, his maturity, and, finally, his heterosexuality. Edgar Huntly foreshadows the emergence of a flexible logic of containment for the plague of carnality whose referent is so insistently racialized in the novel. This logic could invoke exile or—as graphically demonstrated in the novel—genocide, as well as the disciplining mechanisms of the public-health movements that would emerge in the early part of the nineteenth century, movements quite often focused on the perilously contingent youthful bodies that Edgar Huntly emphasizes.

The contagious carnality that spreads outward from the “savage” body of the Indian is disseminated, following the form of the Gothic, by contact; for the wilderness surrounding Norwalk has had, Edgar observes, its “rude surface sometimes traversed by Red-men” (172) long before Edgar wanders into its interior, complicating the making of the young Americans who are supposed to spring from this soil. As Sedgwick points out, the transferential logic of the Gothic holds that “the attributes of the . . . surface . . . are contagious metonymically, by touch.” This contagion, Sedgwick notes, metaphorizes the
transference of identities, which are “social and relational rather than originary or private.” From the Gothic point of view, then, one must “catch” identity from someone else—there is no other way to come by it. The question remains what kinds of identity one is going to catch; thus the types of bodies one has contact with are of paramount importance. Near the close of the novel Sarsefield’s refusal to treat Clithero’s wounds is received by Edgar with dismay; but Sarsefield, whose ability to “manage” the problem of embodiment is reflected in his profession as a surgeon no less than in his Enlightenment rationalism, knows the dangerous transferences that can arise from touch. Unfortunately, Edgar appears not to have been so selective: “My head reposed upon the breast of him whom I had shot in this part of his body. The blood had ceased to flow from this wound, but my disheveled locks were matted and steeped in that gore which had overflowed and choked up the orifice” (197). Edgar is steeped throughout this part of the narrative in the disorderly emissions of the carnal body; the transference of identity is facilitated, moreover, by the openness of his own body, as just before this swoon he notes that he himself is bleeding copiously from a wound on his cheek. While the deaths of his first four Indian victims are rationalized in terms of self-defense and the rescue of the young girl whom they hold captive, his fifth murder, enacted soon after he awakens from this blood-mingling swoon, can find no such defense and is committed for revenge alone. It is this killing, motivated by primal bloodlust, that occasions Edgar’s outcry against “perverse nature,” which here appears to be his own—or the one he has contracted in (and through) the story.

For if identities in the novel are contagious by surface physical contact, they are also, as noted above, passed on by the telling of stories. But it is precisely Edgar’s attraction to the physical aspects of oral storytelling—his attachment to facial expressions and the speech of muscles and limbs rather than the truth of the narrative—that enables meaning to be transmitted. These sympathetic effects, which Edgar believes are the only vehicle for making the whole truth known, allow the story to (bodily) absorb the reader. Yet they also provide a point of metonymic contact, a point of “origin” to which the disordering ripples of “perversity” that spread through the novel are insistently traced. If Edgar’s problems, pre-Clithero, can be summed up as the misfortune of having a body and no property, his story of the savage digression produced by his encounter with Clithero’s car-
nal/alien/Indian history ascribes those problems not to the perversity of his own excitable, imaginative, and carnally attached “nature” but to the ruptures arising from the interventions of outsiders. Indeed, the story in this novel becomes the body’s alibi—the explanation for the unreasonable presence of the carnal in the presumably rational and orderly social realm. Absorption into a well-told story produces a state like sleepwalking, in which the body runs away with itself, is outside all conscious control. If would-be good citizen Edgar mismanages his body, it isn’t his own fault: the story made him do it.

The body’s inescapable connection to the story causes most of the trouble in this Gothic novel, right down to the sensational abortion at its close. Even the written stories in the novel, Mrs. Lorimer’s manuscript and Waldegrave’s letters, are sensational oral performances—that is, they serve as stand-ins for the bodies of their writers. Thus, rather than functioning as emblems of depersonalized virtue, as repositories of self-evident and politically productive truths, the manuscripts become sites of private and deeply troubled identifications. Clithero buries Mrs. Lorimer’s manuscript as though it were a corpse, and the cherished packet of Waldegrave’s letters disappears mysteriously from Edgar’s room just as Waldegrave was suddenly and mysteriously removed from Edgar’s life. Treating the manuscripts as privately fetishized objects rather than texts for rational discussion reinforces the primary and problematic mode of consumption of stories in the novel. For it is Edgar’s attachment to the shapes and surfaces of tales—to the material embodiment of their “storyness”—that allows them to function (dangerously) like bodies as vehicles for cathexis and absorption.

And it is precisely this attachment that Edgar himself, at the opening of his narration, attempts to reproduce in his reader, affirming a connection between the reader and the story that is both inevitable and interminable. Brown’s novel vigorously resists closure in the absorbing effects of its structure, its narrative, and its rhetoric. For although the existence of the memoir that comprises most of Edgar Huntly is explained at its outset as Edgar’s compliance with the duty of self-explanation, this explanation does not account for the three letters appended to the memoir without explanation, letters that throw the very possibility of termination into doubt. Nor do the letters themselves bring things to a close, even though the final one is penned by Sarsefield. Although this letter reports that
Clithero has drowned, making it seem the characters are finally safe from his contagious depravity, the reader’s faith in this ending may be shaken if she recalls, as Beverly Lyon Clark points out, that Edgar also appeared to have drowned earlier in the novel, only to resurface alive in a different place.25 Scenes are just as “contagious” as characters, according to Clark, and when they rub up against one another, transferences can happen. Ironically, the vehicle for this potential episodic transference—the one that most threatens prospects for the characters’ return to rational existence—is Sarsefield, who witnesses both scenes. Sarsefield, moreover, laments in that letter that his own body is not quite as securely sealed off as he would like: Clithero’s escape can be attributed to Sarsefield’s own failure as a jailer, “a province which required an heart more steeled by spectacles of suffering and the exercise of cruelty, than mine had been” (293). Since even Sarsefield’s imperfectly enclosed body can become implicated in the plague of carnal contagion, it appears that no reading practice, however rational, can fully immunize one against embodiment.

Edgar Huntly’s prose also refuses to allow the reader to adopt even the pretense of a rational, Sarsefield-like position; in its emphasis on sensationalism, Edgar’s narration insists on absorbing—and hence embodying—the reader until the final moment, refusing to allow her to separate herself from her experience of his experience in order to understand it. Edgar himself feels the telling of his story as a physically painful struggle between sensation and narration: “One image runs into another, sensations succeed in so rapid a train, that I fear, I shall be unable to distribute and express them with sufficient perspicuity. As I look back, my heart is sore and aches within my bosom” (159). Yet this painful narration has taken place despite Edgar, outside the regulation of his will. As he notes in the final paragraphs of his memoir, the book has been written “insensibly,” almost as though the narrative itself were sleepwalking (281). How can the reader make sense of a book so “insensibly” written? Since, as Edgar notes at the opening of his narrative, his object has been not only to explain his experience but also to reproduce it in his reader, the point is not simply its outcome but also the story itself. The reader knows, after all, that Edgar has safely survived when she begins the novel, for how else could he be telling his story?

There is, however, an advantage in the security that this knowledge offers from the beginning: it allows the reader to focus her attention
on the story itself. Edgar makes a similar point when, coming upon
the figure of an Indian from behind, he remarks that this position
enables him to “distinctly survey his gigantic form and fantastic orna-
ments” (174). The reader, too, enters the narrative from behind—that
is, after Edgar’s experience has (presumably) ended—and she too
can see its form and ornaments. Here form and ornaments amount
to more or less the same thing—the emphasis on bodies (both of the
carnal characters and the Gothic reader) for their own sakes. For the
Indians’ ornaments are part of their bodies, as Edgar reveals when he
notes their legs scored into “uncouth figures”; these are indeed, as
Gardner notes, a form of writing on the body. Similarly, the “fantastic
ornaments” of the Gothic novel are the effects—the rhetorical flour-
ishes—that allow it to write its detail on the body of the reader. It pays
insistent attention to graphic detail in order to leave the reader “matt-
ed and steeped in gore” to the very roots of her hair, a condition that
Sarsefield’s last word—which calls for more, not fewer, spectacles of
suffering and cruelty—does nothing to remedy.

Paul Witherington suggests something similar in his rhetorical
analysis of Edgar Huntly as a “testing out of forms” not necessarily
subjugated to any particular political or literary ends. He argues that
the narrative’s “rhythmically episodic structure, which resists any
particular ‘statement,’ ” is reproduced at the level of its sentences,
which pile clause onto clause more for the pleasure of parallelism than
for the sake of meaning. Even Edgar’s sentences sleepwalk, adding
phrases that turn into pages and “consume weeks and fill volumes”
(281) but refuse to add up to anything rational. Yet Witherington
himself, who is finely attuned to Edgar Huntly’s aesthetic project, in
the end enforces a version of Sarsefield’s critical teleology on the
novel. He classifies Edgar’s assertion that “[t]ime and reason seemed
to have dissolved the spell which made [him] deaf to the dictates
of duty and discretion” (8) as an example of the novel’s “lamentable
excesses”: “Here the sense is obscured by alliteration and wordiness,
and this example makes one wonder if the deafness Edgar claims to
have cast aside might not have been absorbed by Brown.” 26 Even
as Witherington argues that Brown’s “testing out of forms” should
not be read as necessarily leading toward anything, he enforces the
“dictates of time and reason” on this sentence in his protest against
the insistent and sense-obscuring materiality of the rhetoric. Yet the
truth of this sentence is that it is false; Edgar is mistaken; he has
neither cast aside this deafness nor succeeded in reentering the world of the rational so soon after Waldegrave’s death; thus he is susceptible to abandoning “duty and discretion” once more after catching sight of Clithero. And if this is the “sense” that the sentence makes—that is, that Edgar is not sensible—why should it not perform precisely what it describes?

The point of Edgar Huntly may finally be that there scarcely is one. The battering repetition of its alliteration, its “wildering and mazy” syntax, and its overlong and overcrowded sentences all conspire to keep the reader “in that state to which the frame is reduced by blows of a club, mercilessly and endlessly repeated” (160)—the state in which Edgar finds himself after his fall into the cave-pit. But this is, again, its project: not to aid the reader to sense but to goad her toward surrender, toward the shuddery dissolution in which the body is senselessly given over to sensation. Any critical project is ultimately a rationalist one, and the last word on rationalism is spoken, of course, by Sarsefield: “Consciousness itself is the malady; the pest; of which he only is cured who ceases to think” (277). Although Sarsefield intends this statement to refer to Clithero’s irrationality, Witherington reads it as standing in for the central problem facing the artist: “How can one create when the ultimate creation begs to be the obliteration of the evils and falsities of consciousness itself?”27 Sarsefield, however, has already answered this question: by ceasing to think. But to presume that this reply means that death is the remedy the novel endorses is to equate thinking with consciousness and consciousness with existence—to fall back into rationalism. And, contrary to what traditional readings of the novel would lead one to expect, Edgar’s most painful “fall” is not the fall into pure sensation but into rational thought. His least troubled moments are those when he ceases to think. After he wakes up in the cave, he reflects: “I was conscious, for a time, of nothing but existence. It was unaccompanied by lassitude or pain, but I felt disinclined to stretch my limbs, or raise my eyelids. My thoughts were wildering and mazy, and though consciousness was present, it was disconnected with the loco-motive or voluntary power” (159). Edgar’s transition from this painless state to the trauma and gore that subsume the rest of the novel is enacted when he again begins to make those connections—to move and to think. This scenario is repeated at another of Edgar’s brief respites, when he stops to gaze at a waterfall and glory in the beauty of the
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woods. There, he recalls, “I pondered for a while on these stupendous scenes. They ravished my attention, for a time, from considerations relating to myself; but this interval was short, and I began to measure the descent, in order to ascertain the practicability of treading it” (214). His return to practical considerations meets, of course, with “bitter disappointment”: there appears to be no way out, and eventually, driven by necessity, Edgar plunges right into the ravishing “scene,” immersing himself in the waterfall and avoiding drowning by mere chance.

Edgar’s attempts to make nature’s ornamental form serve his own pragmatic purposes are vexed and often tortuous, the cause of many of the narrative’s most painful moments. It seems disappointment can be avoided in this tale only by ceasing to think, by allowing its rhetoric to “ravish” one’s attention. Edgar Huntly implicitly confirms the antinovel polemicists’ worst fears about the genre; its most irresistible invitation to the reader is to abandon the struggle toward narrative “truth” and simply get into the view.

Of course, even in my review of the ways in which Edgar Huntly’s pleasures confound its utility, I would not suggest that the novel was not read for its “use-value” by Brown’s contemporaries. For the Gothic novel was, in fact, instrumentalized in the early American republic. By teaching its readers what to fear and how to fear it, it proved itself congenial to schemes of moral education meant to bring these lessons “home.” Nor do I believe that Brown saw himself as writing novels that would have been termed “depraved” and nihilistic in his day. In his critical writings Brown advocated a “use” for fiction that channeled its captivations toward the discovery of higher truths. Yet as Crito warns in “A Student’s Diary,” there is something in literary eloquence that ultimately limits its usefulness. In his own novels, that something works to turn rationality against itself and subordinate it to the body and its desires. Like Clithero, Edgar Huntly struggles against apprehension to the last, and to miss that point opens the reader to the kinds of disappointment suffered by Witherington and other critics, and dissipates most of the novel’s enjoyment. For although Edgar Huntly can and has been rationally read or “used,” such a reading does not come without its costs. After Edgar’s meal of raw panther, he realizes that the near fatal stomach pangs he suffered were actually “a useful effort of nature to subdue and convert to nourishment the matter I had swallowed” (168). The
power of rationalism is strong enough to tame even the body of a wild brute once Edgar has consumed it; this useful process almost kills him, however, and he declares that if he had known beforehand "the pangs to which [his] ravenous and bloody meal would give birth," he would never have begun it (168). And so it is with Brown's novel: making sense of it, ultimately, makes little sense.

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Notes

I would like to thank Lauren Berlant, Katherine Biers, Peter Coviello, and Joel Porte for their encouraging comments on earlier drafts of this essay.


6 It was precisely such a rationalist relation to texts that characterized print culture in the Revolutionary period, as Michael Warner's recent *Letters of the Republic* demonstrates. Warner argues that republican ideology emphasized the instrumentality of printed objects, viewing them as the metonymic embodiment of the public sphere. Publication was associated with impersonalness, rationality, and disinterested dedication to the national welfare. In the decades following the Revolution, however, the emergence of market capitalism, exacerbated by the excesses of the French Revolution, placed the republican ideal of a self-regulating reading public under increasing stress; the debate over the public function of the novel epitomized these concerns. While early American novels, as Warner shows through his reading of Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*, did make gestures toward publicity, novel reading tended, at the same time, to induce readers toward "a private appropriation [of a character's experiences] that is tangibly imaginary"; see Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990), 173.

7 Charles Brockden Brown, "The Editor's Address to the Public," *The Literary Magazine and American Register*, October 1803, 5.
8 The thematic and structural hallmarks of Brown's domestication of the Gothic have already been amply documented; see, for example, A. Robert Lee, "A Darkness Visible: The Case of Charles Brockden Brown," in American Horror Fiction from Brockden Brown to Stephen King, ed. Brian Docherty (New York: St. Martin's, 1990). See also Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), and Scott Bradfield, Dreaming Revolution: Transgression in the Development of American Romance (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1993), for two divergent accounts of the logic that underlies the translation between the European and American Gothic. For Fiedler, nature, as a metaphor for human nature, is substituted for society as the symbol of evil in the American Gothic, so that the Calvinist view of universal depravity replaces the image of a decaying and corrupt aristocracy. Bradfield sees much the same move being made, though his Foucaultian analytic requires the psychological tropes of the American Gothic to be continually translated back into class terms. My own reading differs from these in highlighting the stylistic rather than iconographic marks of Gothicism in Brown's novels; taking my cue from Brown himself, who advertised his fictions on the basis of their ability to "enchain the attention and ravish the souls of those who study and reflect," I address the Gothic novel as a genre whose ravishing eloquence attempts to produce a specific bodily sensation—fear—in the reader through the projection of the narrator as an eidetic screen for these sensations. The Gothic novel's prose produces a particularly sensational form of identification, prioritizing physical over mental or intellectual connection, that is better connoted by the term absorption. See Charles Brockden Brown's advertisement for Sky-Walk, quoted in The Profession of Authorship in America: The Papers of William Charvat, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Athens: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1968), 26.

9 Brown, "Editor's Address," 5.

10 I am not here attempting, by highlighting this configuration, to call for a utopia of pure pleasures outside all rational ends; nor would I argue that this is what Brown's fiction is really "about." Rather, I simply want to point to the ways in which the project of making sense of the novel, on the assumption that sensation alone is never enough, repeats and reinforces the hierarchies of ends-above-means (the productive over the pleasurable, the social over the bodily) that pervade post-Enlightenment thinking. The extent to which this view has been recapitulated in criticism of Brown's own literary work is striking. Nina Baym, for example, sees his fiction as "flawed," immature, and ultimately unproductive because of its privileging of Gothic sensationalism over tragic awe; see Baym, "A Minority Reading of Wieland," in Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown, ed. Bernard Rosenthal (Boston: G. K Hall, 1981), 87-103. In a spirited response to Baym, Jane Tompkins argues that Brown's work was designed to have not aesthetic but political effect; see "What
Happens in Wieland," in Tompkins, Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 40–61. Yet Tompkins implicitly accepts the terms of Baym’s critique in insisting upon Brown’s productivity; her reading simply shifts the field of production from art to politics. This vision of the utility of fiction allows the genre to have destabilizing effects only within the narrative, leaving unchallenged the presumably rational, instrumental relationship between author, text, and reader. It was, however, precisely the insecurity of this instrumentality that motivated post-Revolutionary anxieties about the effect of Gothic prose. Rational readers, in this view, could not be assumed; they needed to be produced and disciplined by mentors such as the “mature” Brown.

11 Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Huntly, or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1984), 5. Further citations of the novel will be given parenthetically in the text.


13 As Cathy Davidson points out, these polemicists assumed a largely female audience for the novel and worried that novel readers’ womanly virtue would be assaulted by their exposure to stories for which their own experiences offered no analogue; see Revolution and the Word.


15 Jared Gardner, “Allen Nation: Edgar Huntly’s Savage Awakening,” American Literature 66 (September 1994): 432. Gardner distances his astute reading of the nationalist parameters of Edgar Huntly’s racial conflict from previous critiques that erased the novel’s historical specificity by seeking to represent this conflict as a “timeless” one between the civilized individual and the savage within. What this distancing unfortunately obscures is the historically specific collusion of the first conflict with the second—the way that emergent racial divisions were aligned in the early years of the American republic with a call to “American identity” that read as a call to suppress the unruly desires of the body in favor of rational, republican virtue—as was visible in the debate around the novel.

Along these lines, Brown observed, in an essay written seven years after the publication of *Edgar Huntly*, that the general mass of readers could be divided into two types: those who were content to merely appreciate the shape and form of a story and those whose emphasis on a more functional type of learning led them to apply themselves to the text with a kind of "gentle violence." He comments in this context that "the ravenous appetite of Johnson for reading is expressed in a strong metaphor by Mrs. Knowles, who said, 'he knows how to read better than any one; he gets at the substance of a book directly; he tears the heart out of it'" ("Remarks on Reading," *The Literary Magazine and American Register*, March 1806, 166).


Significantly, the development of indulgence into tendency into typology can first be traced, in the early part of the nineteenth century, against the figure of the adolescent onanist, the origins of whose self-abuse were traced both to improper contact between social classes and the solitary indulgence of novel reading; see, for example, Sylvester Graham, *Lectures to Young Men* (Providence, R.I.: Weeden and Corey, 1834). For a history of the anti-onanism campaign in the American nineteenth century, see Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1980).


See Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*.

The implicit association in the mid-nineteenth century between "savage" cannibalism and that other Un speakable, homoeroticism, is detailed in Caleb Crain's "Lovers of Human Flesh": Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels," *American Literature* 66 (March 1994): 25–53.


Witherington, "'Not My Tongue Only,'" 181.