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Benjamin Franklin's famous cartoon "Join, or Die" from 1754 visually represented the separate identities of the individual colonies that also constituted an assembled identity.

disagreement about the various compromises made.

One of the canonical works of American literature, the *Federalist Papers*, was the public relations campaign on behalf of Constitutional ratification. The series of essays, primarily written by Alexander Hamilton, but assisted by James Madison and John Jay, made the case for a strong federal government to unify the individual states constituting the nation. Because the ratification ultimately happened, and because the serially published essays were later packaged as a collected **codex**, we tend to think of the document as a national one—as articulating the ambitions and ideals of an entire nation. But it is important to remember that most of the essays were published in New York, and most were written by the New Yorker Hamilton. In this way, we can see that the *Federalist* essays were actually written from a very particular regional perspective. Nonetheless, they argued for an integrity across the wide expanse of American territory and in this way became a critical document in writing a story of American unity.

In many ways, the *Federalist Papers* epitomize the project of American literature more generally in the early national period: to create a shared or unified political, social, and aesthetic identity across a population that did not yet have such a shared social, aesthetic, and cultural identity. Literature provided an important strategy with which to manufacture a “national identity” that did not yet exist in the 1790s.

## FEDERALIST POETICS

A good deal of early American poetry was designed explicitly to articulate an American exceptionalism

and to establish a shared national literary culture. Many poems were manifestly patriotic and dedicated to celebrating the new nation as federalist: as a unified and democratic assembly of heterogeneous parts. Typical, for example, is Timothy Dwight's “Columbia,” an **ode** to an **allegorical** figure of the United States: the queen, Columbia. The poem explicitly contrasts Columbia's “reign” with that of European monarchs:

*To conquest, and slaughter, let Europe aspire;  
Whelm nations in blood, and wrap cities in  
fire;  
Thy heroes the rights of mankind shall defend,  
And triumph pursue them, and glory  
attend. . . .  
On Freedom's broad basis, [your] empire shall  
rise,  
Extend with the main, and dissolve with the  
skies.<sup>11</sup>*

The poem praises the nation for its democratic politics (“rights of mankind” and “Freedom”) and it anticipates an American empire spread across the enormous territory of North America. But the poem also proposes that this American empire will be fundamentally different—more peaceful and successful—than European imperialism. However, as we have already discussed, this is a fantastical story: the expansion of the U.S. across North America was often the occasion for violence against American Indian nations (e.g., the Trail of Tears, the Seminole Wars, Black Hawk's War), against other nations (e.g., England, Mexico, Spain), and against other American settlers (e.g., Bloody Kansas).

Dwight's poem is included in one of the first anthologies to include verse by American writers, *The Beauties of Poetry*, published in Philadelphia in 1791 by Mathew Carey, a celebrated author and printer. The first half of the volume includes works by renowned and popular British writers of the eighteenth century: Alexander Pope, Oliver Goldsmith, and James Thomson. The second half is dedicated to American poets and includes work by Timothy Dwight, David Humphreys, John Trumbull, Joel Barlow, and many others. Although these American names are no longer familiar to most readers, their work constituted one of the first “schools” of poetry in the United States. These poets were called the “Connecticut Wits” or “Hartford Wits” because they all hailed from Connecticut, and they were wealthy and prominent figures in the arts, politics, and commerce. Dwight was a minister and

and yet we know almost nothing about her until several chapters into the novel. The prefatory “Advertisement” identifies the narrator as a “Lady,” but otherwise there is nothing to indicate Clara’s gender until chapter three when she tells us that she and her brother’s wife are both women. This is not an oversight on Brown’s part, but rather a clever way to disclose the egalitarianism of Clara’s upbringing. She is intelligent, well-educated, and, even though she is a young woman, economically independent. Perhaps most importantly, Clara possesses extraordinary emotional equipoise: she is not easily provoked to anger, melancholy, or fear. She is both sensible and sentimental.

### ***Theodore Wieland***

Although Clara Wieland is the novel’s narrator and protagonist, the title refers not to her, but to her brother, Theodore Wieland, whose crimes form the center piece of the plot. There is, however, nothing in the early parts of the novel to indicate Wieland’s capacity for violence. In many ways, he seems like Clara herself: she describes him as “grave, considerate, and thoughtful” (25). Like her, he is extremely intelligent and an “indefatigable student” (27). But she also observes his tendency towards a “thrilling melancholy,” and admits that she “scarcely ever knew him to laugh” (25).

### ***Father Wieland***

Clara is our narrator, and her brother is our eponymous antagonist, but the first major character to whom we are introduced is their father. Although he dies long before the central story described in the novel occurs, his presence looms large. Orphaned early in life, the elder Wieland spends his youth as an apprentice to a London trader, and then becomes attracted to a French Protestant sect, the Camisards. His faith leads him to North America to which he travels as a missionary, hoping to convert the native people to his religion. The story Clara tells about how her father inexplicably bursts into flames foreshadows all the mysterious events that follow in the novel.

### ***Catharine Wieland***

Theodore Wieland is married to Catharine Pleyel, who is described as “rich, beautiful, and contrived to blend the most bewitching softness with the most exuberant vivacity” (23). We also know that her marriage to Wieland is a good one: that “the most affectionate intimacy” exists between the two of them. They are,

Clara confesses, “born for each other” (23). Catharine is also the mother of their four children. Although Brown does not do much to develop Catharine’s character, and we know almost nothing about the children (who are only briefly referenced in chapter four), the intensity of love between Catharine and Theodore is crucial as it brings into sharper relief the irrationality and horror of his crime.

### ***Henry Pleyel***

Catharine’s brother Henry Pleyel is the final member of the foursome that constitutes the tightknit community at the novel’s center. Like the others, he is intelligent, witty, and erudite. But Clara explicitly contrasts his personality with that of her brother. Whereas Wieland is melancholy and grave, Pleyel possesses a “gaiety [that is] almost boisterous.” In the first chapters of the novel, Clara describes Pleyel as something like the life of the party: he provides “an inexhaustible fund of entertainment” (27). Clara also draws an important contrast between Wieland and Pleyel in observing that Pleyel is motivated by skepticism and doubt. None of the community subscribes to a particular denomination, but she acknowledges that her brother holds faith with “calvinistic inspiration,” which is to say, Wieland believes that God determines human life. Conversely, Pleyel is a “champion of intellectual liberty”—he believes that only human reason and action have determinate power.

### ***Francis Carwin***

Francis Carwin is the one major character who is an outsider, a stranger to the foursome. Although his voice makes an appearance in chapter four, we do not meet him as a character until chapter six when Clara announces him with trepidation and fear: “It is with a shuddering reluctance that I enter on the province of describing him” (56). She is so overcome by the task of description that her narrative shifts to a direct address to Carwin: “And thou, O most fatal and potent of mankind, in what terms shall I describe thee?” (57). But her terror does not seem to correspond to the portrait she paints of Carwin, which is of a rustic and clownish oaf: “[he] had none of that gracefulness and ease which distinguish a person with certain advantages of education from a clown. His gait was rustic and awkward. His form was ungainly and disproportioned” (57). Carwin instantly becomes mysterious to us because of this discrepancy between Clara’s attitude and his exterior appearance. And Carwin’s intrigue continues when Clara describes