

“NOT SO MUCH WRITTEN AS DREAMED”: QUAKER DREAM-WORK IN  
CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN’S *EDGAR HUNTLY*

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THESIS ABSTRACT

“NOT SO MUCH WRITTEN AS DREAMED”: QUAKER DREAM-WORK IN  
CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN’S *EDGAR HUNTLY*

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The religious element of Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-walker* (1799), and, specifically, the novel’s relationship with Quakerism, is often misunderstood, understated, or simply ignored by critics. In fact, Brown’s Quaker background—his devout parents, strict Quaker schooling, and a naturally inquiring mind when it came to religious matters—profoundly effected his work on many levels. Dream-work, the process of reciting and interpreting dreams, was an important way in which Quakers attempted to find meaning in their shared experience. This work attempts to redress this imbalance in current Brown criticism by resituating *Edgar Huntly* within a framework of Quaker dream-work and literary style.

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**“NOT SO MUCH WRITTEN AS DREAMED”: QUAKER DREAM-WORK IN CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN’S *EDGAR HUNTLY*.**

Approximately half-way through Charles Brockden Brown’s fourth novel, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799), the eponymous hero wakes up to find himself mysteriously stuck in a deep pit. It is pitch black (the pit being inside a cave), and Huntly is badly bruised with no recollection of how he came to be there. After realizing his ravenous hunger and fearing that he may “perish with famine,”<sup>1</sup> he laboriously clammers out of the pit and, while sitting in the dark contemplating his fate, has the opportunity to kill and eat a panther, which temporarily assuages his hunger. However, his troubles have not yet ended and he is next “assailed by the torments of thirst” (161). He stumbles around the cave, follows the ever-distant sound of running water, and eventually sees a “glimmering of light” (162), which, as he approaches, becomes more “vivid and permanent” (163). This light is from a fire, kindled by Indians at the mouth of the cave, and signifies Huntly’s exit from the dark recesses of the cave (though not by any means the end of his trials).

This scene is one of the most significant in Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* as, from this point onward, the hero becomes embroiled in a fiercely adventurous journey from this cave back to his hometown. Along the way, he encounters “savage” Indians, rescues a captive girl, and defies death enough times for Leslie Fiedler to term Huntly “the most



often reborn of heroes.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is also this scene which marks an observable change in Brown’s narrative style as his hero all but discards his favored elaborate language and instead explains the events which he experiences after the cave scene in cohesive units of plain language, unadulterated by the archaic, complex rhetoric he uses prior to this scene.

The passage, set in the wilderness of post-colonial Pennsylvania, has been interpreted in a myriad of different ways. However, what is surprising is that the passage is seldom read as having religious significance, many critics favoring a psychoanalytical reading of Huntly’s adventures which posits the cave as a metaphor for Huntly’s tortured psyche.<sup>3</sup> Scholarship on Brown has also focused on the obvious marks of influence in his work, in terms of both philosophy and style, of figures such as William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers,<sup>4</sup> with some (Brown himself among them) also claiming that he was the first author to attempt a form of American gothic.<sup>5</sup> And, although these influences are undeniable, it is misleading to end the list there.

Brown was born, raised, and educated as a Quaker, and to say that this was not among the major influences for his fiction, would be a mistake. There have been sporadic attempts to provide a more Quaker-centric reading of Brown’s life and works, most recently and successfully by Peter Kafer; however, critics have yet to credit Brown’s work with being fundamentally influenced by his Quakerism, right down to his use of metaphor and style—issues that have long perplexed the student of Brown’s fiction. It is this fundamental link between Brown’s writing and Quakerism that I intend to demonstrate, specifically by focusing on *Edgar Huntly*. In this way, I hope to contribute to the observations of Howard Hintz, who stated in *The Quaker Influence in*

*American Literature* that, instead of focusing on Brown's more obvious influences, "it is a more important critical question...to ask what the influences were which preceded that of the eighteenth century philosophical idealists." I wholeheartedly agree with him when he writes that "in seeking the answer, one is led inevitably to Brown's Quaker background and training."<sup>6</sup>

In fact, much of *Edgar Huntly* can be reinterpreted in terms of its relationship with Quaker dream-work and the functions and traditions which surround this phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Dreams and visions were vastly important to Quaker culture because they were regarded as a message from God; dreams were often transcribed (sometimes even published), circulated among Friends, and interpreted by each group for meaning, on which the individual or group then acted as they saw fit.<sup>8</sup>

We know that dreams play an integral part in *Edgar Huntly*; after all, the novel is sub-titled *Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*, and the actions of the sleeping, both mental and physical, are of chief concern in the novel. *Huntly* admits to several dreams which both influence his physical actions and invite the reader into the spiritual conflict playing out within him. Indeed, it is after a particularly violent dream about his dead friend, Waldegrave, that the reader is informed of the extent of *Huntly*'s spiritual condition, which then opens up the possibility that the remainder of the narrative is charting a conversion of sorts. One evening, after chasing Clithero through the wilds of Norwalk, *Huntly* falls into a fitful sleep where he dreams of his dead friend, Waldegrave:

...the image of Waldegrave flitted before me. Methought the sentiment that impelled him to visit me, was not affection of complacency, but inquietude and anger. Some service or duty remained to be performed by

me, which I had culpably neglected: to inspirit my zeal, to awaken my remembrance, to incite me to the performance of this duty, did this glimmering messenger, this half-indignant apparition, come. (124)

This dream leads to a significant revelation regarding Huntly's spiritual state. He tells the reader that Waldegrave had, "at different periods, different systems of opinion, on topics connected with religion and morals"(125) which involved "deify[ing] necessity," "destroy[ing] the popular distinctions between the soul and the body," and "dissolv[ing] the supposed connection between the moral condition of man, anterior and subsequent to death" (125). These tenets he would defend "with all the fullness of conviction" in letters between himself and Huntly, who then reveals that "he had contributed to instill into me" the same beliefs (126).<sup>9</sup> Waldegrave subsequently experiences a "revolution...in his mind," but Huntly did not share in his experience and admits that, despite his attempts to cure Huntly of "the poison" of his letters, Huntly "did not entirely adjure the creed" which Waldegrave had defended in his letters (126).

Huntly interprets the above dream as being Waldegrave's exhortations to renege on his promise to transcribe the "depraved" letters for his fiancée and destroy them lest his fiancée be indoctrinated with the same ideals. However, it could also be interpreted as Waldegrave encouraging Huntly to renounce his former ways and return to piety. After all, one of the aims of the "glimmering messenger" was to hearten his "zeal," a conspicuously weighted word. Soon after the dream, Huntly, in his first bout of sleepwalking, hides the letters in the attic of his uncle's house. It could be argued that this, as Huntly's first deed as a somnambulist, was actually intended to protect the letters from his conscious self and therefore subvert the authority of Waldegrave. However, it is

revealed later in the novel that, had the letters remained in the attic, “the vernal rains and summer heats” would have “sensibly destroyed them” (250). What I suggest is that Huntly’s dream and his subconscious destruction of the letters is the first step on his spiritual journey, demonstrating the importance of dreams in the narrative of *Edgar Huntly*.

Another clue as to the importance of dreams in Huntly’s tale is the heavy use of metaphor throughout the novel. One of the modes of interpreting the dreams and visions of Quakers was the use of metaphor, and Quakers developed several key metaphors which were then used in sermons, journals, and the interpretation of dreams. Michael P. Graves identifies several of those key metaphors as they are present in the sermons of early Quaker preachers.<sup>10</sup> These metaphors can also be applied to Quaker dreams and visions because of the communal nature of Quaker literature. Quakers believe that God reveals Himself to His followers through the medium of the “Inward Light,” which shines in all men but is only available to those who have been convinced of its existence. Because of this belief in direct and personal revelation, what is experienced by one member of the Society is communally accepted as God’s word by everyone in the Society.<sup>11</sup> The five metaphor clusters that Graves identifies are light/dark, hunger/thirst, the pilgrimage, the voice, and the seed, and, although it could be argued that these tropes are not unique to Quakers (indeed, all five of them are often found in Christian writing of every denomination), these five are the most important to Quakers, which makes their presence in Quaker dreams and visions significant. Of the five metaphors Graves identifies, three play a major role in *Edgar Huntly*: Light and dark play a significant role in the novel, through the image of the black cave, the coming and going of night which

marks the vague progression of time, and the way in which light and dark is used overtly to symbolize spiritual knowledge and obscurity, respectively. Huntly's journey is also marked by various degrees of hunger and thirst, to satisfy which he is forced to overcome several obstacles. Lastly, the central portion of the novel reads much like a traditional spiritual pilgrimage, with Huntly using specifically biblical language to describe his journey.

This use of metaphor, combined with the dream-like sequences which permeate the novel, lends strong credence to the claim that *Edgar Huntly* could have been influenced to some extent by the dreams and visions that Brown experienced or heard of through his early life. Quakers often blurred the boundaries between metaphor and reality in their writing and, as Brown employs these metaphors in his novel, he plays with this tradition of metaphor use and allegory. In this way, Huntly's exploits previous to, during, and after the cave section could be viewed in terms of a religious conversion of sorts. This makes the presence of dream-work in *Edgar Huntly* important for two reasons. Firstly, it reveals a plot within the novel, and an aspect of Huntly's character, hitherto ignored by critics but significant if we approach the novel from the viewpoint of Brown's Quakerism. Whether the conversion that Huntly undergoes is autobiographical for Brown, based on the visions of others, or simply a fictional manifestation of Huntly's wavering piety, is unclear. But what is clear is that it conforms to the patterns of a Quaker conversion, informed by the tropes used by other Quakers to describe their dreams and visions. With this in mind, the action following the cave scene in *Edgar Huntly* becomes less the pessimistic descent into madness that many critics have termed it, and more a story of hope through religious regeneration.

Secondly, Brown was consciously exploring and developing the genre of the American novel. He writes about this conscious divide in American and European literature in his “To the Public”: “that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, may be readily conceived” (1). It can be seen, then, in the way in which Brown weaves the patterns of dream-work and visions into his novel and specifically employs the metaphors, visions, and style that were vital to the Quaker culture, that Quakerism played an important part in the young writer’s life, to the extent that it informed his attempt to fashion an American novel.

By first placing Brown’s life within the context of early American Quakerism, and then elucidating on the use of dream-work, metaphor, and style that Brown uses in *Edgar Huntly*, I hope to demonstrate that, far from being the confused and dislocated book many claim it to be, the majority of the action in *Edgar Huntly* involves the religious conflict of its central protagonist. In this way, I will resituate the elements of Brown’s writing which critics have been apt to denounce as mere deficiencies in his craft as being in keeping with the Quaker writing tradition and show that Brown’s work is profoundly influenced by his Quakerism.

### **Charles Brockden Brown: Quaker**

Charles Brockden Brown was, to all intents and purposes, the epitome of the moderately wealthy Philadelphia Quaker. Born to Elijah and Mary Armitt Brown on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1771, he was descended from a long line of relatively prestigious Quakers.<sup>12</sup> Mary Armitt’s ancestors had been among the first to colonize Pennsylvania, emigrating

with William Penn as part of his “Holy Experiment.” By the time she met Elijah Brown in 1758, her family were successful merchants of fairly high social standing in the community.<sup>13</sup> Elijah Brown’s roots were no less weighty. His great-grandfather, James Browne, settled in Burlington, New Jersey, a strongly Quaker community, in 1677 (five years before Penn’s expedition) in order to escape the persecution of Charles II in England. The Browns eventually migrated across the border to Maryland, and Elijah settled in Philadelphia after being sent to the Friends’ Grammar School and subsequently obtaining an apprenticeship with a merchant in the city.<sup>14</sup> Elijah and Mary were married in 1761 in the Arch Street Meeting House in Philadelphia and over the years had six children: James, Joseph, Armitt, Charles Brockden, Elijah, and Jane Elizabeth. Both Armitt and Elijah became clerks in the Treasury Department, while James and Joseph became successful merchants, traveling the world and bringing back the maps and books that adorned the Brown household on South Second Street.<sup>15</sup>

However, Brown was not born into the utopia that his ancestors had envisioned Pennsylvania becoming when they crossed the Atlantic at the end of the seventeenth century. Despite the fact that Quakers had colonized the area and wielded significant political power into the eighteenth century, their religious and moral convictions had been severely tested over the century.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the late-eighteenth century, and especially during the Revolutionary War, suspicion surrounding the actions and political allegiances of the Quakers grew. Tensions came to a head in the summer of 1777 when, based on fabricated evidence which implied that they aided the British, twenty Philadelphia Friends, including Charles Brockden Brown’s father, Elijah Brown, were arrested for disloyalty to the American government and exiled to Virginia. The charges

against them were soon deemed to be false, and they were released in April of 1778, but the event profoundly affected the Quaker community in Pennsylvania, especially the Brown household.<sup>17</sup> It solidified the community's already substantial feelings of alienation and provided the impetus for a revival of a more pure form of Quakerism. After the Revolutionary War, Quakerism went through a reformation known as the Quaker Revival. Friends sought to return to a more pious state, separating themselves from "alien influences" such as politics, and instead focusing on quietism, plainness of dress and personal habits, and an education system that stressed piety and religious teachings. It was in this atmosphere of growing religious regeneration and isolation that Brown began his formative years and entered the Friends' Latin School in 1783, aged twelve.<sup>18</sup>

At the time that Brown was enrolled, the schoolmaster was Robert Proud, a Quaker from Yorkshire, who taught at the school from 1761 to 1790 and who, though famed amongst Quakers for both his piety and classical training, was no republican, describing the continent as "this accursed place" and always contemplating a move back across the Atlantic.<sup>19</sup> Brown thrived under the tutelage of Proud and, although he was given a comparably worldly education, the atmosphere of Quaker schools in the years following the Quaker Revival was unquestionable pious. Robert P. Moses notes how, in this period, "Friends' idea of a good education...was to structure it so as to prevent outside influence from contaminating their children's minds. This guarded education was an education in faith, first stressing certain Quaker and Puritan values, and then the tools of language and numbers."<sup>20</sup>



In 1787, aged 16, he left the Friends' Latin School and began an apprenticeship as a lawyer for Alexander Wilcocks. Despite the prestige of the apprenticeship and possible expense incurred by Brown's family, the road Brown had started to follow was not looked upon favorably by either the Meeting or Brown himself, neither party relishing the inevitable situation when Brown would be asked to defend an untruth. Although Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, arguably Brown's greatest literary influence, would not be published in America until 1795, he was showing early signs that his Quaker sensibility for justice was difficult to reconcile with the mercenary reality of the law.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Brown was becoming increasingly passionate about writing and in 1787 joined the Belle Lettres Club, a mostly-Quaker society (including friends from the Latin School, Joseph Bringhurst and John Davidson) that met to debate the political, philosophical, and literary issues of the day and to exchange poems, essays, and stories. It was in this environment that Brown's creativity was coaxed and nurtured, and before the dissolution of the Belle Lettres Club in 1793 (presumably from causes related to the yellow fever epidemic sweeping through Philadelphia in that year), Brown had quit his legal apprenticeship to follow the path of a man of letters.

In the years that followed, Brown moved to New York and, in the company of non-Quakers, many of whom were committed to the ideals of Deism and Atheism, he began to question more critically the consequences of his faith. His religious ponderings became the subject of letters both to and from his childhood Quaker friend, Joseph Bringhurst, with whom he remained close friends after his move to New York. Brown wrote in October of 1795:

I can make no scruple to answer all your questions in the affirmative [:] “I really think Christianity, that is the belief of the divinity of Christ and future retribution, have [sic] been pernicious to mankind? That it has and does destroy friendship and benevolence? That it has created war and engendered hatred, and Entailed inexpressible calamities on mankind....” I answer that these effects have flowed from the belief in the divinity of Christ and a belief in future retribution... I once thought, as possibly, you now think that religious belief were desirable, even if it were erroneous. I am now of a different opinion, and believe that utility must always be coincident to truth.<sup>22</sup>

Although Brown is certainly sporting with Bringhurst to a certain extent (Kafer identifies the fact that they communicated using a “personal language and a cultural code” that was foreign to onlookers<sup>23</sup>), his new life in New York did involve some serious questioning of the religious doctrines he had been raised with, if not quite the abandonment of them.

It was during these first five years in New York, from 1795 to 1800, that Brown experienced his most creative spurt, culminating in four novels in the space of eighteen months.<sup>24</sup> He wrote of his burgeoning imagination: “When I am sufficiently excited to write, all my ideas flow naturally and irresistibly through the medium of sympathies which steep them in shade,”<sup>25</sup> which involves the interesting implication that his ideas are full of light and then dulled as they flowed through his mind and onto the page. This, of course, is in keeping with the Quaker doctrine of the “Inward Light” through which Quakers believe that God reveals himself to man. Unlike the Calvinists’ doctrine of limited atonement, the Quaker doctrine of the light of Christ, the Inward (or Inner) Light,

shines in everyone; it is the realization and belief in that light, known as “convincement” as opposed to conversion (which is the word used for the resolution of the spiritual conflict), that provides salvation. The exact nature of the Inward Light is mysterious and, since it is experienced individually, very much open to interpretation among Friends. What is generally agreed, though, is that the Light is not innate in humans; instead, it is a gift bestowed on them by God and is evidence of God’s direct influence on human life.<sup>26</sup>

Quakerism played an important role in the young writer’s life; even after his move to the more cosmopolitan New York, he still maintained much of the Quaker sensibility that had been instilled in him during his youth in Philadelphia. Those sensibilities inevitably crept into his writing, whether through overt debate of Quaker doctrine—benevolence in *Arthur Mervyn*; the Voice in *Wieland*—or more subtly, in his unique style of writing—free-flowing and largely unedited. In *Edgar Huntly*, Brown demonstrates another level of Quaker influence, that of dream-work and metaphor.

### ***Memoirs of a Sleep-walker***

Termed by some as “a botched Gothic thriller,” *Edgar Huntly; or Memoirs of a Sleep-walker* (1799) is generally viewed as an interesting psychological tale with serious structural flaws (like many of Brown’s novels)<sup>27</sup> as the central protagonist, Edgar Huntly follows Clithero (who is almost certainly insane) in a slow descent into madness.<sup>28</sup> Modern critics have noted that the novel is replete with symbolism and, most famously, “the tangled confusion of the untouched wilderness” can quite easily be “read as an index to the hero’s mind.”<sup>29</sup> Certainly, the symbolism of Huntly’s various expeditions into the wilds of Pennsylvania— precipitous cliffs, deep chasms, murderous panthers—seems

fairly prominent in the narrative. In fact, it would be difficult to claim that Brown did not intend for there to be an element of “abnormal” psychology in his novel, as there is with every one of his preceding novels. However, the symbols which critics have traditionally used to map Huntly’s psychological landscape could quite easily be adapted to map his spiritual landscape. If we read Huntly’s exploits as having been influenced by Quaker dream-work, this opens up the text to a subtly different interpretation, one in which Brown utilizes traditional Quaker metaphors to create a spiritualized narrative for Huntly. Not only does this reading add to the tapestry of meanings that Brown creates in his novel, but it also provides us with clues as to why he uses vastly different styles throughout his novel, skipping from a highly formal, Latinate diction, to a much plainer style. Critics have long been at a loss to account for these inconsistencies in Brown’s writing, but if we give his Quaker influence the credit that it is due, it becomes apparent that they are in some respects a manifestation of his Quaker background, and are also featured in canonical Quaker writings, such as George Fox’s and Stephen Crisp’s *Journals* (1694).<sup>30</sup>

The novel follows the narrative of Edgar Huntly, the hero of the tale, as he embarks on a journey to investigate the “bloody and mysterious” (6) death of his best friend (and brother of his fiancée), Waldegrave, who was killed near an elm tree not far from his uncle’s house in a fictional district of Pennsylvania, Norwalk.<sup>31</sup> On approaching the tree one evening in the hopes of finding the murderer should he return to the scene of the crime, Huntly spots a sobbing man digging beneath the elm. He attempts to engage the man but is blatantly and bafflingly ignored. It is later discovered that the man is Clithero Edny, an Irish immigrant who works for Huntly’s neighbor, and that Clithero is

a sleepwalker. The next night, Huntly follows him again to the elm, after which Clithero leads him in a frenetic ramble through the wilderness of Norwalk, only to disappear into a cave, into which Huntly is too scared to enter after him.

Huntly, although now convinced of Clithero's guilt in killing Waldegrave, is moved by compassion and benevolence to confront the man and discern the motive behind his crime. At this point, the narrative of the novel passes to Clithero as he tells his story. What Huntly finds out is that Clithero is, in fact, not guilty of the murder of Waldegrave. However, he does carry the burden of considerable guilt over the supposed death of his benefactress back in Ireland, whom he assumes died as a result of him killing her twin brother.<sup>32</sup>

Soon after Clithero relates his story to Huntly, he disappears into the wilderness and Huntly sets out numerous times to find him. When Huntly wakes up mysteriously trapped in a cave, the Huntly-Clithero story ends and Huntly embarks on his own journey from the darkness of the cave to, eventually, the light of his father-figure, Sarsefield's, chamber. At the beginning of this journey, he encounters a band of Indians and a girl whom they have captured at the mouth of the cave; Huntly is forced to kill one of the Indians in order to escape and rescue the girl. After making their way to a small hut in the woods (later discovered to be the abode of Queen Mab, an Indian woman Huntly befriended in his youth), Huntly kills three more Indians before fainting from exhaustion at the sight of white settlers, whom Huntly supposes to be their rescuers. However, the settlers misinterpret Huntly's swoon and leave him in the wilderness for dead. He then spends the majority of his journey traversing through the wilderness in an attempt to

return home, the Indians hunting him seemingly from the cave all the way to his destination. By the end of his journey, he has killed the entire group of Indians.

However, the story does not end with Huntly's return home. Sarsefield informs Huntly that Clithero's Irish benefactor is not in fact dead but is alive and well and living in New York as his wife. Huntly insists that Clithero must be informed of this news to alleviate his guilt and, despite vehement remonstrations from Sarsefield, resolves to tell Clithero the whereabouts of Mrs. Ludloe (now Mrs. Sarsefield). Unfortunately, Clithero is indeed insane and promptly sets off to New York to finish the job he failed at in Ireland. He is intercepted, but the anticipation of his visit causes Mrs. Sarsefield to miscarry. As he is being transported to an asylum in Philadelphia, he attempts to escape by jumping over-board but, as the crew begin to chase after him, takes his own life instead. The novel ends with the final word given by Sarsefield in a letter to Huntly: "With the life of this wretch, let our regrets and our forebodings terminate.... May this be the last arrow in the quiver of adversity! Farewell!"(285).

### **Dream-work and Metaphor**

Dreams and dream-work were vastly important to Quaker culture both in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century because of their association with the Voice of God. In *Night Journeys: the Power of Dreams in Transatlantic Quaker Culture*, Carla Gerona demonstrates how Quakers "thought of dreaming as an especially powerful spiritual experience"<sup>33</sup> and that many Friends "converted, took orders, were baptized, prepared for death, and found penance by way of dreams."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, dreams provided motivation for both individuals and the Quaker society as a whole as transcripts of

dreams were published (under the watchful eye of the Second Day Morning Meeting which, after 1672, regulated all Quaker publications<sup>35</sup>) and circulated as didactic works revealing the experiences and lessons of the Voice of God; visions (while either sleeping or awake) feature prominently in the works of most Quaker writers. In the Revolutionary period, dreams took on a new significance as dream-work often offered the support Friends needed to believe in a controversial pacifist stance which brought persecution on so many levels. As Gerona states, “in a community that valued and sought consensus during these troubling times, dreams and accounts of dreams continued to provide an especially effective platform to play out ideas and attempt to influence others.”<sup>36</sup>

Is this, then, what Brown is attempting in his novel? Is he using the narratives of dreams to “play out ideas” and perhaps even “influence others”? There is no doubt that the concept of dreaming plays an important part in *Edgar Huntly*, and there are several points in the novel where Huntly implies that he is dreaming. For example, when he awakes in the cave he informs the reader that he “existed, as it were, in a wakeful dream,” (154) and further into his trials in the cave he becomes more convinced of this: “Surely...I was still asleep, this was merely a tormenting vision, or madness had seized me, and the darkness that environed and the hunger that afflicted me, existed only in my own distempered imagination.” (156) Although Huntly does not go so far as to say that he was actually dreaming, there are several clues throughout the novel that lead the reader to question whether Huntly physically experienced all that he claims to have experienced. The most striking clue revolves around the time frame of the action, which is deliberately blurred by Brown. Whereas Huntly maintains, based on the information given him from the frontierswoman, that he spent two and a half days in the cave and

twelve hours in his journey from the cave to home (201), Sarsefield claims that only 24 hours elapsed between Huntly leaving home and his being discovered outside Deb's hut (244), implying that Huntly spent only a few hours in the cave. Despite the repeated criticism of Brown that his novels are poorly organized and frequently introduce elements that are not expounded on, this discrepancy is probably not due to a deficiency in Brown's story telling ability. The gratuitous inconsistency is more likely an indication that the majority of Huntly's tale is allegorical and perhaps influenced by a dream.<sup>37</sup> The telling of this dream (or series of dreams) must fulfill a purpose, and it could be argued that Brown is attempting to teach his readers something about his own spiritual journey through the narrative of Huntly.

The didactic element in much of Brown's work has been recognized by critics interested in Brown's curious description of himself as a "moral painter,"<sup>38</sup> and, while it is important to take into account the social dimension of Brown's apparent dream-work, I believe that his use of dreams has more immediate value to Brown as an individual. This is where I disagree with Gerona, who recognizes the importance of dream-work in Brown's works but claims that "[Brown's] dreamers did not necessarily seek to illuminate a religious path or revitalize a religious society."<sup>39</sup> I believe, as suggested above, that Brown explores Huntly's spiritual condition (and, eventually, his conversion) through a pattern of dreams which begin in the pit. In this way, Brown's work can be situated within a corpus of Quaker dream narratives that were circulated during the Revolutionary period and which "increasingly reflected the newer view that a life should be seen as a patterned drama rather than a series of acts."<sup>40</sup>



The phenomenon of dreams initiating conversion experiences for Quakers was well documented by the eighteenth century; in fact, Gerona writes of two dreams that were published in the late eighteenth century and which could have provided Brown with inspiration for certain aspects of his novel. In 1785, Deborah Smith Collins dreamt that she was lost in the wilderness and had to negotiate steep hills, deep valleys, and dark pits on her hands and knees in an unknown place “so very dark, and the way so bad, as to make us tremble and shake with fear.”<sup>41</sup> Four years later, in 1789, Thomas J. had a dream whereby he was walking with his children in the wilderness when a monster appeared and informed them that they “didn’t belong” there. Thomas J., scared, took his children back into the dark woods and eventually found a path that led to “a distant light.” When he showed the dream to his minister, he urged Thomas J. to “keep on the narrow path, avoid the wilderness, and turn to God.”<sup>42</sup> We also know that Brown himself recorded and told others of his dreams. He wrote to his childhood friend, Joseph Bringhurst, in 1793 to tell of a dream he had. He dreamt that he and his friend were “wandering in the region of Romance” on their way to worship “some divinity.” They eventually came upon the temple after making their way “through many wild, unknown and dangerous regions,” but they discovered that the temple was on the other side of a stream. In Brown’s dream, Bringhurst carried him across the river in his arms but when they reached the other side,

a gigantic knight, arrayed in black armor and of fierce and terrible  
mein...rushed suddenly out of the neighbouring forest and seizing me  
who was speechless with afright placed me before him on a steed, who

like himself was coal black, and inspite of my cries and struggles, road furiously away with me into the wood.

Brown then goes on to describe how Bringhurst stood on the bank, “exhibiting marks of the utmost horror and despair,” and eventually, when he thought Brown was “irretrievably lost,” attempted to drown himself in the stream. He was stopped by his mother, who pulled him back.<sup>43</sup>

These dreams bear an obvious resemblance to Huntly’s story, and it is possible that Brown thought of them as he was writing either *Edgar Huntly* or its unpublished predecessor, *Sky-walk*, from which critics claim much of the material for *Edgar Huntly* came.<sup>44</sup> However, what is perhaps more likely is that the images in these dreams—darkness, the wilderness, a distant light, the divisionary stream—were in fact common to many dreams of this period and became staple metaphors for the struggle of convincement.

This supposition gains strength when one looks at the pattern of Quaker metaphors used in sermons and journals in the seventeenth century. As mentioned above, the five key metaphors common to most sermons printed in the seventeenth century were (and are) especially important to Quakers because of the innate complexity and mystery of the Inward Light and personal revelation; metaphor ‘bridges the gap,’ as it were, between an indescribable experience—direct revelation in any form—and the audience.<sup>45</sup> However, the use of metaphor in Quaker writing was rarely straightforward. In the many narratives and journals of the early Quakers, it is not always clear where the dreams end and the reality begins, and for Quakers, this sharp division between sleeping and waking lives was often not appropriate. Because they attempted to live their everyday lives “in

the Light,” they believed that God influenced their actions constantly—whether sleeping or awake—and this was communicated in their writing by a blurring in the distinction between metaphor and reality.<sup>46</sup> Quaker scholars have noted that, by the seventeenth century, “the body had become scripture in the Quaker imagination”<sup>47</sup> and that “when a Friend was moved corporeally to language, the body became the text.”<sup>48</sup>

Keeping in mind the Quaker respect of dreams and visions, as well as their reliance on metaphor to construct communal meaning, it is of little surprise that Charles Brockden Brown, a thoughtful (if not a little doubting) Quaker, should write a novel, abounding in metaphor, about a character who sleepwalks. Indeed, it could be argued that it is through sleepwalking (that is, a physical act associated with sleep) that man can act out his dreams and turn the metaphor into reality. If we are to read *Edgar Huntly*, then, as at least partly inspired by the dreams and visions that Brown heard and perhaps experienced in his youth, is it significant that, of the “five key metaphors” that Graves identifies—light/dark, hunger/thirst, pilgrimage, voice, and seed—three play a major part in his *Memoirs of a Sleep-walker*.<sup>49</sup>

### **“What light has burst upon my ignorance of myself!”**

Graves describes the metaphor of light and dark in traditional Quaker writing as being “so pervasive that it is impossible to understand other clusters of metaphor without understanding the early Quaker vision of light and dark.”<sup>50</sup> Predictably, in the sermons that Graves surveyed, and other instances of popular Quaker writing, light is identified with good and dark with evil, and many preachers “relied upon the tension” of exhibiting the “light-dark antithesis.”<sup>51</sup> It is fitting then, that the binary opposition between light

and dark is the most dominant feature of Brown's work, and, in particular, of *Edgar Huntly*.

This has not, of course, gone unnoticed by critics; however, most tend to provide a secular reading of the light/dark dichotomy and disregard its possible religious significance.<sup>52</sup> One need look little further than the opening pages of the novel to find an example of the light metaphor and evidence that Huntly's tale pertains to a spiritual experience: "What light has burst upon my ignorance of myself...!", Huntly proclaims in the opening chapter, "How sudden and enormous the transition from uncertainty to knowledge!" (6). Huntly is writing here in hindsight of his experience (the narrative, like all Brown's novels, is written in epistolary form, in this case from Huntly to his fiancée, Mary Waldegrave), and the exclamation relates the concept of light to knowledge. Bernard points out that, through this phrase, Brown "introduces light and dark and understanding and confusion immediately in the book."<sup>53</sup> This is not entirely true, however, for Brown makes no mention of dark in this passage, only light. Also, assuming that Brown is using the terms "uncertainty" and "knowledge" as synonyms of "confusion" and "understanding" is problematic. For Brown, a Quaker who has been urged all his life to "weigh his words," this kind of ambiguity with so significant a word as "knowledge" seems unlikely.<sup>54</sup> What I would suggest is that Huntly here is declaring his transition from the darkness of his uncertainty regarding the presence of God to the light of his knowledge of God. In this way, Brown situates his novel within the semantic and thematic framework of Quaker visions, specifically those relating to conviction or conversion.

The most obvious and reoccurring representation of the light/dark metaphor is “the pit,” a place where light does not exist. Huntly is lured into the pit several times in the novel, mostly by Clithero Edny, the guilt-ridden Irishman. Clithero has long been identified by critics as Huntly’s alter-ego, either metaphorically (i.e., he is a character in the story who represents the alter-ego)<sup>55</sup> or actually (i.e., he exists in the story as a figment of Huntly’s imagination)<sup>56</sup> and this is an interpretation with which I fully concur. Whether he is “real” or “imaginary,” it is obvious that, through the search for Clithero, Huntly becomes further embroiled in the darkness.

When Huntly first chases Clithero, while not fully aware of who he is, Clithero ends the chase by “plung[ing] into the darkness” of a nearby cave, and, as mentioned in the synopsis, Huntly is afraid to follow him and so waits, eventually returning home disappointed. The next time Huntly follows Clithero he again encounters the problem of the cave. It is the same cave and Huntly again faces the same dilemma of whether to follow him or not. Interestingly, Huntly has not actually seen Clithero enter the cave as he did the preceding night. Instead, he assumes that this is the route that Clithero must have taken, since it is the same as that which he had taken the previous night. So Huntly volunteers to enter the darkness, but with the optimism that it is “an avenue, terminating in an opening” (94). When he penetrates the cave he is forced to enter on his hands and knees (a mirror of Deborah Smith Collin’s dream where she wanders the wilderness on her hands and knees) and soon “the light disappear[s]” and he finds himself “in the dunnest obscurity” (95). Again, “obscurity” here is a word that cannot be automatically used as a synonym for plain darkness. It was used in that sense in especially the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it is also has the more common meaning of not

being clearly known or understood or even, though this meaning was obsolete by the time Brown was writing, lack of spiritual understanding or enlightenment. Therefore, Brown once again juxtaposes, as he did in the opening pages, the concepts of light and lack of spiritual knowledge.

The image of the cave, which occurs frequently throughout the narrative, has been identified by critics as the “symbol of the mind possessed”<sup>57</sup> and “an enigma within an enigma.”<sup>58</sup> Doubtless it is one of the strongest images in the novel, but I would suggest that it represents the embodiment of darkness as a spiritual concept, possibly in addition to these previous readings. Until this point in the narrative, Huntly has always entered the cave and the darkness while following Clithero; in other words, Clithero has always led him into the darkness. However, soon after the violent dream about Waldegrave, Huntly finds himself alone in the dark with no way out and with no-one to follow, and this is infinitely more terrifying.

By Chapter 16, during which the entirety of the cave action takes place, Huntly has abandoned his search for Clithero; indeed, the Clithero-Huntly story disappears from the mainframe of the narrative at this point, only to return, somewhat clumsily, at the end of the novel. It is in this chapter that the image of the cave (or pit) realizes its full potential as the home of darkness, or lack of knowledge of Christ, and, therefore, subsequent to this chapter, the cave is used as a metaphor for returning to the darkness, or, to utilize the language of conversion theory, the crisis stage. The crisis stage is the point at which the old, sinful “self” rebels against its inevitable assimilation into society’s definition of “self,” the completion of which religious psychologists term the “conversion.”<sup>59</sup> This stage in the conversion process is marked by attempts to return to

familiar, sinful ways (commonly referred to as “backsliding”), and can be clearly viewed symbolically through Huntly’s relationship with the cave. What Huntly experiences while in the cave (primarily, the “torments” of hunger and thirst, which will be discussed below) can be interpreted in terms of religious symbolism and, therefore, his return to “the air and the light” is significant. Indeed, despite the fact that critics have rejected the direct influence of religion in Brown’s tale,<sup>60</sup> Huntly certainly considers the possibility of Divine intervention when he proclaims that “the chance was almost miraculous that led me to this opening” (169). And, once again, Huntly immediately rejoices and emphasizes the contrast between light as knowledge and dark as its antithesis: “the influence of the moon, which had now gained the zenith, and whose luster dazzled my long benighted senses, cannot be adequately described” (169), “benighted” here meaning both affected by the night and, when used figuratively, a state of moral darkness.

In keeping with the conversion theory outlined above, the image of the cave and its darkness reappear twice. Its first reappearance comes in the guise of a place of refuge as, faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles which impede him quenching his thirst (more on the significance of this later), Huntly considers “re-enter[ing] the cave, and tak[ing] shelter in the darksome recesses from which [he] had emerged” (171). Shortly following this, however, the cave takes on a more apocalyptic significance as Huntly, although a relatively safe distance from the cave, begins to doubt that his journey is worthwhile (he believes that his family has been killed in his absence) and admits that “the idea was suddenly suggested of returning, with the utmost expedition, to the cavern” even though “the ultimate event to [himself] would surely be fatal” (179). It is here, then, that Huntly struggles with the implications of his escape from the darkness and his rebirth

into the light. While at first the darkness seems comforting and safe, as Huntly moves further away physically and spiritually, it becomes clear to him that any attempt to return to the darkness will result in his death, real or metaphoric.

Huntly does not return to the cave, nor does he view with the same fear and consternation he experiences earlier in the novel, the coming and going of night. He is no longer “immersed in darkness” from which there seems no escape, and, although he is subjected to yet more trials, most of which occur at night, once Huntly decides definitively to walk away from the cave and the darkness, the light-dark imagery ceases to play an important part in the narrative of his journey. That is, of course, until the end of his journey, when Huntly spies a “light gleam[ing]” from a house near his uncle’s. The light belongs to Sarsefield, Huntly’s mentor and father-figure. Significantly, when Sarsefield enters the chamber, his shadow is “precluded by the position of the light” (231) and, therefore, the figure emits only light, no darkness. Huntly has successfully progressed from the complete darkness of the cave to the complete light of Sarsefield and thus completed the “transition from uncertainty to knowledge” (6).

### **“Assailed by the torments of thirst”**

A second metaphor binary that plays an important part in Huntly’s narrative is that of hunger and thirst. The significance of the hunger/thirst metaphor for Quakers (and common to most other Christian denominations also) stems from the fact that Quakers “believed that people should hunger and thirst for God, just as they experienced hunger and thirst for physical nourishment.”<sup>61</sup> The two metaphors manifested as “bread” and “water” and were often used parallel with but separate from each other. It is not



surprising, then, that in Huntly's world of blurred metaphor and reality, where his dreams are enacted through his sleepwalking, the concepts of hunger and thirst play a major part in his experiences following his awakening in the pit.

Hunger comes first to Huntly; very soon after he wakes up he fears that he may "perish with famine" (154) and, after he climbs out of the pit into the equally dark cave, he encounters the opportunity to assuage it. On seeing the shining eyes, resembling a "fixed and obscure flame," of a panther in front of him, he lifts his trusty tomahawk, which he miraculously found next to him in the pit, and buries it between the eyes of the animal. He then proceeds to consume this flame, the "warm blood and reeking fibres" of the panther; however, instead of feeling instantly satiated, Huntly experiences something akin to chronic indigestion. He rolls around the cave in agony, proclaiming that "the excruciations of famine were better than the agonies which this abhorred meal had produced" (160). When he conjectures how much time has passed in agony since he consumed the panther, he notes, "nature could not have so long sustained a conflict like this" (160). It could be argued that this is the beginning of the transition that so affects Huntly and that he again represents metaphor in corporeal terms; his spiritual conflict following the satiation of his hunger is manifested physically as bodily pain.

Huntly is soon after "assailed by the torments of thirst" (161). This is more difficult to alleviate, but, significantly, it is through his search for water that he discovers the light of the Indian's fire and the exit of the cave. Therefore, his thirst can be viewed as a progression of his hunger, separate but parallel; whereas the fulfillment of his hunger led to his initial transformation and realization of his spiritual conflict, the attempted fulfillment of his thirst led him towards the light.

Huntly, in fact, betrays the significance of the hunger and the thirst he is afflicted with after he consumes the panther. As the pain from his “conflict” subsides, Huntly slips into a deep sleep and describes the dreams he experiences: “I was visited by dreams of a thousand hues. They led me to flowing streams and plenteous banquets, which, though placed within my view, some power forbade me to approach” (160). The interpretation of this dream is straightforward; Huntly is now able to see the “flowing streams and plenteous banquets” which have the ability to alleviate his hunger and thirst, that is, he is able to envision the paths he must take to satisfy his need for Christ, but he is not able to realize them fully yet. Instead, “some power,” God or his own unwilling spirit, is prohibiting him until he has overcome his crises and is reborn into the light. This correlates remarkably with the “Stages of Quaker Development” identified by Brinton as he states that “convincement was, indeed, often only at the beginning of the conflict for it offered a vision of what might be in contrast to what really was.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, if Huntly’s devouring of the panther (which emitted the only light in the cave) represented his convincement of the presence of the Light, the ensuing dream and the remainder of his journey can quite easily be read as the conflict preceding his actual conversion.

### **“The way was unquestionably difficult”**

While critics have observed the fact that *Edgar Huntly* is a story of journeys and quests, because they generally presume that Brown’s Quakerism plays no part in the novel, they have been reluctant to attach religious significance to this aspect of the tale. However, it is clear from both the context of Huntly’s journey, and the imagery that arises from it, that it can be read as an allegory for Huntly’s spiritual journey, a

pilgrimage of sorts. Graves identified that much of the metaphor in the sermons he studied involved “the concept of life as a journey from an evil to a good place” and “come complete with the identification of the believers life with the Hebrews’ in the wilderness” (374). Therefore, the challenge is not simply to say that Huntly embarks on a journey, which is the plot of most novels, but to demonstrate that the journey is from evil (or darkness) to good (or light) and that the wilderness plays a vital part. This is undoubtedly true in *Edgar Huntly* for, although there are numerous instances of pilgrimages, or journeys, in *Edgar Huntly*—the search for Waldegrave’s killer, which makes up the outer frame of the narrative, Huntly’s pursuits of Clithero, his initial foray into the cave—the most significant begins when Huntly finds himself stuck the cave and ends when he sees the light in the window of Sarsefield’s chamber.

The tell-tale signs of the religious aspect to Huntly’s pilgrimage which, distinguish it from a simple plot device or, more formally, a “romantic” quest,<sup>63</sup> are Brown’s consistent use of the images of the path (or the way) and the wilderness, as I believe these become inevitable allegories for the spiritual state of Huntly.<sup>64</sup> Huntly’s preoccupation with the path and the way become apparent when he first exits the cave. He describes his dilemma in the following words: “I was unacquainted with the way. The way was unquestionably difficult” (170). The doubling of the words “the way” adds a considerable amount of emphasis to this concept and implies a connection between Huntly’s journey and the words of Christ: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”<sup>65</sup> Huntly uses the images of the way and the path with biblical significance as he marks his spiritual journey through the ease with which he can follow the path; when his spirit is waning, the path is described as being “obscure” (196) and “intricate and long” (223).

Tellingly, when he escapes from Deb's hut, where "all within was silence and darkness" (176) and arrives at the frontiersman's cottage where "four panes admitted the light" (196) (but from which there was no light within, as there was with Sarsefield's chamber), he describes himself as "a traveler, who had unfortunately lost his way, and had rambled in the wild till nearly famished for want" (197). Just as Brown combines the elements of light, the way, and the path in Huntly's narrative, so too did the early Quaker apologist Robert Barclay when he wrote, "after he hath numbered up their wickedness, doth he not condemn them...for *rebell*ing against this *light*, for not knowing the way thereof, nor abiding in the paths thereof?"<sup>66</sup>

The image of the path gains clarity when Huntly remarks on his choice when he leaves the cottage:

There were two ways before me. One lay along the interior base of the hill, over a sterile and trackless space, and exposed to the encounter of savages, some of whom might possibly be lurking here. The other was the well frequented road, on the outside and along the river, and which was to be gained by passing over this hill. The practicability of the passage was to be ascertained by inquiries made to my hostess. She pointed out a path that led to the rocky summit and down to the river's brink. The path was not easy to be kept in view of to be trodden, but it was undoubtedly to be preferred to any other. (202)

This image of two available paths, despite the fact that they do not correlate exactly to the biblical symbols of the narrow and the broad path, nonetheless invokes the imagery of the Bible and provides Huntly with an obstacle that he must surmount before being able to go

home to the light. No sooner has he begun traveling this path, than he starts to question his decision and experiences another small crisis. He laments: "I seemed to have gain no way. Hence a doubt was suggested whether I had not missed the true road." But this time he realizes the impracticability of turning back and concludes that "to return was as hopeless as to proceed" (204). He overcomes his crisis, which he vaguely describes as "frequent disappointments" and "desperate exertions" which eventually "gained [him] the upper space" (205).

Gradually, Huntly begins to find the road easier to traverse, and shortly before he sees the light of Sarsefield's chamber, he tells his audience that "the path was open and direct" and that he was "sufficiently acquainted with the road," (221) a mirror of the beginning of his pilgrimage, when he was "unacquainted with the way."

Because of Brown's abundant use of metaphor in *Edgar Huntly*, a religious reading which revolves around dream-work is not difficult. Indeed, it seems fairly clear that the portion of the novel from the moment that Huntly awakes in the cave, to the point at which he returns to Sarsefield is representative of his conviction of the presence of God. It is through this journey that he moves away from the anti-theism Waldegrave instilled in him in his youth, and towards the knowledge of God that Waldegrave encouraged him to discover through the dream Huntly experienced prior to waking in the cave.

Unfortunately, this reading is problematic for the text as a whole; although this section of the novel makes up a substantial portion of the novel, it is not the only storyline, and many would argue that a reading which posits that Huntly's conversion is the most important plot within the text is seriously at odds with the remainder of the

novel. His actions following his return to Sarsefield cause chaos and destruction among the community into which he is accepted, and he is not even given the final word in the novel. In fact, by the end of the story, he has been rejected by Sarsefield and his adopted family and the reader is not informed as to the fate of the novel's namesake.

It is because of this discrepancy that I stop short of suggesting that Brown intended for Huntly to provide any sort of model of the good Quaker, profoundly altered by his conversion and instantly transformed into a pious hero. There is no record of Brown ever experiencing a conversion vision similar to Huntly's; indeed, there is no proof that Brown was ever "convinced" at all, since he was a birthright member of the Society.<sup>67</sup> In fact, it could be said that this ambivalent ending following Huntly's conversion is representative of Brown's general feeling towards Quakerism, which was one of measured contemplation and playful skepticism. Brown explores the phenomenon of the conversion experience and its ensuing visions through his character, Huntly, without providing a conventional conclusion, in the same way that he ambiguously debates the issue of benevolence in *Arthur Mervyn* and the pitfalls of direct revelation in *Wieland*. Brown is more interested in setting up a dialectic between his thoughts and ideals, rather than passing judgment on them, which is what ultimately confuses critics looking for the "key" to meaning in Brown's works.

## **Quaker Style**

If there is one other thing that that Brown is consistently berated for, and which is again connected to his Quakerism, it is the seeming inconsistencies in his narrative style. An anonymous reviewer in 1800 wrote a fairly typical review of Brown's writing:

*If a want of perspicuity, if a want of elegance in style, if a want of imagination, if a want of nature in the delineation of characters, if a want of incident, if a want of plot and connection, and, finally, if a want of common sense, be excellencies in a novel, the author of Ormond, Wieland, Arthur Mervyn, &c, &c, has a fair claim to the laurel of preeminence in 'the temple of Minerva.'*<sup>68</sup>

And the accepted critical opinion of his writing has not altered all that much over the last two hundred years. Indeed, much more recently, William Hedges claimed that “at the center of Charles Brockden Brown’s work there exists an ambivalence of ambiguity so deep and intense that it seems partly pathological.” And Hedges is not alone; it could be argued that Brown’s erratic, repetitive, and often incomprehensible style is the biggest reason why Brown is not lauded today as the father of the American novel. However, the idea prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, that Brown was just not that good of a writer, has generally been discounted in modern criticism. The new challenge for critics has been to provide readers with the rationale behind his unique style. Some critics have claimed that Brown’s often dislocated and disjointed writing is a reflection of the dislocated mental states of his protagonists.<sup>69</sup> Others have claimed that it is an unfortunate byproduct of the messy translation of the Gothic (and essentially European) style to a vastly different culture.<sup>70</sup>

However, critics who are looking for the key to Brown’s style are looking in the wrong place. Many of the features of Brown’s writing that have been dismissed by critics as inconsistencies are actually prominent features of Quaker writing. Therefore, if we read Brown through the lens of his Quaker background, it becomes clear that, far

from being an inconsistent writer, Brown was actually conforming quite consistently to the Quaker writing style.

The main problem that critics have had with Brown's style is that he regularly switches from a coherent, descriptive style to one replete with Latinate diction and archaic terms. David Butler is the only critic who has attempted to study this phenomenon in Brown's writing in any depth, but even he deals with the subject rather superficially. On Brown's sporadic shifts in pronoun use, a topic which has baffled critics in the past, especially those who are not aware of Brown's Quakerism, Butler is no more clear about Brown's motives. He explains that Brown "indiscriminately mixes the archaic or Quaker pronouns 'thee,' 'thou,' and 'thine' with the newer pronoun forms, and he does so with complete abandon."<sup>71</sup> Butler doesn't return to Brown's peculiar use of pronouns except to argue that they contribute to the "convoluted construction" of Brown's more elaborate passages. In fact, as Butler suggests, there is little evidence that Brown uses Quaker pronouns in a conscious manner as a tool, but the reason for this is not a stylistic deficiency as Butler implies. Instead, it is a reflection of the slow disintegration of the general use of Quaker pronouns amongst young Quakers at the turn of the nineteenth century. An examination of the records of Yearly Meetings over the years leading up to the turn of the century reveal that, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, the gradual decline in the use of "thee" and "thou" amongst young Quakers had reached a point where the Yearly Meeting recognized that the issue should be addressed. If the youths did not change their ways, the Meeting was prepared to disown them.<sup>72</sup> Most scholars of Quaker language agree that the strict use of "thee" and "thou" amongst Quakers all but died off in the early nineteenth century.<sup>73</sup> It is no surprise, then, that



Brown, as a Quaker writing amidst the fashions and trends of New York, should exhibit this change in Quaker language use. Indeed, Brown showed signs of this change even in his personal writing. In the dream that Brown transcribed and sent to his childhood Quaker friend, Joseph Bringhurst, this phenomenon is clearly in evidence: “Thou and I were wandering in the region of Romance.... At length on observing that you had irretrievably lost me, I thought you attempted to throw yourself in the stream [sic].”<sup>74</sup>

Even if critics do not take into account Brown’s pronoun use, his manner of writing still shifts for no apparent reason between one of lucidity and one “obscured by alliteration and wordiness” throughout his work.<sup>75</sup> Donald Ringe has noted this serious deficiency in *Edgar Huntly*: “the sharp contrast in tone between the long retelling of Clithero’s past and the exciting adventures of the Indian fighting seriously mars the unity of the tale.” Butler attempts to explain this by noting how “Brown employs a simple and lucid prose style to describe the frontier setting and brushes with wild animals, he resorts to high flown eloquence when he presents the workings of the unconscious,”<sup>76</sup> claiming, in other words, that Brown uses his lucid style to describe the outward, and his complex style to describe the inward; however, this explanation also falls short of the mark, especially if we are claiming that the inward and outward worlds of *Huntly* are consciously blurred by Brown. In fact, the two styles that are apparent in Brown’s work are actually representations of two influences. On the one hand, the dream narratives that Brown uses as the principal action of the novel (such as the cave scene and the point at which *Huntly* throws himself into the river to escape his hunters, among others) demand a coherent, simplistic style that would lend itself to multiple means of interpretation. On

the other hand, Brown's more elaborate passages display the influence of the often "incantatory" rhetoric of traditional Quaker journals and sermons.

The periods of lucidity in *Edgar Huntly* are quite clearly marked throughout Huntly's narrative and do conform somewhat to Butler's theory of an inward/outward opposition. At the beginning of Chapter 16, for example, when Huntly introduces the moment when he awoke in the cave, he writes somewhat hyperbolically to his fiancée, "I am conscious of a kind of complex sentiment of distress and forlornness that cannot be perfectly portrayed [sic] by words; but I must do as well as I can. In the utmost vigour of my faculties, no eloquence that I possess would do justice to the tale." (152) In the following paragraph, he quickly shifts from this elaborate style, to one which, quite simply and eloquently, describes his experiences in the cave: "I attempted to rise, but my limbs were cold and my joints had almost lost their flexibility. My efforts were repeated, and at length I attained a sitting posture. I was now sensible of pain in my shoulders and back" (153). This quick change from elaborate to simple sentence structure, from convoluted to logical descriptive passages, and back again, is a pattern that is repeated often in Huntly's narrative and mirrors that alteration in style which is necessary for the straightforward narration of his dreams and the subsequent commentary on their spiritual implications. When Brown utilizes this elaborate style to interpret Huntly's dreams, he is not doing so purely gratuitously in order to perplex the reader. He is following in the tradition of those canonical Quaker writers he studied in his youth, such as George Fox, Stephen Crisp, and John Woolman, who utilized similar patterns in their writing. This is apparent, specifically in his use of ambiguity of time and place, about which critics have complained since his works were first published.

The ambiguity in Brown's fiction is well documented. Readers can debate for hours whether his "villains" are really villains in the true sense of the word or whether they are simply the victims of circumstance or of a faulty education; since all his novels are written in the first person, one is never really sure whether the motives the protagonists claim are their true motives; the novels in general are replete with coincidences, similarly named characters, and plot devices designed to push the reader to the very limits of a suspension of disbelief. Most frustrating of all, especially for critics attempting to situate his work within a historical or political timeframe, is the fact that his sense of place is notoriously hazy. Hedges cantankerously notes that "except when setting becomes an abnormal intrusion on their lives, his sense of place is apt to be virtually non-existent,"<sup>77</sup> and Fiedler joins that chorus when he states that Brown "[moves] his irresolute and inconsistent protagonists through time and space carelessly defined and bearing only a fitful, largely accidental resemblance to the facts of history and geography."<sup>78</sup>

The main cause of critics' frustration is that Brown does identify, to an extent, the location of his action. In *Edgar Huntly*, the fictional area, Norwalk, is placed as being fifty miles from the Forks of the Delaware, and Solebury, the town in which Huntly was born, is a real place in Pennsylvania. The problem is that, for Brown, precise geography is a secondary concern to that of the dreamscape he creates to reflect Huntly's spiritual state. However frustrating this is for critics, it is a direct reflection of the influence from traditional Quaker writers. John Woolman's *Journal* (1774), for example (as well as in countless other spiritual narratives), describes movement from place to place, dwelling not on where he is but instead on the results of him being there. Jackson I. Cope notes

how these writers “[present] only the results of [their] experience rather than a visualization of the experience itself”<sup>79</sup> and of Fox in particular, he writes that he “*records* much history, but he *depicts* less the life of a traveler for truth treading England from its dungeons to Cromwell’s palace, than an immense, recurring dream.”<sup>80</sup> In this way, then, we can see that Brown’s own hazy notion of place is very similar to the sense of place that early Quakers had when constructing their own journals of their spiritual journeys.

The second element of Brown’s writing that can be traced to his Quakerism is his use of repetition, which has led to accusations that Brown was a poor writer.<sup>81</sup> In fact, this highly repetitive style is again a feature of early Quaker writing and is linked to the use of metaphor. Because Quakers speak “with the Light,” (what they say is directly influenced by God), they have little reason to censor or revise what they say. Cope credits this as being the reason why metaphor is of major importance to the Quakers; it is the easiest way to communicate the mystery of the Inward Light. He also claims that this accounts for an “abrupt and broken” style, which was the most recognizable element of the early Quaker writers, but which died out in the “age of plainness” following the deaths of the “First Publishers of Truth,” as George Fox and his original followers were called.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, this “abrupt and broken style” can also be seen in Brown’s work, in his overt shifts in tone most particularly (but also in his hurried plot twists and bizarre character motivations). In this way, Brown seems to be echoing the “incantatory” style of the Quaker literary tradition.

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When Brown died of tuberculosis in 1810 at the age of thirty-nine, his relationship with Quakerism was uncertain. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, his skepticism about the doctrines of the Quakers was almost playful, the lively musings of an intelligent young man, but later in his life, he began to grow more distant from the Quakers and, in 1804, he increased the distance by marrying out of Meeting to Elizabeth Linn, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Neither Elijah nor Mary attended Brown's wedding, and he was "read out of Meeting" in April of 1805.<sup>83</sup> Whatever his standing with the meeting, though, it is clear that, throughout his life, the ideals and doctrines of Quakerism had seldom been far from his thoughts; in fact, before his move to New York, he was the epitome of a devout Quaker, and this can be easily seen through his writing.

Just as the Quakers emphasized the importance of the interpretation of dreams in their culture, so Brown writes a novel that manipulates the dreaming and waking worlds. Just as Quakers relied heavily on metaphor to construct meaning, so Brown uses these same metaphors in various ways to add depth of meaning to his characters and his stories. And just as Quakers were renowned for their disjointed, unique style of writing, so Brown shows signs of this in his own writing, to the extent that his style has been almost universally condemned as deficient.

However, I am not attempting to assert that Brown was a Quaker writer in the traditional sense of the word; it is clear that his influences lay in numerous places, many of which were secular and even antithetical to Christianity. As a Quaker writing American novels in the late eighteenth century, Brown was searching for a voice that would be able to speak of his experiences in the new nation. It was inevitable that his

influences would lie close to home: the socially conscious works of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, the European gothic novels of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, and, obviously, the literature and doctrine of the Quakers, with which he was surrounded. To attempt to label Brown as being a Quaker author, an Enlightenment author, or a political author is an exercise in futility; as Dennis Berthold succinctly put it, “He is not ‘purely’ anything.”<sup>84</sup> However, to negate Brown’s Quakerism—his education, his family background, and his proven thoughtfulness when it came to religion of all kinds—or even to speak of Brown’s Quakerism simply in terms of themes and plot-lines, is to dismiss or limit one of the most important influences in the young author’s life.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799) 154. All references to the text will be to this edition with page numbers in parenthesis.

<sup>2</sup> *Love and Death in the American Novel* 157.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Donald A. Ringe: “Charles Brockden Brown,” 4, and Sydney J. Krause, “Edgar Huntly and the American Nightmare” 298.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Arthur Kimball *Rational Fictions: A Study of Charles Brockden Brown* and Sydney J. Krause “Historical Note” in Krause and Reid (ed.), *Edgar Huntly, or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Axelrod in *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale* made mention of the fact that Brown was one of the forefathers of American Gothic (8), a genre later mastered by Poe and Hawthorne. Kafer specifically connects the birth of American Gothic to his Quaker past by relating many of the classic tropes of the Gothic genre with his experiences as a Quaker during the Revolutionary War (*Charles Brockden Brown’s Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic*).

<sup>6</sup> Hintz 39.

<sup>7</sup> My use of “dream-work” stems from Freud’s definition of the term as “the investigation of the relations between the latent dream-thoughts and the manifest content of dreams, and the processes by which the latter has grown out of the former.” Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 174.

<sup>8</sup> Carla Gerona, *Night Journeys: The Power of Dreams in Transatlantic Quaker Culture* 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Brown underwent a similar meditation and, if one is to believe Kafer, a rejection of the religion of his youth (Kafer 78).

<sup>10</sup> Michael P. Graves, “Functions of Key Metaphors in Early Quaker Sermons, 1671-1700.”

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Hamm, *Quakers in America* for more on the basics of Quaker beliefs.

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<sup>12</sup> David Lee Clark's *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> Kafer 35.

<sup>14</sup> Clark 13.

<sup>15</sup> Kafer 45.

<sup>16</sup> Starting with the French-Indian war in 1754, the Quaker practice of pacifism came under increasing fire as community leaders, most of whom were Quakers, struggled to cope with the dual demands of their religion and their political aspirations. When the Revolutionary War came to Philadelphia in 1777, the Quakers were targeted for a number of reasons. As a consequence of their pacifist views, they refused to join any militia or pay any taxes which contributed to the war effort, which not only led to their alienation within the community, but also brought with it charges of Toryism. Their detractors weren't completely wrong; as Quakers, they believed that God's providence was manifest in the institution of government and that to subvert that institution was, therefore, against God's Will. Arthur J. Meekle, *The Quakers and the American Revolution* 3.

<sup>17</sup> Kafer is the only critic to fully explore how this traumatic event affected Brown's fiction, although it is briefly noted by Richard P. Moses in his article, "The Quakerism of Charles Brockden Brown" 20. Neither Warfel nor Clark make any mention of this in their biographies of Brown and typical criticism of his work shows the same lack of knowledge (perhaps due to lack of interest) in the trials of his Quaker childhood. William Hedges states that "he passes without much question as an early example of the tormented, alienated American artists, though what, if anything, was tormenting him remains somewhat obscure" ("Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions" 110).

Brown was only six at the time that his father was exiled, but Kafer credits this event as being the most significant in terms of influencing his fiction. Although Kafer's reading of Brown suffers from a heavily historical approach, I would be inclined to agree with him. I would add, however, that the events of the Revolutionary period also jaded his perception of Quakerism and this, in turn, could be the key to the mixed message that many critics receive when they attempt a religious reading of his work.

<sup>18</sup> Kafer 46.

<sup>19</sup> Kafer 47.

<sup>20</sup> Moses 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Caleb Williams*, published in England in 1794, tells the story of a young boy who is framed for a crime he didn't commit. Through the story of Williams, Godwin paints a scathing portrait of the legal system in England, which protected the rich and condemned



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the poor without trial. Many of the themes present in *Caleb Williams* also show up in Brown's work, most notably in *Arthur Mervyn*. See Dorothy J. Hale, "Profits of Altruism: *Caleb Williams* and *Arthur Mervyn*" 47-69.

<sup>22</sup> CBB to Bringham, June 11, 1793 (Bennett Census no. 46). Quoted in Kafer 78.

<sup>23</sup> Kafer 79.

<sup>24</sup> The novels were: *Wieland; or the Transformation, an American Tale* (1798), *Ormond; or the Secret Witness* (1799), *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (Part 1 (1799); Part 2 (1800)), and *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-walker* (1799).

<sup>25</sup> Krause, "Historical Essay" 296.

<sup>26</sup> Michael P. Graves, "One Friend's Journey" 515.

<sup>27</sup> Hedges 122.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Bernard, "Edgar Huntly: Charles Brockden Brown's Unsolved Murder" 33.

<sup>29</sup> Ringe 2.

<sup>30</sup> Jackson I. Cope, "Seventeenth Century Quaker Style" 730.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the possible real-world location of Norwalk and its significance, see Grabo's "Introduction" to the Penguin edition of *Edgar Huntly* xii, and Kafer 173.

<sup>32</sup> Clithero's narrative comprises roughly one third of the novel and seems to have only superficial relevance to the novel as a whole. His narrative certainly does not figure strongly in my particular reading of *Edgar Huntly*; however, for a fairly convincing argument that the two stories are integral to each other, see Bernard 33-37.

<sup>33</sup> Gerona 2.

<sup>34</sup> Gerona 130.

<sup>35</sup> Gerona 28.

<sup>36</sup> Gerona 176.

<sup>37</sup> Not only does this denote dream-work, but the amount of time that Huntly claims he spends away from home totals three days, which is significant in biblical terms: Moses was told to command his people to embark on "three days' journey into the wilderness"

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to find the Lord (Exodus 3:18); and Jonah was in the whale for “three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).

<sup>38</sup> See “Advertisement” in *Wieland* and “To the Public” *Edgar Huntly*.

<sup>39</sup> Gerona 209.

<sup>40</sup> Mechel Sobel, *Teach me Dreams: The Search for Self in the Revolutionary Era* 14. See Sobel for a more detailed discussion of the role dreams had in the construction of identity (particularly racial identity) in Revolutionary America.

<sup>41</sup> Gerona 217.

<sup>42</sup> Gerona 215.

<sup>43</sup> CBB to Bringhurst, n.d. (Bennett Census no.42). Quoted in Kafer 72.

<sup>44</sup> The manuscript of, what would have been Brown’s first novel, *Sky-walk* was never published (the publisher who agreed to the task died suddenly, leaving the manuscript to his executors who refused to sell it back to Brown (Clark 160)); however, based on the diaries of William Dunlap and Elihu Hubbard Smith, it seems that Brown utilized a lot of the material from this novel in *Edgar Huntly*. For more on the connections between *Sky-walk* and *Edgar Huntly*, see Krause “Historical Essay” 295-316.

<sup>45</sup> Graves 364-365.

<sup>46</sup> Cope 726.

<sup>47</sup> Nigel Smith, “Hidden Things Brought to Light: Enthusiasm and Quaker Discourse” 57 Quoted in Tarter 180.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The two metaphors that do not feature in a major way are those of the Voice and the Seed. Although Brown plays on the binary oppositions of speaking and silence, most significantly in the figure of Old Deb, whose “tongue was never at rest but when she was asleep” (199), and also in exchanges between Huntly and Clithero, I could not find compelling evidence that they were being used consistently in a metaphoric way, ie., that they represented the Voice of God. Similarly for the Seed. Graves explains that the seed is used symbolically to represent good or evil, the influence of good or evil in a person’s life, and faithful believers (the good seed). Although Brown does not use the image of the seed explicitly in his novel, he does make mention of it in the preface to his first, unpublished, novel, *Sky Walk*, where he writes, “our work, like ourselves, is juvenile, and that aided and fostered by encouragement and lenity, the seed that is at present so

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inconsiderable may in time expand into the loveliness of the rose.” Harry Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown: American Gothic Novelist*, 135.

<sup>50</sup> Graves, 366.

<sup>51</sup> Graves, 368.

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Bernard, for example, identifies that light and dark (along with understanding and confusion, and height and depth) are key metaphors in *Edgar Huntly* but fails to relate them in any way with Brown’s Quakerism. Instead he attributes them as paralleling Huntly’s “movement from sanity to near insanity,” (42) a popular interpretation of the light/dark cluster and one not entirely antithetical to our more Quaker-centric reading. Bernard even goes as far as to say that Huntly is “reborn into the light,” using conspicuously religious language, but failing to make the connection between light, rebirth, and religious conversion. (49) Similarly, Kenneth Kinslow in *Quaker Doctrines and Ideas in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown*, despite being cognitive of the Quaker element to Brown’s use of light-dark imagery, misses the mark somewhat when it comes to its interpretation. In Kinslow’s mind “at the core of man, instead of inner light, Brown implies the existence of ‘the murkiest and impenetrable gloom.’” (136) Bernard and Kinslow exhibit the same fault, which is that they focus on the darkness in *Edgar Huntly* at the exclusion of the light—Bernard actually calls the book “a novel of night and dark” (42); both characterize the novel as being a descent into black, rather than a pilgrimage into light.

<sup>53</sup> Bernard 42.

<sup>54</sup> Quakers believed that, just as God demonstrated his presence directly to the individual through the Inward Light, he likewise directly communicated his wishes through His voice, known as the Voice of God. It is because of this divine connection with the spoken word that Quakers are taught to weigh their words and only speak the truth. Richard Bauman, *Let your Words be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth Century Quakers* 22.

<sup>55</sup> See Fiedler 158 and Bernard 38-42.

<sup>56</sup> Dieter Schultz, “Edgar Huntly as Quest Romance” 329.

<sup>57</sup> Ringe 4.

<sup>58</sup> Krause 298.

<sup>59</sup> See Edwin Diller Starbuck *The Psychology of Religion* 144-162, and George Albert Coe, *The Psychology of Religion* 152-174 for more about conversion theory.

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<sup>60</sup> In “Rhapsodist in the Wilderness: Brown’s romantic quest in Edgar Huntly,” Steve Hamelman claims that God does not direct Huntly as He does Rowlandson (174). Ringe negates the dream mentioned earlier about Waldegrave by noting that “though [Brown] does reveal that Huntly retains, in part at least, the irreligious views that Waldegrave instilled in him, not much is made of that matter in the book” 15.

<sup>61</sup> Graves 372.

<sup>62</sup> Howard H. Brinton, “Stages in Spiritual Development as Recorded in Quaker Journals” 391.

<sup>63</sup> See Schultz and Hamelman for discussions of *Edgar Huntly* as a Quest.

<sup>64</sup> Just as with the other metaphors, I recognize that the concept of pilgrimage is not unique to Quakerism. Edgar Huntly’s pilgrimage in particular bears a very close resemblance to that of John Bunyan in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, especially with their respective connections to dream-work.

<sup>65</sup> John 14:6 (KJV).

<sup>66</sup> Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: Being an Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People Called Quakers* (1678) 116.

<sup>67</sup> Birthright membership was started in 1737. Up until that point, entry into the Society of Friends was gained only after the group was convinced that the would-be member had experienced a conversion vision (Bauman 23).

<sup>68</sup> Anon. *Antijakobin Review*, 6 (Aug., 1800). Quoted in Bernard Rosenthal, “Introduction” Rosenthal, ed. *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown* 451.

<sup>69</sup> David Butler, *Dissecting a Human Heart: A Study of Style in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown* 36

<sup>70</sup> Alan Lawson, “Comparitive Studies and Post-colonial ‘Settler’ Cultures” 15. Quoted in Janie Hinds “Deb’s Dogs: Animals, Indians, and Post-colonial Desire in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly*” 326.

<sup>71</sup> Butler 2.

<sup>72</sup> Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1792. Ezra Michener, *A Retrospect of Early Quakerism; being extracts from the records of Philadelphia Meeting and the Meetings composing it.*

<sup>73</sup> Ezra Kempton Maxfield writes in “Quaker Thee and its History” how young Quakers in the early nineteenth century had begun to use Quaker pronouns only when discussing

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Quaker matters. In fact, due to the archaic nature of the pronouns, the correct form had already been corrupted by the late eighteenth century, with contemporary Quakers asking “How dost thee do?” rather than “How dost thou do?” (642).

<sup>74</sup> Kafer 72.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Witherington, “‘Not my tongue only’: Form and Language in Brown's *Edgar Huntly*” Rosenthal (ed.) *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown* 177.

<sup>76</sup> Butler 50.

<sup>77</sup> Hedges 108.

<sup>78</sup> Fiedler 154.

<sup>79</sup> Cope 746.

<sup>80</sup> Cope 727.

<sup>81</sup> Beverly Voloshin writes that, “his characteristic device for composing, repetition, disperses causal relations even as it attempts to order them” (“*Edgar Huntly* and the Coherence of Self” 262).

<sup>82</sup> Cope 754.

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, he was the fourth son of Elijah and Mary Brown to have taken such a step and, though it is uncertain what the official repercussions were for Brown's siblings, they maintained a strong presence within the family (Clark 17). Moses claims that critics tend to overstate the effect that the official repercussions of Brown's marriage had on his familial relationship since Brown remained in business with his brothers until his death in 1810 (20).

<sup>84</sup> Dennis Berthold, “Desacralizing the American Gothic: An Iconographic Approach to *Edgar Huntly*” 128.

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