Edgar Huntly is lost in the dark:

Charles Brockden Brown and the ambivalent American Gothic

by

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Acknowledgments

Like the character he created in *Edgar Huntly*, Charles Brockden Brown often found himself rambling without direction. As a kid, he'd wander into the woods, disoriented, his body outrunning his mind. Similar to Brown and Huntly, I've often felt lost in the woods, rambling without purpose. I dedicate this project to the people who give me direction. To Professors Jennifer Wenzel, Gregg Crane, A. Van Jordan and Susan Parrish: thank you for being my Sarsefields, voices of reason in a forest of confusion. To my fellow thesis cohort members, thank you for writing about fascinating things. You've all taught me so much. To Archie Ammons, for writing the poem that inspired this project. To Papa Frank, for teaching me there is reason in action. To Nanny Lynn, for the strength of your convictions. To my brother, the most generous and compassionate person I know and my closest friend. And to my parents, who continue to teach me how to give of myself. Leading by example, both of you have shown me that the key to personal happiness is to make other people happy. Ultimately, I think that's the thing that matters the most. It is what gives us purpose and direction.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to show how the ideological ambivalence of one man may illuminate a genre of American literature.

Charles Brockden Brown published *Edgar Huntly* in 1799, exactly ten years after the ratification of the United States Constitution. *Huntly's* narrative transpires in and around Philadelphia. Its eponymous figure is a rational man whose investigation of his friend Waldegrave's murder sends him on a hallucinatory journey into the woods outside Philadelphia. Yet the natural world he encounters bears no resemblance to anything recognizably *natural.* Instead, as we come to realize, Edgar Huntly is exploring the deepest and darkest recesses of his own mind. Once in this forest, Huntly finds himself reverting to his baser instincts. The entire purpose of his quest is lost, and Huntly's behavior becomes increasingly erratic.

Much has been written about *Huntly's* significance as a reflection on the state of post-revolutionary society. In my examination of critical discourse pertaining to *Huntly*, I've noticed two broad trends: the critics who consider *Huntly* a work that espouses revolutionary ardor and the critics who alternately regard *Huntly* as a work of conservatism and revolutionary fear. My thesis will argue that both critical strands are equally correct. Indeed, *Huntly* can be read as both an endorsement of the revolution and a critique of its dangers. The critical divide between whether *Huntly* is revolutionary or conservative is ultimately erroneous. As I argue, *Huntly* is a work of ideological ambivalence, a book that reflects its author's inability to reconcile revolutionary ardor with political conservatism.

Brown is considered the father of the American literary Gothic. Understanding Brown's fundamentally conflicted ideology, and how it is narratively expressed, could help us better understand the particular thematic concerns of the American Gothic, a genre that persists today.

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"I cannot walk through Paris these days without stirring
the ghosts of the past"

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brought out of nature"

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introduction

Charles Brockden Brown published *Edgar Huntly* in 1799, 10 years after the ratification of the Constitution. Its narrative transpires around the revolutionary city of Philadelphia. The book traces the exploits of Edgar Huntly, a rational man whose investigation of a murder sends him spiraling into irrationality. This irrationality manifests itself in a series of sleepwalking episodes. And where does Huntly's subconscious lead him? The woods. Yet the American landscape on display in *Huntly* bears no resemblance to anything recognizably natural. Indeed, as Huntly drifts through the woods, he encounters an otherworldly domain of darkness, shadows, and terror. As we come to understand, he's not exploring an actual forest. Instead, he's exploring the deepest and darkest recesses of his own mind.

Why does this happen? In examining the critical discussion about physical nature and the American Gothic, I haven't found a clear answer. There is little critical discourse about how the particular political context in which Brown wrote, especially his own political beliefs, shaped his unique depiction of nature. As I will argue, an examination of Brown's life reveals a politically conscious man whose own ambivalence expresses itself via his depiction of nature as a place where rational men unravel. The dark recesses of the woods become symbolic of the limits of human reason and the inability of man to make up his mind. Ultimately, *Edgar Huntly* is the story of a divided self, a division I'll argue we can understand in the context of the fundamental opposition in Brown's own life.

My first chapter lays the foundation for the emergence of the literary Gothic in England and the United States. Central to this chapter is the notion of the Gothic as a "labyrinthine descent." As I will show, Gothic narratives tend to use a literal labyrinthine setting (such as the forest or the bowels of a church) as symbolic of the landscape of a depraved mind. Also in this chapter I will illustrate, through a discussion of Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*, how the French Revolution fundamentally shifted the narrative course of the Gothic, infusing it with revolutionary fears spurred on by the excesses and atrocities of The Terror.

My second chapter will focus on the emergence of Brown's worldview. As a child, Brown's education was one of clear oppositions. When he was only six, Brown's father was arrested by the Revolutionary Army because of his allegiance to the Quaker religion. This arrest had a transformative effect on Brown; indeed, his vision of the Revolution was to always be bound up with his father's unfair persecution. And yet as a young man, Brown joined the New York Friendly Club where he came under the influence of revolutionary-minded writers like Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. Brown was himself a physically frail man plagued with extreme self-doubt. His utter lack of self-confidence rendered him highly impressionable, and at the time wrote *Edgar Huntly* he was evidently at a crossroads. On the one hand, his father's arrest told him revolutions could be fundamentally irrational and dangerous. On the other, Godwin fully endorsed the "zealous advocates of liberty" who had led the American revolution (113).

My third chapter will illustrate how Brown's self-doubt is reflected in *Edgar Huntly's* narrative of ideological ambivalence. I argue that *Edgar Huntly's* confused

descent serves as a deliberate parable for Brown's own confusion and his inability to reconcile revolutionary fear with revolutionary ardor. Huntly, like Brown, is a character who cannot make up his mind. Ultimately, though, I read *Edgar Huntly* as Brown's endorsement of his own indecision. If there's one thing Brown was certain of, it was uncertainty. Given Brown's stature as the father of the American Gothic, this ideological ambivalence likely persists in the American Gothic, a genre still flourishing today.

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The Literary Gothic as Labyrinthine Descent

I. A "Hidden and separate place": The shifting labyrinth

One significant difference between the British and American Gothic lies in setting. As Fred Botting points out in his study of the Gothic and its transatlantic passage, the castle and the church represent the "major locus" of British Gothic plots (Botting 2). These castles and churches, Botting writes, are generally in a dilapidated state, and function as a reminder of human barbarism. But unlike Britain, America simply didn't have the ancient castles and churches around which to center Gothic narratives. Thus, as both Botting and Gothic historian Markman Ellis observe, in crossing the Atlantic the British Gothic's castles and churches were replaced by the American wilderness. In this section I trace a common thread between these forms of the Gothic labyrinth. I describe the function of maze-like constructs in two representative British Gothic texts: Horace Walpole's castle-centered *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Matthew Gregory Lewis' church-centered *The Monk* (1796). As I will argue, the labyrinth serves two very different functions in these texts. In the former, the labyrinth is a haven for good characters, whereas in the latter — written after the horrific excesses of the French Revolution — it becomes a place where social rules are transgressed and rationality is abandoned. And it is this latter concept of the horrific labyrinth, I argue, that extends to *Edgar Huntly*.

Otranto's *labyrinth as refuge for the innocent*

Botting posits that the Gothic labyrinth is any place that is "hidden and separate from the outside world" (Botting 81). In Horace Walpole's 1764 book *The Castle of Otranto,* generally regarded as the first Gothic text, this "hidden and separate" place serves a positive function. *Otranto's* plot centers around Manfred, lord of Otranto, who rapidly descends into madness after his son is crushed by a massive helmet that's fallen from the sky. Because the helmet portends the end of Manfred's reign, he urgently attempts to procreate with Isabella, the young woman to whom his son was betrothed. Spurning his depraved advances, the innocent Isabella escapes with the help of a benevolent stranger named Theodore, whom Manfred inexplicably holds responsible for his son's death. Luckily for these two characters, a labyrinthine construct exists to conceal them: the forest outside of the castle.

The natural labyrinth in *Otranto* functions as a refuge for its morally righteous characters. For instance, when Matilda, Manfred's kind daughter, helps Theodore escape her father's wrath, she tells him to retreat to the "labyrinth of caverns that reach to the sea-coast. There thou mayest lie concealed" (Walpole 76). In Botting's description of the Gothic labyrinth, he emphasizes its foremost characteristic is that of psychological disorientation. That's certainly the case for Theodore, who walks "insensibly" through the forest, yet continues on because of his "curiosity in exploring the secret recesses of this labyrinth" (77). It is in this forest that Theodore again meets Isabella who, like him, is using the labyrinthine forest as a means of concealment from the tyrannical Manfred. Together, Theodore and Isabella penetrate even deeper into the forest, eventually taking shelter in the darkness of the forest's caverns. Paradoxically, this darkest place becomes

Theodore and Isabella's sanctuary. The "inmost recesses" of the cave is, in Theodore's words, "beyond the reach of danger" (78).

A shift in the labyrinth

In the 30 years between the publication of *Otranto* and *The Monk,* the storm of the French Revolution rippled across Europe. Its transformative effect on the Gothic is evident in the shifting function of the labyrinth in Gothic narratives. Botting describes how, before the Revolution, the labyrinth was used in Gothic fiction to symbolize "the complexity and variety of society which remained ... unified," afterward it came to represent a descent into darkness and destructive desires (81). In *Otranto*, the forest labyrinth is described as being "beyond the reach of danger" (78). In *The Monk,* published 32 years later, the labyrinth turns into the epicenter of danger. This shift reflects cultural anxieties about the anarchical zeal of France spreading to Britain.

The Monk and the labyrinth of terror

As in *Otranto,* the labyrinth in *The Monk* is described as "cavernous," but it is a cavern of a different sort. In the case of *The Monk*, this "cavern" comes in the form of the "subterraneous vaults" that lie beneath a monastic cemetery. The book features two intertwining story lines; the one about Ambrosio is pertinent to this discussion. In it, Ambrosio — described at the outset of the novel as a "man of holiness" who has "never been known to transgress a single rule of his order" — finds his secluded and celibate life tested when he's confronted with two very different women (Lewis 16-17). The first, Antonia, is a chaste and virtuous woman whose "love" for Ambrosio is platonic and reverential in nature. Simply put, she loves it when he preaches. The second, Matilda, is devious and malicious, masquerading as a male monk in order to gain Ambrosio's trust

and thereby coerce him into sex. Both women fill Ambrosio with violent sexual desires he didn't know he had. Soon, the "tranquility" that "reigned upon his smooth unwrinkled forehead" begins to crumble (Lewis 18). Now Ambrosio is torn between his commitment to religious virtue and his increasingly violent sexuality. Throughout the narrative, Ambrosio's destructive urges gradually supplant all religious values. He ultimately reverts to diabolism to satiate his fiery libido.

In *The Monk's* labyrinth, danger lurks around every corner. The introduction of the vaults occurs when Matilda — who by now has revealed her true gender to Ambrosio, sparking his wild desire — says she must descend to them to heal a snake bite that would otherwise be fatal. At the entrance to the vaults, she warns him not to accompany her because, "Your life would fall victim to your imprudent curiosities" (Lewis 231). Waiting in the darkness, Ambrosio can only hear the "low murmur" of Matilda's voice echoing through the chambers (237). As with Theodore in *Otranto*, it is curiosity that compels him to explore the labyrinth further. He desires, as Lewis writes, to "penetrate into this mystery" (232). But where Theodore's descent into the labyrinth leads to his reunion with Isabella, Ambrosio's signals his complete unraveling. *The Monk's* labyrinth is the place where rationality ends and baseness reigns supreme.

The danger of the labyrinth emerges after the virginal Antonia rejects Ambrosio's aggressive sexual advances. Angry and lustful, he seeks out Matilda and demands her help in securing Antonia. It is here that Matilda reveals her pact with a "guardian" who gives her magical powers (267). But significantly, these powers can only be summoned in the vaults beneath the cemetery. Thus, she and Ambrosio descend to the vaults and into an area that "formed a sort of Labyrinth" (272). As Botting asserts, the particular

quality of the Gothic labyrinth, such as the church vault's "innumerable caves and winding passageways," is that it is "hidden and separated from the outside world" (Lewis 273, Botting 81). Lewis's conception of the labyrinth as, in Botting's words, a place of "utter separation from all social rules" — and thus hidden from detection — is also important here (81). In the labyrinth Matilda summons Lucifer himself to assist Ambrosio in capturing Antonia,[1] and in this same "subterraneous vault," Ambrosio, having lost all semblance of reason and religious commitment, drugs and imprisons Antonia. Because of the labyrinth's literal separation from any kind of social order, Ambrosio is assured that Antonia will "comply with his desires" (Lewis 377). After all, the place he's hidden her is "by no means easy to discover," with Ambrosio having to navigate "long passages" to get there (378). But where *Otranto's* "hidden and separate place" is a haven for the good, *The Monk's* provides the stage for Ambrosio's descent into utter depravity and the "gratification of [his] senses" (Botting 81; Lewis 380). "No danger is near you," Ambrosio lies to Antonia as she wakes from a drugged sleep (381). Unlike the *Otranto* labyrinth which lies "beyond the reach of danger," this labyrinth only exposes Antonia to more danger (Walpole 78). After Ambrosio brutally rapes and murders her, he is discovered in an "artfully concealed" area of the vault. His captors are left "chained up in surprize [sic]" because they cannot believe this blood-soaked murderer is the same person they once regarded as a "Man of Holiness" (Lewis 393, 16).

II. "All is confusion & tyranny": The French Revolution's Gothic impact

[1] *The Monk's* downright absurd narrative was heavily criticized and satirized upon its release. Lewis himself, evidently a good sport, even wrote a brief satire of it (Parreaux, 57). For more on *The Monk's* reception see Andre Parreaux's 1960 book *The Publication of The Monk: A Literary Event 1796-1798.*

The French Revolution had a profound and lasting effect on the Gothic. In this section I will attempt to frame *The Monk* in the context of Lewis' own experiences with the Revolution and in terms of what literary critic Ronald Paulson calls "fables of revolution" (537). As I will illustrate, Lewis experienced an ideological shift wherein he went from supporting the Revolutionary uprising to being terrified by it, in particular by its mutation into the devastating period of Terror that lasted from 1793 to 1794. This shift was a function of his personal experiences, experiences that saw him dodging French bullets in Arnheim and befriending displaced members of the French aristocracy. After showing how Lewis' Revolutionary exposure informing his work, I will argue that *The Monk* can be read as distinctly opposed to the Revolution. As French Revolutionary historian Emmet Kennedy argues, *The Monk* represents a "parable ... of the French Revolution's atrocity and violence" (Kennedy 137). In this way, *The Monk* is representative of a shift toward conservatism in 1790s Gothic fiction. Understanding this shift, that is, the emergence of a decidedly anti-revolutionary bent in Gothic fiction in the 1790s, is vital to my reading of *Edgar Huntly,* which posits that Brown was torn between the conservatism that dominated 1790s Gothic and the liberalism of thinkers like Godwin.

Lewis' initial sympathy toward the French Revolution

Lewis' first intellectual engagement with the Revolution reflects sympathy toward the revolutionaries. During the summer of 1791, Lewis, a 17-year-old student at Oxford University, spent a summer studying in Paris (Ellis 98). At this time, the initial revolutionary dust had settled, and the National Constituent Assembly, which had become France's governing body in the wake of the Revolution, was at work drafting

what would become the Constitution of 1791. It was a period of relative calm, and Lewis' sole extant letter to his mother during this summer of study does not allude to any revolutionary turmoil or societal unrest. Instead, he discusses at great length some literary projects he's working on (Lewis qtd. in Peck, 184-186). But as Markman Ellis argues, we can regard Lewis' effusive discussion of his burgeoning literary impulses as indirect evidence of his support for the Revolution. Indeed, though his letter from Paris doesn't explicitly mention revolutionary support, it does suggest that Paris's literary atmosphere provided an ideal setting for his creativity to flourish. In the letter, he tells his mother that, among other works-in-progress, he's written a farce that he believes to be a work of "beauty and simplicity" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 185). Much of his writing during the period was, according to Ellis, informed by his readings of French literature of the period (98). In a letter the following March discussing his writing, Lewis refers to his knowledge of "at least twenty French Operas" as something that will help him formulate his own work (Lewis qtd. in Peck 187). Lewis doesn't mention specific titles in his letter, but according to historian Vincent Giroud, French opera in the post-Revolutionary era adopted a largely propagandistic tone. Works like 1791's *Guillaume Tell* and *Le despotisme monacal* told stories of the horrors of aristocratic rule and the ultimate triumph of liberty (Giroud 95). Thus, for Ellis, Lewis' reverence for post-Revolutionary French literature, coupled with his lack of discussion of politics in his letters, seems a "tacit approval" of the Revolution (98). Ellis adds that Lewis "professed to love French culture just as [he] detested the autocratic French monarchy" (98). Lewis emerged from his summer study in Paris in 1791 with warm feelings toward the Revolution and its effects on Parisian society, a post-

revolutionary society which he found, according to Ellis, "pleasingly sybaritic and luxurious" (98).

The emergence of Lewis' opposition to the Revolution

In the span of only a few years, however, Lewis's feelings toward the Revolution changed significantly. His ideological shift is important to chart because it is characteristic of a broader shift in the Gothic toward a preoccupation with, and often a decided stance against, the Revolution. As critic Ronald Paulson asserts in his study of the Revolution's literary impact, the Gothic in the 1790s became "the form adopted by those who were either against or merely intrigued by the Revolution" (537).

It was May 1794, and the Revolution had undergone significant changes since Lewis' Parisian trip. First, in August 1792, the Constitutional Monarchy had crumbled and been replaced by a Republic, which came in the form of the Committee on Public Safety (Ellis 102). In June 1793, under The Committee's direction began the single bloodiest period of the Revolution, The Reign of Terror. In the Terror's one-year period, Ellis estimates that between 40,000 and 250,000 people were killed. Trials occurred in which witnesses were not heard, defense lawyers weren't present, and executions were carried out within 24 hours of conviction (Ellis 102).

Against this backdrop of extraordinary violence, we can trace a marked shift in Lewis's feelings toward the Revolution. In 1794 he accepted a job at the Hague as an Ambassador to the United Province of the Netherlands (Ellis 98). While in this job, Lewis's view of the Revolution soured. Three factors solidified his opposition toward the Revolution: his literary engagement with the Revolution; his firsthand experience with Revolutionary violence while stationed in Arnheim; and his befriending, in Holland, of

several members of the former French aristocracy for whom he felt great admiration and empathy.

As Ellis points out, by 1794, Lewis had begun reading narratives from French émigrés. Among other things, these narratives alluded to the bloodshed occurring in France at the time (Ellis 103). According to Elizabeth McCartney's doctoral thesis on post-Revolutionary French émigré literature, there were more than 200,000 French émigrés scattered about in the post-Revolutionary period, of whom approximately one-quarter were exiled nobles (2, 18). As she asserts, the authors who emerged from this group provided veiled accounts of "the outrageousness of the Revolution," especially alluding to its descent into chaos and Terror (14). One such author was Stephanie-Felicite Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, the Contesse de Genlis, whom McCartney describes as "a defender of the Church, governess to the royal family, and author of nostalgic memoirs about her early life at court" (149). Though Contesse de Genlis never wrote works that were explicitly anti-Republican, McCartney asserts that she "resist[ed] both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries in her émigré work" (161). DeGenlis's literary portrayal of pre-Revolutionary Paris as a "center of cosmopolitan cultural activity" can be seen as an implicit endorsement of the monarchical order (McCartney 174). More conspicuously anti-Revolutionary material came in the form of French exile journalism, which was widely disseminated in both London and the Netherlands around 1794. As Simon Burrows points out in *French Exile Journalism and European Politics*, a series of exile journals and newspapers emerged in London beginning in 1792 (15). According to Burrows, these journals were counter-revolutionary in nature, written by men who'd been "deeply scarred by their experiences during the revolution" (45). Burrows estimates that

between 33 and 44 percent of the major exiled journalists were either nobles or clergymen (39). Given their propagandistic bent, it's not surprising that these journals frequently published damning first-hand accounts of the Revolution. One such example from November 1793 reads:

> Each day sees new pillaging of the Churches. Profanation is mingled with robbery. Men riding the wagons charged with images of saints ... parodying the ceremonies of the Church ... [and] succeed in destroying the last traces of the Christian religion (Burrows 150).

Lewis also likely read *Memoirs of Mrs. Coghlan* (1794), an anti-revolutionary account by an English woman describing her stay in Paris in 1788. Mrs. Coghlan recounts the pre-revolutionary city as a beautiful place of "every refinement of luxury" (5). During her trip, Coghlan befriended Dukes, Princes and Marquises, writing that "the persons with whom I have been acquainted, were the most part distinguished for genius and talent" (10). But that all changed with the Revolution, which, according to Coghlan signaled "destruction ... to long established orders" and the emergence of "stern, inexorable Republican virtue" that ensured a "gloomy scene" for Paris (38,5). In his 1794 work *The Example of France: a warning to Britain,* English writer Arthur Young expresses a sentiment similar to Coghlan's as he describes the "Present State of France" as an anarchical bloodbath, with "murderers and banditti" running the streets (14). Based on his travels through a Terror-ridden France, Young asserts that "all parts ... have been scenes either of insurrection, of plunder, or of blood" (16).

For Lewis, to read how a revolution he'd indirectly supported had descended into a wave of violence was undoubtedly shocking. In particular, as Ellis asserts, Lewis was disturbed to hear that victims of the Terror were often imprisoned in "the crypts and cloisters of monasteries" while awaiting punishment (103). The fact of ostensibly sacred

places doubling as prisons finds its way into *The Monk* when Ambrosio imprisons Antonia in a "private Vault" beneath the abbey (Lewis 378). A letter to his mother marked July 22, 1794 alludes to his knowledge of the Terror when he writes, "'You may perhaps be a little alarmed for me, when you hear of the progress of the French'" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 211).

But Lewis' knowledge of the Revolution wasn't merely gleaned from conversation and reading — he also landed in the line of French fire. Indeed, while in Arnheim, the Netherlands in 1794 as part of his Hague job, he found himself dodging French artillery. "I saw two cannon balls pass through the roof of the house about ten yards distant," Lewis wrote in November 1794, "... I was much shocked at seeing a countryman whose leg had been shot away at that moment" (Lewis qtd. in Ellis 101). This attack was part of a larger series of campaigns beginning in 1792 that saw the French Revolutionary army attempting to expand its sphere of influence beyond France. A number of factors undergirded the campaigns, but perhaps most significant was the fear, within the Revolutionary government, of aristocratic forces attempting to quash the Revolutionary state from without. The entire region of the Netherlands ultimately fell under French control in 1794 (Schama 191).

In addition to reading anti-Revolutionary literature and first-hand experience of the Revolution's violence, Lewis's change of sentiment can also be attributed to the bonds he forged with former members of the French aristocracy during his time at the Hague. Upon arriving at the Hague, his journals reflect that he found the whole place dreary and incredibly dull. "The Devil Ennui has made the Hague his favorite abode," Lewis wrote his mother in July 1794, two months after his arrival (Lewis qtd. in Peck 211). But this

boredom soon diminished when he met an exciting group of exiled aristocratic Frenchwomen. "As of late I have ... got into a very agreeable Coterie, which assembles every other night," Lewis wrote his mother two months after his letter complaining about ennui (Lewis qtd. in Peck 212). This group included one "Madame de Matignon," whom Lewis called "one of the cleverest Women I ever met with" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 212). Whereas in 1791 he found himself opposed to the monarchy, in 1794 it is clear his sympathies lay with these exiled aristocrats — a fact at least partially explained by the quality of their dinner parties. The "Coterie," Lewis writes, represent "the very best society of Paris" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 212). It is hard not to draw a comparison here to Mrs. Coghlan and her characterization of Parisian high society as "distinguished for genius and talents" (10). Lewis' befriending of these exiles is the final piece of evidence suggesting a shift in sympathy from revolutionaries to members of the aristocratic order.

Reading* The Monk *as reflective of revolutionary fear

I should preface this section by acknowledging that *The Monk* cannot be read solely as an indictment of the French Revolution. As critics like David Morse have pointed out, there are ways in which it validates certain revolutionary sentiments. One of the primary targets of assault at the beginning of the Revolution was the church and a "rejection of Christian or Catholic references" (Hunt 82). Similarly, in *The Monk*, Lewis represents the church as "an institution which contradicts human nature," a place of "rottenness, putrescence, decay" (Morse 56-57). Thus, it would be reductive to claim that *The Monk* is totally anti-revolutionary. But as I will argue, it does seem to be substantially preoccupied with two fears that are inextricably bound up with the

Revolution: (1) the idea that revolutions cause people to behave in uncontrollable ways; and (2) that crowds represent, collectively, a force of terror and destruction.

In his study of the Revolution's impact on the Gothic, Ronald Paulson calls Ambrosio's narrative the "story of his insane, uncontrolled rush into freedom" (536). Where *Otranto* was the story of the old guard, the king Manfred and his castle, *The Monk* is, in Paulson's words, "a fable of revolution," with Ambrosio's sexual liberation functioning as a symbolic critique of the political liberation that took place in France in 1789 (537). Paulson asserts that the French Revolution was characterized by the "appalling ease with which [man's] nature could be inverted" (539). It was through this inversion that the oppressed became the oppressors, leading to the Terror. Ambrosio exists in this same mode, with his personal revolution engendering an inversion of his sexually repressed nature. Toward the beginning of the novel, we get a picture of Ambrosio as the image of strength and virtue, having lived a life of "study [and] total seclusion from the world" (Lewis 17). Introducing him in the lead-up to his first sermon, Lewis paints Ambrosio as calm and reasoned: "tranquility reigned upon his smooth unwrinkled forehead" (18). He is, as Lewis asserts, "equally unacquainted with cares and crimes" (18). In his subservience to the church and specifically his celibacy, Ambrosio is beholden to a higher authority. Although he took his own vows, Ambrosio didn't really have a choice in the matter: he was abandoned outside the monastery as a baby. He knows no other life.

But then something happens in *The Monk's* narrative that forces Ambrosio to question, and ultimately rebel against, the divine authority he's unquestioningly obeyed. This shift is represented in language suggesting a bubbling revolution within him. The

internal revolt begins to surface after his pupil, Jerome, reveals that "he" is actually a beautiful and seductive woman named Matilda. Suddenly, Ambrosio's religious commitment falters as he feels that "his heart throbbed with desire" (62). Scared of what he's feeling, he encourages Matilda to leave because "insensibly your passions will gain a superiority over your reason" (64). What is ironic about this warning to her is that it should be, in fact, directed at Ambrosio himself. Indeed, the rest of the novel is a study in how Ambrosio's passion conquers his reason and facilitates what Paulson terms an "uncontrolled rush into freedom," the same "uncontrolled rush" that led to the French Terror (536).

Just as the French Revolution descended into tyranny and bloodshed, Ambrosio's personal revolution results in his becoming a depraved tyrant, forcing the chaste and innocent Antonia to do his bidding. In overthrowing religious authority, Ambrosio becomes, to borrow Paulson's phrase about the French, the "greater tyrant [him]self" (538). As he rapes Antonia in the basement vault, it's clear he's lost all semblance of reason and rationality. For him, the height of his personal revolution, namely, the fulfillment of his lust for Antonia, is also the pinnacle of his despotism. "Wretched Girl," he tells her, "you must stay here ... and witness ... what it is to die in the horrors of despondency" (385). In the "hidden and separate" space of the vaults, Ambrosio is free from social order, free to rape and murder Antonia (Botting 81). The fact that Ambrosio's liberation makes him so depraved suggests *The Monk's* stance that submission to higher authority and forms of moral order is essential to a decent society.

Crowds played a vital role in facilitating the French Revolution, and in *The Monk* Lewis takes a clear stance against such crowds and their destructive power. As Paulson

asserts, the crowd represented the "central phenomenon" of the Revolution (540). English author Young's 1794 first-hand account of post-Revolutionary France describes "the mob" as acting "so independently of all ... that, to compliment the result with the term government, would be truly ridiculous" (6). And yet crowds did wield decisive power in pivotal Revolutionary events like the storming of the Bastille and the September Massacres (Paulson 540). In the eyes of people like Lewis, The Crowd came to represent, in Paulson's words, "complete uncontrol of unruly passions" (541). The notion of the crowd as an unruly and destructive force appears throughout *The Monk.* At the beginning of the book, foundation is laid for the crowd being base and morally bankrupt. Although they flock to Ambrosio's sermon, they are not "assembled ... from ... thirst of information," Lewis writes (7). Thus, the image we get of the crowd is of an amorphous mass lacking sense or reason. Toward the end of the book, the crowd appears again to exact revenge on a nun, Mother St. Agatha, who's accused of torturing and killing another nun, Agnes, for Agnes's momentary transgression of her vow of chastity. A terrified Mother St. Agatha is left to the mercy of the crowd. While a lone voice or two suggests that she be put on trial, the resounding voice is one of "indignation ... confusion ... [and] disturbance" (Lewis 355). Despite the nun claiming she didn't kill Agnes, the crowds — who are now called "The Rioters" — continue their attack. During this passage Lewis employs dehumanizing language to describe the riotous mass, writing that they "heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance" (356). As Lewis clearly elucidates, this mass of people is only capable of violence: "They tore [Agatha] one from another, and each new Tormentor was more savage than the former" (356). Instead of speaking, the crowd emits "howls" (356). Mother St. Agatha dies soaked in blood, "a

mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting" (356). In its description of a revolutionary mob acting senseless of law and order, the scene recalls a passage in Young's *The Example of France* that describes a post-Revolutionary Parisian mob "cut[ting] the cords of [a] criminal, and carr[ying] him off in triumph" (17).

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Charles Brockden Brown: A Life of Opposition

I. Early life: questioning the Revolutionary impulse

At various points in *Edgar Huntly,* Edgar alludes to a childhood of forest exploration. "I had traversed part of it, at an early age," he recalls, "... led by a roaming disposition" (Brown, *Huntly* 100). As a child, Edgar views the natural world as a place of pure wonder, recalling "districts so romantic and wild" (3). Huntly calls his natural explorations "rambles." In rendering this portrait of a young man guided by a natural curiosity, Brown surely drew from his own youthful experience. In his biography of his friend Brown, William Dunlap asserts that as a young man, Brown went on enough "unseasonable rambles" that he became "habituated to solitary walking" (9). According to another biographer, David Lee Clark, these walks were actually prescribed by Brown's schoolmaster, who "allowed him to be absent from school for such purposes" even though these rambles led to "great uneasiness in the different members of [Brown's] family" (19, 9). Painting a picture of Brown's youth, critics unanimously concur that the boy's unstoppable bookishness presented a detriment to his already "frail" constitution (Ringe, *Brown* 4). With this in mind, the prescribed forest walks can be seen as a way to literally get Brown outside his head. In the same way that Edgar traverses a "craggy and obscure" forest outside Philadelphia, the young Brown was apt to explore the forest with "a total unconsciousness of what was passing about him, or of the flight of time, or the progress of his feet" (Brown, *Huntly* 6, Dunlap 9). This image of 11-year-old Brown with

his nose pressed against ink provides the proper framework in which to view the growth of Brown's ultimate ambivalence. Indeed, he was exposed to so many different sources of intellectual stimuli from such a young age that he ultimately became, like Huntly, a man "disabled ... by the confusion of ... thoughts" (Brown, *Huntly* 27).

As a child, Brown was raised as anything but a radical revolutionary. In fact, a study of his childhood reveals a series of events suggesting that the young Brown was made to feel significant skepticism about the American Revolution. These formative events include the arrest of his Quaker father by the revolutionary army, Brown's education from a schoolteacher opposed to the American Revolution, and Brown's learning of the horrors of the French Terror**.** These events caused the young Brown to be skeptical of a continuation of Revolutionary thought and belief in America.

The first event that shaped Brown's Revolutionary skepticism happened when Brown was only three years old. Amid the convening of the first Continental Congress and the Declaration of Independence, Quakerism, the religion of Brown's family, came under suspicion because many Quakers "remained true to their traditions in objecting to war" (Clark 16). This Quaker refusal to fight for independence was fundamentally at odds with the national climate of revolutionary enthusiasm, one in which, according to Peter Kafer, "committees popped up advocating for militia rule and wanting steep penalties for 'those refusing to pick up arms'" (35). The Quakers' commitment to nonviolence was provocative to many people actively involved in the Revolution. For example, John Adams began to view Quakers not only with disdain, but also with suspicion, and, in the words of one Philadelphia Quaker at the time, "It seems universally agreed that Philadelphia will no longer be the happy asylum for Quakers that it once was"

(Unnamed Quaker qtd. in Kafer, "Revolutionary Philadelphia" 472). Those words proved prophetic. On August 28, 1777, Adams, in his role as a member of the Continental Congress' "Committee on Spies," drew up a list of Philadelphia Quakers who were to be "disarmed and secured" by the Revolutionary army (Kafer 1). Among these men was Elijah Brown, father of young Charles. The mens's houses were searched, and they were incarcerated for months without a formal trial. The arrests of these men stemmed from an incident in which a group of Quakers sympathetic with the British cause allegedly provided a British fleet with papers about U.S. troop movement. However, as Peter Kafer points out, the event in question never happened. The supposedly treasonous papers were in fact "blatant forgeries" (3). Instead, these arrests were an intimidation measure carried out to ensure that "potentially arms-carrying" Quakers would be scared into reconsidering their pacifistic stance (Kafer 35). Brown's father was kept confined with 19 other Quaker men for months. Their confinement was a study in how the new country's justice system could be outright ignored. As Kafer points out, the writ of *Habeas corpus* was summarily ignored "for just these 20 people, in this one instance" (5). Thus, the imprisoned Quakers had no idea when they'd be tried , or for what. In fact, there wasn't a whole lot anybody knew about the status of their imprisonment. They were soon taken out of Philadelphia, through Maryland and into Virginia, making it very difficult for the mens' wives and friends to advocate for their release. After all, who had jurisdiction over the men? To whom should they write? The Assembly of Pennsylvania? The Governor of Virginia? Eventually, the men were released. For young Charles, this event served as an illumination of the irrational excesses of the Revolutionary temper. The same group that heroically established his country's independence had also carried out the senseless arrest

of his father. According to critic Colin Morris, Elijah Brown's arrest showed young Charles "the disorientation that democratic justice could cause" (612). How could he reconcile this sense of irrationality the supposed rationality of the Revolution? Such thoughts revolved in Charles' head as he rambled through the Philadelphia woods.

Young Brown's classroom experience also helped mold a sense of revolutionary skepticism. Brown attended a Quaker school. It was there that he fell under the tutelage of Robert Proud, a man disgusted with the excesses of the American Revolution and who often complained that the revolutionaries had used "violence [to] ... usurp the power over their former masters." He was known to call the just-recently established United States "this accursed place" (Kafer 47). Proud's was a voice of revolutionary opposition, a man who sympathized with the British and "nurtured" this same sense of revolutionary scrutiny "in his students" (Morris 613). As biographer David Lee Clark asserts, Proud's "influence in shaping the course of [Brown's] life cannot be measured" (21). Proud's relationship with Brown was, Clark says, "of the most intimate nature" (20). His classroom was the first place, outside of books, where Brown's intellectual curiosity was genuinely nurtured, with Proud helping to "prompt the precocious Charles Brown on his intellectual way" (Kafer 48). Perhaps it's Proud's influence one detects when reading this excerpt from an ostensible tribute to George Washington that Brown published in 1789:

> Let the candor then write on his tomb
> Here America's favorite lies;
> Whose soul for the want of due room,
> Has left us to range in the skies (Brown qtd. in Morris 617)

While the poem was purportedly a tribute to Washington, in actuality it was Brown's "reworking" of a poem that had been written to condemn the revolutionary Benjamin Franklin (Kafer 50). For Morris, what the poem and its "ridiculously overblown" tone

illustrate is a clear skepticism on Brown's part toward Washington's post-war deification. Brown's sardonic "tribute" suggests that both Proud's influence and his father's arrest were at the forefront of his mind when he composed the poem.

Finally, Brown's learning about the French Revolution illustrated for him the full horrors that revolutions could cause among the people they supposedly liberated. What evidently came before Brown's knowledge of the French Revolution, though, was his documented reading of David Hume's *History of England* (1778), a book whose central claim, according to Morris, is that "illegal violence" — revolutionary violence — "leads inevitably to tyranny" (613). Thus, by the time Brown heard the news from across the Atlantic, he already had some idea of the dangers of revolutionary violence. News of the Terror flooded into Philadelphia, and Morris points out that "before long French exiles were arriving in the City of Brotherly Love" (633). At roughly the same time of the reports of the Terror, another, literal sickness reached shores of Philadelphia: a devastating outbreak of Yellow Fever. For Brown, the fever, coinciding as it did with the French Revolutionary fervor, became symbolic of "the diseases of passion and interest" (Morris 633). Evidence for Brown's connection of literal disease and the disease of passion-induced violence can be traced to *Ormond* (1799), a book that describes a disease-ridden city becoming the center of "conspiratorial" violence resembling that of the French Revolution (Morris 633). Brown makes the connection between disease and the French explicit in *Ormond* when he has one of the characters posit that "Frenchmen were exempt from this disease," implying that they've either brought it or had it already (Brown, *Ormond* 47).

II. Young adulthood: The Friendly Club and radical flirtations

But when Brown was a young man something changed. As a friend of his, Elihu Hubbard Smith, later wrote, "Godwin came, & all was light" (Smith qtd. in Ringe, *Brown* 4). This is perhaps an oversimplification, but there is a strong sense in which Brown's exposure to William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and the tenants of radical liberalism facilitated a decisive shift in his emerging ideology. Brown's embracing of progressive radicalism as a young man certainly stands in contrast to the revolutionary doubt he grew up with, and helps us better understand the contradictory worldviews to which Brown was exposed, and the sense of his divided ideological self when he wrote *Edgar Huntly.*

As a young man Brown read William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), a book that, according to W.M. Verhoeven, served as an endorsement of the faculties of human reason (8). Godwin believed that man could be perfected by means of "rational understanding and pure reason" (Verhoeven 8). He composed *Enquiry* in the immediate wake of the French Revolution. In this pre-Terror period, the Revolution had excited British liberals, and Godwin capitalized on this to publish a book that could "give birth to the most auspicious reforms" (Godwin qtd. in Verhoeven 14). Godwin was a radical. Whereas Brown's early life had taught him that human nature spawned revolutionary violence, in Godwin, Brown found a genuine advocate for human reason. Godwin's anarchical vision was of a "republican utopia" in which humanity would use the powers of reason to perfect itself and live harmoniously together. Far from the rigidly hierarchical system of governance that Brown's pro-British teacher Proud had advocated, Godwin believed, according to scholar Stephen Frye, "that governmental institutions were inherently corrupt" (70). Godwin believed in the revolution that takes place inside

people's heads. Actual political revolutions could turn dangerous, in Godwin's view: "Revolution is engendered by an indignation against tyranny, yet is itself even more pregnant with tyranny" (Ch. 2). Yet Godwin still believed that nothing was more important than the overthrow of tyranny and the harnessing of human reason to pave a better future for mankind. This was the book that Brown called "my Oracle" (Brown qtd. in Kafer 66).

Mary Wollstonecraft presented another radical voice for the young and insatiably literary Brown to consume and regurgitate. Taken together, Wollstonecraft and Godwin, a married couple, represent the first pioneering voices for what we can now identify as modern liberalism. Brown read Wollstonecraft with as much enthusiasm as he had Godwin. In her *Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft operates in the Godwinian revolutionary strain by advancing an argument "for the social emancipation of women" (Clark 110). Wollstonecraft's argument for women's equality had a clear impact on Brown. In an 1806 letter to an unidentified woman he calls "Miss Susan," Brown effusively describes the intellectual growth of his wife's young sister "M.," whose literary aspirations he regards with both admiration and melancholy. Writes Brown,

> Our M … makes nothing of devouring two or three volumes in a day … I see her deeply absorbed in a book … Indeed, the poor girl has no resource, this cold, house-keeping, home-staying weather, but books (Brown qtd. in Dunlap 236).

This brief paragraph suggests Brown's view, informed by Wollstonecraft, that a woman's role extended beyond the confines of the home. The mention of "this cold, house-keeping, home-staying weather" serves as a reminder of the colonial woman's traditional role as homemaker. But Brown felt women should achieve both intellectual and social autonomy. Brown's advocacy for the "active" woman appears as a crucial theme in his

work. His feminist ideals are on most conspicuous display in “The Paradise of Women,” an essay in *Alcuin* (1798), a Wallstonecraftian feminist dialogue. Brown begins the essay by describing a party thrown by a respected man of letters. Arriving at the party, however, the guests discover the lettered man is absent, with the man’s sister having taken his place (Brown qtd. in Dunlap 247). The perplexed male guests initially converse with the sister out of politeness, but soon begin to find her genuinely engaging. “The guests who came in search of the man … lingered a little,” the unnamed narrator writes, “but soon found something in the features and accents of the lady, that induced them to prolong their stay, for their own sake" (Dunlap 245). What is this *something* that causes the men to stay? It is the woman's fierce intelligence. Indeed, Brown describes at great length a formal gathering at which no distinction is made between the sexes, with men and women functioning on the same social level:

> Whatever business of the hour, both sexes seemed equally engaged in it … the stage was occupied sometimes by men, sometimes by women, and sometimes by a company of each … it seemed as if magnificence and symmetry had been consulted, rather than a scrupulous decorum (Brown qtd. in Dunlap 260).

Since no intellectual difference between the sexes exists, Brown argues, neither should the social superiority of the men. Axelrod highlights Brown’s feminist values in his biography of the author, asserting that Brown’s works are filled with “feminist speculations” that other male authors were reticent to address (Axelrod 119). According to Axelrod, Brown’s willingness to address feminist issues sets him apart from the vast majority of male authors of the period. David Lee Clark resoundingly concurs with Axelrod, arguing for Brown as the very first American author to tackle women’s rights. According to Clark, Brown endorses “the first extended, serious argument for the rights of women that had yet appeared in America." To feminist critic Anita Vickers, this

embracing of women's rights "signifies Brown's initial idealism" (10). In this way it is further evidence of Brown's early liberal radicalism.

Brown's mounting progressive and revolutionary feelings were nurtured by his involvement in the New York Friendly Club. The Friendly Club was a literary society established in 1793. Comprised of young up-and-coming writers, thinkers and businessmen, it quickly became a hotspot of progressive thought, and also a forum for Brown to pursue publications in periodicals (Cronin 474, Stearns 103). The core members — among them Brown and his friends William Dunlap and Elihu Hubbard Smith — wanted to use the group to collaboratively "improve public knowledge" (Parrish E40). Though it has sometimes been critically posited that the group was fundamentally conservative[2], this does not appear to be the case. Rather, they embraced and encouraged liberal thought, paying particular attention to Godwin and Wollstonecraft (Parrish E42). And Elihu Smith, who founded the Club, was in fact an avowed Godwinian (Kafer 72). Thus, the Friendly Club became a place where Brown's revolutionary bent continued to grow.

III. Two roads diverged

At the time he sat down to write *Edgar Huntly* in the late 1790s, Charles Brockden Brown was at a crossroads. His father's arrest had taught him about the dangerous irrationalities spurred on by the Revolution. His exposure to the French Revolution had shown him the chaos and violent disorder into which revolutionary masses and individuals could descend. By contrast, his readings of Godwin and

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[2] Some critics have represented the group as being fundamentally federalist (i.e. conservative). See, for example, the article by Cronin cited in my bibliography.

Wollstonecraft opened up a world of revolutionary possibilities. According to these thinkers, human agency and reason was the greatest force of all, the force that could quash tyranny and reign in a world of radical utopianism. And Brown's involvement in the Friendly Club only solidified these progressive values, encouraging his liberal thought and validating it in a group setting.

By the time he wrote *Huntly*, Brown wasn't entirely clear on where he stood. As critic William Hedges asserts, in his early writings Brown projects "an ambivalence or ambiguity so deep ... it seems partly pathological" (107). Similar to Hedges, William Frye points out that young Brown felt a "persistent ambivalence regarding political issues" at the time (71). For Brown, two roads diverged. One was the road of conservatism, the road of restraint, the road that told him revolutions were dangerous and destructive, that people couldn't self-govern without becoming totally debased. The other was the road of radicalism, the road that prescribed throwing caution to the wind, the road of Godwinian utopian change: a place where individual reason reigned. Between these roads young Brown stood. Yet he could not pick just one. As critic Colin Morris asserts, Brown in the 1790s didn't have a concrete political allegiance (611). Instead, he found himself divided, a division that I argue *Huntly* serves as a parable for.

Perhaps because of his indecisiveness, Brown was drawn to the literary Gothic, a genre that emphasized confusion and human indecision. Before Brown's *Wieland* debuted in 1798, Gothic texts by British writers like Walpole, Lewis and Ann Radcliffe had already found their way across the Atlantic and into the hands of people like Brown, who eagerly absorbed their narratives of "excess" replete with "spectres, monsters ... evil aristocrats, monks and nuns" (Botting 1). These Gothic imports soon gained wide

popularity. In his study of the American Gothic, Donald Ringe points out that as early as 1795, Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was widely available in Philadelphia — despite having just debuted in England a year before (*Gothic* 14). Both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Monk* also made their way to the States, with *Monk* appearing "occasionally in the [literary] catalogues of 1798 and 1799" (Ringe, *Gothic* 14). These British Gothic texts presented a stark contrast to the American literature of the time, much of which, such as 1782's *Letters from an American Farmer,* employed a starkly realistic style with the goal of "reporting the commonplace realities of the material world" (Ringe, *Gothic* 6). But British Gothic texts had nothing to do with "commonplace realities." They were gripping and salacious narratives "calculated to interest the *feelings* of an audience" ("Never performed in Boston..." (emphasis added)).[3] For Brown, an impressionable young man gripped by conflicting political feelings, these fantastical Gothic narratives struck a chord.

[3] When thinking about the emergence of the literary Gothic in America, it's worth considering the fact that a penchant for distinctly Gothic effects can be found in earlier Puritan texts such as Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom* (1662) and Jonathan Edwards's 1741 sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.* Both of these works employ in their narratives the ideas of "the returns of the past" and "chaos ... toward the ultimate restitution of order and convention" that Alan Lloyd-Smith cites as being central features of the literary Gothic (1). In fact, reading anachronistically it's tempting to speculate that Gothic writers appropriated some of these Puritan literary techniques and put them to different, more secular uses.

three

Edgar Huntly: A Narrative of Ideological Ambivalence

Prelude: Edgar Huntly in the woods

A pivotal moment in *Edgar Huntly* finds the eponymous hero lost in the dark. Just moments before, at least it seems like moments ago to him, he was in his bed in his family's farmhouse. So where is he now? He tries to think, but thoughts don't come easy. He feels confusion, but more than that he feels hunger. Unbearable hunger. His hands graze something and he soon ascertains he's on the floor of a cave. How did he get here? He thinks back on what's happened. It is 1787. He lives just outside Philadelphia. He is a calm, reasoned, rational man who lives a normal life. And yet over the past few weeks, his sedate existence has been interrupted by the appearance of Clithero Edny, an Irish immigrant whom Edgar finds mysteriously digging at the exact site where Edgar's friend Waldegrave was murdered. Presuming Clithero to be his friends' murderer, Edgar follows him on a series of "rambles" into the woods outside Philadelphia, where Clithero then disappears into "the mouth of a cavern" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 17). What Edgar soon realizes is that Clithero is totally unconscious of his night rambles: he is a sleepwalker. Edgar questions Clithero about Waldegrave's murder. Clithero relays a long personal narrative that reveals he has absolutely nothing to do with Waldegrave's demise. Edgar was completely mistaken. His presumption of Clithero's guilt was entirely unfounded. In the aftermath of this faulty accusation, Edgar begins to question his own sense of reason and rationality. "My judgement," he realizes with horror, "was ... sunk into imbecility and

confusion" (93). Since he was so wrong about Clithero, how can he rely on his own reasoning faculties?

Those were the thoughts revolving in his head when he fell asleep. And now he is on the floor of this cave. A new feeling asserts itself: rage. He is suddenly awake now, more awake than he's ever been. *Who put me here*? By God, he's going to find his way out of this subterraneous prison. He might have been placed here for a reason, but intellectual reasoning will not help him here. He must revert to a more primal nature, a nature lain dormant his entire life. Edgar Huntly is now a creature of the jungle.

I: A problem in the criticism?

In their respective articles on *Edgar Huntly*, scholars Ezra Tawil and Paul Downes both allude to the problem with *Edgar Huntly* scholarship that I intend to rectify here: namely, that critics are too quick to pin *Edgar Huntly* as either a work of conservatism or liberalism. Critics like Richard Chase in the 1950s have traced what they see as the " 'radical spirit' " running through Brown's books (Chase qtd. in Downes 413). Conversely, Downes shows how other critics feels strongly that Brown's novels reflect a " 'conservative backlash against revolutionary ideas' " (Clemit qtd. in 413).

In my own readings of *Edgar Huntly* criticism, I've observed a similar critical divide: those who see *Edgar Huntly* as conservative (i.e. skeptical of revolutionary impulse/activity), and others who see it as liberal (i.e. persuaded by the merits of the revolutionary ethos). Critical appraisals from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century tend to focus on *Edgar Huntly's* revolutionary aspect, namely, the way it endorses individual human agency. In an 1827 review of *The Works of Charles Brockden*

Brown, an unnamed author characterizes *Edgar Huntly* as a book that "embraces the living spirit within us" via its depiction of "rugged scenery" ("Review 3"). For the reviewer, *Edgar Huntly* is the work of an author whose literary vision of "*beau ideal*" is of a flawed character, Edgar, who may be prone to flights of fancy, but is nevertheless relentlessly "inquisitive ... and generous," and a symbolically revolutionary figure. Similarly, a 1942 review of Brown's works in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* emphasizes "the influence of Godwin" in his Gothic works, without mentioning any conservatism he might have been exposed to ("Distinguished Americans"). And in a 1950 review of a biography of Brown, Frederick Tolles describes Brown as a "cultural nationalist," someone more keen on positively impacting "the early American republic" than criticizing it (244). Even some more recent critics have examined *Edgar Huntly's* revolutionary aspects. In his 2006 study of *Edgar Huntly,* Ezra Tawil points to prefatory notes by Brown as evidence of *Edgar Huntly's* revolutionary bent:

> America has opened new views ... to the moral painter ... It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* xxiii)

Brown additionally mentions America's "new springs of action" and "new motives to curiosity," suggesting Brown's preoccupation with the idea of a uniquely American literature and, thereby, implying that he's looking to distance himself from British culture. This idea of breaking away from British culture to establish a uniquely American culture is part of the revolutionary spirit.

Generally, though, more recent *Edgar Huntly* criticism has focused on its conservatism. In her 1992 doctoral thesis, Anita Vickers posits that *Edgar Huntly* evinces Brown's conversion from the liberalism of his young adulthood to a clear federalist

stance. For her, *Edgar Huntly's* representation of "a world where chaos and madness triumph over order and reason" expresses "Brown's increasing skepticism of Republican policies" (14, 169-170). As Vickers points out, *Edgar Huntly* is set in 1787, the same year as the Shays' Rebellion, an event that saw farmers taking up arms to protest mounting tax debts. The Rebellion and its resulting violence prompted widespread fear about the new government's susceptibility to "further acts of insurgency" (Vickers 172). According to Vickers, the Rebellion would have been fresh in the minds of the reading public when they picked up *Edgar Huntly* in 1799. The fact that *Edgar Huntly* is set in the woods further suggests that it can be read as a parable for the dangers of armed insurrections, with the woods serving "as a metaphor ... for the dangers of unchecked republicanism in a weakened political climate" (Vickers 170, 178). Similarly, for critic Dana Luciano, *Edgar Huntly's* narrative warns of ungovernable freedom through its depiction of Edgar as unable "to behave like a good republican ... should" (6). Other critics, such as Paul Downes, cite Clithero's narrative trajectory as a warning about the dangers of revolutions. As Downes asserts, Clithero's killing of Wiatte represents "an incident of revolutionary violence" akin to the revolutions in the United States and France, because it similarly facilitates the "rise to power of a previously subjugated class" (with Clithero serving as a stand-in for this class) (419,420). Thus, for Downes, Clithero's subsequent downward spiral makes *Edgar Huntly* a cautionary tale about revolutions, one warning that, "Revolution ... threatens ... the resulting order" (420).

My answer to this critical divide is a simple one: *Edgar Huntly* can be read both ways — as conservative *and* liberal, federalist *and* anti-federalist, fearful of revolutions *and* excited by revolutionary ardor. To prove this, I will provide both readings, assigning

each equal weight and attention to each. Once I've established that both readings are valid, I will move toward my broader argument: namely, that by virtue of its clear oppositions, *Edgar Huntly* is neither revolutionary nor anti-revolutionary. Thus, the critical divide is erroneous. Ultimately, I argue, *Edgar Huntly* is a parable for Brown's own confusion — the story of an author who cannot make up his mind. The implications of this ambivalence are great because as the father of the American Gothic, Brown set a precedent for works that followed.

II. Edgar Huntly *as anti-revolutionary: a comparative reading with* The Monk

I previously argued that *The Monk* marks a shift in the British literary Gothic toward conservatism. In its depiction of a seemingly rational and good man's descent into depravity, I read the book offers a parable for the French Revolution's descent into the period of Terror that began in 1793 and led to the deaths of up to 250,000 people (Ellis 102). The trajectory of the French Revolution shocked Matthew Lewis, whose initial view of the Revolution had been colored by propagandistic pro-revolutionary literature as well as his own "pleasingly sybaritic and luxurious" stay in Paris in 1791 (Ellis 98). What Lewis learned about the Terror scared him, and it's that sense of fear that infects *The Monk.* He heard about the mass killings. The bloodshed. The multitude of victims imprisoned in crypts and cloisters (Ellis 103). He heard about all of this, and then he wrote *The Monk.* As I have argued, Ambrosio's sexual liberation symbolizes the devastating outcome of political liberation in France. The Revolutionary Terror demonstrated, as Paulson writes, "the appalling ease with which [man's] nature could be inverted" (539). In this way, *The Monk* is a book that reflects revolutionary terror, or, as

critic Emmett Kennedy argues, offers a "parable ... of the French Revolution's atrocity and violence" (Kennedy qtd. in Ellis 81). In Lewis' mind, the passion that produces revolutions, in Ambrosio's case, an internal, sexual revolution, is a destructive force that leaves one completely debased.

Like *The Monk*, *Edgar Huntly* illustrates how baser passions can supersede human reasoning with destructive consequences. In the course of *Edgar Huntly's* narrative, Clithero experiences a deranged psychological unraveling akin to Ambrosio's. In this section, I explore the similarities between the two texts — similarities that, to my knowledge, have not been adequately explored by critics. Both novels tell of ostensibly rational and reasonable men becoming overcome by base passions, leading them to commit atrocities totally at odds with their apparent characters. And both works feature labyrinths functioning as places of terror. In *The Monk*, as I've discussed, the labyrinth is the church's catacomb-like basement. In *Edgar Huntly*, the labyrinth takes a decidedly different form: the woods and limestone caves outside Philadelphia. In both instances, the labyrinths display "the absence or loss of reason ... in full horror" (Botting 83). As I'll show, both *The Monk's* Ambrosio and *Edgar Huntly's* Edgar are led to these labyrinths of terror after they've lost their rational faculties. In this way, the labyrinth serves a symbolic function as the psychological landscape of human madness. I argue that one can read *Edgar Huntly* as a book that, by virtue of its striking similarities to the demonstrably anti-Revolutionary *The Monk*, implicitly reflects revolutionary fears.

Before discussing the textual similarities, though, I think it may be helpful to note certain similarities in the lives of Matthew G. Lewis and Charles Brockden Brown. These similarities may aid in accounting for the shared features in their books. As children, both

men were bookish and led somewhat insular lives. While Brown's parents went out on trips, Brown was partial to staying at home with a book in his hand. It was during these solitary reading sessions that he taught himself the French language (Dunlap 7, 10). Similarly, one of Lewis's biographers charts his childhood "moods of deep detachment" during which he read literature and drama (Peck 4). Both were physically small and weak as young men, with Brown possessed of "a frail and delicate constitution" and Lewis himself surmising, at age 16, that "'I promise to be a remarkably little personage'" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 184). I mention their shared diminutive stature only because it helps illuminate the potent sense of insecurity reflected in both of their personal journals. Reading through the journals, one senses that both young men were highly impressionable, even malleable, and plagued with self-doubt. In Lewis's case, this insecurity is partially evidenced by his constantly seeking praise and validation from his mother. "'Believe,'" he wrote her during his summer in Paris, "'that my heart is conscious in cherishing you, that I fulfill a duty, that I procure myself a pleasure, and that I can never equal my obligation to you'" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 184-185). This quote suggests his deference to his mother; she appears, from his memoirs at least, to have been the final arbiter of his works. Her arbitration was necessary because Lewis evidently questioned his own abilities. After sending his mother a farce he'd written, he sent her a follow-up letter with the following request: "Tell me seriously did the Farce make you laugh, did it interest you the first time you read it?" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 186). After a play of his was met with a middling audience response, Lewis "'immediately withdr[e]w the piece'" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 222). So powerful was his insecurity that he refused to place his name on the title page of *The Monk* until after he'd read a series of positive critical

appraisals (Peck 24). Similarly, young Charles Brockden Brown was also gripped by a clear self-doubt. According to William Dunlap — a friend of Brown who compiled his early letters — Brown was overcome by insecurity after deciding to abandon the profession of law in favor of a career in letters. The shift "preyed upon his happiness and undermined his health," Dunlap writes (18).

This shared insecurity may go toward explaining why both men experienced such profound ideological shifts in their lives. Both Brown and Lewis were wavering in their own convictions and susceptible to flattery. This made them highly impressionable. And when they met someone who nurtured them and validated their artistry, they were likely to empathize with that person's ideology. With Lewis, for instance, his befriending of French aristocratic exiles helped mold the anti-Revolutionary stance we see in *The Monk.* Reading Lewis's glowing accounts of these exiles, one wonders how much his shifting ideological stance can be chalked up to his excitement at being included in their social circle. The "Coterie," Lewis wrote in a gushing letter to his mother, reflected "'the very best society of Paris'" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 212). And it was this group that plucked Lewis out of "'the Devil Ennui'" by providing him entertainment and attention "'every other night'" (Lewis qtd. in Peck 211, 212). In much the same way, the Friendly Club provided Brown with a sense of intellectual validation and enrichment that helped lead to his embracing of revolutionary ardor. These parallels are meant to be suggestive of a kindred psychological development between the two men — the idea that both authors experienced ideological pulls in different directions.

The first parallel between *The Monk* and *Edgar Huntly* is that both follow a narrative trajectory wherein ostensibly rational men are debased by a passion that

supersedes their reason and leads them to abhorrent behavior. As I've previously discussed, *The Monk* begins by representing Ambrosio as a highly rational individual whose sense of reason is unshakeable. He has "never been known to transgress a single rule of his order," the narrator points out, adding that, "The smallest stain is not to be discovered upon his character" (Lewis 17). Shown preaching at the outset of the novel, Ambrosio "expatiate[s] on the beauties of Religion" with clarity and grace (19). He is, as we're meant to see, a sensible man, firm in his convictions. Although Clithero Edny is not the holy figure that Ambrosio is, he is initially a man of clear reason and rationality. Discussing his childhood in Europe, Clithero explains to Edgar that as a young servant-boy he was adopted by a woman he served, the benevolent and worldly Mrs. Lorimer, who saw fit to raise him as her own son (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 36). Thanks to Mrs. Lorimer, young Clithero is inculcated with the principles of rationality and reason afforded by the study "of history and science" (37). He is also privy to conversations Mrs. Lorimer has with her group of intellectual friends, conversations infused with "all that could charm the sense or instruct the understanding" (42). Similarly, Ambrosio's rationality was nurtured when he was "was educated in the Monastery ... [a] period ... passed in study" (Lewis 17). Both novels describe the nurturing of rational and moral sensibilities as bringing rewards. Clithero describes how, after his moral education, Lorimer made him a member of the family and how he grew in influence until finally he oversaw "the selection and government ... of her servants" (39). Ambrosio too becomes powerful, exerting tremendous influence throughout his sermonizing on the congregation which finds its "attention irresistibly attracted" to him (Lewis 18).

Yet both Ambrosio and Clithero are transformed by a base passion that abruptly and decisively conquers their carefully cultivated reason. With Ambrosio, this passion is sexual. After spending 33 years cloistered away, the recognition that "Jerome" is actually a beautiful woman named Matilda engenders in him a feeling he's never felt before. Suddenly, his entire disposition shifts. Whereas before he was completely morally upright, the violence of his sexual feelings causes him to revert to a baser state. Upon viewing this woman, "a thousand opposing sentiments combatted in Ambrosio's bosom" (Lewis 62). But the one that supersedes all others is the sense of "passion," the fact that "his heart throbbed with desire" (62). This is the beginning of Ambrosio's unraveling, the moment when all that painstakingly developed reason begins to crumble and his thoughts become "bewildered" (62). While in this scene he does "recover from his confusion" and admonish Matilda, the moment is short-lived. With this view of the female form, the damage has been done. Consequences will follow. While the inciting incident for Ambrosio is sex, for Clithero it's murder. As Clithero explains to Edgar, Mrs. Lorimer had a twin named Wiatte, a man as vile as she was pure. Wiatte "exceeded in depravity," Clithero tells Edgar, "all that has been imputed to the arch-foe of mankind" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 44). The only good thing Wiatte did was have a beautiful daughter, Clarice, with whom Clithero falls in love. As Clithero explains to Edgar, Wiatte was eventually apprehended by authorities over a gambling debt and sentenced to banishment, where he then supposedly died at sea. Years pass. In the interim, Clithero professes his love for Clarice to Mrs. Lorimer, who replies that, "Never, in my opinion, was a passion more rational and just" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 56). Thus here again we get the sense that Clithero operates on a clear standard of rationality. Alas, that rationality crumbles one

evening when, walking alone, Clithero hears a voice behind him and in an instant realizes it's Wiatte — who is not dead after all. Not only has Wiatte returned, but he plans to kill Clithero, telling him, "Damn ye, villain, ye're a dead man!" before discharging a pistol and misfiring (71). The moment forces Clithero to act in self-defense. While this act, unlike Ambrosio's, is morally justifiable, it still transcends the sense of rationality Clithero had held true. "The attack was so abrupt that my thoughts could not suddenly be recalled," he tells Edgar (71). Indeed, his "exertions were mechanical" as he withdraws a pistol and kills Wiatte. Similar to Ambrosio's sense of "passion" as he views Matilda, Clithero is overcome with a feeling of "unconscious necessity" as he kills Wiatte (74). Like Ambrosio, his rational faculties are temporarily restored — "I had not lost my presence of mind," he says in explaining why he fetched a doctor for the dying Wiatte — but, alas, not for long.

Both authors represent passion as usurping reason with dire consequences. Once he's felt the rumblings of a sexual passion, it doesn't take long for Ambrosio to unravel. Previously a "tranquil" man, Ambrosio finds himself veering down a violent path to his most primal nature (Lewis 18). He begins to find it "impossible ... to arrange his ideas" (66). He wants to be morally upright — to cast Matilda out of the monastery, to do what a life of celibacy and divine worship prescribes him to do — but he can't stop thinking about "her left breast: ... that was such a breast!" (65). His sexual hunger begins to consume him. His reason is replaced with "confusion" an "inflamed imagination" (67). And when his sexuality finally emerges, it does so with a vengeance, having been chained up under a vow of celibacy for so many years. As the narrator informs us, "Vice is ... most dangerous when lurking behind the Mask of Virtue" (84). Having "forgot his

vows, his sanctity, and his fame," Ambrosio kidnaps Antonia, binds her up in the underground labyrinth of the monastery, and rapes her. Gone is the reason that had him leading the church with a "smooth unwrinkled forehead" (18). In its place is an unruly passion. Instead of the divine will, Ambrosio is guided only by "the gratification of the senses" (380). As the narrator asserts, "His lust was become madness" (380).

Clithero experiences a similar debasement, with consequences equally violent. Clithero's killing of Wiatte is an impulsive action he's unable to reconcile with his rationality, and, as critics like John Cleman have pointed out, this causes him to "lose hold of his reason" (205). Mulling over the killing, he remembers Mrs. Lorimer telling him that she had "believed her Fate to be blended with that of Wiatte" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 77). Mrs. Lorimer's superstition had her convinced that anything that happened to Wiatte would happen to her. Thus, in the aftermath of Wiatte's killing, Clithero begins to convince himself that he's responsible for Lorimer's death as well. Indeed, if Lorimer's prophecy holds true, it's only a matter of time before "my lady" expires (79). Despairing over the loss of a woman who hasn't died yet, Clithero decides there is only one solution: to kill Mrs. Lorimer, a decision he reaches in a moment of heated passion. Similar to how Ambrosio finds it "impossible ... to arrange his ideas," Clithero resolves to kill Lorimer in a moment that "was too brief for more than itself to be viewed by the intellect" (Lewis 66, Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 85). Recounting the story to Edgar, Clithero admits that his faculties of reason were no match for "the daemon that possessed me" (85). In his perverted state, he convinces himself that killing Mrs. Lorimer is the best thing he can do for her. That way, she'll be spared the pain of realizing her brother died. After mistaking Clarice for Mrs. Lorimer and thus almost killing his betrothed, Clithero explains to Mrs.

Lorimer the reason he did it — because of the prophecy. Hearing that her brother is dead, Mrs. Lorimer faints. In his perverted state, Clithero assumes she's dead and immediately leaves Ireland for America to escape the whole thing. But he cannot outrun his own demons. And so, in Philadelphia, Clithero finds himself sleepwalking, impelled by the force of "unconscious necessity" that overtook him the moment he raised his gun to kill Wiatte.. For Edgar, Clithero initially is not a hopeless case and Edgar aims to "restore this unhappy man to purity and peace" (32). In Edgar's view, the thing that will most help Clithero is *reason*: "Reason was ... an antidote to ... insanity like his" (98). And Edgar employs his own reasoning to justify what Clithero did: "He acted," Edgar convinces himself, "in obedience to an impulse which he could not control nor resist" (94). How can Clithero be held culpable for an action in which his "will" was "not concerned" (94)? After all, Clithero's attempted murder of Lorimer "originated in those limitations which nature has imposed upon human faculties" (95). However, what Edgar does not realize at this early juncture is that the "impulse" that overtook Clithero has totally destroyed his reason. The power of human reason that Edgar holds supreme is no match for the "daemon" of passion that "possessed" Clithero. Like Ambrosio, Clithero is doomed from the instant his passion surfaces. The totality of Clithero's debasement becomes apparent at the end of *Edgar Huntly*. On hearing that Mrs. Lorimer and her husband Sarsefield are also in the Philadelphia area, Edgar runs to Clithero's forest dwelling to inform him that Mrs. Lorimer is not, in fact, dead, and provides him with her present location: "By imparting this intelligence, I hoped to work the most auspicious revolutions in his feelings" (295). But instead of eliciting the positive response he'd hoped for, Edgar is met with the following angry rant:

> "Rash and infatuated youth, thou hast ratified, beyond appeal or forgiveness, thy own doom. Thou hast once more let loose my steps, and sent me on a fearful journey ... I will fly to the spot which thou describes ... If she be alive, then am I reserved for the performance of a new crime" (304).

This speech represents a unique moment of rational introspection for Clithero. In this one moment, Clithero understands that he's not susceptible to reform. Edgar's attempt to reason with Clithero isn't only futile, but also destructive. Indeed, the information provided by Edgar leads Clithero on one final quest to kill Mrs. Lorimer. When he fails, he kills himself. Both Ambrosio and Clithero's deaths occur at sea, with Clithero forcing "himself beneath the surface" of the water and Ambrosio being "carried ... into the river" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 308, Lewis 442).

Significantly, at the nadir of their debasement, both Ambrosio and Clithero are described in distinctly dehumanizing terms, in language that recalls similar descriptions of French revolutionary masses. When Edgar stumbles upon Clithero deep in the woods, he describes him not as a human being, but rather as some kind of wild plant: "His scanty and coarse garb had been ... rent away by brambles and thorns ... his arms, bosom, and cheeks were overgrown" (108). Accompanying this description is Edgar's observation that Clithero's expression suggests an "anarchy of ... passions" (108). And toward the end of the book, Clithero becomes so unrecognizable that Edgar mistakes him for an Indian (280).[4] Ambrosio is described in similarly dehumanizing terms. During his rape of Antonia, as his "passion became more violent," Ambrosio is described alternately as a "Barbarian," "Ravisher," and a "Monster" (Lewis 383, 385). When he is finally captured, Ambrosio's captors see a man so animalized that they "scarcely could persuade

[4] The novel abounds with racist caricatures of Native Americans. It is not the place of this thesis to address that, but those interested in pursuing the topic should consider starting with Robert D. Newman's "Indians and Indian-Hating in *Edgar Huntly* and *The Confidence Man*," published in *MELUS* Issue 3, Volume 15.

themselves that what they saw was no vision" (393). To me, this dehumanizing language presents an interesting parallel with the description of the French revolutionary masses that emerged in émigré literature during the revolution. In these works, the Crowd is invariably described as "bloodthirsty ... animal like in [its] ferocity" (Paulson 536). As critic Ronald Paulson points out, for audiences outsides France, the revolutionary Crowd came to represent the "complete uncontrol of unruly passions" (541). Representative of this particular literary output of anti-Revolutionary diatribes is Louis-Sebastian Mercier's 1799 work *A New Paris.* Among many grotesque moments, Mercier describes a scene in which a revolutionary Crowd — whom the author refers to as "tigers" in dehumanizing language similar to *The Monk* and *Edgar Huntly* — captures a former princess and administers a gruesome brand of justice. She is beaten and decapitated, but that's not where it ends. "After Madame de Lambelle's body was mutilated in a hundred different ways," Mercier writes, "... one of these monsters cut out her virginal part to make himself a mustache, in the stunned presence of spectators" (6). It's accounts like these that left people like Lewis trembling, and I note the similar language of dehumanization applied to both the Crowd as well as Clithero and Ambrosio.

Implicit in the representation of Clithero and Ambrosio's debasement is a fear inextricably bound up with revolutions: that national emancipation causes the surfacing of individual passions "incompatible with order and coherence" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 1). Paul Downes argues that Clithero's story represents an allegory of "revolutionary violence" (419). For Downes, Clithero receives an "Enlightenment education" (419). And yet this enlightened education is fundamentally at odds with the "monarchic mentality" (the deference to a singular authority) that leads Clithero to unquestioningly believe

everything Mrs. Lorimer says. When Clithero kills Wiatte, this is his "revolutionary moment" because it's a moment when he's emancipated from "arbitrary tyranny" (i.e. the influence of Wiatte) (Downes 421). But his emancipation does not bring him joy and freedom; instead, it leaves him terrified of the power he's attained through an act of impulsive violence. Unable to carry the burden of this individual power — which represents, in essence, personal liberty — Clithero finds himself debased, so encumbered by his democratic empowerment that he's imprisoned within his own sub-conscious, sleepwalking through the forest outside Philadelphia. Where Clithero's "revolutionary moment" is his killing of Wiatte, Ambrosio's is his intercourse with Matilda, because it signals the (sexually) oppressed Ambrosio's liberation from the (sexually) oppressive tyranny of the Church. The personal revolutions of both Clithero and Ambrosio attest to the view of revolutions advanced by more conservative strains of literary gothic, those that viewed such like the French and American as "uncontrolled rush[es] into freedom" (Paulson 536).

The second key feature between *The Monk* and *Edgar Huntly* is that in both novels the central setting is the labyrinth of terror — a place where, as Botting says, "the absence or loss of reason ... is displayed in full horror" (83). "This scene," Clithero tells Edgar of the wilderness outside Philadelphia, "is adapted to my temper" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 93). Indeed, in the same way that Clithero is, according to Edgar Huntly, "a maniac," the labyrinthine forest in *Edgar Huntly* can also be called downright maniacal. It is the place where human depravity reaches its nadir. It is nothing like the natural world that Thomas Jefferson or Lewis and Clark wrote about. Instead, Brown's terrifying forest represents the metaphorical landscape of a depraved mind. As an 1827 review of *Edgar*

Huntly points out, Edgar "sees reflected in the face of nature the same harsh and strongly marked features, which ... predominate in his views of human character" ("Review 3"). *Edgar Huntly's* labyrinthine forest is the place people retreat to when they're confronting the limits of their own reason, or, as Edgar calls it, "the prospect of limits that could not be overleaped" (100). The notion of intellectual darkness is literalized in both *Edgar Huntly* and *The Monk's* labyrinths. In *The Monk*, Ambrosio's introduction to the labyrinthine vaults beneath the monastery are as a place of "total darkness" (Lewis 231). Similarly, Edgar's first view of the cave is as a vault of "darkness" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 17). Significantly, Ambrosio and Edgar are introduced to these labyrinths by characters who are even more debased than them, and who — at least at first — journey further into the labyrinth than they do. In *The Monk,* this character is Matilda, who implores Ambrosio not to follow her because "Your life would fall a victim to your imprudent curiosities" (231). In *Edgar Huntly,* this character is Clithero, whom Edgar observes as he "plunged into the darkness" of the cave (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 17). I have suggested in Chapter 1 how *The Monk's* labyrinth reflects French revolutionary terror. I would argue that *Edgar Huntly's* labyrinth evinces Brown's fear of the American revolution and individual liberation, in that it shows these things to be forces that wreak havoc on human reason. As Edgar says when he first enters the cave, "I began to fear that I should be involved in a maze, and should be disabled from returning" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 102). Like the maze-like passageways of *The Monk's* underground crypt, once you enter the forest labyrinth of *Edgar Huntly*, there's no going back. In *Edgar Huntly's* forest of base human nature, there is no place for reason. As he teeters on the edge of a precipice, Edgar surmises that, "By leaping down I might incur no injury, or might ... dash myself to

pieces on the points of rocks" (103). He tries to apply his reasoning faculties but finds it "impossible to ascertain" the depth of the cavity (103). The darkness defeats reason. For Edgar Huntly, the knowledge that his reason won't help him here is suffocating: "it seemed as if I were surrounded by barriers that would forever cut off my return to air and to light" (104). This "light" can be taken not just as the literal light shining outside the cave, but also the light of Edgar's enlightened education. As a clear symbolic device of what the cave represents, "an animal leapt forth" as Edgar first waits at the mouth of the cave (18). Indeed, this is the labyrinth of base nature. Edgar does not realize this at the outset of his journey; instead he regards following Clithero into the forest as an enlightenment mission, a process to ascribe meaning to Clithero's actions: "To comprehend [Clithero] demands penetration into the recesses of his soul" (10). But among the "groves and precipices" and "pits and hollows" that constitute Clithero's debased mind, there is nothing for Edgar to comprehend. As Edgar realizes in retrospect, Clithero's story is one that's "incompatible with order and coherence" (1). Following behind Clithero, Edgar realizes that, "It seemed to be the sole end of his labors ... to plunge into the darkest cavities" (20). The labyrinthine forest is the perfect place to take this plunge, because it features a series of "openings" which "always terminate, sooner or later, in insuperable difficulties" (100). For Edgar, this descent into darkness supplants his reason and plunges him "into ... a different state of mind" (20). In this state he shortly becomes, like Clithero before him, a victim of sleepwalking and its powers of debasement. Waking up at the bottom of the cave after a sleepwalking episode, Edgar realizes, "My thoughts were wildering and mazy" (168). This description of his thoughts closely mirrors his initial description of the forest and cave as "a maze" (20). Teetering

on "the ... tremulous verge of the dizziest precipice," Edgar's transformation is complete. "I plunged," he says, "into ... a different state of mind" (20). Mere reason will not help him in this cave. He must call forth his baser nature, a nature lain dormant his entire life. He must not defer to his education, but instead his instinct: "I tasked my ... senses to discover the nature of my present situation" (170). In *Edgar Huntly's* labyrinth of terror, Edgar reverts to his basest nature. The revolution enabled him personal freedom, and yet that liberation is destructive because it causes him to regress to a state where he's crawling on all fours, "compelled ... to resort to hands as well as feet" as he traverses the cave (102).

III. Edgar Huntly *as a work of revolutionary fervor*

But as I mentioned at the outset of the chapter, Brown was a man split in two. As much as he was susceptible to the ideas of conservatism preached by his teacher Robert Proud and affirmed by his father's arrest, he was equally shaped by his involvement in the Friendly Club and his voracious readings of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. As much as it can be read as a work of revolutionary fear, *Edgar Huntly* can *also* be read as an endorsement of revolutionary principles. It does this by advancing a clearly Godwinian character as the book's moral arbiter, endorsing distinctively liberal values, and, finally, suggesting the occasional utility of human impulses, something anti-revolutionary writers feared and abhorred.

The first feature that suggests *Edgar Huntly* is a work endorsing revolutionary ardor and the newly established democracy is that its moral center and ultimate hero is a distinctly Godwinian character. Sarsefield does not appear in the flesh until toward the

end of the novel, but his knowledge and sense of unshakeable reason is alluded to throughout by both Edgar and Clithero. For his part, Edgar continually refers to Sarsefield as not only a teacher but a kind of foster father, the father Edgar himself has never had. Edgar remembers, for instance, how Sarsefield would take Edgar along as "the companion of all his pedestrian excursions" (100). With Sarsefield, Edgar felt safe exploring the woods. That's because Sarsefield was there beside him to make the whole thing make sense. He is a character we trust from the beginning of the novel to the final page, offering frequent "moralizing narratives" and "synthetical reasonings" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 100). In his philosophy, Godwin was a man preoccupied with morality and reasoning. In *An enquiry concerning political justice* (1793), Godwin advances his vision of liberalism and personal freedom while at the same time rallying against the kind of conservatism that Brown's schoolteacher Robert Proud was in favor of. Godwin argues that morality is a product of experience and that "there is no instance of an original propensity to evil" (18). In Godwin's humanistic mind, everyone is susceptible to reform. Godwin believed that men were "being[s] endowed with intellect, and capable of discerning the differences and tendencies of things" (113). In contrast to anti-revolutionary tomes like Mercier's *Le Nouveau Paris* (1799) and Arthur Young's *The example of the French* (1794), which advanced a view of man as malleable and easily prone to debasement, Godwin saw man as inherently good and capable of self-betterment. Where Mercier and Young used their works to suggest that the masses needed an aristocratic leader in order because they couldn't self-govern, Godwin believes quite the opposite. While acknowledging that man is not perfect, Godwin believes that man is "perfectible" through exercise of his reason and moral feelings (118). Therefore,

Godwin argues that "no government should restrain the excursions of an inventive mind" (118). Man, Godwin believes, must "be habituated to follow without alarm the train of his speculations" (119). When I first read this assertion, I thought about Edgar and Clithero's sleepwalking episodes. Would Godwin endorse these rambles as the act of "inventive minds"? I don't believe so. At the same time that Godwin endorses "excursions of the inventive mind," he also adds a qualifier: that these excursions be carried out in the name of virtue, by men who've been conditioned to understand their duty to do good (119). For Godwin, men should govern themselves once they've learned to "act [on] ... virtue ... and to utter ... truth" (119). As critic A.K. Rogers points out in a critical assessment of Godwin, the philosopher's main "creed" is that people be "freed from ... tyranny" in order to learn for themselves the value and utility of virtue, and then act on that (54). Godwin believes that "man in his true nature is a creature of reason," and that "of all existing forms, democracy is indisputably the best" venue for individual reason to come to fruition because it allows the most individual liberty (Rogers 53). Unlike Clithero and Edgar, Sarsefield, in his clear morality and sense of reason, is an ideal Godwinian revolutionized figure. Unlike Edgar, Sarsefield realizes that Clithero is a "madman" who is not susceptible to reform (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 276). *Edgar Huntly* implies that Sarsefield is able to reach this realization because he inhabits a higher plane of reason than Edgar or anyone else does. While the weak-willed Edgar gives way to his sympathies — still insistent that he's "sensible of nothing but my compassion" for Clithero — Sarsefield has the presence of mind to realize that Clithero is a "madman whose liberty is dangerous" (283). As a practitioner of Godwinian reason, Sarsefield realizes that whatever reason Clithero possessed has been irreversibly "perverted" (308).

Clithero is, quite simply, a lost cause, and it's thanks to Sarsefield that Clithero is stopped before he can murder Mrs. Lorimer. Eventually, Edgar is forced to concur with Sarsefield that, "Clithero is a maniac" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 305). Thus, Sarsefield's sense of reason eventually triumphs over Edgar's faith in intuition. As critic Dana Luciano writes, Sarsefield "believes in logic, not sensation" (7). Like Godwin, Sarsefield is a man who absolutely abhors tyranny. This becomes evident when he reveals to Edgar that he was forced to take the deranged Clithero prisoner to prevent him from killing Lorimer. "On me devolved the province of [Clithero's] jailer and his tyrant," Sarsefield writes to Edgar (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 308). He continues, with evident disgust, that being a tyrant over Clithero was "a province which required a heart more steeled by spectacles of suffering and the exercise of cruelty than mine had been" (308).

Several critics have identified the fundamentally revolutionary aspects of Sarsefield's character. In a version of *Edgar Huntly* edited by Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro, the editors point out that the name Sarsefield recalls Patrick Sarsefield, a 17th century Irish commander who fought valiantly against the British aristocracy (46). Since the Sarsefield in *Edgar Huntly* is also Irish, this shared name certainly seems like a deliberate move on Brown's part to color Sarsefield as a radical revolutionary character by tapping into the public's memory of the heroic Patrick Sarsefield. Luciano says something similar, arguing that Sarsefield projects a "republican rationality" that makes him "the novel's most mature character" (9). He is, in Arthur G. Kimball's words, an embodiment of "the humane skill and learning which mark a civilized nation" (224). Similarly, critic Downes calls Sarsefield the book's symbolic "Enlightenment educator," a man who by virtue of his powers of reasoning and rationality renders the book a tacit

endorsement of revolutionary ardor. To me, it is highly significant that *Edgar Huntly* ends with a single letter from Sarsefield, considering that the last 300 pages have been taken up by a very long letter from Edgar to Mary Waldegrave. By literally giving Sarsefield the last word, Brown suggests that Sarsefield's is ultimately the account we should trust. The letter from Sarsefield is very succinct, and yet more powerful than most of Edgar's digressive commentary. In the letter, Sarsefield admonishes his former pupil for his "rashness" in providing Clithero with Lorimer's location (305). As an exasperated Sarsefield reminds Edgar, "I know better than you the character of Clithero" (306). That's because Sarsefield is the fullest realization of the Godwinian ideal, a man who is, in Godwin's words, "a moral being ... endowed with intellect, and capable of discerning the differences and tendencies of things" (113).

A second way *Edgar Huntly* reads as a book advancing revolutionary values is in its socially progressive content. With the glaring exception of Brown's racist and dehumanizing treatment of Native Americans, *Edgar Huntly* is for the most part a progressive book, one endorsing the kind of radical humanism that Godwin held up as ideal. Godwin believed that all humans, regardless of race, class, or gender should have the same shot at attaining the sense of morality that would enable them to live lives of pure reason. In *Edgar Huntly* we observe this idea of equality on display in several ways. The first is that Edgar's murdered friend Waldegrave is described as having taught at a "negro free-school" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 148). Waldegrave is described as a man with "scrupulous integrity" (148). Thus, by Brown placing this scrupulously moral man in a black school, we can regard this as suggesting the author's belief in black equality. This racial progressivism is consistent with the picture of Brown that scholar Robert Levine

portrays as a man thoroughly "antislavery" (Levine qtd. in Barnard and Shapiro, 87). The progressivism same goes for gender equality in *Edgar Huntly*, as evidenced by the characters of Mrs. Lorimer and Mary Waldegrave. Mrs. Lorimer is a smart and highly capable woman who, like Mary Wollstonecraft, by virtue of her intelligence and individuality agency is on the same level as men. Clithero describes her as ably conversing with many respected people: "her associates were numerous, and her evening conversations embellished with all that could charm the sense or instruct the understanding" (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 42). Also, Mrs. Lorimer's reason guides her democratic practice. Instead of forcing Clithero to remain in the class of servants, she enables him, through hard work and education, to rise out of the ranks of subservience and oversee "the selection and government ... of her servants" (39). Thus, Lorimer emerges here as a clear democratic leader. It is merely incidental, Brown suggests, that she is a woman. Indeed, this is the same Brown whose ideal world was one in which the symbolically intellectual "stage [would be] occupied sometimes by men, sometimes by women, and sometimes by a company of each" (Brown qtd. in Dunlap 260). One senses that this liberal progressivism is alive and well in *Edgar Huntly*, with the character of Lorimer functioning as just as much an arbiter of what is "rational and just" as Sarsefield (Brown, *Edgar Huntly* 56). The marginal character of Mary Waldegrave is further evidence of the novel's feelings toward gender equality. Indeed, though Mary may not appear in the text, almost the entire book takes the form of a letter to her. In her Edgar places his complete faith, not only romantically but also intellectually, grappling with complex and ambiguous moments of introspection. That all this self-reflection is for a

woman once again suggests that women in *Edgar Huntly* occupy the same intellectual plain as men.

The final way *Edgar Huntly* is revolutionary is that in it Brown makes a case for individual human impulse not *always* being a bad thing. The notion of impulse, and of people operating on baser instinct, is what anti-revolutionary writers latched onto in their condemnations of the participants in the French and American revolutions. To them no greater evil existed than man's propensity to act without thinking clearly. That's what Mrs. Coghlan and Arthur Young write about their travels in post-Revolutionary France, marveling that a country previously beautiful had, through the Revolutionary "destruction ... [of] long established orders," transformed its population into "murderers and banditti" (Coghlan 38, Young 14). This idea of the horrors wrought through the destructive impulses of the Revolutionized is brought to even grislier life in Mercier's *New Paris*, in which he describes a Revolutionary crowd that is guided only by savage impulse as it tears a woman to shreds (6). Because these people operate solely on instinct, Mercier animalizes them, calling them tigers. While this same language of animalization is on display in *Edgar Huntly*, the sentiment behind it is somewhat different. Indeed, through Edgar's wilderness narrative, we get the sense that Brown perhaps sees some utility in the human recourse to impulse. Once in the wilderness, Edgar can no longer rely on reason. As he wakes in the darkness of the cave, he realizes that even "the utmost vigour of my faculties" will not help him (166). The principles of rationality and reason do not exist in *Edgar Huntly's* forest labyrinth. Instead, Edgar must get acquainted with his animal instincts, the very same kinds of base instincts that impelled the French Revolutionary mass to behave like "tigers" in Mercier's book. But for Edgar, his recourse to the base

actually proves helpful. First, it is through "involuntary impulse" and a "freak of insanity" that he is able to kill an attacking panther (175-176). And his killing of the panther enables him to feast on it, without which "I should scarcely have avoided death" (177). Thus, Edgar's impulses save his life.

But Edgar's impulses don't only serve his immediate needs; they also provide a means of saving an innocent girl and avenging the deaths of both Waldegrave and Edgar's uncle. Shortly after leaving the cave, Edgar kills four Indians in a fit of "perverse nature" (212). The killings are brought on, as Edgar Huntly relays to Mary, by "the disparate impulse of passione" (199). And yet it is *because* of this desperate passion that Edgar is able to save a young girl the Indians were keeping hostage and return her to her family. And, as Edgar later learns, it is also through these killings that he's able to avenge Waldegrave and perhaps his uncle's murders, since it turns out "the assassin [of Waldegrave] had himself been killed, and probably by my own hand" (297). That the solving and avenging of Waldegrave's murder is accomplished not through Edgar's reasoning but his animal instinct suggests Brown saw situations in which acting on intuition made sense. Granted, *Edgar Huntly* presents many scenarios in which impulse is bad — Clithero's attempted murder(s) of Lorimer being the obvious example. But the fact that Edgar Huntly's self-admitted impulsive actions both save his life and avenge a family death suggest a politically radical endorsement of impulse on Brown's part — a dubious endorsement to be sure, but not much in Brown's life was done without great uncertainty.

IV. The final reading: Edgar Huntly *as parable for Brown's ambivalence*

In the previous two sections I made two arguments: first, that *Edgar Huntly* can be read as anti-revolutionary or conservative, and second, that it can be read as pro-revolutionary or liberal. The fact that these arguments directly contradict each other goes toward advancing my final reading of *Edgar Huntly* as a deliberate parable for — and ultimate endorsement of — Brown's own ideological ambivalence, and his inability to reconcile revolutionary fear with revolutionary ardor.

There are several passages in *Edgar Huntly* that, to my mind, directly reflect the potent sense of self-doubt and irreconcilable opposition that preoccupied Brown. One gleans Brown's self-reflection as early as the first page, when Edgar begins his narrative with the admission that, "Till now, to hold a steadfast pen was impossible" (1). Edgar goes on to wonder if he will be able to tell the story without "confusion" (1). To me, this opening passage is more than character exposition for Huntly; it is character exposition for Brown, painting a picture of an author plagued by self-doubt, and concerned, like Huntly, with his own susceptibility to "indistinctness and confusion" (1).

As Brown begins to describe Huntly's doomed quest to save Clithero Edny, the text becomes increasingly self-reflexive, illuminating Brown's divided self through the character of Huntly. The image of Brown's conflicting thoughts first surfaces as Huntly prepares to follow Clithero during his night rambles. On the one hand, Edgar acknowledges that, "Curiosity is vicious " (13). But then he directly contradicts himself by asserting that, "Curiosity, like virtue, is its own reward" (13). To me, these two conflicting statements reflect the conflict between conservatism and liberalism that raged in Brown's head. As a kid in school, Brown was taught by Robert Proud, an avowed Tory, that individual curiosity and folly was a bad thing because it led to senseless

violence. But as a young man, Brown's reading of Godwin instructed him that human curiosity was merely a natural part of human development: "There is nothing that more eminently contributes to intellectual energy, than for every man to be habituated to follow without alarm the train of his speculations" (Godwin 129). Shortly after his ruminations on curiosity, Edgar begins to follow Clithero and complains that, "He was perpetually changing his direction" (Brown, *Huntly* 16). Later on, Edgar admits that he, too, is often susceptible to "the wanderings" of his thoughts (22). In these instances, Brown reflects his own sense of indecision through Clithero and Edgar.

In his book *Dreaming Revolution,* Scott Bradfield asserts that *Edgar Huntly* "takes a long time getting nowhere" (23). In arguing for *Edgar Huntly* as a parable for Brown's ambivalence, it might seem like I'd take a stance similar to Bradfield's, claiming that, in its indecisiveness, *Edgar Huntly* doesn't really amount to anything. But that is not the case. To me, *Edgar Huntly* does not only read as a parable for ambivalence, but also as Brown's *endorsement* of ambivalence. After Edgar hears Clithero's narrative and realizes that Clithero had nothing to do with Waldegrave's murder, he begins to reflect on his deficiencies: "Was it owing," he wonders, "to my *imperfect education* that the inquietudes of [Clithero] were not traced to a deed performed at the distance of a thousand leagues?" (93, emphasis added). With this reflection, Edgar begins to question the utility of having decisive feelings of any kind. If there's a clear lesson Edgar learns, it's that it can be dangerous to follow strong convictions. After all, as Edgar acknowledges, "How imperfect are the grounds of all our decisions!" (95). Other critics have alluded to the sense of ambivalence inherent in *Edgar Huntly*. But no *Edgar Huntly* criticism I've read has articulated what I see as Brown's endorsement of his own

ambivalence about conservatism (i.e. the Old World) and liberalism (the New World). After Edgar realizes that he has unwittingly enabled Clithero to hunt down and attempt to kill Mrs. Lorimer, Huntly reflects on the "obscure and contradictory" nature of Clithero's narrative (293). Edgar realizes it was a mistake to attempt to make sense of Clithero's contradictory story. In taking Clithero's side, and taking it strongly, Edgar only does harm. By the end of the book, both Clithero and Mrs. Lorimer's unborn child are dead — deaths that could have been avoided if Huntly had not intervened. Reflecting on how disastrous his quest to help Clithero turned out, Edgar asserts, "How little cognizance have men over the actions and motives of each other!" (293-294). Edgar's biggest mistake wasn't presuming Clithero's innocence, but instead presuming that he, Edgar Huntly, had any authority to take a stand either way. If he had remained detached and ambivalent, human losses could have been avoided. As Sarsefield, the book's voice of reason, implores Huntly in his final letter, "Be ... more obsequious for the future" (307). In other words, stand back and don't take sides.

Brown was a man tormented by the revolution of his own conflicting ideas. *Edgar Huntly* is proof that he was unable to reconcile these ideological oppositions. But how could he anyway? After all, *How imperfect are the grounds of all our decisions!* In a letter to "Henriette G.," Brown shared the following concerns about the general reading public:

> ... what advantages can he derive from [the book], whose rapid and unsteady glances can produce none but general and indeterminate ideas, who dwells not on a single object long enough to know its properties? (Brown qtd. in Bradfield 19)

This is not to say that Brown didn't have faith in the ability of a select few people to attain pure reason. That's why, in *Edgar Huntly,* we get the character of Sarsefield to

represent that rare man whose decisions are sound and whose rationality is unshakeable. But most people, Brown and Edgar Huntly among them, could not be Sarsefield. The only thing Brown was certain of was his own uncertainty — an ideology of ambivalence.

conclusion

In Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 short story "The Pit and the Pendulum," the unnamed narrator, a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition, awakens in the dark. The last thing he remembers was being sentenced to death by the Inquisition. And now he's here. But *where* is here? He tries to "exercise [his] reason," but reasoning does not help him in this darkness (Poe qtd. in Thompson 307). And so he reverts to a more primal nature, reaching "out my hand" and discovering "something damp and hard" (307). If this sounds like a familiar set-up, that's because it is: Poe modeled the scene after Edgar's cave awakening in *Edgar Huntly* (Boyd 191). In the same way that Huntly finds his thoughts "wildering and mazy" upon waking, Poe's narrator realizes he has "lapse[d] into insensibility" (Brown, *Huntly* 166, Poe qtd. in Thompson 307). When Huntly and "Pit's" narrator finally rise to explore, they find themselves similarly compromised, with Edgar "totter[ing] and stagger[ing]" and Poe's narrator "trembling [and] ... thrust[ing] [his] arms wildly about" (Brown 168, Poe 308). In *Edgar Huntly's* cave scene, Huntly speculates as to whether "I was the victim of some tyrant who had thrust me into a dungeon of his fortress" (169). In "Pit," this is exactly what happens. As the narrator begins to realize, this blackness is the prison to which the tyrannical Inquisition has condemned him. What this comparison suggests is Brown's clear influence on Poe, an influence that is well documented, with Poe himself calling Brown a "*genus* [sic]" and calling him, alongside Nathaniel Hawthorne, the "best writer of fiction in America" (Perry and Sederholm 10, Poe qtd. in Carter 190).

In discussing the excerpt from "Pit" and mentioning Poe's reverence for Brown, I hope to suggest the broader implications of my project. Charles Brockden Brown's vision did not die with him. It found its way directly into other authors' work, Poe included.[5] Poe is, of course, a more towering literary figure than Brown. But how much of Poe's stylistics and thematic concerns might have actually begun in the mind of Charles Brockden Brown? My aim with this project has been to illuminate the ambivalence that I see as central both to *Edgar Huntly's* narrative and to Brown's life. Ultimately, Brown uses *Edgar Huntly* to argue that most men are too easily confused to act on conviction. And if this ambivalence lies at the heart of Brown's work, perhaps it lies at the heart of the American Gothic.

[5] For a discussion of the similarities between *Huntly* and another Poe story, "Tale of the Ragged Mountains," see Boyd Carter's essay "Poe's Debt to Charles Brockden Brown."

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