

For November, the Ascension Book Group will continue reading two novels by Early American author Charles Brockden Brown contained in the collection *Three Gothic Novels: Arthur Mervyn* (1799); and *Edgar Huntly* (1800). Charles Brockden Brown has often been referred to as America's first novelist and America's first full-time writer. Among scholars of Early American literature, it is well known that Brown was both heavily influenced by, as well as reciprocally a heavy influence upon the English writers associated with Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* was directly influenced by the novels of Brown. The Ascension Book Group will meet to discuss these two novels of Charles Brockden Brown in Wheeler Hall on Sunday, December 8 at 1:00 p.m. after the Coffee Hour. Refreshments will be provided. For any questions please contact Ken Kelling at (773) 853-2337 or kjjjk07@gmail.com.

Three Gothic Novels

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Arthur Mervyn: or, Memoirs of the Year 1793 (1799-1800) is the tale of a man whose life is influenced by the chaotic world around him during the yellow fever plague of 1793. Mervyn leaves the family farm after family conflict to seek a better life in the city. His life is controlled very often by things that seem to be out of his control. Brown shows in this story the microcosm of one life that becomes representative of some of the negative and positive effects of a new country that is still finding itself as a new nation during a time of social stress caused by a deadly epidemic.

Edgar Huntly: or, The Memoirs of a Sleepwalker (1799-1800) is a story narrated by Edgar Huntly who is trying to solve the murder of a close friend. The story uses the mechanism of two sleepwalkers to drive the story, but also reflects upon the complex issues of morality. Brown's origins as a Quaker are a strong influence on his ideas of what is morally acceptable and what is not, the idea that someone can commit a deed that could be called an act of mercy or kindness instead of an act of murder. His Quaker roots show in his philosophical ideas reflected in the democratic principals of equality between the classes and equality in the rights of women. According to researcher Scott Bradfield, "Brown's notion of truth is so deeply private, so radically democratic, it never firmly or fully establishes itself anywhere or in any one person. All people stand equal in their judgment of the truth, because no permanent, instantly accessible field of knowledge exists to which they can submit."