

‘WHAT THEY SEEK FOR IS IN THEMSELVES’:
QUAKER LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT IN EIGHTEENTH- AND
NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Quakerism was an important influence on a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American writers. Looking at the work of, amongst others, Charles Brockden Brown, Robert Montgomery Bird, Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Greenleaf Whittier, it demonstrates that both the stereotyped depiction of Quakers and the use of Quaker ideas, such as the inward light in literature of the period, helped writers tackle some of the paradoxes of democracy in a young nation. The perceived mystery of Quaker individualism is used in these texts first to dramatise anxiety over the formation of American ‘character’ as either fundamentally unique and unknowable or representative of the whole nation, and secondly for more constructive ends in order to create a language able to express unity in diversity.

KEYWORDS

Quakerism, American literature, democracy, character, discernment, language

I come at this project from an interested ‘outsider’ perspective. My mother was a life-long member of the Religious Society of Friends. As a child I had sometimes accompanied her to the Saffron Walden Meeting (where, unbeknown to me, respected Quaker journalists such as Walter Robson had once attended [Robson 1970]). Unlike George Fox, I did not possess ‘a gravity and stayedness of mind and spirit not usual in children’ (1998: 3) so I had tended to find the contemplative silence uncomfortable rather than edifying. However, in later years, despite not becoming a member of the society myself, I did find our philosophical discussions about the nature of Quaker belief very stimulating. In particular, I was struck by the idiosyncratic blend of individualism, as evinced by the William Penn quotation which forms the title of this essay, and to which I return presently, and a democracy in worship that rejects the traditional hierarchy of clergy and congregation.

The same blend of individualism and egalitarianism has underpinned cultural depictions and scholarly analyses of American identity since 'American Studies' as a discipline attained its own distinct identity in the early part of the twentieth century. What Stephen Fender (1992: 163) dubs the 'collective singular' of the American democratic self has important implications for how one approaches key areas of American culture and mythology. From the pioneer's precarious balancing of his or her sense of independence with the drive to establish communities, to the formal consideration of Walt Whitman's aggregative poetics, the underlying question remains the same: how does the American individual reconcile the self-evident truth that 'all men are created equal' with an ethos which encourages individuality, ambition and personal achievement? A customary resolution lies in paradox, the idea 'that democratic unity can be achieved only through true individualism' (Templin 1970: 175).

Given that this paradox is particularly fruitful (or problematic, depending on one's point of view) in Quakerism, my own readings of American literature have given me cause to reflect on its influence, especially given that relatively little has been written in this area, the vast majority of critical analysis being devoted to the importance of New England Puritanism. It is necessary at this point to state that the relationship between the individual and wider society is a universal concern, and is certainly of relevance to other American faiths such as Puritanism. However, in the orthodox Calvinist inheritance it can be argued that the individual's status is in fact much clearer. Despite there being, as Janice Knight asserts, a 'homocentric' emphasis on 'right walking' in much Puritan writing (1997: 98), the preoccupation with predestination and strict church hierarchy makes the abjectness of the individual quite evident. In other words, the individual is very much subject to external factors, both theological and societal. In Quakerism, characterised by immanence and a lack of hierarchical structures, the relationship seems much more nebulous. It is for this reason, as well as the emphasis on silence, that it has been exploited by a number of American writers.

Although the last two decades have seen an increasingly sophisticated interest in my subject, throughout the last century much of the scholarly work has asserted rather too instrumental a relationship between writers' biographies and their literary output. It has frequently been enough for critics such as Henry Seidel Canby and Howard W. Hintz (1940) to argue, for example, that James Fenimore Cooper's Quaker ancestry inspires him to pour 'the Quaker ideal' into the character of Natty Bumppo, such that Leatherstocking becomes, in Canby's famous formulation, 'the best Quaker in American literature' (1931: 116). This is to gloss over both the complexities of Cooper's religious background—including the shift away from Quaker radicalism toward Episcopalianism described by Wayne Franklin (2001: 163)—and the ambiguities inherent in Natty's portrayal. If he is a representative of Quaker ideals such as 'reliance upon the inner light' and 'inflexible simplicity' (Canby 1931: 116), he is nonetheless one entirely inassimilable into a modernising society based on economic progress and the authority of written laws. What, then, would this say about Cooper's Quaker attitudes? Surely only that the ideal is always on the brink of obsolescence. Most of all, and this is a theme I return to at greater length,

Canby's article ignores the problems associated with the idea of 'representativeness' itself.

More recently, Richard P. Moses' article 'The Quakerism of Charles Brockden Brown' (1986), whilst eloquently making the case for more dedicated research into Quakerism and literature, stops short of investigating how the content and form of Brockden Brown's work are partially shaped by his Quaker upbringing. Instead, the primary aim of the piece is merely to establish that the writer *was* a Quaker through parentage and education. The danger of Moses' approach and, one might add, David Sox's approach in *Quakers and the Arts* (2000), is that despite the valuable biographical and theological insights on offer, the ultimate aims are reclamation and the creation of a taxonomy of Quaker artists. Far from making Quakerism an integral element of American literary history, negotiating in complex ways with other key influences such as New England Puritanism and Common Sense philosophy, such approaches risk its deracination or 'othering' through the establishment of an entirely separate tradition.

James Emmett Ryan's more progressive approach is to explore the representation of Quaker characters in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American literature. Taking as his starting point the depiction of the Hallidays in Chapter 13 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Ryan cogently argues that American writers, picking up on Voltaire and Rousseau's valorisations of the society, tend to present idealised images of the 'good Quaker'. They are benevolent, even angelic figures whose quaint peculiarities of (stereotypically Hicksite) speech and simple dress seem more evidence of local colour than a dynamic spiritual community. Indeed, the prevailing tendency in texts such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Letters from an American Farmer* and *Life in the Iron Mills* is not advocacy of the Quaker faith, but appropriation of the Quaker figure as *deus ex machina*, rescuing angel or temporary respite from the evils of the modern world, but crucially one 'not entirely assimilable to the American political and social context' (Ryan 2003: 199). Frequently outside both the main narrative frame and society, Quakers '[come] to be understood as rather ineffectual, indeed anachronistic figures: Americans who are morally correct and yet insufficiently equipped to wrestle with modernity' (2003: 192). Like Cooper's Natty Bumppo, and Bayard Taylor's 'Quaker Widow' (1881) they are always passively waiting on the verge of obsolescence, always nostalgic for more egalitarian times, and always 'radically "other"' (2003: 193).

Apart from acknowledging Lawrence Buell's wry comment that Quakers are often employed 'as a stick with which to beat the Puritans' (1989: 250), Ryan provides little in the way of explanation as to *why* Quakers are manipulated in these ways. That they are is almost axiomatic, yet one has to ask precisely what it is about Quaker belief, language and behaviour which encourages such literary stereotyping in the first instance. My first aim in this paper is to do this. Not only can an understanding of this underlying issue, I contend, render scholarly attention to Quaker characters potentially more sophisticated, it can also throw light on two other important issues. First, the paradox of democracy I alluded to earlier, through which individualism and collectivism are held in delicate balance. Secondly, the way in which American writers with Quaker ancestry or at least an interest in the tenets of Quakerism,

attempt to dramatise, resolve or exploit this constitutive paradox in thematic or formal terms. It is not my intention to offer an exhaustive definition of 'American literature'. Rather, I aim to take one aspect I do consider distinctive—that is, the reflexive examination in countless literary texts of what constitutes an American 'character'—and argue that an examination of the difficulties authors (and literary characters) have in locating and describing the Quaker 'character' can enrich one's understanding of American literature as a whole. Misreadings and corruptions of Quaker thought can provide valuable clues to anxieties about broader American identity. This is one reason why Quakers have so often been used as moral and ethical types, and why the poetics of writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and, in particular, Walt Whitman, inherit elements of Quaker intuition and, as we shall see, tensions between linguistic signifier and referent.

In the service of this central argument I expand on certain key terms. As well as 'character', I wish to explore the theme of secrecy or 'mystery' which regularly surfaces in depictions of Quakers and Quakerism and carries over into the work of, in particular, Charles Brockden Brown. This, indeed, is the element I feel James Emmett Ryan fails to acknowledge in his otherwise compelling account. Attendant on this theme of 'mystery' are questions of 'enunciation' informed very specifically by Quaker theology: where one speaks from and who one speaks for. Is the source of one's most significant utterances (and therefore of one's 'character') located within or without? Should the soul be considered coterminous with the self or separate? (As F. O. Matthiessen observes, Walt Whitman resorts to formulations such as 'my soul and I' to emphasise his belief in the separation of soul and conscious personality [1968: 539].) If the self does not truly speak of itself (as William Penn believed) and for itself, how can one ever trust the veracity of its words? Again, Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, with its ventriloquising villain, dramatises this question in Gothic fashion. Clearly, language is of primary importance here, and this essay looks at 'plain speaking', as well as the traditional Quaker split between divine and carnal language, in order to suggest that such issues further complicate the perception of 'character', and are thus of relevance to the formation of American identity.

Misreadings of Quaker character, or projections of stereotypical characteristics upon the Quaker, derive in a number of literary examples from the radical inwardness of the faith. (Indeed, 'what they seek for is in themselves' refers in this essay not just to the inwardness of Quakerism itself, but to the use made of Quakers by various authors and characters to work through their own psychological concerns.) A well-known passage from *The Journal of John Woolman* (1774) provides a useful starting point for a discussion of this essential component of Quaker belief, and of its misinterpretation by others:

As I lived under the cross and simply followed the openings of Truth, my mind from day to day was more enlightened; my former acquaintance was left to judge of me as they would, for I found it safest for me to live in private and keep these things sealed up in my own breast.

While I silently ponder on that change wrought in me, I find no language equal to it nor any means to convey to another a clear idea of it... There is a harmony in the sound of that voice to which divine love gives utterance, and some appearance of right

order in their temper and conduct whose passions are fully regulated. Yet all these do not fully show forth that inward life to such who have not felt it, but this white stone and new name is known rightly to such only who have it (1989: 28–29).

A number of crucial points are raised here. Immediately, one is struck by the continuity between these sentiments and William Penn's exhortation to 'turn in, turn in, I beseech you', which follows the quotation in my title. If one were to take this passage out of the overall context of the *Journal*, as, for reasons I assume will become clear, I have deliberately done, the prevailing tone would be one of secrecy, cliquishness or wilful mystification. For the uninitiated, it appears that affective knowledge of divine love is simply unavailable unless one is already in the know. Most importantly, Woolman cannot give the reader help, as the language at his disposal is not adequate to describe revelation. (This disjunction I return to presently in my brief discussion of Quaker language.) The direct result of this ironic failure of articulation—ironic because Woolman somewhat articulately describes it—is that others are 'left to judge'. In other words, linguistic limitations lead to a mystery at the heart of the Quaker. There is an epistemological gap heightened by the perceived secrecy of the faith, which renders true 'character' clandestine and ensures that others must 'judge' by imposing their own interpretations. An outsider may never understand the secret.¹

Of course, to focus only on this mystery is to ignore its translation, in Woolman's case, into social activism in the form of the anti-slavery testimony. But my point is that, for various political and cultural reasons, this is exactly what certain writers do. The mystery is first identified, and then the perceived epistemological space filled with projected signs, often in the form of stereotypical linguistic tics and sartorial idiosyncrasies, and co-opted for ideological ends. In this way, the Quaker becomes a convenient laboratory for issues pertaining to character and the direction in which a new nation must move.

One fascinating example of this process can be found in Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods, or the Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky* (1837). The eponymous anti-hero, Nick, is a legendary shadowy figure who stalks the forests of Kentucky, occasionally murdering Indians with extreme brutality and inscribing their corpses with the sign of the cross. For a contemporary, genre-aware reader it is not difficult to guess that Nick is in fact Nathan Slaughter, the Quaker. Roaming the country with his faithful dog Peter, Nathan claims to be 'a man of peace and quiet' (Bird 1967: 75). Indeed, his steadfast refusal to enter into combat against the Native Americans earns him ridicule and abuse from characters such as Roaring Ralph Stackpole, the horse thief, who jeers 'every able-bodied man should sarve [*sic*] his country' (1967: 78). Adhering to the doubling conventions of the Gothic, however, the novel gradually reveals Nick as Nathan's murderous alter-ego, first unleashed after his entire family was killed by Indians and he received a near-fatal scalp wound.

In the tradition of American Quakers-gone-bad (alongside Captain Ahab), Nathan is a reluctant hero whose narrative function, witnessed in ever more impressive yet disturbing acts of physical courage, rescue and violence driving the story to its bloody conclusion, is achieved at the expense of his avowed quietism. Inevitably, however, he disappears from the narrative frame, back into the woods and distinctly beyond

the pale. In this he is conventional enough, and joins Natty Bumppo in the ranks of virtuous literary outsiders. Yet the persistent emphasis on the intrigue of his faith merits closer attention. Throughout the novel, the essential tenets of Nathan's Quakerism are reconfigured by other characters as dark, mysterious and threatening. For example, Roland, for much of the narrative Nathan's companion in attempting to escape the Indians, reflects on the Friend's reluctance to reveal biographical details, and attributes it to his religious beliefs:

he seems to affect mystery in all that concerns his own private movements—it is the character of his persuasion (Bird 1967: 156).

Later, when Nathan, face-painted and dressed in native garb, is captured by the Indians, they mistake him for a white witch-doctor or conjuror, due to 'the enigma of his appearance'. Some of the 'savages' 'beset the supposed conjuror with questions calculated to pluck out the heart of his mystery. But questions and curiosity were in vain. The conjuror was possessed by a silent devil...' (Bird 1967: 316).²

Although Roland and the reader do eventually discover the key biographical detail—the slaughter of Nathan's family—the sense remains that Quaker silence and privacy will forever cast him as dangerous 'other'. His essential unknowability make his incorporation into American frontier society impossible. Joanna Brooks reads this politically, arguing that '[t]his doppelgänger Quaker protagonist brings Quakers face-to-face with their own complicity in Indian violence, and face-to-face with the Gothic double at the heart of William Penn's Holy Experiment: the essential contradiction between the Quaker peace testimony and British colonialism' (2004: 46). Certainly there are elements of truth in this appraisal. However, I propose an alternative reading. For me, *Nick of the Woods* is primarily a novel about the fear of diversity. Consider this quotation:

It is on the frontiers, indeed, where adventurers from every corner of the world, and from every circle of society are thrown together, that we behold the strongest contrasts, and the strangest varieties, of human character (Bird 1967: 71).

Far from describing a celebration of diversity, the novel's trajectory, culminating in the massacre of Native Americans, the self-imposed exile of the Gothic Quaker and the restoration of wealth and property rights to the educated white Anglo-Americans Roland and Edith Forrester, is a plea for the expunging of difference. If someone as ostensibly harmless as a Quaker can become a murdering psychopath, it asks, how can we trust anyone outside conventional pioneer norms?

In the end, Nathan is simply *too* individualistic: his self-reliance surpasses even that which is regarded as an integral aspect of the American character. With this observation, I return to the paradox with which I started this paper. For one aspect of the paradox, as commentators like John P. McWilliams Jr have noted, is that the belief in blanket equality leads not simply to a bleaching of difference but to the solipsistic projection of the individual's character onto all others. In short, the democratic individual may reductively attempt to view all others as 'like me'. In the post-Revolutionary United States

...America and the Americans were becoming vacant mirror images of one another, [so] no one was quite sure whether the individual should be defined through the nation, or the nation through the individual (McWilliams 1985: 6).

Nick of the Woods deploys the figure of the unaccountable, malevolent Quaker to dramatise what happens when this strategy of national characterisation breaks down, when even stereotyping of the other explodes into unpredictable violence. Bird's frontier is the epistemological frontier which prevents one American from ever really knowing another. The Quaker, as the most extreme personification of this frontier, becomes a test case for fears connected with nation-formation.

Language plays a vital role. Nathan's character remains elusive partly because of his customary reticence, and partly because there is such a conflict between his protestations of peace and his acts of butchery. In fact, the novel can be read as the persistent rehearsal of the unreliability of language, the chasm between word and referent. Again, in contrast to a figure like Roaring Ralph Stackpole, whose vernacular garrulousness renders him a caricature, and thus more easily legible in terms of a single defining trait, the Quaker represents the ultimate in linguistic illegibility. The exaggeration of Hicksite speech, the incessant use of 'thee' and 'thou', only serves to highlight the failure of genre literature to represent a faith based on immanent truth rather than conventional signifiers.

Given that Bird's linguistic fears are (inadvertently) in many respects corruptions of Quaker concerns about the efficacy of language, I would like briefly to examine some of the main issues in this area. What I hope to have implied in the preceding observations is that the democratic individual, in speculating on whether the other is merely a reflection of the self or is in fact something entirely 'other', must also ruminate on questions of enunciation. Does the individual speak, as a *representative* individual, for the whole nation, or is nationhood more accurately conceived as an aggregate of unique individuals who speak only for themselves? An understanding of Quaker thinking on language will help illuminate subsequent discussion of American writers who, whilst not always depicting Quakers, either dramatise anxieties over enunciation (Charles Brockden Brown), or attempt to forge literary voices which reconcile individual and collective expression (Emerson and Whitman).

Nigel Smith has written convincingly of early Quakers' 'daring verbal experimentation' (1995: 68). Jackson L. Cope uses the more evocative term 'incantatory' to describe early Quaker prose (1971: 208). Such prose is reminiscent of the rhetorical patterns of John's Gospel and the biblical parable, and characterised by repetition, a marked tendency to transgress the boundary between the literal and the metaphoric to the extent to which they merge together, and a feeling of 'agrammaticalness'. This is the sense that, in Cope's words, 'the intense concentration upon individual words wholly removes the process of expression from a grammatical frame of reference, as the mind is driven on too rapidly to formalize the restraining relationship between sentence elements' (1971: 208). An example taken from George Fox's autobiography (1694) clearly demonstrates this:

For when first I set my horse's feet upon Scottish ground I felt the Seed of God to sparkle about me, like innumerable sparks of fire. Not but that there is abundance of

the thick, cloddy earth of hypocrisy and falseness above, and a briery, brambly nature, which is to be burnt up with God's Word, and ploughed up with His spiritual plough, before God's Seed brings forth heavenly and spiritual fruit to His glory. But the husbandman is to wait in patience (1998: 254).

The literal 'ground' so rapidly becomes the 'cloddy earth' of spiritual weakness that one feels the material to be swallowed up by the metaphorical, which is in turn very mixed. Here, seeds sparkle, words burn, and alliteration only enhances the focus upon imagery rather than syntactic structure. Accordingly, this feels like a very *literary* or poetic piece, if one considers literature to be that which licences ambiguity, nuance and subjectivity rather than strict formal convention or objectivity. What is most important here is the feeling of spontaneity. The feeling is achieved through, for example, the repeated sub-clausation and the preponderance of commas, both of which imply a headlong rush of thought rather than carefully considered and systematically arranged ideas. Similarly, the retention of awkward constructions such as 'Not but that there is' suggests instantaneous expression. Fox's exhilarating prose is therefore the closest possible approximation of inward movement. It epitomises early Quakers' attempts 'to inscribe their prophetic words as quickly as they felt them, trusting that the spirit of the language would be captured in the transcription and would ultimately move its readers' (Tarter 2005: 181). Kate Peters is another recent scholar to have insisted on this close connection between the written word and inward urging (2005: 16).

A passage like Fox's might appear to do much to refute Daniel B. Shea's assertion that 'a Quaker journalist too often neglected as well an immediate and natural source of imagery in the wilderness through which he travelled from meeting to meeting' (1968: 41). However, we must remember that Shea is referring specifically to *American* Quaker autobiographies. If we compare, for example, John Woolman and Elisabeth Ashbridge to George Fox and James Naylor, we can see that in the New World the incantatory mode ('plain' as in powerful, direct and hortatory) was largely eschewed in favour of a style which might more accurately be termed 'plain' (as in, reasoned and simple, perhaps influenced by Enlightenment philosophical discourse). We must also bear in mind that Fox's autobiography itself has a complex history of editing: in other words, the text one reads today is not necessarily the spontaneous outpouring it was intended to be.

When one considers in addition John Woolman's own revisions of his journal in 1773, as well as the more widespread editorial work carried out by the Second-Day Morning Meeting in 1673 to quell enthusiasm and to some extent individuality in Quaker writings,³ some vital questions are raised. Clearly, the relationship between spoken ministry and published writing is far from simple. Fox's headlong, exciting rush of language reveals the divine compulsion, the effacement of self required of the Quaker autobiographer, whilst simultaneously betraying the need for persuasive self-expression. Subsequent editorial interventions seem to suggest a move away from the Quaker writer as corporeal mouthpiece for Gnostic revelation, and toward Quaker text as *representative* character, speaking less for individual enthusiasm and more for the Quaker community as a whole. Inspiration shifts to instruction, inner testimony to exterior example. Underlying this move is a concern that the distance from

inward revelation through divine language, where ‘all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue’ (Fox 1998: 27), to transcription in ‘carnal’ language, can result in corruption of the message. Ironically, human intervention is required to make the message more representative.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss Quaker theological history in too much detail, it is worth noting that the complex negotiations between textual authority and inner testimony, between individual passion and the demands of society summarised above, are key elements of the schism of 1827 which led to the emergence of the group known as ‘Hicksites’ or liberal Quakers. Such debates did not exist in a vacuum, of course, relating as they did to widespread tensions between urban bourgeoisification and adherence to agrarian ideals, and orthodoxy versus free thinking, the latter exemplified by Thomas Paine. For me, the key issues are, to rehearse these terms once again, enunciation and representativeness. Influence is notoriously hard to quantify, of course, but my contention is that Quakerism’s influence can be traced through American writers’ concern with these issues. It is fascinating, for example, to note that Thomas Paine’s own ‘Epistle to the Quakers’ criticises those Quakers who, ‘without a proper authority for so doing, put [them]selves in the place of the whole body of the Quakers’. Nobody, he asserts, has ‘any claim or title to Political Representation’ (1908: 93). In the texts I shall look at now, by Charles Brockden Brown, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, the same questions are adumbrated: who does one speak for? Who speaks for the individual? Which voices do we trust? For reasons I hope have been clear by implication, these questions are more fruitfully traced through Quakerism, with its emphasis on the inner light and the virtue of silence, than, say, Calvinism, with its stricter, more unquestioning adherence to both textual and ecclesiastical authority.

Charles Brockden Brown’s maternal and paternal ancestors, as David Lee Clark explains (1952: 16), were all devout Quakers, and the writer’s formative years were spent in a household and a school (the Friends Latin School in Pennsylvania) which strived for the simplicity of early Christianity and espoused anti-war and anti-slavery sentiments typical of many Quakers. Later, Brockden Brown’s marriage to Elizabeth Linn saw his departure from the Religious Society of Friends for using a hireling minister, but he remained fundamentally a Quaker in ethical and political persuasion. As he stated in his 1809 pamphlet ‘An Address to the Congress’

There are others who will pass me by as a visionary; and some, observing the city where I thus make my appearance, may think my pacific doctrine, my system of rational forbearance and forgiveness carried to a pitch of Quaker extravagance. The truth is, I am no better than an outcast of that unwarlike sect, but cannot rid myself of reverence for most of its practical political maxims (quoted in Clark 1952: 273).

Where Brockden Brown diverges from traditional Quakerism, or at least adapts it, is in the channelling of inward contemplation into what he terms a ‘visionary’ state, where ‘[i]deas & incidents pass in my mind during the course of...delightful reverie’ (quoted in Kafer 2000: 544). If his aim is to render the immanent divine aesthetic, then the natural result is a type of fiction concerned with inner psychology, the hearing of voices and the dangers of listening to the wrong voices—the Gothic.

The author's trick in *Wieland* (1798) is to associate nefarious external voices both with sense impressions and with the continuing influence of the Old World in post-Revolutionary America. Thus, Quaker concerns over external authority are appropriated for more secular ends: the portrayal of the perils of the young Republic.

Wieland, subtitled *The Transformation*, depicts the traumatic transformation from a society based on Enlightenment reason and Common Sense, to a psychological and spiritual internalisation of conflicting truths where the possibility of the supernatural has to be entertained. As a foretaste of this, the narrative opens with the spontaneous combustion of Wieland's father, an event which inhabits the liminal space between the magical and the scientifically explicable. The Enlightenment idyll inhabited by Clara and her companions, represented by the bust of Cicero (Brockden Brown 1960: 26), is shattered by the intervention of the ventriloquist Carwin. Carwin provokes such horror precisely because the protagonists are all too ready to believe their senses, and to believe in the ghostly voice from outside, rather than seek alternative explanations. When Theo remarks, having supposedly heard his wife Catharine's voice, '[h]ere is an effect, but the cause is utterly inscrutable' (1960: 40), he is not *denying* the law of cause and effect, as he also states, '[t]here was no room to doubt that I had heard my wife's voice' (1960: 38). Rather, he is simply suspending judgment pending a rational explanation.

Brockden Brown obviously assumes that sense-perceptions cannot be trusted. In this, he reflects a widely held view of Quakers in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Melvin B. Endy Jr explains, the Quakers traditionally held at best an ambivalent view of reason. Even the more Platonic of them stipulated that the 'inner light' and 'reason' existed in different spheres, and that only the former could provide a direct communication with God. To quote Endy:

The position of most Friends was that, as Barclay also made clear, reason was an excellent agent of man's knowledge and control of 'natural' things, but one must distinguish between the natural and the spiritual realms (1973: 231).

It is worth recognising, however, that even writers such as John Woolman employed the language of Enlightenment reason in texts intended for both Quaker and non-Quaker readerships, texts such as 'On the Keeping of Negroes' designed to expose both the cruelty and the affront to natural rights of slavery. As J. William Frost explains: 'Woolman's inconsistent use of enlightenment religion suggests that he tailored his vocabulary to fit his audience, his genre, and his purpose in writing' (2003: 185). So whilst Quaker journals tend to lack appeals to reason, focussing understandably on inward movement, anti-slavery tracts (and this is especially true of those written by Anthony Benezet) appeal to the Enlightenment sensibilities of their audience in order to persuade. Yet this still suggests that the natural and spiritual, or public and private, exist in discrete contexts.

In *Wieland* the consequences of failing to make the distinction between natural and spiritual realms are fatal. A society based solely on reason and sense perception cannot succeed: it is constantly threatened by a beguiling, disembodied voice from elsewhere, the Old World. Carwin is clearly intended to be that Old World voice, as the reader is told that he is English (with a vague Spanish connection). He occupies

an external enunciatory position of agency and authority, and is the catalyst for increasingly horrific events, culminating in Theodore Wieland's murder of his family and Clara's justifiable fratricide (in terms of the twisted morality of the narrative). The ease with which he facilitates these events stems first from his linguistic ability, the 'exquisite art of this rhetorician' (Brockden Brown 1960: 84), and secondly from his instinctive understanding of the putative ideal society's major weakness—discernment. His somewhat overblown, Latinate discourse, exemplified in utterances such as 'I purposed to seek some retreat in the wilderness, inaccessible to your inquiry and to the malice of my foe' (1960: 238), is combined with his ability to expose the characters' failure to locate an edifying collective morality by listening to the right voices. Once Theo is tempted along a path of individuated action, society's breakdown becomes inevitable.

Fred Lewis Pattee argues in his introduction to *Wieland* that the true horror of the story resides in the gradual realisation that Carwin's voice functions merely to awaken the dementia latent in Theo's soul, a psychological defect in the form of religious mania caused by the mysterious death of the father (Pattee 1960: xii). I agree, and it is in this interpretation that one can detect the stirrings of proto-psychoanalytic thinking in Brockden Brown's work, itself inflected with Quaker thought. For in implying that the external voice may actually correspond with a malevolent inward movement, *Wieland* dramatises debates in Quakerism linking George Fox, Robert Barclay and twentieth-century discussions of Jungian psychology. One has to recognise that accompanying the inner light is an inner darkness (clearly revealed in *Nick of the Woods*), and that the devil may offer false testimony. As Barclay eloquently expresses it: 'the devil may be as good and able a minister as the best of them; for he has better skill in languages, and more logic, philosophy and school-divinity, than any of them; and knows the truth in the notion better than they all' (1877: 297). Secularising these theological ideas, Jung's reading nonetheless adheres to the question of discernment: one must identify the correct voice and base moral activity upon it. Most significantly for this argument, as Margery Abbott explains, 'Jung believed that if we do not accept the reality of the inward darkness, we can all too easily project it on others without realizing the damage this does' (Abbott 2000).

We return once again to the paradox of the democratic individual. Ultimately, *Wieland* is less concerned with whether authority is external to the self or wholly immanent (as Margery Abbott outlines, Barclay believed the former, Rufus Jones the latter), than with the tendency of the individual to project his or her own character and appendant failings on to others. Still haunted by the language and influence of the Old World, the New Eden is corrupted because the individual consciousness is mistaken for a representative or collective one as a source of inspiration and action. The irony of Brockden Brown's text, then, is that the Romantic visionary individuation informing both its style and its content locks its characters within their troubled psyches and offers no way out into wider society. What they seek for is indeed in themselves, but they are as yet unable to discern it.

If *Wieland* is dominated by images of confined space in the form of closets and chasms, *Edgar Huntly* (1799) tries to move into the landscape. Yet it is evident that the American landscape, in all its magnificence, becomes merely a mirror of Huntly's

consciousness as, in his pursuit of the elusive Clithero Edny into the wilderness, he descends from reason into savagery and madness. Once again, the individual projects and represents, and in so doing, becomes representative. In the end, '[c]onsciousness itself is the malady' (Brockden Brown 1988: 277) because it projects its anxieties outwards without restraint from inner moral voices. What the individual lacks, Brown suggests in both works, is not simply the means to discern, but a language adequate to express discernment and revelation without crippling symbol or allegory.

Part of the Transcendentalists' project was to do just this: to find a language equal to the task of representing discernment, which in their eyes inhered in direct communication with the Creator through nature. Similarly, the language employed by both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman strives, somewhat factitiously but nonetheless in earnest, to reconcile individual and collective consciousness.

My analysis will therefore focus on formal linguistic concerns, rather than on circumstantial, biographical evidence or coincidence. Certainly, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman expressed a degree of fondness for Quaker ideals,⁴ and in Emerson's case it may well be true that 'the years during which he was subject to the direct influence of Quakerism (roughly 1827-1836) were the formative years of his intellectual life' (Tolles 1938: 147). Additionally, there are strong parallels at the level of imagery: Thoreau, for instance, evoking the 'seed' as metaphor for spiritual (and labour) potential throughout *Walden* (1882: 91). Yet these facts are not enough in themselves to ascertain influence. After all, Emerson's American religion, based on the poetic individual's communication and inspiration through nature, also contained elements of Enlightenment philosophy, Swedenborgian mysticism and Romanticist solitude. Quakerism operates more subtly in Transcendental writing, in the complex interrelations between inward contemplation, spontaneous utterance and rhetoric designed to inflame the collective or national will whilst retaining the sincerity of individual revelation.

Emerson writes in 'Circles' (1841):

Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions. Let us rise into another idea: they will disappear. The Greek sculpture is all melted away, as if it had been statues of ice; here and there a solitary or fragment remaining, as we see flecks and scraps of snow left in cold dells and mountain clefts, in June and July (2003: 313).

It is clear here that for Emerson 'all language is vehicular and transitive' ('The Poet' 2003: 344): emulating the theme of the passage, the mixing of metaphors; the occasional syntactical disjunctions (note the awkward shift from 'another idea' to 'they will disappear'); the tension between poetic effects and the desire to reproduce Edenic or chthonic language;⁵ and the characteristic allusions to both classical aesthetics and the beauty of immediate nature; all conspire to disallow any kind of stasis in idea or, importantly, in the ethical procedure of reading. I mean 'ethical' in the specific sense that the 'loosely associative' style (Manning 2002: 256) forces the reader to exercise consciousness to produce unity.

Apart from the obvious resemblances to the 'incantatory' early Quaker style discussed earlier, a style, if we remember, designed to appear contemporaneous with

divine movement, the passage places such demands on the reader that reading itself becomes a kind of discernment. One has to construct 'voice' from what is potentially a heap of almost disconnected fragments. As Susan Manning expresses it, '[s]yntax is a property of consciousness; it is the act of mind that transforms classification into poetry and fragmentary thoughts into communicate relationship' (2002: 255). Thus it is an attempt at the formal level to make productive the democratic paradox of individual and collective. The individual reader, like the poet, becomes representative ('The Poet' 2003: 326): in the act of discernment, the locating of voice, he or she creates a subjective vision of the world nonetheless explicatory of the world for all others.

In the unification of fragments, the reader participates in the democratic process of what Emerson famously terms 'The Over-Soul':

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE... We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the three; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul (2003: 295).

The similarities with Quakerism in this passage are numerous: the oblique allusion to 'that of the divine' within the self (commensurate, to an extent, with the inward light), the importance of silence.⁶ Yet Emerson's overall vision departs in a couple of significant ways. First, the importance of the poet as representative figure, yet with keener than average connection to this collective soul, makes the Transcendentalist vision more explicitly aesthetic than that of the Quaker. In short, the language of God becomes the language of beauty, a beauty which, nonetheless, has edifying moral potential for the American people. Secondly, the Quaker tension between self-abnegation (in functioning as a mouthpiece) and the need for self-expression becomes Emerson's 'I am nothing; I see all' ('Nature' 2003: 184). It is transmuted into a form of egotism which, as Lawrence Buell observes, revels in 'high literature's ability to reinvent the world in words' (2003: 111). 'Nature always wears the colors of the spirit' states Emerson, adding '[i]n the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature' ('Nature' 2003: 185). Coming close to the resolution of the paradox through his poetics, Emerson still propounds a kind of projection: nature as reflection of man's beauty. This seems very nearly antithetical to the simple taxonomies of nature's bounty and variety one finds in the botanical writings of John and William Bartram, for example. What saves Emerson from pure egotism, I would stress again, is the ethical imperative placed upon the reader as discerner.

Walt Whitman reprises and expands this readerly role. His poetry exhibits structurally an ideal of American democracy in its multiple paratactic taxonomies of items. These items tend to be separated only by 'and' or the simple comma, thereby refusing hypotaxis or subordination.⁷

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod
horses on the granite floor... ('Song of Myself' 1982: 77).

His is another form of incantation, of Adamic language: simply to summon through words American people and places is to make them tangible, real. The reader is fused with the poet in the immediacy of this incantation. Moreover, as Glenn N. Cummings has observed in his study of the crucial Hicksite influence on Whitman, the directness and simplicity of this approach 'cut through poetic ornamentation, merge speaker with referent, and become a spontaneous manifestation of experience' (1998: 77).

One might also posit that reader merges with poet, referent and nation in the very reading process and becomes a 'character' in the work. In those moments when Whitman uses the second person, for example, 'Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded' (1982: 77) the reader is implicated as a player. Because 'you' may be both singular and plural, the reader's character becomes unique yet federated, and representative as a synecdoche rather than solipsistically. This simple technique effectively addresses the tension between individuality and collectivity. Reading is again discernment, but this time one is not compelled to make sense of loosely associated fragments of poetic consciousness, as with Emerson, but to discern (and become part of) a collective voice in the aggregative, nation-building structure which feels like the given voice of all experience since time immemorial.

Somewhat ironically, then, Whitman is more successful in fusing the individualistic and the collective by virtue of the preoccupation with the 'I' at the centre of his most celebrated work, and its relationship with the 'you':

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you ('Song of Myself' 1982: 72).

The prominence of the 'I' in Whitman indicates not a tendentious egotism, but rather a universal first person which in the end encompasses the poet, the reader, the citizen of the USA, even the country itself. We are all prophets, in other words. Certainly, this is a secularised and aestheticised vision, as well as an idealised one. But in its pronominal fluidity and its recognition of the 'collective singular' it represents, I feel, the best attempt to reconcile inward movement—call it inspiration, revelation, chthonic language—with the shared appreciation of the divine in the world.

None of the writers I have so far looked at could be said to have been Quakers without equivocation. As I have shown, in representing Quakers and adapting elements of Quaker language and belief, they strive to make sense of, and unravel, the paradox nestled at the heart of the democratic nation: that equality stems from individualism and that each individual is, in a sense, representative of the whole nation. Whether this representativeness ends in solipsism or a collective consciousness depends partly on poetics and partly on whether one views 'character' as substantive or mediated by others. Stereotypical depictions of Quaker characters, I have argued, stem from a perceived mystery at the heart of the faith, a gap filled with anxieties over national character and difference. Non-Quaker writers such as Emerson allude to Quakerism and manipulate Quaker ideas for similar reasons. For them, the epistemological gap offers an opportunity to explore ethical questions of human relationships and the complex inter-relations of art, the individual and society. Their

reading of Quakerism may be no less stereotypical in certain respects, and is certainly selective, but their commitment to formal experimentation brings questions of discernment and poetics into much more fruitful areas. They attempt to find equilibrium between individual and society, rather than simply naming the problem.

So what of the poet and essayist who actually dedicated his life sincerely and ardently to the Religious Society of Friends? John Greenleaf Whittier's work is most frequently characterised as paradoxical. Indeed, Edward Wagenknecht's 1967 critical biography is subtitled *A Portrait in Paradox* and profiles a writer torn between adherence to the divine word and ambition for artistic self-expression. The introduction to the 1975 edition of the *Poetical Works* goes further, arguing that Whittier's verse feels 'most effectively religious when it is not patently "religious poetry"' (1975: xx) and lapses into didacticism when attempting an explicit expression of faith. Moreover, his attempts to find revelation in the natural world, and specifically in the American landscape, result all too often in confrontation with nature's muteness and imperviousness. For example, the opening lines of 'Snowbound' (1866) testify to a winter landscape which rebuts both affective absorption in natural phenomena and, significantly, the poet's attempt to derive beauty from the blankness of snow and hence the blank page:

The sun that brief December day
 Rose cheerless over hills of gray,
 And, darkly circled, gave at noon
 A sadder light than waning moon.
 Slow tracing down the thickening sky
 Its mute and ominous prophecy,
 A portent seeming less than threat,
 It sank from sight before it set (2003: 5-6).

As Lewis H. Miller asserts, 'the conception of the natural world displayed in the opening stanza is blatantly antithetical to Emerson's conception of a benign, plastic nature' in 'The Snow-Storm', an obvious antecedent of Whittier's text (1980: 297).

The problem here has to do with nostalgia's relationship with form. Emerson and Whitman achieve a closer approximation—and it can still only ever be an approximation—of divine revelation through the associative (in Whitman's case federative) composition of their texts, lending formal qualities which I have contended come close to the incantatory style of the early Publishers of Truth. Most importantly, these qualities give the impression, through artful looseness, of spontaneity, of a work intensely *present* or contemporaneous with discernment. Similarly, John Woolman's journalistic prose, though complicated by editing, is nonetheless an attempt to portray Quaker consciousness through life, to reflect honestly and almost immediately on the spirit's relationship with worldly experience. The structure mimics the fluidity of that relationship. Whittier, in contrast, tries to articulate inchoate or fluctuating experience within the constraints of regular, sometimes jaunty metrical structure. Distrusting of the prophetic word's efficacy, the poet cannot allow his poetry to reproduce a sense of spontaneous outpouring. Instead, the metre imposes structure upon a world which Whittier fears has lost structure and cannot be described. At the

same time it is always looking back, in characteristic elegiac or nostalgic mode, to a mythical time when word and experience, revelation and its expression, were supposedly coterminous and contemporary.

What the poetry cannot, or will not do, therefore, is attempt to resolve the paradox with which this paper has been concerned. At times, indeed, Whittier strays rather too close to the stereotyping of the Quaker I have previously discussed. 'The Quaker of the Olden Time' (1866) is a representative Quaker, an idealised every-Quaker. The rigidity of the form and the nostalgic yearning for lost time constitute a plea against individuality even as the poet attempts individual self-expression. Ultimately Whittier, in extolling the old Quaker's virtues, seems to advocate withdrawal of the poem as it is written:

He listened to that inward voice
Which called away from all (2003: 62).

Ironically, it is Whittier's desire for Quaker example that renders his poetry less effective in expressing individual testimony and experience than non-Quaker writers of discernment such as Emerson and Whitman. Unable to reconcile individual with collective experience, the poetry propels itself toward silence.

I return at last to my original comment—that I have come at this research from the position of an interested 'outsider'. It will be clear that outsidership is both of acute significance in the texts under consideration and, in a sense, reflects my initial relationship to the material. I also hope to have made it clear that Quaker thought and language have played a particular role in the development of American literature and have inflected the very notion of American 'democracy'. But it is worth noting that my interest extends beyond the literary, for it seems to me that the tensions between individual and society I have outlined are now, in an age of globalisation, worthier of attention than ever before. In other words, there is a real and valuable continuity between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concerns I have been analysing and the concerns of the present day. With individuals becoming, to use Zygmunt Bauman's term, 'extraterritorial', and thereby running the risk of secession from all personal connections (2001: 55), there is a pressing need for considered reformulations of the individual's position within communities (both local and global ones). This is, of course, not an issue unique to Quakerism, nor even to religious faith in general. Yet it is within Quakerism, which has traditionally occupied a position of 'otherness' within society, a 'heterotopic stance' (Pilgrim 2004: 217), that these ideas are distilled and some of the more sophisticated debates are taking place. Quakerism, more than other branches of faith, can encourage both an ecumenical openness and a reliance on deeply held personal belief. (This is one reason why I as an outsider am attracted to Quaker debates, why I feel they are couched in non-exclusive terms.) Moreover, as Gay Pilgrim asserts, the Religious Society strives today to reconcile increasing diversity with a sense of what makes it unique. As the world appears to get smaller and yet more divisive, these are questions of concern to both insider and outsider.

NOTES

* An embryonic version of this paper was presented at the *Symbiosis* 'Across the Great Divide' Conference at the University of Edinburgh, June 2003. The quotation which forms the title is quoted in Bancroft's *History of the United States* (1837: II, 338).

1. At the close of the (less authoritative) 1961 edition of the *Journal*, it is clear that inner and outer still appear to be irreconcilable: 'That which is of God gathers to God', Woolman declares, 'and that which is of the world is owned by the world' (1961: 223).

2. Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*, a novel which demonstrates a certain coyness about referring directly to Judge Temple's religious background, suggests that the Judge may not be entirely trustworthy precisely because his inward beliefs create the same kind of mystery. This is described in terms of a void, or space, where concrete practice should be: 'It's nather a Methodie, nor a Papish, nor a Prasbetyrian, that he is, but jist nothing at all; and it's hard to think that he "who will not fight the good fight, under the banners of a rig'lar church, in this world, will be mustered among the chosen in heaven", as my husband, the Captain there, as ye call him, says' (Cooper 1988: 154).

3. Other factors leading to a slightly more conservative Quakerism in the eighteenth century would include the more rational ethos of William Penn, and the codification of Quaker thought laid down by the Calvinist-influenced Robert Barclay in his 1678 work *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*.

4. Emerson, in conversation with the Reverend David Greene Haskins, declared, 'I am more of a Quaker than anything else. I believe in the "still, small voice", and that voice is Christ within us' (Haskins 1971: 48). Thoreau went so far as to comment, according to Emerson, that Quakerism constituted 'Transcendentalism in its mildest form' (*Journal* 1914: VI 97). In his adulatory writing on Elias Hicks, Whitman declares that Fox, Barclay and Hicks 'have all diagnos'd, like superior doctors, the real inmost disease of our times' which turns out to be a lack of a 'National Morality' or a general depletion of morals (1982: 1235). In the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, as Susan Dean notes, Walt Whitman exhorts the reader to 'take off your hat to nothing known or unknown to any man or number of men' (quoted in Dean 1999: 191), a direct reference to the early Quaker's refusal of 'hat-honor'. David Kuebrich (1989) tells us that Elias Hicks, the nineteenth-century American Quaker, could count Walt Whitman's parents and paternal grandfather amongst his adherents.

5. I use 'chthonic' in the sense of 'from the earth'; that is, language which connects unambiguously to its roots in material or natural things.

6. In 'Art and Criticism' Emerson says: 'The silences, pauses of an orator are as telling as his words' (1995: 88-89).

7. 'Hypotaxis' and 'parataxis' are linguistic terms describing relationships of subordination and coordination between clauses, respectively.

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