

## The rise of American Gothic

From the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century and the beginnings of a distinctive American literature, the Gothic has stubbornly flourished in the United States. Its cultural role, though, has been entirely paradoxical: an optimistic country founded upon the Enlightenment principles of liberty and "the pursuit of happiness," a country that supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims, has produced a strain of literature that is haunted by an insistent, undead past and fascinated by the strange beauty of sorrow. How can the strikingly ironic, even perverse, career of the Gothic in America be accounted for? Why has it been so at home on such inhospitable ground?

The most common responses to these questions have recourse to conventional metaphors: the Gothic, it is frequently reasoned, embodies and gives voice to the dark nightmare that is the underside of "the American dream." This formulation is true up to a point, for it reveals the limitations of American faith in social and material progress. Yet a simple opposition between the convenient figures of dream and nightmare is overly reductive. These clichés, and the impulses in American life that they represent, are not in mere opposition; they actually interfuse and interact with each other. This realization will take us far in understanding the odd centrality of Gothic cultural production in the United States, where the past constantly inhabits the present, where progress generates an almost unbearable anxiety about its costs, and where an insatiable appetite for spectacles of grotesque violence is part of the texture of everyday reality.

I want to locate the rise of American Gothic and its powerful appeal in certain verbal devices or *figures*. As I broadly define them, these include fictional specters and authorial personae, rhetorical strategies for meditating on America's perplexing history, and strange uses of tropes, such as metaphor and personification, that *turn* language (to "trope" means to "turn") toward suggestions of distinctive and dark American obsessions. Inevitably, the writers of the new republic were deeply influenced by the narrative situations,

conflicts, settings, and motifs that made British Gothic so popular on both sides of the Atlantic. The perverse pleasures that acquired conventional status in the Gothic by the early nineteenth century – claustrophobia, atmospheric gloom, the imminence of violence – were generated in early American literature too, and by such standard architectural locales as the haunted house, the prison, the tomb, and by such familiar plot elements as the paternal curse and the vengeful ghost. However, the specificity of American Gothic, what makes it distinctively *American*, does not come just from formulaic plots and situations of an aristocratic genre being adapted to the democratic situation of the new world. More important, as I shall demonstrate, is the *formal* adaptability and innovative energy of American Gothic. Nowhere is all this more evident than in the strange tropes, figures, and rhetorical techniques, so strikingly central in American Gothic narratives, that express a profound anxiety about historical crimes and perverse human desires that cast their shadow over what many would like to be the sunny American republic. Especially important in this tradition of verbal devices is *prosopopoeia*, or personification, by which abstract ideas (such as the burden of historical causes) are given a “body” in the spectral figure of the ghost. It is also the strategy that enables the dead to rise, the ghostly voice to materialize out of nowhere, and objects to assume a menacing pseudo-life. It thus achieves the ultimate effects of the haunted, the uncanny, and the return of the repressed while placing these thoroughly in the depths of American life and the American psyche.

The rise of the Gothic in America, then, was enabled by imitating earlier achievements, yet the figures it generated are emphatically *neither* conventional nor convenient. They are insistently troubling. And what they “trouble” is not only the comprehensibility of America as a subject – including the locus of cultural and political authority after the revolution and the perfectibility of human beings in a democracy – but also the forms and functions of literary expression. For American Gothic is, first and foremost, an innovative and experimental literature. Its power comes from its dazzling originality and diversity in a series of departures that situate the perverse – as forms, techniques, and themes – *inside* the national mainstream and thereby unsettle the implications of Walt Whitman’s brave assertion that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.”<sup>1</sup>

Leslie Fiedler has rightly observed in an American context that the whole tradition of the Gothic might best be grasped as “a pathological symptom rather than a proper literary movement” (Fiedler, “Invention of the American Gothic,” p. 135). Such an approach helps us to locate the territory of the Gothic not in history exactly, but rather in a particular historical sensibility and even more certainly in *historiography* (literally the study of the *writing*

of history), the often convoluted and blatantly constructed discourse of narratives that circle around themes and events that are rarely susceptible to direct exposition. Generally, the sense of the past that pervades Gothic literature does not encourage the writer to explain origins in clear relation to end-points in a seamless linear narrative. Nor does the writer seize on history as a coherent field that is subject to authorial control. Instead, history controls and determines the writer. Gothic texts return obsessively to the personal, the familial, and the national pasts to complicate rather than to clarify them, but mainly to implicate the individual in a deep morass of American desires and deeds that allow no final escape from or transcendence of them.

The historical dimension of American Gothic is entirely congruent with the notion of the Real – of the myriad things and amorphous physicality beyond representation that haunt our subjectivity and demand our attention, that compel us to explanatory language but resist the strategies of that language – according to the definition of “Real” proposed by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. As Malcolm Bowie explains in analyzing Lacan, “the Real is that which lies outside the Symbolic process, and it is to be found in the mental as well as in the material world: a trauma, for example, is [like sudden physical dissolution] intractable and unsymbolizable.”<sup>2</sup> To engage with the Real is to bring the powerful resources of literary form and language to bear on a traumatic “otherness,” including much of America’s past, that has crucially shaped identity and everyday reality in the present – yet finally to face the limited power of those resources at the same time. In the Gothic approach to the past, the mind of both writer and reader make contact with the limits of their power, with that which – as Bowie asserts – our structures “cannot structure.”<sup>3</sup> Yet it is that very struggle to give the Real a language that singularly shapes the American Gothic as broadly symptomatic of cultural restlessness, the fear of facing America’s darkly pathological levels. It is also, I suggest, what gives rise to Gothic verbal figures, their urgent straining toward meaning, and their consequent strains upon the limits of language. This tension between an impossible – or at best, ineffable – reference to the Real, on the one hand, and a strange textual surface, on the other, constitute the experimental game played by American Gothic writing. Gothic images in America thereby suggest the attraction and repulsion of a monstrous history, the desire to “know” the traumatic Real of American being and yet the flight from that unbearable and remote knowledge.

In his *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), D. H. Lawrence helps us to understand this coalescence of American energy in dark images. For him, these figures cast a spell upon the reader’s imagination and stimulate our interpretive curiosity, but in gesturing everywhere – which is to say, nowhere

in particular – they only dimly consolidate a definite meaning and thus further excite desire. Writing during the moment of high modernism, Lawrence asserted that European modernists “had not yet reached the pitch of extreme consciousness” that animated the American nineteenth century; whereas the modernists were “*trying to be extreme*,” many nineteenth-century Americans “just were it.” Lawrence accounts for this essential American modernity – the status of the “extreme” in the literary mainstream – by contrasting nineteenth-century European realism, which was “explicit” and “hate[d] eloquence and symbols, seeing in them only subterfuge,” to the Americans who “refuse everything explicit and always put up a sort of double meaning, [who] revel in subterfuge.”<sup>4</sup> Given Lawrence’s symbolic orientation, it is not surprising that he had little use for Benjamin Franklin, the writer who serves conveniently as a metonym for the American Enlightenment and its ideals of progress and self-advancement and whose popular autobiography (begun in 1771, prior to the revolution, and published in 1818) came to represent the standard American view of the rational individual rising by his own efforts in the marketplace. “The Perfectability of Man! Ah heaven, what a dreary theme!” Lawrence sneers, as he expels Franklin from his American canon. “The ideal self! Oh, but I have a strange and fugitive self shut out and howling like a wolf or a coyote under the ideal windows. See his red eyes in the dark? This is the self who is coming into his own.”<sup>5</sup>

Lawrence’s vivid sense of this “strange and fugitive self” that has been repudiated by the enlightened and forward-looking American psyche reveals much about the cultural origins and ideological matrix that gave rise to the American Gothic project. In psychoanalytic terms, this “fugitive” – banished, haunting the border of life, determined to return – has the lowly status of the “abject,” as defined by Julia Kristeva (see chapter 1 above). The abject is less a specifiable “thing” than a location for throwing off the psyche’s *and* a culture’s most basic drives, the ones most in need of repression. Radically excluded and driven away by the superego of something like Franklin’s national ideology, the abject, as Kristeva asserts, “does not cease challenging its master . . . [It is] a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2). The abject signifies a domain of impossibility and uninhabitability, associated with betwixt-and-between conditions where death keeps invading life, into which the normative American subject must cast the irrational, the desire unacceptable to consciousness, and locate it “over there” in some frightening incarnation of the always inaccessible Real. Moreover, it is precisely this consignment or repudiation that enables the subject to emerge

as a coherent national subject, a proper citizen of the republic, by contrast to that other. At the same time, as Sigmund Freud has observed, the very point of the repressed is its eventual *return*. Gothic literature is committed to representing that fearful “uncanny” as it reappears in arresting figures<sup>6</sup> that partake generally of the “monstrous” (the Latin origin of which means a showing forth, or something capable of being shown or *demonstrated*). Indeed, Freud theorized the uncanny on the basis of actual Gothic literature (albeit German), which he saw as among the most potent cultural archives of the return of the repressed. The uncanny, he suggests, “is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar”; it designates the peculiar quality of something “that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light” (Freud, “The Uncanny,” pp. 369–70, 376).

Lawrence’s “fugitive,” then, returns to the house of the American ideal persistently; it has a deeply familiar but thrown-off story, a history, that insists upon being told, however indirectly. Indeed, Lawrence’s striking simile comparing the abjected self to a wolf or a coyote (a more American animal) suggests a primordial violence in a figure that strains toward narrative expression. Yet Lawrence’s figure of the “fugitive” is itself distinctly fugitive: the monster that returns does not demonstrate; it can at best only “shadow forth,” to use one of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s preferred expressions, in a symbolic moment that represents a complex unknown. The figure of the wolf (or coyote) could mean *this*, or it could mean *that* – or both and more. The text does not, and probably cannot, commit itself to single explicit significance. The American Gothic, like Lawrence’s simile, can be said to strain powerfully but ineffectively in an always fragmentary narrative: it manifests itself often in the strangest of tropes, *catachresis* (as in “howling like a wolf . . . under the ideal windows”), a figure for which there exists no precise literal referent, merely a “something” that can appear verbally in no other way. All we are left with, ultimately, is the image of the monster’s “red eyes in the dark” that follows us as we turn away in baffled unease. This assessment by Lawrence is a sharp critical lesson in the strange narrative unfolding of the repressed’s urgent return and its dependence upon figures that cannot be said to “work” in any conventional way. With that insightfulness, as I now hope to show, Lawrence teaches us quite accurately how to read the American Gothic of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century.

In 1781 an intensely religious farmer in upstate New York ritually murdered his wife and four children after hearing the command of religious “voices.” This bizarre and unaccountable story eventually caught the attention of

Charles Brockden Brown, a lawyer from Philadelphia who is often regarded as the first professional author in the United States. Brown used this fragment of American history as the premise of *Wieland; or the Transformation* (1798), the first major novel to adapt the conventions of British Gothic to American circumstances. By any measure, *Wieland* is an awkward novel, a catachresis writ large, marked by a disproportionate relationship between sensational scenic effects and inadequate causal explanation or resolution. Yet it has attracted intelligent commentary from generations of literary scholars, and not simply because of its historical status. Written from the first-person perspective of Clara Wieland, who serves as a register for the dreadful course of events she unfolds – and whose reluctant, traumatized *writing* is the novel's most engaging aspect – the narrative gestures frequently toward pervasive anxieties about the individual's capacity for common sense and self-control within the unstable social order of the new American republic. *Wieland's* account of the "transformation" into a murderous monster of the benevolent, self-governing, and responsible man – the ideological bedrock of the Enlightenment promise of the free individual's role in the common good – marks the return of the irrational "other" to dismantle the fundamental propositions of the national experiment. More specifically, *Wieland* repudiates the autonomy of the individual and points to a much darker account of why history unfolds in the destructive way that it does. The sins of the fathers – their excesses, their violence and abuses, their predispositions toward the irrational – are visited upon their children, who, despite their illusions of liberty, find themselves in the ironic situation of an intergenerational compulsion to repeat the past. Brown thus inaugurates a historiographical paradigm that will have a long career in American Gothic and will shape the historical imperatives of Nathaniel Hawthorne and William Faulkner, among others.

At the outset of Clara Wieland's retrospective narrative, she and her brother Theodore, along with their friends Henry Pleyel and his sister Catherine, pursue an ideal and harmonious existence of study, conversation, and cultural pursuit at a country estate in the environs of Philadelphia. Buoyed up by wealth and a confidence in their innate goodness, they reveal no cracks in their ideological armature that might render them susceptible to calamity. But after the arrival of a mysterious traveler, Francis Carwin, who turns out to be a ventriloquist – appropriating their voices for what turn out to be dangerous aims indeed – their Enlightenment complacency unravels. Theodore Wieland hears voices and becomes morose and incommunicative; Clara too hears voices emanating from her bedroom closet threatening to rape and kill her. After much rumination on the source, mode, and meaning of "the voice," Theodore acts upon a seemingly spectral command to

murder his wife (Catherine) and their children as proof of religious devotion; he then breaks out of jail and attempts to kill Clara too. But this ultimate violence is arrested when Carwin confesses his ventriloquist pranks, which leads Wieland to doubt that it was God's voice he heard. He commits suicide, Clara and Pleyel escape to Europe, and the novel ends. Out of this tortu-ous, incredible plot, one mystery stubbornly persists: Carwin emphatically denies ventriloquizing the murderous directive to Wieland and thus his own culpability in it. What, then, might explain Wieland's grotesque transformation? Might he be a *personification* of wider and deeper causes, rather than the cause in himself? A possible solution lies in what might be called the historical deep psyche of the American subject.

Nina Baym suggests that the Wieland family is "*shadowed* by a calamitous past in which the threat to their happiness is both contained and predicted."<sup>7</sup> The patriarch of the Wielands emigrated to America from Germany in search of freedom of religious expression. A fanatic who acknowledged no authority apart from his own inner light, he built a fantastic temple where he practiced his strange rituals of worship. Increasingly morbid, he became convinced that God would punish him for failing to carry out a divine command, and he eventually died – of spontaneous combustion, no less – in his own temple, which thereby acquired a stark symbolic ghostliness for the next generation. As good Americans, his children turned their backs on the excesses of the father and converted the temple to a pleasure-house dedicated to the pursuit of intellectual beauty. The Gothic turn of narrative in *Wieland* is predicated upon the repression of that past historical gloom. This Real returns with the full ironies of the uncanny – as a darkly familiar imperative – when the son, Theodore, fulfills the destiny required by "divine command" that the father had left unfinished. As Baym argues, "the threat to the family lies in its own depths, in the strain of madness and melancholia" that had been unsuccessfully "exorcised." Given that the threat lies in both the historical and the psychopathological "depths" and is bound up with familial obligations, it is useful to link Baym's "*shadow*" of the past upon the present to the "strains" of melancholia. Freudian theory posits that melancholia arises when the subject has sustained an ambivalent and unresolved relation to a lost object: the mourner turns the residual anger felt for the lost object – a parent, say – inward onto the ego, in a narcissistic identification with the lost object. This identification incorporates the lost object in order to recover and preserve it. Figuratively, the ego altered by such identification becomes a kind of unquiet grave that harbors the living dead. In a sense, the ego seeks to overcome its own fragmentation by bringing the dead back to life. According to Freud, "*the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and . . . in this way an object loss was transformed into an ego-loss.*"<sup>8</sup>

The congruence of Freud's discourse with *Wieland*; or *the Transformation* shows how the son's conscious disavowal of the father still contains an unconscious identification with the patriarchal mission and the American past that is connected with it. Moreover, the role of the Gothic, we now see, is figuratively to embody an intergenerational tendency when the son finds himself, to his horror, transformed into the very father whose fanaticism he had vehemently rejected. The spectral, disembodied, or ventriloquized voice – instrumental in the Gothic's alignment of present and past – might be understood as an example of what Nicolas Abraham has called "the phantom" in his late twentieth-century "complement" to Freud's theory of melancholy. The departed who are most likely to haunt us, he suggests, are those who were "shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave" and thus have been thrown away (abjected) by their culture and their descendants. The phantom in any subject's later recollections of it arises from an epistemological predicament, for it "is meant to objectify, even if under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations, the gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one's life produced in us . . . Consequently, what haunts are not the dead, but *the gaps left within us by the secrets of others*."<sup>9</sup> Such gaps and secrets are what surface in *Wieland's* transformation. One might well inquire "who is the protagonist of *Wieland*?": the patriarch, the son who uncannily resurrects his destiny, or Clara, who registers the family's disintegration? Or might the underlying agent of *Wieland* be the shadow of history itself, whether that shadow is understood as an inherited state of mind or the emergence of a ghostly phantom from the depths of the historical psyche?

To respond to these questions is to confront the basic cultural project underlying the Gothic's rise in America. Charles Brockden Brown began to write quite soon after the publication of the great Gothic prototypes – the British romances of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis – but, unlike his English antecedents, he had neither a rich national history to draw upon nor a valid reason for setting an American tale in Catholic Italy. In a new republic without any visible textures of the past, the Gothic mode proved difficult to adapt to American realities. As Fielder observes, "the generation of Jefferson was pledged to be done with ghosts and shadows, committed to a life of yea-saying in a sunlit, neoclassical world. From the bourgeois ladies to the Deist intellectuals, the country was united in a disavowal of the 'morbid' and the 'nasty'" ("Invention of the American Gothic," p. 144). Brown's achievement – which would have tremendous influence upon his Gothic followers – was to resituate "history" in a pathologized return of the repressed whereby the present witnesses the unfolding and fulfillment of terrible destinies incipient in the American past. Even as this redirection of the Gothic

focus enabled Brown to anticipate Freud, it also permitted him to reestablish the origins of the American self in the Puritan theology of the colonial seventeenth century – itself quite basic to the American Gothic after Brown – specifically in its acute interests in the marks of sin and transgression and its view of history as a dark necessity, the working-out of a retributive divine plan. If early American Gothic was therefore bent perversely on dismantling the complacencies of ideological investments in human perfectibility through tales of the perverse, it turns out that its mission was a kind of political engagement rather than just escapist storytelling.

To amplify this point I should emphasize the essentially conservative nature of Brown's American Gothic. By raising doubts about the ability of individuals to govern themselves in a full-fledged democracy, Brown participates in Alexander Hamilton's state-oriented Federalist skepticism about the realizability of Thomas Jefferson's confidence in supposedly "free" individualism. *Wieland*, then, is a twice-told tale, narrated once as a Gothic horror story about a son's "transformation" and again as political warning. As Jane Tompkins puts it, the novel "presents a shocking and uncharacteristically negative view of what it meant to survive the War of Independence." Amid the instability of political and social life during the years immediately after the revolution, the Wieland family inhabits "social spaces [that are] empty."<sup>10</sup> They have no authorities of any kind available to tell them what to do, what to believe, how to act. In its twice-telling Brown's novel links the patricide of revolution, by which the newly independent nation threw off its colonizing father, to the son's revolt against the familial and thus all-too-familial father. As would be the case to a lesser extent in later Brown novels such as *Edgar Huntley* (1799) and *Arthur Mervyn* (1800), *Wieland* demonstrates through the circuits of melancholy and its specifically Gothic features that neither the personal nor the cultural past is dead and that both can uncannily return.

Later generations of American writers would transform Brown's historical sense into a rich recasting of how to rewrite history. In these returns the shadow acquires a more explicit mission and a ghostly embodiment, as an actual moving figure (a revenant) returns from an unquiet grave. Through prosopopoeia – the figure of haunting through personification – the shadow begins to speak. And this shadow *knows* the underbelly of American history, the Real that has yet to be completely represented.

"In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?" taunted the acerbic British critic, Sydney Smith in 1820. Two years earlier, in the *Edinburgh Review*, he opined that "Literature the Americans have none," and speculated that the British would supply that need forever: "why should

the Americans write books, when a six weeks' passage brings them, in their own tongue, our sense, science and genius, in bales and hogsheads? Prairies, steam-boats, grist-mills, are their natural objects for centuries to come."<sup>11</sup> Smith could not have predicted that British literary imperialism would be hotly contested in American thought until the end of the civil war in 1865; nor would his prejudices have allowed him to understand that the Gothic productions of Charles Brockden Brown, among others, helped instigate one of the world's first postcolonial literatures. In the half-century following Smith's insult, American writers adapted the major tenets of English Romanticism to their own cultural circumstances with astonishing success. According to Robert Weisbuch's useful survey of the postcolonial impulse in the United States, American responses accelerated in two directions. The transcendentalists – Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman – extended “the visions of the English Romantics to everyday historical living with an unprecedented literalness,” while the Gothic tradition realized its greatest artistic brilliance in Poe and Hawthorne, who exposed to “withering skepticism” the Romantic faith in “the individual ego or selfhood.”<sup>12</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, in particular, redirected the Gothic project and refined its strategies to address the shadows now cast by the past upon the present. He purged American Gothic of its European trappings by avoiding the sensationalism of Brown, yet he consolidated Brown's investment in the ongoing haunting of history's evils and injustices. Most importantly, Hawthorne worked earnestly in the medium of the Gothic to define the identity and historical possibilities of the Anglo-American writer.

Whereas Brown was obliged to strain the limits of credibility in tracing the relation of historical fragments to America's search for authority, Hawthorne located a distinct national subject explicitly in the colonial past, often in the Puritan origins of the American self. This historical archive proved so rich that, with Hawthorne, the Gothic arrived at what it had lacked for several generations: a national way of reconstructing history that arose from a homegrown verbal tradition and a strong engagement with the idea of “America.” If Hawthorne's point was to cultivate an underdeveloped historical sensibility in his home country – or, as he puts it in the preface to *The House of Seven Gables*, to “connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is fitting away from us” (Hawthorne, *Novels*, p. 351) – then his style rightly includes not only a lush “atmospheric medium” and a carefully crafted narrative form, but also some recurring figurative techniques by which the past is made to “live” again in striking ghostly images. Generally, Hawthorne's approach to historiographical narrative achieves what might be called a symbolism of *implication*. His novels work at the intersection of history and autobiography to demonstrate both a present indicative of the

past and a meshing of the author's subjectivity with ancestral evil. His preferred mode is a Puritan-based allegory, which implies indirectly rather than gesturing explicitly, and his revival of the past is intimately bound up with the success or failure of haunting figures. Perversely, Hawthorne's greatest successes were often predicated upon a certain referential obscurity – and hence a multiplicity – in his symbols.

Nowhere is this paradox more evident than in *The Scarlet Letter* of 1850. Set in the early days of the Puritan colonial experiment in Massachusetts, a society in which sin was indistinguishable from crime, it traces the career of Hester Prynne and the letter A which she is forced to wear as punishment for adultery and as a cautionary warning to regulate the behavior of other women. The capacity of the letter to refer proves to be highly unstable as it evolves over time to signify more sympathetic views of Hester: while it slips toward suggesting “Angel” and “Able” – reflecting Hester's generosity toward the community that scorns her – it never entirely sheds its original import. Cumulatively, the narrative turns toward an allegory about reading such symbols to suggest that a conclusive interpretation of texts, particularly historical texts, is a remote possibility. Hawthorne's play with ambiguity has important political implications arising from the early feminist movement of his own time. *The Scarlet Letter* explores the energy of feminine agency in oppressive regimes and interrogates the boundary between private and public life. Yet Hawthorne's response to Hester's protofeminism is ambivalent at best. Indeed, this much discussed novel is centrally engaged with gender politics, particularly with clarifying the stances of male writers who bear witness to the history of wrongs against women in the republic. This quest is exposed in the long preface to Hester's story, “The Custom-House,” where Hawthorne offers a distinctly Gothic version of autobiography. Most immediately, “The Custom-House” details Hawthorne's frustration with his job as a civil servant, his fortunate discovery of a few fragments of Puritan historiography pertaining to Hester Prynne, and history's power to stimulate the imagination seeking a “neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (a highly Gothic vision already as Hawthorne writes it, reminiscent of Walpole's second preface to *The Castle of Otranto*). In this metaphorical world of romance-writing, we are assured, “Ghosts might enter here, without affrighting us” (Hawthorne, *Novels*, p. 149). “The Custom-House” turns out to be swarming with ghosts – it is surely one of the most deeply emblematic haunted houses in American literature – and they bear messages about the male writer's obligation to affiliate himself with their patriarchal mission, even as he wonders about past wrongs done to women. If such ghostly directives inform a theory of literature, which

is a central project of Hawthorne's preface, they also arise gradually from strange accretions of symbols that extend the Gothic's traditional focus on mysterious hauntings in new ways.

The Gothic work of "The Custom-House" is carried out by figures of *exhumation*, a process that links the author's cruel Puritan ancestors to a more literary "father," one Jonathan Pue, who inscribed Hester Prynne's story prior to the revolution. The conjoined authority of *two* writers culminates in the present moment and thus puts pressure on the responsibility of Hawthorne as "author." He begins by speculating whether the "persecuting spirit" of his ancestors, who came to Massachusetts with their Bibles and their swords, might be memorialized by the bloodstains of their victims upon their corpses, "so deep a stain, indeed, that [their] dry old bones, in the Charter Street burial ground, must still retain it" (Hawthorne, *Novels*, p. 126). This forensic and highly Gothic curiosity about the signs of history's evil deeds is bound up with an imaginary exhumation of the family graves; having dug them up, Hawthorne proceeds to personify them: "'What is he?' murmurs one gray *shadow* of my forefathers to the other. 'A writer of story-books!'" Hawthorne's *protopoiea* – the means by which the ghostly "shadow" is endowed with speech – locates his historical project in a melancholic search for affiliation. To recall Freud's image of melancholy's incorporation of the "shadow" of the lost object into the subject, where it functions as a sharp critic of the ego, then, is to confront important clues about the psychological dimensions of Gothic historiography in Hawthorne. For one thing, it suggests a grim determinism, for this writer's repugnance at his ancestors' crimes does not mitigate his recognition that "strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine" (*Scarlet Letter*; *ibid.*, p. 127). Moreover, the resonant implications of the "shadow" require Hawthorne to pursue his career as a writer in ways that will appease the ghostly fathers, perhaps by continuing their mission of surveying and regulating women's agency and sphere of action. "The past," Hawthorne ominously asserts, "was not dead" (*ibid.*, p. 142). How, then, might the writer approach "the corpse of dead activity" – the fragmentary residues of history that survive into the present – and "raise up from these dry bones an image" (p. 144)?

In "The Custom-House" Hawthorne negotiates his transition from the "office" of civil servant to the "office" of the writer of historical romance. The terms of that negotiation persist as tropes of exhumation, metaphors of unearthing useful residues from the grave of history that are supplemented by exhortations emanating from history's patriarchal ghosts. "The Custom House" is a very important instance of the innovative treatment that the Gothic receives in America, primarily because Hawthorne borrows conventional Gothic elements that he refuses to treat literally. There are no "real"

exhumations here, no encounters with actual ghosts: such things enter the text through the syntax of "it was *as if* . . ." the grammar of simile, metaphor, and analogy.<sup>13</sup> Hawthorne approaches the legacy of Gothic literature – a set of conventions with which his audience was familiar – as a set of representational practices that can now be used figuratively, in the spirit of irony or parody, within a narrative that is not, strictly speaking, a Gothic story. Rather, he adapts such clichés as graves and ghosts to ground his senses of the suitability of early American history for postcolonial literature, his relation with a gendered past, and the attractions of romance-writing. This playful conversion of the elements of Gothic plot or scene into whimsical rhetoric and elaborately sustained figures is a sophisticated experiment, one that is aware of its own belatedness in the Gothic's evolution. As a result the reader is left wondering about the precise orientation of Hawthorne's ominous hints and forensic autopsies. While his figures give expression to the deep psyche of American history – speaking as they seem to from a melancholic tomb incorporated in the subject as a sort of phantom emanating from the historical unconscious – the reader is never quite certain of their meaning or function as Gothic hauntings.

If Hawthorne might thus be said to produce not only the figures of ghosts but also the "ghosts" of "figure" in "The Custom House," such a blight or palsy soon spreads beyond this extended preface to *The Scarlet Letter* itself, contaminating its central symbol. Hester's A, Hawthorne demonstrates, has no singular meaning capable of transcending its historical context or the time in which it was manufactured, since it was read and interpreted by people long dead who never arrived at a consensus. Evidently, Hawthorne refused the Romantic ideology of literary symbol which, according to Coleridge in England, promised stable, transparent, and coherent "meaning" beyond the vicissitudes of history.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Hester's scarlet letter is subjected to scene after scene of reading and interpretation, none of which is corroborated by the text or its author. Given this narrative organization, *The Scarlet Letter* functions as an allegory of reading that focuses on a failed symbol, one that betrays its promise to elucidate and clarify an enduring human truth and so provides no certain knowledge of America's historical origins. The obsession of such other nineteenth-century American writers as Melville, Poe, and James with allegories of reading – narratives that turn upon empty or unreadable signs or texts – might be broadly characterized as a "ghosting" of the text and its interpretive certainty, a literary development coincident with the rise of American Gothic and especially important to Hawthorne.

In the end, though, Hawthorne worried about whether the characters in *The Scarlet Letter* "retained all the rigidity of dead corpses" (*Novels*, p. 148). They do, partly because of the weight of allegorical abstraction they

are designed to carry, but more fundamentally because they continually betray their spectral origins in a complex American Real. Arising from the hallucinatory uncanny and incorporating the imperatives of their author's acute melancholia, the characters of this romance stumble through a dark dream. Hawthorne's intervention in American history stems from a profound filial duty that he feels toward the dead, arising from his obsessions with his tyrannical forebears and their unquiet graves, which are the ultimate site of his writing as a reader of their vestiges. His interest in the uncanny therefore emerges in one of his earliest short tales, "Roger Malvin's Burial" (written in 1828, published in 1846), in which a man who abandons his wounded father-in-law to die in the forest is compelled to return to the same site, years later, where he unknowingly murders his own son. This story might be more appropriately entitled "Roger Malvin's Exhumation," for the repressed father returns to demand an ironic compensation. Hawthorne's personified figures of haunting will finally return with greater urgency in *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), in which the latest scion of the Pyncheon family walks the earth as a Puritan revenant and perpetuates ancestral crimes in the name of authority and legitimacy before meeting a retributive end. Throughout his career Hawthorne experimented with many figurative shades of America's historical corpse to augment the political relevance of the Gothic ghost story. However, for a fully realized aesthetics of the corpse and the darkest attractions of death, Hawthorne's work required the supplement of Edgar Allan Poe.

Poe's career was winding down in the 1840s, just as Hawthorne's was starting to accelerate, and so they represent quite different points on the American Gothic continuum. Whereas Hawthorne domesticated the Gothic for the purposes of politicized historiography, cautiously curbing its notorious sensationalism, Poe reveled in Gothic excess with a morbid abandon barely restrained by his tight formal control. While Hawthorne, the friend of presidents and secluded genius of the New England literary scene, was an exemplary bourgeois citizen of the world, Poe was in several senses a denizen of the urban underworld. A dissolute alcoholic, chronically short of money, vituperative in his professional relations, continually scrambling from one journalistic hack job to another, he turned a very dark melancholic despair toward the death drive that appears in his masterful short stories and lyric poems of the 1830s and 1840s. Poe's anatomy of melancholy took the symbolism of exhumation to depths that would have caused Hawthorne to blush; his horrific scenes transgressed every literary taste, yet at the same time few American writers have been so utterly preoccupied with beauty or have sought such precise aesthetic effects. Of all nineteenth-century

American writers, Poe seems most thoroughly our contemporary in his attempt to give language and a narrative structure to what Freud came to describe as the unconscious. He was empathetically *not* a man of his time: as Kenneth Silverman, a recent Poe biographer, observes, "at a time when James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson [and others] were creating a feeling of space and self-reliant freedom, he was creating in his many accounts of persons bricked up in walls, hidden under floorboards, or jammed in chimneys a mythology of enclosure, constriction, and victimization."<sup>15</sup>

All Gothic writing seeks to induce in the reader a particular affect from within the spectrum of horror: Brown's aim is abrupt surprise; Hawthorne's might be called the gloomy foreclosure of hope; Poe's characteristic emotional matrix is an acute claustrophobia. Spatial configuration is crucial in achieving this painful sense of imprisonment – while Hawthorne's haunted houses admit escape, Poe's coffins and sealed tombs resonate with finality – but architectural motifs in Poe's writing also function as a symbolic equivalent for characters afflicted with impossible desires that insist upon a grotesque realization. Obsessive melancholics all, Poe's people surrender their defenses in the conventional symbolic order and slide inexorably toward the chaotic and abjected Real. Their power over the reader's affective response is extraordinary; Slavoj Žižek's argument about contemporary Gothic is applicable to Poe: "the spectator is supposed to view [the scene] from close up so that he loses his 'objective distance' toward it and is immediately 'drawn' into it. [The text] neither imitates reality nor represents it via symbolic codes[;] it 'renders' the Real by 'seizing' the spectator."<sup>16</sup> This "Poe effect" arises less from the themes of his stories than from his interest in detailing the processes by which the subject is compelled to pursue a truth that is culturally proscribed; we read on, oriented toward a knowledge that is both a fascination and a fear.

Indeed, a striking quality of Poe's fiction is the progressive narrowing of the safe ground between fascination and fear. This zone is greatly reduced in the course of the story, squeezing the reader between conflicting responses that ultimately collapse into each other in a moment of horrific recognition. Poe's interest in narrative imprisonment was generated, it seems, by his own suspension between cultures and their political values. Unlike most American writers of his time, he set few of his tales in the United States; as Jared Gardner suggests, Poe's contempt for democracy led him to construct "a no-place and nowhere that might be anywhere but here."<sup>17</sup> However, the "American" Poe – a Southerner who wandered between North and South, finding acceptance and a congenial home nowhere – retained deep, if rather oblique and ambivalent connections to the most urgent and vexed question of his day, the abolition of slavery. Given his preference for the narrative setting of



"elsewhere," it seems odd that Toni Morrison would claim that "no early American writer is more important to the concept of African Americanism than Poe."<sup>18</sup> Certainly Poe does not write directly about the repugnant facts, appalling ethics, or national shame of slavery. Yet several of his most celebrated texts are rightly understood now as profound meditations upon the cultural significance of "blackness" in the white American mind. A surprising amount of Poe's work may be said to Gothicize the deep oppression and violence inherent in his culture's whiteness and thus to transform America's normative race into the most monstrous of them all.

Blackness consequently appears, albeit with different resonances, throughout Poe's writings. His poem "The Raven" (1845) exploits the Gothic potential inherent in Victorian America's elaborate rituals of mourning in a manner that turns cultural excess into poetic excess. The poem explores the bereavement of a speaker who may expect no "surcease of sorrow" (Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, p. 81) by incarnating his melancholia in the symbol of a raven who descends upon him, never to depart. The literal blackness of the bird is given figurative resonance by its poetic origin "on the Night's Plutonian shore" (*ibid.*, p. 83); this figure, then, culminates in the Freudian trope of the melancholic shadow falling permanently upon the narrating ego at the poem's close:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting,

And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted — nevermore! (p. 86)

Poe here associates melancholia with a densely symbolic blackness, just as surely as he affiliates the black body with an ontological melancholia, the embodiment of a loss that speaks only of loss. "The Black Cat" (1843) is a more complex beast fable in which the symbolic import of "blackness" conflates the evil perpetrated by the white upon the body of the black, the long and painful memory of the black, and the return of the black as revenant to exact revenge. In this story blackness allegorizes not merely a personal (or even cultural) melancholia, as it does in "The Raven," but the abject underside of a national "normality."

To describe Poe's Gothic fictions as "philosophical" is to suggest that he pursues the question of explanatory origins for the problems of evil and suffering in both the individual and the national psyche. A corollary, as Gardner suggests, is the central issue "of whether there is some ultimate interior thing that can survive the calamities that befall exteriors: . . . does there remain something primal — something buried — that can survive these

calamities?"<sup>19</sup> "The Black Cat" interrogates the impulses of such a calamitous drive toward meaningless, unprovoked violence, and even though Poe cannot explain how it comes about, he provides a rich Gothic figure to illustrate its temporal consequences. In a parody of the contemporary genre of the Temperance Tract — a form of witnessing that details the devastation of alcohol abuse — "The Black Cat's" narrator recounts his escalating violence against his beloved pet cat, culminating in his murder of the poor animal. Filled with remorse, he acquires another, almost identical cat, but his abusive habits continue: attempting to kill the cat and so be rid of it, he turns his fury upon his wife, whom he also murders. He conceals the corpse behind a wall, but his crime is apprehended by "a voice from within the tomb," when the cat — which had somehow become incarcerated within the tomb — emits "a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony" (*Poetry and Tales*, p. 606).

Because his "American" investments are so oblique, Poe's tales require a historical contextualization. As an abolitionist allegory, "The Black Cat" aligns the psychoanalytic Real, including the Gothic figure of the undead come back to settle scores, with the historical real of the sheer perverseness of American slavery. Lesley Ginsberg has demonstrated the efficacy of such an allegorical reading by situating Poe's cat in relation to the animal images of abolitionist literature. If proslavery supporters dehumanized blacks, abolitionists pointed out, by their alternative discourse, the full horror of slavery's dissolution of the boundary between human and animal. Slave narratives like that of Frederick Douglass, Ginsberg reminds us, celebrated the "rhetorical transformation from the 'beast-like stupor' of slavery to the full humanity of freedom." Indeed, Ginsberg suggests an important cross-fertilization between the tropes of the Gothic and the slave narrative: Douglass, she notes, narrates his first act of physical resistance in terms that are both Christian and the familiar one of the Gothic revenant: "it was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery!" The combination of the abolitionist trope of the slave as domestic animal or chattel and Douglass's assertion of his humanity as a figurative return from the grave ultimately leads Ginsberg to argue that "Douglass allows us to reread the irrepressible voice of the dead in 'The Black Cat' as an explicit metaphor for the silences and repressions upon which the peculiar institution [of black slavery] was built."<sup>20</sup>

Poe's allegorical experiments with the symbolic potential of blackness are also congruent with his representations of women, the *otter* patriarchal chatel of the American nineteenth century. Female characters enter his fiction, as black ones do, always already oriented toward the tomb; the point of the fiction is to dramatize their return from a state of death to fulfill their

erotic mission, one which finds its counterpart in the death drive of his male protagonists. Because Poe so thoroughly identified woman as the object of necrophilic desire, his fictions of the female revenant turn upon a repellant but arresting beauty, a different form of the "perverse" from the violence that drives "The Black Cat," one that now seeks pleasure without shame and remains somehow impervious to the claustrophobia that usually besets Poe's male characters and readers.

Poe's most powerful achievements in the textual macabre gather the writer and the reader together into the spiral of the drive toward death – the inevitable consequence of an unrestrained melancholic absorption. Whereas Freud understood the death drive as a biological urge in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), a force on the threshold between the organism and the psyche, Lacan has since reconceptualized it as the return of a sense of the chaotic and othered Real (which always threatens to absorb life into death) that had been precariously excluded by the subject's imaginary sense of its identity. The death drive designates the pressure of the unbound energies of the *id* to drive irrationally toward the Real against the limits enforced by the bound structure of the *ego*. Richard Boothby suggests that the death drive – and its pressure to "unbind" or "dissolve" the *ego* – is activated by a traumatic event "registered in an indelible image"; the *ego* obsessively returns to the traumatic image "in an effort to contain it in a repaired *Gestalt*. But at the same time, the memory of the trauma, itself an image of fragmentation and disintegration, provides the forces opposing the *ego* with their blazon of retaliation against the *ego* and its strictures."<sup>21</sup> Poe's narratives frequently stage this kind of encounter between the protagonist and a corpse, the emblem of the Real, but the unrequited melancholia that prompts this encounter does not inevitably require that the two be identical. Rather, Poe's Gothic effect is empowered by the confounding figure of *chiasmus* – the symbolism of crossing over, whereby the qualities of one object uncannily imbue the other (as life is invaded by death) – to situate the literally dead in relation to the traumatic shattering of the protagonist's *ego*, all within a death drive that is now clearly bound up with the process of narration. Between 1835 and 1838 especially, Poe composed several stories that enact this traumatic process.

"Berenice," the most disturbing of these stories, is an account of obsessive-compulsive disorder, or what the nineteenth century pathologized as "monomania," as it proceeds to an appalling fulfillment. Egaeus, Poe's narrator, becomes strangely attracted when, "in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to [his] view" (*Poetry and Tales*, p. 230). Berenice's teeth constitute for Egaeus a fetish object, for he "felt that their possession could alone ever restore [him] to peace"

(p. 231); just as a fetish acquires meaning by a synecdochic logic, by which the part stands for the whole, the teeth here come to suggest the larger cultural specter of the devouring mother, the myth of woman as *vagina dentata* (a vulva lined with teeth). By this unconscious logic, to possess the teeth is to control the power of feminine sexuality and thus stabilize the contours of the *ego*. But the drive to possess the desired object as a means of self-possession goes terribly wrong in this story because Poe will allow no refuge in conventional symbolic terms. The abjected Real erupts into the literal when, after Berenice's death, Egaeus violates the corpse to retrieve the white objects of his longing. Poe renders the horrors of the Real by preventing any symbolic containment of it. Egaeus cannot even put the horror into words, only dimly recalling the desecration as "a fearful page in the record of my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strived to decypher them, but in vain" (p. 232). If Egaeus's narrating *ego* is unbound by the trauma of his vile act, the narrative process itself is afflicted by its contagion, for it cannot unfold the deeply physical Real in any direct representation; it can but look away at the corpse's violation. The full horror of Poe's revelation, then, comes in part from its falling back into relentless verbal production at the conclusion of the tale. Egaeus may be able to read what has hitherto haunted him as "a fearful page," but Poe's narrative does not linger to register the extent of his trauma or the extreme consequences of the death drive: "With a shriek I bounded to the table, and grasped the box that lay upon it. But I could not force it open; and in my tremor it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily; and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro on the floor" (p. 233). According to Kenneth Silverman, Poe extends the moment of horrified recognition in this "copulative ending."<sup>22</sup> By employing the rhetorical trope of *polyhydrotos*, a succession of conjunctions, this sentence's series of "ands" helps greatly, in its sheer repetition, to suggest the repetitive death drive and its traumatic unbinding of normal logic, as the final words call attention, with a grisly equality, to the trembling hands, the fall, the shattering box, and the residue of the Real all at once.

The great lessons of Edgar Allan Poe are those of a certain compositional economy: for him chiasmus and prosopoeia, the tropes of Gothic haunting and the return of the dead, turn perversely toward the literal – the decimated body – in order to assert the residue of history (including racial and gender history in America) as an often horrifying and incomprehensible Real continually calling the subject toward what is dying or has died. In Poe's hands,

Hawthorne's delicately sustained personifications acquire a forceful brevity and a chilling, literal animation; Brown's monstrosities lose their speculative abstraction to achieve a starker, more concise, and more visible animation. Despite his careful tracing of traumatic effects from pathological desires, Poe understood that absence is more unsettling than presence, particularly when the absent manifests itself indirectly as uncanny, the psychological, cultural, or physical otherness just below the threshold of what is conscious and conventional.

These Gothic lessons were not lost upon subsequent writers of the American nineteenth century. Emily Dickinson articulates the process of death in the voices of lyric speakers who address us from beyond the grave in a kind of reverse apostrophe: "I heard a fly buzz - when I died -" (Poem 591).<sup>23</sup> She verifies the inadequacy of poetic figures to capture the ineffable Real at the center of natural phenomena; her famous "Slant of Light" poem details the coming and passing of an oppressive illumination - "When it comes, the Landscape listens - / Shadows - hold their breath - / When it goes, 'tis like the Distance / On the look of Death -" (Poem 320) - but the light itself is the absent object of her intricate personifications and similes. Dickinson's melancholy vision of absences also occurs in Herman Melville's writing: the appalling whiteness of the whale in *Moby-Dick* (1851), by its very "indefiniteness, shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe,"<sup>24</sup> while the title character's constant refrain of "I would prefer not to" in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853) functions as a catechism, that rhetorical figure for which there is no literal referent, so as to bring the symbolic order of everyday language into traumatic collision with the blank inaccessibility of the Real. Such occasional Gothic features would consolidate themselves most fully for Melville in his Brockden-Brownish *Pierre* or, *The Ambiguities* (1852). But if Melville invests the most realistic, documentary narratives with the shadows of Gothic terror, nineteenth-century American Gothic reaches its most complex expression in the late writing of the expatriate Henry James, who not only gives us *The Turn of the Screw* by 1898 but returns to the United States to encounter, both in *The American Scene* (1907) and his last tale of New York, "The Jolly Corner" (1908),<sup>25</sup> the ghosts of the hypothetical selves he might have become had he remained in America. All of these writers refuse the complacent, progressive ideology of their native country. The terms of their refusal - the figures of the melancholic shadow, the "corpse" of an evil history working toward fulfillment, the "shadows" of human action manifested in the unquiet revenant - constitute a brilliantly innovative, experimental literature that perpetuated the life of the Gothic mode and consolidated the underside of writing in the American grain. The Gothic tradition in the

United States reflects not the critic Harold Bloom's model of literary advancement as overcoming the "anxiety of influence" - for these writers were keenly celebratory of their dark antecedents - but rather a haunting *influence of anxiety*, the enduring appeal of the Gothic to our most continuous fears, especially in an America haunted by the dark recesses of its own history.

## NOTES

- 1 Walt Whitman, "Preface to *Leaves of Grass*" (1855) in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), p. 5.
- 2 Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 94.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 4 D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923; reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. ii.
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 15.
- 6 The relation between the abject's will-to-return and figurative innovation in Gothic literature is suggested by Julia Kristeva, who notes that "the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages" (*Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982], p. 45).
- 7 Nina Baym, "A Minority Reading of *Wieland*" in Bernard Rosenthal, ed., *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981), p. 90, my emphasis.
- 8 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *On Metapsychology*, volume xi of *The Penguin Freud Library*, trans. James Strachey et al., ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 258, my emphasis.
- 9 Nicolas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom: a Complement to Freud's Metapsychology," in *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Françoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 75-77, my emphasis. Abraham distinguishes between *melancholia* - the loss of a loved one, the unsuccessful mourning, and the consequent incorporation of the lost object as a "tomb within" - and *the phantom*, by which descendants of the dead "objectify those buried tombs through diverse species of ghosts. What comes back to haunt are the tombs of others." The phantom represents, then, "the burial of an unspeakable fact within" the departed ("Notes," p. 76). Abraham's account of its emergence is strikingly resonant with the plot of *Wieland*: "it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography" (*ibid.*, p. 78).
- 10 Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: the Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 44, 52.
- 11 Sydney Smith, "Travels in America," *Edinburgh Review* 21 (December 1818): 144.
- 12 Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xviii.
- 13 For a fuller analysis of Hawthorne's tropes of exhumation, see my articles "Filial Duty": Reading the Patriarchal Body in "The Custom House," *Studies in the*

- Novel* 25 (1993), and "Necro-filia: Hawthorne's Melancholia," *English Studies in Canada* 27 (2001).
- 14 According to Coleridge the symbol conveys universal truth; it is characterized "above all by the transience of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, 1971), p. 468.
- 15 Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 228.
- 16 Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry: an Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 174.
- 17 Jared Gardner, *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 127.
- 18 See Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 32.
- 19 Gardner, *Master Plots*, p. 128.
- 20 Lesley Ginsberg, "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat'" in Robert Martin and Eric Savoy, eds., *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), p. 104. See also Joan Dayan, "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies and Slaves," *American Literature* 66 (1994): 239-73.
- 21 Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 92-93.
- 22 Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, p. 113.
- 23 Dickinson's poems are cited from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). Note also Daneen Wardrop, *Emily Dickinson's Gothic: Goblin with a Gauge* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996).
- 24 Herman Melville, *Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick*, ed. G. Thomas Tanselle (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 1001.
- 25 See Eric Savoy, "Spectres of Abjection: the Queer Subject of James's 'The Jolly Corner,'" in Glennis Byron and David Punter, eds., *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 161-74.