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The Figure of the Gothic Author in Nineteenth-Century America

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Abstract

This study comprises an investigation into the figure of the Gothic author in nineteenth-century America. Overall, it demonstrates that the persistent critical attribution of Gothic identities to practitioners of the Gothic genre — what I term the Gothicisation of the Gothic author — exerted a profound impact upon the perception and practice of Gothic authorship. Tracing this trend back to the biographical approach to literary criticism which dominated nineteenth-century literary discussion, I argue that a method of textual exegesis which read the content of an author's work as an index of their character posed a particular threat to the public reputations of practitioners of the Gothic. Conflated with their troubled protagonists, diagnosed with dysfunctional psychological traits and aligned, both metaphorically and literally, with Gothic character types, this discourse created a cultural climate in which Gothic authorship had to be strategically negotiated. As I illustrate, this was primarily achieved through the adoption of evasive writing strategies that were designed to distance the author from their chosen mode of writing. Whilst this thesis places the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship in a transatlantic context, it is especially concerned with the unique ramifications that it held for notions of American national identity during the nineteenth century. Following the American Revolution, when the process of nation-building became tightly bound up with the creation of a successful and authentically American national literary canon, the figure of the American author assumed a nationally representative status. This was instantly problematised, I argue, by the Gothic's prominence within America's emerging literary tradition. As well as examining the ways in which authors navigated the negative personal connotations attached to Gothic authorship, therefore, this study also interrogates the rhetorical strategies that American critics used to de-gothicise the Gothic works of authors whose writing was deemed to be of significant national value.

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Declaration of Originality

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Note on texts

Original spelling and punctuation have been retained throughout for quotations.

Introduction

Gothicising the Gothic Author

On the 1 January 1848 the satirical American periodical, *The John-Donkey*, printed a parodic 'How To' guide for writers 'desirous of achieving immortality' as Gothic authors.¹ Facetiously glossing the nineteenth-century Gothic as the 'Common-place High-pressure Highfaluting' style (a direct descendent of '*the Romantic High-pressure Highfaluting*' mode inaugurated during the 1790s by the hugely popular, yet contentious novels of 'Mrs. Radcliffe' and 'Monk LEWIS'), this guide advises the genre's contemporary aspirants to adopt the following practices:

When you sit down to write, tangle your hair carefully, loosen your neckerchief, and rumple your shirt-collar. Upset all the chairs, overturn all earthen utensils, and kick the bed-clothes around your attic. [...] Follow these rules, and every one will think you an author of great genius, or a bedlamite — and the distinction between the two is very slight. In either case they will think you inspired. If you can talk in your preface about some clique — some secret cabal, whose members are busily engaged in putting you down — so much the better. Declare you will not be put down, or you will not stay 'put.' Assume the defensive.²

According to this manual, Gothic authorship is bound up with the espousal of recognisably Gothic lifestyles or behaviours. At best, rumoured to be associated with the enigmatic and exclusive underworld of secret societies, practitioners of the genre are expected to exhibit a kind of dark glamour. At worst, they are painted as seedy, undignified or pathetic underdogs, fundamentally unsuited to the demands of everyday life. Imagined in a permanently 'defensive' posture, they are associated with such basic personal "failings" as domestic disorder, poor personal hygiene and sartorial mishap. This portrait also makes the psychological connection between Gothic authorship and emotional dysfunction or insanity, with Gothic works demonstrating a fine line between literary 'genius' and the ravings of a 'bedlamite'. Simultaneously a figure of lurid fascination and pity, the Gothic author is represented as anathema to normality. They are creatures of melodrama and excess, flamboyantly or compulsively manifesting the extremes of their chosen mode of writing.

Whilst clearly tongue-in-cheek (as well as promoting the cynical adoption of eccentric literary personas as a commercially beneficial self-fashioning strategy), this set of

¹ 'Hints to Novelists', *The John-Donkey*, 1 January 1848, p. 11 (p. 11).

² 'Hints to Novelists', p. 11.

instructions is illustrative of one of the most pervasive critical discourses surrounding Gothic authorship in the nineteenth century: the assumption, almost invariably pejorative, that writers who produced Gothic fictions were Gothic figures in their own right. Within this discourse, the world of the Gothic author was one in which the boundaries between fact and fabrication were always blurred. The fictional Gothic narratives consumed by readers were perceived merely to be a reflection or extension of the Gothic narratives that their creators inhabited in actuality.

This study argues that the persistent critical alignment of Gothic fictions with Gothic realities — what I term the Gothicisation of the Gothic author — exerted a profound impact upon the perception and practice of Gothic authorship in nineteenth-century America. I argue that the ubiquity of biographical readings of Gothic texts, which conceptualised them as the product of everything from low-level melancholia to sinister pathologies and demonic possession, created a literary climate in which Gothic authorship had to be strategically negotiated. On a personal level, individual writers often resorted to evasive writing practices, such as anonymous authorship, or the adoption of metafictional Gothic subgenres designed to erect a deflective barrier between the content of their fiction and their own character. On a wider scale, the conceptualisation of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects frequently shaped the construction of their early reception histories. More often than not, this led to the publication of character portraits which cast shadowy question marks over their reputations, many of which have inflected their on-going cultural legacies and critical treatment up until the present day. Rufus Griswold's infamous obituary of Edgar Allan Poe is a case in point.³ Under certain conditions, however, it prompted contemporary essayists, reviewers and biographers to justify, reinterpret, or entirely elide the Gothic elements in an author's corpus. These critical acts of redemption or realignment were often influenced by the literary nationalist appropriation of specific authorial careers, most notably Nathaniel Hawthorne's. When the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship became entangled with questions of national cultural identity, especially in connection with a specific writer's emergent canonicity, patriotism demanded that the troubling personal implications attached to the Gothicism of their writing be rhetorically defused.

³ [Rufus Griswold], 'Death of Edgar Allan Poe', in *Poe in his Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of his Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, ed. by Benjamin F. Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 73-80.

The Critical Field

The field of American Gothic studies has broadened exponentially in recent years. In particular, recent scholarship has enriched our knowledge and understanding of the Gothic's socio-political functions within American literature and culture. Many of these studies — including those by Kathleen Brogan, Keith Cartwright, Renée L. Bergland, Justin D. Edwards, Maisha L. Wester, Kari J. Winter, Bridget M. Marshall, Arthur F. Redding, W. Scott Poole and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet — have continued to elucidate the Gothic's often contradictory role, both in enabling and critiquing the racial inequalities at the heart of America's troubled political history.⁴

Several studies have been conducted into the important cultural work carried out by the American Gothic in relation to the politics of gender and sexuality. Poole and Monnet, for example, have explored the unique relationship between the representation of race and gender within American Gothic literature.⁵ Major interventions in scholarly debate have also been facilitated by the excavation of previously underappreciated or unknown traditions of American female Gothic authorship, with Dara Downey and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock both drawing attention to bodies of feminist ghost stories.⁶

A significant body of criticism has been produced on the connections between the Gothic and the construction, or subversion, of major American political discourses. Marilyn Michaud has examined the intersections between the Gothic and Republicanism, whilst Johan Höglund has traced the presence, both current and historical, of imperialist ideologies

⁴ Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Keith Cartwright, *Reading Africa into American Literature: Epics, Fables, and Gothic Tales* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002); Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000); Justin D. Edwards, *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003); Maisha L. Wester, *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Kari J. Winter, *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Bridget M. Marshall, *The Transatlantic Gothic Novel and the Law, 1790-1860* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Arthur F. Redding, *Haints: American Ghosts, Millennial Passions, and Contemporary Gothic Fictions* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011); W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic: Gender and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

⁵ Poole; Monnet.

⁶ Dara Downey, *American Women's Ghost Stories in the Gilded Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

in American Gothic texts.⁷ From the respective angles of literary responses to Catholicism and the influence of Cotton Mather, Farrell O'Gorman and Dorothy Z. Baker have considered the often sceptical relationship between the American Gothic and notions of American exceptionalism.⁸ More broadly, Siân Silyn Roberts has interrogated the role that interactions between European Enlightenment thought and the Gothic have played in enabling post-revolutionary American readers to conceptualise themselves as political subjects.⁹

Greater attention has been paid in recent years to American Gothic regionalism. Eric Gary Anderson and Taylor Hagood, Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow and Brigid Cherry have all produced groundbreaking edited collections on America's Southern Gothic tradition, whilst Faye Ringel has explored New England's rich historical relationship with supernatural history and folklore.¹⁰ Bernice M. Murphy's and Sherry R. Truffin's observations upon the cultural significance of the less regionally circumscribed settings of the rural, the suburban and the schoolhouse have also afforded valuable insights into the historical construction of America's Gothic geographies.¹¹

Finally, the horizons of American Gothic scholarship have been broadened by a number of interdisciplinary contributions to the field. Sarah Burns and Kerry Dean Carso have both explored cultural cross-fertilizations between the Gothic and visual culture, and Anna Sonser has posited a connection between the consumption of American Gothic texts and commodity economics.¹²

⁷ Marilyn Michaud, *Republicanism and the American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009); Johan Höglund, *The American Imperial Gothic: Popular Culture, Empire, Violence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

⁸ Farrell O'Gorman, *Catholicism and American Borders in the Gothic Literary Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017); Dorothy Z. Baker, *America's Gothic Fiction: The Legacy of 'Magnalia Christi Americana'* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014).

⁹ Siân Silyn Roberts, *Gothic Subjects: The Transformation of Individualism in American Fiction, 1790-1861* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Eric Gary Anderson and Taylor Hagood, eds, *Undead Souths: The Gothic and Beyond in Southern Literature and Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow, eds, *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic* (London: Palgrave, 2016); Brigid Cherry, ed., *True Blood: Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Faye Ringel, *New England's Gothic Literature: History and Folklore of the Supernatural from the Seventeenth through the Twentieth Centuries* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995).

¹¹ Bernice M. Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Sherry R. Truffin, *Schoolhouse Gothic: Haunted Hallways and Predatory Pedagogues in Late Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars' Publishing, 2008).

¹² Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Kerry Dean Carso, *American Gothic Art and Architecture in the*

Despite this rapid expansion, the majority of recent criticism on the American Gothic has adopted a thematic approach. Apart from the notable exception of M. Susan Anthony's examination of the contemporary critical responses to early American Gothic drama, very little work has been done on the reception history of the Gothic in America.¹³ In comparison, a number of important studies have been conducted into the pejorative critical discourses which shaped the Gothic's often unfavourable reception in late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Britain. Several of these studies focus upon the Gothic's perceived inferiority or contemptibility as a literary form. In *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000), Michael Gamer has made a compelling case for the idea that the Gothic's condemnation by critics arose from concerns about its ability, as a form of popular culture, to cross generic boundaries and infect supposedly higher literary forms, such as 'the ballad, tragedy, and metrical romance'.¹⁴ According to Gamer, the Gothic's conceptualisation as a sub-literary 'cancer' was central to 'the production of romantic ideologies of genre', in which the gothic perpetually haunts, as an aesthetic to be rejected'.¹⁵ Focusing specifically upon the early responses to Matthew Lewis's Gothic play, *The Castle Spectre* (1797), Lauren Fitzgerald has also attributed the Gothic's negative reception to its contravention of romantic ideals of composition. Working from the premise that the 'critical outcry' against the Gothic was largely provoked by the 'mode's propensity for conventions' during a critical era which 'prized originality over imitation', Fitzgerald argues that the critical vilification of Matthew Lewis was triggered by a reaction against the overtly plagiaristic elements of *The Castle Spectre*.¹⁶ Tacitly observing the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship, Fitzgerald argues that the early reception of *The Castle Spectre* helped to introduce the concept that 'Gothic villainy is [...] not only a type of plagiarism; the plagiarist is a type of Gothic villain'.¹⁷ For Fitzgerald, the treatment of the Gothic author as a Gothic subject is not a comment upon the moral and psychological conditions that influenced the creation of Gothic fictions, but upon the genre's limited scope for creative integrity.

Age of Romantic Literature (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014); Anna Sonser, *A Passion for Consumption: The Gothic Novel in America* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 2001).

¹³ M. Susan Anthony, *Gothic Plays and American Society* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4.

¹⁵ Gamer, pp. 4, 23, 7.

¹⁶ Lauren Fitzgerald, 'The Gothic Villain and the Vilification of the Plagiarist: The Case of *The Castle Spectre*', *Gothic Studies*, 7.1 (2005), 5-17 (p. 5).

¹⁷ Fitzgerald, p. 12.

Scholars have also examined the moral and sociological objections which led to the Gothic's denigration within British literary criticism. L. Andrew Cooper, for example, has suggested that fears surrounding the 'generative potential' of Gothic fictions to trigger cultural degeneration have 'been central to' their 'assignment to the ranks of 'low' culture from the very beginning'.¹⁸ In *Contesting the Gothic* (1999), James Watt has similarly noted the critical backlash against the Gothic's perceived antagonism towards the political or moral status quo. Whilst arguing that a large proportion of Gothic works published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were 'unambiguously conservative', he locates 'the historical basis for the perceived notoriety of the Gothic romance' both in the genre's association with German fiction — 'since anything "German" was guilty by association with the deluded revolutionary idealism attributed to the Illuminati, or to writers such as Schiller and Kotzebue' — and in the way in which it was 'seen to 'circulate' so promiscuously among a large and diverse audience', feeding the demands of 'an undisciplined yet ever-expanding reading public' that was no longer circumscribed by class or gender.¹⁹

What all of these studies share in common — apart from their confinement to the reception of the British Gothic — is their focus upon how the negative critical discourses surrounding the Gothic were influenced by the attribution of problematic qualities to the texts themselves, rather than to those who wrote them. There has been no sustained investigation, however, into how the cultural conceptualisation of the Gothic author as a Gothic figure shaped the genre's reception and practice.

Whilst there have been a number of studies which consider the critical tendency to attach a gothicised discourse to Gothic writers, these observations tend to be made in isolation, in reception histories dedicated to individual American Gothic writers and the cultural phenomena which influenced critical reactions to their work. Focusing upon Poe's afterlives in folkloric and literary studies, for example, Kirsten Møllegaard has observed the enduring tendency for interpretations of his fiction to perpetuate mythologies surrounding

¹⁸ L. Andrew Cooper, 'Gothic Threats: The Role of Danger in the Critical Evaluation of *The Monk* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*', *Gothic Studies*, 8.2 (November 2006), 18-34 (pp. 18, 19).

¹⁹ James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; repr. 2004), p. 8.

his 'short, turbulent life' and the 'strange circumstances of his death'.²⁰ Gothicised imaginings of specific authors have also been acknowledged in Benjamin F. Fisher's and John L. Idol, Jr. and Buford Jones's respective edited collections of contemporary responses to Poe and Hawthorne, and in Samuel Chase Coale's diachronic study of Hawthorne criticism from the nineteenth century to the present.²¹ Approaching the subject from the angle of visual culture, Susan S. Williams has examined the role that the daguerreotype has performed in reinforcing the enduring, polarised images of Poe and Hawthorne as 'a lost soul' and 'a dreamer unwilling to contend with the material realities of the customhouse or the literary marketplace'.²²

This thesis begins to address this lacuna, both in American Gothic scholarship and in Gothic reception history more broadly, by conducting the first extensive and systematic study into the critical gothicisation of the figure of the Gothic author. In addition to excavating one of the most pervasive, yet understudied discourses surrounding Gothic authorship in the literary criticism of the period, the significance of this discourse for our wider understanding of how nineteenth-century American readers and writers engaged with the Gothic is twofold. Firstly, by demonstrating the pervasiveness of the critical tendency to treat Gothic authors as Gothic subjects, it will provide a valuable framework for understanding how author-centric approaches to literary criticism influenced the way in which Gothic texts were interpreted, constructed and represented. Establishing this relationship opens new and revealing avenues for contextualising the cultural and personal pressures which moulded the careers of some of America's most iconic nineteenth-century writers, especially Nathaniel Hawthorne and Louisa May Alcott. Secondly, in a literary-political climate in which the Gothic genre and the figure of the Gothic author became problematically bound up with ideas of national identity, the gothicisation of the Gothic author carried wider, even unique implications within the context of nineteenth-century

²⁰ Kirsten Møllegaard, 'Fame After Life: The Mystery of Edgar Allan Poe's Death', *Folklore (Estonia)*, 65 (2016), 129-50 (p. 144).

²¹ Benjamin F. Fisher, 'Introduction', in *Poe in his Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of his Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, ed. by Benjamin F. Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. xi-xxvi (p. xiii); John L. Idol, Jr. and Buford Jones, 'Introduction', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by John L. Idol, Jr. and Buford Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. xi-xxxviii (p. xi); Samuel Chase Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne: Haunted Minds and Ambiguous Approaches* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 3, 37, 45.

²² Susan S. Williams, 'Daguerreotyping Hawthorne and Poe', *Poe Studies/ Dark Romanticism*, 37.1-2 (January-December 2004), 14-20 (p. 15).

America. As I will demonstrate, the collisions between generic and national anxieties in the criticism of the period afford important insights into the role that the Gothic's reception history, especially the cultural reception of Gothic authorship, has played in the construction of American literary history, not only in the nineteenth century, but (as I illustrate in the conclusion to the thesis) in more recent scholarly accounts.

The Biographical School of Literary Criticism

The inclination to treat Gothic authors as Gothic subjects was a direct product of the biographical school of criticism, which dominated the literary discussion of the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century literary criticism was fascinated by the figure of the author. Privileging investigations into the specific personal circumstances surrounding the creative paths taken by writers — even to the extent that it was standard critical practice to dedicate a significant portion of literary reviews to potted biographical sketches of the author under scrutiny — the figure of the author was habitually situated at the centre of textual exegesis.

In direct contrast to Roland Barthes's, Michel Foucault's and W. K. Wimsatt's and M. C. Beardsley's privileging of textual polysemy and readers' interpretations over authorial intention, the biographical school of criticism used an author's life as the starting point for decoding their work.²³ The perceived necessity of this methodology was outlined in an anonymous essay published in *The North American Review* in October 1857:

When we criticise a work with no personal knowledge of the writer, we obtain an impartiality of judgment in some respects, at the expense of thorough and sympathetic understanding of his point of view, his qualifying circumstances and his personal enthusiasms and prejudices. The blunders of inference which follow upon letting loose the astuteness of professed critics over an unknown country, are often ludicrous, sometimes disastrous. The knowledge of an author's life, by increasing our power of throwing ourselves into his position, sheds lights on many a dark passage, explains many a seeming paradox, and more than compensates for the loss of entire impartiality of judgment, with its accompanying indifference of criticism.²⁴

Likening attempts to understand a literary work without prior knowledge of its author's background to blundering ignorant and unequipped into unfamiliar territory, this critic justifies the diminished objectivity, or 'impartiality' of biographical criticism on the grounds

²³ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-48; Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', *Partisan Review*, 42.4 (1975), 603-14; W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *The Sewanee Review*, 54.3 (July- September 1946), 468-88.

²⁴ 'The Life of Charlotte Bronte', *The North American Review*, October 1857, pp. 293-329 (pp. 294-95).

that it enables a more complex level of insight into elements of a text whose meaning would otherwise remain obscure.

From an author's perspective, the most problematic ramification of the biographical school of criticism was the reciprocity that it presumed between author and text. As Nina Baym has observed in her history of the novel's reception in antebellum American newspapers and periodicals, reviewers 'constantly' related 'books to their authors'.²⁵ According to Baym, literary works were treated as 'syntactically identical with' their 'author[s]', even to the extent where 'the one noun' was 'substituted for the other', and 'Author [...] after subgenre classification', was 'the chief way of describing a book, and the corpus of works by a given author' became 'a way of describing an author'.²⁶

As well as using authors' biographies to interpret their work, literary texts were also consulted as autobiographical keys to interpreting their creators. Especially noticeable is the morally loaded tendency to read the nature of an author's writing as an index of their character. As part of the logic of this approach, critics frequently worked from the premise that only certain kinds of person could produce certain kinds of work. In an essay which appeared in September 1879 in *The North American Review*, for example, Anthony Trollope argued that 'We could hardly have had "Childe Harold" except from a soured nature. The seraphic excellence of "Hiawatha" and "Evangeline" could have proceeded only from a mind which the world's roughness had neither toughened nor tainted'.²⁷ Using the poetry of Byron and Longfellow as proof of the corruption and purity of their respective mindsets, Trollope assumes a fundamental affinity between the tone and subject of texts and the dispositions of their authors.

Whilst she acknowledges the critical conflation of authors with their works, Baym argues that this perceived relationship was 'entirely circular, wholly self-contained, and purely textual'.²⁸ Critics viewed the figure of the author in abstract terms and their interest in this figure 'was controlled by the concept of the author as a literary practitioner rather than a biographically interesting individual'.²⁹ Within this framework authors are 'defined by

²⁵ Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 249.

²⁶ Baym, pp. 251, 250.

²⁷ Anthony Trollope, 'The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The North American Review*, September 1879, pp. 203-22 (p. 203).

²⁸ Baym, p. 251.

²⁹ Baym, p. 249.

the work they produce, not the circumstances of their lives'.³⁰ Although I agree with Baym's central premise that authors' identities were often imagined to mirror the nature of their writing, I wish to amend the suggestion that this connection operated solely within the abstract, theoretical sphere of self-contained literary discourse. In addition to colouring the reception of authors as artists, this paradigm often had a very tangible impact on their moral, psychological, domestic and social reputations. Prompting speculations about authors' private lives, literary analysis conducted within the biographical school of criticism was inherently personal, prurient and more than a little invasive.

Something that stands out in numerous pieces of biographical criticism during this period is the metaphorical equation of textual analysis with pursuit. In an article published in 1853 in *The National Magazine*, one critic boasted that:

We know not how it may be with others, but for our single selves, we have great faith in our being able to discover authors in their books; to discover their peculiarities of mind and person, and oftentimes the circumstances of their lives; building, as it were, complete forms from their fragmentary members scattered in many places. It may not always be intentional — in most cases we fancy it is not — but there is always something of an author in his books, even when he is most false to himself, or disguises himself the most. Any perfect and impenetrable disguise is impossible.³¹

A likeminded critic similarly reflected in an article for *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* in June 1819 that:

The man of letters, in one sense, may always be his own biographer, [...] And even where his self-love tempts him to hide or extenuate, his anxiety may betray as much as a confession, and throw further light upon his character.³²

Both of these critics represent writing in perilous terms. The repeated emphasis on images of penetration, discovery, 'confession' and 'disguise' portrays authorship as an often involuntary, yet inevitable, act of autobiographical self-revelation. The first piece in particular constructs an overtly predatory relationship between the critic and their chosen authorial subject (or quarry). Visualising the authorial presence in a literary work as a gruesome trail of 'scattered' body parts, they cast the author into the role of a criminal suspect and the critic into that of a detective, methodically combing the text for incriminating evidence. The second critic similarly associates authorship with the risk of

³⁰ Baym, p. 251.

³¹ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, January 1853, pp. 17-25 (p. 17).

³² 'The Life of Charles Brockden Brown', *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal*, June 1819, pp. 58-77 (p. 59).

exposure. Arguing that an author's writing often sheds 'light' on the aspects of their life that they are most anxious to 'hide', they conceptualise its content as an unwittingly self-indicting slippage, akin to what we might now describe as a Freudian slip.

As a widely accepted approach to literary analysis, the biographical school of criticism was not solely reserved for the Gothic. It follows, however, that a theoretical position which approached fictional writing as veiled autobiography would have been more personally problematic and stigmatising when applied to practitioners of modes of writing that were deemed to be morally controversial. When interpreted according to the biographical framework, composing Gothic fictions — a genre which often favoured supernatural plotlines and engaged, to varying degrees of brazenness, with a range of taboo subjects, from murder to sexual violence and incest — was tantamount to an admission of moral guilt, degeneracy, depravity, or at the very least, an exhibition of psychological disturbance.

The Figure of the Gothic Author and American Cultural Identity

The treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects was not a purely American, but a transatlantic discourse, with British critics just as likely to gothicise practitioners of the genre as a response to the content of their fiction. In a January 1827 article which appeared in *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, for example, one critic wrote of Charles R. Maturin, author of *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), that:

It is folly to say that our minds do not take the colour of the channel in which we permit our thoughts to flow: it cannot be otherwise. He who devotes his genius to the conjurations of romance, finally either believes in their horrors, or becomes irritable and nervous. So it was with Maturin.³³

Treating Maturin's work not only as a symptom of his natural temperament, but as an addiction which further exacerbated it, Gothic authorship is painted as a vicious cycle which both feeds on and nourishes the internal darkness of those who practise it. A more explicit instance of gothicisation in a British periodical is to be found in a July 1847 essay in *The Athenaeum* on the life and career of the German author E. T. A. Hoffmann:

It is recorded that at this period he exhibited symptoms of a cruel and malignant disposition; — taking delight in wantonly torturing animals, tyrannizing over boys

³³ 'Conversations of Maturin. — No. I', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, January 1827, pp. 401-11 (p. 401).

weaker than himself, and exerting the most perverse ingenuity to devise means for frightening children. This misanthropy continued until he became an author.³⁴

In this account, Gothic authorship is diagnosed as a cathartic outlet for Hoffmann's disturbing, sadistic impulses. It is only by writing about perverse or pathological acts that he is able to banish the most unacceptable aspects of his own behaviour. As the critic goes on to narrate, 'From the time he commenced his first romance, he went to the opposite extreme; making himself a perfect slave to his friends [...] while his attachment to his cat amounted to a passion'.³⁵

Despite the fact that Gothic authors were gothicised on both sides of the Atlantic, this study specifically focuses upon the significance of this phenomenon within the context of nineteenth-century America. This is because the treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects was uniquely problematic in the United States, where the Gothic played a more pivotal role in the national canon and in shaping notions of literary and national identity than it had in Britain. As Sarah M. Corse has observed, the decades following the American Revolution saw an increasing preoccupation with the connection between 'nation-building processes and national canon formation'.³⁶ In order to fully shed its colonial status, America required a successful and nationally representative literary tradition of its own. Within this urgently embryonic climate, in which the development of a national literary culture became indistinguishable from ontological questions of nationhood, the figure of the American author assumed a prophet-like or synecdochic importance: the search for canonical literary figures was also a search for the face of the nation. In an article published in *The Yale Literary Magazine* in January 1847, for example, one critic suggested that:

Literature [...] does not merely animate a single thought, or a single range of thought[s], but gives life and form to the Ideal of a whole people. It does not manifest necessarily the hidden yearnings of any one man, or any set of men; but it bodies forth clearly and palpably the "Hero Worship" of a nation.³⁷

The problem for America was that the authors it produced were, predominantly, Gothic. From the outset, the Gothic played a major role in America's post-revolutionary canon. As well as providing the genre of choice for early antebellum figures, including Charles Brockden Brown (widely accredited not only as the progenitor of the American

³⁴ 'Hoffman and Fantastic Literature', *The Athenaeum*, 31 July 1847, pp. 811-13 (p. 811).

³⁵ 'Hoffman and Fantastic Literature', p. 811.

³⁶ Sarah M. Corse, *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; repr. 2001), p. 19.

³⁷ 'The Creative Art — Phases of Literature', *The Yale Literary Magazine*, January 1847, pp. 97-107 (p. 100).

Gothic tradition, but of professional American authorship more generally), William Dunlap, James Kirke Paulding, John Neal, Washington Irving, George Lippard and Edgar Allan Poe, the Gothic's on-going, integral position within the nation's literature was also borne out in later, postbellum works, especially those of Nathaniel Hawthorne. An indebtedness to Gothic conventions was even detectable in works that could not be straightforwardly categorised as belonging to the genre, such as the novels of Lydia Maria Child, James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville. The Gothic's initial popularity amongst American writers was largely due to the fact that the early national period coincided with the Gothic novel's commercial heyday in the British literary market of the 1790s. As Cathy N. Davidson, Kay Mussell and Leonard Tennenhouse have observed (to quote Tennenhouse), 'the gothic was not an indigenous genre but a highly desirable import'.³⁸ As the Gothic continued to dominate the American canon throughout the nineteenth century, however, it became increasingly difficult to view its proliferation in coincidental terms. The darkest of genres had found fertile soil and taken root in the national imagination.

If, as Corse suggests, authors and the literature that they wrote were seen to be defining a new 'national consciousness', then the Gothic productions favoured by American authors, and the inner darkness that the biographical school of criticism suggested that this implied about them, carried troubling implications for America's national identity.³⁹ In relation to the symbolic cultural function played by Gothic monsters, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock has suggested that 'Our monsters [...] tell us a great deal about ourselves — they tell us who we imagine we are, what we hope we're not, and what we are afraid we might ourselves become'.⁴⁰ Read alongside the nationally representative role into which the figure of the American writer was cast during this period, the gothicisation of the Gothic author — a discourse which often aligned Gothic writers with villainous Gothic tropes — not only served to make pejorative judgements about practitioners of the form, but also articulated pressing anxieties about the possible monstrosity of the national psyche.

³⁸ Cathy N. Davidson, 'Isaac Mitchell's *The Asylum*; or, Gothic Castles in the New Republic', *Prospects*, 7 (1982), 281-99; Kay Mussell, 'Gothic Novels', in *Concise Histories of American Popular Culture*, ed. by M. Thomas Inge (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1982), pp. 157-64; Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 90.

³⁹ Corse, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, 'American Monsters', in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 41-55 (p. 42).

In a less existential way, the vogue for Gothic fiction in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain had also raised concerns about the issue of national identity. As L. Andrew Cooper has observed, commentators responded to the 'belief in and fear of Gothic fiction's potential to create Gothic realities' by assuming the civic responsibility of 'defending society' from the dangers posed by consuming Gothic texts.⁴¹ According to Cooper, critics were especially keen to preserve readers from the following four threats:

the critic first considers the Gothic novel for what effects it might have on its young readers. Second, the critic checks to see how safe the novel is for women, or how well it reinforces normative gender roles in general. Third, the critic considers the potential the novel might have for inspiring a resurgence of the wrong kind of supernatural belief. Finally, and most importantly for the heyday of British Gothic in the shadow of the French Revolution, the critic examines the novel's political orientation to see whether or not it might inspire revolutionary or other sentiments directly opposed to the ruling order.⁴²

What all of these threats share in common is their potential to corrupt or contaminate. Gothic novels, and by extension, Gothic authors, were vilified as a hostile insurgent force or infectious disease, capable of destabilising the nation's moral and social equilibrium. Within this context, the gothicisation of the Gothic author serves to demarcate the genre's antithetical position in relation to Britain's true national identity.

Contrastingly, as Teresa A. Goddu has noted:

If the British gothic is read in social terms, the American gothic is viewed within psychological and theological rubrics. [...] the American gothic, it has been argued, takes a turn inward, away from society and toward the psyche and the hidden blackness of the American soul.⁴³

Although the treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects was similarly used by many American critics to express misgivings about the genre's morally corrosive influence, this critical discourse was also, often tacitly, introspective. Whilst British critics understood the Gothic as an external threat to society, American criticism was often plagued by the nagging doubt that the nation's attraction to the genre externalised an innate, internal Gothicism. Whereas the Gothic's popularity in Britain was treated as an *epidemic*, the apprehensions of American critics surrounding its ability to resonate so powerfully and consistently with

⁴¹ Cooper, pp. 19, 18.

⁴² Cooper, p. 19.

⁴³ Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 9.

American writers often conveyed the anxiety that this predilection reflected something that was nationally *endemic*.

Critical protestations surrounding the Gothic's moral shortcomings frequently went hand in hand with, and were exacerbated by, the genre's association with 'low culture'. In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, perceptions of the Gothic's trivial cultural status were fuelled by its dual associations with female authorship and cheap, mass market production (as exemplified by the critical notoriety of the Minerva Press). Catering to the (often purportedly female) reading public's insatiable appetite for the genre by generating scores of Radcliffean imitations, this heavily commercialised brand of Gothicism encouraged its denigration as a mode of writing that could be lucratively practised regardless of basic literary talent. Practitioners of the Gothic were lampooned as cynical opportunists, more eager to jump on the bandwagon than to become pioneering figures of literary innovation. This elitist attitude to the Gothic is famously summed up in the 'Terrorist System of Novel-Writing' (1797), which paired a moral critique of the genre as a social symptom of the French Revolution, with a scathing satire about its reliance upon hackneyed conventions, such as 'tapestry hangings', 'towers [...] remarkably *populous* in *owls* and *bats*', swooning heroines and '*subterraneous* passages'.⁴⁴

This cultural stigma was inherited by the American Gothic. As with the moral censure surrounding the genre, however, the implications of its relegation to the status of 'low culture' were also intensified within the American context. With an established and internationally respected literary tradition dating back centuries, British critics could dismiss the Gothic as a distasteful interloper on the country's otherwise exemplary literary scene. For American critics, however, there was no pre-existing national literary standard against which to measure a temporary influx of Gothic fiction. The Gothic's domination of America's canon during the very decades in which the nation's literary reputation was being defined on the world stage meant that the gothicisation of the Gothic author was accompanied in America by the additional shame that the nation might not only be morally and constitutionally, but also intellectually, inferior.

⁴⁴ A Jacobin Novelist, 'Terrorist System of Novel-Writing', *Monthly Magazine, and British Register*, August 1797, pp. 102-104 (pp. 103-04).

Generic Boundaries

Generic definition has long been a source of preoccupation, even consternation, for Gothic scholars. Many critics, including Eino Railo, Edith Birkhead, and, more recently, Anne Williams, Terry Heller and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, have taken a taxonomic approach to this question, seeking both to catalogue and interpret the core meanings of the genre's recurring tropes, themes and plot conventions.⁴⁵ Critical debates have also considered whether the Gothic ought to be defined as a discrete, historically contained moment in literary history (ranging from the productions of Horace Walpole to those of Matthew Lewis, or perhaps Charles Maturin), or more broadly understood as a continually evolving mode of writing. Some critics have pointedly argued that certain genres, whilst bearing a close thematic and aesthetic kinship to the Gothic, ought to be categorised separately from it. R. A. Gilbert, for example, makes this argument with regards to the ghost story.⁴⁶ In direct contrast to the view espoused by Gilbert, this study examines the treatment of traditionally canonical Gothic authors, such as Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Edgar Allan Poe, alongside the reception and content of narratives that overlap with the traditions of the ghost story and sensational fiction. This inclusive definition of the Gothic reflects an approach to genre that corresponds with the ideas promulgated by a number of theorists.

Despite what Ralph Cohen has glossed as its self-contradictory argument for the 'need and futility of genre designation', the central premise of Jacques Derrida's 'The Law of Genre' (1980) — that genre constitutes a 'sort of participation without belonging' — provides a helpful starting point.⁴⁷ As John Frow has observed, 'Derrida is right to distinguish between participation and belonging [...] Texts work upon genres as much as they are shaped by them, genres are open classes, and participation in a genre takes many different forms'.⁴⁸ My inclusion of texts which cross generic boundaries, whilst simultaneously bearing a familial resemblance to foundational Gothic texts, is also an acknowledgement

⁴⁵ Eino Railo, *The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1927); Edith Birkhead, *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* (London: Constable, 1921); Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of the Gothic* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Terry Heller, *The Delights of Terror: An Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, rev. 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1986).

⁴⁶ R. A. Gilbert, 'Ghost Stories', in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 68-69.

⁴⁷ Ralph Cohen, 'History and Genre', *New Literary History*, 17.2 (Winter 1986), 203-18 (p. 204); Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. by Avital Ronell, *Critical Enquiry*, 7.1 (Autumn 1980), 55-81 (p. 59).

⁴⁸ John Frow, *Genre*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 30.

both of Rick Altman's evolutionary understanding of genre, not as 'the permanent *product* of a singular origin, but the temporary *by-product* of an ongoing *process*', and Ralph Cohen's historicist argument that the 'repeated redefinitions' of 'genre concepts in theory and practice arise, change, and decline for historical reasons' that are both 'social and aesthetic'.⁴⁹

The elasticity of my approach to defining the Gothic's parameters is especially indebted to Alastair Fowler's 'modal' understanding of genre, according to which texts are comprised of 'fugitive admixtures' of different traditions, signalling their relation to them through recognisable 'tinges of generic colour'.⁵⁰ As Fowler observes specifically in relation to the Gothic:

the gothic romance (*The Old English Baron*) yielded a gothic mode that outlasted it and was applied to kinds as diverse as the maritime adventure (*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*), the psychological novel (*Titus Groan*), the crime novel (*Edwin Drood*), the short story, the film script, and various science fiction subgenres (already foreshadowed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*).⁵¹

In terms of more recent examples of criticism specifically dedicated to the Gothic, the eclecticism of this study has been informed by Franz Potter's definition of the genre as a 'continual diffusion of discourses', and by Michael Gamer's conceptualisation of the Gothic as a 'shifting "aesthetic"', rather than a monolithic tradition.⁵² It is also indebted to Robert Miles's description of the Gothic's various manifestations and departures in terms of 'genealogies' (as opposed to 'a single, comprehensive genealogy'), and to Fred Botting's perception of the Gothic as 'a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing'.⁵³

Thesis Outline

The opening chapter of this study comprises a detailed, interrogative survey of the critical treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects. In order to establish the close relationship

⁴⁹ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), p. 54; Cohen, pp. 204-10.

⁵⁰ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 107.

⁵¹ Fowler, p. 109.

⁵² Franz Potter, *The History of Gothic Publishing, 1800-1835: Exhuming the Trade* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 4; Gamer, p. 4.

⁵³ Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 9; Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 14.

between this discourse and the biographical school of criticism, I argue that the critical impulse to treat fictional texts as veiled autobiography was especially galvanised by works that were considered to be controversial or sensational. Fascinated by the disturbing or macabre elements in Gothic narratives, critics repeatedly conflated Gothic authors with their protagonists, or attempted to map aspects of their plotting onto events in their own lives.

The main body of this chapter illustrates three of the primary ways in which practitioners of the Gothic were gothicised in nineteenth-century criticism. Firstly, I explore the attribution of dysfunctional psychologies to Gothic authors. During a period in which psychological disorders were widely understood as a manifestation of moral degeneration, the biographical approach to literary criticism often led critics to interpret the similarly stigmatised practice of Gothic authorship as a symptom of mental illness. Secondly, I examine a critical trend whereby Gothic authors were aligned, both metaphorically and sometimes literally, with stock Gothic character types, usually villains. In particular, this section interrogates the four character types (ghosts, demons, magicians and psychopathic surgeons) that were most systematically used to represent Gothic writers and explores how each type was deployed to symbolically articulate discomfort about the nature of Gothic authorship. Thirdly, this survey draws attention to the circulation of popular Gothic mythologies relating to particular Gothic authors (stories or anecdotes about their lives and habits which had a consciously Gothic inflection).

In contrast, chapter two investigates the circumstances under which certain Gothic authors were exempted from gothicisation by literary critics. I argue that within the context of nineteenth-century American criticism this exemption was predominantly driven by literary nationalist impulses. Using the critical representation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's career as my primary case study, I argue that the widespread attempt to disassociate Hawthorne's personal identity from the Gothic nature of his work stemmed from the critical consensus that his works combined a superior literary quality with an authentic 'Americanness', providing America's first genuine opportunity to present a literary figure to the world who could not only rival British and European authors, but who could also use his work to capture the essence of American life, scenery and cultural memory. A central focus of this chapter is the repeated critical comparisons that were made between Poe and Hawthorne. Although many critics acknowledged the persistent morbidity in both authors'

works, Poe's tales were often perceived as an extension of his own disturbed and disordered psyche, whereas Hawthorne's were not. To explain this disparity, I compare articles which praised Hawthorne's use of native themes and historical events in his fiction (despite its Gothic inflection), with pieces which disparaged the lack of a national consciousness in Poe's writing.

The third chapter investigates the combined impact of the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship, and the critical vilification of the culture of sensationalism in nineteenth-century America, upon the manner in which Gothic narratives were constructed. I argue that the pejorative attribution of Gothic identities to Gothic writers encouraged the proliferation of two evasively metafictional Gothic subgenres — what I call the 'anti-Gothic Gothic' and Gothic parody — that were designed both to distance the author from their chosen mode of writing and to exploit the financial advantages of the genre's popularity. Building upon recent scholarship by Franz Potter, Anthony Mandal and Elizabeth Neiman, which has resuscitated critical interest in varieties of Gothic fiction that have historically been relegated to the underworld of sub-literature, the individual Gothic stories analysed in this chapter have been sourced from a selection of popular periodicals and story papers.⁵⁴ In direct contrast to the previous chapter's exploration of Hawthorne's canonical, even hyper-literary career, this chapter's focus upon what Franz Potter has described as the 'trade Gothic' demonstrates that the gothicisation of the Gothic author exerted a profound impact upon the perception and practice of Gothic authorship, regardless of the perceived literary status occupied by an author or text.⁵⁵ Indeed, by examining examples of Gothic fiction that were largely published with a view to making a profit, I illustrate that the treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects raised particular challenges when it clashed with matters of economic necessity.

The fourth chapter examines the hidden Gothic career of Louisa May Alcott. Largely remembered as the immensely successful author of wholesome domestic children's fiction, especially the *Little Women* series, Alcott also produced a considerable corpus of Gothic works, most of which were published in the popular story papers, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *The Flag of our Union*. The purpose of this final section is to use a single-

⁵⁴ Potter; Anthony Mandal, 'Mrs. Meeke and Minerva: The Mystery of the Marketplace', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 42.2 (2018), 131-51; Elizabeth Neiman, *Minerva's Gothics: The Politics and Poetics of Romantic Exchange, 1780-1820* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019).

⁵⁵ Potter, p. 1.

author case study to synthesise the arguments made in the previous three chapters about the impact of the gothicisation of the Gothic author upon the perception and practice of Gothic authorship. Examining Alcott's conflicted relationship with Gothic authorship (as evidenced by her ambivalent treatment of the genre in her letters and diaries, her decision to publish the bulk of her Gothic fiction anonymously or pseudonymously, and the didactically anti-Gothic stance staged in the second volume of *Little Women*, as well as other lesser-known examples of her children's, and even her Gothic, fiction), this chapter demonstrates not only that the critical treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects prompted her to conceal her identity as a Gothic writer, but that the personal and professional pressures exerted by this discourse were increased both by her combined statuses as a female writer and a literary nationalist icon, and by the much censured sensationalist market to which her blood-and-thunder pot-boilers contributed.

To conclude, the purpose of this investigation into the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship is not to assess its value or validity as an approach to textual exegesis. This is not to say that it does not raise ethical questions. As I will point out, the treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects was often deployed to police the boundaries of normative discourses, especially those surrounding gender politics and the reductive divide between 'high' and 'low' culture. Nor do I wish to either affirm or deny the possibility that Gothic texts can constitute a biographical reflection of those who write them. Indeed, in the conclusion I explore examples of how gothicised notions of Gothic authorship have been both roundly dismissed and willingly embraced by practitioners of the genre. Overall, however, the aim of this study is to examine the role that this discourse has played in situating the figure of the Gothic author at the very centre of the genre's cultural reception. As Teresa A. Goddu has noted, 'the gothic, like all discourses, needs to be historicized; to read it out of cultural context is to misread it'.⁵⁶ By interrogating the collision between the critical gothicisation of the Gothic author and the literary-political context of nineteenth-century America, I demonstrate the profound impact that this cultural moment has exerted upon the ways in which American Gothic texts were, and continue to be, read, written, evaluated and negotiated.

⁵⁶ Goddu, p. 2.

Chapter 1: The Gothic Author as Gothic Subject in Nineteenth-Century Criticism

Introduction

This chapter constitutes an interrogative survey of the systematic representation of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects in nineteenth-century literary criticism, or the attribution of Gothic identities to practitioners of the Gothic genre. Situating this phenomenon within the context of the biographical school of criticism that was favoured by many critics during this period (including Henry T. Tuckerman, Rufus Griswold, James Herbert Morse and numerous anonymous commentators), the first section will demonstrate that this approach was applied with a heightened enthusiasm to Gothic texts. Frequently leading to the presumption that Gothic fiction contained disturbingly autobiographical content, and to the conflation of Gothic authors with their often troubled or immoral protagonists, this section will argue that the biographical school of criticism carried especially problematic ramifications for the public image of Gothic writers. The second section will further elucidate the impact of the biographical school of criticism upon the reputations of Gothic writers by exploring the persistent critical tendency to cite Gothic texts as evidence of their creators' disturbed psychological state, even to the extent that the plotlines of Gothic works were used to diagnose authors with specific mental illnesses. The third section will excavate a widespread critical trend whereby Gothic authors were aligned, both metaphorically and literally, with traditional Gothic character types, such as ghosts and necromancers. Examining the symbolic significance of these archetypal figures, this section will argue that their incorporation into the critical discourse surrounding Gothic authorship served both to indicate the perceived inextricability of Gothic authors from their fictional creations and to articulate concerns about the nature and effects of Gothic fiction itself. The fourth and final section will illustrate how the Gothic personas attached to Gothic authors were consolidated through the circulation of Gothic mythologies: legends about writers' lives and habits which had a consciously Gothic inflection.

This overview will provide the foundation for the arguments pursued in the subsequent three chapters of the thesis. By revealing the relentless gothicisation of the Gothic author in nineteenth-century American literary criticism, and the pejorative moral

and psychological assumptions that this discourse encoded, it will provide a much needed explanation for the pervasive patterns of strategic distancing which characterised the practices of both Gothic authors and commentators upon the genre. As the evidence presented in the following chapters attests, the attribution of Gothic identities to Gothic authors was instrumental not only in influencing how Gothic writers related to their chosen genre (both in terms of decisions about the ways in which Gothic texts were composed and to questions of textual ownership), but in shaping the conflicted critical reception histories of Gothic authors who were deemed to play a central role in America's emerging literary canon.

Methodological Considerations

With a view to acknowledging the centrality of British literary culture to the nineteenth-century American consciousness, this chapter cites the critical treatment of both American and British Gothic writers. As Leonard Tennenhouse has argued, 'The literary evidence' suggests that, throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many 'American authors and readers were more interested in producing and consuming English literature than in creating' their own.¹ As a result of the absence of international copyright laws in the nineteenth-century American publishing industry, as well as a plethora of other impediments to the establishment of a flourishing national literary culture in the decades following the American Revolution, the American literary marketplace was flooded throughout much of the period by British importations. With British literature playing such a prominent role in the national reading experience, articles on British literature and authors were a prominent feature of American literary criticism. As Frank Luther Mott observed in his seminal historical study of American magazines, 'Much of the critical talent of American magazines was expended on English works'.²

The survey also includes the comments of critics whose essays and reviews initially appeared in British periodicals prior to their republication in American ones. The decision to include this material is based on two considerations. First, there was a prominent culture of borrowing from British sources in the nineteenth-century American periodical industry. A

¹ Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 1.

² Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1938-1968), II, *1850-1865* (1938), p. 159.

significant portion of the literary criticism to which American readers were exposed originated in the British press. This culture of recycling (or perhaps scavenging) is most clearly embodied in the existence of a fairly large contingent of American magazines whose pages were exclusively filled with miscellaneous selections of articles reprinted from a wide variety of other publications (both British and American). Most of the articles which I have cited with British provenances were published in this type of American periodical, in publications such as *Littell's Living Age*, *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, *The Museum of Foreign Literature* and *Campbell's Semi-monthly Magazine*. Second, whilst the gothicisation of the Gothic author carried specific ramifications within nineteenth-century American culture, it was nonetheless part of a wider transatlantic dialogue surrounding Gothic authorship and should be situated within this broader context. Furthermore, as the second chapter will demonstrate, the overlaps between the treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects in British and American criticism also serve to highlight the significance of instances in which this discourse was temporarily suspended.

Whilst the material examined here presents a fairly unanimous verdict on the nature of Gothic authorship, the material from which it is has been sourced was published in a diverse range of periodicals, often representing opposing perspectives, ideologies and editorial practices. Although Northern publications, such as the Boston based *The North American Review*, the New York based *The Literary World* and the Philadelphia based *Potter's American Monthly*, are most frequently cited (these cities being the hubs of literary journalism in the nineteenth century), Southern voices are also represented in pieces taken from the Richmond based *The Southern Literary Messenger* and the Charleston based *The Southern Quarterly Review*. As well as differing geographical perspectives, material has also been included from periodicals whose dates of publication situated them within different historical eras within the period. Antebellum publications, for example, such as *The Portfolio* and *The International Monthly Magazine*, are cited alongside postbellum ones, including *Appleton's Magazine* and *Scribner's Monthly*. Several of the publications represented lent their support to opposing political ideologies. Some were Whig (*The North American Review*) and others Democrat (*The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*). Some were pro-slavery (*The Southern Literary Messenger* and *The Southern Quarterly Review*), whilst others backed the abolitionist movement (*The Independent* and *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*). Reviews and articles are also taken from periodicals

with opposing literary priorities. Whereas some appeared in magazines and newspapers which espoused strong literary nationalist policies and endeavoured to publish only native material, including *Putnam's*, *Emerson's Magazine* and *The North American Review*, others, as noted above, are taken from publications which were content to republish material from British periodicals. The survey incorporates commentary from 'serious' literary magazines (*Scribner's*, *Appleton's*) and popular papers (*Holden's Dollar Monthly Magazine* and *Waldie's Select Circulating Library*), from satirical magazines (*The John-Donkey*), religious publications (*American Quarterly Church Review and Ecclesiastical Register*), and periodicals which laid a heavy emphasis upon national politics (*Harbinger* and *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*).

Despite their diametric opposition on many topics, the shared participation of these publications in the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship indicates that the Gothic author was a literary figure that critics responded to with a universal disapprobation, squeamishness and morbid fascination. This is not to suggest, however, that the treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects was an entirely depoliticised phenomenon. As I will demonstrate throughout the thesis, the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship often took on an especially acute significance when placed in dialogue with politically sensitive or controversial discourses, especially literary nationalism and rhetoric designed to police the boundaries of normative gender behaviours.

The Gothic Text as Autobiography

The objectives of the biographical school of criticism — an approach to textual exegesis based upon the assumption that an author's work must necessarily act as an index of their life and character — are laid out in L. Mallette Anderson's March 1879 article in *Potter's American Monthly*:

is it not a pleasant and profitable employment of time to thus connect the work and the author, and study out as near as possible the connection of their daily lives, their temperament, their actual veins of human nature, and the result of it all in their works?³

For Anderson, literary works are the direct product, or 'result', both of an author's basic nature — their disposition and moral principles — and of their experiences. The most

³ L. Mallette Anderson, 'Novels and Novel-Reading', *Potter's American Monthly*, March 1879, pp. 187-94 (p. 191).

rewarding task for the critic, Anderson contends, is the search for parallels between an author's individual circumstances and the content of their creative output.

The biographical school of literary criticism was not reserved for any particular form or genre. One critic writing for *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* in June 1857, for example, argued that 'Fielding did not put himself into his stories more entirely than Mrs. Bronte', a comparison which encompasses allusions to the picaresque, mock epic, the Gothic and the novel form in general.⁴ When literary texts were interpreted according to a framework which treated them as autobiographical artefacts, however, the genre to which they belonged played a major role in shaping the conclusions that were reached about the personal conditions that inspired them. Innately invasive and prone to exercises in moral and psychological dissection, this model of criticism attached a particular stigma to Gothic writers, whose writing typically focused on the perverse, the occult, the taboo or the grotesque.

Not only was there more at stake for the reputations of Gothic writers when their work was subjected to biographical exegesis, but, somewhat predictably, this mode of analysis appears to have held a particular appeal in discussions about texts of a more sensational or controversial nature. It was not uncommon for critics to acknowledge the increased desire amongst readers to discover intimate details about the personal lives of authors who wrote in an especially strange or idiosyncratic vein. In an 1834 article republished in *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* from the *Edinburgh Review*, for example, one critic acknowledged the lurid fascination exerted by the infamous Matthew 'Monk' Lewis, observing that 'We may naturally feel curious to see the recorded impressions of such a person'.⁵ This sense of intrigue is similarly present in essays on American writers. In an article published in 1869 in *Littell's Living Age*, for example, one reviewer enthused about the biographical insights to be gained from the posthumous publication of Hawthorne's *Note-Books* (his personal record of daily impressions and observations, many of which were later used in his writing). According to this critic, 'in consequence chiefly of the very peculiar character of the writings of the author of "The Scarlet Letter", serious students of his books were, from time to time, tormented by

⁴ 'Charlotte Bronte', *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art*, June 1857, pp. 648-54 (p. 648).

⁵ 'Journal of a West India Proprietor', *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, September 1834, pp. 222-28 (p. 222).

accesses [sic] of curiosity about the man himself'.⁶ Whilst insisting that Hawthorne possessed a 'pure and living soul', they nevertheless stoke this 'curiosity' about the possibility of Hawthorne being a Gothic figure in his own right by suggesting that the darker components of his fiction indicate that 'the man habitually lived in some sphere in which shadows were perpetually interfering with his vision'.⁷ The publication of his private *Note-Books* are welcomed as an illuminating, if not titillating, opportunity to trace how their author came from 'perfect innocence' to 'know so much and to make such strange speculations'.⁸

Unequivocal assertions about the autobiographical nature of Gothic works frequently featured in the literary journalism of the period. Critical accounts of the Brontës' novels (especially Charlotte's) — whose elusive pseudonymous publication and controversial subject matter caused an enormous flurry of interest and speculation both in Britain and across the Atlantic — were a case in point, with reviewers habitually taking the advertisement of *Jane Eyre* (1847) as 'an autobiography' at face value. One critic wrote in an article republished in *Littell's Living Age* from the *Christian Remembrancer*, for example, that 'Jane Eyre professes to be an autobiography, and we think it likely that in some essential respects it is so'.⁹ Henry T. Tuckerman similarly wrote in an 1871 article in *Appleton's Journal* that Charlotte Brontë 'so deeply recognized the necessity of intense personal experience to make true and vital the literature of fiction, that no praise or pelf could lure her into new experiments, when life had yielded no fresh material'.¹⁰ Mistaking Anne Brontë's work for Charlotte's, another reviewer wrote of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in an August 1848 article for *The Literary World* that, like 'its predecessor', *Jane Eyre*, the novel must be 'an autobiography', as 'There are many thoroughly matter of fact scenes in these books so literally depicted that we read them only as faithful transcripts of the writer's experience'.¹¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the American author who galvanised some of the most extensive biographical exegesis was Edgar Allan Poe. In an anonymously published article which appeared in *Scribner's Monthly* in April 1876, for example, one critic argued that 'The

⁶ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne's Private Diary', *Littell's Living Age*, 2 January 1869, pp. 62-64 (p. 62).

⁷ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne's Private Diary', p. 62.

⁸ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne's Private Diary', p. 62.

⁹ '*Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 June 1848, pp. 1-7 (p. 1).

¹⁰ Henry T. Tuckerman, 'Literature of Fiction: II. Female Novelists', *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science, and Art*, 21 October 1871, pp. 455-59 (p. 459).

¹¹ '*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *The Literary World*, 12 August 1848, pp. 544-46 (p. 544).

life and the writings stand intimately connected, almost inseparable, in Poe'.¹² The most (in)famous and lastingly influential example of the biographical interpretation of Poe's work, however, is to be found in Rufus Griswold's defamatory 1849 obituary. Originally published under the pseudonym of 'Ludwig' in the *New York Daily Tribune*, this account, which simultaneously depicted Poe as a raving madman, demonic figure and hopeless addict, was more famously republished in Nathaniel P. Willis's forenote to *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* (1850), to which Griswold also contributed in his rather inexplicable capacity as Poe's literary executor. Controversial from the moment of its publication, the most contentious and personally damaging aspect of the memoir was arguably Griswold's commentary on the autobiographical content of Poe's writing. As well as pointedly acknowledging the belief that 'Every genuine author in a greater or less degree leaves in his works [...] traces of his personal character', Griswold asserted that 'The Raven was probably [...] a reflexion and an echo of his [Poe's] own history', and that 'Nearly all that he wrote in the last two or three years [...] was in some sense biographical'.¹³ Echoing Anderson's broader comments upon the merits of the biographical school of criticism, Griswold claimed that Poe's nature could be discovered in his writing, arguing that 'those who had taken the trouble to trace his steps, could perceive, but slightly concealed, the figure of [Poe] himself'.¹⁴ Encouraging readers to track down the 'real' Poe in the pages of his fiction, Griswold set a long observed precedent for critical readings which align Poe with the deranged Gothic narrators of tales such as 'The Black Cat', 'The Imp of the Perverse' and 'Berenice'.

Although Poe's works attracted an especially high level of autobiographical interpretation (perhaps stimulated by Griswold's sordid and monstrous depiction of him), the writings of many other American Gothic authors were also read in this vein. In an article entitled 'Concerning Hawthorne and Brook Farm', which appeared in *Every Saturday* in January 1869, M. D. Conway argued that Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'works have a singularly autobiographical character'.¹⁵ Another critic asserted in *The National Magazine* in January

¹² 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', *Scribner's Monthly*, April 1876, pp. 799-808 (p. 803).

¹³ [Rufus Griswold], 'Death of Edgar Allan Poe', in *Poe in his Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of his Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, ed. by Benjamin Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 73-80 (pp. 78, 79).

¹⁴ Griswold, p. 79.

¹⁵ M. D. Conway, 'Concerning Hawthorne and Brook Farm', *Every Saturday*, 2 January 1869, pp. 13-18 (p. 17).

1853 that 'If ever author was revealed in his books, Hawthorne is the man'.¹⁶

Correspondingly, in a review of *The House of the Seven Gables* which appeared in *The North American Review* in January 1853, Hawthorne's novels are described as being

in the truest sense of the word, autobiographical; [...] we have learned from his books immeasurably more of his mental history, tastes, tendencies, sympathies, and opinions, than we should have known had we enjoyed his daily converse for a lifetime [...] he takes his public life for his confidant, and betrays to thousands of eyes likes and dislikes, whims and reveries, veins of mirthful and of serious reflection, moods of feeling both healthful and morbid.¹⁷

This critic represents Hawthorne's fictions as a direct conduit between the mind of the author and his readers, even presenting them as an adequate substitute for a personal relationship. Significantly, echoing the more predatory accounts of the biographical school of criticism that were discussed in the introduction, the act of writing is articulated in terms of risk, with the author betraying to 'thousands of eyes' all aspects of his interior life, including those of a 'morbid', or Gothic variety.

Critics often referred to the plotlines of Gothic texts in order to construct a rough outline of an author's personal history. Commentators upon Charlotte Brontë's work, for example, routinely endeavoured to unearth the identity of the then mysterious figure of 'Currer Bell' by assembling the most salient details of her protagonists' fictional lives (usually Jane Eyre's). Focusing upon the perceived emotional intensity of Charlotte Brontë's depictions of physical and psychological hardship, one critic wrote in *The North American Review* in October 1857 that, collectively, her novels present an account of the author's own 'sufferings', these being 'those portions of her life which called forth her most glowing words'.¹⁸ Delving further into the minutiae of Brontë's fiction, an anonymous reviewer of *Shirley* (1849) wrote in *Holden's Dollar Magazine* in January 1850 that:

Currer Bell is a woman; she has always lived in the North of England; she is the daughter of a clergyman of the 'Established Church;' she has been a governess, and she has suffered deeply from an ill-assorted marriage. The burden of her complaint is constantly the misery of an unhappy match; it is the audible groan, which strikes upon the ear through all her productions.¹⁹

Although the first three of these biographical assumptions are indeed uncannily accurate, the fourth — that the author has 'suffered deeply from an ill-assorted marriage' — is

¹⁶ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, January 1853, pp. 17-24 (p. 18).

¹⁷ 'The House of The Seven Gables', *The North American Review*, January 1853, pp. 227-48 (p. 229).

¹⁸ 'The Life of Charlotte Bronte', *The North American Review*, p. 297.

¹⁹ 'Shirley. By Currer Bell', *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, January 1850, p. 57 (p. 57).

deduced purely from the plotlines of Brontë's novels (perhaps in reference to Mr Rochester's disastrous first marriage in *Jane Eyre*). In the same vein, in an article republished in *Littell's Living Age* from the *Christian Remembrancer*, another reviewer sought to piece together an accurate profile of Brontë by interpreting the character of Jane Eyre as a fictional avatar created to explore her most traumatic experiences. From their reading of the novel they reach the conclusion that its author had to have been 'an oppressed orphan, a starved and bullied charity-school girl and a despised and slighted governess'.²⁰

In instances where more was known about an author's life, critics tended to search for crossovers between significant moments in their biography and the appearance of recurrent themes or specific episodes in their fiction. It has been common practice in readings of Poe's American Gothic fiction to trace the genesis of his imagination's Gothicism to the deaths by tuberculosis of the three women with whom he was most intimately associated — his mother, Eliza Poe, his stepmother, Frances Allan, and his much scrutinised child-bride, Virginia Clemm. Aside from the well-documented emphasis upon Poe's tragic family history, however, contemporary critics also explored the possibility of autobiographical links between his fiction and his formative educational experiences. Henry B. Hirst speculated in an 1849 essay in *McMakin's American Courier* that the decadent lifestyle Poe espoused while studying at university might have provided an imaginative prototype for settings that would later act as atmospheric centrepieces in his Gothic fiction. Hirst describes how 'During the day, frequently for weeks together, he [Poe] passed his hours in studies which were only pursued in chambers litten with sepulchral lamps, of various-colored chemical fires', and suggests that he 'afterward described' the murky and claustrophobic opulence of this scene 'in that spirit-haunted apartment of the Lady Rowena Tremaine, in his terribly imaginative tale of "Ligeia"'.²¹ In another article published in January 1851 in *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review*, another critic examined the potential parallels between Poe's immersion in European Gothic architecture during his early education abroad at the Newington School in England (an 'ancient place', or 'a sort of labyrinth', complete with 'crypts and Gothic arches — quaint old staircases, pointed windows and oak ceilings — gnarled trees and angular enclosures') and the often

²⁰ 'Jane Eyre: An Autobiography', p. 1.

²¹ Henry B. Hirst, 'Edgar Allan Poe', in *Poe in his Own Time*, ed. by Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 154-58 (p. 155).

Europeanised Gothic aesthetic that emerges in his tales.²² This critic posits Poe's experience of this sombre and antiquated environment as a major catalyst in his creative development, writing that its shadowy, labyrinthine features were both 'peculiarly qualified for impressing and feeding his young poetic aspirations' and 'indelibly impressed' upon 'his mind and character for life'.²³

Responding to the shadowy hues and tone which characterise the Gothic as a genre, critics were especially likely to locate the biographical provenance of Gothic works in experiences of profound trauma. Critical discussions of Charles Brockden Brown's fiction, for example, often explored the relationship between his traumatic personal experience of yellow fever epidemics in Philadelphia and New York between 1793 and 1798 (he lost his close friend Elihu Hubbard Smith in the epidemic and narrowly escaped death himself) and the incorporation of ghoulishly graphic depictions of the disease into his Gothic novels *Arthur Mervyn* (1799) and *Stephen Calvert* (1799). According to Brown's biographer, William H. Prescott, the 'spectacle' he witnessed in Philadelphia 'made too deep an impression on him to be readily effaced, and he resolved to transfer his own conceptions of it, while yet fresh, to the page of fiction'.²⁴ Similarly, in an article published in *Century Illustrated Magazine* in June 1883, James Herbert Morse insisted that Brown's 'experience in the two plague-stricken cities, combined with a most brooding and vivid imagination, had worked into the blood', affecting his mind so deeply that all of his fictional protagonists, 'were but the incorporation of the author's own mental experiences'.²⁵ He argues that Brown's harrowing encounters with the disease infected all of his later fiction, including narratives that were not obviously designed to evoke the horrors of a pestilence-ridden cityscape, such as *Wieland* (1798), *Edgar Huntly* (1799), 'and even Jane Talbot' (1801), a novel that ostensibly falls into the category of domestic, rather than Gothic, fiction.²⁶

In his article entitled 'Concerning Hawthorne and Brook Farm' (1869), M. D. Conway similarly links Zenobia's suicide in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) to 'the impression made upon' the author by witnessing a 'similar suicide' of a young woman in 'Concord'.²⁷ Although

²² 'Edgar Allan Poe', *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review*, January 1851, p. 66 (p. 66).

²³ 'Edgar Allan Poe', *The United States Magazine*, p. 66.

²⁴ William H. Prescott, *Biographical and Critical Miscellanies* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1875), p. 29.

²⁵ James Herbert Morse, 'The Native Element in American Fiction: Before the War', *Century Illustrated Magazine*, June 1883, pp. 288-98 (p. 289).

²⁶ Morse, p. 289.

²⁷ Conway, pp. 16-17.

Conway pays lip service earlier in the piece to the fact that Hawthorne 'regretted extremely that the world should have persisted in ascribing a more historical and personal design to *The Blithedale Romance* than was just', he affirms the autobiographical origins of this fictional incident on the grounds that Hawthorne's hypersensitive sensibilities would have necessitated his return to the subject in a fictional medium.²⁸ Conway describes Hawthorne as 'a man whose nerves were without integument, and terribly exposed to all kinds of impressions without', and whose mind was home to a 'vigorous soil which nursed into some kind of life every seed that managed to get into it'.²⁹ Like Prescott and Morse, Conway interprets Gothic authorship as a response to trauma, as a compulsive act in which negative experiences take on a haunting imaginative afterlife.

The most extreme, and arguably un-nuanced, biographical interpretations of Gothic texts literally conflated authors with their protagonists. The eponymous Caliph Vathek, for example, was often perceived as an embodiment of his notoriously decadent creator, William Beckford. In an article published during September 1834 in *Waldie's Select Circulating Library*, one critic (quoting from an article published in the *London Quarterly Review*) argued that Beckford 'betrays, in a thousand places, a settled voluptuousness of temperament, and a capricious recklessness of self-indulgence, which will lead the world to identify him henceforth with his Vathek'.³⁰

Correspondingly, in an article on Charlotte Brontë that was republished in June 1848 in *Littell's Living Age* from the *Christian Remembrancer*, another critic asserted that 'in *Jane Eyre* [...] we have, in some measure, a portrait of the writer'.³¹ It was not uncommon practice for critics of Charlotte Brontë's work to entirely collapse the conceptual boundaries between the author and her protagonists, using her names (both real and pseudonymous) and the names of her characters interchangeably as synonyms for each other. In an article reproduced in August 1850 from the *Cologne Gazette* in *The International Monthly Magazine of Literature*, for example, one critic wrote that 'it is said that Currer Bell, *Jane Eyre*, Miss Bronte, — for all three names mean the same person, — is in London'.³² Another

²⁸ Conway, p. 16.

²⁹ Conway, pp. 16, 17.

³⁰ 'Italy; With Sketches of Spain and Portugal. By the Author of *Vathek*', *Waldie's Select Circulating Library*, 2 September 1834, pp. 152-60 (p. 152).

³¹ 'Jane Eyre: An Autobiography', p. 2.

³² 'German Criticism of English Female Romance Writers', *The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science and Art*, 5 August 1850, p. 1 (p. 1).

critic, whose article was republished from *The Press* in *Littell's Living Age* in May 1857, similarly pondered that 'When some cruel reviews of "Jane Eyre" appeared, what was the position of poor Jane Eyre herself?'³³

This conceptual slippage between author and protagonist is also a common feature of criticism on Hawthorne and Poe. In an article published in August 1872 in *Every Saturday*, for example, one reviewer made the assumption that Septimius Felton (the eponymous protagonist of Hawthorne's posthumously published 1872 Gothic novel) 'may be taken as in some sense an ideal representation of Hawthorne himself'.³⁴ Likewise, M. D. Conway posited that the narrator of *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Miles Coverdale, 'may be safely regarded as one of the most faithful specimens of self-portraiture ever made by any author'.³⁵ Again, in an article published in *Scribner's Monthly* in May 1880, Edmund Clarence Stedman likens all of Poe's narrators to self-portraits, stating that 'His studies of character were not made from observation, but from acquaintance with himself' and that 'the central figure, however disguised, is always the image of the romancer himself'.³⁶

Gothic Psychologies

In an article published in the *Century Illustrated Magazine* in June 1883, James Herbert Morse observed that the Gothic nature of Charles Brockden Brown's work 'seems to have been constitutional'.³⁷ Correspondingly, in an article published in *Beadle's Monthly* in February 1867, Elizabeth Oakes Smith stated that 'I saw that the "Raven" was really Mr. Poe — [...] he was *what he wrote*'.³⁸ Rather than interpreting the presence of Gothic themes in Brown's and Poe's work as a response to traumatic events, both commentators suggest that their attraction to dark subject matter was the product of their innate psychological makeup, or essence. Starting from the premise that only certain kinds of person could have produced certain kinds of texts, critics working within the biographical school of criticism often turned to an author's generic proclivities to determine their psychological character. When applied to authors who employed the Gothic in their writing, this approach habitually

³³ 'The Life of Charlotte Bronte. By Mrs Gaskell', *Littell's Living Age*, 16 May 1857, pp. 1-8 (p. 7).

³⁴ 'Hawthorne's *Septimius Felton*', *Every Saturday*, 17 August 1872, pp. 179-80 (p. 180).

³⁵ Conway, p. 16.

³⁶ Edmund Clarence Stedman, 'Edgar Allan Poe', *Scribner's Monthly*, May 1880, pp. 107-24 (pp. 117, 120).

³⁷ Morse, p. 289.

³⁸ Elizabeth Oakes Smith, 'Autobiographic Notes. Edgar Allan Poe', in *Poe in his Own Time*, ed. by Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 219-35 (p. 225).

led to the interpretation of their works as an externalisation of their atypical, deviant or generally unhappy interior lives. In fact, critics frequently cited negative psychological tendencies as a prerequisite for authentic Gothic authorship. Edmund Clarence Stedman, for example, argued that the unique creative signature of Poe's work was dependent upon the unbalanced mental state in which he wrote: 'Were it not for' Poe's excesses and neurotic crises, should we have had the peculiar quality of his art and the works it has left us?'³⁹

One of the most succinct ways in which critics articulated the perceived psychological reciprocity between Gothic authors and their work was through the description of an author's genius in Gothic terms. In a March 1854 article on Edgar Allan Poe (republished in *The Critic* from the *London Literary Journal*), for example, the Scottish Critic, George Gilfillan, described the author's 'depraved genius'.⁴⁰ Poe was similarly branded as possessing an 'eccentric' and 'morbid genius' (*Scribner's Monthly* (May 1880)) and as belonging to the 'intense order' of 'genius' (*Harbinger* (July 1854)).⁴¹ Other instances of this trend include a July 1864 article in *Littell's Living Age* (republished from the *Spectator*), which referred both to 'The Ghostly genius' of Nathaniel Hawthorne, as well as to 'the shadowy character of his own genius'.⁴² In November 1880, another critic writing for the *Catholic World* described Hawthorne's 'genius' as being of the 'gloomy sort', and in an October 1864 article in *The North American Review* he was described as a writer 'whose genius diverged always out of the sun into the darkest shade'.⁴³ It is important to clarify here that in the context of these articles the term 'genius' is not used to denote exceptional ability, but to describe 'a person's characteristic disposition' (a usage that was popular in the literary criticism of the nineteenth century).⁴⁴ In describing the 'genius' of authors, critics referred to their essential qualities, rather than to their superlative literary talent. By labelling the genius of Gothic authors as 'depraved', 'intense', 'ghostly', 'shadowy', 'gloomy', 'eccentric' and 'morbid', these critics depict their minds as being innately predisposed to the creation of Gothic narratives.

³⁹ Stedman, p. 123.

⁴⁰ George Gilfillan, 'Authors and Books. Edgar Poe', in *Poe in his Own Time*, ed. by Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 174-86 (p. 175).

⁴¹ Stedman, p. 107; 'Tales, by Edgar A. Poe', *Harbinger, Devoted to Social and Political Progress*, 12 July 1845, pp. 73-74 (p. 73).

⁴² 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 30 July 1864, pp. 219-22 (pp. 219, 220).

⁴³ J. V. O'Connor, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Catholic World*, November 1880, pp. 231-37 (p. 234); 'The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The North American Review*, October 1864, pp. 539-57 (p. 550).

⁴⁴ 'Genius, n. and adj.', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 8 June 2017].

This essentialist understanding of Gothic genius is illustrated by the following description of Hawthorne's imagination, which appeared in a review of *The Blithedale Romance* in *The American Whig Review* in November 1852:

A thought crosses us, whether Mr. Hawthorne would paint a wedding as well as a death; whether he could conjure as distinctly before our vision the bridal flowers, as he has done the black, damp weeds that waved around the grave of Zenobia. We fear not. His genius has a church-yard beauty about it, and revels amid graves, and executions, and all the sad leavings of mortality.⁴⁵

Locating the power of Hawthorne's writing in his innate affinity with the themes of death and decay, this critic suggests that his work would be far less compelling if he disregarded his basic instincts and attempted to engage with happier topics.

It has often been a temptation to imagine the homes of Gothic authors, especially those of an unusually picturesque nature, as architectural extensions of their occupants' psychologies. Marion Harney, for example, has recently described Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill as an 'autobiographical site'.⁴⁶ Comparably, albeit inversely, the perceived Gothic psychologies of Gothic authors were sometimes represented in nineteenth-century criticism through the metaphors of Gothic architecture or environments. The mind of the Gothic author was pictured as a Gothic structure or landscape, suggesting that their fictions were an externalisation of the Gothic worlds that they internally inhabited. In his article published in *Century Illustrated Magazine* in June 1883, Morse imagined Poe as writing in 'that unsunned mine of his, producing shapes grotesque and horrible, in an atmosphere whose murkiness was only surpassed by its miasmic vapors'.⁴⁷ Mirroring the oppressive sense of claustrophobia that permeates much of Poe's work, especially his obsessive focus upon the horrors of being buried alive, this description of the author's mind as an airless and poisonous pit suggests that his fiction was the product of a suffocating entrapment within his own mind. An architectural metaphor is also used to represent Poe's psychological state in an article published in April 1876 in *Scribner's Monthly*. Whilst the depiction of Poe's 'works' as being 'only a ruined arch', is not directly used to represent the nature of the author's mind, this critic does go on to suggest that Poe's fictions were the result of his 'half-

⁴⁵ 'The Blithedale Romance', *The American Whig Review*, November 1852, pp. 417-24 (p. 423).

⁴⁶ Marion Harney, *Place-making for the Imagination: Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013; repr. London: Routledge, 2016), p. 7.

⁴⁷ Morse, p. 295.

maniacal brawl, with himself and with the world'.⁴⁸ In light of this, the likening of the author's creative legacy to a 'ruined arch' suggests that, like the crumbling feudal monasteries and castles favoured in many early Gothic narratives, his oeuvre is a derelict monument to the past sins, corruptions and secrets that tormented him in life.

Similarly, in the same review of *The Blithedale Romance*, which explored the 'church-yard beauty' of Hawthorne's imagination, 'Hawthorne's genius' is likened to 'an old country mansion of the last century' with exaggeratedly Gothic features:

The locks and bolts are rusty, and the doors creak harshly on their hinges. Huge twisted chimneys branch out of every gable, and in every chimney is lodged some capricious, eccentric old rook, who startles us unexpectedly with his presence. Great wings, and odd buttresses, jut out from all of the corners, the phrenological bumps of architecture; while here and there, in warm sheltered nooks, sweet climbing flowers, dewy roses, cling lovingly to the old moss-grown walls, and strive, but with ill success, to conceal the quaint deformity of the building.⁴⁹

Whilst the mansion described in this passage does not ostensibly fall into the category of the medieval European architecture favoured in the Walpolean and Radcliffean schools of Gothic literature, the critic's decision to list archaic features (such as 'buttresses' and 'moss-grown walls') and typical Gothic machinery in a manner not dissimilar to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century critical accounts of the genre that poked fun at its perceived reliance upon these set ingredients (such as the 'Terrorist System of Novel-Writing' (1797)) instantly conjures up the image and atmosphere of a traditional Gothic castle or monastery.⁵⁰ An extra layer (possibly an allusion to the poisoned flowers in Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844)) is contributed to this spooky aesthetic by the depiction of the 'dewy roses' which attempt, yet fail to mask, the 'deformity of the building'. It is implied that their natural beauty and fragrance thinly mask the mansion's fundamental unwholesomeness, perhaps with a view to beguiling and corrupting unwitting innocents. It is in the reference to the 'wings' and 'buttresses' protruding from the building as 'phrenological bumps', however, that the psychological significance of this architectural imagery is most explicit. By layering a phrenological metaphor on top of an architectural one, the critic draws a conceptual link between the 'quaint deformity' of the Gothic style of architecture — a form which was often viewed as a misshapen and unsatisfactory contrast

⁴⁸ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 807.

⁴⁹ 'The Blithedale Romance', p. 417.

⁵⁰ A Jacobin Novelist, 'Terrorist System of Novel-Writing', *Monthly Magazine, and British Register*, August 1797, pp. 102-104.

to the ordered lines and geometric symmetry of the neoclassical school — and a misshapen human skull (phrenology being the popular nineteenth-century pseudo-science which used measurements of the skull to ascertain a person's psychological traits). Hawthorne's head is pictured as the facade of a Gothic mansion, and his thoughts as the terrors which typically lurk within them.

Critics also drew connections between Charles Brockden Brown's intense creative focus upon Gothic settings and the Gothic mindset that he personally inhabited. In his analysis of *Edgar Huntly* in his biography of Brown, William H. Prescott noted that 'It is worth observing how the sombre complexion of Brown's imagination [...] sheds its gloom over his pictures of material nature, raising the landscape into all the severe and savage sublimity of a Salvator Rosa'.⁵¹ Comparably, in an article published in the *New York Literary Gazette and American Athenaeum* in March 1826, another critic wrote that 'The nature of Mr. Brown's mind led him to portray the affecting, the sublime, the wild, and the mysterious'.⁵² In both pieces, Brown's works are treated as a key to discerning his psychological state, with his attraction to the 'wild', the 'sublime' and the 'savage' mirroring his tempestuous internal landscape.

The critical treatment of Gothic texts as an index of their author's psychological makeup frequently emphasised the conviction that there was something fundamentally wrong with the minds of individuals who felt themselves compelled to adopt the genre. It is notable, for example, that the act of Gothic authorship was often associated with the concept of 'unnaturalness'. In a review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* republished from *The British Critic* in *The Port-Folio* in September 1818, one critic described the 'disjointed combinations and unnatural adventures' in the novel as the products of a 'diseased and wandering imagination'.⁵³ Similarly, in an article on Nathaniel Hawthorne that appeared in *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review* in July 1851, another critic asserted that there is 'a sort of unnaturalness in his world'.⁵⁴ Again, in a July 1848 article in *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, George Lippard's fiction is deemed to be the result of 'a prurient, morbid, and

⁵¹ Prescott, p. 29.

⁵² 'Charles Brockden Brown and his Works: No. 1', *New York Literary Gazette and American Athenaeum*, 11 March 1826, pp. 7-9 (p. 8).

⁵³ 'Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus: From the *British Critic*', *The Port-Folio*, September 1818, pp. 200-07 (p. 207).

⁵⁴ A. D. M., 'The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*, July 1851, pp. 272- 93 (p. 281).

unnatural taste'.⁵⁵ In each case, the allusion to the author's 'unnaturalness' is used to indicate the abnormal lens through which they perceive and relate to the world. Their outlook is deemed to be at odds with what is normal, rational and healthy.

The perceived 'unnaturalness' in the psychologies of Gothic authors was sometimes argued on the grounds that their fictions indicated a dysfunctional relationship with conventionally negative concepts. Their voluntary engagement with dark and macabre subject matter was read as an unnaturally enthusiastic response to themes that, in the critic's view, ought to evoke distress or repulsion. In a July 1864 article in the *American Quarterly Church Review, and Ecclesiastical Register*, for instance, Ann Radcliffe is described as 'a lady who seems to have become early enamored of misery and misfortune, and who could deal with nothing but calamity and horrors'.⁵⁶ The Gothic universe, with its focus upon the themes of catastrophe and human suffering, is imagined as her (un)natural habitat, or the only sphere in which she can flourish and excel.

Whilst Hawthorne's Gothic romances were largely met with critical approbation (a trend which we shall return to in greater detail in chapter two), reviewers often responded uneasily to what they viewed as his basic instinctive attraction to morbid subject matter. As one critic put it in *The Literary World* in July 1877, 'It was the one fault of [...] Hawthorne that he loved to deal more or less with the morbid and horrible'.⁵⁷ In another article published in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* in August 1853, a second critic observed that Hawthorne's 'special ability to depict exceptional modes of human behaviour' is unfortunately 'conjoined' with a 'special temptation to linger amid what is morbid, and to court intimacy with whatever deviates from the dull standard of conventionalism'.⁵⁸ Whilst these critics do not deny the literary merits of Hawthorne's Gothic works, they question his desire to 'give to distortion and oddity the preference over' more wholesome or cheerful themes.⁵⁹ In several reviews of Hawthorne's fiction, critics censured not only his attraction to distasteful topics, but what they describe as his overwhelming addiction to them. Again, in the November 1852 review of *The Blithedale Romance* in *The American Whig Review*, the

⁵⁵ Motley Manners, 'New American Writers: No. 1. The Author of *The Quaker City*', *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, July 1848, pp. 421-24 (p. 423).

⁵⁶ 'Uses and Abuses of Fiction', *American Quarterly Church Review, and Ecclesiastical Register*, July 1864, pp. 230-45 (p. 241).

⁵⁷ 'Review 16', *The Literary World*, 1 July 1877, p. 30 (p. 30).

⁵⁸ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, August 1853, pp. 481-88 (p. 481).

⁵⁹ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, p. 481.

critic writes that 'It is a pity that' Hawthorne 'should be afflicted with such a melancholy craving for human curiosities'.⁶⁰ Likewise, in a September 1873 article in *Every Saturday*, 'Lady Juliet Pollock' describes the author's 'irresistible fascination' with 'The grave, the winding-sheet, the corruption of the body'.⁶¹ According to Pollock, 'The physical process of death was at once alluring and appalling to him. He was fastened to it by the horror it inspired'.⁶² She pictures Hawthorne's engagement with Gothic themes as a self-destructive and conflicted relationship, or a kind of creative sadomasochism. Whilst inspired by the ideas of mortality and putrefaction, Hawthorne is also envisioned as being simultaneously repulsed by the irresistible magnetism that they exercise over his imagination.

George Gilfillan takes his perception of the Gothic author's 'singular attraction to all dark, dreadful, and disgusting objects and thoughts' a step further.⁶³ Not only does Gilfillan express his disgust at Poe's willing engagement with grim and grisly concepts, but he even goes so far as to suggest that the writer's psychological deviance ran so deep that he actively endeavoured to manipulate the conditions of real life to provide perverse inspiration for his creations: 'Poe had not one spark of genuine tenderness, unless it were for his wife, whose heart, nevertheless, and constitution, he broke — hurrying her to a premature grave, that he might write *Annabel Lee* and *The Raven*!'⁶⁴ In this account, Gilfillan speculates that Poe hastened Virginia Clemm's death because of his impatience to draw from life in his Gothic poetry. He is imagined as a calculating and pathological creature, preying in a disturbingly psychosexual way on a weak and declining muse in order to harvest material for his art.

Another avenue used to explore the 'unnaturalness' of Gothic authorship was the socially conservative discourse of gender deviance. Numerous critics, including L. Andrew Cooper, have examined the historical reaction to the Gothic as a perilously subversive genre, which harboured the potential to disrupt the moral fabric of patriarchal society by tempting young novel readers (especially women) into transgressing established sexual

⁶⁰ 'The Blithedale Romance', p. 418.

⁶¹ Lady Juliet Pollock, 'The Imaginative Literature of America', *Every Saturday*, 13 September 1873, pp. 284-92 (p. 289).

⁶² Pollock, p. 289.

⁶³ Gilfillan, p. 181.

⁶⁴ Gilfillan, p. 176.

norms.⁶⁵ With regards to Gothic authorship itself, several recent studies have examined the perceived gender deviance of the Gothic imagination. Lauren Fitzgerald has noted the critical discomfort surrounding the perception of Gothic authorship in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries as a form of literary transvestism. She observes that 'If Lewis cross-dressed as a writer of Gothic (coded feminine), Radcliffe was similarly in drag as an author (coded masculine)'.⁶⁶ In his reception history, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, Michael Gamer has similarly pointed out the unease provoked by the Gothic's 'considerably blurred [...] gendering'.⁶⁷ Gamer suggests that 'the strong presence at the end of the eighteenth century of Horace Walpole, William Beckford and Matthew Lewis among the ranks of gothic writers' led to the Gothic's portrayal as a 'primarily feminine realm corrupted by a flamboyant, "wanton" masculinity'.⁶⁸ He argues that the dominance of male writers — many of whom were associated with flamboyantly theatrical or effeminate personas — within a supposedly female literary form, led to an understanding of the Gothic imagination as one in which the boundaries between masculine and feminine were subversively and unnaturally dissolved.

This discourse is primarily perpetuated in nineteenth-century American criticism through the representation of Gothic authors as exhibiting characteristics associated with the opposite sex. Edmund Clarence Stedman, for example, described Poe as possessing 'the delicacy, the sophistry and weakness of a nature more or less effeminate'.⁶⁹ Stedman marks the author's imagination out as "other", or "unnatural", through articulating it in terms that traditionally act as signifiers of femininity.

Perhaps more common was the censure of female practitioners of the Gothic for their perceived masculinity. This paradigm plays a key role in the discussion surrounding the Brontës' novels. This was largely a result of the fact that their decision to publish their works under androgynous pseudonyms established the question of authorial identity, especially gender identity, as a central point of critical interest from the outset. Critics relentlessly alluded to the gender deviance present in the Brontës' works by labelling them as

⁶⁵ L. Andrew Cooper, 'Gothic Threats: The Role of Danger in the Critical Evaluation of *The Monk* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*', *Gothic Studies*, 8.2 (November 2006), 18-34.

⁶⁶ Lauren Fitzgerald, 'The Sexuality of Authorship in *The Monk*', *Romanticism on the Net*, 36.37 (November 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.7202/011138ar>> [accessed 15 October 2019] (para. 4 of 39).

⁶⁷ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 51.

⁶⁸ Gamer, pp. 50-51.

⁶⁹ Stedman, p. 118.

unwomanly. In a June 1848 review of *Jane Eyre* republished in *Littell's Living Age* from the *Christian Remembrancer*, for example, one critic stated their lack of surprise that 'the hypothesis of a male author should have been started'.⁷⁰ They then go on to defend this observation on the grounds that 'Throughout there is a masculine power, breadth and shrewdness, combined with masculine hardness, coarseness, and freedom of expression'.⁷¹ In direct contrast to the censure of Poe's effeminacy, Brontë, as a female practitioner of the Gothic, is denounced for displaying excessive strength, passion and assertiveness in her writing (all traits which are typically coded as masculine). Similarly, in a March 1850 article in *The American Whig Review*, Brontë is described as a writer who 'could only draw from her own masculine mind, and half-masculine soul'.⁷² Her perceived deviance is expressed through the image of an unnatural hybridisation between the feminine and the masculine in her psychological makeup. The emphasis upon the composite or hermaphroditic nature of her mind is used to erect a partition between Brontë and other 'normal' women, thereby explaining the controversial content of her fiction. This metaphorical hybridisation of Brontë's mind is echoed in a January 1850 article published in *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, where she is pictured as a 'literary sphinx — half woman and half monster'.⁷³ Whilst this critic does not explicitly refer to the author's deviant masculinity, they envisage her in terms of monstrous duality. Her feminine, human 'half' is imagined as being grotesquely twinned with a grotesque and unnatural counterpart.

As well as drawing connections between Gothic authorship and forms of perceived social deviance, it was not uncommon for critics to posit Gothic fictions as symptomatic manifestations of mental illness. In an April 1876 article in *Scribner's Monthly*, one critic asserted that 'actual mental decay exists' in Poe's writings, whilst George Gilfillan (in the same article in which he accuses Poe of deliberately accelerating his wife's demise) claimed that his writings 'are not the productions of a healthy or happy man'.⁷⁴ In a similar vein, a critic in a July 1851 article on Hawthorne in *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review* posited that 'A tendency to disease in his nature, appears in the fearful intensity of his

⁷⁰ 'Jane Eyre: An Autobiography', p. 1.

⁷¹ 'Jane Eyre: An Autobiography', p. 1.

⁷² T. C. C., 'Shirley, Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights', *The American Whig Review*, March 1850, pp. 230-34 (p. 233).

⁷³ 'Shirley. By Currer Bell', p. 57.

⁷⁴ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 801; Gilfillan, p. 181.

narratives'.⁷⁵ In this article, the critic goes on to assert the possibility of tracing the presence of this mental 'disease' in specific works:

the unhealthiness of the writer's mind is more prominently exhibited in a few of these stories, than elsewhere. 'The Birth-mark', 'Rappaccini's Daughter', and 'Roger Malvin's Burial', are the nettles and mushrooms of Mr. Hawthorne's mind, and certainly should not be tied up with a bouquet of flowers for the public. Perhaps we hate these tales the more that they are bound in the same covers with 'The Celestial Railroad', and 'Drowne's wooden Image', the happiest efforts of the author.⁷⁶

Whilst ostensibly non-Gothic tales like 'The Celestial Railroad' and 'Drowne's Wooden Image' are praised in this passage as Hawthorne's 'happiest' literary 'efforts', several Gothic tales are selected as being representative of his diseased psychology. Describing these tales as the 'mushrooms' of Hawthorne's mind, which should not be included in 'a bouquet of flowers', this critic likens them to a contaminating fungus which ought to be quarantined away from healthier literary specimens.

Some critics did not stop at general attestations of an author's diseased psychology, but attempted to diagnose them with a specific variety of mental illness. One of the most elaborate examples of this is to be found in Francis Gerry Fairfield's October 1875 essay on Poe, 'A Mad Man of Letters' (published in *Scribner's Monthly*). In this essay, Fairfield starts from the premise that there is 'madness' in the author's 'method', attributing Poe's Gothic imagination to the effects of epilepsy.⁷⁷ According to Fairfield, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' could 'have been written by no man with whom the physiological and psychological traits of the malady had not become personal matters of fact'.⁷⁸ Like many of the autobiographical readings of Gothic texts examined earlier in this chapter, he insists that the content of the tale, 'in which he traces the subjective and objective phenomena of epilepsy [...] symptom by symptom, sensation by sensation, delusion by delusion', could only have resulted from intense personal experience.⁷⁹ In order to unpack the psychological emphasis of Fairfield's diagnosis, it is important to note that his nineteenth-century understanding of epilepsy differs dramatically from the current understanding of the condition. For Fairfield, epilepsy falls into two major categories. One, as we would recognise it today, is characterised by physical convulsions or fits. The other — which Fairfield variously refers to

⁷⁵ A. D. M., p. 281.

⁷⁶ A. D. M., p. 285.

⁷⁷ Francis Gerry Fairfield, 'A Mad Man of Letters', *Scribner's Monthly*, October 1875, pp. 690-700 (p. 691).

⁷⁸ Fairfield, p. 697.

⁷⁹ Fairfield, p. 697.

as 'cerebral', 'larvated', 'masked' and 'Brain epilepsy' — however, is not just indicated by physical symptoms (i.e. fits), but by episodes of psychological disturbance, including morbid hallucinations, somnambulistic trances, bouts of mania and memory loss.⁸⁰ It is to this latter variety that Fairfield attributes the origins of Poe's fictions. Rather than viewing epilepsy as a neurological disorder, he understands it as a degenerative form of mental illness, as indicated by the article's crass title, and by his reference within the text to 'epileptic insanity'.⁸¹

Fairfield repeatedly traces the inspiration for Poe's Gothic tales back to his experiences of the symptoms suffered during epileptic episodes. He draws links, for example, between the hallucinations he believes Poe to have suffered and the hallucinatory quality of much of his fiction. He argues that 'singular hallucinations' seem to 'form the basis of stories like "The Black Cat," "Ligeia," "Morella," "William Wilson," and the later products of Poe's pen almost without exception'.⁸² Fairfield also reads the Gothic tropes in many of Poe's tales as evidence of Poe's attempts to conceptualise the progressive degeneration of his mind. He interprets the recurring images of doppelgängers and diabolical doubles, for example, as a 'haunting consciousness' of the 'progress of the malady'.⁸³ As well as reading the doubling in 'William Wilson', 'Ligeia' and 'Morella' in this light, he also locates the author's awareness of his subjugation to mental illness in the uncannily persecutory animals which haunt several of his tales, which he interprets as metaphors for Poe's inescapable malady: 'It is the black cat he cannot kill — the raven that croaks a Nevermore in answer to all his yearnings for the beautiful that once might have been, but is now a lost opportunity'.⁸⁴

Beyond looking for manifestations of Poe's supposed epilepsy in individual tales, Fairfield also hypothesises that, 'Were it possible to ascertain the exact order of their production, it would, I think, be no very difficult task to construct from Poe's tales a kind of psychological biography illustrating the progress of the mental alienation'.⁸⁵ Like the anonymous reviewer who located the diseased nature of Hawthorne's mind within certain tales, Fairfield categorises Poe's fictional corpus according to medical rather than literary

⁸⁰ Fairfield, p. 691.

⁸¹ Fairfield, p. 692.

⁸² Fairfield. p. 691.

⁸³ Fairfield, p. 697.

⁸⁴ Fairfield, p. 697.

⁸⁵ Fairfield, pp. 697-98.

criteria. Conceptualising Poe's works as a 'psychological biography', Fairfield seriously considers the possibility of their collective extra-literary value as a resource for tracking Poe's descent into 'insanity'. They are not approached as creations that possess literary value in their own right, but as the detailed case notes of a disturbed and vulnerable psychiatric patient.

It is revealing in itself that Fairfield attempted to diagnose Poe with epilepsy. Largely due to the theories of Victorian thinkers — such as Cesare Lombroso and Bénédict Morel — who associated the condition with degeneracy and criminality, epileptics suffered from a particularly gothicised stigma in nineteenth-century society. It featured heavily, for example, in the media speculations surrounding the Whitechapel murders.⁸⁶ Especially significant, however, is the fact that three years before the publication of Fairfield's article on Poe, epilepsy was openly associated with the authorship of sensational varieties of fiction. In *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (1874), the eminent psychiatrist, Henry Maudsley, argued that the condition triggered a 'singularly vivid imagination, which is apt sometimes to occupy itself with painful or repulsive subjects. Probably the invention of the modern sensation novel, with its murders, bigamies, and other crimes, was an achievement of the epileptic imagination'.⁸⁷ Like Maudsley, Fairfield also draws a wider, euphemistic, connection between cerebral epilepsy and Gothic fiction in general, commenting that the condition 'accounts, no doubt for many of the morbid phases of the imagination that occur in literature'.⁸⁸ Viewing the genre as a whole as a medical phenomenon rather than a literary tradition, he suggests that all of its manifestations are the product of disease.

The Gothic Author as Gothic Villain

The purest manifestation of the gothicisation of the Gothic author in nineteenth-century criticism is to be found in the alignment — both metaphorical and literal— of Gothic writers with archetypal Gothic character types. Cementing the perceived reciprocity between Gothic authors and Gothic texts, the portrayal of Gothic authors as Gothic character types encoded two pejorative assumptions about Gothic authorship that served to reinforce the

⁸⁶ Jack Gann, 2016, "'A Fit of Mania": Epilepsy, Violence and Murder in the Victorian Imagination' <www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/blogs/a-fit-of-mania-epilepsy-violence-murder-victorian-imagination> [accessed 30 September 2019] (para. 8 of 9).

⁸⁷ Henry Maudsley, *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), p. 243.

⁸⁸ Fairfield, p. 691.

moral and intellectual stigmas that have surrounded it since the late eighteenth century. First, by representing Gothic authors as typical members of the cast of a Gothic novel, critics toppled them from the lofty, transcendent status of creators, imagining them instead as participants within their own Gothic narratives. In taking the biographical school of criticism to such a literal extreme, creative agency was often almost entirely denied to Gothic authors within this discourse. Second, critics emphasised the perceived immorality of Gothic fiction by aligning Gothic authors with Gothic villains, rather than heroes or heroines. These villains assume multiple guises, but this section will pay particular attention to four especially popular figures: ghosts, demons, disturbingly un-empathetic (or even psychopathic) surgeons and magicians. In likening Gothic authors to these feared and marginalised characters, critics insinuated that the corrupt and deviant nature of their work necessitated their separation from mainstream society.

Typically understood as lingering, non-corporeal imprints, trapped in a 'liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality', ghosts often represent isolation or loneliness.⁸⁹ Their disembodiment, combined with their association with nocturnal hours, separate them from the living, preventing them from being involved in conventional human activities and interactions. Several feminist critics have explored the particular relevance of ghostly imagery to nineteenth-century female writers on the grounds that spectral imagery resonated with their own sense of erasure within the patriarchal social structure of the time. Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar have suggested that 'An eighteenth' and 'nineteenth-century middle-class woman in particular might well have felt herself to be apparitional, confined to the private sphere like the phantom Angel', whilst Diana Wallace has described the legal and economic disenfranchisement of nineteenth-century women in terms of 'ghosting'.⁹⁰ As well as being subjected to a pejoratively gendered discourse, it is perhaps revealing that the perceived social marginalisation of Gothic authors was also articulated through the metaphor of spectrality. This is exemplified by two critical descriptions of Poe, both published in the

⁸⁹ María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, 'Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities', in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. by María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 1-28 (p. 2).

⁹⁰ Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar, 'Introduction', in *Ghost Stories by British and American Women: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography*, ed. by Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. xi-xlii (p. xxv); Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 14.

1860s. In the first, Elizabeth Oakes Smith reflected that 'To me Poe was more spectral than human', and in the second Eugene Benson commented that 'Poe was like a banished spirit'.⁹¹ Particularly in Benson's account, Poe is depicted as a man doomed to exist on a different plane to those around him, literally cast out or exorcised from the world of the living. Similarly, in an 1850 review of *The Scarlet Letter* in *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, another critic suggested that Hawthorne has 'stood on the confines of society, as we see some sombre figure'.⁹² Although Hawthorne is not explicitly likened to a revenant in this description, the reference to the author as a 'sombre figure' on 'the confines of society' evokes the image of a bleak and shadowy being, permanently exiled to the periphery of things. The implication is that he is a solitary watcher, always looking in but never taking part.

In an article republished in *Littell's Living Age* from *The National Review* in January 1861, Nathaniel Hawthorne was similarly represented in spectral terms, with the critic observing that 'Mr Hawthorne's peculiar genius lies in the power he possesses [...] to haunt the reader, with his conceptions'.⁹³ As well as occupying the status of isolated, wandering figures, ghosts have also traditionally assumed the role of harbingers or messengers. Within this capacity, they usually materialise in order to expose past sins and to call the perpetrators of these sins to account. When ghosts occupy this role, the fear that they inspire is primarily related to the revelation of uncomfortable truths. In referring to Hawthorne's 'power' to 'haunt the reader' with the concepts explored in his fiction, therefore, this critic perhaps alludes to the Gothic's longstanding association with the exhumation of past tyrannies, and with what Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock has termed the 'revisioning of history'.⁹⁴ In this instance, the ghosting of Hawthorne may be read less in accusatory terms, and more as a sympathetic acknowledgement of the fact that in using their fictions to acquaint, or haunt, their readers with unwelcome realities, Gothic authors must expect to forfeit the comforts of social acceptance.

⁹¹ Smith, p. 231; Eugene Benson, 'Poe and Hawthorne', *The Galaxy*, December 1868, pp. 742-48 (p. 742).

⁹² 'The Scarlet Letter — A Romance', *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, September 1850, pp. 484-500 (p. 484).

⁹³ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 26 January 1861, pp. 217-32 (p. 221).

⁹⁴ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, 'Introduction: The Spectral Turn', in *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), pp. 3-17 (p. 5).

For critics set upon exposing the moral shortcomings of Gothic narratives and those who produced them, demons were often the villainous archetype of choice. In a December 1834 review of William Beckford's infamous, oriental Gothic novella *Vathek* (a tale complete with Faustian pacts, ghoulish graveyards, the ritual slaughter of innocents and multiple descriptions of nubile young bodies), for example, a scandalised critic, after denouncing the piece as 'impure, disgusting, and execrable', argued that it could only have been produced by someone 'whose prolific fancy preferred as its repast all that was diabolical and monstrous'.⁹⁵ Despite Beckford's contemporary notoriety as a man of excessive and unorthodox appetites (amongst other things he was alleged to be a pederast), this critic claimed to draw their conclusions about the author's 'diabolical' nature from his writing alone, 'without knowing anything of Mr. Beckford's character'.⁹⁶ The tale that Beckford has created is deemed sufficient, regardless of any biographical context, to regard him in a demonic light. In this article, the diabolical lexicon used to denounce *Vathek* is used to cancel out the critic's simultaneous recognition of Beckford as 'a youth of extraordinary genius'.⁹⁷ Despite the fact that the novel was written before the author reached 'twenty years of age', the premature 'genius' that facilitated this feat is denounced as 'totally poisoned and perverted at its source'.⁹⁸

Many critical appraisals of American Gothic romances are likewise torn between admiration for the author's talents and discomfort about the perception of such works as morbid and immoral. In a December 1864 article in the *Circular*, for example, a concerned critic insisted that Hawthorne 'wrote in the interest of evil-worship', and that 'no amount of skill in this line can atone for the dark and essentially evil spirit that pervades his writings'.⁹⁹ Despite acknowledging the literary merits of Hawthorne's works, this critic rejects them on the grounds that they have sprung from a demonic source of inspiration. The Gothic imagination is envisaged as an 'evil spirit', poisoning creative minds (no matter how superior) and turning potential masterpieces into abominations.

The conceptualisation of Poe in demonic terms was also common in nineteenth-century commentaries on his life and work. In addition to describing him as 'spectral' in her

⁹⁵ 'Original Literary Notices', *The Southern Literary Messenger*, December 1834, pp. 188-89 (pp. 188, 189).

⁹⁶ 'Original Literary Notices', p. 189.

⁹⁷ 'Original Literary Notices', p. 188.

⁹⁸ 'Original Literary Notices', pp. 188, 189.

⁹⁹ 'North American Review on Hawthorne', *Circular*, 5 December 1864, pp. 298-99 (p. 298).

'Autobiographic Notes', for example, Elizabeth Oakes Smith observed that the author 'carries a Mephistophelean smile that can not be hidden'.¹⁰⁰

Another particularly colourful, even comic, use of a demonic metaphor is to be found in a July 1848 review of George Lippard's gruesome Gothic novel, *The Ladye Annabel* (1842), published in *Holden's Dollar Magazine*. In their account of the novel, the critic recalls that 'there was, both in construction and design, an evidence of a powerful fancy continually at work spreading the supernatural feast, like a demon-cook decking an infernal board with horrible tit-bits'.¹⁰¹ In this abject, almost carnivalesque depiction of Lippard as a 'demon-cook', exuberantly compiling a grisly feast from 'horrible tit-bits', the critic refers to the author's tendency to pile horrors upon horrors in his fiction. The image of Lippard gleefully revelling in the act of combining as many revolting ingredients as possible is used to criticise him for delighting in excesses of gore and depravity. Significantly, the title of this article is 'The Author of the Quaker City', a reference to the author's previous production, a Gothic novel which painted in minute detail scenes of inner city murder, debauchery, gambling and seduction. Whilst the moral censure present in this review is so exaggerated as to be slightly tongue-in-cheek, it nevertheless traces the origin, or in this case the concoction, of Gothic fictions to infernal impulses. The image of Lippard as a maniacal demon chef is designed to bring a smile to the reader's lips, but at the expense of the author's public image.

In several critical accounts the conceptualisation of Gothic authors in demonic terms is extended from the metaphorical to the literal. In a comment quoted in *Emerson's Magazine and Putnam's Monthly* from the *Providence Journal*, for example, William Beckford's Gothic imagination is understood as the result of demonic possession. The critic asserts that:

Mr Beckford was undoubtedly what we would call in our day 'a medium' — the victim, perhaps, of some haunting demoniac possession. His 'Vathek' was written in French, at a single sitting of three nights and two days, and without intervening sleep or rest.¹⁰²

In this account, the legendary narrative of *Vathek's* extemporal composition is used as evidence for its diabolical inspiration. Reluctant to believe that any author would autonomously choose to produce such a work, this critic presents Beckford as the unwitting

¹⁰⁰ Smith, p. 226.

¹⁰¹ Motley Manners, p. 422.

¹⁰² 'Our Window', *Emerson's Magazine and Putnam's Monthly*, October 1857, pp. 540-42 (p. 541).

mouthpiece for an evil narrative over which he has no control. His role in the novel's creation is conceptualised in terms of victimhood rather than literary achievement.

Correspondingly, George Gilfillan seriously posits 'demonic possession' as an occult diagnosis for the origin of Poe's various idiosyncrasies.¹⁰³ As well as likening him to 'one of the Gadarene swine, filled with the devil', Gilfillan argues that the author resembled a 'raving demon' when he 'entered the house of his intended bride on the night before the anticipated marriage' (here, he refers to an incident which led to Poe's arrest and the dissolution of his engagement to Sarah Helen Whitman).¹⁰⁴ Gilfillan also writes that it was 'demonic possession too, of a different kind', which led Poe to fancy 'the entire secret of the making of the universe to be revealed to him, and went about everywhere shouting "Eureka"' (referring to the creation of Poe's 1848 prose poem of the same title).¹⁰⁵ Intent on the conclusion that Poe may have become the 'bound victim of infernal influence', Gilfillan urges his readers, regardless of the fact that they live in an 'age' of supernatural 'scepticism', to consider the possibility that Poe's writings and his erratic and unstable behaviour were both the result of his mind being hijacked by satanic forces.¹⁰⁶ This hypothesis is corroborated by Nathaniel P. Willis's speculation that Poe's mind may have been 'inhabited by both a devil and an angel'.¹⁰⁷ Suggesting that Poe was tormented by the presence of 'two antagonistic spirits imprisoned in one body, equally powerful and having complete mastery by turns', Willis conceptualises Poe's supposed demonic possession in terms similar to what we would recognise today as dissociative identity disorder.¹⁰⁸

The third archetype used to represent the Gothic author as a Gothic figure was predominantly employed to censure the perceived unnaturalness of the Gothic writer's habitual engagement with disturbing themes. By portraying Gothic authors as coldly objective, even pathological surgeons, critics suggested that they must have an innate lack of human feeling to work so closely with these topics. In an article published in *The Southern Quarterly Review* in April 1849, this metaphor is extensively applied to the Gothic novels of the Scottish writer and editor, John Gibson Lockhart. Whilst he is best remembered for his

¹⁰³ Gilfillan, p. 177.

¹⁰⁴ Gilfillan, pp. 176, 178.

¹⁰⁵ Gilfillan p. 178.

¹⁰⁶ Gilfillan, p. 177.

¹⁰⁷ Nathaniel P. Willis, 'Death of E. A. Poe', in *Poe in his Own Time*, ed. by Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 94-99 (p. 94).

¹⁰⁸ Willis, p. 94.

celebrated biography of his father-in-law, Sir Walter Scott, Lockhart also published two Gothic novels — *Adam Blair* (1822) and *Matthew Wald* (1824) — and it is to these two 'tales of profound horror' that the critic refers.¹⁰⁹ They disapprovingly observe that Lockhart

appears to take no interest in what he sees. He exhibits the stern habitual indifference of the anatomist. He shows you the horrid wound, the butchered frame, the divided tendons, the gushing arteries, the sundered and still quivering heart, without sharing in your emotions; and some portion of your thrill and shudder is due to your revoltings at that cool indifference — that stoical fortitude, — which not only fails to sympathize with the horrors which it contemplates, but which shows no part of sympathy with your distresses.¹¹⁰

In this grisly description 'the cool indifference' with which Lockhart seems to treat his Gothic subject matter is likened to the undertaking of detached scientific enquiry. The author is envisioned as a jaded and emotionless anatomist, dispassionately laying bare the internal organs, tissues and effluvia of the human body. The human fear and suffering present in his work are analysed with the same cold objectivity as a cadaver on the dissecting table.

According to this critic, the 'chief defect of the author' is that 'he simply does not feel' the Gothic 'spectacle' that he describes.¹¹¹ A significant part of the 'thrill and shudder' that his fictions provoke are due to the profound lack of empathy that they exhibit.

Similarly reptilian descriptions are given to the American works of Charles Brockden Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In his biography of Brown, Prescott also pinpoints the cold-bloodedness of Brown's approach to authorship as one of his central 'defects'.¹¹² He writes that in the passages in Brown's novels which 'exhibit the soul in scenes of [...] fearful strife', we

are coolly invited to investigate its causes and all the various phenomena which attend it; every contingency, probability, nay, possibility, however remote, is discussed and nicely balanced. The heat of the reader is seen to evaporate in this cold-blooded dissection.¹¹³

Correspondingly, in an article published in January 1853 in *The National Magazine*, another critic wrote that in Hawthorne's 'delineations of man and the world', it 'is as if he surveyed both from a distance, calmly and coldly; or if warmly, with only a scientific warmth, such as

¹⁰⁹ 'Modern Prose Fiction', *The Southern Quarterly Review*, April 1849, pp. 41-83 (p. 76).

¹¹⁰ 'Modern Prose Fiction', pp. 76-77.

¹¹¹ 'Modern Prose Fiction', p. 77.

¹¹² Prescott, p. 49.

¹¹³ Prescott, p. 49.

an enthusiastic anatomist might experience in a rare case of dissection'.¹¹⁴ A further critic in an 1860 article in the *New Englander and Yale Review* similarly described Hawthorne's 'merciless dissection of the human heart'.¹¹⁵ As with the article on Lockhart, these studies interrogate the Gothic author's unsettling tendency to treat their subjects as scientific specimens. A vital psychological disconnect between the authors and the harrowing nature of their fiction is ventured as an explanation for their ability to engage, or disengage, with horror so candidly.

The metaphorical alignment of Gothic authors with practitioners of the occult was also prevalent. The terminology used by critics to conflate the Gothic author with this character type was varied, with different synonyms indicating different levels of moral disapprobation. Especially pejorative were the comparisons made between Gothic authorship and necromancy. In a review of *The House of the Seven Gables* published in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* in July 1851, for example, one critic referred to Hawthorne as 'a necromancer'.¹¹⁶ Correspondingly, in an April 1860 review of *The Marble Faun* in *The Atlantic Monthly*, another critic suggested that Hawthorne 'breathed a necromantic life' into his fiction.¹¹⁷ Likewise, Edmund Clarence Stedman claimed that Poe's 'magic was that of a necromancer'.¹¹⁸ In each case, the likening of these authors to wizards who specialise in raising and binding the dead is used to denote a dark maverick quality in their writing. In aligning Gothic authors with black magic, these critics suggest that in writing their fictions (fictions which deal with taboo subjects such as dysfunctional psychologies, violent sexual desires and innate human evil), such writers were meddling with dangerous, forbidden forces to which their readers ought not to be exposed.

In comparison, critical pieces which likened Gothic authors to witches, wizards, magicians and enchanterers tended to be more morally ambiguous. In many instances, the description of an author in these terms was used to denote the highly addictive quality of their writing. Critics often articulated the seductive or siren-like appeal of Gothic fiction by imagining their authors as having cast a spell over the reader. In an article on Ann Radcliffe published in the *New York Illustrated Magazine of Literature and Art*, for example, one critic

¹¹⁴ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, p. 22.

¹¹⁵ 'The Marble Faun', *New Englander and Yale Review*, May 1860, pp. 441-53 (p. 441).

¹¹⁶ 'Review 1', *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, July 1851, pp. 430-31 (p. 431).

¹¹⁷ 'Reviews and Literary Notices: *The Marble Faun*, by N. Hawthorne', *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1860, pp. 509-10 (p. 509).

¹¹⁸ Stedman, p. 118.

described how 'After reading a few chapters the fair authoress lays her spell on you' and nostalgically reminisced that 'Happy days were those when the witchery of Ann Radcliff's spells had me entranced'.¹¹⁹ Correspondingly, a critic in *The New-York Literary Journal* in May 1820 wrote that while Radcliffe's 'spells actually operate, her power is truly magical'.¹²⁰ In both cases, Radcliffe's writing is described as enchanting or even ensnaring the reader, mesmerising and holding them captive with fantastic visions.

Magical terminology was used to the same effect in many critical evaluations of Poe and Hawthorne's American fictions. In an 1879 article published in the *Maine Farmer*, Henry Wentworth Higginson recalled that after reading Poe he 'felt that we had been under the spell of some wizard'.¹²¹ Correspondingly, Edmund Clarence Stedman observed that 'All the materials of the wizard's craft were at his command'.¹²² In July 1851, one critic likewise described the 'witchery' of Hawthorne's 'style' in *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*.¹²³ Similarly, in a July 1850 review of *The Scarlet Letter* in *The North American Review*, Hawthorne is described as 'the master of such a wizard power over language'.¹²⁴ Again, in an October 1874 article in *Scribner's Monthly*, W. C. Wilkinson observed that 'You feel all the time in reading Hawthorne that you are under the spell of a wizard'.¹²⁵ Finally, this metaphor was extended in a May 1860 review of *The Marble Faun* in the *New Englander and Yale Review*, in which a critic stated that 'The singular spell which the accomplished story-teller had contrived to weave round the imagination and feelings of his readers in his previous productions, proved conclusively that the days of "Salem Witchcraft" were not over'.¹²⁶ Comparing the effects of Hawthorne's works to the frenetic atmosphere of the Salem Witch Trials, this critic emphasises the irresistible power of his writing by linking it to a previous event in America's history, during which mass hysteria was linked to the occult. Whilst all of these critics praise the irresistible pull of Gothic fiction, there is

¹¹⁹ G. F. D., 'Ann Radcliffe', *New York Illustrated Magazine of Literature and Art*, 1 January 1847, pp. 167-71 (pp. 170, 168).

¹²⁰ 'On British Novels and Romances, Introductory to a Series of Criticisms on the Living Novelists', *The New-York Literary Journal, and Belles-Lettres Repository*, 15 May 1820, pp. 37-46 (p. 42).

¹²¹ Henry Wentworth Higginson, 'Short Studies in American Authors: II. — Poe', *Maine Farmer*, 3 May 1879, p. 4 (p. 4).

¹²² Stedman, p. 117.

¹²³ A. D. M., p. 286.

¹²⁴ 'The *Scarlet Letter, a Romance*', *The North American Review*, July 1850, pp. 135-49 (p. 147).

¹²⁵ W. C. Wilkinson, 'The Literary and Ethical Quality of George Eliot's Novels', *Scribner's Monthly*, October 1874, pp. 685-703 (p. 701).

¹²⁶ 'The *Marble Faun*', p. 441.

often the underlying insinuation that their consumption might not necessarily be good for the reader. The Gothic is represented more as a guilty pleasure than an enriching or edifying genre.

It is important to note that, unlike most Gothic character types, the designation of Gothic writers as practitioners of the occult was sometimes used to confer an honorary literary status. Commonplace in critical essays on Ann Radcliffe, for instance, are references to the author as 'The Enchantress'. Significantly, Dale Townshend and Angela Wright have drawn a connection between 'the metaphors of magic' that often features in Radcliffe's contemporary reception and the Romantic veneration of 'the powers of original genius'.¹²⁷ In Radcliffe's case, this title was often used to indicate her exemplary status as 'a lone female genius in a pantheon peopled almost entirely by men'.¹²⁸ One anonymous critic claimed in 1824, for example, that 'It has been pretended that original genius belongs not to the female sex; but who has more indisputably possessed that attribute than the enchantress of "Udolpho?"'¹²⁹ Similarly, in a footnote added to his *The Pursuits of Literature* in 1796, T. J. Mathias praised Radcliffe as 'the mighty magician of [...] UDOLPHO', whilst slighting the novels of other female writers.¹³⁰ In this instance, the pointed reversal of Radcliffe's gender is not used to censure her perceived gender deviance, but to elevate her above her female peers. In both of these instances Radcliffe's alignment with a Gothic character type is not used to censure her work or her character, but to participate in a wider intellectual and aesthetic appreciation for her work, which led her to be referred to by Nathan Drake as the 'Shakspeare of Romance Writers' and celebrated by Sir Walter Scott as 'the first poetess of romantic fiction', a title which was revealingly paired with a description of Radcliffe as a 'mighty enchantress'.¹³¹

American critics also tapped into this magical discourse to praise extraordinary literary talent, both British and native. In an article published in *Smith's Weekly Volume for*

¹²⁷ Dale Townshend and Angela Wright, 'Gothic and Romantic Engagements: The Critical Reception of Ann Radcliffe, 1789-1850', in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. by Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 3-32 (pp. 5, 3).

¹²⁸ Townshend and Wright, p. 18.

¹²⁹ 'Authoresses and Autographs, No. II', *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, January 1824, 316-22 (p. 318).

¹³⁰ T. J. Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature: A Satirical Poem in Four Dialogues*, 11th edn (London: T. Becket, 1801), p. 56.

¹³¹ Nathan Drake, *Literary Hours; or Sketches Critical, Narrative, and Poetical*, 3rd edn, 3 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1804), I, 361; Walter Scott, 'Prefatory Memoir to Mrs Ann Radcliffe', in *The Novels of Mrs Ann Radcliffe* (Edinburgh: Border Press, 1824), pp. i-xxxix (pp. iv, vii).

Town & Country in April 1845, for example, one critic referred to Radcliffe as 'the enchantress of Udolpho'.¹³² Radcliffe was likewise described as 'The enchantress' in *Waldie's Select Circulating Library* in April 1834.¹³³

A similar lexicon was also used in relation to Hawthorne's writing. In a May 1864 article in *The Independent*, for instance, one critic mourned that:

The enchanter is dead. His wand is broken. His book is buried with him. The strange, weird, mysterious magic by which he summoned out of nothingness beings clothed with immortality, to be the companions of the race as long as it endures, and the delicious harmonies which waited upon the utterance of his spells, will delight mankind no more.¹³⁴

Correspondingly, in *Littell's Living Age* in February 1891 (in an article republished from the *Edinburgh Review*), another critic argued that Hawthorne was the 'greatest master of the preternatural, the magician of the spell of supernatural awe'.¹³⁵ In all four instances the references to Hawthorne and Radcliffe as '*The Enchanter*', '*The Enchantress*', or '*the magician*' (my emphasis) are used to mark them out as exemplary figures who have occupied a unique position in literary history (despite their genre of choice). I shall return to this positive positioning of certain Gothic authors, especially Hawthorne, in chapter two.

Gothic Mythologies

The gothicised image of the Gothic author was compounded in nineteenth-century criticism by the widespread circulation of Gothic mythologies relating to practitioners of the genre. gothicised narratives about the lives and habits of individual writers were presented in various different ways, from personal anecdotes detailing striking first-hand encounters with an author, to repetitive retellings of popular apocryphal legends. What these narratives all have in common, however, is their tendency to embellish the trends discussed in the first three sections of this chapter. Using the perceived biographical relationship between author and text to paint dubious moral and psychological portraits of Gothic authors, even to the extent that they often conflated them with Gothic character types, these mythologies enforced the conceptualisation of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects in the cultural

¹³² 'Mrs. Radcliffe', *Smith's Weekly Volume for Town & Country*, 9 April 1845, pp. 238-40 (p. 240).

¹³³ 'Article 1', *Waldie's Select Circulating Library*, 22 April 1834, pp. 241-56 (p. 247).

¹³⁴ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Independent*, 26 May 1864, p. 4 (p.4).

¹³⁵ 'American Fiction', *Littell's Living Age*, 28 February 1891, pp. 515-33 (p. 525).

imagination by assimilating their fictional works as part of a larger, supposedly *true* Gothic story.

A British Gothic author who attracted more than his fair share of cultural myth making in both Britain and America was William Beckford. This was no doubt partially encouraged by the author's infamy outside of his literary reputation. The stories surrounding his erection of the tower at Fonthill Abbey and his vast wealth, for example, are indisputably rooted in fact. It is likely, however, that the perceived parallels between these aspects of Beckford's life and *Vathek's* notorious plotline led to an increased desire to construct further mythologies around them. In a November 1883 article in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, for example, 'THE AUTHOR OF "VATHEK"' is remembered as 'a sort of mysterious personage' who was rumoured to live 'a sort of hermit's life, secluded in luxurious retirement' amid the 'wealth and the splendor' of Fonthill.¹³⁶ By using 'VATHEK' as an initial identification label for Beckford, before going on to describe his 'luxurious' lifestyle, the critic implicitly invites the reader to compare fiction and reality. In another article republished in *Littell's Living Age* from *Temple Bar* in July 1871, an apocryphal anecdote about Beckford, in which he punishes two unfortunate gentlemen for trespassing on his property, similarly begins by introducing him as 'the author of "Vathek"'.¹³⁷ In the following narrative, the critic describes how,

when Beckford was living in gorgeous seclusion at Fonthill, two gentleman, who were more curious to spy into the glories of the place, because strangers were forbidden, climbed the park walls at dusk, and on alighting within the prohibited inclosure, found themselves in the presence of the lord of the place. Beckford awed them by his proud condescension. He politely dragged them through all the splendours of his palace, and then, with cruel courtesy, made them dine with him. When the night was advanced, he took his involuntary guests into the park, bidding them adieu with the remark, that as they had found their way in they might find their way out.¹³⁸

Again, Beckford's self-imposed isolation, combined with Fonthill's picturesque architecture, affords the author and his home the status of living folklore. In this darkly humorous tale, Beckford's legendary home exerts a fascination precisely because it is 'forbidden'. Like a typical haunted house or Gothic mansion, those who are foolhardy enough to trespass within the 'prohibited inclosure' are terrorised and persecuted to appease the 'grim humor'

¹³⁶ 'Miscellany', *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, November 1883, pp. 715-21 (p. 716).

¹³⁷ 'Charles Young and his Times', *Littell's Living Age*, 29 July 1871, pp. 298-305 (p. 304).

¹³⁸ 'Charles Young and his Times', p. 304.

of its eccentric and villainous owner.¹³⁹ By attaching this tale of perversely tyrannical hospitality and 'cruel' humiliation to the already iconic property, this apocryphal story embellishes the basic mythology of seclusion and decadence surrounding Beckford and Fonthill by providing another quasi- or mock-Gothic narrative to accompany it.

The similarities between the architectural centrepieces of Beckford's personal and literary lives no doubt created considerable scope for imaginative cross-fertilisation between the two in journalistic accounts of the author's exploits. Descriptions of Beckford's famed construction of the tower at Fonthill, for example, are often accompanied by retellings of a popular myth in which his response to the collapse of his first attempt at building it was simply to remark on the pleasure taken in seeing the structure crumble spectacularly to the ground. In a December 1864 article in the *Dollar Monthly Magazine*, for instance, one critic wrote that when 'a violent gale of wind brought the vast structure to the ground', Beckford 'merely' remarked that 'he should have been glad to witness the fall of such a mass of materials'.¹⁴⁰ In a June 1844 article in *Campbell's Foreign Semi-Monthly Magazine*, we encounter a similar retelling of the same story. In this version, however, Beckford's project is thwarted by fire rather than wind. The critic narrates how 'The owner, [...] so far from suffering annoyance from the accident, enjoyed the burning crest, as a sublime spectacle, regardless of the fact that what the flames were devouring would cost a fortune to repair'.¹⁴¹ In both versions, Beckford's seemingly counterintuitive enjoyment of this 'spectacle' paints him in a luridly maniacal light. His perverse delight in a gratuitous, albeit impressive scene of destruction is used to maintain the long established image of the author as self-destructive, transgressive and idolatrous (much like *Vathek's* protagonist).

Amongst the apocryphal stories that have been attached to American Gothic authors, some have assumed an almost canonical status. They were so commonly repeated in essays and reviews that they began to shape the way in which individual authors were viewed by the public. Although their veracity could not be proven fully (something that was often tacitly alluded to by critics), they came to constitute the version of the author with which readers were most familiarly acquainted. With regards to Nathaniel Hawthorne, these stories tended to contribute to the image of the author as an eccentric misanthrope. It was

¹³⁹ 'Charles Young and his Times', p. 304.

¹⁴⁰ 'Freaks of a Millionaire', *Dollar Monthly Magazine*, December 1864, pp. 431-34 (p. 431).

¹⁴¹ 'Obituary', *Campbell's Foreign Semi-Monthly Magazine*, 16 June 1844, pp. 285-88 (p. 286).

often the case, for example, that articles on Hawthorne referred to his reputedly odd behaviour during his residence at the Old Manse in Concord. According to this popular narrative, Hawthorne's neighbours were both fascinated and disconcerted by his reclusive habits. In a July 1881 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, George H. Holden described the author as the 'recluse dweller of the ancient parsonage' and related how 'Hawthorne, when he first dwelt at the Old Manse, had made a singular impression upon the villagers, among whom a report was current that this man Hawthorne was somewhat uncanny — in point of fact, not altogether sane'.¹⁴² Similarly, in a footnote attached to an August 1853 article in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, another critic described how,

When occupying the Old Manse, Mr. Hawthorne is said to have been, to his neighbours, as much a phantom and a fable as the old parson of the parish, dead half a century before, whose faded portrait in the attic was gradually rejoining its original in native dust.¹⁴³

Other, less extensive retellings of this myth include a description of the "'grave gray eyes" of the silent man of the "old manse"' in a July 1871 article in *The Independent*, a depiction of 'the weird Hawthorne, himself a shade', who 'flits through the [...] the Old Manse' in a January 1853 article in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, and a reference to the author as being 'a phantom to his neighbours' in a February 1891 article republished from *The Edinburgh Review* in *Littell's Living Age*.¹⁴⁴ Hawthorne's refusal to integrate into his local community is repeatedly gothicised by references to his ghostliness. He is envisioned as an ethereal, haunting presence in Concord, made visible by his conspicuous invisibility. All of these accounts represent the author as having been absorbed into the fabric of local supernatural folklore, occupying a similar legendary position within the rural New England community to the 'fable' of the 'old parson of the parish' (a ghost story which Hawthorne himself alludes to in his introduction to *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846)).

Although the gothicised stories relating to Hawthorne's reputation during his enigmatic tenancy at the Old Manse were the most high profile in literary criticism, various other stages of Hawthorne's life were similarly dogged by narratives surrounding his

¹⁴² George H. Holden, 'Hawthorne among his Friends', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, July 1881, pp. 260-67 (p. 263).

¹⁴³ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, p. 482.

¹⁴⁴ J. H. M., 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Independent*, 20 July 1871, p. 6 (p. 6); 'Homes of American Authors', *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American literature, Science and Art*, January 1853, pp. 23-30 (p. 30); 'American Fiction', *Littell's Living Age*, p. 524.

allegedly odd and reclusive behaviour. As early as his student years at Bowdoin College in Maine (which he attended from 1821 to 1825), for instance, he is rumoured to have lived in self-imposed isolation from his classmates. This narrative is related in a May 1876 article in *Scribner's Monthly* by George Thomas Packard, who writes that 'The author's college life was prophetic of the after years, when he so dwelt apart from the mass of men'.¹⁴⁵ Packard describes how 'When the class was graduated Hawthorne could not be persuaded to join them in having their profiles cut in paper [...]; nor did he take part in the Commencement exercises'.¹⁴⁶ Hawthorne's strange refusal to have his profile 'cut in paper' alongside his associates is emphasised by the fact that the original graduation day profiles of several of the more noteworthy alumni are reproduced on the same page of the article. Given Hawthorne's prominent and widely celebrated national status as an author at the time of the article's publication, his surprising absence from this visual record of the college's history affords him an even ghostlier presence on the page than the gallery of old and ethereal silhouettes.

More explicitly gothicised narratives were repeatedly circulated about Hawthorne's reportedly nocturnal and antisocial behaviour in his hometown of Salem, Massachusetts (to which he returned and lived in purported solitude after his time at Bowdoin). In an October 1864 article in *The North American Review*, for example, one critic observed that 'Stories still float in the social gossip of the town' about 'the young recluse who walked by night'.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, in an October 1872 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, R. H. Stoddard wrote that the author

never mingled with the society of Salem, but remained within-doors during the day, and rambled about in the evening. He was averse to going out in the daytime unless there was a gathering in the streets, a muster, a political meeting, or a fire. Fires were a great attraction to him, provided he could watch them unobserved in some dark corner.¹⁴⁸

In this account, Hawthorne's nocturnal preferences are twinned with the unsettling insinuations that he was also a voyeur and a pyromaniac. He essentially occupies the role of Salem's resident bogeyman, a figure who lurks unseen in corners and delights, like Beckford, in spectacles of destruction. Even Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (a friend of Hawthorne's who

¹⁴⁵ George Thomas Packard, 'Bowdoin College', *Scribner's Monthly*, May 1876, pp. 47-61 (p. 52).

¹⁴⁶ Packard, p. 52.

¹⁴⁷ 'The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne', p. 544.

¹⁴⁸ R. H. Stoddard, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, October 1872, pp. 683-97 (pp. 688-89).

would later become his sister-in-law) wrote in a March 1838 review of *Twice-told Tales* in the *New-Yorker* that:

We have heard that the author of these tales has lived the life of a recluse; that the inhabitants of his native town have never been able to catch a glimpse of his person; that he is not seen at any time in the walks of men.¹⁴⁹

These apocryphal Gothic stories also found their way into accounts of Hawthorne's later life at the Red Cottage in Lenox, Massachusetts, where he moved with his family in 1850.

George H. Holden, for example, wrote that, 'Hawthorne lived in great retirement at Lenox, and is to this day referred to by the villagers as "the silent man"'.¹⁵⁰

Amongst American Gothic authors, Poe is perhaps the most mythologised figure of the nineteenth century. The perception of Poe 'wrought by Griswold as a well-nigh Satanic creature: evil, half deranged, and grim' has been widely acknowledged as the primary critical origin of Poe's sensationalised afterlife, and does not require further examination.¹⁵¹ Instead, the following paragraphs will explore two first-hand accounts by writers who purported to defend him from Griswold's defamatory memoir. These accounts were both written by literary individuals who claimed to have been personally acquainted with Poe during his lifetime. They describe especially intimate or affecting encounters with the author and provide vivid descriptions of the impressions and emotions that these encounters provoked. The most interesting aspect of these accounts however, is the surprisingly gothicised image of Poe that they ultimately preserve. Whilst they endeavour to paint him in a predominantly sympathetic and human light, they often simultaneously appear to contradict themselves by re-affirming the Griswoldian mythos that they claim to refute.

This contradictory preservation of the Griswoldian mythos is enacted in both accounts through their seemingly counter-intuitive reliance upon Gothic conventions. The first, a piece published in *Scribner's Monthly* in March 1878 and elegiacally entitled 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', recounts the reminiscences of an anonymous female poet who claims to have struck up an intimate personal friendship with Poe in Richmond during the last weeks of his life. In the closing paragraph of the poet's account, she calls upon her 'actual

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, 'Twice-told Tales', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by John L. Idol, Jr. and Buford Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 29-34 (p. 30).

¹⁵⁰ Holden, p. 262.

¹⁵¹ Benjamin F. Fisher, 'Introduction', in *Poe in his Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of his Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, ed. by Benjamin F. Fisher (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. xi-xxvi (p. xix).

personal knowledge of Poe' to legitimate her rejection of Griswold's monstrous depiction of the author, insisting that 'in the picture presented to us by Dr. Griswold, — half maniac, half demon, — I confess, I cannot recognize a trait of the gentle, grateful, warm-hearted man whom I saw amid his friends'.¹⁵² This repudiation of Griswold's gothicisation of Poe is problematised throughout the preceding content of the article, however, by the narrative devices and tropes used to present the intense nature of the poet's relationship with the author, and to evoke the mystery and pathos surrounding his death.

In the opening section of the article, the poet recalls that as 'A shy and dreamy girl, scarcely more than a child, I had all my life taken an interest in those strange stories and poems of Edgar Poe'.¹⁵³ She is first introduced to him through his 'strange' works, which spark an interest in the man behind them and lead her to contemplations about his character:

Who was Edgar A. Poe? My idea of him was then, and for years after, as other productions of his pen met my eye, that of a mysterious being in human shape, yet gifted with a power more than human; a something of weird beauty and despairing sadness, touched with a vague suspicion of evil which inspired in me a sense of dread, mingled with compassion.¹⁵⁴

This introductory passage has a dual significance. First, by explaining how her 'idea' of Poe as a 'mysterious', superhuman and potentially 'evil' being was initially established by reading the 'productions of his pen', she corroborates the popular critical conceptualisation, encouraged by the biographical school of criticism, of the Gothic author as a necessarily Gothic subject. Her youthful, gothicised imaginings about Poe are fed by the content of his fiction. Second, from the start of her account, the unnamed poet appears to write herself into a Gothic narrative in which she and Poe are the central protagonists. Despite the fact that her personal acquaintance with the author is isolated to a very minimal period of time much later in her life, she endeavours to establish a profound connection between them that predates their official meeting. The author is an object of fascination for the poet since the days of her early youth, tacitly implying that their future meeting is in some way fated or predestined. Furthermore, her depiction of Poe as a creature 'of weird beauty and despairing sadness', who filled her with a 'sense of dread, mingled with compassion', immediately positions him in a narrative role which is highly reminiscent of the sinister, yet

¹⁵² 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', *Scribner's Monthly*, March 1878, pp. 707-16 (p. 715).

¹⁵³ 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', p. 708.

¹⁵⁴ 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', p. 707.

irresistably charismatic Gothic anti-hero, possibly in the darkly romantic vein of Emily Brontë's Heathcliff or Maturin's Melmoth. He is the troubling yet undeniably attractive figure who encroaches (albeit through his writing) on her childhood innocence. Although the relationship which is later established between the two writers is entirely platonic, the poet's experience of simultaneous attraction and repulsion in her youthful response to Poe sets the conflicted and romanticised tone for the Gothic elements of the narrative that are to follow.

When reminiscing about her friendship with Poe in later years, the poet describes how her fanciful childhood imaginings about him were corrected by his gentlemanly, yet shy and benignly eccentric, nature. Despite the considerable effort that she expends upon dispelling these egregious impressions, however, this character portrait is disrupted by the gothicised counter-narrative which emerges at several intervals in her story. In one of the more extended Gothic set pieces, the poet recalls an occasion when, out walking one day, she and Poe visited 'the "Hermitage," the old deserted seat of the Mayo family, where he had, in his youth, been a frequent visitor'.¹⁵⁵ She describes how Poe was deeply affected by the decay and ruin to which the building had succumbed:

Entering the deserted house, he passed from room to room with a grave, abstracted look [...] The light of the setting sun shone through the drooping ivy-boughs into the ghostly room, and the tattered and mildewed paper-hangings, with their faded tracery of rose garlands, waved fitfully in the autumn breeze. An inexpressibly eerie feeling came over me, which I can even now recall, and, as I stood there, my old childish idea of the poet as a spirit of mingled light and darkness, recurred strongly to my imagination. I have never forgotten that scene, or the impression of the moment.¹⁵⁶

This passage is saturated with Gothic imagery, from the 'mildewed' decor to the atmospheric backdrop of the 'setting sun'. On a basic level, the room is a 'ghostly' revenant for Poe, reminding him of happier days gone by. From the poet's perspective, however, Poe himself is the most spectral presence in this scene. The 'grave, abstracted' version of him that the poet witnesses at this moment signals the return of the Gothic figure — the 'spirit of mingled light and darkness' — that haunted her childhood imagination. The Gothic atmosphere of the abandoned house seems designed not only to enhance the pathos of

¹⁵⁵ 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', p. 712.

¹⁵⁶ 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', p. 712.

Poe's nostalgia, but to accompany the 'eerie feeling' that this uncanny return of the subject of her youthful obsession provokes.

As Kirsten Møllegaard has noted, 'the strange circumstances' surrounding Poe's 'death' have 'been the subject of intense debate and speculation'.¹⁵⁷ Playing a significant role in the construction of the Gothic mythos surrounding Poe's life, it is both surprising and revealing that the poet's article, which also turns to a Gothic discourse to narrate the circumstances of Poe's death, acts as a contemporary source for the kind of speculation that Møllegaard describes. In the poet's account, the build up to Poe's mysterious demise is carefully choreographed, for example, through the inclusion of quasi-preternatural foreshadowings. When describing her final meeting with Poe, for example, she recalls that:

He was the last of the party to leave the house. We were standing on the portico, and after going a few steps he paused, turned, and again lifted his hat, in a last adieu. At the moment, a brilliant meteor appeared in the sky directly over his head, and vanished in the east. We commented laughingly upon the incident; but I remembered it sadly afterward.¹⁵⁸

In this account, the meteor is clearly designed to be interpreted as a death omen, marking Poe out as the doomed, tragic figure of popular legend. In the same vein, the poet goes on to include an account of her own whereabouts during Poe's final days. She claims that whilst nursing a dying friend, she took some respite during the middle of the night in reading a manuscript of one of Poe's unpublished poems, recently gifted to her by his sister. The poet recalls that, 'These strange prophetic lines I read at midnight, while the lifeless body of my friend lay in an adjoining chamber, and the awful shadow of death weighed almost forebodingly upon my spirit'.¹⁵⁹ Although she is not with Poe at the time of his passing, her knowledge of the event is uncannily adumbrated by his presence, via the proxy of his 'prophetic' verses, in another chamber of death.

Another conflictingly gothicised recollection of Poe is to be found in a February 1863 article in the *Sixpenny Magazine* by the American women's rights activist Mary Gove Nichols. In her description of her first meeting with Poe, Nichols lays a great emphasis upon the 'taste and gentility' of his 'cottage'.¹⁶⁰ She asserts that 'so charming a dwelling I never saw', and takes great care to note such details as the 'floor of the kitchen' being as 'white as

¹⁵⁷ Kirsten Møllegaard, 'Fame After Life: The Mystery of Edgar Allan Poe's Death', *Folklore (Estonia)*, 65 (2016), 129-50 (pp. 144, 135).

¹⁵⁸ 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', p. 714.

¹⁵⁹ 'Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', p. 714.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Gove Nichols, 'Reminiscences of Edgar Poe', in *Poe in his Own Time*, ed. by Fisher, pp. 210-16 (p. 211).

wheaten flour' and the 'check matting' adorning the 'sitting-room floor'.¹⁶¹ Everything in this description suggests an environment that is neat, clean and fresh. Poe's domestic life is portrayed as healthy and well ordered. It is also presented as a reflection of his character, with Nichols surmising that the 'taste and gentility' she remembers 'must have been lent to' the cottage 'by the presence of its inmates'.¹⁶² The tranquillity and wholesomeness of this domestic scene is a far cry from the Griswoldian mythos surrounding Poe's frenzied and disordered personal life.

However, any posthumous rehabilitation of Poe's reputation that this idyllic scene might have afforded is complicated by the troubling incident that Nichols claims to have witnessed upon her arrival at the cottage:

On the occasion of this my first visit to the poet, I was a good deal plagued — Poe had somehow caught a full-grown bob-o'-link. He had put him in a cage, which he had hung on a nail driven into the trunk of a cherry-tree. The poor bird was as unfit to live in a cage as his captor was to live in the world. He was as restless as his jailer, and sprang continually in a fierce, frightened way, from one side of the cage to the other. I pitied him, but Poe was bent on training him. There he stood, with his arms crossed before the tormented bird, his sublime trust in attaining the impossible apparent in his whole self.¹⁶³

At the very least, this account of Poe's wilful, needlessly distressing and delusively futile attempt to capture and train the terrified bird carries the implication of disturbing psychological impulses. On another, more traditionally Gothic level, however, Poe's attempt to imprison the previously free and innocent bird evokes the cruelty and sadism of the archetypal Gothic villain, a theme that is revisited countless times in incarnations of the genre from Walpole to Emily Brontë. Like the unnamed poet, Nichols insists that despite his mild eccentricities, Poe was fundamentally 'a gentleman'.¹⁶⁴ These protestations are once again called into question, however, by the intensity of the gothicised anecdote with which they compete. Although these accounts offer a more flattering appraisal of Poe's nature than Griswold's brutal character assassination, they nonetheless play their own part in perpetuating the Gothic mythology that it originated.

¹⁶¹ Nichols, p. 211.

¹⁶² Nichols, p. 211.

¹⁶³ Nichols, p. 210.

¹⁶⁴ Nichols, p. 216.

Conclusion

Collectively, the examples that have been examined in this chapter illustrate a major trend in nineteenth-century attitudes towards Gothic authorship. Whilst the biographical approach to literary criticism cast authorship in general in a deeply personal light, it held a particular significance when applied to the Gothic, with texts belonging to the genre almost invariably held up as unflattering mirrors of those who wrote them. Conflated with their own (often disturbing) protagonists, diagnosed with deviant psychologies, portrayed as villainous Gothic figures, and even woven into their own sensational Gothic mythologies, Gothic authors were faced with the prospect of being represented to the public as living embodiments of a mode of writing which took the darker, most dysfunctional aspects of life as its primary focus. Associated with negative qualities from insanity and misanthropy to psychopathy and inhumanity, they were cast as societal outcasts and degenerates.

Whilst this investigation has highlighted the transatlantic prevalence of the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship, the following three chapters interrogate its particular significance within the context of nineteenth-century America. As we have seen at various points throughout this chapter, particularly in the positive references to Hawthorne and Radcliffe's work and the simultaneous rehabilitation and gothicisation of Poe's reputation in the accounts by Mary Gove Nichols and the author of 'The Last Days of Edgar A. Poe', the presentation of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects was not always straightforwardly negative. In the following chapter, I examine the particular conditions under which American critics demonstrated a strategic reticence about reading Gothic works as an index of their author's character. Specifically, I explore critical attempts to diminish the Gothic persona attributed to Nathaniel Hawthorne as part of a literary nationalist campaign to legitimate his status as a central figure in America's emerging literary canon.

Chapter 2: American Literary Nationalism and the De-Gothicisation of Nathaniel Hawthorne

Introduction

Whilst the attribution of Gothic identities to Gothic writers was a commonplace of the biographically-inflected criticism of the nineteenth century, there were certain authors whom critics were reluctant to implicate in this discourse. This chapter investigates the circumstances that encouraged the suspension of the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship. Following a brief transatlantic examination of the cultural factors which galvanised critics to safeguard Ann Radcliffe's reputation, the main body of this chapter uses the contemporary reception of Nathaniel Hawthorne's career to argue that literary nationalism was the primary driving force behind the rejection of this discourse within the context of nineteenth-century America. In a cultural climate fraught with anxieties about the perceived lack of a successful and authentic national literature, American critics throughout the nineteenth century were frequently on the look-out for writers who were capable of transforming the nation's literary fortunes. When Hawthorne became widely recognised as a nationally significant figure, however, this literary breakthrough was jeopardised by the personal, and by extension national, stigma attached to the Gothicism of his writing.

Referring to a range of contemporary sources, this chapter demonstrates that critics strategically negotiated this problematic disjuncture between Hawthorne's Gothicism and nationalism by playing down or justifying the Gothic content of his fiction and fiercely denying that it stemmed from psychological or moral failings. In order to consolidate the argument that Hawthorne's exemption from the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship was motivated by a literary nationalist agenda, the final section of this chapter examines the disparity between the critical treatment of Hawthorne and other Gothic writers whose works were deemed to play a less pivotal role in the development of America's national canon. Whilst these pieces typically refute the possibility that the Gothic elements in Hawthorne's supposedly authentic American masterpieces could be a reflection of his life and character, they simultaneously interpret the works of other writers, especially Edgar Allan Poe, as indicting self-portraits.

Why Nathaniel Hawthorne?

Nathaniel Hawthorne's enduring canonical status has generated significant critical dissatisfaction. Held up in seminal studies (most influentially F. O. Matthiessen's) as one of the central figures in America's so-called literary Renaissance, Hawthorne's presumed stature, in conjunction with a similarly heavy focus on other white, male writers, such as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and Melville, has rightly been diagnosed as being representative of a restrictively patriarchal and racially un-diverse approach to American literary history.¹ In order to rectify this distorted understanding of the nineteenth-century American literary landscape, a considerable body of scholarship has been carried out to recover the voices of writers whose significance has been underappreciated, or even erased. As a result of this valuable work by critics including Jane Tompkins, Lena Hill, Dorri Beam and Emily Miller Burdick, many previously sidelined female and African American authors have taken their place alongside what Philip Gould has described as the 'elite coterie of literary kingpins' to reveal an American literary culture that was more diverse and complex than has previously been acknowledged.²

My decision to use Hawthorne's perceived national significance during the nineteenth century as the foundation for this chapter's argument does not reflect a rejection of the importance of this on-going recovery work. The purpose of this study is not to suggest that Hawthorne ought to be considered the most nationally representative American writer of the period, to make any judgements upon the moral or aesthetic value of his writing, or to endorse the canonical status that he has consistently been afforded. I have focused specifically upon Hawthorne's nineteenth-century critical reception because the clear friction between nationalist admiration for his work and discomfort about its Gothicism in numerous essays and reviews provides valuable insights into the role that the gothicisation of the Gothic author played in shaping cultural anxieties surrounding American national identity during this period.

¹ F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941; repr. 1968).

² Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Lena Hill, *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the American Literary Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Dorri Beam, *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Emily Miller Burdick, *Engendering Romance: Women Writers and the Hawthorne Tradition 1850-1990* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); Philip Gould, *Covenant and Republic: Historical Romance and the Politics of Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

Critical Counter-Narratives to the Gothic Author as Gothic Subject

Despite the ubiquity of critical pieces which enforced the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship, the understanding of the Gothic author as a Gothic subject was by no means universally accepted. On the contrary, there were many essays and reviews in which critics pointedly attempted to condemn the automatic assumption that Gothic fictions revealed sordid autobiographical truths. Often, the opposition to the gothicisation of the Gothic author in these pieces appears to have been motivated by a scepticism towards the biographical model of literary analysis itself. In July 1844, for example, an article by the English journalist, Cyrus Redding, entitled 'Recollections of the Author of "Vathek"', was republished in the American periodical *The New World* (it had previously appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* the preceding month). At the beginning of the article, which recalls a number of personal anecdotes relating to Redding's own acquaintance with William Beckford, there is some ambiguity surrounding his attitude towards the author's widely sensationalised reputation. Redding begins by noting that the Gothic mythos which surrounded Beckford's earlier life at Fonthill Abbey continued to engulf him during his subsequent residence in Bath's Lansdown Crescent, where he moved in 1822:

Some there were who thought he passed his time in working incantations, like his own Caliph. Surmises were current about a brood of dwarves that vegetated in an apartment built over the archway connecting his two houses. The vulgar, poor and rich alike, gave a sort of half credit to cabalistical monstrosities invoked in that apartment.³

By the end of the article, however, this hyperbolically gothicised introduction has been repeatedly undermined. When, by rare fortune, Redding (a great fan of *Vathek*) is unexpectedly invited into Beckford's home, a series of revelatory conversations with his literary idol lead him to realise that there is far less biographical crossover between the author and his fiction than he had previously assumed. Like many others (as we saw in the previous chapter), Redding is especially curious to learn about Beckford's architectural projects and their possible connection with *Vathek*'s tower. When he tries to draw Beckford out on this presumed autobiographical link between 'the tower of the Caliph' and the towers that he built at Fonthill and Lansdown Crescent, however, Beckford cheerfully, yet firmly, informs him that he favours towers simply because he has 'extraordinary sight' and is

³ Cyrus Redding, 'English Magazines: Recollections of the Author of *Vathek*', *The New World*, 13 July 1844, pp. 38-42 (pp. 38-39).

'partial to glancing over a wide horizon'.⁴ Later, when Redding questions Beckford about the 'wall' that he had infamously built 'round Fonthill', Beckford (wise to the Gothic insinuations of the question) responds that, contrary to the rumours that he 'built the wall' to 'cut myself wholly off from mankind', he had actually had it erected because he is 'fond of animals' and wished to protect them from being hunted for sport on his grounds.⁵ To a large extent, Redding's recollections act as a moral fable, or cautionary tale, against making the hasty and reductive assumption that an author's life will be mirrored in their works. Apparently ashamed of his own implication in this model of reading, and by the baseless and vulgar prurience that it encouraged him to indulge in, Redding uses his account to demythologise Beckford, allowing him to emerge as a quiet and amiable man with a taste for natural landscapes and an interest in wildlife conservation, rather than a dangerous misanthrope obsessed with dabbling in the forbidden arts.

Amongst British Gothic writers, Ann Radcliffe emerges as a figure whom critics were especially reluctant to treat as a Gothic subject. This was largely due to the absence of what L. Andrew Cooper has termed 'Gothic threats' in her novels.⁶ As Cooper observes, many British critics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were apprehensive about the Gothic's 'generative potential' to corrupt youthful and female readers, encourage a resurgence in archaic supernatural beliefs, and incite dangerous revolutionary ideologies (a fear that was particularly acute in the wake of the French Revolution).⁷ Despite Radcliffe's treatment by many recent critics, including Ellen Arnold and Kate Ferguson Ellis, as a subversive, proto-feminist icon, her Gothic narratives, which incorporated what Cooper glosses as the 'explained supernatural, a critique of sensibility, and warnings against the influences of other kinds of Gothic romance', encouraged many contemporary reviewers to praise her work for what David Durant and Robert Miles have respectively described as its 'philosophically traditional' or 'reassuringly orthodox' values.⁸ As James Watt has observed,

⁴ Redding, p. 40.

⁵ Redding, p. 41.

⁶ L. Andrew Cooper, 'Gothic Threats: The Role of Danger in the Critical Evaluation of *The Monk* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*', *Gothic Studies*, 8.2 (November 2006), 18-34 (p. 19).

⁷ Cooper, p. 18.

⁸ Ellen Arnold, 'Deconstructing the Patriarchal Palace: Ann Radcliffe's Poetry in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*', *Women and Language*, 19.2 (Fall 1996), 21-29; Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Cooper, pp. 29-30; David Durant, 'Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 22.3 (Summer 1982), 519-30 (p. 519); Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 16.

conservative critics were particularly complimentary of Radcliffe's use of the explained supernatural, 'drawing attention to the parallel between credulity or superstition and revolutionary idealism, and implicitly equating rationalizing explanation with a recovery of the rule of law'.⁹ Devoid of sustained supernatural plotlines, libidinous overtones, or potentially incendiary mob scenes (such as the much-censured moment in *The Monk* where Matthew Lewis depicted a corrupt mother superior literally being torn to pieces in the street by angry protestors), Radcliffe's supposedly status quo-upholding works were welcomed as a safe, or 'contaminant-free' alternative to the perilously disruptive creations of other Gothic writers.¹⁰

The critical approbation that Radcliffe's Gothic novels received was frequently accompanied by a conscientious campaign to divest her of the matching Gothic identity that was routinely stamped onto practitioners of the genre. This campaign often took the form of character portraits designed to disassociate Radcliffe from the discourse of gender deviance that was repeatedly used to explain the unhealthy or unnatural origins of Gothic texts. Far from painting Radcliffe's mind in masculine or hermaphroditic terms, many critics presented her as a shining exemplar of true womanhood. In his 'Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe', which was attached to her posthumously published novel *Gaston de Blondville* (1826), for example, Thomas Talfourd observed that:

during a period, in which the spirit of personality has extended its influence, till it has rendered the habits and conversations of authors almost as public as their compositions, she confined herself, with delicate apprehensiveness, to the circle of domestic duties and pleasures.¹¹

Explicitly referring to the biographical school of criticism and the dangers that its invasively investigative stance posed to the public reputations of authors, Talfourd praised Radcliffe's life, and by extension her work, on the grounds that there was nothing incriminating to be discovered about her retiring and entirely gender normative lifestyle. In addition to laying an emphasis upon the fact that Radcliffe was 'minutely attentive to household affairs', Talfourd also devoted a section of his biographical sketch to debunking the gothicised rumours which had sprung up around the permanent hiatus that she had taken from

⁹ James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; repr. 2004), p. 116.

¹⁰ Cooper, p. 29.

¹¹ Thomas Talfourd, 'A Memoir of the Author, with Extracts from the Journals', in *Gaston de Blondville; or, The Court of Henry III*, 4 vols (Philadelphia, PA: H. C. Carey and I. Lea, 1826), I, 3-83 (p. 3).

professional authorship following the publication of *The Italian* in 1797.¹² Defending Radcliffe against the 'absurd report' that, 'haunted by the images of fear, with which she had thrilled her readers, she had sunk into a state of mental alienation', Talfourd even included a statement from her physician, Dr. Scudamore, attesting to the fact that she 'enjoyed a remarkably cheerful state of mind; and no one was further removed from "mental desolation," as has been so improperly described of the latter part of her life'.¹³

The positive image of Radcliffe as a paragon of feminine virtue prevailed well into the nineteenth century. In fact, her longstanding association with traditional domestic values was often adopted by American critics who were keen to vindicate her writing. In an article published in *Appleton's Journal* in 1871, for example, Henry T. Tuckerman approvingly remembered her as someone who 'never enjoyed any literary society of note', 'lived secluded from the fashionable world', and 'was thoroughly domestic in her habits'.¹⁴ Her writing is even presented as a testament to her devotion to married life: a hobby which she took up to amuse herself whilst 'sitting by the fire through the long, lonely evenings, waiting for her husband, whose editorial labors often detained him far into the night'.¹⁵ Radcliffe is similarly represented in *The United States Review and Literary Gazette* in April 1827 as a woman who was 'satisfied with the quiet occupations and enjoyments of domestic life' and who possessed 'a full relish for the snugness and quiet of home'.¹⁶ In *Smith's Weekly Volume for Town & Country* in April 1845, she is likewise described as being 'minutely attentive to her domestic duties', despite the 'fanciful and imaginative style of' her 'writings'.¹⁷ Correspondingly, in an article that appeared in June 1850 in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Radcliffe's wholesome domesticity is affirmed through an emphasis upon her rumoured enthusiasm for culinary matters. According to the critic, she 'prided herself on making the most delicious puddings, and the best *Kecks-captain* eaten in Lincoln', and took a considerable interest in 'every imaginable receipt', from, 'gooseberry-tarts' and 'pastries', to 'the secrets of anchovy sauce, ginger and nutmeg'.¹⁸ Aware of Radcliffe's gothicisation in less complimentary articles, the critic even satirises this rival discourse by sardonically

¹² Talfourd, p. 62.

¹³ Talfourd, pp. 60, 60, 66.

¹⁴ Henry T. Tuckerman, 'Literature of Fiction: II. Female Novelists', *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, 21 October 1871, pp. 455-59 (p. 457).

¹⁵ 'Literature of Fiction: II. Female Novelists', p. 457.

¹⁶ 'Review', *The United States Review and Literary Gazette*, April 1827, pp. 1-8 (pp. 3-4).

¹⁷ 'Mrs. Radcliffe', *Smith's Weekly Volume for Town & Country*, 9 April 1845, pp. 238-40 (p. 239).

¹⁸ 'Selected Sketch: Amusing Anecdote of Anne Radcliffe', *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 June 1850, p. 4 (p. 4).

commenting that, despite writing about 'frightful apparitions' in her novels, 'the only dream Mrs. Radcliffe had' at night 'was about a fight between one of her rabbits and her favorite hen, and the ghost of some weasels in the pantry where she kept her provisions'.¹⁹

Determined to entirely diffuse all of the 'malicious suppositions' (generated by 'the lowest journalists in London') that Radcliffe was a 'sorceress', an 'Emmenide', a 'harp who lived upon corpses and drank blood out of brass cups', or even, revealingly, a 'blue-stocking', this critic goes on to ridicule the biographical school of literary criticism.²⁰ He does this, as the title of the article suggests, by telling an 'Amusing Anecdote of Anne Radcliffe'. In this apocryphal tale, Radcliffe, who has ceased publishing Gothic romances following the insulting comparisons made between her work and Matthew Lewis's, and because of the gothicised character portraits that had been used to smear her in the press, is duly surprised to hear that a new Gothic romance is being published under her name. After some investigation, Radcliffe traces this literary fraud to a young, aspiring author named Robert Will. When she goes to confront the imposter, however, she is amused to encounter the following scene:

Mr. Robert Will, like young authors of all countries, lived in a garret. Anne Radcliffe ascended, step by step, very softly, until she came to the apartment, whose walls were hung in black, and decorated with relics of heraldry, bones and death's heads; on one side of the room was a sand-glass, on an empty coffin, and on the other a table, on which were crossed a scythe and poignard.

Leaning on a table of black wood, sat a young man, in a monk's dress, writing by the light of two sepulchral lamps, and the vacillating and bluish flames of the spirits of wine which were burning in a bronze vase. Anne Radcliffe smiled at the infernal phantasmagoria, evident marks of a barren imagination which sought to fertilize itself by the sight of external objects; and recalled her little mahogany table, and her light and cheerful cabinet in which she composed her works.²¹

The supposed connection between Gothic lifestyles and Gothic authorship is gleefully subverted in this passage. In feeling the necessity to populate his garret with theatrical Gothic paraphernalia in order to write Gothic fiction, it is suggested that the imposter uses these tawdry props as part of a contrived performance to overcompensate for the fact that, unlike Radcliffe, who is perfectly at ease writing her superior tales in a 'light and cheerful' domestic setting, they have very little genuine literary talent. He is merely playing at Gothic authorship, whereas Radcliffe, despite her wholesome domesticity, is the genuine article.

¹⁹ 'Selected Sketch: Amusing Anecdote of Anne Radcliffe', p. 4.

²⁰ 'Selected Sketch: Amusing Anecdote of Anne Radcliffe', p. 4.

²¹ 'Selected Sketch: Amusing Anecdote of Anne Radcliffe', p. 4.

Radcliffe's de-gothicisation is illustrative of the internal / external dichotomy which underpinned the difference between Britain's and America's respective fears surrounding the Gothic, and the figure of the Gothic author, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Radcliffe's positive reception was largely motivated by the perceived safeness of her writing. Painted with a reassuringly "gender-normative" palette that was designed to distance her from the Gothic rumours that had become attached to her life and career, she was divested of the monstrous discourse that was routinely attached to authors whose Gothic works were deemed to be a threat to the fabric of society. In contrast, Nathaniel Hawthorne's critical de-gothicisation was very much a response to anxieties about America's innate national identity. Rather than posing an external threat to an established culture, the Gothic image which accompanied Hawthorne's work, despite its perceived literary nationalist value, threatened to define it.

Hawthorne's Rehabilitation in Context: American Literary Nationalism

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of literary nationalism to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American criticism. Throughout this period, critical discourse was packed with commentary and vigorous debate about the state of the fledgling republic's emerging literary tradition, the form that this tradition should take, and the authors who ought to be included within it. Whilst there was inevitable disagreement amongst critics when it came down to deciding the finer points of the matter, the two fundamental tenets of the literary nationalist movement were that America, following its political independence from Britain in 1783, needed a literature of its own, and that this national literature ought to be authentically 'American'. It would need, in other words, to reflect the American cultural experience. One critic stipulated in *The Atlantic Magazine* in June 1824, for example, that 'a writer of talents, among our own people, should devote his abilities and apply his acquirements to subjects of domestic interest'.²²

As Sarah M. Corse observes, 'the search' in the United States for 'a critically renowned "native" literature was a subject of concern to artists, journalists, and the cultural elite virtually from the moment of political independence'.²³ The enthusiastic and often

²² 'Domestic Literature', *The Atlantic Magazine*, 1 June 1824, pp. 130-39 (pp. 137-38).

²³ Sarah M. Corse, *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; repr. 2001), p. 19.

zealous commitment to this search was predominantly galvanised by the concern that whilst America had achieved 'political autonomy' following the Revolution, it still required 'a separate cultural tradition' in order to fully shed its colonial status.²⁴ Writers and critics repeatedly expressed the anxiety that, without a national literature, America's cultural identity would remain shackled to Britain's. As the lexicographer Noah Webster characteristically put it in 1787, the 'authority of foreign manners keeps us in subjugation'.²⁵ The perceived urgency of this literary nationalist campaign was also heightened by the widely accepted 'connection between nation-building processes and national canon formation'.²⁶ Influenced by other contemporary literary nationalist ideologies, especially German Romanticism, many believed that America's final authentication as a nation was contingent upon the creation of a unique literary culture. As Liah Greenfeld notes, the prolonged absence of a national literary tradition 'was a difficult thought to bear because [...] the lack of a national culture raised the question as to the reality of the nation itself'.²⁷

If America's genuine existence could only be validated by the birth of a successful native literature, then the common and frequently reiterated nineteenth-century conviction that such a tradition had failed to come into being amounted to an existential crisis of national proportions. Despite the persistent nationalist rallying cries issued by the nation's intelligentsia, a significant proportion of the articles published on the subject lamented America's apparently unshakeable reputation as a resounding literary failure. In an article somewhat melodramatically titled 'Literary Delinquency of America', which appeared in November 1815 in *The North American Review*, for example, one critic claimed that 'this country wants literary distinction' and levelled the 'serious charge' against 'Americans' that they had not 'entered into the service of literature'.²⁸ Even as late as the 1890s, critics were still insisting that America possessed a stunted literary culture. A critic in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1897, for instance, wrote that although 'It is an old story that the people of the United States have been slow in achieving their intellectual independence', the 'complaint is still rife that we have little or nothing in the way of a national literature'.²⁹

²⁴ Corse, p. 27.

²⁵ qtd. in Corse, p. 17.

²⁶ Corse, p. 19.

²⁷ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 442.

²⁸ 'Literary Delinquency of America', *The North American Review*, November 1815, pp. 33-43 (p. 33).

²⁹ 'Men and Letters', *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1897, pp. 569-73 (pp. 569-70).

Not only were critics disillusioned by the perceived inferiority and lack of 'Americanness' in their countrymen's productions, but the open derision aimed at American letters by foreign, especially British, commentators further embittered a critical climate that was increasingly despondent and self-conscious. Perhaps the most notorious attack on American letters was launched in 1820 by the British critic, Sydney Smith. Scathingly questioning, 'In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?', Smith's words assumed a painfully canonical status in the discourse surrounding America's literary deficiencies.³⁰

The widely shared belief, both on home soil and on the world stage, that America was failing to achieve the literary growth that it required to gain cultural independence and authenticity led swathes of critics to search compulsively for the reasons behind this capitulation. As Anne Lounsbery has observed, 'the desire for a uniquely national literature coincided with the dramatic rise of print culture'.³¹ Despite the fact that America had an unusually 'broad and heterogeneous reading population' for the period, its literary needs — especially a voracious appetite for novels — were rarely satisfied by American writers.³² A particular source of consternation, for critics and authors alike, was the lack of international copyright laws. Whereas American publishers were legally obliged to pay native authors for the privilege of publishing their works, this was not the case when it came to reproducing the works of European and British writers. Unsurprisingly, many publishers took advantage of this copyright loophole and the cheap republication of British and European texts became a popular and lucrative business strategy, which dramatically reduced both publishers' interest in publishing American texts and the financial incentive for aspiring American writers to pursue professional authorship. The cultural ramifications of this situation were gloomily laid out by a critic in *Holden's Dollar Magazine* in November 1848:

the copy-right laws of our country do not recognize the right of property in the foreign author, and as a greater number of new novels can be constantly obtained, for nothing, from abroad, than our readers can make way with, there can be no inducement to pay the home author for his productions, and as novel writers, like

³⁰ Sydney Smith, 'Review of Adam Seybert's *Statistical Annals of the United States of America*', *The Edinburgh Review*, January 1820, pp. 69-80 (p. 79).

³¹ Anne Lounsbery, *Thin Culture, High Art: Gogol, Hawthorne, and Authorship in Nineteenth-Century Russia and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 9.

³² Lounsbery, p. 9.

other human beings must live by their labor, they soon desert a calling which will not afford them their bread and butter.³³

As well as obstacles erected by the infrastructure of the publishing industry itself, many critics also considered the possibility that the conditions in nineteenth-century America were fundamentally incompatible with the flourishing of a great national literature. Some pointed to the fact that, having only gained its status as an independent nation in the 1780s, America was still, figuratively speaking, in its cultural infancy. How could such a recently formed nation, possessing what J. Gerald Kennedy has described as an 'inchoate collective identity', realistically be expected to produce a definitive canon?³⁴ As one critic put it in the *National Era* in May 1851:

A National Literature is a product of centuries; it must have a national historic basis; it demands national homogeneousness, maturity of customs, habits, and views, fixedness of principles, policy, and pursuits, (yet not forbidding progress;) it presupposes a thoroughly systematized social organization, and a settled adjustment of the industrial arts relatively to the fine art, the sciences, and letters. At our youthful period it were ridiculous to expect such an acquisition; it would be an instance of precociousness unheard of among nations.³⁵

According to this critic, less than a century into its independent existence and lacking the social, cultural and moral cohesion which ought to underpin the identities of established nations, America was simply too undeveloped and ill-defined as a nation to nurture the growth of a native literary tradition.

The social contexts of nineteenth-century America were also considered a potentially insurmountable barrier to the realisation of its literary ambitions. One perspective was that American society was too heterogeneous to permit authors to capture the American cultural experience in their work. Supposedly quoting the American author, Bayard Taylor, M. G. Van Rensselaer observed in *Lippincott's Magazine* in June 1879 that 'an American school of fiction is, in the nature of things, impossible', due to the reality that 'Our civilisation [...] cannot be painted as a whole, because it is not homologous'.³⁶ The main cause of this heterogeneity, or 'fragmentariness', in Van Rensselaer's view, is the nation's

³³ 'The Discipline of Life', *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, November 1848, pp. 692-94 (p. 693).

³⁴ J. Gerald Kennedy, *Strange Nation: Literary Nationalism and Cultural Conflict in the Age of Poe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 11.

³⁵ 'Obligations of the Secular Periodical Press of Our Country to American Literature. [No. 1]', *National Era*, 8 May 1851, p. 73 (p. 73).

³⁶ M. G. Van Rensselaer, 'American Fiction', *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science*, June 1879, pp. 23-31 (p. 24).

sheer geographical scale.³⁷ Pointing out that 'we [the North] see life in one way, our neighbour at the South or West in another and a very different way', Van Rensselaer argued that America was too deeply divided along regional lines to be satisfactorily represented within one all-encompassing literary tradition.³⁸

Whereas some critics posited excessive social diversity as a major stumbling block for American letters, others sought an explanation in the opposite notion that the nation's population was too socially homogenous. In a June 1850 article republished in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* from the *Dublin University Magazine*, for example, one critic wrote that 'although America enjoys' the advantages of a constitution under which all men are born equal:

it can not be denied that her social condition presents impediments of a formidable character toward the cultivation of the higher and more refined branches of literature. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are not quite so favorable to the cultivation of elegant tastes as might be imagined; where every kind of social rank is obliterated, the field of observation, which is the province of fiction, becomes proportionately narrow.³⁹

Seemingly marking out the novel form and its tendency towards societal 'observation' as the benchmark for literary refinement, this critic argues that the lack of diversity caused by America's non-hierarchical social structure had reduced the scope for creating compelling and 'elegant' fictions. They suggest, somewhat ironically, that America's literary failure was caused by the progressive social values upon which it was supposedly built.

In his much demonised essay, Sydney Smith scornfully wrote that Americans 'should make it their chief boast, for many generations to come, that they are sprung from the same race with Bacon and Shakespeare'.⁴⁰ Claiming that America's sole sources of cultural pride could be found in the aspects of its culture that it had inherited from the Old World, Smith scorned what Liah Greenfeld has described as 'the strictly derivative character of national identity in America'.⁴¹ Having started out as an English colony, generations of Americans had often unquestioningly embraced England's cultural heritage as their own. As Jennifer Clark

³⁷ Van Rensselaer, p. 24.

³⁸ Van Rensselaer, p. 24.

³⁹ 'American Literature', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, June 1850, p. 37 (p. 37).

⁴⁰ Smith, p. 79.

⁴¹ Greenfeld, p. 403.

notes, America was 'attached to England through history, heritage and culture'.⁴² Given the perceived necessity for American cultural independence following its advent as a republic, however, these inherited cultural foundations, which drew attention to the fact that the nation 'was forced into existence while still bereft of a readily definable individual character', were often treated by critics as an especially troubling factor against the possibility for genuine literary autonomy.⁴³ In a June 1845 article in *The American Whig Review*, for example, a critic going by the pen name of 'Il Secretario' wrote that, 'An original literature implies a race either not derivative from another [...]; or one which, if secondary, has [...] under a new body of influences, formed for itself a fresh and complete identity of its own'.⁴⁴ Pessimistic, however, that America would be capable of forming such an identity, Il Secretario claimed that:

As yet, too, the mass of our individuality, so far as we have any, is English. Our ancestral memories [...] are but such as we nourish in common with England — of Alfred, of Elizabeth, of Cromwell, of Cressy, of Poitiers, of Naseby and of Worcester — of what Shakespeare tells us, of what Milton defended. What but a long line of glories of our own can ever efface these impressions?⁴⁵

Many critics suggested that the perceived paucity of America's cultural heritage, outside of that which it shared with Britain, had fostered bad habits amongst American writers, rendering them too deferential to British literary models. Il Secretario, for example, complained that 'we have mainly a feeble and an imitative literature, that servilely copies everything from abroad', whilst a critic in *The Southern Review* in July 1879 similarly wrote that 'The ties of blood and language' to 'the mother country' and 'the natural pride in her noble literature, have been too much for us; we are still walking in leading strings'.⁴⁶ Again, in an October 1855 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, another critic observed that, 'There has been, undoubtedly, too much consultation of the literary precedents of Europe and conformity with their decisions, and too little faith in our own powers of mental self-government'.⁴⁷ In each case, the influence of Britain's renowned literary tradition is deemed to weigh so heavily upon the shoulders of aspiring American authors that, instead of forging

⁴² Jennifer Clark, *The American Idea of England, 1776-1840* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013; repr. London: Routledge, 2016), p. 2.

⁴³ Clark, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Il Secretario, 'American Letters — Their Character and Advancement', *The American Whig Review*, June 1845, pp. 575-81 (p. 579).

⁴⁵ Il Secretario, p. 579.

⁴⁶ Il Secretario, p. 576; 'Novel Writing', *The Southern Review*, July 1879, pp. 504-16 (p. 505).

⁴⁷ 'Our Books and Authors', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, October 1855, pp. 658-63 (p. 658).

fresh and innovative native approaches to writing, they are intimidated into producing meek imitations of British works.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's Contemporary Reception

Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary career (1828-1860) unfolded against a backdrop of immense cultural anxiety. Troubled by its relative youth, the inherited aspects of its culture, its lack of social cohesion, and the reliance of its authors upon foreign, especially British literary models, America was suffering from what might be thought of as a crisis of national authenticity. Given this crisis, one of the most striking patterns in Hawthorne's contemporary reception was the tendency to single him out as a uniquely nationally-authenticating figure. His works were often heralded as an invaluable opportunity for the process of cultural definition to finally gain momentum.

The positive nationalist response to Hawthorne's writing was partially encouraged by the warm reception that he received in Britain. As John L. Idol and Buford Jones have observed, 'A zeal to have American writers recognized as the peers of their European counterparts informs the appraisals by many of Hawthorne's countrymen'.⁴⁸ Concerned by America's lack of literary status on the world stage, the appreciation for Hawthorne's work by critics on the other side of the Atlantic was welcomed as a sign that the nation was beginning to acquire some much needed cultural capital. This pride is exemplified in an April 1837 review of Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales* in the *Age*, in which Horatio Bridge celebrated the fact that the collection had 'been extensively read and admired in this country, as well as copied frequently and with high praise, by several of the literary periodicals of England'.⁴⁹ Bridge praises the 'grace and delicacy' of Hawthorne's 'style' on the grounds that 'it will compare advantageously with that of the best living English writers' and 'expresses the hope' that Hawthorne's future 'literary labors' will continue to 'confer credit upon the literature of his country'.⁵⁰

As Ezra Tawil has observed, literary nationalist critics and writers in nineteenth-century America were deeply preoccupied with the idea that contributions to the nation's

⁴⁸ John L. Idol, Jr. and Buford Jones, 'Introduction', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by John L. Idol, Jr. and Buford Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. xi-xxxviii (p. xix).

⁴⁹ Horatio Bridge, 'Twice-told Tales', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Idol and Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 21-22 (p. 21).

⁵⁰ Bridge, pp. 21, 22.

canon ought to be 'infused with some distinct quality of "Americanness"'.⁵¹ Perhaps the most important factor in Hawthorne's elevation as a national literary figure was the critical recognition of his writing as possessing an authentically 'American' essence. The seeds of this discourse are present in reviews of Hawthorne's writing from as early as his anonymous publication of *Fanshawe* in 1828. Whilst the romance was not published under Hawthorne's own name, Sarah Josepha Hale nevertheless 'recommend[ed] the book' in the *Ladies Magazine* in the November of that year 'to all who wish[ed] to encourage the talents of our own writers'.⁵² This precedent was more explicitly built upon in a March 1837 review of *Twice-told Tales* in the *New England Farmer, and Gardener's Journal*, in which Thomas Green Fessenden opined that 'The *Tales* are all, or nearly all American'.⁵³ Similarly, in a September 1846 essay in *The American Whig Review*, Charles Wilkins Webber wrote that 'Hawthorne is national — national in subject, in treatment and in manner', and that he was 'happy to perceive in him something of that [...] which we have [...] asked as worthy characteristics of a truly National Literature'.⁵⁴ Orestes A. Brownson correspondingly declared in the *Boston Quarterly Review* in April 1842 that 'Hawthorne' was 'fitted to stand at the head of American Literature', on the grounds that his writing possessed a 'pure, deep feeling of nationality', whilst a literary obituary dedicated to Hawthorne in *The American Monthly Knickerbocker* in July 1864 went so far as to declare that 'A new American literature [...] sprang up at his [Hawthorne's] bidding'.⁵⁵ In the same vein, critics in *Lippincott's Magazine of Literature, Science and Education* and *The Nassau Literary Magazine* both praised what they described as Hawthorne's 'native genius'.⁵⁶

Some critics promoted the authentic 'Americanness' of Hawthorne's writing by drawing parallels between his national importance and the stature of other foreign authors whose names and works were deemed to possess an emblematic national status. According

⁵¹ Ezra Tawil, *Literature, American Style: The Originality of Imitation in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p. 2.

⁵² Sarah Josepha Hale, 'Fanshawe', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Idol and Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 3 (p. 3).

⁵³ Thomas Green Fessenden, 'A Valuable Book', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Idol and Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 20-21 (p.20).

⁵⁴ Charles Wilkins Webber, 'Hawthorne', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Idol and Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 79-93 (pp. 81-82).

⁵⁵ Orestes A. Brownson, 'Literary Notices and Criticisms', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Idol and Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 59 (p. 59); 'Hawthorne', *The American Monthly Knickerbocker*, July 1864, pp. 93-94 (p. 94).

⁵⁶ Henry T. Tuckerman, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Lippincott's Magazine of Literature, Science and Education*, May 1870, pp. 498-507 (p. 499); 'Hawthorne', *The Nassau Literary Magazine*, May 1880, pp. 9-13 (p. 13).

to Henry T. Tuckerman (writing for *The Southern Literary Messenger* in June 1851), for instance, 'Boccaccio in Italy, Marmontel in France, Hoffman [sic] and others in Germany, and Andersen in Denmark, have made the tale or brief story classical in their several countries; and Hawthorne has achieved the same triumph here'.⁵⁷ Compared with major European authors whose works have become inextricably bound up with ideas of national identity, Hawthorne is likewise singled out as a nationally representative and culture-building icon. A similar sentiment was expressed in an obituary which appeared in *The Independent* in May 1864. Envisaging Hawthorne's memory as a unifying cultural legacy to be shared and inherited by all generations of Americans present and future, the anonymous critic wrote that 'his genius and fame belong to us all. They constitute a possession for ourselves and our posterity forever which will not wear out or grow dim'.⁵⁸

Some critics emphasised the perceived national essence of Hawthorne's writing by likening it to the American landscape. In an April 1842 article in *The North American Review*, one commentator claimed that 'His writings retain the racy flavor of the soil. They have the healthy vigor and free grace of indigenous plants'.⁵⁹ Similarly, in an August 1850 article in *The Literary World*, another critic 'commend[s]' Hawthorne to his 'countrymen' on the grounds that 'The smell of your beeches and hemlocks is upon him; your own broad prairies are in his soul; and if you travel away inland into his deep and noble nature, you will hear the far roar of his Niagara'.⁶⁰ By emphasising Hawthorne's deep-rootedness in the native 'soil', both of these critics praise the ability of his works to resonate with the experiences of native readers. They imply a fundamental kinship or understanding between Hawthorne and the American public, a relationship which is underscored in the *Literary World* article by the critic's description of Hawthorne as an 'author of your own flesh and blood'.⁶¹

The national essence of Hawthorne's writing was most systematically located in his use of native themes. In an April 1842 review of his *Twice-told Tales* in *The North American Review* (a periodical that was especially keen to promote Hawthorne's work), one critic argued that a 'characteristic merit of' Hawthorne's 'writing is, that he seeks and finds his

⁵⁷ Henry T. Tuckerman, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1851, pp. 344-49 (p. 347).

⁵⁸ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Independent*, 26 May 1864, p. 4 (p. 4).

⁵⁹ 'Critical Notices: Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales*', *The North American Review*, April 1842, pp. 496-99 (p. 497).

⁶⁰ 'Hawthorne and his Mosses. By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont', *The Literary World*, 24 August 1850, pp. 145-47 (p. 146).

⁶¹ 'Hawthorne and his Mosses', p. 146.

subjects at home, in the characters, the events, and the traditions of his own country'.⁶² This assessment was corroborated in a later, April 1856 article in the same periodical, where the critic asserted that 'The only writer who has bravely tried the traditions and primitive character of New England in the crucible of analytical imagination is Hawthorne'.⁶³ Again, John Louis O'Sullivan commended Hawthorne in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in February 1842 for his use of 'fresh' native material, observing that 'He has not imported his literary fabrics, nor made them after patterns, to be found in either obscure or noted foreign warehouses'.⁶⁴

In his preface to *The Marble Faun* (1860), the only one of his novels not set in America, Hawthorne famously considered the incompatibility between American subject matter and the conventions of romance. Comparing America unfavourably to the 'poetic or fairy precinct' of 'Italy', the quintessentially European 'site of his Romance', he complained that 'No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land'.⁶⁵ Having built a successful literary career out of three critically acclaimed American romances prior to the publication of *The Marble Faun*, as well as numerous short stories dealing with native themes, the sincerity of Hawthorne's preface is uncertain. In bemoaning the difficulties of creating romances out of the materials afforded by a country devoid of 'antiquity', and by observing that 'Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make them grow', however, Hawthorne echoed the frustrations of many nineteenth-century American critics.⁶⁶ As Theo Davis notes, it was not uncommon in the literary nationalist commentary of the period for critics to make the 'counterintuitive assertion that America was a singularly uninteresting subject'.⁶⁷ Whilst the necessity for an authentic national literature was widely agreed upon, it was also often conceded that the country's lack of medieval history and various other traditional

⁶² 'Critical Notices: Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales*', p. 497.

⁶³ 'ART. II.', *The North American Review*, April 1865, pp. 319-49 (p. 46).

⁶⁴ John Louis O'Sullivan, 'Twice-told Tales', in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Idol and Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 57 (p. 57).

⁶⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, ed. by Susan Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; repr. 2008), p. 4.

⁶⁶ Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Theo Davis, *Formalism, Experience, and the Making of American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1.

components of romance writing, such as feudal architecture, acted as a severe impediment to the imaginations of aspiring American writers.

Widely presumed to be barren of romantic potential, Hawthorne's almost exclusive commitment to native subject matter was often represented as an uncommonly heroic act of patriotism. In an August 1872 review in *Every Saturday* of Hawthorne's posthumously published romance, *Septimius Felton* (1872), one critic asserted that 'There is something characteristic of American patriotism in' Hawthorne's 'effort to make out that the absence of the romantic element which he so dearly loved was somehow a desirable circumstance'.⁶⁸ They suggest that if he had followed his own literary inclinations then he:

would have been tempted to give us the Walter Scott style of romance, and to have dealt in slouched hats, buff jerkins, and mediaeval oaths. As, however, the most picturesque weapon of which he could avail himself was an old 'king's arm' which had been fired at Louisburg, and the most picturesque garment a suit of Yankee homespun, he had to plunge deeper for his sources of interest.⁶⁹

Similarly, in a January 1873 article reprinted in *Littell's Living Age* from *The Cornhill Magazine*, another critic suggested that 'It was as a patriot, and not as an artist, that' Hawthorne 'congratulated himself on his American origin'.⁷⁰ Arguing that there is a 'struggle between his sense of the rawness and ugliness of his native land and the dogged patriotism befitting a descendant of the genuine New England Puritans' in his work, this critic compared him to a 'sensitive mother, unable to deny that her awkward hobbledohoy of a son [America] offends against the proprieties, but tacitly resolved to see proofs of virtues present or to come even in his clumsiest tricks'.⁷¹ According to both critics, Hawthorne's fidelity to the cause of creating an authentic American literary tradition is proven by the noble sacrifice of his aesthetic ideals for nationalist ones.

Perhaps with a view to making the case for Hawthorne's inter-regional relevance and appeal, the critic who compared his writing to the 'broad prairies' and the 'roar' of the 'Niagara' in *The Literary World* in August 1850 argued, somewhat spuriously, for its respective affinities with the landscapes of the Midwest and the border between New York state and the Canadian province of Ontario.⁷² Overall, however, Hawthorne's elevated

⁶⁸ 'Hawthorne's *Septimius Felton*', *Every Saturday*, 12 August 1872, pp. 179-80 (p. 180).

⁶⁹ 'Hawthorne's *Septimius Felton*', p. 180.

⁷⁰ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 25 January 1873, pp. 195-207 (p. 196).

⁷¹ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, pp. 196-7.

⁷² 'Hawthorne and his Mosses', p. 146.

literary status tended to be located in his regional significance as a New England writer. In September 1872, for example, Henry Ware observed in *Appleton's Journal* that:

He seized upon the dry and barren scenes and traditions of New-England life, which to most minds seemed utterly destitute of all features of poetry or romance, and touching them with the magic of his fancy, transformed them into realms of beauty and chronicles of wild mystery that are scarcely surpassed in the pages of any fiction that has been written in any time.⁷³

Similarly, in the same article that he praised Hawthorne's decision not to import his 'literary fabrics' from 'foreign warehouses', Louis O'Sullivan specifically celebrated the fact that 'It is from New England history and social existence that he derives his hints and materials. New England traditions, New England incidents, New England customs, New England manners, are the staples of his productions'.⁷⁴ These perspectives on Hawthorne's regionalism were corroborated by the influential New England critic, Henry T. Tuckerman, in his 1851 article in *The Southern Literary Messenger*. Tuckerman, commenting on Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), wrote that:

It is as if we were baptized into the consciousness of Puritan life of New England character in its elemental state; and know, by experience, all its frigidity, its gloom, its intellectual enthusiasm and its religious aspiration. [...] The scenery, tone and personages of the story are imbued with a local authenticity which is not, for an instant, impaired by the imaginative charm of romance. We seem to breathe, as we read, the air and be surrounded by the familiar objects of a New England town.⁷⁵

The New England focus of Hawthorne's writing was considered to be so integral to its success that his decision to set *The Marble Faun* in Italy led some critics to receive it as the most disappointing of his works. In a July 1879 article in *The Southern Review*, for example, one critic suggested that it lacked the distinction and creative integrity of Hawthorne's New England romances:

Hawthorne, as it is just that he should, is most telling, most charming when his story is laid in the heart of New England. *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, giving three different phases of New England life, are by far his most artistic creative works. In the *Marble Faun* there is the same delicate fancy, the same critical acumen, but it is an exotic, and is lacking in the high moral purpose, and the keen artistic feeling which characterize his New England stories.⁷⁶

⁷³ Henry Ware, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne (with Portrait)', *Appleton's Journal*, 14 September 1872, pp. 405-408 (p. 407).

⁷⁴ O'Sullivan, p. 57.

⁷⁵ Tuckerman, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Southern Literary Messenger*, p. 348.

⁷⁶ 'Novel Writing', *The Southern Review*, July 1879, pp. 504-16 (pp. 509-10).

As Ezra Tawil has suggested, Hawthorne 'was always more of a pawn in' the 'literary-nationalist game than one of its players'.⁷⁷ Indeed, the enthusiasm of his reception as a New England romancer was largely galvanised by the perceived ability of his works to advance the New England-centric cultural movement that coincided with the beginning of his career. As Nina Baym has elucidated, the 1840s saw 'New England intellectuals' embark 'on a program to install their region as the historical fountainhead of the nation. In the literary world, this involved encouraging literature written by New Englanders, with New England subjects and themes presented in a national context'.⁷⁸ These intellectuals sought to establish New England as the cultural epicentre of the United States, allowing its regional literature and history to become nationally representative. Hawthorne was most directly implicated in this regionalist branch of the literary nationalist movement through his close association with the eminent New England publishing firm Ticknor and Fields. Holding the copyright not only to Hawthorne's work, but to many other significant New England writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes, the firm, largely driven by the vision of its junior partner and Hawthorne's close friend, James T. Fields (1817-1881), was instrumental in promoting and establishing New England's national literary significance. Circulating New England writing as 'nationally exemplary of the best American writing', the publicity that Hawthorne received as one of the firm's major authors placed him in a prime position to be recognised as one of New England's, and by extension America's leading literary figures.⁷⁹

Outside of the publishing industry, one of the most prominent proponents of the movement to instate New England as the cultural heart of America, and specifically of the role that American romances had to play in achieving this, was the Massachusetts orator, lawyer and congressman, Rufus Choate (1799-1859). In 1833 Choate delivered an address in Hawthorne's hometown of Salem entitled, 'The Importance of Illustrating New-England History by a Series of Romances Like the Waverly Novels'. Holding up Sir Walter Scott's approach to romance writing as an ideal model upon which to build a national American literature, Choate urged American writers to compose similarly constructed historical romances, beginning with 'the landing of the Pilgrims, and pass[ing] down to the war of

⁷⁷ Tawil, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Nina Baym, 'Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*: Producing and Maintaining an American Literary Classic', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 30.2 (Summer 1996), 61-75 (p. 65).

⁷⁹ Baym, p. 64.

independence'.⁸⁰ Championing the colonial period in New England as America's 'heroic age' and the Puritan settlers as America's heroes of old, he expressed the hope that authors would give:

to the natural scenery of the New World, and to the celebrated personages and grand incidents of its earlier annals, the same kind and degree of interest which Scott has given to the Highlands, to the Reformation, the Crusades, to Richard the Lion-hearted, and to Louis XI.⁸¹

As Baym has noted, Choate was particularly keen to endorse Scott's model of romance writing as a blueprint for American literature because of its perceived ability to stoke 'patriotic and nationalist sentiment' in an era overshadowed by the emerging political conflicts that would ultimately culminate in the American Civil War.⁸² Choate promoted 'Such a literature', despite its rootedness in New England history, as a uniting national narrative that 'would be a common property of all the States, — a treasure of common ancestral recollections', and which might even have the potential to 'do *something* to perpetuate the Union itself'.⁸³ Choate also saw the romance genre's characteristic blurring of fact and fiction as an opportunity to represent American history through a nostalgically rose-tinted lens. He believed that a united and harmonious national identity would coalesce far more successfully around American romances which did not dwell on the more morally dubious aspects of its colonial past, such as 'The persecutions of the Quakers, the controversies with Roger Williams and Mrs. Hutchinson, the perpetual synods and ecclesiastical surveillance of the old times'.⁸⁴

There is no evidence to indicate that Hawthorne heard Choate's address, and although he greatly admired Scott's work, his own writing embodied a very different model of romance to the one that Choate advocated. Whilst, as David Van Leer glosses, his 'romanticization of the US' relied upon the discovery of 'romance already present in the country's forgotten past', his representation of this past was far from airbrushed.⁸⁵ Rather

⁸⁰ Rufus Choate, 'The Importance of Illustrating New-England History by a Series of Romances Like the Waverly Novels', in *The Works of Rufus Choate: With a Memoir of his Life*, ed. by Samuel Gilman Brown, 2 vols (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1862), I, 319-46 (p. 320).

⁸¹ Choate, p. 319.

⁸² Baym, p. 65.

⁸³ Choate, p. 344.

⁸⁴ Choate, p. 339.

⁸⁵ David Van Leer, 'Literary Nationalism and US Romantic Aesthetics', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. by George Alexander Kennedy and others, 9 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), VI: *The Nineteenth Century, c.1830-1914*, ed. by M. A. R. Habib, pp. 188-204 (p. 195).

than eliminating problematic colonial episodes from his romances, Hawthorne keenly scrutinised them, perhaps drawing his readers' attention most unrelentingly to the hypocrisy and emotional sadism of Puritan morality. Methodological approaches aside, however, much of the perceived significance of Hawthorne's New England romances resided in their perceived potential to answer the simultaneously regionalist and nationalist rallying cries of Choate and other like-minded New England intellectuals. Setting his romances in New England and drawing out the romantic potential of its history, Hawthorne was writing in the right place, and at the right time, to spearhead the campaign to establish New England's cultural primacy.

Literary Nationalism and the Gothic

It would be untrue to suggest that literary nationalism and the Gothic were automatically treated as mutually exclusive concepts in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. As a tradition, the American Gothic has been most consistently interpreted in terms of what Charles L. Crow has described as a 'counter-narrative' to the 'dominant, sanctioned history of the United States'.⁸⁶ However, in the early decades following American independence it was not uncommon for the Gothic to be employed for culture building as well as countercultural purposes. Benjamin F. Fisher and Teresa A. Goddu have both contributed valuable insights into this phenomenon, with Goddu acknowledging that 'The gothic played a central role in America's movement toward literary nationalism', and Fisher making a convincing case for the argument that the early antebellum author, James Kirke Paulding, was a 'forerunner in the ranks of America's literary nationalists', partially as a result of his efforts to overhaul the 'extravagant plotting and expression' of the British Gothic in order to give relevance to the genre within the American context.⁸⁷

On more than one occasion, early American Gothic writers stood at the vanguard of the American literary nationalist movement, often using the prefaces to their novels as a platform for announcing literary nationalist manifestos. This patriotic strand of Gothicism first emerged in the writings of America's first professional author, Charles Brockden Brown.

⁸⁶ Charles L. Crow, 'Preface', in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. xvii-xxii (p. xviii).

⁸⁷ Benjamin F. Fisher, 'James Kirke Paulding's Gothicism and American Literary Nationalism', *Gothic Studies*, 1.1 (August 1999), 31-46 (p. 40); Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 53.

In the preface to his Gothic novel, *Edgar Huntly* (1799), Brown claimed that the 'purpose' of the narrative was to 'exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our own country'.⁸⁸ He declared his ambition to call 'forth the passions' and engage 'the sympathy' of his readers by drawing his inspiration from 'suitable' native materials, including 'The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness', rather than by falling back on the 'materials usually employed for this end' by British Gothic authors, namely 'Puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras'.⁸⁹

A similarly nationalist sentiment is present in several of the prefaces to John Neal's (1793-1876) Gothic novels. As an especially vociferous proponent of the literary nationalist movement, Neal promoted the importance of an authentic American literary tradition in many of his works, including literary essays designed to raise the profile of underappreciated American writers and epic poems about America. Neal's most strident nationalist statement, however, appeared in the preface to his Gothic novel, *Rachel Dyer* (1828). Announcing 'another DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE in the great REPUBLIC OF LETTERS', Neal pointedly reminded his readers of the perceived inextricability of cultural and political independence.⁹⁰ Later, in the preface to his Gothic novel, *The Down-Easters* (1833), Neal echoed Brown's call for the adoption of American Gothic machinery. He mocked fellow American writers who imitated British Gothic conventions, observing that, 'To judge by our novel-writers, play-makers and poets, [...] we have cottages and sky-larks in our country; pheasants and nightingales, first families, youth of a "gentle blood", and virtuous *peasantry*; moss-grown churches, curfews and ivy-mantled towers'.⁹¹ Presenting his writing as a defiant rejection of imported literary norms by casting off the traditional conventions of the British Gothic, Neal, like Brockden Brown, situated the American Gothic at the very heart of the literary nationalist campaign.

Despite the allegiance of early and, especially in Brockden Brown's case, foundational American Gothic writers to nationalist principles, many critics were reluctant to engage with, let alone celebrate, the integral role that the Gothic had played in America's emerging literary tradition. In fact, the Gothic contributions of authors like Brockden Brown

⁸⁸ Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker, with Related Texts*, ed. by and introd. by Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), p. 3.

⁸⁹ Brown, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁰ John Neal, *Rachel Dyer: A North American Story* (Portland, ME: Shirley and Hyde, 1828), p. xviii.

⁹¹ John Neal, *The Down-Easters, &c. &c. &c.*, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1833), I, p. v.

and Neal were commonly sidelined as an immature phase or jarring false start in the process of cultural definition. Even Hawthorne attempted to distance himself from Neal in his preface to *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Describing Neal as a 'wild fellow', who 'almost turned my boyish brain with his romances', Hawthorne fondly, but decisively, dismissed his predecessor's work as a mere childhood indulgence.⁹²

One possible reason for this cultural distancing, as Goddu suggests, is that 'the early national period' saw the 'negotiation' of the 'ideological manoeuvre that eventually based America's distinctiveness on its difference from rather than its connection to the gothic'.⁹³ As a genre largely dedicated to exposing the darkest aspects of human society, psychology and morality, the bleak and irrational worldview typically presented in Gothic texts was fundamentally incompatible with the American Enlightenment principles that had formed the basis for America's post-revolutionary national identity. America's transition from a colony to a republic has been widely identified as 'the central event of the American Enlightenment'.⁹⁴ Privileging *a posteriori*, empiricist systems of thought, such as Deism and Lockean "Sensationalist" Psychology (an epistemology which emphasised the centrality of human reason to the accurate interpretation of physical data transmitted via the five senses), the American Enlightenment stemmed from a belief in 'the primacy of reason'.⁹⁵ Indeed, the emergent, post-revolutionary narrative of America as a progressive, tolerant and egalitarian utopia dedicated to the pursuit of 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness' was often rhetorically buttressed by the nation's perceived foundation upon these rationalist ideals. As Benedict Anderson noted in his now canonical study into nationalist psychology, communities are 'distinguished, not by their falsity / genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'.⁹⁶ Frequently exposing moral visions of America that were at worst devastating and at best ambivalent, the Gothic genre was perilously liable to disrupt the optimistic, enlightenment teleology which underpinned American society's collectively imagined identity.

⁹² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 2 vols (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1881), II, 159.

⁹³ Goddu, p. 54.

⁹⁴ Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment: 1750-1820* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 1.

⁹⁵ Ferguson, p. 22.

⁹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.

At times, the pessimistic image of America that Hawthorne projected in his Gothic works was censured for its damaging lack of patriotism. In a November 1852 review of *The Blithedale Romance* in *The American Whig Review*, for example, one critic claimed that despite Hawthorne's skill, it would have been better if his 'brain [...] moulder[ed] for ever in neglect and darkness'.⁹⁷ This rather extreme response to Hawthorne's work is predicated on the grounds that 'The soul of beauty is Truth, and Truth is ever progressive'.⁹⁸ Criticising Hawthorne for his engagement with 'stern, uncongenial dogmas, which should have died with' the 'Puritan fathers' and for 'dig[ging] out the graves of past centuries', they suggest that his writing has the potential to unnecessarily undermine America's progressive Enlightenment narrative.⁹⁹ To a large extent, however, critics do not appear to have been overly concerned by the gothicised portrayal of America's history in Hawthorne's fiction. Despite the uncomfortable image of the nation that it frequently presented, his depiction of America's colonial past was often defended on the grounds that he was making the most out of native materials.

More perturbing to the majority of critics was the possible assumption that Hawthorne's Gothicism was a reflection of the author himself. According to the biographical school of criticism, if Hawthorne's works were Gothic, then so was he, meaning that his essentially American masterpieces were the result of moral or psychological dysfunction. As noted in the introduction to the thesis, the widely accepted connection between nation-building and the creation of a national literature in nineteenth-century America saw the elevation of the figure of the successful American author to a nationally representative, even prophet-like status. In 1840, Orestes A. Brownson characteristically articulated the expectation, for example, that American authors ought to embody the nation's 'wishes, hopes, fears, and sentiments'.¹⁰⁰ As Lara Langer Cohen glosses, Brownson contested that American authors 'must, in fact, *be* the nation'.¹⁰¹ Whilst the authentic 'Americanness' of Hawthorne's writing underpinned his celebrated status as a national literary icon, therefore, it became problematic when it collided with his Gothicism. Perhaps more than any other

⁹⁷ 'The Blithedale Romance', *The American Whig Review*, November 1852, pp. 417-24 (p. 418).

⁹⁸ 'The Blithedale Romance', *The American Whig Review*, p. 418.

⁹⁹ 'The Blithedale Romance', *The American Whig Review*, p. 418.

¹⁰⁰ Orestes A. Brownson, 'American Literature', in *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists*, 2nd edn, ed. by and introd. by George Hochfield (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 246-53 (p. 249).

¹⁰¹ Lara Langer Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 28.

nineteenth-century author, the Gothic nature of Hawthorne's writing was perceived as an index, not only of personal, but of national, character. It is this anxiety which drives many of the attempts by critics to de-gothicise Hawthorne and his fiction.

Hawthorne's Critical De-Gothicisation

An awareness of the potential critical backlash that the Gothic elements in his fiction might provoke appears to have caused Hawthorne some anxiety. He self-consciously described his most famous Gothic work, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), as 'hell-fired', and when his publisher, James T. Fields, suggested that he publish it as a standalone novel stripped of the collection of short stories that had originally been intended to offset its Gothicism, Hawthorne wrote him an apprehensive letter expressing his doubts about the scheme:

If the book is made up entirely of 'The Scarlet Letter', it will be too sombre. I found it impossible to relieve the shadows of the story with so much light as I would gladly have thrown in. Keeping so close to its point as the tale does, and diversified no otherwise than by turning different sides of the same dark idea to the reader's eye, it will weary very many people, and disgust some. Is it safe, then, to stake the fate of the book entirely on this one chance? A hunter loads his gun with a bullet and several buckshot; and, following his sagacious example, it was my purpose to conjoin the one long story with half a dozen shorter ones; so that, failing to kill the public outright with my biggest and heaviest lump of lead, I might have other chances with the smaller bits, individually and in aggregate.¹⁰²

Whilst he had already published numerous Gothic tales as part of his short story collections, *Twice-told Tales* and *Mosses from an Old Manse*, Hawthorne was afraid that his readers would object to a longer, more concentrated Gothic narrative unaccompanied by any light relief.

Despite Hawthorne's concerns, Fields's gambit paid off. Although many critics had praised Hawthorne's short story collections as welcome additions to an authentic American literature, it was the publication of *The Scarlet Letter*, one of the first transatlantically successful American novels, which cemented his status as one of the most significant trailblazers in American letters. As Henry James described it in his 1880 biography of Hawthorne:

the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* was in the United States a literary event of the first importance. The book was the finest piece of imaginative writing yet put forth in the country. There was a consciousness of this in the welcome that was given it — a

¹⁰² *Selected Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. by Joel Myerson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), p. 142.

satisfaction in the idea of an American having produced a novel that belonged to literature, and to the forefront of it. Something might at last be sent to Europe as exquisite in quality as anything that had been received, and the best of it was that the thing was absolutely American; it belonged to the soil, to the air; it came out of the very heart of New England.¹⁰³

Noting *The Scarlet Letter's* positive transatlantic reception, and arguing for its rootedness in the American landscape to emphasise both its national and regional essence and appeal, James celebrated its publication as a turning point in the fortunes of American literature by drawing together all of the literary nationalist discourses that were typically used to promote Hawthorne's work.

Hawthorne's establishment as a national literary icon coincided with the advent of his career as an author of Gothic novels. This did not go unnoticed by critics, and the success of *The Scarlet Letter* and Hawthorne's subsequent romances was tempered by a discomfort with their Gothicism, or what critics commonly referred to as their 'morbid', 'gloomy', 'mawkish', 'ghastly' or 'grim' elements. As we saw in the previous chapter, many critics implicated Hawthorne and his writing within the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship. He was described as a 'phantom' and a 'necromancer', censured as a man who 'wrote in the interest of evil-worship', and diagnosed as being 'afflicted with' a 'melancholy craving for human curiosities'.¹⁰⁴

As Samuel Chase Coale has observed, 'during Hawthorne's lifetime and after his death, the myth of the morbid recluse had taken such firm control of his image that family members and others were eager to sabotage and undermine it'.¹⁰⁵ His wife, Sophia Hawthorne (née Peabody), for example, published his *English Note-Books* in 1870, ostensibly with a view to rescuing his reputation from the lasting damage that its persistent gothicisation had caused:

It is very earnestly hoped that these volumes of notes ... will dispel an often expressed opinion that Mr. Hawthorne was gloomy and morbid. He had the inevitable pensiveness and gravity of a person who possessed what a friend of his called 'the awful power of insight'; but his mood was always cheerful and equal, and

¹⁰³ Henry James, *Hawthorne* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), p. 108.

¹⁰⁴ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, August 1853, pp. 481-88 (p. 482); 'Review 1', *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, July 1851, pp. 430-31 (p. 431); 'North American Review on Hawthorne', *Circular*, 5 December 1864, pp. 298-99 (p. 298); *The Blithedale Romance*, p. 418.

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Chase Coale, *The Entanglements of Nathaniel Hawthorne: Haunted Minds and Ambiguous Approaches* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), p. 45.

his mind peculiarly healthful, and the airy splendor of his wit and humor was the light of his home.¹⁰⁶

James T. Fields similarly attempted to rehabilitate Hawthorne's reputation in *Yesterdays with Authors* (1872). In response to the speculation that 'all of his moods were sombre', Fields assured his readers that Hawthorne was 'jolly [...] like other people', that he had a 'humorous side', and that he had 'seen him marvellously moved to fun'.¹⁰⁷ Hawthorne's friend, the poet and critic R. H. Stoddard (whom he helped obtain the appointment of inspector of customs at the Port of New York), earnestly recalled in an 1880 article in *The Independent* how his own mistaken expectations surrounding Hawthorne's eccentricity were dispelled upon their first meeting, writing that 'He was not, either at this time or later, the recluse that I had been told. He was not shy, or reserved, or silent; but, on the contrary, communicative, genial, and kindly'.¹⁰⁸ Correspondingly, Anthony Trollope, with whom Hawthorne was on very good terms, painted a character sketch of him in *The North American Review* designed to explode the misconception that he was enslaved to his 'weird imagination' in all aspects of his life.¹⁰⁹ Trollope insisted that, despite his shyness, 'he could, when things went well with him, be argumentative, social, and cheery', and attempted to demythologise Hawthorne's Gothic image by replacing it with an almost comically down-to-earth one: 'I [...] have heard him discuss, almost with violence, the superiority of American vegetables. Indeed, he once withered me with a scorn which was anything but mystic and melancholy because I expressed a patriotic preference for English peas'.¹¹⁰

The most aggressive refutation of Hawthorne's Gothic image appeared in Julian Hawthorne's 1885 biography of his father. Entitled *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*, the biography immediately seeks to present the subject in a normative, wholesomely domestic light. In the introductory pages, the biographer defensively asserted that:

This biography will not be found to err on the side of reticence. The compiler has given everything that the most liberal construction of his obligation could demand. The closet, to be sure, had no skeleton in it; there was nothing to be hidden.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Sophia Hawthorne, 'Preface', in *Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 2 vols (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876), I, pp. vii-x (pp. viii-ix).

¹⁰⁷ James T. Fields, *Yesterdays with Authors* (Boston, MA: J. R. Osgood and Company, 1872), p. 63.

¹⁰⁸ R. H. Stoddard, 'A Glimpse of Hawthorne', *The Independent*, 2 September 1880, pp. 2-3 (p. 2).

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Trollope, 'The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The North American Review*, September 1879, pp. 203-22 (p. 207).

¹¹⁰ Trollope, p. 207.

¹¹¹ Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife: A Biography*, 4th edn, 2 vols (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1885), I, p. v.

Julian Hawthorne suggests that any attempt to search for Gothic sub-texts in the biography will simply reflect the unhealthily prurient disposition of the reader, claiming that 'This book is a simple record of lives; and whatever else the reader wishes to find in it must be contributed by himself'.¹¹² He goes on to deny the popular conception of his father as 'a sort of morbid, timid, milk-and-water Frankenstein, who was drawn on by grisly fascination to discuss fearful conceptions'.¹¹³ He scoffs at the widespread conflation of Hawthorne with his more dysfunctional characters, such as 'Miles Coverdale', 'Arthur Dimmesdale', 'Roger Chillingworth', 'Clifford', or even 'the Spectre of the Catacombs', and denounces the tendency to conduct autobiographical readings of his fiction, asserting that 'any attempt to make the works throw light upon their author is certain to miscarry'.¹¹⁴ He even attempts to sever the presumed link between his father's character and the nature of his works by stressing that there was a healthy degree of psychological detachment between Hawthorne's personal and professional lives:

Some men are swallowed up by their profession, so that nothing is left of them but the profession in human form. But, for men like Hawthorne, the profession is but a means of activity; they use it, and are not used by it.¹¹⁵

Whereas Hawthorne's family and friends used personal anecdotes and intimate character portraits to counter the Gothic discourse which threatened to mar his reputation, most critics turned to his writing to evidence their refutation of his Gothic image. Given the popular critical assumption during the period that the nature of an author's writing reflected their character, the simplest way to de-gothicise Hawthorne (and the nation he was deemed to emblemise) was to de-gothicise his work. Most critics who adopted this approach did not attempt to deny the Gothic elements in Hawthorne's fiction outright. Instead, they employed rhetorical strategies designed to morally and aesthetically decontaminate these elements, thereby justifying their presence in Hawthorne's writing and exempting him from the personal stigma that was routinely associated with their use. This strategic decontamination is exemplified in an article by Henry Ware in *Appleton's Journal*. According to Ware:

The chambers of his [Hawthorne's] tales are crowded with many grim and ghastly visions; they are full of moth and rust, of cobwebs and thick-piled dust; the

¹¹² Julian Hawthorne, p. v.

¹¹³ Julian Hawthorne, p. 84.

¹¹⁴ Julian Hawthorne, pp. 85, 243.

¹¹⁵ Julian Hawthorne, p. 244.

atmosphere is often heavy with suggestions of horror, and the reader advances with a thrill of terror. But there are also everywhere passages of wonderful and tender beauty, descriptions as minute in detail as the rarest photographs.¹¹⁶

Ware's description of the 'grim and ghastly visions' and the 'atmosphere [...] of horror' in Hawthorne's writing could not be more stereotypically Gothic. Apparently concerned by the negative assumptions about the author that this statement might provoke, however, he immediately follows it up by praising Hawthorne's photographic descriptive powers and the 'passages of wonderful and tender beauty' in his writing. In so doing, Ware attempts to play down the significance of Hawthorne's Gothicism by implying that it is cancelled out by his unique literary skill.

A similar manoeuvre is observable in Paul Siogvolk's November 1852 review of *The Blithedale Romance* in *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine*. Like Ware, Siogvolk acknowledged the Gothic content, or 'peculiar passages scattered up and down' Hawthorne's writing, but insisted that the author had enough 'self-knowledge' and knowledge of 'human nature', that when 'dealing' with these darker moments he 'knows precisely what he is about, and precisely how far to go'.¹¹⁷ Siogvolk justifies the presence of darker themes in Hawthorne's fiction by suggesting that he had sufficient powers of empathy and self-scrutiny to engage with them without succumbing to the temptation to transgress any unacceptable boundaries or break any taboos. In order to distinguish the superior psychological intelligence discernible in Hawthorne's writing from the 'mawkish craving after the supernatural and the sentimental that disfigures the works of weaker men', Siogvolk even refers to the 'peculiar passages' in his fiction as '*Hawthornisms*'.¹¹⁸ Whilst acknowledging their basic kinship with the conventions of traditional Gothic fiction, Siogvolk suggests that they ought to be separately classified in order to reflect their qualitative differences.

The Gothic content in Hawthorne's fiction was also justified in a September 1852 review of *The Blithedale Romance* in the *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*. The critic posited that 'the sagacity which distinguishes between the really spiritual in thought and life and the morbid phenomena which so often propose themselves as spiritualities, —

¹¹⁶ Ware, p. 407.

¹¹⁷ Paul Siogvolk, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne: *The Blithedale Romance*', *The Knickerbocker*, November 1852, pp. 3-7 (p. 4).

¹¹⁸ Siogvolk, p. 4.

these are the tokens of a master-mind in our author'.¹¹⁹ Whilst this critic acknowledges a cynical trend whereby lesser authors attempt to legitimate the gratuitous inclusion of 'morbid phenomena' in their writing by claiming that it serves a higher spiritual purpose, they refuse to include Hawthorne within this trend, arguing instead that the superior calibre of his mind permits him to use these same phenomena to achieve a genuine level of spiritual profundity.

There is often a revealing correlation in nineteenth-century Hawthorne criticism between his treatment as a literary nationalist icon and attempts to de-gothicise his fiction. In a January 1853 article in *The National Magazine*, for example, one critic praised Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales* as 'the finest and purest tales ever written in America' and proudly recalled that when *The Scarlet Letter* was published 'reviewers', both at 'home and abroad', were 'loud in its praise'.¹²⁰ As well as extolling Hawthorne's role in raising America's literary profile, this critic also admires his use of American, specifically New England, material:

The traditions and legends of New-England find in Hawthorne a fitting historian. The Spirit of the early settlers glares fiercely in his pages, or glimmers like red flame. There is something of the old Puritan about all that he writes; something stern, uncompromising.¹²¹

Whilst this description of Hawthorne's interaction with America's colonial history is intended as a commendation of the native quality of his fiction, there is something unmistakably gloomy, Gothic even, in the critic's depiction of Hawthorne's evocation of this history. Their depiction of the 'stern' and 'uncompromising' Puritan 'spirit' glaring out of the pages like 'red flame' is especially striking in its resemblance to Hawthorne's own rueful description of *The Scarlet Letter* as 'hell-fired'. Apparently discomforted by the close proximity of the national and Gothic elements in Hawthorne's writing, the critic seeks to reconcile them:

The ancient witch element of his native town pervades all that he has written. He seems to have brooded over it, until it has become a portion of his being. Not that he deals in witches, ghosts, or any of the unearthly agencies of Mrs. Radcliffe, or Monk

¹¹⁹ 'The Blithedale Romance. By Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*, September 1852, pp. 292-294 (p. 294).

¹²⁰ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, January 1853, pp. 17-24 (pp. 18, 20).

¹²¹ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, p. 24.

Lewis; he has too pure and natural a taste, too keen a sense of the ludicrous for that.¹²²

Despite Hawthorne's interaction with some of the darkest episodes in America's history, particularly the Salem Witch Trials, the critic denies the Gothic nature of this aspect of his writing by arguing that he had too much common sense to embellish it with vulgar or 'ludicrous' supernatural machinery. The presence of this material, and by extension its nationalist value, is vindicated on the grounds that the author does not buy into the 'unearthly' aesthetic of the school of fiction popularised by Radcliffe (this critic appears to overlook Radcliffe's careful use of the explained supernatural) and Lewis in the 1790s.

Alongside this justification of the gloomier elements of Hawthorne's work, the critic also goes out of their way to dispel the notion that Hawthorne had a Gothic personal life. They adamantly insist that Hawthorne's famously solitary lifestyle 'had not made him melancholy or misanthropic, nor wholly unfitted him for the bustle of life'.¹²³ This emphasis upon Hawthorne being 'pretty much like other people', as opposed to a gothicised figure subsisting on the margins of society, is of particular significance as it appears to have been galvanised by the critic's own allegiance to the biographical school of criticism.¹²⁴ In the opening paragraph of the article they announce their 'great faith in' being 'able to discover authors in their books', and later assert that Hawthorne's productions 'mirror the man, and could not have been written by any other man'.¹²⁵ Buying so whole-heartedly into the idea that authors are revealed in their works, there is a great deal at stake for this critic in their nationalist bid to downplay Hawthorne's connection with the Gothic.

In a July 1851 article in *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*, A. D. M. similarly championed Hawthorne's credentials as 'the first writer, in the English tongue, of the highest order of romance', declaring that 'One side of Mr. Hawthorne's mind would furnish the heads of several first class French romancers'.¹²⁶ A. D. M. singles out *The Scarlet Letter* as 'the most powerful imaginative work of the present era of English Literature' and boasts that the preface to *Mosses from an Old Manse* is 'not surpassed by any thing of its

¹²² 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, p. 24.

¹²³ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, p. 19.

¹²⁴ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, p. 19.

¹²⁵ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The National Magazine*, pp. 17, 22.

¹²⁶ A. D. M., 'The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*, July 1851, pp. 272-93 (pp. 293, 289).

kind in English Literature'.¹²⁷ In addition to celebrating Hawthorne as an American literary figure capable of rivalling the best British and European authors, A. D. M. also praises his unmatched ability amongst American writers to create authentically American characters, claiming that *The House of the Seven Gables*' Phoebe is the only New England girl we ever met in a book', embodying 'the truest delineation of the American female character'.¹²⁸

A. D. M.'s praise for Hawthorne is not unequivocal. In particular, they censure what they perceive to be the unnecessary moments of Gothic excess in *The Scarlet Letter*:

The author's love for symbolism occasionally amounts to a ridiculous melo-dramatic perversity, as when it fathers such things as the minister's hand over his heart, and the hideous disfigurement of his bosom, Dame Hibbins from Gov. Bellingham's window screeching after Hester to go into the forest and sign the black man's book, and the meteoric 'A' seen upon the sky during the midnight vigil.¹²⁹

Whilst A. D. M. disapproves of Hawthorne's 'melo-dramatic' inclinations, however, their criticism is not overly harsh. The Gothic current in Hawthorne's fiction is not read as a disturbing reflection of his overall character, but as an occasional tendency to indulge in over-the-top imagery. Apparently keen to provide a weightier justification for Hawthorne's Gothicism, A. D. M. also chooses to paint his engagement with difficult subject matter in a religious light. They assert that 'No reader possessing the slightest portion of spiritual insight, can fail to perceive that the chief value of this romance is religious', and that they 'find the author's delineation of spiritual laws equalled by his healthy and profound religious sentiment'.¹³⁰ Comparing Hawthorne to other writers who would be destroyed by the 'godless or misanthropic spirit, which so often destroys men who know much of human nature', they argue that he is able to follow 'the track of a spiritual law into the darkest or wildest scene, without losing his faith in God, or his love for humanity'.¹³¹

Hawthorne was also promoted as a major American literary figure in an April 1876 article in *Scribner's Monthly*, entitled 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne'. The anonymous critic described him as being 'as fresh and significant to the world at large as to America', endorsing Oliver Wendell Holmes's description of his 'Yankee mind' as 'a seedling' raised 'in the natural soil', rather than 'in pots of English earth', as 'a generous statement of a large

¹²⁷ A. D. M., pp. 286, 285.

¹²⁸ A. D. M., pp. 282, 292.

¹²⁹ A. D. M., p. 290.

¹³⁰ A. D. M., pp. 286, 289.

¹³¹ A. D. M., p. 281.

fact'.¹³² Like A. D. M., this critic clearly felt the necessity to legitimate their nationalist affirmation of Hawthorne by negotiating what they euphemistically describe as the 'extremes' in his fiction.¹³³ They go to great lengths to emphasise the absence of morally corrosive or dangerously pessimistic elements in his writing. They argue that the 'sad, questioning twilight' which characterises his writing is 'at no time threatening' and that there is never 'anything disordered about the sadness that appears. There is not protest against life and fate, no gloomy or weak self-pity'.¹³⁴ The decision to refer to Hawthorne's Gothicism in terms of 'sadness' is in itself strategic. Rather than associating the author with more alarming concepts, such as horror and terror, they depict his writing in a softer, more melancholic light, or what they describe as a 'gentle and steady gray luminousness'.¹³⁵

As well as defending the Gothic elements in Hawthorne's stories, this critic also sought to provide an acceptable biographical explanation for their presence in his writing. To this end, attention is drawn to the fact that many of his earlier stories were written during a period of 'long and oppressive isolation'.¹³⁶ Although Hawthorne's famously reclusive lifestyle during the years following his graduation from Bowdoin college was often used to prop up the gothicised mythos surrounding him, this critic diffuses the Gothic potential of this information, turning it instead to his advantage:

The wonder should be that Hawthorne's mind could soar above the shadows as often as it did at this time, and, above all, that he should always give us a taste of a complete, a wholesome, unselfish, pure, and profound philosophy amidst even the bitterest distillations of his dreams.¹³⁷

The reason that Hawthorne's ability, despite his prolonged isolation, to intermingle the 'shadows' in his stories with so many 'wholesome', 'unselfish' and 'pure' elements, ought to be read as a testament to his mental robustness. Instead of making inferences about Hawthorne's disturbed or dysfunctional psychology, they reach the opposite conclusion that 'He was rational, self-possessed, and simply manful'.¹³⁸ Tacitly acknowledging the discourse of gender deviance that was often attached to Gothic authorship, this critic even emphasises Hawthorne's traditional masculinity.

¹³² 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', *Scribner's Monthly*, April 1876, pp. 799-808 (p. 808).

¹³³ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 806.

¹³⁴ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 806.

¹³⁵ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 806.

¹³⁶ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 806.

¹³⁷ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 806.

¹³⁸ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 808.

In a July 1871 article in *The Independent*, J. H. M. pinpointed Hawthorne's career as the apotheosis of America's literary history to date, proudly remembering him as 'our great romancer'.¹³⁹ J. H. M. expresses particular admiration for Hawthorne's representation of New England, writing that 'he lingers lovingly about the homestead; he strolls in the gardens and orchards, along the grassy, elm-shaded avenues of our New England villages'.¹⁴⁰ They fondly compliment the fact that 'Squirrels play about, and birds sing in his most retired forest scenes', and that 'Apple trees overhang his green lanes, and the magnificent autumn foliage glows in his pictures'.¹⁴¹ Alongside this praise for Hawthorne's engagement with New England's natural landscape, J. H. M. also describes the unsettling contrast between the 'sunshine' and 'shadows' in his writing.¹⁴² They portray the experience of reading his fiction as a disorientating oscillation between order and chaos, light and dark, beauty and ugliness, observing that the reader will find themselves on the

border-line between reason and insanity. He will find himself both among gloomy and terrible scenes and among the loveliest in the world, where the beauty of order and the dreadfulness of violation of established order are brought most vividly into contrast. The blackest shadows and the sweetest sunshine will play alternately over the pages he reads.¹⁴³

In order to explain this jarring dissonance, J. H. M. suggests that Hawthorne 'preferred to be in the shadow — not so much because it was shadow, as because in shadow he best saw the beautiful workings of sunlight'.¹⁴⁴ The prevalence of Gothic elements in Hawthorne's fiction is not the result of his instinctual predilection for gloominess and morbidity, they reason, but part of a stylistic strategy which uses the interplay between contrasting lighter and darker elements to make the lighter elements stand out more clearly.

Like the author of 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', J. H. M. also acknowledges the Gothic mythologies which had sprung up around Hawthorne's reputed shyness. They recall the rumours about Hawthorne's self-imposed solitude in Salem, living as a 'recluse even from his own household', and observe that through the eyes of the public he was perceived to walk 'about wrapt in his impenetrable veil, unseen, or half seen, or seen only by

¹³⁹ J. H. M., 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *The Independent*, 20 July 1871, p. 6 (p. 6).

¹⁴⁰ J. H. M., p. 6.

¹⁴¹ J. H. M., p. 6.

¹⁴² J. H. M., p. 6.

¹⁴³ J. H. M., p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ J. H. M., p. 6.

glimpses'.¹⁴⁵ In order to discredit these rumours, J. H. M. turns to the content of Hawthorne's posthumously published *Note-Books*, the closest available approximation to his autobiography. As Sophia Hawthorne had hoped, J. H. M. claims that Hawthorne had been 'supposed to dwell always in shadow, until those sunny "American Note-books" disclosed how many chinks and apertures let sunlight into the dark chambers of his soul'.¹⁴⁶ Rectifying the inaccurately sombre image of Hawthorne that had dominated his reception prior to their publication, J. H. M. contends that the *Note-Books* had succeeded in introducing the public to a far more cheerful and wholesome version of a much misunderstood or 'misknown' author.¹⁴⁷ Once again, the establishment of Hawthorne as America's 'great romancer' is underpinned by the refutation of his Gothic identity.

American editors also appropriated articles originally published in British periodicals that sought to situate Hawthorne at the forefront of American literary culture and justify the Gothic aspects of his work. This is exemplified by an October 1868 article in *Littell's Living Age*, which was republished from *The North British Review*. The article opens with the typical critical observation that 'The institutions and social life of America would appear in some respects unfavourable to the production of any form of literary activity in which the imagination is principally concerned'.¹⁴⁸ Immediately after acknowledging the established critical paradigm surrounding America's inability to produce great national literature, however, this critic urges readers to reconsider their pre-existing prejudices on the basis that:

A country that can boast of three such contemporary authors as Emerson in Philosophy, Longfellow in Poetry, and Hawthorne in Pure Fiction, cannot be considered a barren or unhopeful soil for the cultivation of the richer fruits of the imagination.¹⁴⁹

Alongside their selection of Hawthorne's work as representative of America's successful literary evolution in the realm of fiction, this critic concedes that 'There are dark and curious chambers within his consciousness' and that 'he manifests a fondness for dealing with sides of our nature where assuredly the strength and cheerfulness of humanity

¹⁴⁵ J. H. M., p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ J. H. M., p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ J. H. M., p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, pp. 67-86 (p. 67).

¹⁴⁹ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, p. 67.

[do] not lie, which by some is felt to be morbid'.¹⁵⁰ Determined to refute this apparent morbidity, however, the critic deploys several arguments in Hawthorne's defence. First, they distinguish the darker elements in Hawthorne's works from those in the sensational pot-boilers or blood-and-thunder narratives that were popular at the time. Denouncing 'the popular taste' as having become 'vitiating by unhealthy stimulus and coarse sensational excitement' in 'these days of demoralizing fiction and over-wrought incident', they suggest that only 'the dainty reader' will appreciate 'anything so refined' as the 'flavour' of Hawthorne's work.¹⁵¹ Emphasising the cultural divide between 'literary' and 'popular' fiction, and situating Hawthorne firmly within the former category, they set a precedent for justifying Hawthorne's Gothicism on the grounds that it is not merely a strategy for satisfying the sordid tastes of less discerning readers, but part of an intellectually sophisticated creative project. To shed some light on what this project entails, the critic acknowledges Hawthorne's 'preference' for 'dangerous themes', such as 'the working of emotions', and his apparent tendency to 'play with them'.¹⁵² Rather than demonstrating a sadistic, inhuman curiosity on the author's part — an assumption which had often resulted in Hawthorne's gothicised portrayal as a pathological surgeon or scientist — the critic insists that this 'toying' is only 'apparent' and should instead be understood as 'an application to Ethics of the Baconian experimental method of enquiry'.¹⁵³ It is Hawthorne's conscientiously philosophical approach to writing, they argue, which enables him to scrutinise 'such topics', the 'treatment of which in almost any other hands than his would degenerate into sickly sentimentalism or repulsive ugliness'.¹⁵⁴ To further underscore their refutation of Hawthorne's Gothic image, this critic also argues that, irrespective of his exploration of darker themes, the 'general healthiness' of his 'nature' is demonstrated by his more obvious affinity with lighter subjects:

The heart that so sings in harmony with childhood's sweetest music can hardly be suspected of choosing and enjoying the delineation of horror and evil for its own sake. Even in his tales of darker shade and lurid light, these qualities are relieved, and their real character attested, by the bright sunshine and winning beauty that form the broader features of the picture.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, pp. 67, 68.

¹⁵¹ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, p. 68.

¹⁵² 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, p. 68.

¹⁵³ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, p. 68.

¹⁵⁴ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, p. 68.

¹⁵⁵ 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Littell's Living Age*, 10 October 1868, pp. 9, 70.

If Hawthorne's overall character is to be deduced from the nature of his writing, they argue, then the 'darker', 'lurid' elements of his imagination are far outweighed by the pure and wholesome ones.

Efforts to suppress the compromising Gothic discourse surrounding Hawthorne were also present in early biographies. One of the most prominent examples of this is to be found in Henry James's 1879 biography, *Hawthorne*, a tribute that was arguably intended to position James as its subject's direct literary descendant. James has little patience for the prevailing notion that Hawthorne was 'preponderantly gloomy'.¹⁵⁶ He scoffs at 'some few' readers who continue to treat him as a 'dusky and malarious genius' and stresses that 'The general impression of this silence-loving and shade-seeking side of his character is doubtless exaggerated, and, in so far as it points to him as a sombre and sinister figure, is almost ludicrously at fault'.¹⁵⁷ James contends that there is a fundamental divide between Hawthorne's 'gloomy' imagination and his personal life, or 'his heart and his happiness'.¹⁵⁸ Rather than springing from traumatic experiences or periods of emotional darkness in the author's life, James argues that the

duskiest flowers of his invention sprang straight from the soil of his happiest days. This surely indicates that there was but little direct connection between the products of his fancy and the state of his affections. When he was lightest at heart, he was most creative.¹⁵⁹

Importantly, this character evaluation is preceded by a nationalist introduction to Hawthorne's career. In the opening pages, James honours Hawthorne's status as 'the most valuable example of the American genius', remembering him as 'the writer to whom his countrymen most confidently point when they wish to make a claim to have enriched the mother-tongue'.¹⁶⁰ Although James is reluctant to view Hawthorne's productions as nationally representative, arguing that this would be 'a mistake of proportion', he wholeheartedly endorses their value as authentic depictions of New England life and culture.¹⁶¹ He argues that Hawthorne 'virtually offers the most vivid reflection of New England life that has found its way into literature', describes the 'cold, bright air of New England' as seeming 'to blow through his pages', and praises his ability to convey an

¹⁵⁶ James, p. 27.

¹⁵⁷ James, pp. 47, 26.

¹⁵⁸ James, p. 98.

¹⁵⁹ James, p. 99.

¹⁶⁰ James, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ James, p. 3.

accurate 'impression of the manners, the morals, indeed of the very climate, of the great region of which the remarkable city of Boston is the metropolis'.¹⁶² James even uses his subject's coincidental birth 'on the 4th July, 1804', the 'great American festival, the anniversary of the Declaration of national Independence', to bolster his advocacy of Hawthorne's unique literary achievements.¹⁶³ He strongly implies that Hawthorne's position in America's literary canon was somehow destined from birth, observing that, 'a person who has been ushered into life by the ringing of bells and the booming of cannon [...] receives by this very fact an injunction to do something great, something that will justify such striking natal accompaniments'.¹⁶⁴

There are, of course, deviations from this pattern of pairing nationalist appropriations of Hawthorne's work with the rejection of his Gothic image. In a June 1879 article in *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science*, M. G. Van Rensselaer begins by repeating the common literary nationalist lament that 'It is a fact universally allowed that we do not possess an indigenous school of fiction'.¹⁶⁵ Like many others, Van Rensselaer identifies Nathaniel Hawthorne as the exception to this rule, naming him as 'the one first-rate man we can boast'.¹⁶⁶ To support this, Van Rensselaer focuses on Hawthorne's superior literary technique, venerating 'his fineness of sense and skill of hand' as 'exquisite beyond praise'.¹⁶⁷ As with the other critics, Van Rensselaer couples a literary nationalist admiration for Hawthorne with a rhetorical manoeuvre calculated to legitimate the Gothic content in his fiction:

That he was by nature morbid, and his work pathological rather than simply surgical, does not invalidate his claim to the highest rank as an artist. For he did not push pathology outside the legitimate bounds of art — outside the bounds of possible beauty.¹⁶⁸

What is uncommon about this example is the fact that the critic does not reject the idea that Hawthorne was naturally morbid, even 'pathological'. Rather than de-Gothicising Hawthorne via the de-gothicisation of his writing, they focus instead on denying that the Gothic elements in Hawthorne's writing should necessarily 'invalidate' his eminent literary

¹⁶² James, pp. 4, 3.

¹⁶³ James, p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ James, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶⁵ Van Rensselaer, p. 753.

¹⁶⁶ Van Rensselaer, p. 758.

¹⁶⁷ Van Rensselaer, p. 758.

¹⁶⁸ Van Rensselaer, p. 758.

status. Insisting that Hawthorne never took his Gothicism so far as to preclude the possibility for 'beauty', they do not see any reason why his achievements should be devalued by the psychological deficiencies that lay behind them. This article is, of course, the proverbial exception that proves the rule.

The Comparative Treatment of Hawthorne and Other Gothic Authors

The literary nationalist ideology behind Hawthorne's critical de-gothicisation is most discernible in pieces where it stands in direct contrast to the attribution of Gothic identities to practitioners of the genre deemed to play a less significant, or even detrimental role in the development of America's literary tradition. The authors of these pieces are not fundamentally averse to the treatment of Gothic writers as Gothic subjects, or to biographical exegesis in general, but to the application of this potentially incriminating method of interpretation to an author they wish to present as a national literary hero.

This relative treatment is exemplified by a June 1883 article by James Herbert Morse in *Century Illustrated Magazine*, entitled 'The Native Element in American Fiction. Before the War'. As the title suggests, this article exhibits a strong literary nationalist agenda. Like many others, Morse acknowledges America's demoralising lack of literary prestige on the world stage:

Europe, as we said, was eager to read and to swallow whatever came; but the scholarship of Europe was even then jealously critical of our use of all this vast material, — and well it might be. Looking back upon it now, in the light of more exacting literary art, we can see the early weaknesses, and must acknowledge the justice, even while we lament the spirit, of the severest things that were said against us [...] We gave the world a generous feast, but so ill-cooked that only large appetites could partake with impunity.¹⁶⁹

Morse traces the cause of America's literary failings not to the ideas, or '*invention*' of its 'early writers' — which he insists were 'quite equal to that of their English brothers' — but to their ability to skilfully execute these ideas.¹⁷⁰ He argues that early American works were stylistically inferior to English ones, observing that 'in the choice and artistic disposition of material they were not held to so high a standard', and suggesting that 'the magnificent success of' earlier 'novelists like Cooper seems due to their breadth rather than delicacy of

¹⁶⁹ James Herbert Morse, 'The Native Element in American Fiction: Before the War', *Century Illustrated Magazine*, June 1883, pp. 288-98 (p. 293).

¹⁷⁰ Morse, p. 288.

treatment — a gift of nature and not of art'.¹⁷¹ Despite these initial struggles, Morse is far from despondent about America's recent literary history. This optimism is largely based upon the opinion that American letters have been almost singlehandedly redeemed by Hawthorne's timely arrival upon the scene as an author who, unlike his predecessors, was capable of producing writing that was both stylistically accomplished and authentically American. As well as describing him as 'original and purely American, — Puritan, even, in his cast of thought and in all the internal and external conditions of his creation', Morse also makes the case that 'His style is masterly in ease, grace', and 'clearness', and that 'We never reached such insight, or such grace of style, before Hawthorne'.¹⁷²

Apparently concerned that Hawthorne's Gothicism could be used to dismantle these claims, Morse wastes no time in justifying this aspect of his writing and rejecting the unwholesome personal image habitually associated with it. Similarly to J. H. M, he endeavours to legitimate what he describes as the 'darkness' or 'shade' in Hawthorne's work by suggesting that it is actually part of an intricate chiaroscuro technique.¹⁷³ He argues that 'His mastery of light and shade — the power of deepening gloom by sunshine and intensifying sunshine by means of darkness — is of the finest order'.¹⁷⁴ Also like J. H. M., Morse refers to the content of Hawthorne's *Note-Books* to refute his enduring reputation for morbidity and gloominess, stating that their publication has

thrown a flood of light not only upon the workings of Hawthorne's mind but on the sources of his artistic effects. They supplement with a sunny external quality the gloom of his psychology. They show us in his own nature a capacity for beauty and sweetness, where his own generation saw only a capacity for morbid analysis; that is, they furnish the biography of a more sympathetic side of his mind, while the novels represent what was equally real in his emotional nature. No doubt, while his actual life was simple and pure-minded, capable of absorbing beauty and interest, he had, in imagination, lived through the tortures of the damned.¹⁷⁵

Whilst Morse does not deny that Hawthorne 'lived through the tortures of the damned' in his imaginative life, he, like Julian Hawthorne, is careful to draw a clear distinction between this and 'his own nature' and 'actual life'.

This generic dispensation is not, however, extended to Charles Brockden Brown. Whilst emphasising the separation between Hawthorne's personal and professional lives,

¹⁷¹ Morse, p. 288.

¹⁷² Morse, pp. 293, 294.

¹⁷³ Morse, p. 294.

¹⁷⁴ Morse, p. 294.

¹⁷⁵ Morse, p. 294.

Morse interprets Brown's Gothicism — glossed in his description of his work as an 'incubus of horrors' and reference to his 'peculiar gift' for 'paint[ing] the night side of human experience' — as a reflection of his own life and psychology, writing that 'Brown's early life was unmistakably gloomy. From a temperament delicate and fine, but morbid, — in which the intellectual overbalanced the physical forces, — sprang his first book'.¹⁷⁶ Morse even draws an explicit comparison between the origins of the 'gloomy characteristics' and 'morbid analysis' in Brockden Brown and Hawthorne's fiction, arguing that whereas in Hawthorne's case 'we can see that the gloom came' as 'the work of an artistic sense', with 'Brown, it seems to have been constitutional — the gift at once of temperament and circumstances. He was possessed by it'.¹⁷⁷

It is revealing that Morse dismisses Brown's works not only for belonging to the stylistically inferior American tradition which preceded Hawthorne's career, but for lacking an authentically native quality, arguing that it 'contained [...] not a hint of the new American life, not a spark of that humor which afterward flashed freely in American literature'.¹⁷⁸ Having discarded Brown's works as a valuable asset to American literature, Morse is content to treat him as a Gothic subject. Contrastingly, in addition to advocating Hawthorne's writing as both stylistically elegant and essentially American, he is also meticulous in his efforts to exempt him from the pejorative discourse surrounding his chosen mode of writing. This de-gothicisation even extends to Morse's clarification of the fact that his rhetorical description of Hawthorne's Americanness as 'Puritan' is not intended to align him with any of the potentially gothicised associations surrounding the nation's early colonial history: 'He was too sane a man, of course, to yield credence to the Puritan suspicion of demonic influences'.¹⁷⁹

Comparative studies of Poe and Hawthorne yield similar insights into the relationship between Hawthorne's appropriation as a literary nationalist icon and the repudiation of his gothicised image. Probably the most in depth example of this is located in Hawthorne's son-in-law George Parsons Lathrop's 1876 biography *A Study of Hawthorne*. Aware that 'The first and most common opinion about the man Hawthorne is, that he must have been extremely gloomy, because his mind nourished so many grave thoughts and

¹⁷⁶ Morse, p. 289.

¹⁷⁷ Morse, p. 289.

¹⁷⁸ Morse, p. 289.

¹⁷⁹ Morse, pp. 293-94.

solemn fancies', Lathrop attacks what he presents as this common misconception from multiple angles.¹⁸⁰ On a basic level, he uses his privileged position as a member of Hawthorne's extended family to denounce the inaccuracy of the widely circulated character portraits emphasising his gloominess and morbidity. On numerous occasions, Lathrop testifies to the fundamental healthiness of Hawthorne's mental state, asserting that he possessed a 'healthy nature', that 'in truth he was a perfectly healthy person', and that although 'abundant' and 'ardent', he had a 'self-contained and perfectly balanced nature'.¹⁸¹

Like many of the critics cited above, Lathrop does not deny the fact that Hawthorne's fiction dealt with darker themes:

One of the least thoughtful remarks which I have heard touching Hawthorne was this, that his books could not live because they dealt with the 'sick side' of human nature. As if great poets ever refrained from dealing with it! The tenure of fame depends on whether the writer has himself become infected with sickness.¹⁸²

He rejects the idea that an author's engagement with the 'Sick side' of human nature automatically reduces the value of their work, arguing that this is only the case if it embodies an externalisation of the author's own 'sickness'. He is emphatic, however, that 'the morbid phases' studied in Hawthorne's narratives found their origins 'entirely outside of himself', and that 'it is a great mistake to suppose that the abnormal or preposterous' aspects of his work are 'the fruit of *self-study*', or 'personal traits disguised in fiction'.¹⁸³ Like numerous others who sought to defend Hawthorne's reputation, Lathrop seized upon the publication of his *Note-Books* as proof of his psychological soundness, arguing that they expose just 'how far apart from himself' his 'creations were'.¹⁸⁴ He recalls the 'general rustle of surprise' caused by the *Note-Books*' unexpected revelation of the author's 'simple, wholesome nature', and the fact that 'The psychical conditions described by Hawthorne had only the remotest connection with any mood of his own'.¹⁸⁵ Serving as a written scrap-book of 'impressions and observations drawn from the world around him', Lathrop identifies the *Note-Books* as a biographical record of the fact that the gloomier aspects of Hawthorne's

¹⁸⁰ George Parsons Lathrop, *A Study of Hawthorne* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1886), p. 286.

¹⁸¹ Lathrop, pp. 284, 286, 291.

¹⁸² Lathrop, p. 310.

¹⁸³ Lathrop, pp. 310, 286.

¹⁸⁴ Lathrop, p. 307.

¹⁸⁵ Lathrop, p. 307.

fictions were not drawn from within, but were 'mainly translations, into the language of genius' of external phenomena.¹⁸⁶

Lathrop devoted a whole chapter of his biography to a comparison of Hawthorne's works with Washington Irving's and Edgar Allan Poe's. The comparisons he draws between Hawthorne and Irving are largely stylistic. He 'ranks' Hawthorne's 'genius' higher than Irving's, for example, due to his unrivalled 'psychological analysis and symbolic imagination'.¹⁸⁷ Contrastingly, Lathrop's comparison of Hawthorne and Poe focuses extensively on the authors' individual psychologies, especially in relation to the role that these psychologies played in the creation of their Gothic narratives. Whereas he repeatedly emphasises the healthy nature of Hawthorne's psychology and the disconnect between his personal and professional lives, Lathrop insists that the opposite was true of Poe. This comparison is all the more important, he suggests, due to the historical tendency of critics to reach the opposite conclusion:

When Hawthorne's tales first appeared, they were almost invariably taken to bear an intimate and direct relation to the author's own moods; while Poe's were supposed to be daring flights of pure imagination, or ingenious attempts to prove theories held by the writer, but were not charged directly to his own experience. Time has shown that the converse was the case.¹⁸⁸

Lathrop argues that the Gothic 'quality in Poe's work 'was at least largely owing' to 'disease', even if 'it did not spring from it', and claims that he 'pictured his own half-maniacal moods and diseased fancies' in his tales.¹⁸⁹ Although he concedes that Griswold's character assassination of Poe was 'unjust', he nevertheless insists that he was 'a worse enemy to himself than any one else could be', and that 'The imperfections of his temperament have pierced his poetry and prose, shattered their structure, and blurred their beauty'.¹⁹⁰

Lathrop goes on to provide a troubling psychological dissection of Poe's creative process:

it would be difficult to find a poetic fury less allied to sane human life than that which informs his [Poe's] tales. It is not the *representation* of semi-insanity that he gives: he himself is its *representative*. Instead of commanding it, and bringing it into some sort of healthy relation with us, he is swayed and carried away by it. His genius flourished

¹⁸⁶ Lathrop, p. 307.

¹⁸⁷ Lathrop, p. 301.

¹⁸⁸ Lathrop, p. 307.

¹⁸⁹ Lathrop, pp. 308, 310.

¹⁹⁰ Lathrop, p. 308.

upon him like a destructive flame, and the ashes that it left are like a deadly powdered poison.¹⁹¹

In addition to visualising Poe's masochistic and self-destructive relationship with writing, Lathrop also attempted to ascertain the reason for his attraction to Gothic subject matter. He reaches the conclusion that 'the most loathsome hideousness' and 'debasement and unbeautiful horror' that Poe 'forces upon' the reader was actually, ironically, the corrupted perversions of his failed efforts to prove himself as 'the special apostle of the beautiful in art'.¹⁹² Lathrop expands upon this diagnosis by claiming that:

This passionate, unhelmed, errant search for beauty was in fact not so much a normal and intelligent desire, as an attempt to escape from interior discord; and it was the discord which found expression, accordingly, instead of the sense of beauty, — except (as has been said) in fragments. Whatever the cause, his brain had a rift of ruin in it, from the start, and though his delicate touch often stole a new grace from, classic antiquity, it was the fragility, the quick decay, the fall of all lovely and noble things, that excited and engaged him.¹⁹³

Poe's 'search for beauty', he surmises, was always doomed to fail as a result of an innate, perverse attraction to its destruction.

Lathrop admits that 'Hawthorne, too, wandered much amid human ruin', but is insistent that this was not undertaken, like Poe, 'with delight in the mere fact of decay'.¹⁹⁴ Instead, he posits that Hawthorne's engagement with this material was driven by a moral purpose, namely the possibility of learning 'how much of life was still left in the wreck' and showing how 'future structures might be made stronger by studying the sources of failure'.¹⁹⁵ In order to explain this fundamental difference between Poe's and Hawthorne's use of Gothic themes, Lathrop turns to the essentialist concept of genius. Whereas he describes Poe's as being 'connected' with a 'morbid and shattering susceptibility', he defines Hawthorne's as a 'tremulous, constantly re-adjusted sensitiveness which indicates the perfect equilibrium of health'.¹⁹⁶ Yet again, Lathrop stresses the absence of 'actual mental decay' in Hawthorne's psychology, presenting the 'healthier endowment' of his mind as the basis of his ability to turn the Gothic genre to positive, pedagogical ends.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ Lathrop, pp. 310-11.

¹⁹² Lathrop, p. 309.

¹⁹³ Lathrop, p. 309.

¹⁹⁴ Lathrop, p. 310.

¹⁹⁵ Lathrop, p. 310.

¹⁹⁶ Lathrop, p. 311.

¹⁹⁷ Lathrop, pp. 311-12.

Nowhere is Lathrop's determination to repudiate the moral and psychological relationship between Hawthorne and Poe more apparent than in his assertion that 'Hawthorne — the calm, ardent, healthy master of imagination — is able to create the disordered type that Poe *is*'.¹⁹⁸ He argues that:

Clifford Pyncheon in the 'Seven Gables' is Poe himself, deprived of the ability to act: in both are found the same consummate fastidiousness, the same abnormal egotism. [...] the coruscating play of his intellect is almost precisely that brilliant but defective kind of ratiocination which Poe so delights to display.¹⁹⁹

Likening Poe to a living embodiment of the dysfunctional character types that Hawthorne excelled in creating, Lathrop suggests that Poe's relationship with the Gothic was born out of his own state of psychological disorder, whilst Hawthorne's was the product of superior insight and craftsmanship. Whilst Hawthorne occupies a lofty position of intellectual detachment in this comparison, Poe's creative process, as a Gothic subject in his own right, is far from autonomous.

Bound up with these comparisons between Poe's diseased Gothic nature and Hawthorne's healthy and non-Gothic one, is Lathrop's emphasis upon their respective non-national and national approaches to authorship. Whilst the perceived 'Americanness' of Hawthorne's writing leads Lathrop to repudiate his Gothic image on nationalist as well as personal grounds, the supposed lack of attention to native subjects in Poe's work appears to disqualify him from being afforded a similar reprieve. Lathrop's celebration of Hawthorne's authentic native quality echoes many of arguments that were common in literary nationalist appropriations of his work. Like numerous others, Lathrop champions Hawthorne's commitment to New England themes, proudly asserting that 'The history of Hawthorne's genius is in some sense a summary of all New England history'.²⁰⁰ To further this argument, he claims that:

The Ionian intellect of Athens culminates in Plato; Florence runs into the mould of Dante's verse, like fluid bronze; Paris secures remembrance of her wide curiosity in Voltaire's settled expression; and Samuel Johnson holds fast for us that London of the eighteenth century which has passed out of sight, in giving place to the capital of the Anglo-Saxon race today. In like manner the sober little New England town [Salem] which has played a so much more obscure, though in its way hardly less

¹⁹⁸ Lathrop, p. 311.

¹⁹⁹ Lathrop, p. 311.

²⁰⁰ Lathrop, p. 8.

significant part, sits quietly enshrined and preserved in Hawthorne's singularly imperishable prose.²⁰¹

In aligning Hawthorne with other major authors, both from classical antiquity and the European canon, whose names and works have come to be associated with specific native locations, he attempts to confer a similarly representative status upon him. Lathrop also promotes the inextricability of Hawthorne's writing from New England by implying that it was partly Hawthorne's immersion in the region's natural landscape which nourished his literary powers: 'this fair flower of American genius rose up unexpectedly enough, breaking the cold New England sod for the emission of a light and fragrance as pure and pensive as that of the arbutus in our woods, in Spring'.²⁰²

In recent years numerous critics, such as Tom Wright, Eric Gary Anderson and Jace Weaver, have drawn attention to Poe's identity as a Southern writer.²⁰³ Indeed, Poe's regionality was by no means universally ignored by contemporary critics. In a December 1868 article in *The Galaxy*, for example, Eugene Benson paired his description of Hawthorne as the 'finest distillation of the New England mind' with his recognition as Poe as 'the gift of the South to American literature'.²⁰⁴ Lathrop, however, refused to recognise any native traits or nationalist impulses in Poe's writing. Instead, he bluntly stated that, unlike Hawthorne, Poe 'exhibits nothing' in the way of genuine Americanness in his writing', possessing 'no aptitude' in 'the use of native material'.²⁰⁵ According to Lathrop, Poe's 'want of deep literary identification with the national character', could have been caused by the innate fact that 'his genius was a detonating agent which could have been convulsed into its meet activity anywhere'.²⁰⁶ To bolster the claim that Poe's literary talent 'had nothing to do with soil', Lathrop pointed to the fact that Poe's works had been readily appropriated by foreign literary movements, such as 'a group of men, in Paris, headed by Baudelaire' and

²⁰¹ Lathrop, pp. 11-12.

²⁰² Lathrop, p. 8.

²⁰³ Tom Wright, 'Edgar Allan Poe and the Southern Gothic', in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, ed. by Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 9-20; Eric Gary Anderson, 'The Fall of the House of Po Sandy: Poe, Chesnutt, and Southern Undeadness', in *Undead Souths: The Gothic and Beyond in Southern Literature and Culture*, ed. by Eric Gary Anderson, Taylor Hagood and Daniel Cross Turner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), pp. 23-35; Jace Weaver, 'Mr Poe's Indians: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and Edgar Allan Poe as a Southern Writer', *Native South*, 5 (2012), 38-60.

²⁰⁴ Eugene Benson, 'Poe and Hawthorne', *The Galaxy*, December 1868, pp. 742-48 (p. 747).

²⁰⁵ Lathrop, pp. 313, 316.

²⁰⁶ Lathrop, p. 313.

'the Rossetti-Morris family of English poets'.²⁰⁷ If Poe's writing could be so easily assimilated to the needs and ideals of groups as geographically and ideologically disparate as the French Symbolist movement and the Pre-Raphaelite school, Lathrop reasons, then it could not possess much in the way of qualities and concerns that were exclusively representative of America. The point could not be clearer. With no nationalist agenda staked upon Poe's writing, Lathrop felt no inclination to exempt him from the gothicised discourse from which he had so conscientiously sought to extricate Hawthorne.

It is likely that Lathrop reiterated his opinions on the diametric opposition between Poe's Gothic and non-nationalist identity and Hawthorne's non-Gothic and nationalist one in the anonymous April 1876 article entitled 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne' (discussed in chapter one and earlier in this chapter). The article was published anonymously, but the frequent appearance of identical phrasing to that used in Lathrop's biography of the same year points either to his authorship, or to the influence of his biography. At the beginning of the article, Lathrop (or his imitator) draws attention to the fact that 'we often hear Poe and Hawthorne classed together as "weird" or "grotesque"', both adjectives which gloss the Gothic content in their fiction.²⁰⁸ Apparently concerned by the incriminating assumptions about Hawthorne's character that could be precipitated by a reader's awareness of his generic likeness to Poe, the critic insists that 'There was nothing gloomy in Hawthorne's character [...] I urge this here, to mitigate prevalent notions about his peculiarity, which perhaps tend to attach him by another unreal association to Poe'.²⁰⁹ It is not necessary here to revisit the article's interrelated refutation of Hawthorne's Gothic image and celebration of his nationalism, which was discussed earlier in the chapter. It is important to note, however, that the indicting commentary on Poe's Gothic nature in this article (much of which is lifted directly from *A Study of Hawthorne*) is again accompanied by a denial of there being any authentically national content in Poe's writing. The author criticises, for example, the 'slight American substance' in Poe's work and declares that 'he has no traits that we can call American. We even fancy in him a kind of shrinking from any identification with his native land, instinctive, if not conscious'.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Lathrop, p. 314.

²⁰⁸ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 799.

²⁰⁹ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 806.

²¹⁰ 'Poe, Irving, Hawthorne', p. 803.

Conclusion

It would be remiss to conclude this chapter without some mention of 'The Custom House', the introduction to, or framing narrative of, *The Scarlet Letter*, which provided some of the most comprehensive and direct authorial insights into Hawthorne's approach to romance writing. In 'The Custom House', Hawthorne presents his writing process, as well as his inspirations for the upcoming narrative, in a light that is both distinctly autobiographical and distinctly Gothic. Alongside the fond, yet often biting, character sketches of his fellow colleagues at the Salem Custom House, which make up the bulk of the piece, Hawthorne explores his strong personal connection to Salem through longstanding ancestral ties. Whilst his family has 'deep and aged roots' in the town's 'soil', Hawthorne meditates upon the uncomfortable truth that their heritage there is marred by the involvement of two generations of its Puritan patriarchs in two of the most infamous episodes in America's early colonial history.²¹¹ Acknowledging the 'persecuting spirit' of both of these ancestors (William Hathorne (c. 1606-1681) and John Hathorne (1641-1717)), Hawthorne explains how the elder was associated with the brutal persecution of the Quakers, having been implicated in 'an incident of [...] hard severity towards a woman of their sect', before revealing that his son 'made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom' of accused individuals during The Salem Witch Trials that 'their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him'.²¹²

Significantly, Hawthorne admits to his own personal fascination with his family's participation in these bloody events, somewhat ghoulishly speculating as to whether his ancestors' actions have left the legacy of a family 'curse'.²¹³ Hawthorne traces this fascination back to his youth, remembering that:

The figure of that first ancestor, invested by family tradition with a dim and dusky grandeur, was present to my boyish imagination, as far back as I can remember. It still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past, which I scarcely claim in reference to the present phase of the town. I seem to have a stronger claim to a residence here on account of this grave, bearded, sable-cloaked, and steeple-crowned progenitor.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. by Brian Harding and introd. by Cindy Weinstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; repr. 2008), p. 9.

²¹² Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 10.

²¹³ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 10.

²¹⁴ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 9-10.

Hawthorne even reflects upon his obsessive, almost masochistic compulsion to repeatedly return to Salem, despite the fact that he is 'invariably happiest elsewhere'.²¹⁵ He likens this impulse to the irresistible pull of a 'spell', before arriving at the resolution that his morbid and obsessive attachment to the town and its violent past is 'evidence that the connection, which has become an unhealthy one, should at last be severed'.²¹⁶

Following this gothicised family and self-portrait, Hawthorne famously elucidates the atmospheric conditions under which he preferred to compose romances. He describes the romantic inspiration afforded by the defamiliarising impact of a 'familiar room' that has been bathed in 'Moonlight', observing that:

A child's shoe; the doll, seated in her little wicker carriage; the hobby-horse; — whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness [...] the floor of our familiar room has become 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.²¹⁷

As well as describing his ideal romance-writing conditions in terms that would later come to be defined as the uncanny, Hawthorne envisages this archetypal moonlit room as a space that is acutely susceptible to hauntings. He imagines a 'looking-glass' within it as being 'haunted' and muses that 'Ghosts might enter here'.²¹⁸

Whilst 'The Custom House' displays Gothic and autobiographical tendencies, as well as the occasional intermingling of the two, Hawthorne repeatedly appears reticent about these aspects of the piece. In the opening paragraphs, for example, he skittishly attempts to justify his autobiographical approach, remarking that 'It is a little remarkable, that — though disinclined to talk overmuch of myself and my affairs [...] an autobiographical impulse should [...] have taken possession of me, in addressing the public', before reassuring the reader (and apparently himself) that 'we may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and even of ourself, but still keep the inmost Me behind its veil'.²¹⁹ Furthermore, in a manner similar to his initial reluctance to publish *The Scarlet Letter* as a standalone Gothic novel, Hawthorne also seems keen to temper the Gothicism of his description of the moonlit room. Whilst he seemingly relishes the idea of the space being inhabited by ghosts,

²¹⁵ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 9.

²¹⁶ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 11.

²¹⁷ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 30.

²¹⁸ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 31, 30.

²¹⁹ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 5.

for example, he immediately follows up this description with the assurance that they would enter into the room 'without affrighting us'.²²⁰ Hawthorne also tones down the eeriness of the visual effect of the moonlight by imagining that there is a 'somewhat dim coal-fire' in the room, whose 'warmer light mingles itself with the cold spirituality of the moonbeams, and communicates [...] sensibilities of human tenderness to the forms which fancy summons up'.²²¹

If the systematic attempts to vindicate the Gothic elements in Hawthorne's fiction that we have encountered in this chapter are anything to go by, then Hawthorne's critics were considerably more nervous about his Gothicism, and the identity that was presumed to accompany it, than the author himself ever was. Despite Hawthorne's attempts to dilute the incidents of autobiographical Gothicism in 'The Custom House', he nevertheless presented a blueprint for American romance writing that would have been greatly troubling for many literary nationalist critics seeking to promote him as the nation's cultural figurehead. Describing an approach to authorship which draws on the Gothic experiences, surroundings and inclinations, not only of the individual author but, through his focus on a family lineage steeped in colonial sin, the nation itself, Hawthorne opened the most celebrated years of his literary career by outlining a link between Gothic realities and Gothic authorship that many critics felt impelled to decontaminate.

In the following chapters, the focus will move from the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship to the very tangible impact that it exerted upon the construction of Gothic texts. In 'The Custom House', we encounter an iconic moment in American literary history, in which the framing narrative introducing a Gothic work was used to negotiate the author's decision to venture into Gothic territory. In the next chapter, I will continue to examine the strategies that American writers used to negotiate, explain or vindicate their use of the Gothic.

²²⁰ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 30.

²²¹ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 31.

Chapter 3: American Periodicals, the Culture of Sensationalism and the Strategic Construction of Gothic Texts

Introduction

The focus in this chapter shifts from an excavation of the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship to an interrogation of the impact that this discourse had upon the construction of Gothic texts in nineteenth-century America. I argue that the systematic attribution of Gothic identities to Gothic writers encouraged them to adopt narrative strategies that were intended to disassociate them from their chosen genre. In the first section of the chapter, I examine an important crossover between the gothicisation of the Gothic author and widespread critical concerns about the appetite for sensationalism in nineteenth-century American culture. In the subsequent sections, I analyse a selection of Gothic short stories sourced from a range of contemporary periodicals, which all exemplify a strategically evasive approach to the practice of Gothic authorship. I categorise these stories as belonging to one of two highly metafictional Gothic subgenres, both of which were designed to provide the sensational trappings of a marketable mode of writing, whilst simultaneously sanitising, undermining and denouncing it.

I term the first of these subgenres the 'anti-Gothic Gothic'. I argue that in stories belonging to this category, the primary narrative threat is located in the perils of consuming Gothic fiction itself. It is precisely the act of reading Gothic texts that leads to Gothic realities. The second subgenre that I examine is the parodic Gothic. Whilst stories in this category often appear genuinely Gothic at the outset, they are ultimately resolved with comic scenes, usually where a mistaken supernatural entity is revealed to be entirely benign, or at worst a mischievous hoax. I suggest that practitioners of the parodic Gothic took advantage of the genre's popularity at the same time as exonerating themselves from taking it seriously. They shielded themselves from accusations of possessing undesirable Gothic attributes by humorously dismantling and poking fun at the 'Gothic' scenarios laid out at the beginning of their works. As well as looking at anti-Gothic Gothic stories and Gothic parodies aimed at adult readers, this chapter also explores the common adaptation of these Gothic models for stories published in children's magazines. In these stories typical Gothic themes and motifs are deployed, but usually with the pedagogical aim of

discouraging youthful readers either from developing an early taste for Gothic fiction or from giving an unhealthy credence to the supernatural.

The Culture of Sensationalism in Nineteenth-Century America

My decision to focus upon the practice of Gothic authorship in popular periodical culture is based upon several considerations. Firstly, apart from Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's recent consideration of the subject as part of an investigation into the feminist appropriation of the ghost story in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century America, and Gary Hoppenstand's study into the impact of Ambrose Bierce's writing upon the evolution of the Gothic tale nineteenth-century American periodical culture, the Gothic's role in the periodical culture of the period remains largely uncharted territory.¹ This chapter therefore provides a timely contribution to this relatively understudied area of American Gothic scholarship.

Secondly, as I will demonstrate, the acute critical anxiety surrounding the proliferation of sensational modes of entertainment in nineteenth-century America, including the Gothic, provides further important insights into the relationship between the gothicisation of the Gothic author and conceptions of American national identity. In addition to raising questions about the innate moral and psychological character of the American population, the public's seemingly insatiable appetite for sensational narratives also placed a troubling question mark over the nation's intellectual status. Whilst, as we saw in the previous chapter, critics were able to deploy a range of rhetorical manoeuvres to justify Hawthorne's more highbrow brand of Gothicism, it was less easy to redeem Gothic fictions that were purpose-built for mass gratification and therefore deemed to occupy a position at the opposite, inferior end of the literary spectrum.

As noted in chapter one, the nineteenth-century American periodical industry thrived upon transatlantic exchange (a relationship that was epitomised by the habitual republication of articles which had originally appeared in foreign periodicals). In recent years, Gothic scholarship has been greatly enriched by studies which have interrogated the previously held assumption that the generic hegemonies — the characteristics and

¹ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Gary Hoppenstand, 'Ambrose Bierce and the Transformation of the Gothic Tale in the Nineteenth-Century American Periodical', in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. by Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 220-38.

preoccupations — of individual Gothic traditions can be satisfactorily demarcated along national lines. Angela Wright, for example, has observed that 'the work of the [British] Gothic is specifically indebted to a French tradition of writing'.² More broadly, Monika Elbert and Bridget M. Marshall have argued for the importance of applying a transnational perspective to Gothic texts produced during the nineteenth century, whilst Glennis Byron has coined the term 'globalgothic' to acknowledge the 'transnational flows' that have been enabled between previously geographically circumscribed Gothic traditions as a result of modern internationalisation.³ In relation to the literary overlaps between Britain, America and Europe, Avril Horner has called for scholars to 'situate works by British writers and American writers within a European context and legacy', making a particular case for 'the importance of translation and European writing in the development of the Gothic novel'.⁴ Similarly, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik have championed 'new research into the ways in which cross-fertilisation has taken place in Gothic writing from Europe and America'.⁵ Specifically focusing on the transatlantic exchanges between British and American Gothic writing, Leonard Tennenhouse and Siân Silyn Roberts have both questioned the notion (in Roberts's words) that 'the Gothic's transmission across the Atlantic in the 1790s resulted in an altogether new incarnation of the form, with wholly "American" preoccupations'.⁶ Rather than embodying an entirely *sui generis* or Anglophobic new genre, they suggest, the American Gothic borrowed heavily from British themes and tropes.

Whilst the transatlantic exchanges between the American Gothic and foreign Gothic traditions is not the main focus of this section, many of the anti-Gothic and parodic Gothic narratives discussed later in the chapter nevertheless provide a useful demonstration of the cross-fertilisation that Horner and Zlosnik describe. Despite the strong literary nationalist climate in nineteenth-century America, much of the Gothic literature published in

² Angela Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 12.

³ Monika Elbert and Bridget M. Marshall, eds, *Transnational Gothic: Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2016); Glennis Byron, 'Introduction', in *Globalgothic*, ed. by Glennis Byron (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 1-10 (pp. 5, 4).

⁴ Avril Horner, 'Introduction', in *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange 1760-1960*, ed. by Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 1-16 (pp. 3, 1).

⁵ Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, 'Introduction', in *Le Gothic: Influences and Appropriations in Europe and America*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-14 (p. 2).

⁶ Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Siân Silyn Roberts, 'A Transnational Perspective on American Gothic Criticism', in *Transnational Gothic*, ed. by Elbert and Marshall, pp. 19-34 (p. 22).

contemporary periodicals embodied a rich patchwork of different Gothic traditions. As well as borrowing generic conventions from these traditions — especially those belonging to Britain and Germany — these narratives are also informed by wider, transatlantic discourses and points of cultural reference, especially by pedagogical theories originating in Britain and France. Drawing on numerous sources and influences, both from America and further afield, these narratives provide a refreshing corrective to what Roberts has described as the 'exceptionalist' paradigm of 'national distinctions — "British" [or European] vs. "American"'.⁷

Finally, perhaps more than any other printed medium during the period in question, the reading experiences of Americans were filtered through the periodical. As Shelley Streeby notes, 'By 1840, more newspapers were published in the United States than in any other nation'.⁸ Due to various factors, including technological advances, the post-revolutionary rise in literary nationalist sentiment, improved transport links, economic growth and a rapid increase in literacy amongst the population, the nineteenth century saw an explosion in periodical culture. To give a brief overview of some of the figures: by 1833, there were approximately 1,200 newspapers in circulation, and by 1840, this number had increased to 1,500 on-going periodicals of various kinds.⁹ Individual publications that saw a significant increase in subscribers included *Godey's Lady's Book*, which had a list of 70,000 subscribers by 1851 and 150,000 before the Civil War, and the *New York Ledger*, which had a circulation of 400,000 by the 1860s.¹⁰ Significantly, cheap weekly magazines (of which there were roughly 4,295) thrived during this period, reaching an approximate circulation of 10.5 million by the 1870s.¹¹ This on-going boom in the periodical industry frequently led critics to make such declarations as, 'This is the golden age of periodicals!'¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson famously acknowledged the embedded cultural significance of the periodical in his 'Address on the Fugitive Slave Law' (1851):

for who are the readers and thinkers of 1854? Owing to the silent revolution which the newspaper has wrought, this class has come in this country to take in all classes. Look into the morning trains which, from every suburb, carry the businessmen into

⁷ Roberts, p. 19.

⁸ Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 11.

⁹ Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith, 'Introduction: Periodical Literature in Social and Historical Context', in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. by Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 3-16 (pp. 4-5).

¹⁰ Price and Belasco Smith, p. 5.

¹¹ Price and Belasco Smith, p. 5.

¹² qtd. in Price and Belasco Smith, p. 5.

the city to their shops, counting-rooms, work-yards, and warehouses. With them enters the car — the newsboy, that humble priest of politics, finance, philosophy, and religion, he unfolds his magical sheets — twopence a head his bread of knowledge costs — and instantly the entire rectangular assembly, fresh from their breakfast, are bending as one man to their second breakfast.¹³

The rise of the periodical in nineteenth-century America occurred hand in hand with what David S. Reynolds has described as 'a dramatic shift toward the sensational' in the nation's popular culture.¹⁴ During this period, a large proportion of America's increasingly mass-produced print culture served to cater for the population's voracious appetite for sensational reading materials. As Reynolds notes, the flourishing of 'seamy social texts such as penny papers, trial reports, and crime pamphlets; romantic adventure fiction (much of it quite dark) [...] and erotic and pornographic writings', saw the American public 'fed an increasingly spicy diet of horror, gore, and perversity'.¹⁵ What Streeby has likewise referred to as 'the culture of sensation' was often associated with the surge in American criminal literature.¹⁶ As Karen Halttunen has observed, 'Among the new types of murder narratives, the one that achieved cultural dominance was the printed report of the murder trial'.¹⁷ Freedom of the press permitted the most shocking crimes to be 'fashioned' into what Sara L. Crosby has described as 'interminable soap operas' and widely distributed to captive audiences, with trial reports in such high demand that they were repeatedly anthologised in volumes such as *The Record of Crimes in the United States* (1833).¹⁸

Naturally, nineteenth-century American culture was not unique in its craving for the sensational. It is the case, however, that the American press and public developed a particular reputation, both at home and abroad, for taking their indulgence in the macabre, the lurid, the violent and the grotesque to unique extremes. There are numerous instances throughout the period where sensationalism was treated as being in some way synonymous

¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Fugitive Slave Law', in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols (New York: Sully and Kleinteich, 1883), xi, 203-30 (p. 206).

¹⁴ David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 169.

¹⁵ Reynolds, pp. 71, 171.

¹⁶ Streeby, p. 28.

¹⁷ Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998; repr. 2001), p. 36.

¹⁸ Sara L. Crosby, *Poisonous Muse: The Female Poisoner and the Framing of Popular Authorship in Jacksonian America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016), p. 78; *The Record of Crimes in the United States; Containing a Brief Sketch of the Prominent Traits in the Character and Conduct of Many of the Most Notorious Malefactors, who Have Been Guilty of Capital Offences; and who Have Been Detected and Convicted* (Buffalo, NY: H. Faxon, 1833).

with the American psyche. In an article entitled 'The Books We Read', published in *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* in September 1873, for example, H. M. Henley extemporised that:

The great desire for adventure, for something out of the natural order of life — something that will make one's hair stand on end — is purely American; so also, to a great extent, is the flood of light literature that almost shapes an average American mind. This appetite for books that are thrilling, startling, and even horrible, calling into action the very worst phases of human nature, controls us almost completely to-day, as the passion for what is sensual and immoral does the French nation.¹⁹

Similarly, in an 1860 volume on contemporary newspapers, Lambert A. Wilmer observed that 'No narrative of human depravity or crime can shock or horrify an American reader'.²⁰ Critics on the other side of the Atlantic also commented scathingly on the perceived dominance of sensationalism in American culture. In the 1850s, for instance, a writer in the *Westminster Review* scoffed that, 'Our press is bad enough [...] But its violence is meekness and even its atrocities are virtues, compared with that system of *brutal and ferocious outrage* which distinguishes the press of America'.²¹ Correspondingly, in an 1884 account of her visit to the United States, Emily Faithfull recalled with some distaste that 'the American newspaper very often startles its more cultured readers with extraordinary sensational headings and the prominence it gives to horrors of all kinds — murders, elopements, divorces, and wickednesses in general'.²²

As Frank Luther Mott has observed, 'fiction filled more pages than any other type of writing' in nineteenth-century American periodicals.²³ Constituting a significant portion of the sensationalist material consumed by the public, this fiction (which often belonged to subgenres of the Gothic) generated huge volumes of negative critical attention. Unlike Emerson, who celebrated the periodical's ability to engage 'all classes', many critics were alarmed by the almost universal access to sensational fiction that had been facilitated by the

¹⁹ H. M. Henley, 'The Books We Read', *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, September 1873, pp. 229-30 (p. 229).

²⁰ Lambert A. Wilmer, *Our Press Gang; or, A Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers* (Philadelphia, PA: J. T. Lloyd, 1860), p. 173.

²¹ qtd. in Reynolds, p. 172.

²² Emily Faithfull, *Three Visits to America* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1884), p. 336.

²³ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930*, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1938-1968), II, 1850- 1865 (1938), p. 223.

rapid expansion of America's transport links and the relative affordability of many publications.²⁴ Henley, for instance, expressed concerns about the fact that:

There is scarcely a home so isolated, or a family so poor, that does not receive into its midst every week some one of that class of papers, whose star contributors are the most execrable imitators that wield a pen, and whose closely-printed columns are utterly destitute of culture and true sentiment.²⁵

Like a virulent epidemic, Henley locates the danger of sensational material in its democratising ability to cross gender, class, age and geographical boundaries. Similar sentiments are found in an article entitled 'Periodical Reading', in which an anxious critic, using the pseudonym 'C.', sought to weigh up the pros and cons of periodical literature's increasing accessibility:

The prodigious amount of periodical reading at the present day, makes the question of the utility of such reading one of no little moment. If the effect be good, immense benefit must accrue to those in all classes of life whose minds feed on this sort of aliment. If evil, it would be impossible to compute the amount of that evil. Hundreds of thousands read nothing else.²⁶

Reaching the conclusion that 'useful reading' is 'becoming less and less popular' and that 'the only cry is for something more exciting' (i.e. material of a sensational nature), their verdict points to the greater likelihood of periodical fiction resulting in great 'evil'.²⁷

Critics repeatedly voiced their concerns about the form that this 'evil' might take. Frequently, this censure served to uphold age-old prejudices about the essential qualitative divide between 'high' and 'low' culture. In an article published in the *The Southern Literary Messenger* in August 1859, for example, one critic cited the 'establishment of the present horde of literary periodicals and magazines' and the sensational fiction that they tended to favour as being guilty of supplanting the 'place of a higher and purer literature', and of doing 'injury' to the prospect of 'an elevated literature'.²⁸ As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the possibility of something being injurious to the development of America's emerging cultural status in the nineteenth century was no small matter. For this critic, the popularity and pervasiveness of sensational fiction was a very real threat to the nation's continuing struggle for literary, and by extension cultural and intellectual, credibility.

²⁴ Emerson, p. 218.

²⁵ Henley, p. 229.

²⁶ C., 'Periodical Reading', *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, January 1845, pp. 59-62 (p. 59).

²⁷ C., p. 49.

²⁸ E. T., 'What Will He Do With It?', *The Southern Literary Messenger*, August 1859, pp. 108-11 (p. 108).

In a manner reminiscent of the earlier critical backlash against the productions of Britain's Minerva Press, American sensation fiction was often censured for the harmful impact that it was suspected to have upon the intellect, morality and mental health of its consumers. In explanation for his concerns about the easy accessibility of sensational fiction, for instance, Henley insisted that 'Books are good only as they exert a healthful influence on our minds'.²⁹ Likening sensational fiction to fruit 'which has fallen to the ground' and is 'rotten at the core and stung by insects', Henley presents it as the antithesis to 'sound and healthy' reading material.³⁰ Henley was especially troubled by the negative influence that this type of reading might exert upon the developing minds of youthful readers, and urged parents to guard their children against exposure to overly sensational fictions. He argues that an early indulgence in sensationalism constitutes a 'false education and tells terribly on their after lives', tracing this permanent psychological damage, or 'wrecking' of young minds to the tendency of sensational fiction to act as an 'unnatural [...] stimulant', which leaves 'the mind weakened and unsatisfied when it is withdrawn'.³¹

The metaphorical comparison between consuming sensational fiction and imbibing harmful, intoxicating and addictive substances regularly appeared in the critical commentary of the period. In an April 1865 article in *The Ladies' Repository*, Jennie F. Willing emphasised sensationalism's unhealthiness by lamenting the fact that 'The market is overstocked with [...] narcotizing poisons'.³² In a September 1849 article in the *Christian Register* (originally published in the *National Era*), Dr. William Elder similarly asserted that 'the victims of this trashy extravagance are kept regularly drunk upon the small beer of sentimentalism', an addiction which renders 'their sensibilities irritable, morbid, feeble', and 'approaching to exhaustion'.³³ Significantly, Elder draws a direct connection between the popularity of sensational fiction and the commercial publication of 'criminal reports of civil and ecclesiastical courts'.³⁴ He perceives the psychological damage associated with these narratives, both fictional and journalistic, as symptomatic of a wider state of societal degeneration brought about by the culture of sensationalism.

²⁹ Henley, p. 230.

³⁰ Henley, p. 229.

³¹ Henley, p. 229.

³² Jennie F. Willing, 'Fiction', *The Ladies' Repository*, April 1865, pp. 202-05 (p. 203).

³³ William Elder, 'Works of Fiction', *Christian Register*, 7 September 1849, p. 144 (p. 144).

³⁴ Elder, p. 144.

A striking feature of the critical censure surrounding the rise of sensationalism in American periodical culture is its repeated reliance upon an overtly gothicised mode of discourse. In a manner redolent of the gothicisation of the Gothic author, Henley represented the consumers of sensational material as the monstrous inhabitants of a horrifyingly Gothic reality. He observes that 'The masses of the people seem to be running wild over "blood and thunder" stories. They are their only mental meat and drink. Nothing else will satisfy their unnatural and ravenous appetite'.³⁵ Like many of the critics discussed in chapter one, Henley associates sensationalism with a discourse of unnaturalness, imagining the readers of sensational fiction as a dehumanised, faceless and insatiably hungry mob.

This gothicised discourse is similarly pronounced in an article that was published in the *New York Evangelist* on 20 January 1859. Like many of the critics cited above, this critic expressed the concern that allowing the public, especially 'the young', to indulge in 'tales of horror' would 'familiarize' their 'mind[s] with deeds of blood' and 'prepare for the acting of real tragedies'.³⁶ To emphasise their uneasiness about the 'morbid state of the public taste' and its potential for shaping dark and violent realities, the critic gothicises the corrupting influence of marketing campaigns dedicated to sensational entertainment.³⁷ They suggest that America's cities had been transformed into landscapes of horror by the relentless and cynical commercialisation of sensational material. With regards to the advertisement of sensational plays in American theatre districts, for example, the critic provides this nightmarish, Dante-esque description:

it often happens to us, in going home at night, to ride up the Bowery, when all the Theatres on that street 'hang out their banners on the outer wall'. And if we were not in a very collected frame of mind, we should hardly make the passage in safety. All the most dreaded characters figure on the canvas — pirates on the sea, and robbers on the land; horsemen riding away in haste from the scene of dark and deadly crimes; mixed up with all the imps of the pit; with ghosts and goblins, which are seen all together, dancing their wild dance of death, by the lurid light of infernal flames.³⁸

The critic is most unnerved, however, by the preponderance of 'Flash Newspapers' and 'Blood and Thunder Literature' in America:

³⁵ Henley, p. 229.

³⁶ 'Literature of the Horrible: Edgar A. Poe in France', *New York Evangelist*, 20 January 1859, p. 1 (p. 1).

³⁷ 'Literature of the Horrible', p. 1.

³⁸ 'Literature of the Horrible', p. 1.

It requires some nerve to walk through our streets which are fierce with pictured horrors. We cannot pass by even a dead wall, or a board fence around a vacant lot, without having a vision of blood glaring out upon us. Flaming handbills announce some dreadful heart-rending tale, set off by a terrific figure of an Indian with his tomahawk raised above a captive maiden's head, ready to sink it in her brain! Or the tables are turned, and some hapless woman, who has been deceived, turns upon her betrayer, and has her arm upraised, about to plunge a dagger into his guilty breast. With such a startling appeal, all the world is invited to read the horrible tale of Love and Revenge — price four cents a copy!³⁹

As with the marketing of sensational theatre, the apparently omnipresent advertisements for sensational periodical literature are accused of turning the cityscapes they deface into frightful collages of Gothic images.

In 1842, during his editorship of the *New York Aurora*, Walt Whitman employed an unapologetically gothicised palette to paint his fellow editor, James Gordon Bennett. As editor of the *New York Herald* (first published in 1835), Bennett gained notoriety in the periodical industry for his publication of shocking and sordid stories, especially his coverage in April 1836 of the gruesome murder of the prostitute Helen Jewett. In response to this prurient sensationalism, Whitman fiercely lampooned Bennett by picturing him as an abject Gothic hybrid:

A reptile marking his path with slime wherever he goes, and breathing mildew at everything fresh and fragrant; a midnight ghoul, preying on rottenness and repulsive filth; a creature, hated by his nearest inmates, and bearing the consciousness thereof upon his distorted features, and upon his despicable soul; one whom good men avoid as a blot to his nature — whom all despise, and whom no one blesses — *all this* is James Gordon Bennett.⁴⁰

Whitman's depiction of Bennett as a loathsome and monstrous figure is particularly significant as it transfers the gothicised discourse that was usually attached to the authors of Gothic fiction onto its purveyors. Recognising that the editor's dedication to creative integrity was often tempered by a commercial agenda, Whitman places the ultimate responsibility for the nation's addiction to sensationalism upon the entrepreneurs who opportunistically exploited its economic potential.

³⁹ 'Literature of the Horrible', p. 1.

⁴⁰ Walt Whitman, 'Dickens and Democracy', in *Walt Whitman of the New York 'Aurora', Editor at Twenty-two: A Collection of Recently Discovered Writings*, ed. by Joseph J. Rubin and Charles H. Brown (State College, PA: Bald Eagle Press, 1950), pp. 114-16 (p. 115).

The Anti-Gothic Gothic

In his study of the relationship between the Gothic and the birth of Romanticism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, Michael Gamer acknowledges the inevitable friction that existed between writers' commercial and reputational priorities in a publishing industry that was in thrall to the divided opinions of readers and critics. Gamer observes that the 'gothic's popularity with readers and unpopularity with reviewers' made 'both the costs and benefits of marking one's text as "gothic" extremely high'.⁴¹ He argues that this 'conflict between the demands of popular and critical audiences' encouraged 'writers to appropriate [the] gothic using duplicitous strategies'.⁴² 'It is no accident', he claims, 'that a considerable amount of early-nineteenth-century writing explicitly denies (or otherwise deflects) its association with the gothic at its moments of closest kinship'.⁴³ This concept of the use of strategic duplicity as part of the Gothic author's endeavour to satisfy the expectations of reviewers and general readers alike also provides a helpful framework for understanding certain trends in the practice of Gothic authorship in nineteenth-century American periodical culture. In order to reap the economic benefits of a highly marketable genre whilst simultaneously avoiding critical censure, practitioners of the Gothic (perhaps encouraged by editors who, unlike Bennett, were keen to maintain both the popularity and respectability of their publications) frequently worked within subgenres which provided the sensational trappings of the Gothic at the same time as refusing to endorse the genre. Within these subgenres the price, or compromise, for practising the Gothic is that the narratives must ultimately turn on themselves, self-reflexively rejecting the tradition to which they belong.

Amongst these Gothic subgenres, the anti-Gothic Gothic was the most explicit in its efforts to deny its participation in the Gothic tradition. The adoption of a recognisably Gothic aesthetic in these stories is justified by a veneer of moral and metafictional didacticism, wherein the Gothic form is in itself gothicised. In this subgenre, the Gothic threat or phenomenon is invariably revealed not to be a typical Gothic villain or malign supernatural agency, but the dangers inherent in the act of consuming Gothic fiction. As

⁴¹ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 12.

⁴² Gamer, pp. 23, 67.

⁴³ Gamer, p. 7.

noted above, a major driving force behind the critical outcry against the culture of sensationalism in nineteenth-century America was the fear that exposing youthful readers to sensational varieties of fiction would exert a permanently debilitating impact on their psychological development, crippling their emotional and intellectual faculties in adult life. It is often this presumed causal relationship between imbibing Gothic fiction and stunted mental and moral growth that acts as the catalyst for disaster in anti-Gothic Gothic narratives.

American practitioners of the anti-Gothic Gothic adopted a very similar discourse to that which had been employed by critics with pedagogical objections to the Gothic in early nineteenth-century Britain. Drawing upon Lockean educational theory — specifically the concept that early exposure to 'fearful Apprehensions' and 'terrible Objects' indelibly scars, or 'shatters' a child's 'Spirits' — many critics expressed the anxiety that allowing children to access frightening fictions, usually through the oral medium of the nursemaid, would cause irreparable psychological damage.⁴⁴ In his *Genuine Guide to Health* (c. 1810), for example, Dr. Churchill declared that 'Nothing, in my opinion, can be more reprehensible than the too common practice in nurses and servants, of alarming the tender minds of children with the idle tales of hobgoblins, haunted houses, &c.', an argument which is justified on the grounds that many have 'from such wanton frolics, lost their lives; whilst others again have had their intellects so much impaired, as to be rendered miserable, and altogether disqualified for the occupations of life ever after'.⁴⁵ Tracing this vilification of the nursemaid back to Locke's influential *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693), Dale Townshend has observed that Locke's 'anxiously sketched [...] scenario in which nursemaids and other servant-girls terrify into subjection the children placed in their care through horrific tales' served to establish an 'image that would recur throughout the educational tracts of the next century'.⁴⁶ The connection between an early exposure to Gothic narratives and lifelong mental deficiency encouraged critics and writers to imagine these irresponsible female servants as Gothic bogeymen in their own right, a representation that bears distinct similarities, not only to the

⁴⁴ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by R. H. Quick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p. 96.

⁴⁵ qtd. in James Plumtre, *The Truth of the Popular Notion of Apparitions, or Ghosts, Considered by the Light of Scripture: A Sermon* (Cambridge: James Hodson, 1818), p. 15.

⁴⁶ Dale Townshend, 'The Haunted Nursery: 1764-1830', in *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, ed. by Anna Jackson, Karen Coats and Roderick McGillis (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp. 15-38 (p. 19).

gothicisation of the Gothic author, but to the gothicised discourse surrounding the purveyors of sensation fiction in nineteenth-century American periodical culture.

The figure of the Gothic narrative-dispensing nursemaid as a Gothic villain persisted as a fictional trope well into the nineteenth century. It is exemplified in the anonymously published 'My Ghosts', a story that was originally published in the British *Household Words* (edited by Charles Dickens) before its republication across the Atlantic in the 25 July 1857 issue of *Littell's Living Age*. In this story, the nameless narrator describes how his life has been blighted, or 'haunted' since childhood by the ghoulish tales embedded into his impressionable mind by a nursemaid keen to pacify his nightly tears of pain and frustration during a lengthy convalescence from injuries sustained as the result of a fall from a rooftop.⁴⁷ 'To secure her needful rest at all hazards', the narrator recalls, his nursemaid 'told' him 'frightful stories to cure frightful sufferings, and successfully soothed or silenced fits of agony by deliriums of fear'.⁴⁸

In a distinctly Lockean vein, the narrator explains how his premature exposure to a heady diet of horror and terror caused his rational faculties to atrophy, resulting in an inability to interpret the world around him in non-supernatural, or anything other than evil, terms. 'She daily perverted my reason', he claims, to the extent that her tales:

taught to see in the dark the forms of wild beasts, of tigers, alligators, and serpents ready to devour me — of black men and child-stealers coming to take me — and of aerial forms in white sheets with corpse-like faces inviting me to the grave; my eyes, my faculties, my brain and mind, were trained to serve me falsely and supply me with hallucination.⁴⁹

Even when he is released from his nursemaid's nightly tyranny, the narrator is unable to emancipate himself from the psychological damage that she has inflicted. He reveals that his ability to make progress at school was hampered by his inability to gain basic literacy skills, a situation which arises from his conviction that the alphabet is 'a hideous collection of spectres invented to torment little boys'.⁵⁰ 'How was I to learn them', he explains, when they 'were all full of devils' and 'whirled round in pools of fire mist, with fairies, kelpies, tigers, dragons, whales, and ghosts?'⁵¹ Even when he has eventually learned to excel in the academic sphere, the narrator describes an episode in which his successful completion of a

⁴⁷ 'My Ghosts', *Littell's Living Age*, 25 July 1857, pp. 242-46 (p. 242).

⁴⁸ 'My Ghosts', p. 242.

⁴⁹ 'My Ghosts', pp. 243, 242.

⁵⁰ 'My Ghosts', p. 244.

⁵¹ 'My Ghosts', p. 243.

college oral exam is thwarted by the sudden return of his 'juvenile disease of stammering', an outward symptom of nerves 'torn or over-stimulated' by his nursemaid's terrifying stories.⁵²

As much as anything else, 'My Ghosts' acts as a moral fable for wealthy parents in a society in which the responsibility for their children's upbringing was regularly delegated to servants. 'Physiology may say what it pleases', the narrator insists, 'but nurses are the mothers of the boys'.⁵³ In his case, this arrangement has only exposed him to maternal substitutes lacking in the tenderness and intelligence to nurture and care for him properly. 'The mother of my broken bones' (his initial fall from the roof largely resulted from another nursemaid's negligence), he states with bitter irony, 'was the cause of my passing into the hands of the mother of my ghost-haunted mind'.⁵⁴ As the victim of both physical neglect and psychological abuse, it is ultimately the 'mother' who 'fractured' his 'mind' who inflicts the deepest scars.⁵⁵ Repeatedly referring to her as 'my ghostly mother', it is she who haunts him into maturity, assuming a lasting Gothic status in his imagination.⁵⁶

Servants who fill their young charges' heads with Gothic fictions that harmfully shape their adult minds also play a significant role in the American Anti-Gothic Gothic. They feature briefly but prominently in William Dunlap's 'The Ghost Murderer', a short story published in the 17 January 1835 edition of the literary newspaper, *The New-York Mirror*. In this narrative, the protagonist's excessive exposure to Gothic tales during his childhood leads to fatal consequences. 'The Ghost Murderer' opens with the self-reflexive observation that, 'It is now trite, (after the instructive lessons Maria Edgeworth has given,) to talk of the importance, to the adult, of that early education he or she receives'.⁵⁷ By mentioning Edgeworth (who co-wrote the educational manual, *Practical Education* (1798), with her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth) in his opening sentence, Dunlap immediately draws the reader's attention to the fact that the narrative is filtered through the lens of a pedagogical framework that privileges reason and rejects the irrational, and by extension, the supernatural leanings of the Gothic. Deeply influenced by Rousseau's reason-oriented educational theory, Edgeworth discouraged parents in *Practical Education* from allowing

⁵² 'My Ghosts', p. 244.

⁵³ 'My Ghosts', p. 242.

⁵⁴ 'My Ghosts', p. 242.

⁵⁵ 'My Ghosts', p. 242.

⁵⁶ 'My Ghosts', p. 242.

⁵⁷ William Dunlap, 'The Ghost Murderer', *The New-York Mirror*, 17 January 1835, pp. 225-26 (p. 225).

their children to read tales involving 'unnatural characters' and 'improbable events', on the grounds that 'we should early cultivate the reasoning faculty, instead of always appealing to the imagination'.⁵⁸ It is the great 'misfortune' of 'The Ghost Murderer's' protagonist, Charles Janson, that such narratives form a major part of his childhood experience.⁵⁹

Following this reference to Edgeworth's educational writings, Dunlap's narrator acknowledges the similarity between the childcare systems adopted by the wealthier classes in Britain and America. He comments specifically upon the transatlantic relevance of concerns surrounding the exposure of children to unregulated oral storytelling practices:

The impressions made by the nursery-maid or the governess, by the footman or coachman, in Europe; or by the attendants and companions of the infant in America, are never fully effaced through life, and, in some instances, form and mould the character, bestowing happiness or inflicting misery upon the individual, and all who are connected with him.⁶⁰

In Charles Janson's case, his formative years are filled with terrifying stories drawn from African myths and folklore. The only son of the wealthy owner of a plantation in South Carolina, the majority of his upbringing is conducted by slaves. As part of a desperate bid to gain their master's favour, the slaves (who occupy the same role in this story as the nursemaid in 'My Ghosts') go out of their way to satisfy Charles's every whim. In a passage heavily inflected by the endemic racism of the period, the narrator describes how the slaves carelessly overindulged Charles's insatiable appetite for scary, supernatural tales:

These stories were of the power of witchcraft; the wonderful Obi; the malignant influence of the enemy, who could use sickness, pining, wasting and death, without approaching his victim; and all the wild superstitions of the *new negro* recently from his barbarous state in Africa, combined with those of the slave who had been born *such*, (according to the anomalous laws of the country,) and whose mind was freighted with the absurdities of the ignorant white population, in addition to those of his own colour.⁶¹

Upon reaching adolescence, Charles is sent abroad to complete his education in England. However, whilst he is academically successful, even graduating from 'Oxford with honour', his early immersion in Gothic narratives exerts a lastingly pernicious influence.⁶² Despite his accomplishments, the narrator explains, 'the consequences of his early teachings

⁵⁸ Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), p. 246.

⁵⁹ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶⁰ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶¹ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶² Dunlap, p. 225.

hung around him; the first impressions were stamped indelibly upon him'.⁶³ Although he appears to thrive in this new, intellectually rigorous environment, Charles's childhood addiction to Gothic narratives endures and his 'reading' continues to be 'directed by the notions he had imbibed in infancy — romances — fairy tales — legends of haunted houses — ghost and witch stories'.⁶⁴ Charles even channels his newly acquired academic skills into gaining access to the contents of documents which nullify any of the good that his intellectual progress may have done him. He seeks out texts, such as "'Glanville on witchcraft'", which further glut his appetite for the supernatural and increasingly carry him further and further away from a rational worldview:

He found books in abundance to strengthen his love of the marvellous and weaken the better powers of the mind, and among them none had greater effect than Daniel Defoe's proofs of the existence of witches and spirits, with his essays on dreams, divinations, spectres, omens, apparitions after death, enchantments, necromancy, geomancy, hydromancy, æromancy, pyromancy, chiromancy, augury and auroscipy — in short, manifold and ample proofs of the existence of all he wished to find, but could not discover in nature.⁶⁵

Like many of the detractors of sensational fiction, Dunlap frequently indicates the unhealthiness of Charles's literary tastes by suggesting that his mind has been 'poisoned'.⁶⁶ Similarly to the protagonist of 'My Ghosts', this psychological poisoning is predominantly manifested in the fact that the erosion of his rational faculties reduces his capacity to accurately interpret sensory data. His obsessive consumption of Gothic reading material leads him to see paranormal phenomena where there are none. Possessing a false reputation amongst his friends for bravery, his courage is only genuine when he encounters 'danger' in 'a palpable and tangible form'.⁶⁷ Whilst he laughs 'among his companions at the fear of ghosts and hobgoblins', he is a 'coward in the dark', trembling 'in darkness and privacy [...] at the noise or the unusual appearance which suggested the thought of their presence' and starting 'at the nonentities which his excited imagination made real, in despite of his reason'.⁶⁸

The event which marks the tragic culmination of Charles's early exposure to the Gothic occurs when he celebrates his graduation from university by taking the traditional

⁶³ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶⁴ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶⁵ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶⁶ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶⁷ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁶⁸ Dunlap, p. 225.

grand tour of Europe. Fittingly, it takes place during his travels in Germany. Home of the *Schauerroman* ('shudder novel'), and used as an early and often derogatory term in literary criticism to denote the Gothic element in texts (i.e. the German school of fiction), Germany was perceived to possess a particular affinity with the Gothic, similarly to the way in which sensationalism later came to be associated with the United States. Indeed, Dunlap emphasises the significance of this location, describing Charles's entry into a land where

the spirits of the air and of the mountains sport habitually with the devils of the lower regions, and the hags who are subservient to them, in all the wild gambols of the wildest imagination — in *that country* occurred the adventure which it is the object of this tale to recount.⁶⁹

Unsurprisingly, this Gothic context plays havoc with Charles's already over-active imagination. Clearly not of Poe's view that 'terror is not of Germany but of the soul', his irrational fears are disastrously overstimulated by the dark, supernatural associations evoked by his surroundings.⁷⁰ Charles is so affected by this backdrop that, in a manner reminiscent of Austen's Catherine Morland, he begins to interpret his experiences in accordance with traditional Gothic plotlines.⁷¹ Unlike *Northanger Abbey's* heroine, however, his misinterpretations do not lead to such comedic mistakes as the vilification of an innocent cabinet, but to an entirely avoidable fatality.

Whilst riding through a forest in the Harz Mountains, Charles becomes separated from his servant. Immediately reaching the histrionic conclusion, perhaps exacerbated by the further atmospheric cliché of a thunderstorm, that his travelling companion has deliberately fallen behind to plot his death in collusion with local banditti, he rides on in a fit of panic. Rather than achieving his object of reaching safety in the next village, however, he takes a wrong turning and finds himself at the gates of a remote dwelling. Both 'antiquated[ly]' feudal in appearance, reminding him of a 'baronial castle', and disquietingly 'dilapidated', the building immediately intensifies his belief that he has become ensnared in a real-life Gothic narrative.⁷² Despite his apprehensions, Charles reluctantly seeks shelter for the night. Matters are not improved, however, by the 'dreary and fear-inspiring' aesthetic of

⁶⁹ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁷⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1965), p. 8.

⁷¹ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon*, ed. by James Kinsley and John Davie and introd. by Claudia L. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; repr. 2008), pp. 122-25.

⁷² Dunlap, p. 225.

the accommodation allocated to him.⁷³ Surrounded by 'old tapestry hangings', he drifts off to sleep amidst 'imaginings fraught with the tales he had read of robbers, murdered travellers' and 'haunted chambers'.⁷⁴

The catastrophe which cures Charles of his addiction to the Gothic for good unfolds when he is abruptly awoken from already troubled dreams by an ominous groaning noise. To his horror, he sees that there is 'a tall figure' in the room, 'ghastly pale, with glaring eyes fixed upon' him.⁷⁵ Without pausing to seek for 'rational conjectures respecting this apparition', Charles automatically jumps to the conclusion that the chamber is haunted.⁷⁶ He panics and a somewhat farcical chase scene ensues: 'Charles sprang from his bed to the side opposite the apparition; but with arms outstretched, it followed him, by turning round the foot of the bed. The young man sprang to the other side — the spectre followed'.⁷⁷ As a last resort, Charles barricades himself in a closet, where he braces himself against the door until his pursuer suddenly lets out an agonised cry and falls silent. After a night spent cowering in the closet, he opens the door to find a man's dead body lying outside. This leads to the sobering discovery in the cold light of day that his pursuer was not in fact a 'supernatural enemy', but a man afflicted with somnambulism.⁷⁸ He is informed that although the man was supposed to have been accompanied during the nocturnal hours by a watcher, this had not been the case on the previous night. Succumbing to a dangerous fit in his guardian's absence, the man had vainly sought Charles's aid, frantically pursuing him until perishing.

Duly devastated when faced with the fatal consequences of his misinterpretation of the night's events, Charles accuses himself of 'murder' and bitterly traces the source of the disaster back to his childhood exposure to fictions crowded with occult horrors.⁷⁹ 'If he had not been filled with the notions of supernatural visitations by an early, bad education', he realises, then he could have avoided 'a night of horrors, and the death of a fellow creature'.⁸⁰ The conclusion of this narrative could not make it any clearer that the real Gothic threat, both to Charles and to those he encounters, is not malevolent supernatural

⁷³ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁷⁴ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁷⁵ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁷⁶ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁷⁷ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁷⁸ Dunlap, p. 225.

⁷⁹ Dunlap, p. 226.

⁸⁰ Dunlap, p. 226.

forces, but the corrosive effect that Gothic fictions exert upon the rational mind. Unable to use logic and empirical evidence to understand what is happening around him, Charles unwittingly helps to shape a reality that is far darker than the one he fears.

It is both illuminating and puzzling that William Dunlap chose to stage such an (apparently) unambiguous disowning of the Gothic genre in 'The Ghost Murderer'. Hardly a closet Gothicism, Dunlap was not only a close friend of Charles Brockden Brown — the so-called father of the American Gothic — but was himself a pioneering figure in the introduction of Gothic dramas to the American stage. His verse drama, *Fountainville Abbey* (1795), was based on Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and he wrote about his translations from the Gothic dramas of the German playwright, Kotzebue, in *A History of the American Theatre from its Origins to 1832* (1832).⁸¹ One possible real-life source for the tale's protagonist is Dunlap's friend and correspondent, the painter, Washington Allston (1779-1843). There are marked parallels between Allston's early life and the plot of 'The Ghost Murderer'. Also growing up on a plantation in South Carolina, Allston recalled how the self-proclaimed 'banditti mania' which characterised much of his work originally stemmed from 'tales of witches and hags, which the negroes used to tell me'.⁸² Like Janson, Allston's obsession with the Gothic also played a significant role in his life at university, even to the extent where his friends nicknamed him the 'Count', with one, Leonard Jarvis, recalling how 'he would sup on horrors until he would be almost afraid to go to bed until he had made sure that no goblin was under it or in the closet'.⁸³ Rather than constituting a genuine renunciation of the Gothic and its harmful effects, it seems more likely, given Dunlap's own Gothic preferences, that 'The Ghost Murderer' encoded a private joke, playfully masquerading as a sanctioned example of metafictional didacticism.

Alfred R. Phillips's anti-Gothic Gothic narrative, 'My Mad Tenant', also tells the story of a man whose formative exposure to Gothic fiction leads to disaster. Published in the 3 March 1877 issue of the humour magazine, *Puck*, the outcome of this narrative is predictably less dire than the fatality left on Charles Janson's conscience at the end of 'The Ghost Murderer'. The unnamed narrator nevertheless suffers great embarrassment and the

⁸¹ William Dunlap, *A History of the American Theatre from its Origins to 1832* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832), pp. 197-275.

⁸² *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, ed. by Nathalia Wright (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), pp. 333, 300.

⁸³ qtd. in Jared Flagg, *The Life and Letters of Washington Allston* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), p. 27.

loss of valuable property as a direct result of his addiction to the Gothic. In the opening lines, the narrator frankly admits to having 'an eccentric turn of mind' and explains that this 'eccentricity' is predominantly 'shown in an inordinate love of the mysterious'.⁸⁴ As in 'The Ghost Murderer', this obsession is initially instilled by his avid childhood consumption of 'terrible tragedies, horrible histories, hideous homicides, and strange stories'.⁸⁵ In an inversion of one of the central tropes of this subgenre, it is not the narrator's nursery maid who introduces him to the Gothic, but he himself who terrifies her by subjecting her to the frightening tales that he has sourced himself. He recalls how his nurse, 'a plain and simple [...] country girl' named Janet Gruesome, used to sit by his 'bedside of a night, shivering with cold and terror as she listened' to his stories.⁸⁶ Whilst the aptly named Gruesome does not impart these tales to the narrator herself, she is nevertheless represented as an irresponsible co-conspirator in his exploits. By failing to curb his Gothic tastes, she violates the position of adult responsibility with which she has been entrusted.

The self-destructive nature of the narrator's reading habits are hinted at early on in the narrative when he explains that the excessive hours that he devoted to poring over Gothic fiction during his childhood 'ruined' his 'eyesight'.⁸⁷ This detrimental impact upon his vision can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. His sight is not only physically damaged, but his powers of moral and rational perception are also lastingly impaired. Another on-going symptom of the vitiating effects of the narrator's addiction to the Gothic is his apparent inability to renounce his childhood identity. This is primarily indicated by the fact that Janet Gruesome is still his sole companion by the time that he has reached adulthood. He reveals that upon receiving a substantial inheritance from a wealthy Australian uncle at the age of 'forty', he 'instantly' moved to the countryside, 'taking' his "'nurse'" and (tellingly) his 'romances' with him.⁸⁸ Emotionally stunted and refusing to embrace his sexual maturity, he never mentally vacates the dark, imaginary world inhabited in his nursery.

Although the narrator's newfound wealth offers him the opportunity to get his affairs in order and make something of his life, he chooses instead to invest it in augmenting

⁸⁴ Alfred R. Phillips, 'My Mad Tenant', *Puck*, 3 March 1877, pp. 13-14 (p. 13).

⁸⁵ Phillips, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Phillips, p. 13.

⁸⁷ Phillips, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Phillips, p. 13.

his dysfunctional, infantile existence. Keen to bring his Gothic fantasies to life, he goes in search of a rental property which embodies the quintessential architectural conventions of the genre. He finds this embodiment in *The Yews*:

One day I came across a vast gloomy mansion that exactly suited my fancy. It was a weird and ghostly building, with whispering voices in its ivy-clad walls, doors that opened directly they were shut, and shut directly they were opened. Long corridors lighted by narrow windows led into recesses, so that on moonlight nights the shadows of the tall trees outside took spectral shapes, and seemed pointing with bony fingers to spots where deeds of violence had been done; whilst the withered branches tapped eagerly against the window-panes, as if they were houseless ghost wishing to take up their abode in this mysterious mansion. I was delighted and determined to take it at once.⁸⁹

The narrator is especially thrilled to learn that, amongst this abundance of traditional Gothic features, *The Yews* also possesses a locked room which he is prohibited from entering. Delightedly referring to it as 'a sort of Bluebeard chamber', he relishes the added dimension of reality that it lends to the building's potential for simulating the experience of living in a Gothic narrative.⁹⁰

On the evening that the narrator and Janet Gruesome take up residence in *The Yews*, their tenancy takes on more generic authenticity than even he had bargained for. He is contentedly settling down in his parlour to re-read one of his 'most favorite tales of terror and imagination', when the door suddenly opens to reveal 'a venerable white-haired old gentleman, clad in velvet dressing-gown and scarlet slippers'.⁹¹ Introducing himself as Briareus Balcombe, he accuses the narrator and his companion of being ghosts who have escaped from the locked room. 'I keep the ghosts in there', he casually explains, 'Sometimes one or two escape, and then I come out to hunt for them, I thought you were ghosts — stray ones'.⁹² When pressed to give a more satisfactory explanation for his presence in the house, Balcombe, mimicking the typical Russian doll structure of many Gothic novels, obligingly provides a Gothic origin story about how he came to occupy the mysterious chamber. He claims that in his youth he and his cousin were rivals for the love of a beautiful woman named Elvina. Initially, believing himself to possess the upper hand in the matter, he travelled to India, hoping to better himself and make himself worthy of asking her hand in

⁸⁹ Phillips, p. 13.

⁹⁰ Phillips, p. 13.

⁹¹ Phillips, p. 13.

⁹² Phillips, p. 13.

marriage. Upon his return, however, he is heartbroken to discover that Elvina has been unfaithful to their understanding, having married his cousin in his absence. In order to remove him from the scene, the treacherous cousin exploits Briareus's belief that he can commune with spirits and has him incarcerated in the chamber under the pretext of insanity. Claiming to have been imprisoned there ever since, Balcombe tells the narrator that he co-inhabits the chamber with ghosts who 'come and tell' him 'stories — wild horrible stories', and that he would be very happy to 'tell them to' his new acquaintance 'some night'.⁹³

On the morning following this surreal encounter with the eponymous 'Mad Tenant', the narrator discovers to his puzzlement that Briareus has vanished, and then to his dismay that his disappearance has suspiciously coincided with that of some valuable plate which formed part of his inheritance. Upon enquiring about the matter to the agent who managed the letting of the Yews, he is regretfully informed that he has 'been done', having fallen victim to a scam perpetrated by the well known local con man, Soleman Smith.⁹⁴ He learns that Briareus Balcombe never existed and that the so-called 'Bluebeard chamber' was only a storeroom containing 'pictures and some old furniture of no particular value'.⁹⁵ Speculating as to why Smith may have chosen to target the narrator, the agent suggests that:

No doubt he found out all about the room, and also heard — asking your pardon, sir — that you had queer crotchets, so got into the house when it was empty, picked the lock of the room, and played the madman.⁹⁶

Ultimately, the narrator's obsession with the Gothic renders him foolish and gullible. Having caught the scent of this vulnerability, Smith is able to concoct a ruse that appeals to the fantasy universe that his victim is desperate to inhabit.

Whilst the narrator's final humiliation provides a comic denouement to this cautionary tale, Phillips's narrative nonetheless conveys a more serious message about the moral impact of consuming Gothic fiction. When he discovers that 'Briareus' has been cruelly imprisoned in the locked chamber for years, the narrator does not react to his plight with pity or compassion, but with a cold and calculating opportunism. When Smith / Balcombe promises to regale him with the Gothic tales that have been imparted to him by

⁹³ Phillips, p. 13.

⁹⁴ Phillips, p. 14.

⁹⁵ Phillips, p. 14.

⁹⁶ Phillips, p. 14.

his ghostly companions, the prospect proves to be too tempting for the narrator to resist and he refuses to contemplate the idea of helping him to escape from captivity. He remarks to Janet Gruesome that, 'He, poor fellow, is harmless, but to-morrow I will see the agent, who must provide a keeper. I do not want Mr. Briareus removed until I have heard his stories. It will save my eyesight, not reading at night'.⁹⁷ Callously viewing him as a convenient resource that he can mine for new fictional material rather than a victim in need of assistance, he reveals himself to be disquietingly similar to the Gothic villains that he has spent so much time reading about.

The Parodic Gothic

Even more prevalent than the anti-Gothic Gothic in nineteenth-century American periodical culture was the parodic Gothic. By Gothic parody, I refer to Janet Beer and Avril Horner's definition of the parodic as 'a literary mode that, whilst engaging with a target text or genre, exhibits a keen sense of the comic, an acute awareness of intertextuality and an engagement with the idea of metafiction'.⁹⁸ In his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Chris Baldick observes that 'Many Gothic tales are already half-way to sending themselves up'.⁹⁹ Dealing riotously in excess and gaining much of its popularity from the repetition of a familiar set of themes and tropes, the Gothic has always possessed an element of auto-parody. As a genre that seems to engender more authorial anxiety than most, largely as a result of the repeated critical scrutiny of these characteristics, the comic self-reflexivity that parody affords has often been used as a useful discursive mechanism by Gothic practitioners keen to either confront or avoid the critical stigma attached to their chosen mode of writing. In his study of Matthew Lewis's deployment of parody in his *Tales of Wonder* and *Tales of Terror* (1801), Douglass H. Thomson has argued that Lewis strategically exploited 'the comic potential of his horror materials' in order to 'satisfy his readers seeking Gothic adventures at the same time' as defusing 'critical alarm'.¹⁰⁰ Lewis seeks to 'seriously indulge the popular taste for the Gothic' at the same time as avoiding

⁹⁷ Phillips, p. 14.

⁹⁸ Janet Beer and Avril Horner, "'This isn't exactly a ghost story': Edith Wharton and Parodic Gothic', *Journal of American Studies*, 37.2 (August 2003), 269-85 (p. 270).

⁹⁹ Chris Baldick, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; repr. 2009), pp. xi-xxiii (p. xxiii).

¹⁰⁰ Douglass H. Thomson, 'Mingled Measures: Gothic Parody in *Tales of Wonder* and *Tales of Terror*', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 50 (May 2008) <<https://doi.org/10.7202/018143ar>> [accessed 15 October 2019] (para. 5 of 22).

censure, Thomson suggests, by appearing, 'in a mocking way', to 'reprove' his 'readership for such fascinations'.¹⁰¹ The parodic stance adopted in many examples of nineteenth-century American Gothic periodical fiction also appears to be driven by this dual motivation. Whilst offering the thrilling Gothic aesthetic that was popular amongst a mass readership hooked on sensational fictions, the self-parodying tone of these tales simultaneously serves to obscure the author's personal and professional affiliation with the genre. The comedic, metafictional mockery that these texts make of the Gothic erects an exonerating barrier between the author and the tradition to which they are contributing. By appearing to use humour to interrogate the workings of the genre, the author assumes the guise of a critically detached and often cynical commentator, rather than an enthusiastic creative participant, who could be accused, according to the biographical school of criticism, of being Gothic in their own right.

As Robert Phiddian has observed, parody 'disfigures its pre-texts in various ways that seek to guide our re-evaluation or refiguration of them'.¹⁰² In the Gothic parodies that I examine in this section, the primary function of this disfigurement is to refigure the Gothic tradition's preoccupation with the supernatural as an absurdity. A significant volume of fiction which initially presents itself as genuinely Gothic in nineteenth-century American periodicals culminates in humorous denouements, usually in which a suspected supernatural menace is revealed to be the result of human agency (usually a light-hearted, albeit misguided prank) or the foolishly hysterical misinterpretation of everyday sights and sounds. In the case of the latter, the parody of the piece is heightened by the farcically quotidian source of the supposed paranormal activity. The more mundane the explanation, the more ridiculous the supernatural machinery of the Gothic is made to appear. In the anti-Gothic Gothic, the tragic or disastrous misinterpretation of sensory data is used to represent the Gothic genre as a serious Gothic threat in and of itself. In contrast, the parodic Gothic uses similar instances of mistaken supernatural phenomena to comedic effect, mobilising one of the Gothic's central devices against it to perform a strategically self-defeating act of generic disempowerment.

One Gothic parody which adopts this narrative framework is the anonymously published 'A Genuine Ghost Story'. Appearing in the *Christian Advocate* on 6 December

¹⁰¹ Thomson, para. 13 of 22.

¹⁰² Robert Phiddian, *Swift's Parody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 13-14.

1894, this story centres around a 'lone house standing near a plantation', which remains untenanted for an extended period of time due to its reputation for being haunted.¹⁰³ One evening, however, an unusually courageous man resolves to conduct an investigation into the cause of the 'strange noises' that are 'heard' in the building 'every night after dark'.¹⁰⁴ Although he is initially startled by a bloodcurdling cacophony of sound which suddenly starts up 'all over the bottom of the house [...] as of thousands of demons rushing in all directions', the source of the noise is ultimately traced to a rabbit infestation.¹⁰⁵ The reader is informed that 'The rabbits had got into the house from the neighbouring plantation' and that the man who discovers 'their nocturnal wanderings' is rewarded for his logical approach to the situation by getting the 'house at a reduced rent'.¹⁰⁶ In a darkly comic aside we also learn that he profited from 'several capital rabbit pies made of the ghosts' bodies'.¹⁰⁷

Another parodic tale which follows this pattern is Jas. S. Bailey's 'A True Ghost Story' (published in *The Cultivator & Country Gentleman* on 12 October 1871). Narrated from the perspective of a physician whose work frequently forces him to travel by 'gloomy paths' during the dead of night, the tale describes the events of one particular journey when 'Night came down on' him 'like a pall'.¹⁰⁸ The narrator claims that, upon entering into 'the immediate vicinity of a large grave yard', he was appalled to descry 'a white object moving among the grass'.¹⁰⁹ Terrified by the presence of what he presumes to be a ghostly apparition, the physician recalls how his 'gait became somewhat jerking', 'cold perspiration moistened his brow', and that his 'heart beat audibly, and sounded like the thundering of a locomotive'.¹¹⁰ Despite being petrified with fear, he determines to discover the true nature of the apparition, an act of 'closer scrutiny' which reveals 'a spirit in the shape of a — *white cow*'.¹¹¹ Both of these stories hook the reader's attention by appearing to lay the groundwork for straightforwardly Gothic narratives involving spine-tingling encounters with the supernatural. Their titles, advertising the revelation of 'true' or 'genuine' hauntings, confidently promise the fulfilment of these expectations, and this is seemingly confirmed by

¹⁰³ 'A Genuine Ghost Story', *Christian Advocate*, 6 December 1894, p. 798 (p. 798).

¹⁰⁴ 'A Genuine Ghost Story', p. 798.

¹⁰⁵ 'A Genuine Ghost Story', p. 798.

¹⁰⁶ 'A Genuine Ghost Story', p. 798.

¹⁰⁷ 'A Genuine Ghost Story', p. 798.

¹⁰⁸ Jas. S. Bailey, 'A True Ghost Story', *The Cultivator & Country Gentleman*, 12 October 1871, p. 654 (p. 654).

¹⁰⁹ Bailey, p. 654

¹¹⁰ Bailey, p. 654.

¹¹¹ Bailey, p. 654.

the pointed introduction of standard Gothic machinery, such as the evocation of eerie Gothic settings and descriptions of heightened emotion. Ultimately, however, both of these stories culminate in extreme anti-climax. The ghost stories are only 'true' or 'genuine' because they do not involve any actual ghosts, only the laughable results of human error.

Another striking feature of both of these narratives is their apparent superficiality. Right up until the final delivery of their parodic punch lines, the whole substance of both tales consists of a loose assortment of traditional Gothic conventions. Anaemically going through the generic motions to provide the basic contours, or silhouette, of a recognisably Gothic narrative, neither text leaves room for character development, let alone the interrogation of topical debates or fears. There is no ghost in the machinery, either on a literal or an artistic level. It is certainly possible to dismiss both of these stories as crude examples of hack writing, the creative collateral of a publishing industry which forced authors to churn out limply formulaic material in order to meet the demands of a largely undiscerning and often prurient reading public. More compelling, however, is a metafictional reading of this approach to the parodic Gothic. By coupling comedic supernatural debunkings with narrative superficiality, writers were able to practise the Gothic under the auspices of poking fun not only at the supernatural elements of the genre, but at its narrative structures more generally. Consciously parodying the Gothic's historic reputation as what Michael Gamer has described as a 'mass-produced fiction-by-numbers', practitioners of the parodic Gothic deflected the focus away from their participation in the genre by gently satirising the inferiority of their readers' literary palates.¹¹²

Both of the Gothic parodies examined above describe themselves as ghost stories. The majority of the subsequent examples studied in this chapter also define themselves as belonging to this tradition. At first glance, the ghost story might seem like a separate, albeit adjacent, cultural phenomenon to the craze for sensationalism which gripped the United States during the nineteenth century. Whilst sensational fiction often focused on earthly horrors, especially human crime, and drew much of its inspiration from non-fictional mediums like the trial pamphlet, ghost stories typically utilised supernatural terrors to meditate upon abstract fears about the nature and purpose of human existence, such as the possibility of the afterlife, the relationship between body and soul, religious doubts

¹¹² Gamer, p. 9.

engendered by the enlightenment and doctrinal schisms. Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the figure of the ghost became increasingly bound up with economic concerns. As Andrew Smith has noted, due to factors such as the emergence of Marxist theory and fears surrounding the disquieting immateriality of the stock exchange, the Victorian 'ghost story participated in a field of spectrality', in which ghostly metaphors were enlisted in journalists' and political economists' efforts to 'make visible the seemingly ineffable'.¹¹³ In addition to critiquing economic culture, however, ghosts also began to enjoy an economic capital of their own. According to E. J. Clery, late eighteenth-century Britain saw the ghost '[f]reed from the service of' the 'doctrinal' and 'caught up in the machine of the economy [...] available to be processed, reproduced, packaged, marketed and distributed by the engines of cultural production'.¹¹⁴ 'The rise of supernatural fictions must be understood', Clery argues, 'in relation to the contemporary rise of consumerism'.¹¹⁵ Anthony Mandal has similarly observed that the ghost story's considerable economic value in the nineteenth-century literary marketplace increased in line with developments in the book and periodical industries, such as the emergence of circulating libraries and the success of new modes of dissemination, including serialisation and the three volume or "triple-decker" novel. As Mandal points out, 'the history of the ghost story itself is one that was quint-essentially shaped by the materiality and modern technologies and processes of the Victorian print culture from which it emanated'.¹¹⁶

This consumerist context also applies to the American ghost stories examined in this section. Rather than viewing these texts through a philosophical, ontological or theological lens, it is more helpful to view them as canny participants in a growing periodical industry that was in thrall to the sensationalist market. Whilst dealing with the supernatural (at least ostensibly), many of these texts deliberately took on the features of sensational literature. By advertising themselves as 'true' and 'genuine' tales of the occult, for example, the two aforementioned ghost stories adopted a modishly journalistic tone, perhaps intended to replicate the experience of reading a trial pamphlet or a non-fictional periodical piece about

¹¹³ Andrew Smith, *The Ghost story, 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 10.

¹¹⁴ E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 17.

¹¹⁵ Clery, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Anthony Mandal, 'The Ghost Story and the Victorian Literary Marketplace', in *The Routledge Handbook to the Ghost Story*, ed. by Scott Brewster and Luke Thurston (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 29-39 (p. 39).

a grisly rape or murder. In order to take full advantage of the sensationalist market, many writers of parodic ghost stories blurred the lines between fact and fiction entirely, emphasising the veracity of their narratives by presenting them as pieces of journalism. Gothic parodies produced within this narrative framework often promoted themselves as sensational feasts for the imagination by purporting to collate multiple examples of genuine supernatural phenomena. As in the narratives discussed above, however, these phenomena are swiftly disproved to comic effect.

A typical instance of this approach to Gothic parody is found in the invitingly entitled 'Two or Three Ghost Stories', an affectedly journalistic piece by the Reverend A. D. Field that was published on the 1 April 1867 in *The Ladies' Repository*. Initially using the advertisement of several Gothic narratives rolled into one to hook readers' attention, the piece goes on to perform three of these comedic debunkings. The first two narratives relate incidents in which sensory data is foolishly misinterpreted. In the first, a spinning wheel which appears to be moving of its own accord is revealed to be an illusion caused by rodent antics: 'A basket of dried fruit hung in the rafters', the narrator explains, and:

The rats would run up the rafter, steal a bit of fruit, jump on to the wheel, from thence to the swift, and set the two in motion, and then spring to the floor and scamper away. And this was the ghost!¹¹⁷

The second example involves a man who is 'wakened' one night by a 'funereal noise' or 'dismal groan'.¹¹⁸ Whilst he initially leaps to the conclusion that he has been subjected to a ghostly visitation, a thorough search of his accommodation subsequently reveals that:

There was a board partition between the rooms covered with paper. At one of the cracks the paper had become torn, and as the chilly air urged its way through the crevice a fluttering piece of paper made the groan, as boys get up a clarionet music with a leaf. This was Fulton's ghost.¹¹⁹

The third case laid out in Field's piece is eventually attributed to the machinations of a prisoner who attempts to alleviate the ennui of his jailhouse existence by taking advantage of the supernatural beliefs of the followers of the Spiritualist movement (a cultural phenomenon that was also perceived to be implicated in exploiting the commercialisation of the occult). The narrator explains that pilgrims flocked to the prison from far and wide 'for weeks' to witness the building shaking 'its walls with a curious intelligence', as well as

¹¹⁷ A. D. Field, 'Two or Three Ghost Stories', *The Ladies' Repository*, 1 April 1867, pp. 207-08 (p. 208).

¹¹⁸ Field, p. 208.

¹¹⁹ Field, p. 208.

the inexplicable phenomenon of 'a stick standing in the corner' which 'would dart up toward the ceiling, and then fall back to its place'.¹²⁰ The awestruck congregation are embarrassingly disillusioned one day, however, when their credulity is rewarded by the appearance of a prisoner who 'dryly' announces: "'Gentlemen, there will be no performance here to-night; the string is broke.'"¹²¹ Following the audience's swift and sheepish departure, the narrator explains how they came to be so thoroughly duped:

The jail was old, and one of the thick oaken planks of the floor had become so warped that it formed a complete lever. By touching one end gently the shrewd prisoner could shake the whole building. The tapping was made by a ring on the beam connected to the prisoner's finger ring by an unseen horse hair; the stick was made to dance by a string run over the beam; but the string broke, and the ghost and its worshipers vanished.¹²²

In each of these cases, the reader is given a methodical and laconically matter of fact breakdown, either of the everyday phenomena creating the impression of supernatural events or the mechanisms that have been employed to choreograph such illusions. Laying out the rational explanations behind these mistaken supernatural phenomena with a precision that is both clinically objective and farcical in equal measure, this piece lures its readers into experiencing an entirely different reaction to its contents from the one that is promised in its title: laughter.

A further example of this model of Gothic parody appears in Charles Nordhoff's 'Ghost or No Ghosty' (also published in *The Ladies' Repository* in March 1859). Rather than presenting itself as a piece of journalism, this narrative assumes the loftier guise of an academic treatise using empirical data to weigh up the probability of the occult. Throughout, the narrator reveals their anti-supernatural bias by mocking the tendency of the human imagination to interpret everyday phenomena in ghostly terms. 'Rats have, from time immemorial, made famous ghosts', they acknowledge, as well as observing that 'The crooked limb of a tree seen in the dim twilight or distorting moonshine, makes a frightfully-natural ghost'.¹²³ Facetiously mirroring Bailey's narrative, they also acknowledge that, 'Under certain circumstances a cow will make an unexceptionable ghost'.¹²⁴ This pseudo-academic commentary is fleshed out by references to various incidents of mistaken

¹²⁰ Field, p. 208.

¹²¹ Field, p. 208.

¹²² Field, p. 208.

¹²³ Charles Nordhoff, 'Ghost or No Ghosty', *The Ladies' Repository*, March 1859, pp. 171-74 (p. 171).

¹²⁴ Nordhoff, pp. 171-72.

supernatural occurrences, from a haunting which eventually turned out to be the 'mere product of a disordered liver', to a misunderstanding in which a sailor is terrified by the apparently disembodied greeting of "'A stiff breeze, shipmate!'", only to discover that the voice belongs to a 'parrot' that has 'escaped from a companion vessel' and 'taken refuge on the topsail lift'.¹²⁵ Claiming that they are 'not going to do the ghosts the injustice of relating only *sham* ghost stories', and supposedly mixing 'genuine, unadulterated specimens' with rationally explicable ones, Nordhoff's narrator seems to adopt a more ambiguous attitude towards the supernatural than the narrative voice adopted by Fields.¹²⁶ Whilst the performance of this more equivocal stance allows the reader to experience the desired frisson of Gothic sensationalism, however, the overall dominance of dry humour prevents the narrator's protestations of open-mindedness from ringing true. Opening with the revelation that 'The only ghost I ever came into contact with proved, on closer examination, to be a whale', and concluding with the advice to its readers to 'believe every ghost bogus till he proves himself genuine', the parodic tone of the piece and its apparent refusal to endorse the supernatural underpinnings of the Gothic are unmistakable.¹²⁷

The Cultural Work of Gothic Parody

In her groundbreaking study into what she describes as the 'cultural work' of popular, sensational fiction, Jane Tompkins reconfigured the parameters of the American canon by focusing scholarly attention on texts that were written, 'not so that they could be enshrined in any literary hall of fame, but in order to win the belief and influence the behaviour of the widest possible audience'.¹²⁸ Whilst Tompkins's study focuses predominantly on the novel form, especially on the domestic, sentimental fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe, her arguments also yield fruitful insights into the workings of more ephemeral modes of writing, particularly sensational periodical fiction. So far, the Gothic parodies that I have examined have all operated very straightforwardly. In each case, the bathetic unmasking of a presumed supernatural entity humorously conveys, or creates the appearance of conveying, the basic absurdity of the Gothic as a genre. As well as these simpler parodies, however,

¹²⁵ Nordhoff, pp. 174, 172.

¹²⁶ Nordhoff, p. 172.

¹²⁷ Nordhoff, pp. 171, 174.

¹²⁸ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; repr. 1986), p. xi.

periodicals also hosted narratives which combined poking fun at the Gothic with the dissemination of more nuanced political agendas. As Beer and Horner point out, the 'cultural politics' of parody 'cannot be essentialised': able to 'function' both 'conservatively' and 'subversively' it can 'use humour either to interrogate or to restore the status quo'.¹²⁹ As such, the protective political neutrality that parody gains from its basis in laughter has made it a valuable discursive tool for authors, enabling them to engage with contentious issues at the same time as using a veneer of humour to shield themselves from the explosive critical backlash that might be triggered by their association with these issues. There are many examples of stories published in nineteenth-century American periodicals in which parody's interpretive slipperiness provides a doubly protective layer for authors seeking not only to practice Gothic authorship without risking their reputations, but to harness the genre's commercial popularity as a wide reaching vehicle for subversive social commentary.

One Gothic parody which falls into this category is John Ross Dix's 'The Chickenville Ghost; or, Which is the Witch'. Published on the 10 July 1858 in the popular story paper, *The Flag of our Union*, the narrative opens with the observation that, 'There never had been such excitement in Chickenville, since Chickenville obtained the distinguished honors of a local [supernatural] habitation'.¹³⁰ Set in a provincial New England town where spiteful gossip acts as a kind of currency, the inhabitants of Chickenville are whipped up into an elated frenzy of excitement by the rumours that their community is being plagued by both 'A GHOST, AND A WITCH!'¹³¹ It swiftly emerges that this gossip is attached to the doings of a young woman named Chylena Ramsay. The only daughter of a financially struggling widow, Chylena's already 'extremely delicate' constitution is further weakened when she attempts to support her mother by taking on large amounts of extra sewing work.¹³² Unresponsive to the ministrations of the local physician, her health continues to deteriorate until it is assumed that she is suffering from a fatal consumption. Desperate to restore Chylena's health and encouraged by the conviction that her illness is the result of excessive labour rather than disease, her fiancé travels to Boston in search of a solution.

¹²⁹ Beer and Horner, p. 274.

¹³⁰ John Ross Dix, 'The Chickenville Ghost; or, Which is the Witch', *The Flag of our Union*, 10 July 1858, p. 224 (p. 224).

¹³¹ Dix, p. 224.

¹³² Dix, p. 224.

The young man's return coincides with the growing certainty in Chickenville that Chylena is a witch, aided in her unholy rites by a ghostly familiar. This suspicion primarily arises from the fact that, despite her ill health, she is able to produce vast quantities of high quality needlework at an inexplicably accelerated rate. The members of the local sewing circle to which she belongs are especially perturbed when her response to being allotted a seemingly insurmountable task (as the prettiest and most youthful member of the group, she is the object of petty vengeance and cruelty) is to return the assignment, not only on time, but beautifully completed. The townsfolk's suspicions about Chylena's witchcraft are further fuelled by a spate of supposedly unearthly encounters that are reported by individuals who have travelled past her home (suspiciously located on the outskirts of the settlement) during nocturnal hours. One man swears that he heard 'the most onchristian sounds as ever was heerd' as he 'went by Widow Ramsay's cottage', including 'Chylena Ramsay singing in some diabolical language, and every now and then laughing and talking'.¹³³ Another disgruntled witness compares the noises that he heard to 'forty thousand death-watches, all ticking at once', as well as claiming to have seen, from his vantage point 'under the window-sill', a 'great, black figure on the blind', whom he identifies as Chylena's ghostly familiar.¹³⁴ This figure, he informs his rapt audience, gave him 'a blow on the side of' his 'head', so forceful that it made him 'see stars' and 'sent' him 'like a football, bang into the middle of the road'.¹³⁵

As we might expect, Dix's tale enacts a comic debunking of the Chickenville residents' supernatural theories. As well as producing prolific amounts of needlework, Chylena is also restored to health, and the narrative concludes on the day of her wedding. Keen to dispel the vicious rumours surrounding his wife and to rebuke his guests for their foolish beliefs, the groom lifts a sheet of cloth that has been concealing a mysterious object situated in the midst of the wedding feast. This action reveals the 'WITCH' to be nothing more than a 'beautiful GROVER & BAKER'S SEWING MACHINE!' that was purchased on his trip to Boston.¹³⁶ The bizarre noises that had so confounded the townsfolk were merely the clickings and whirrings of the machine at work, the dark shadow on the blind was the

¹³³ Dix, p. 224.

¹³⁴ Dix, p. 224.

¹³⁵ Dix, p. 224.

¹³⁶ Dix, p. 224.

groom's, and the blow on the head received by one of the witnesses was a rebuke for his impertinent attempt at espionage.

As with less multifaceted Gothic parodies, 'The Chickenville Ghost' appears to promise a terrifying supernatural plotline. In the opening paragraphs, the narrator titillates the reader with the warning that the ensuing narrative will chillingly undermine the false sense of security from supernatural perils that is fostered by living in an enlightened age of progress and technology: "Bless my heart!" the fair reader may possibly exclaim, "do you really mean to assert, that in this enlightened age, these days of daguerreotypes, submarine cables and railroads, people are foolish enough to believe in such things?"¹³⁷ In the actual event that the presumed witchcraft is indeed nothing more than a handy technological invention, however, the audience is gently teased for allowing the story to tempt them away from their enlightened rationalism. Beneath this light-hearted chiding, however, there is a deeper layer of social commentary. At its heart, this is a story about gender politics. The deterioration of Chylena's health, followed by her salvation in the form of a sewing machine, serves as an indictment of the interminable household drudgery that was commonly the lot of less affluent nineteenth-century women. In their hasty leap to the conclusion that her restoration, combined with the increased efficiency of her work, is the product of diabolical forces, the townsfolk do not even pause to consider that these dramatic improvements might be the result of her emancipation from domestic servitude. Explaining to his incredulous guests that the introduction of the sewing machine into their household will ensure that his 'wife will be no household drudge, but what heaven intended a good wife to be, not a slave to her needle, but a friend and a companion', Chylena's husband hails modern technological advances as a major step towards revolutionising the entrenched inequality in the power dynamic between the sexes.¹³⁸ On a darker level, Dix's superficially cheerful story questions the societal tendency to use discourses of monstrosity to marginalise women who are judged to be too successful, attractive, or in any way idiosyncratic. Disturbingly, it is the women's sewing circle which acts as the epicentre of Chylena's persecution. Older, less attractive, and in some cases unmarried, its members are threatened and frustrated by their younger rival's ability to attain the standards of beauty and domesticity demanded of women by patriarchal norms. Chylena is the victim, in other

¹³⁷ Dix, p. 224.

¹³⁸ Dix, p. 224.

words, of patriarchal society's insidious ability to divide and conquer by turning women against each other.

The desire to knock Chylena from her pedestal makes the women of the Chickenville sewing circle especially keen to brand her as a witch, and by extension, a social outcast. To do this, they seek the advice of the town attorney, Mr. Pipchin. In order to get to the bottom of the mystery, Pipchin researches historical instances of supposed supernatural occurrences, including the 'Cock Lane Ghost' and 'the case of Joan of Arc', as well as 'diligently' perusing 'all the text books on the subject' of the occult, from 'Sir Walter Scott's work on "Demonology and Witchcraft" and 'Mrs. Crowe's "Night side of Nature"', to 'the Memoirs of Matthew Hopkins the Witch-finder, and the History of Salem Witchcraft'.¹³⁹ It is significant that several of these texts and case studies, namely those involving Matthew Hopkins, Salem Witchcraft and Joan of Arc, refer to incidents where accusations of witchcraft were used to silence unusually outspoken, vulnerable or intelligent women. Despite the fact that the story is set in the modern age of daguerreotypes and sewing machines, we are left to wonder if, without her fiancé's protection, Chylena might have been subjected to similar violence. Described as a 'remarkably dictatorial' man, 'a tall thin, hard-featured personage', with 'sallow cheeks, an aquiline nose, over the bridge of which the skin stretched so tightly, it much resembled old parchment', and 'short, stubby, iron gray hair', Pipchin himself acts as a visceral embodiment of patriarchal power, especially the persecutory religious authoritarianism of America's Puritan past.¹⁴⁰ His role within Dix's narrative is to evoke the dangerous chauvinism of men like Matthew Hopkins, the magistrates who conducted the Salem Witch Trials, and others guilty of putting women to death under the influence of misogynist texts in the tradition of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and the works of Cotton Mather.

Dix's passing reference to the 1792 case of the Cock Lane Ghost in association with the Chickenville witch hunt is also noteworthy. A popular supernatural attraction that even drew the interest of high-profile eighteenth-century figures such as Samuel Johnson, the "haunting" was eventually unmasked as a hoax in the form of 'a young girl' who, 'confined to her bed, produced [...] mysterious scratching noises with her toe-nails on a board

¹³⁹ Dix, p. 224.

¹⁴⁰ Dix, p. 224.

concealed in' a 'couch'.¹⁴¹ On a basic level, the inclusion of this case study in Pipchin's research enhances the narrative's humorous tone, bolstering the Gothic parody of the piece by pointing to a real life example of the supernatural debunking which defines the subgenre. As with the more disturbing social commentary which runs beneath the light-hearted surface of the story, however, the reference to the Cock Lane Ghost also involves the uneasy combination of comedy (it was repeatedly parodied and satirised in popular culture by authors including Charles Dickens), with an allusion to abuse born of the unequal power relations between men and women (a young girl, Elizabeth Parsons, was forced to fraudulently perform the haunting of 'scratching Fanny' by her father, Richard Parsons, and William Kent, a usurer from Norfolk). A key turning point in the commercialisation of the spectral, this episode also depended on the financial exploitation of a female body, thus representing a disturbing microcosm of a society that was driven by consumerism, sensationalism and patriarchal oppression. Like Chylena's tale, in other words, the genuine, albeit non-supernatural, Gothicism of this episode was obscured by the comic discourse that surrounded it.

Published on the 15 June 1861, also in *The Flag of our Union*, Giacomo S. Campana's enigmatically entitled Gothic tale, 'The Ghost With The —', also makes use of parody's subversive and deflective qualities. Like many examples of Gothic parody, the story takes the form of several Gothic narratives rolled into one. Told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator travelling through rural south-western Virginia, they are encompassed within the familiar Gothic framing device of ghost stories exchanged around the fire of a country inn to pass the time on a winter's evening. The first ghost story involves an uncanny experience shared by a family of Kentucky slave owners. Its narrator informs the inn's company that 'An old gentleman on his deathbed, had had a will prepared, the chief object of which was to emancipate his slaves'.¹⁴² Before he could validate the will with his signature, however, 'he was seized with a sudden and violent spasm, and died almost immediately, with the pen still in his hand'.¹⁴³ Dying intestate and therefore unable to ensure the freedom of his slaves, the spirit of the deceased subsequently appears to the

¹⁴¹ Dix, p. 224.

¹⁴² Giacomo S. Campana, 'The Ghost With The —', *The Flag of our Union*, 15 June 1861, p. 6 (p. 6).

¹⁴³ Campana, p. 6.

intended beneficiaries of the will, gazing upon them 'with a sad, regretful look'.¹⁴⁴ These hauntings persist until, one day, the will is removed from the drawer in which it has been locked for safe keeping. Rather than remaining unsigned, the old man's relatives are astonished to discover that the document now bears 'the well-known signature of the deceased, as it would have been written by his own hand if he had lived a few minutes longer'.¹⁴⁵ Forced to concede that the signature is not a forgery, 'The negroes' are not inherited with the rest of the estate but 'set free'.¹⁴⁶ According to the narrator of the second ghost story, his contribution to the evening's entertainment is an authentic ghostly encounter related to him by an English acquaintance. Whilst studying medicine in Edinburgh, the acquaintance was perturbed to see his older brother riding down the street towards him, seemingly without any awareness of his sibling's presence or of his surroundings in general. The witness later discovers that on 'the same day and hour' of this vision, his 'brother and his favorite horse had fallen over a precipice and been dashed to pieces', leaving him in no doubt that what he saw 'was the disembodied spirit of the deceased'.¹⁴⁷ The third and final ghost story relates to the inn itself. Associated with the 'story of a ghost with a bloody knife', the building is rumoured to be haunted by the vengeful spirit of a man 'stabbed in the heart with a large butcher's knife' by his wife's adulterous lover.¹⁴⁸

It is at this point that the story descends into parody. More disquieted by the ghostly theme of the evening than he would care to admit, the narrator of the framing narrative retires to his garret for the night, where he is tormented by nightmares about bloody knives. Awoken with a start in the early hours by the sound of 'a heavy foot-fall upon the stairs', he is terrified when 'A tall figure, robed in white, with a lantern in its hand' enters the room.¹⁴⁹ Reeking of the 'odors of the charnel house', the visitation stands over the narrator's bed, draws 'a long, glittering *knife*' from beneath its robes, and threateningly passes it 'twice across its own throat' before backing out of the room.¹⁵⁰ Terrified by this presumed encounter with the inn's resident spectre, the narrator is just beginning to regain his

¹⁴⁴ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Campana, p. 6.

composure when the figure returns a second time and the same performance is repeated. On this occasion, however, an ominous development is noted: the knife is '*dripping with blood*'.¹⁵¹ Shaken by the night's events, the narrator informs the inn's proprietor of his ordeal. Rather than corroborating the haunting, however, the proprietor is greatly amused by his guest's allegations of ghostly harassment. He informs him that the tale of the ghost with the bloody knife has no connection with the inn whatsoever, belonging instead 'to another public house, about twelve miles further up the valley' called The White Horse.¹⁵² Possessing the similar title of 'The White Hart', it transpires that there has been some confusion regarding the tale's provenance. As for the ghostly intrusion, the proprietor explains that the figure was simply 'a poor deaf and dumb fellow', employed by the inn to 'kill hogs'.¹⁵³ Entering the room in order to wake its usual occupant, the overseer, 'he made the gesture with the knife to explain his errand'.¹⁵⁴ When the first trip failed to yield the desired result 'he made a second one', bringing with him 'the bloody knife with which he had been sticking the hogs'.¹⁵⁵

In their study into what they describe as the comic turn in Gothic fiction, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik have observed that humorous or parodic scenes are sometimes inserted into a narrative to provide 'a measure of detachment from scenes of pain and suffering that would be disturbing in a different Gothic context'.¹⁵⁶ Campana arguably employs this pain-relieving, deflective use of parody in 'The Ghost With The —'. Of all the ghost stories exchanged in The White Hart's fire-lit parlour, the only one which possesses any contemporary political relevance is the first. Taking the question of slavery as its central theme, this story uses a spectral discourse to engage directly with one of the most polarising debates in nineteenth-century America. The fact that the hauntings only stop when the slaves are emancipated strongly suggests that the narrative has an anti-slavery agenda. This reading is complicated, however, by the decision of one of the beneficiaries to forgo 'his share of the negroes', not for their own benefit — 'He firmly believed they would be happier with him than if left to themselves' — but to honour his relative's dying wish.¹⁵⁷ The

¹⁵¹ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁵² Campana, p. 6.

¹⁵³ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁵⁵ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁵⁶ Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Gothic and the Comic Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 13.

¹⁵⁷ Campana, p. 6.

equivocal political stance adopted in this narrative is certainly explicable, given that the economic survival of many nineteenth-century periodicals depended upon their ability to cross the sectional divides of an increasingly divided nation. Often operating on a national rather than a regional level, periodicals had a vested interest in participating in what Patricia Okker has described as 'the process of forming and sustaining a communal identity'.¹⁵⁸ As Thomas Lilly has noted, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* negotiated the ideological schism between North and South in the years preceding the American Civil War by attempting to appeal to 'an audience constructed as national'.¹⁵⁹ Like *Harper's*, which advertised itself as 'a strictly national work', that pledges 'to no religious sect or political party', *The Flag of our Union* similarly sought to widen its appeal by identifying itself as *The Flag of our Union: A Literary and Miscellaneous Family Journal, Containing News, Wit, Humor, and Romance — Independent of Party or Sect*.¹⁶⁰

The Flag of our Union's non-partisan ethos does little to help penetrate the political ambiguity in Campana's narrative. Something that the author is clear about, however, is the ghost story's sharp resonance within the cultural moment. The narrator reveals that it is 'After discussing "the troubles of the country"' that 'one of the company drew out of his pocket Owen's "Footsteps on the Boundary of Another World" [...] This naturally led to the subject of ghosts and supernaturalities in general, and several ghost stories'.¹⁶¹ Given that the story was published only weeks after the outbreak of the American Civil War in April 1861 and set in Virginia, one of the most pivotal seceded states in the conflict, there is little doubt as to the nature of the 'troubles' to which they refer. Moving straight from a discussion surrounding the Civil War (and presumably the issue of slavery) to the exchange of ghost stories, the implication is that the minds of the inn's company, and by extension the American consciousness, are haunted by this unfolding national conflict. In light of this uncomfortably topical and perhaps subversive opening, it is telling that the remainder of the story (which takes up the majority of the narrative space) shifts first to a tale set in England, literally enacting a geographical displacement or 'detachment' from 'troubles' closer to

¹⁵⁸ Patricia Okker, *Social Stories: The Magazine Novel in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Lilly, 'The National Archive: *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and the Civic Responsibilities of a Commercial Literary Periodical, 1850-1853', *American Periodicals*, 15.2 (2005), 142-62 (p. 143).

¹⁶⁰ qtd. in Lilly, p. 148.

¹⁶¹ Campana, p. 6.

home, before dissolving into Gothic parody.¹⁶² Furthermore, at the close of the evening, it is only the story of 'the ghost with the bloody knife' that continues to 'intrude' upon the narrator's thoughts, permeating his subconscious with dreams of 'hobgoblins and harpies, devils and dragons [...] all with bloody knives in their hands'.¹⁶³ Apparently unaffected by the first narrative, whose evocation of the spectre of slavery returning to haunt the consciences of the living cuts closest to the bone of contemporary national traumas, the only ghost story to exert any emotional or psychological power over the narrator is the one that is ultimately exploded by laughter. Campana's use of humour to cover his tracks, therefore, is twofold. Not only does he sidestep his culpability as a Gothic author by appearing to poke fun at the genre, but he also uses parody to hide the narrative's most provocative, topical, and arguably abolitionist elements in plain sight.

Navigating the Children's Gothic

The meteoric rise of the periodical in nineteenth-century America also saw the advent of a growing demand for children's magazines. Pioneered during the 1820s by Lydia Maria Child's *Juvenile Miscellany* and Nathaniel Willis and Asa Rand's *The Youth's Companion*, this burgeoning market gradually expanded to include popular children's publications such as *Merry's Museum* (1841) and *St. Nicholas Magazine* (1873), as well as designated children's sections in predominantly adult publications. In her study into the cultural status of the *Juvenile Miscellany*, Carolyn L. Karcher attributes the establishment of this market to three historical factors:

the shift of economic production from the home to factories and the accompanying transmutation of homemaking and child rearing into full-time activities for married women of the middle class; second, the emergence of a new concept of childhood and a new concern for the moral edification of children; and third, the formation of a middle-class value system stressing hard work, productivity, usefulness, frugality, self-denial, sobriety, orderliness, and punctuality.¹⁶⁴

The increasingly middle-class outlook that Karcher describes produced a children's periodical culture in which pedagogy was often ranked topmost in the list of editorial priorities. As well as providing entertainment, these publications also assumed the role of

¹⁶² Horner and Zlosnik, p. 13; Campana, p. 6.

¹⁶³ Campana, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Carolyn L. Karcher, 'Lydia Maria Child and the *Juvenile Miscellany*: The Creation of an American Children's Literature', in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. by Price and Smith (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp. 90-114 (p. 92).

providing their youthful readers with a moral, intellectual, and sometimes religious education. The fictional content in children's magazines was predominantly designed to teach values from piety and charity, to self-discipline and common sense. The pedagogical didacticism of this medium hardly appears to lend itself to the sensationalism which dominated other areas of the periodical industry. Although children's magazines were even more ethically opposed to the publication of straightforwardly Gothic texts than periodicals aimed at adult readers, however, they provided a particularly hospitable venue for the metafictional subgenres of Gothic parody and the anti-Gothic Gothic. When aimed at a youthful audience, these subgenres provided a unique opportunity for authors keen to create the appearance of sanitising the practice of Gothic authorship even further. Written under the auspices of discouraging youthful readers either from developing an early taste for Gothic fiction (the anti-Gothic Gothic), or from giving an unhealthy credence to the supernatural (Gothic parody), the children's Gothic deftly paired entertaining Gothic motifs with plot outcomes that were supposedly designed to achieve the paradoxical end of nipping any youthful attraction to the genre in the bud.

An illustrative case study of the Gothic's place in nineteenth-century American children's periodical literature is to be found in the publishing history of *The Youth's Companion*. In its early years, under the editorship of Nathaniel Willis and Asa Rand, *The Youth's Companion* only achieved a small, regional circulation and lukewarm reception. This was largely due to the severity and stuffiness of the magazine's religious didacticism. As Karcher observes, the publication largely specialised in 'brief anecdotes centering on children's conversion experiences and exemplary deaths'.¹⁶⁵ After 1857, when the ownership of *The Youth's Companion* was transferred to Daniel Sharp Ford, however, its fortunes were transformed. Radically overhauling the magazine's aesthetic, Ford reduced the evangelical overtones of the magazine's fictional content, as well as adapting it to appeal to the family as a whole. This refashioning was cannily combined with the strategic injection of entrepreneurial, circulation-boosting features, mainly the advertisement of prizes — from stationery and hairbrushes to sewing machines and pianos — for readers who could secure a certain number of new subscriptions. It was during this second, more dynamic incarnation that *The Youth's Companion* published a significant number of

¹⁶⁵ Karcher, p. 94.

children's Gothic parodies. Mixing the commercial popularity of Gothic themes with comic endings that dispelled perceived supernatural dangers and restored a comfortably common-sense worldview, these parodies offered a prime opportunity for gently spooky, family friendly entertainment. A typical example is to be found in 'A Ghost-story Spoiled' (4 October 1883). Following an opening paragraph which lays out the premise that the supernatural can usually be rationally accounted for, the culprit behind a perceived haunting is duly revealed to be nothing more than a screech owl.¹⁶⁶ Almost identically parodic plotlines are followed in 'A Brave Woman's Ghost Story' (21 July 1881), in which the 'ghost' turns out to be a rusty weather cock, and in 'A Ghost Story Spoiled' (6 August 1863), where the din produced by a presumed spectre is eventually discovered to be a cat with a saucepan stuck on its head.¹⁶⁷ In Edward Aiken Shaw's 'A Ghostly Procession' (5 January 1893), the haunting is methodically traced to the eerie shapes cast on a bedroom wall by the smoke from a candle, and in 'A Ghost Story Explained' (21 December 1865), the apparently supernatural activity of a deceased husband is unmasked as a ruse set up by a villainous maid, intent on purloining her widowed mistress's furniture.¹⁶⁸

Whilst these parodies possess a very similar narrative structure to those aimed at adult readers, their content is comparatively restrained, embodying an appropriately diluted Gothic aesthetic. There are some instances in *The Youth's Companion*, however, of the children's Gothic being used to broach more subversive and polarising issues. In 'The Haunted Cabin: A Georgia Ghost Story' (published on 9 November 1865 under the pseudonym, Uncle James), for example, a ghost that is rumoured to haunt a cabin in the Charleston region, so that 'Nobody would go near it, night nor day', is eventually 'found out' to be a runaway slave.¹⁶⁹ The haunting is a desperate performance intended to scare off the locals and prevent recapture. In order to account for the slave's ability to make himself resemble a spectral torso with 'neither head, arms nor legs', the narrator explains that, being 'black as coal', he 'used to walk about with nothin' but his shirt on'.¹⁷⁰ Whilst the narrative is not openly abolitionist, there are several signals which imply that it ought to be

¹⁶⁶ 'A Ghost-Story Spoiled', *The Youth's Companion*, 4 October 1883, p. 396.

¹⁶⁷ 'A Brave Woman's Ghost Story', *The Youth's Companion*, 21 July 1881, p. 266; 'A Ghost Story Spoiled', *The Youth's Companion*, 6 August 1863, pp. 126-27.

¹⁶⁸ Edward Aiken Shaw, 'A Ghostly Procession', *The Youth's Companion*, 5 January 1893, p. 12; 'A Ghost Story Explained', *The Youth's Companion*, 21 December 1865, p. 204.

¹⁶⁹ Uncle James, 'The Haunted Cabin: A Georgia Ghost Story', *The Youth's Companion*, 9 November 1865, p. 178 (p. 178).

¹⁷⁰ Uncle James, p. 178.

decoded in these terms. It is hardly a coincidence, for example, that the slave's self-preserving deception is shattered when the 'lash' of a whip fails to go straight through him, thus proving his corporeality.¹⁷¹ Also striking is the author's decision to place an explanatory asterisk above the revelation that the ghost is 'a strong buck-nigger'.¹⁷² Apparently perturbed by the terminology that southern slave owners used to categorise their human property, the reader is issued at the bottom of the page with this apology: 'As this story is given just as it was told at the time, I do not feel at liberty to suppress this coarse Georgia phrase'.¹⁷³ The very fact that the slave assumes a ghostly identity in this narrative should not be overlooked. Oppressed racial minorities have been subjected to a long history of rhetorical spectralisation in the United States. Tracing this motif back to the vanishing Indian trope, Renée L. Bergland has argued that 'the practice of representing Indians as ghosts' worked 'both to establish American nationhood and to call it into question'.¹⁷⁴ Applied to the institution of slavery rather than to Indian removal in this instance, it is possible that the author of 'The Haunted Cabin' evoked this spectral discourse in order to indict the centrality of the slave trade to notions of southern regional identity.

The controversial subtext of this narrative is also suggested by its repeated refusal to slot comfortably into the category of children's fiction. In most of the children's Gothic parodies examined in this chapter the intended juvenile audience is indicated by the soothingly mechanical tone and structure of the narrative. The ghostly events that occur have very little embellishment, either on a psychological or a metaphorical level. In 'The Haunted Cabin', however, the narrator (a traveller in the deep South), takes the time to situate his encounter with the story of the escaped slave against a symbolically morbid backdrop. Explaining that he 'remained in Augusta for some weeks after the yellow fever took its leave', he pairs a tale about slavery with one about sickness, contagion and delirium.¹⁷⁵ In addition to the diseased societal condition that is indicated by this allusion to a deadly and gruesome epidemic, the feverish undertone that runs throughout the narrative is augmented by the persistent and compulsive laughter of the man who imparts the story of the escaped slave to the narrator. During his narration of events he is depicted as

¹⁷¹ Uncle James, p. 178.

¹⁷² Uncle James, p. 178.

¹⁷³ Uncle James, p. 178.

¹⁷⁴ Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), p. 5.

¹⁷⁵ Uncle James, p. 178.

chuckling, 'ha-haing heartily' and repeatedly relapsing into 'fit[s] of laughing'.¹⁷⁶ Given the ominous omission from the narrative of the slave's fate following the removal of his ghostly disguise, this exaggerated, even frenzied mirth feeds into a darkly parodic humour that is not designed to restore a comforting faith in logic and reason, but to reveal a human reality that is far more unwholesome and inexplicable than one stalked by imaginary supernatural threats. Usually careful to steer clear of politics, *The Youth's Companion's* publication of this piece stands out as an unusually risky editorial decision. Either the story slipped under the generally cautious radar of the magazine's editorial team, or, in line with Tompkins's understanding of sensationalism, it formed part of a bold effort to shape the political attitudes of future generations of Americans. Published in the months following the end of the American Civil War, we might speculate that this uncharacteristic decision was galvanised (like Campana's narrative) by its acute relevance to the cultural moment. It is even possible that the story's contentiousness was deliberately camouflaged by its appearance in an otherwise non-polemical children's magazine. Packaged in a reassuringly non-threatening format, it automatically encouraged readers to make similar assumptions about its content.

The metafictional didacticism of the anti-Gothic Gothic also lent itself very well to the largely pedagogical aims of the children's Gothic. Sophie May's 'Cooking a Ghost. A Story for the Little Folks' (published in *Merry's Museum and Woodworth's Cabinet* on 1 January 1867) is a particularly good example of this subgenre's adaptation for a juvenile audience. One night, when her grandmother is called away to tend to a sick neighbour, the young protagonist of this tale, Janie, is left alone at home, stringing apples to pass the time. Despite the cosiness and familiarity of her surroundings, Janie is unnerved by her solitude and finds herself reflecting on 'all the awful things she had ever known', from beggar men to 'wild Indian[s]'.¹⁷⁷ Falling asleep amidst these fearful imaginings, Janie's 'blood' runs 'cold' when she is jarred awake by the 'most fearful howling from beneath the window! — a prolonged, unearthly sound'.¹⁷⁸ Terrified, she looks up and catches sight of 'the most hideous face that ever was known! It had a grinning mouth, and great glaring eyes which

¹⁷⁶ Uncle James, p. 178.

¹⁷⁷ Sophie May, 'Cooking a Ghost: A Story for the Little Folks', *Merry's Museum and Woodworth's Cabinet*, 1 January 1867, pp. 53-55 (p. 54).

¹⁷⁸ May, p. 54.

seemed fairly to blaze with wicked light!¹⁷⁹ Almost immediately, the appearance of the ghoulish face at the window is revealed to be an ill-conceived prank pulled off by Janie's cousins: it was 'nothing but a *jack-o'-lantern!*', the culprits chorus gleefully as they burst into the room, a 'hollow pumpkin with a candle inside'.¹⁸⁰ Despite their reassurances that they 'didn't mean any harm' and only 'did it for nonsense', Janie is so traumatised by the experience that she falls into an alarmingly catatonic state.¹⁸¹ Utterly unresponsive, her cousin's increasingly 'frightened' entreaties have no 'effect', and she seems 'not to hear them, no matter how loud they' speak.¹⁸² Upon her return, the children's grandmother is empathetic towards the pranksters' plight, forbearing to 'scold' them on the grounds that they 'had no idea of the mischief' they 'might cause' by frightening their cousin.¹⁸³ However, she gravely cautions them against playing similar tricks in the future, telling them the sobering and unmistakably Lockean anecdote of a 'little boy' she once knew 'who lost his reason and became a perfect idiot from such a fright as this you have given Janie this evening!'¹⁸⁴ Fortunately, in Janie's case, her ordeal leaves no lasting damage. The next morning she is relieved to see that by daylight the jack-o'-lantern, which had caused so much distress the night before, is 'anything but a frightful object', and wonders how 'it could have startled her so'.¹⁸⁵ To reward Janie for stringing her apples so diligently, and perhaps to exorcise the last of her grandchildren's residual trauma, the grandmother bakes the jack-o'-lantern into a 'saucer-pie' and the tale concludes with this heart-warming tableau:

So the yellow, gleaming, horrid face called a jack-o'-lantern was stewed and mixed with cream, sugar, eggs, and spice. It came out of the oven in two golden pies done to a turn. Somewhere about tea-time there were three happy children in the summer-house playing 'go visiting,' and eating a delicious dish which they called 'baked jack-o'-lantern'. Levi, the 'hired man', said it was the first time he ever heard of 'cooking a ghost'.¹⁸⁶

Whilst it is not sensational Gothic fiction per se that acts as the Gothic threat in May's narrative, the message that the gratuitous stimulation of terror 'isn't safe' condemns the

¹⁷⁹ May, p. 54.

¹⁸⁰ May, p. 54.

¹⁸¹ May, p. 54.

¹⁸² May, pp. 55, 54.

¹⁸³ May, p. 55.

¹⁸⁴ May, p. 55.

¹⁸⁵ May, p. 55.

¹⁸⁶ May, p. 55.

symbiotic relationship between fear and pleasure that defines the genre's appeal.¹⁸⁷

Discouraging young readers from cultivating an early taste for the chilling frissons offered by such entertainments, the primary object of fear in this story is fear itself.

Conclusion

With the exception of William Dunlap and, to a lesser extent, John Ross Dix, very little is known about the majority of the authors discussed in this chapter. With many of these stories published anonymously, it is practically impossible to determine their origins. As a result of this authorial obscurity and lack of biographical information, there is no obvious way, apart from analysing the content of the texts themselves, of determining the motivations behind their authorship. It is plausible, then, that these authors adopted the anti-Gothic Gothic and parodic Gothic subgenres, not because they wished to justify their use of the genre, but simply to condemn the Gothic and its pernicious influence upon American society. Whilst we cannot rule out this interpretation, I would argue that it is rendered unlikely by the kinds of periodicals in which these stories were published.

Appearing in popular story papers, many of which were economically dependent upon the culture of sensationalism, these narratives were selected with a view to satisfying, rather than evangelising against, the public's appetite for Gothic fiction.

To close, I will briefly consolidate my metafictional reading of the anti-Gothic and parodic Gothic subgenres by demonstrating that the deflective agenda behind these texts was frequently hinted at in the narrative framing devices that authors used to introduce them to the reader. Revealingly, these framing devices often acted as coy disclaimers of the author's Gothic identity. In 'The Alibi: A Real Experience' (published in *The Albion* on 14 September 1861), for example, the narrator opens by insisting that they 'wholly disbelieve in spirit rapping, table-turning and all supernatural eccentricities of that nature', that they 'refuse credence to the best authenticated ghost story', and that they 'can sleep in the gloomiest haunted room in the gloomiest haunted house, without fear of a nocturnal visitor from the other world'.¹⁸⁸ Apparently adamant that there is no room for the supernatural in their life (and by extension, that the following narrative is not the product of their own unnatural proclivities), this narrator boasts of their immunity to settings that evoke a Gothic

¹⁸⁷ May, p. 55.

¹⁸⁸ 'The Alibi: A Real Experience', *The Albion*, 14 September 1861, p. 435 (p. 435).

atmosphere and scoffs at cultural trends, namely the spiritualist movement, that rely on a belief in the occult.

A similar disclaimer is to be found in the opening paragraph of B. W.'s 'My Ghost Story', published in the *Prairie Farmer* on 3 May 1873:

This much I want to say, by way of introduction, or explanation, or apology, I hardly know which: I am not a Spiritualist, mesmerist or psychologist — never was and never expect to be. I do not believe in the black art, or in witchcraft or in ghosts. I am, on the contrary, a very practical sort of man, conservative about my beliefs and disbeliefs. In religious matters I hold pretty strictly to the faith of my Puritan ancestors, giving full credit to everything that savors of the marvelous or supernatural in the Bible, but rejecting everything of the kind recorded elsewhere than in the Scriptures, or narrated by others than the writers of the same.¹⁸⁹

In this framing device, the supposedly flustered and apologetic narrator goes out of their way to present their foray into the Gothic as an entirely uncharacteristic venture. Like the narrator of 'The Alibi', B. W. denies any affiliation with cultural trends, including pseudo-sciences, which might indicate a Gothic sensibility. They cite their refusal to credit any supernatural events which appear outside of a religious context and, apparently associating the Gothic with a detrimentally liberal outlook, don their conservatism like a badge of honour. Another framing device of this ilk appears in 'Ghost Stories', published in *The Friend* on 31 July 1880. Whilst the narrator confidentially admits that they 'like sometimes to hear or read a ghost story', they also claim that they 'always like to hear the explanation for it'.¹⁹⁰ Although they plead guilty to their willingness to derive amusement from ghost stories, this frivolity is tempered by the stipulation that they conclude with the restoration of the rational status quo.

In the framing device employed in 'The Ghost's Supper' (published in *Graham's American Monthly Magazine* under the pseudonym of 'a Stray Waif'), we encounter a far more devil-may-care stance:

Are you fond of ghost stories? I am. To me they are the luxuries — the tit-bits of literature. For making such an avowal I shall probably be accused of possessing a vitiated taste, but I care little for that. Why should I care any thing. Every man has a predilection for something or other which his neighbour considers foolish; my predilection is for tales of the supernatural.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ B. W., 'My Ghost Story', *Prairie Farmer*, 3 May 1873, p. 142 (p. 142).

¹⁹⁰ 'Ghost Stories', *The Friend*, 31 July 1880, pp. 404-05 (p. 404).

¹⁹¹ Stray Waif, 'The Ghost's Supper', *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*, October 1851, pp. 243-46 (p. 243).

In this instance, the narrator pre-empts the moral censure that their engagement with the Gothic is likely to provoke. Brazenly stepping forward as an aficionado of the genre, they tackle the prejudices attached to it head on. Although this approach does not act as a vindication of their appreciation for the Gothic, its defiant self-awareness goes a long way towards taking the wind out of potential critics' sails. Whereas the majority of authors did not use their framing devices to play devil's advocate quite so stridently, there are many cases where they affect a similarly nonchalant attitude. Pleading a lack of personal interest or investment in the stories they tell, they seek to avert the perception that they are defined by them. In 'The Ghost-Raiser' (published in *The North American Miscellany and Dollar Magazine* on 1 April 1852), for example, the narrator claims to be entirely indifferent to their story:

My Uncle Beagley, [...] *will* tell stories. Among them, he tells his Single Ghost story so often, that I am heartily tired of it. In self-defence, therefore, I publish the tale in order that when next the good, kind old gentleman offers to bore us with it, everybody may say they know it.¹⁹²

In 'A Ghost Story' (published in *The National Magazine* in January 1858), the author dodges culpability for their Gothic tale by having the narrator lay out the following rules of engagement:

There are many incidents on record which resemble the following plain narrative, and in the books of wise men may be found attempts, more or less plausible, to account for similar facts without having recourse to anything supernatural. The reader will draw his own inferences.¹⁹³

Refusing to offer their own opinion on the ghostly subject matter of their narrative, or to take moral responsibility for it, the onus is placed entirely upon the reader to interpret it as they see fit. Re-directing the biographical school of criticism away from the creator of the text, its Gothicism is located in the eye of the beholder. The darker its interpretation, in other words, the darker the imagination of the reader.

By modern standards, readings of texts which treat authorial and narrative voices as interchangeable are deemed to be crude and un-nuanced. In these nineteenth-century framing devices, however — an age in which the critical identification of authors with their protagonists was almost de rigueur — it is likely that authors cannily exploited this blurring of identities to their own advantage. Using their narrators to advertise desirable character

¹⁹² 'The Ghost-Raiser', *The North American Miscellany and Dollar Magazine*, 1 April 1852, pp. 203-04 (p. 203).

¹⁹³ 'A Ghost Story', *The National Magazine*, January 1858, pp. 54-59 (p. 54).

traits, such as common sense and Christian faith, or to proclaim their distaste for Gothic subject matter, they manoeuvred themselves into a position where they were equipped to negotiate and evade the stigmas routinely associated with the genre. I will return to this blurring between authorial and narrative voice in the following chapter on Louisa May Alcott's career.

Above all, these framing devices embody the conflict between personal and professional interests that lies at the heart of the anti-Gothic and parodic Gothic subgenres. To balance the preservation of the author's reputation against the commercial benefits of satisfying the public demand for sensational modes of fiction, the Gothic disclaimers which open many of these narratives are frequently followed up with paradoxical assurances of their genuine Gothic credentials. This usually takes the form, like many examples of the genre, from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Dracula*, of assurances regarding the authenticity of the events described in the narrative. In 'My Ghost Story', for example, the narrator, following their protestations of disbelief in supernatural events outside of the scriptures, insists that 'the following' ghostly narrative 'occurred exactly as I have written it'.¹⁹⁴ Again, in 'The Alibi', the narrator explains that 'although I scoff at white ladies, bleeding nuns [...] there is a species of supernatural occurrence in which I am, I confess, an unwilling and hesitating believer'.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, in 'A Ghost Story', after the evasive assertion that it is up to the reader to 'draw his own inferences', the narrator immediately states that, 'It is for me simply to relate the whole history, from the beginning to the end, only promising that it is true in every particular'.¹⁹⁶ From behind the protective veil of morality, empiricism, piety or conservatism, these authors guarantee their readers all the thrills, chills and sensational adrenaline rushes inherent in the experience of reading a Gothic text, without allowing themselves to fall victim to the widespread biographical association of Gothic authors with their subjects. Treading a delicate tightrope between respectability and marketability, they carefully construct a Gothic economy in which these conflicting priorities are no longer at odds.

¹⁹⁴ B. W., p. 142.

¹⁹⁵ 'The Alibi', p. 435.

¹⁹⁶ 'A Ghost Story', p. 54.

Chapter 4: A Gothic Alter-Ego: Louisa May Alcott and her Hidden Career

Introduction

This chapter consolidates my investigation into the figure of the Gothic author in nineteenth-century America by bringing together the arguments pursued in the previous three chapters and applying them to a single-author case study. Throughout her prolific literary career Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) penned sensational Gothic thrillers. Provocatively engaging with the themes of murder, adultery, bigamy, sexual and psychological abuse, fraud, recreational drug use, mesmerism and insanity, Alcott's Gothic corpus is a far cry from the much celebrated children's fiction (most notably *Little Women* and its sequels) which led her to be treasured by the American reading public as 'The Children's Friend'. One of the most significant aspects of Alcott's approach to authorship is her conscientious generic compartmentalisation. Her Gothic ventures are the only ones that she consistently sought to conceal. I argue that the pejorative discourses attached to Gothic authorship during the nineteenth century (the biographical school of criticism's gothicisation of the Gothic author, its ramifications, both for practitioners of the Gothic and for literary nationalist efforts to appropriate their work, and the critical censure surrounding America's culture of sensationalism) played a fundamental role in shaping the way in which Alcott conducted her literary career.

In order to demonstrate that Alcott's conflicted authorial identity was a product of these discourses, I examine her approach to Gothic authorship from three angles. In the first section of the chapter, following a brief delineation of the trajectory followed by the Gothic episodes in Alcott's career, I explore her attitude towards the genre. Using Alcott's often contradictory testimony as a starting point, I demonstrate that her relationship with the Gothic was characterised by three strikingly distinct, even irreconcilable, responses: a personal identification with, and enjoyment of, reading and writing Gothic texts, a scornful dismissal of the genre as artistically inferior, and a strategic exploitation of its commercial benefits. I conclude this section by tracing these contradictions to the critical discourses surrounding the Gothic that were explored in the first three chapters of the thesis. In the second part of the chapter I examine Alcott's self-consciously metafictional reflections upon

Gothic authorship and its consequences for authors and their public reputations within her Gothic writing itself. The focus of this section is Alcott's sensational novel, *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (1866). In the third section I analyse the strategies that Alcott employed throughout her career to negotiate her problematic double identity as a writer. From the anonymous and pseudonymous publication of her Gothic works, to the staged rejection of her Gothic exploits as mere youthful folly in the largely autobiographical *Little Women* (despite her dissimulation, it was widely known that Alcott had written Gothic thrillers), I illustrate that Alcott went to great lengths to preserve her wholesome public image in a critical climate that venerated her contributions to juvenile fiction whilst demonising the figure of the Gothic author.

Alcott's Gothic Career: An Overview

Since the unveiling of Alcott's Gothic corpus, critics, biographers and readers have been fascinated by the duality of her creative identity. Elena Emma Sottilotta refers to Alcott's 'double identity as a writer' and Madeleine B. Stern similarly describes 'America's best-loved author of juvenile fiction' as having 'led a double literary life'.¹ The intrigue surrounding the revelation of Alcott's 'career within a career' has primarily been inspired by the contrast between what Monika Elbert has described as her established 'canonized image as the patron saint of children's literature' and the much darker authorial alter-ego presented by her violent, libidinous and often subversive Gothic productions.² Judith Fetterley, for example, observes that they contain 'no hint of the *Little Women* ethic or ambience', and Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine B. Sterne celebrate Alcott as 'an author' who was 'as familiar with the macabre attractions of opium and hashish as she was with the wholesome pleasures of apples and ginger cookies'.³

¹ Elena Emma Sottilotta, 'Diabolical Crossings: Generic Transitions Between the Gothic and the Sensational in Dacre and Alcott', *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 14 (Summer 2015), 81-99 (p. 84); Madeleine Stern, 'Introduction', in *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*, ed. by Madeleine Stern (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1995), pp. xi-xxix (p. xi).

² Madeleine B. Stern, 'Louisa M. Alcott in Periodicals', *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1977), 369-86 (p. 371); Monika Elbert, 'Introduction' in *The Early Stories on Louisa May Alcott: 1852-1860*, ed. by Monika Elbert (New York: Ironweed Press, 2000), pp. 9-16 (p. 16).

³ Judith Fetterley, 'Little Women: Alcott's Civil War', *Feminist Studies*, 5.2 (Summer 1979), 369-83 (p. 370); Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine B. Stern, 'Five Letters That Changed an Image: Louisa Alcott Unmasked', in *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home*, ed. by Madeleine B. Stern (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1998), pp. 83-92 (p. 89).

Before proceeding, it should be noted that Alcott's Gothic career was one of the worst kept secrets in nineteenth-century American literary history. Despite her diligent efforts to bury this aspect of her writing, she left tantalising hints relating to her many forays into the shadowy realm of Gothic fiction in her letters and journals, various interviews, and even in her children's fiction. Prior, however, to Leona Rostenberg's discovery in 1942 of Alcott's Gothic pseudonym — A. M. Barnard — amongst the Alcott papers held in Harvard's Houghton library, knowledge surrounding her engagement with the Gothic was merely speculative. This lacuna in Alcott scholarship was primarily occasioned by the zealous pruning of the content of Alcott's letters and journals by their first official editor, Ednah Dow Cheney. In her 1888 edition of Alcott's personal papers, Cheney, in line with the more hagiographical life writing practices of the era, significantly altered the original text, not only by making emendations to superficial errors in spelling and punctuation, but by ignoring dates, omitting passages deemed to be too intimate or unflattering, and substituting initials for certain names. Significantly, these names included those of the editors with whom Alcott liaised about the publication of her Gothic thrillers. Since the breakthroughs enabled by Rostenberg's scholarship and by subsequent archival discoveries, including that of Alcott's 'Notes and Memoranda' (entries in her journal in which she carefully recorded the titles of her published stories alongside her earnings for them), critics have been able to track down, collect and re-publish the majority of Alcott's lost thrillers, piecing together a Gothic oeuvre that is more extensive and thematically rich than had previously been anticipated.

Alcott's most concentrated, and arguably most significant, period of Gothic authorship took place during her thirties, between 1863 and 1870. The aesthetic and thematic seeds of these later works can be traced, however, to Alcott's juvenilia, especially the plays that she and her older sister, Anna, co-authored for private family theatricals. Providing an early indicator of the generic versatility that would characterise Alcott's later career, these plays are roughly divided along the lines of sentimental domesticity and Gothic sensationalism. The most Gothic text within this adolescent corpus is *Norna; or, The Witch's Curse*, in which the eponymous enchantress uses her powers to avenge a young woman who has been brutally murdered by her husband. Although not intended for publication, this early text is of particular interest when mapping the trajectory of Alcott's Gothic career as its engagement with the themes of domestic abuse, female revenge and androgyny

(Norna is interchangeably referred to as a 'witch' and a 'wizard') adumbrates the feminist overtones present in many of her professionally authored Gothics.⁴

Between 1852 and 1860, during her twenties, Alcott embarked on her path to professional authorship. As well as publishing her first collection of children's stories, *Flower Fables* (1855), originally written to entertain Ralph Waldo Emerson's daughter, Ellen, Alcott also gained her first experiences of writing short stories for periodicals. During this apprenticeship period she primarily contributed to the *Saturday Evening Gazette*, a weekly paper edited by a family acquaintance, William Warland Clapp, Jr. As with her early dramas, the tonal, stylistic and thematic polarisation of Alcott's contributions to the *Saturday Evening Gazette* served as a precursor to the divergent creative pathways that she would pursue more thoroughly in subsequent decades. Alongside sentimental and often saccharine narratives, such as 'The Sisters' Trial' (1856), 'Mabel's May Day' (1856), 'The Cross on the Church Tower' (1857) and 'Little Sunbeam' (1857), appeared her first ventures into the Gothic. In 'Agatha's Confession' (1857), for example, the psychologically unstable female narrator admits to having allowed another woman, a rival for her husband's affections, to be buried alive. Inadvertently revealing her secret in a guilt-fuelled fit of somnambulism, the grisly truth of Agatha's crime is confirmed when her suspicious husband investigates the contents of her victim's tomb. Even more violent and macabre is Alcott's 1854 story, 'The Rival Prima Donnas'. Also taking a romantic rivalry between two women as its central plotline, the narrative concludes with a spurned lover assassinating her younger competitor by crushing her skull with a crown of iron that has been concealed within a coronet of flowers. Driven insane by this gruesome spectacle, which is melodramatically choreographed to take place on the stage of a crowded opera house, the murderer lives out the rest of her days in an asylum, 'singing mournfully' to herself and weaving 'garlands'.⁵ Whilst lacking the control and nuance that Alcott was able to exercise in later Gothic productions, these early examples offer valuable insights into her early experimentation with the themes and tropes, especially the figure of the female anti-heroine, that she would repeatedly return to and develop during the 1860s.

⁴ Louisa May Alcott, *Comic Tragedies: Written by 'Jo' and 'Meg' and Acted by the 'Little Women'* (Boston, MA: Roberts Brothers, 1893), p. 28.

⁵ Louisa May Alcott, 'The Rival Prima Donnas', in *The Early Stories of Louisa May Alcott: 1852-1860*, ed. by and introd. by Monika Elbert (New York: Ironweed Press, 2000), pp. 37-50 (p. 50).

It is more than likely that Alcott also contributed Gothic thrillers to a paper called the *American Union* during the 1850s. As Stern has suggested, 'it can be assumed that the *American Union* was the principal vehicle in which Alcott aired her early experiments in sensationalism'.⁶ The case for this argument is based on evidence which appears in the same series of letters that initially revealed Alcott's Gothic pseudonym. In a letter dated 7 January 1865, James R. Elliott (the editor of *The Flag of our Union*), wrote to her in an attempt to encourage her to contribute more regularly to his own paper. Comparing the rates of payment offered by the two publications, Elliott informed Alcott that the remuneration offered by *The Flag of our Union* is 'fully equal to \$16.00 for a first page story in the 'American Union' which paper I think you have contributed to while it was under the management of Messrs. Graves & Weston'.⁷ Alcott's connection with the *American Union* is more concretely indicated by an advertisement that appeared in its 21 May 1859 issue, announcing that:

'The Steel Bracelet; or, The Skeleton in the Closet!' a deeply interesting Original Story, by L. M. Alcott, will occupy the first page of next week's paper. We call particular attention to it as an entertaining narrative of extraordinary merit.⁸

Unfortunately, there is no surviving copy of the issue in which 'The Steel Bracelet' was due to appear, and the tale, along with several others whose putatively Gothic titles were recorded in Alcott's journal and volume of *Notes and Memoranda* during this period — 'Otilia's Oath' and 'A Phantom Face' — have never been recovered.

Between 1863 and 1870 Alcott produced the bulk of her Gothic corpus. It is these stories that have precipitated the majority of the revisionist criticism that has appeared since Leona Rostenberg's discovery of her Gothic pseudonym. During this period, Alcott almost exclusively contributed her blood-and-thunder pot-boilers to *The Flag of our Union* and to three of the publications produced by one of the most prodigious tycoons of the nineteenth-century American periodical industry, Frank Leslie. The most sensational and morally subversive of these thrillers were published in *The Flag of our Union* under the pseudonym A. M. Barnard. Whilst the paper purported to be a family publication containing 'not one vulgar word or line', it nevertheless 'specialized in riveting and violent narratives

⁶ Madeleine B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Hearth and Home* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1998), p. 67.

⁷ qtd. in Stern, 'Introduction', in *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked*, p. xvii.

⁸ qtd. in Stern, *From Blood & Thunder*, p. 67.

frequently concerned with convicts and opium addicts'.⁹ Alcott's contributions to this paper included 'V.V.; or, Plots and Counterplots' (1865), 'A Marble Woman; or, The Mysterious Model' (1865), 'Behind a Mask; or, A Woman's Power' (1866) and 'The Abbot's Ghost; or, Maurice Treherne's Temptation' (1867). The three Leslie papers to which Alcott contributed Gothic thrillers were *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Frank Leslie's Chimney Corner* and *Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine*. As Stern has observed, whilst all of these publications 'were designed for a mass readership', they 'were geared to somewhat differing tastes'.¹⁰ The boldest thrillers that Alcott penned for Frank Leslie appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, a weekly that 'reported every cause célèbre from murders to executions, from revolutions to prizefights, from assassinations to scandals'.¹¹ Perhaps the most significant of these stories is 'Pauline's Passion and Punishment' (1863), for which Alcott was awarded a \$100 prize in 1863. Other notable contributions include 'A Pair of Eyes' (1863), 'A Whisper in the Dark' (1863) and 'Taming a Tartar' (1867). The stories that Alcott produced for the other two Frank Leslie publications have generally drawn less critical attention, probably as a combined result of their relatively mild Gothicism and political restraint. This comparative circumspection was perhaps due to the family, and more specifically youthful and female, audiences, at which *Frank Leslie's Chimney Corner* and *Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine* were respectively aimed. These ostensibly tamer examples of Alcott's Gothic portfolio include 'A Nurse's Story' (1866) and 'Perilous Play' (1876) (*Frank Leslie's Chimney Corner*), and 'Betrayed by a Buckle' (1870) and 'La Belle Bayadere' (1870) (*Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine*). Unlike the stories published in *The Flag of our Union*, all of Alcott's contributions to the Frank Leslie papers were published anonymously.

Although most of Alcott's Gothic works took the form of short stories or novelettes, she also produced two Gothic novels. The first of these — *A Modern Mephistopheles, or The Fatal Love Chase* — was written in 1866 for serialisation in *The Flag of our Union*, but was rejected by Elliott on the grounds that it was 'too long & too sensational!'¹² Despite Alcott's attempts to dilute the novel's steamiest elements, her revised text (meekly re-named *Fair Rosamond*) was rejected for a second time. It was not until 1995 that Alcott's initial version

⁹ qtd. in Stern, 'Louisa M. Alcott in Periodicals', p. 373; Stern, ed., *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked*, p. xvi.

¹⁰ Stern, ed., *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked*, p. xvi.

¹¹ Stern, ed., *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked*, p. xvi.

¹² *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy and Madeleine B. Stern, and introd. by Madeleine B. Stern (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), p. 153.

of the novel was published under the title *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. *Fair Rosamund* remains unpublished to this day. The only extant manuscript copy is held in Harvard's Houghton Library. In 1877 Alcott's second Gothic novel — *A Modern Mephistopheles* — was published anonymously as part of the Roberts Brothers' 'No-Name series'. Whilst Alcott resurrected the title of her earlier, un-published text, and though both pieces share an over-arching Faustian theme, they are otherwise unrelated.

Alcott's Relationship with the Gothic

A study devoted to the figure of the Gothic author in nineteenth-century America, especially one analysing the often intensely biographical assumptions surrounding the conditions and processes of Gothic authorship, would be somewhat one-sided or imbalanced if it lacked an examination of the testimony of a writer whose Gothic works were produced within this context. Whilst there are unavoidable holes in Alcott's testimony (afraid of prying eyes peering posthumously into her personal affairs, she destroyed many of her letters and diary entries), meaning that some of her most intimate insights into Gothic authorship may well have been lost, it is nevertheless sufficient to afford a detailed picture of her intense, yet often uneasy relationship with the genre. Writing at a time when Gothic authors were often branded as morally or psychologically unstable, or even as Gothic villains in their own right, the simultaneous relish and reluctance that characterised Alcott's approach to Gothic authorship affords us a valuable opportunity to observe the personal, social and cultural pressures that these discourses exerted on the career of an individual writer.

There is plenty of evidence in Alcott's letters and journals to support the view that, despite an acute awareness of the moral and aesthetic prejudices attached to the genre, she enjoyed Gothic fiction. The often guilty pleasure that the Gothic afforded Alcott in her reading life is illustrated by a journal entry dated August 1850, in which she makes a note of 'Reading Mrs. [Fredrika] Bremer and Hawthorne' and declares that 'The "Scarlet Letter" is my favorite'.¹³ This early expression of her literary tastes is especially revealing as Alcott immediately follows it up with the reflection that, 'Mother likes Miss B. better, as more wholesome. I fancy "lurid" things, if true and strong also'.¹⁴ Significantly, Alcott seeks to justify her preference for the 'lurid' (a term that she repeatedly used as a gloss for the

¹³ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 63.

¹⁴ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 63.

Gothic) over the 'wholesome' to herself, and even perhaps to others (at least during her younger years, her parents habitually read and commented on her journals). She vindicates her decision to favour Hawthorne over Fredrika Bremer (known for her realist novels), on the grounds that the 'lurid', if used correctly, can be a moral vehicle, thereby embodying its own, albeit less obvious, form of virtue. Despite the combined anxiety and defiance that Alcott grappled with following her youthful enjoyment of *The Scarlet Letter*, her attraction to Hawthorne's 'lurid' style does not seem to have diminished with age. Fourteen years later, in a journal entry dated April 1864, she recorded: 'Read Oliver Twist, Cecil Dreeme & Scarlet Letter again & like them all better than ever'.¹⁵ I will return to a comparison of the different challenges that Alcott and Hawthorne faced as Gothic writers later in the chapter.

A further example of Alcott's enjoyment of Gothic fiction is to be found in her journal entry for 1852, in which she includes Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in a 'List of books I like'.¹⁶ Importantly, this list was written as a response to Alcott's self-censorship of her supposedly inferior literary tastes. In an ascetic attempt to curb her passion for fiction in general, she recorded her 'resolution to read fewer novels, and those only of the best'.¹⁷ Including *Jane Eyre* in a dauntingly highbrow list of works, featuring 'Emerson's poems' and 'Goethe's poems, plays, and novels' (both authors whom she idolised throughout her life), as well as non-fictional texts by Carlyle, Plutarch, Hypatia and Saint Francis de Sales, Alcott does not appear to have perceived the novel's Gothicism to be a sufficient reason for expelling it from her sanctioned list of high culture reading.¹⁸ Although she frequently submitted to the wider cultural assumption that the Gothic was an inferior literary form, this journal entry demonstrates that she also greatly admired examples of the genre.

Alcott also enjoyed writing Gothic fiction. In a journal entry dated June / July 1862, she follows up her record of writing 'two tales for L[eslie]' with the reflection that:

I enjoy romancing to suit myself; and though my tales are silly, they are not bad; and my sinners always have a good spot somewhere. I hope it is good drill for fancy and language, for I can do it fast.¹⁹

As with her defensive rationalisation of her preference for Hawthorne's writing over Bremer's, Alcott both evokes and mutes her enthusiasm in this passage, self-consciously

¹⁵ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 129.

¹⁶ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁷ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 67.

¹⁸ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁹ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 109.

moderating her expression of the gusto with which she penned her Gothic thrillers. Again, she vindicates the Gothicism of her work by emphasising the absence of the genuine immorality with which the genre had been widely charged. It is also revealing that, despite her overtly professional attitude to writing thrillers — 'I hope it is good drill for fancy and language' — Alcott also represents her 'romancing' as a frivolous source of personal pleasure. Denigrating her efforts as 'silly', she justifies her engagement with this mode of writing by renouncing the status of her efforts as serious literary works. Whilst expressing her attraction to the genre, Alcott does not treat her Gothic corpus as a body of work upon which she would be willing to stake her authorial reputation. She simultaneously embraces and undermines Gothic authorship by envisaging it as a sub-literary, yet financially remunerative endeavour, as well as a self-indulgent act of escapism which firmly belonged to the private rather than the public sphere. It was only by publishing her works anonymously or pseudonymously that Alcott was able to navigate this paradox.

Alcott's papers also include hints that penning Gothic thrillers brought her emotional release or solace. In a journal entry dated September 1864, for instance, upon one of the numerous occasions that her first novel, *Moods*, was rejected by editors, Alcott wrote that she combated the disappointment of her 'fruitless' efforts by dashing off 'a blood & thunder story or novelette of several hundred pages to relieve my feelings & called it "V. V."'.²⁰ In this instance at least, Alcott seems to have turned to the Gothic's more sensational aesthetic as a source of emotional catharsis.

Alcott's apparent enthusiasm for the Gothic is corroborated by the testimony of those who knew her personally. In the preface to *Comic Tragedies* (a posthumously published collection of Alcott's co-authored adolescent dramas), her sister, Anna Pratt, recalled that when staging their family theatricals, her sister always 'played the villains, ghosts, bandits, and disdainful queens; for her tragedy-loving soul delighted in the lurid parts'.²¹ She reveals that 'no drama was perfect in her eyes without a touch of the demonic or supernatural', and depicts Alcott as having 'revelled in catastrophe', as 'the darker scenes were her delight'.²² Pratt pays particular attention in her preface to the composition and production of 'The Witch's Curse', 'a play full of revenge, jealousy, murder, and sorcery, of

²⁰ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 132.

²¹ Alcott, *Comic Tragedies*, p. 7.

²² Alcott, *Comic Tragedies*, pp. 7, 13.

all which indeed they knew nothing but the name'.²³ Whilst careful to include the disclaimer that the play's disturbing content was not rooted in personal experience, thus guarding their reputations against the critical penchant for unflatteringly biographical readings of acts of Gothic authorship, Pratt singles the piece out on the grounds that Alcott 'called it the "lurid drama," and always considered it her masterpiece'.²⁴ The significance of Pratt's observation is twofold. First, despite their collaboration, 'The Witch's Curse' is very much represented as Alcott's creative vision, or property. Second, the description of Alcott's particular pride in this piece suggests that the Gothic played a formative role in her earliest positive experiences of authorship. Pratt reveals that the creation of 'The Witch's Curse' acted as an important creative epoch for her sister, marking a transition away from domestic sentimentalism towards Gothic sensationalism. 'Hitherto', she writes, 'their dramas had been of the most sentimental description, given to the portrayal of woman's devotion, filial affection, heroism, and self-sacrifice'.²⁵ Presenting 'The Witch's Curse' as a turning point in the style and tone of their youthful creations, she implies that its composition facilitated Alcott's discovery of a new and energising artistic outlet. As Daniel Shealy has noted, Alcott's juvenilia is a 'good indicator of what she truly enjoyed writing', proving that she 'leaned toward the sensational, despite her later inclinations to suppress this type of writing'.²⁶ If Pratt's testimony is anything to go by, then the Gothic was key to shaping Alcott's early literary ambitions.

Approaching the question from the opposite end of her creative spectrum, Alcott's reflections upon her attitude to writing juvenile fiction are equally illuminating. During Alcott's lifetime, and for several decades after her death, it was almost universally taken for granted that the erstwhile author of Gothic pot-boilers had found her true literary calling in composing wholesome stories for children. This was largely due to the fact that Jo March's eventual adoption of children's fiction in the closing chapters of *Little Women* is joyfully hailed by her family as the moment where she has 'found' her true 'style at last' (Jo was widely interpreted as Alcott's autobiographical mouthpiece).²⁷ In reality, however, Alcott's

²³ Alcott, *Comic Tragedies*, p. 12.

²⁴ Alcott, *Comic Tragedies*, p. 11.

²⁵ Alcott, *Comic Tragedies*, p. 12.

²⁶ Daniel Shealy, 'Louisa May Alcott's Juvenilia: Blueprints for the Future', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 17.4 (Winter 1992), 15-18 (p. 15).

²⁷ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, ed. by and introd. by Valerie Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; repr. 2008), p. 420.

relationship with children's fiction was largely devoid of the warm glow of idealism which characterises Jo's creative blossoming. As Valerie Anderson has pointed out:

Little Women was not a product of long and painstaking literary effort, each phrase refined and perfected. Rather it was the reluctant work of a few feverish weeks of writing in order to make money to pay off family debts.²⁸

In general, Alcott seems to have taken little enjoyment in writing children's fiction, presenting it as both boring and creatively stultifying. In a journal entry from September 1867, Alcott listlessly records her initial impressions, both of beginning the process of writing *Little Women* and of taking on the editorship of the children's magazine, *Merry's Museum*: 'Niles, partner of Roberts, asked me to write a girls book. Said I'd try'; 'Fuller asked me to be the Editor of "Merry's Museum." Said I'd try'; 'began at once on both new jobs, but didn't like either'.²⁹ Following a hiatus from writing her breakthrough novel, Alcott's enthusiasm for the project was lukewarm at best when she returned to it the following year: 'I begin "Little Women" [...] I plod away, though I don't enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters; but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it'.³⁰ Even when her established reputation as a children's author had brought her fame and fortune, the process of writing juvenile fiction still appears to have left Alcott cold. In January / February 1877, for example, she complained in her journal of her sense of creative stagnation, admitting to 'being tired of providing moral pap for the young'.³¹ Alcott's sense of ennui also spills over into her correspondence, as in a letter tentatively dated to December 1878 she confesses to an aspiring author seeking her advice that 'though I do not enjoy writing "moral tales" for the young, I do it because it pays well'.³² Whilst Alcott's commentary on her children's writing does not straightforwardly tell us anything about her relationship with the Gothic, a comparison of her attitudes to practising these respective literary modes flags up two very different creative responses. Despite her frequent equivocation surrounding the Gothic, she nevertheless identified with it as a source of enjoyment, escapism and self-expression, unlike the tedium, drudgery and self-denial she associated with juvenile fiction. Although her reputation as the 'Children's Friend'

²⁸ Valerie Anderson, 'Introduction' in *Little Women*, ed. by Valerie Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; repr. 2008), pp. vii-xxvii (p. vii).

²⁹ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 168.

³⁰ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 165-66.

³¹ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 204.

³² *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy and Madeleine B. Stern (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1987), p. 232.

established and permanently sustained her eminent literary status, she seems to have perceived it more as a creative rut than a comfortable, yet fulfilling niche.

However, notwithstanding the affinity that she repeatedly expressed for the Gothic (albeit one often tinged with uncertainty or mild self-reproach), Alcott's personal papers also contain multiple examples of her rejecting or demeaning the genre. In a letter written to her friend Alf Whitman on 11 May 1862, for example, Alcott observed that:

'The South Breaker' is better than Prescotts usually are, being more natural & simple, with less blood & thunder & very little *jewelry* which last is her pet hobby. I read 'Sir Rohan's Ghost' & thought it had great merits & great faults.³³

Demeaning Harriet Prescott Spofford's style, especially in her 1859 novel *The South Breaker*, on account of its exuberant Gothicism (which in Spofford's case was often heightened by the signature decadence of her linguistic palette), she hails her contemporary's departure from this mode of writing as a welcome improvement. This was not the only occasion on which the Gothic featured negatively in Alcott's correspondence with Alf Whitman. In a letter written to her friend on 22 June 1862, she scathingly discussed her own engagement with the genre, informing him that:

I intend to illuminate the Ledger with a blood & thunder tale as they are easy to 'compoze' & are better paid than moral & elaborate works of Shakespeare, so dont be shocked if I send you a paper containing a picture of Indians, pirates wolves, bears 7 distressed damsels in a grand tableau over a title like this 'The Maniac Bride' or 'The Bath of Blood. A thrilling tale of passion', &c.³⁴

Alcott's representation of the Gothic, particularly the stock tropes of blood-and-thunder sensationalism, is far from flattering. Belittling its hackneyed conventions in a manner reminiscent of earlier satirical treatments of the genre, and exaggerating its artistic inferiority as a mainstay of popular culture by comparing it to the lofty genius of Shakespeare, Alcott draws a playful, yet pointed, distinction between the literary path that she is considering and the creation of genuine literature. Our reading of Alcott's caustic treatment of the Gothic in this extract should be moderated, of course, by the fact that she expresses these opinions in a letter. Written in the months immediately preceding her most concentrated period of Gothic authorship, it is certainly possible that her mocking treatment of the genre was a performatively breezy attempt to diffuse any disapprobation that her future career path might provoke. Presenting her engagement with the Gothic as

³³ *The Selected Letters*, p. 77.

³⁴ *The Selected Letters*, p. 79.

the necessary price for earning a successful living, rather than the product of serious literary endeavour or personal inclination, she may have sought to erect a barrier of plausible deniability surrounding the accusation that the Gothic was an intrinsic element of her personal and creative identities.

In her June 1862 letter to Whitman, Alcott justifies her intention to pursue Gothic authorship on the grounds that sensational tales 'are better paid'. Although Alcott often described her literary career in vocational terms, an awareness of her writing as a much needed source of income was never far from her mind. Torn between idealism and shrewd commercial pragmatism, Alcott's simultaneously artistic and professional outlooks are exemplified by an untitled article that was published on 17 March 1888 in *The Critic*, in which she offered advice to aspiring female authors on the importance of cultivating the practical skills and knowledge required to navigate the business side of the publishing industry: 'Now that women have made a place for themselves in journalism and literature, it is wise for them to cultivate, not only their intellectual faculties, but their practical ones also and understand the business details of their craft'.³⁵

From an early age, monetary matters were a source of great preoccupation, even obsession, for Alcott. This anxiety predominantly arose as a result of the persistent financial hardships that she and her family experienced throughout her youth, adolescence and much of her adulthood, largely as a result of her father's professional inefficacies. Alcott's consuming horror of poverty is persistently articulated in her journals. In a May 1850 entry, for example, she complained that 'my moodiness makes it hard to be cheerful when I think how poor we are', and in August 1867, after returning from an extended trip to Europe, she wrote, 'Got to work again after my long vacation, for bills accumulate & worry me. I dread debt more than the devil!'³⁶ Assuming the burden of the role of her family's primary breadwinner in her father's stead, Alcott, 'the self-created paterfamilias', often envisaged her literary career as a means of realising her dearly cherished 'dream of supporting the family and being perfectly independent'.³⁷ Alcott's conceptualisation of her literary endeavours as a solution to financial difficulties is illustrated by her tendency to

³⁵ qtd. in Madeleine B. Stern, 'Louisa May Alcott and the Boston *Saturday Evening Gazette*', *American Periodicals*, 2 (Fall 1992), 64-78 (p. 75).

³⁶ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 61, 158.

³⁷ Madeleine B. Stern, 'Introduction', in *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy and Madeleine B. Stern (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), pp. 3-40 (p. 12); *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 162.

metaphorically visualise her imagination as a money-making machine. In December 1856 she described herself as 'living like a spider, — spinning my brains out for money'; in January 1861 she referred to the profits made from her writing as 'my head money'; and in November 1874 she commented with some satisfaction that 'The golden goose can sell her eggs for a good price'.³⁸ There are even instances where she appears to have prioritised the financial remuneration gained from her writing even more highly than literary success or recognition in its own right. Describing the positive reception of her poem, 'Thoreau's Flute', upon its appearance in the prestigious pages of *The Atlantic* in a June 1863 journal entry, for example, she writes that, 'It was printed, copied, praised & glorified — also *paid for*, & being a mercenary creature I liked the \$10 nearly as well as the honor of being "a new star" & "a literary celebrity"'.³⁹

This self-proclaimed, 'mercenary' aspect of Alcott's attitude to authorship certainly complicates our understanding of her relationship with the Gothic, as she often cited commercial considerations as a justification for her generic choices. When explaining her decision to write Gothic tales for Leslie's and Elliot's story papers, she frequently represented it as the reluctant sacrifice of her artistic integrity in exchange for financial gain. This exigent outlook is illustrated by a February 1865 entry in Alcott's journal:

Wrote a new Novelette for Elliott 'A Marble Woman' & got \$75 for it with which I made things comfortable at home with wood, coal, flour, clothes &c. Mr Elliott wants tales, poems, sketches & novelletes, so I can spin away ad libitum.

Wrote a little on poor old 'Success' but being tired of novels I soon dropped it & fell back on rubbishy tales, for they pay best & I can't afford to starve on praise, when sensation stories are written in half the time & keep the family cosy.⁴⁰

Similarly, in a May 1864 entry, Alcott noted that her 'Leslie tale "Enigmas" came out & was much liked by readers of sensation rubbish. Having got my \$50 I was resigned'.⁴¹ Again, in another letter to Alf Whitman dated Sunday 4 August 1861 (presumably when she was contributing her earlier Gothic works to the *American Union*), Alcott offered the explanation that, 'They like that flat sort of tale so I send it as I should a blood and thunder one if they ordered it for money is my end & aim just now'.⁴² Demeaning her Gothic output as 'rubbishy', and describing her efforts with an air of cynical resignation, these accounts unveil

³⁸ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 81, 103, 192.

³⁹ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 119.

⁴⁰ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 139.

⁴¹ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 130.

⁴² *The Selected Letters*, p. 67.

a very different relationship with the genre to the one implied by her enthusiasm for reading Hawthorne and for creating sensational, supernatural melodramas. What also stands out, however, is the lack of moral self-censure in this commentary. Whilst she was undoubtedly aware of the ethical and psychological smears that critics frequently attached to practitioners of the Gothic, the only accusation that Alcott appears to have levelled against herself in relation to her Gothic productions was her calculating exploitation of the popularity of the sensationalist market.

An especially illuminating insight into Alcott's contradictory relationship with the Gothic is to be found in an October 1868 letter to Mary E. Channing Higginson. In response to her correspondent's warm praise for *Little Women*, which had been published earlier that year, Alcott writes that 'I should gladly write this sort of story altogether, but, unfortunately, it does n't pay as well as rubbish, a mercenary consideration which has weight with persons who write not from inspiration of genius but of necessity'.⁴³ This assertion of her preference for children's fiction over sensational 'rubbish' is intriguing because it stands in direct contradiction to her December 1878 letter (cited above), confessing that she only wrote 'moral tales' for the young for matters of financial exigency. Expressing dramatically opposing opinions about different genres at different moments in her life, it is often difficult to differentiate (particularly in Alcott's correspondence) between the coy and the candid.

This contradiction is potentially explained by Teresa A. Goddu's evaluation of Alcott's literary career as a purely financially driven campaign to 'negotiate the newly commercialized literary marketplace'.⁴⁴ According to Goddu, she changed literary 'modes like costumes', with 'the only "natural" thing about Alcott's writing' being 'her ambition'.⁴⁵ Whilst, as Goddu suggests, there are times when financial obligations caused Alcott to perceive all aspects of her literary work as a 'form of service — even slavery', she also appears to have associated the Gothic with a personal sense of freedom and exhilaration that she rarely attributed to writing children's fiction.⁴⁶ Whilst Alcott's personal papers are ultimately too slippery a surface on which to gain a solid purchase upon her attitude to the Gothic, we can see from her frequently conflicted testimony on the subject that she had an

⁴³ *The Selected Letters*, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 96.

⁴⁵ Goddu, pp. 118, 117.

⁴⁶ Goddu, p. 122.

extremely fluid relationship with the genre. Oscillating between guilt and pleasure, enthusiasm and cynicism, admiration and derision, the Gothic seems to have simultaneously epitomised for Alcott everything that she most cherished and resented about authorship and the literary profession.

Many critics, including Meg Jensen, Elaine Showalter, Karen Halttunen and Martha Saxton, have traced the inconsistencies or contradictions in Alcott's career to her devoted, yet troubled, relationship with her father, the transcendentalist philosopher, Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888).⁴⁷ It is certainly the case that Alcott's father, who had an avid interest in early childhood development and recorded detailed notes on the emerging habits and character traits of his three oldest daughters, applied a pejoratively gothicised discourse to his observations about the young Louisa. In his notes, for instance, he recorded 'signs of impending evil' in his purportedly strong-willed, boisterous and often disobedient child.⁴⁸ In another critique of the fiery personality that Alcott supposedly shared with her mother, Bronson sullenly noted that, 'Two devils, as yet, I am not quite divine enough to vanquish — the mother fiend and her daughter'.⁴⁹ Whilst Alcott's father seems to have taken his unlimited access to his daughter's early journals for granted, it is unlikely that this was a reciprocal privilege. There are indications, however, that Alcott was aware of this infernal discourse. In a letter written to her father on 1 January 1858, for instance, she signs herself, perhaps wryly, 'your loving demon'.⁵⁰ If it was indeed the case that Alcott grew up internalising the knowledge that her much idolised father conceived of her character in diabolical, sinful terms, it is possible that her frequent rejection of the Gothic was symptomatic of what John Matteson has diagnosed as her sense that she could 'satisfy her father only by being something other than herself'.⁵¹ The demonic lexicon that he employed in his early censure of Alcott's basic nature may well have encouraged her to deny her

⁴⁷ Meg Jensen, 'The Writer's Diary as Borderland: The Public and Private Selves of Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Louisa May Alcott', *Life Writing*, 9.3 (September 2012), 315-325 (pp. 321-24); Elaine Showalter, 'Introduction', in *Alternative Alcott*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988; repr. 1995), pp. ix-xliii; Karen Halttunen, 'The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott', *Feminist Studies*, 10.2 (Summer 1984), 233-54; Martha Saxton, *Louisa May Alcott: A Modern Biography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995).

⁴⁸ qtd. in John Matteson, *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott And her Father* (New York: Norton, 2007), p. 10.

⁴⁹ *The Journals of Amos Bronson Alcott*, ed. by Odell Shepard (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1938), p. 173.

⁵⁰ *The Selected Letters*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Matteson, p. 192.

appreciation of the genre which could be seen to most closely corroborate this projected identity.

This biographical interpretation of Alcott's ambivalent relationship with the Gothic is arguably validated by her own testimony. In her memoir, *Across My Path: Memories of People I have Known* (1916), LaSalle Corbell Pickett recorded a conversation with Alcott, where she allegedly revealed, in a moment of unusual candour, that her rejection of the Gothic in favour of children's fiction was largely due to the psychological pressures exerted by her father's high moral standards. Revealingly, this admission appears to have been prompted by Pickett's reiteration of the common critical assumption that *Little Women* 'shows your true style of writing, — the pure and gentle type':

I think my natural ambition is for the lurid style. I indulge in gorgeous fancies and wish that I dared inscribe them upon my pages and set them before the public [...] How should I dare interfere with the proper grayness of old Concord? The dear old town has never known a startling hue since the redcoats were there. Far be it from me to inject an inharmonious color into the neutral tint. And my favorite characters! Suppose they went to cavorting at their own sweet will, to the infinite horror of dear Mr. Emerson, who never imagined a Concord person as walking off a plumb line stretched between two pearly clouds in the empyrean. To have had Mr. Emerson for an intellectual god all one's life is to be invested with a chain armor of propriety. [...] And what would my good father think of me [...] if I set folks to doing things that I have a longing to see my people do? No, my dear, I shall always be a wretched victim to the respectable traditions of Concord.⁵²

It is hard to tell whether the tone of this outburst is playful or despondent. It undeniably communicates, however, the plight of an author who felt constricted by and uncomfortable within her creative skin. To a certain extent, Alcott attributes the repression of her creative instincts to the desire to avoid her own father's censure. This paternal anxiety also extends, however, to her comment upon Emerson's role in moulding her moral and aesthetic compasses. Growing up in what Susan Cheever has described as the American Bloomsbury, amongst such eminent transcendentalist thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller, not to mention her own father, it is more than likely that Alcott regarded her attraction to Gothic sensationalism as a shameful departure from the lofty ideals and prestige of her cultural heritage.⁵³

⁵² LaSalle Corbell Pickett, 'Louisa Alcott's "Natural Ambition" for the "Lurid Style" Disclosed in a Conversation', in *Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott*, ed. by Madeleine B. Stern (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1984), p. 42.

⁵³ Susan Cheever, *American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau: Their Lives, their Loves, their Work* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007).

Whilst readings of the Freudian psychomachia induced by Alcott's paternal relationships provide a helpful starting point in unravelling the complexities of her relationship with the Gothic (especially her decision to conceal or denounce her Gothic productions), it is more important to situate her conflicted attitude towards the genre in relation to three wider nineteenth-century American literary discourses: the biographical school of criticism, the growing cult of literary celebrity, literary nationalism and, interwoven with all three, the gothicisation of the Gothic author.

Susan M. Ryan's recent study, *The Moral Economies of American Authorship* (2016), provides a valuable contextual framework for understanding the compound, interrelated impact that these discourses exerted upon Alcott's career as a professional, often financially driven, writer. According to Ryan, the nineteenth century saw an era in American culture where 'an author's moral reputation emerged as a crucial element in the presentation and marketing of printed material'.⁵⁴ In a literary marketplace where 'authorial character' functioned 'as a kind of currency', Ryan argues, an individual author's '(perceived) good character came to comprise such elements as credibility, admirableness, and influence'.⁵⁵ Directly impacting on the overall success of authors' careers, not least in financial terms, 'nineteenth-century Americans saw character not just as a means of acquiring capital but as itself a form of capital'.⁵⁶

The intense 'investment' in authorial character that Ryan describes demonstrates a further manifestation of the biographically driven critical climate that encouraged the tendency to treat Gothic authors as Gothic subjects.⁵⁷ Significantly, amongst other factors, Ryan lists 'genre' as one of the many 'contingent' factors upon which authorial character was judged.⁵⁸ In light of this trend, it is hardly surprising that in her interview with Pickett, Alcott cited the fear of 'set[ting]' her 'gorgeous fancies [...] before the public' as one of her motivations for resisting the temptation to openly 'indulge' in the 'lurid style'. If the 'traffic in authorial character' indeed 'shaped how individual texts were marketed and received as well as how writerly careers were represented and evaluated', then Alcott's association with the Gothic — a genre singularly encumbered by ethical baggage, even to the extent that its

⁵⁴ Susan M. Ryan, *The Moral Economies of American Authorship: Reputation, Scandal, and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Marketplace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 4.

⁵⁵ Ryan, pp. 6, 5.

⁵⁶ Ryan, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Ryan, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Ryan, p. 4.

practitioners were routinely conceptualised as Gothic villains or diagnosed with moral and psychological abnormalities — would have been a major impediment to the maintenance of her eminent position within this character-driven economy (especially after the publication of *Little Women* in 1868).⁵⁹ In a literary marketplace governed by author-centric, biographically-inflected critical paradigms, Alcott literally could not afford for her ascendant status as 'The Children's Friend' (a title intimately bound up with the perceived morality of her children's fiction) to be tarred by an association with the Gothic.

In relation to this moral economy of authorship, Ryan points out another major offshoot of the cultural fascination surrounding authorial character in nineteenth-century America: the reading public's increased interest in the cult of literary celebrity. By the 1850s, 'as individual, named authorship gained ascendancy', Ryan argues:

Americans invested increasing energy in the elusive project of knowing their favourite authors. To that end, readers sought access to authors' personal selves through illustrated essays and collections devoted to their homes and lifestyles as well as through widely disseminated reproductions of their signatures and likenesses, the latter made possible by technological developments in photography and printing.⁶⁰

This growing 'intimacy industry' had a substantial impact on Alcott and her career.⁶¹

Following the immense success of *Little Women*, 'The Children's Friend' was almost constantly petitioned with requests to sign autographs, conduct interviews for magazines and anthologies on the lives of famous American writers, and to accept unannounced visits from fans conducting eager literary pilgrimages to her family home in Concord. Presumed to be a living epitome of the wholesome domesticity enshrined in her fiction, Alcott was relentlessly sought out by an adoring public desperate to connect with her on a personal level. Prior to her literary success, Alcott appears to have coveted the status of literary celebrity, noting in a journal entry on 29 November 1856 that 'The boys teased me about being an authoress, and I said I'd be famous yet'.⁶² When this fame eventually became a reality, however, Alcott quickly came to resent the frequent intrusions into her private life, bemoaning the unsolicited advances of 'autograph fiends' and crossly complaining about 'Reporters sit[ting] on the wall' to 'take notes' and 'artists sketch[ing] me as I pick pears in

⁵⁹ Ryan, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Ryan, p. 16.

⁶¹ Ryan, p. 16.

⁶² *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 81.

the garden'.⁶³ In a particularly illuminating passage in her journal entry for April 1868, at the outset of her rise to celebrity, Alcott recorded with some discomposure that 'People begin to come and stare at the Alcotts. Reporters haunt the place to look at the authoress, who dodges into the woods *à la* Hawthorne, and won't be even a very small lion'.⁶⁴ Referencing the famously reclusive behaviour that had formed the basis for many of the Gothic mythologies circulated about Hawthorne, Alcott transfers the gothicised discourse away from the Gothic author and onto the reporters who were so intent upon catching a glimpse of her in her native environment. Using the spectral metaphor of haunting to censure the intrusiveness of their unsolicited presence, she implies that they have transformed her home life into an uncanny or *unheimlich* experience, forcing her to don a secretive persona in a place where she was previously at liberty to be herself.

As Ryan observes, 'readers' investment in knowing their admired authors intimately proved as odds with authorship's moral economies'.⁶⁵ In other words, the investigations into author's lives that were inspired by the rising cult of literary celebrity increased the risk of biographical discoveries that might undermine the commercially valuable assumption that wholesome works were produced by wholesome individuals. Whilst Alcott does not explicitly refer in her personal papers to concerns surrounding the reputational crisis that the exposure of her Gothic fiction might provoke, there are several occasions on which she expresses her resentment towards the violation of privacy commonly suffered by writers as a result of journalistic attempts to peel back their public personas and penetrate the hidden nooks and crannies of their personal lives. In her journal entry for February 1885, for example, she writes that she 'Read Geo.[orge] Eliot's Life. Glad it is not gossipy. No one's business what she thought & did'.⁶⁶ In a similar vein, in an entry written later that year, Alcott recorded having 'Sorted old letters & burned many. Not wise to keep for curious eyes to read, & gossip-lovers to print by & by'.⁶⁷ In light of these comments, Alcott certainly seems to have been troubled by the prospect of the exposure, as a direct result of the cult of literary celebrity, of unflattering disparities between her children's fiction and less innocent biographical realities, such as her Gothic alter-ego.

⁶³ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 270, 183.

⁶⁴ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 171.

⁶⁵ Ryan, p. 19.

⁶⁶ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 250.

⁶⁷ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 262.

A further thread that is important to tease out from Alcott's interview with Pickett is her assertion that she would 'always be a wretched victim to the respectable traditions of Concord'. On a basic level, this comment is a rueful jibe aimed at the strait-laced conventionalism of the town's wider community. It is possible, however, that Alcott's reference to Concord's 'respectable traditions' also points to her awareness of the New England town's iconic, even unique, status amongst the creative hubs of America's burgeoning nineteenth-century literary culture. As discussed in chapter two, the nineteenth century saw the self-conscious establishment by influential literary nationalist intellectuals of New England as the nation's cultural epicentre. Whilst this movement was most consistently connected with the overtly intellectual and philosophical (often transcendentalist) works of Concord-based writers like Hawthorne and Emerson, this discourse also, to a lesser degree, encompassed America's emerging canon of children's literature. In a May 1888 article in *The Independent*, for example, one critic forwarded their literary nationalist agenda by making a claim for the superiority of American juvenile fiction on the grounds that 'It is brighter, gayer, and also perter and smarter than its English counterpart'.⁶⁸ Similarly, in an April 1876 article in *Scribner's Monthly*, another critic praised the nation's children's fiction by making a case for its authentic Americanness. Specifically linking this authenticity to the 'local coloring' of stories where 'the scene is laid in New England', they congratulate the convincingness with which 'the sun shines, the brook runs, the bobolink and oriole sing, the chestnuts drop from the tree, the ice resounds, the snow sparkles, and the children and grandchildren all go to the homestead at Thanksgiving'.⁶⁹

As the pre-eminent children's writer of her day, it is unsurprising that Alcott was sometimes celebrated in nationalist appropriations of this more modest literary niche. In an April 1879 article published in *Potter's American Monthly*, for instance, as part of a typically encyclopaedic literary nationalist bid to list America's most influential and respected authors to date, one critic, after comparing Hawthorne to Sir Walter Scott and Shakespeare, more restrainedly acknowledged the efforts of 'Louisa M. Alcott, as a writer for juveniles'.⁷⁰ A literary nationalist sentiment is also detectable in certain of the many biographical sketches written about Alcott in children's magazines. In a December 1877 article which

⁶⁸ 'Literature: American Story-Books For Girls', *The Independent*, 3 May 1888, p. 16 (p. 16).

⁶⁹ 'Two Books for Children', *Scribner's Monthly*, April 1876, pp. 897-98 (p. 897).

⁷⁰ 'Review 2', *Potter's American Monthly*, April 1879, pp. 315-16 (pp. 315-16).

appeared in *St. Nicholas*, for example, attention is paid to Alcott's New England cultural background:

Close by is another house, under the same hill-side, where Mr. Hawthorne lived and wrote several of his famous books, and it was along the old Lexington road in front of these ancient houses that the British Grenadiers marched and retreated on the day of the battle of Concord in April, 1775.⁷¹

Associating Alcott (to whose house this passage refers) both with Hawthorne, the quintessential bannerman not only of American literary nationalism but of New England literary nationalism more specifically, and with Concord's historical role in the Revolutionary War, the author of this piece very consciously attempts to represent her to their youthful audience as an equally essential touchstone of their cultural education and heritage.

Alcott was by no means a strident literary nationalist. In her October 1868 letter to Mary E. Channing Higginson, however, she illuminatingly wrote that 'Your husband gave me the praise which I value most highly when he said the little story [*Little Women*] was "good, & American"'.⁷² Whilst it is perhaps prudent to take this comment with a pinch of salt (as we have seen, this letter epitomises Alcott's often contradictory testimony regarding her attitudes to writing juvenile and Gothic fiction), it nevertheless provides a valuable insight into her awareness of the advantages attached to the prestige of literary nationalist approval. It is also significant that Alcott's appreciation of the praise lavished upon *Little Women's* authentic Americanness is paired with her grateful recognition of its moral endorsement as a 'good' story. This symbiosis between literary nationalism and moral goodness in Alcott's contemporary reception is further illustrated by a March 1878 article in *Arthur's Illustrated Home Magazine*:

May Louisa Alcott long live to write such stories for our young people, who ought to look upon her as one of the greatest women of our age. Now some will laugh at that; but what is greater — that a woman can do — than helping the people of a whole generation to grow into good, sensible and true men and women?⁷³

This direct corollary between Alcott's perceived literary nationalist status and her unimpeachable morality highlights the key difference between Alcott's and Hawthorne's dilemmas as Gothic authors. Whilst, as chapter two demonstrated, Hawthorne's novels

⁷¹ F. B. S., 'Miss Alcott, The Friend of Little Women and of Little Men', *St. Nicholas*, December 1877, pp. 129-31 (p. 130).

⁷² *The Selected Letters*, p. 118.

⁷³ Lichen, 'The Home Circle: From my Corner. No. 24', *Arthur's Illustrated Home Magazine*, March 1878, pp. 158-59 (p. 159).

were hailed as literary nationalist triumphs *despite* their morally questionable Gothic elements, Alcott's literary nationalist status was virtually inseparable from the perceived domestic, and, by extension, womanly goodness of her children's fiction. Indeed, referring to her ability to shape 'true men and women', this article appears to cite her fiction as a useful vehicle for promoting the values of the cult of True Womanhood, a domestic ideology of womanhood which served to enforce the philosophy of separate spheres by maintaining the boundaries between accepted 'male' and 'female' behaviour. Whereas Hawthorne's Gothicism had to be negotiated to consolidate his literary nationalist appeal, Alcott's, as a female, children's author, had to be hidden from view entirely.

When comparing Hawthorne's and Alcott's differing literary nationalist prospects as nineteenth-century American Gothic authors, we must also take into account the respective subgenres or forms that they practised. Whilst the designation of a text as a romance — Hawthorne's chosen mode of writing — was habitually used as a slur against supposedly fanciful or vacuous, often supernatural, fiction, it also evoked a more highbrow literary heritage dating back to the romances of the medieval period and to the canonical works of writers such as Edmund Spenser and the poets of the graveyard school. In designating his novels as romances and conscientiously adapting the form for an American context, Hawthorne's demarcation of his Gothic works in these terms enabled them to be apotheosised as forerunners in the on-going grail quest for that great hallmark of America's literary ascendancy: the Great American Novel. It should be noted, as Nina Baym has observed, that the term 'romance' (nebulous at the best of times) was 'used so broadly and inconsistently' during the nineteenth century 'that in any given instance of trying to fix its meaning the critic or writer was evidently indulging in a creative rather than a descriptive activity'.⁷⁴ If the genre's cultural pedigree was in any way uncertain prior to Hawthorne's appropriation of the term, however, his association with the romance soon established its status as 'a distinct and defining American fictional form', deemed to be 'indispensable for constructing a canon of major works'.⁷⁵

If we were to categorise Gothic subgenres hierarchically in terms of their perceived cultural value (i.e. 'high' and 'low' culture), however, then the blood-and-thunder thrillers

⁷⁴ Nina Baym, 'Concepts of the Romance in Hawthorne's America', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 38.4 (March 1984), 426-43 (p. 430).

⁷⁵ Baym, p. 426.

that Alcott penned for Leslie's and Elliott's sensational story papers would be situated at the very bottom. As a self-proclaimed hack writer, Alcott, unlike Hawthorne, wrote for a mass audience who predominantly read her productions on account of their ability to satisfy a craving for melodramatic sensationalism, rather than intellectual stimulation. Importantly, many critics hailed Alcott's juvenile and domestic fiction as a welcome departure from the widespread appetite for sensationalism perceived to be so corrosive to America's emerging literary and moral culture. In a May 1870 article in *The Monthly Review and Religious Magazine*, for example, one critic praised her 'healthful' domestic novel, *An Old-fashioned Girl* (1869), on the grounds that it was 'free from the sensational excitement of the novels of the day, and the author avoids entirely the morbid tendency characteristic of some of our most popular story-tellers'.⁷⁶ This view is corroborated in an August 1870 review, again of *An Old-fashioned Girl*, in *Lippincott's Magazine*, in which the critic bemoans the fact that it 'is now understood that a book which appeals to the imagination must be sensational or it cannot be successful'.⁷⁷ Conceding that it is possible to 'name some honorable exceptions to the present literary degeneracy', however, and stating that these exceptions predominantly 'owe their creation to female talent', they praise Alcott's novel as an example of this much needed literary counter-movement.⁷⁸ Given that Alcott's domestic and juvenile fiction was frequently hailed as an antidote to the mania for sensationalism that had come to dominate the American literary marketplace, she was in no position to flaunt her erstwhile career as a successful writer of Gothic pot-boilers. If her reputation was to be cemented by the perception of her fiction as a wholesome, family friendly antidote to the sensationalist plague sweeping the nation (a plague that was deemed to have an especially detrimental impact on children's moral and psychological development) then it would have been entirely counter-intuitive to publicly endorse her identity as a writer guilty of spreading this cultural disease.

⁷⁶ 'New Publications: *An Old-Fashioned Girl*', *The Monthly Review and Religious Magazine*, May 1870, pp. 516-20 (p. 516).

⁷⁷ C. L. P., 'Review 2: *An Old-Fashioned Girl*', *Lippincott's Magazine of Literature, Science and Education*, August 1870, pp. 230-32 (p. 230).

⁷⁸ C. L. P., p. 230.

Alcott's Metafictional Musings on Gothic Authorship

Whilst Alcott never commented explicitly upon the pejorative discourses surrounding Gothic authorship in nineteenth-century America, her awareness of the creative restrictions that they imposed are indicated by the metafictional undercurrent that is detectable in her Gothic thriller, *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (1866). Drawing on the trope of the Faustian pact and connecting it with the acts of reading and writing Gothic texts, Alcott appears to have used this text as a vehicle for ruminating upon, or perhaps bemoaning, the social, professional and reputational concerns that were bound up with authoring Gothic fictions. The Faustian events indicated by the novel's original title — *A Modern Mephistopheles, or The Fatal Love Chase* — are triggered when its protagonist, Rosamund, driven to a state of desperation by her suffocatingly uneventful life, declares her willingness to 'sell' her 'soul to Satan for a year of freedom'.⁷⁹ No sooner has she made this reckless utterance, than the Byronic Philip Tempest, a man who bears an uncanny resemblance to a 'portrait of Mephistopheles' on display in her childhood home, arrives upon the scene, seduces her, and tricks her into a sham marriage.⁸⁰

The most metafictionally charged scene in the narrative occurs in one of the earliest pieces of dialogue between Rosamund and Tempest. In this exchange, Rosamund expresses her determination to satisfy her wanderlust at any cost, declaring her ambition to 'try every pleasure before I am too old to enjoy them'.⁸¹ Drawing a direct corollary between pleasure and fulfilment, Rosamund insinuates her desire to pursue experiences that are frowned upon, or even forbidden, by respectable society. Despite his corrupting influence, it is striking that within this conversation, Tempest, a cynical and world-weary libertine, plays devil's advocate for the pursuit of a more conventional lifestyle. As someone who has already taken a defiantly anti-establishment path in life and begun to suffer the consequences, he checks her hedonistic impulses with the warning that:

There is very little real liberty in the world; even those who seem freest are often the most tightly bound. Law, custom, public opinion, fear or shame makes slaves of us all, as you will find when you try your experiment.⁸²

⁷⁹ Louisa May Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (New York: Dell, 1995), p. 1.

⁸⁰ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 5.

⁸¹ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 7.

⁸² Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 8.

Suggesting that her apparent disregard for societal norms is merely a fanciful illusion born out of youthful naivety, Tempest predicts that the weight of public censure will eventually extinguish the ardour of her rebellion.

In terms of its possible reflections upon Gothic authorship, the main significance of this early conversation lies in the connections that it draws between pleasure-seeking and the acts of reading and writing Gothic fiction. In the opening chapters of the narrative, Rosamund's Gothic sensibilities are implied by her attraction to 'tempests' and 'danger'.⁸³ In her exchange with Tempest, this attraction is made explicit by the references that she makes to her literary activities. She reveals, for example, that 'I often make romances when I'm tired of reading them'.⁸⁴ The Gothic bent of these romances is further intimated by her observation that there is a tendency for villains and anti-heroes to be more compelling than straightforwardly virtuous characters: 'In the books I read the sinners are always more interesting than the saints, and in real life good people are dismally dull'.⁸⁵ Not only does Rosamund turn to Gothic romances to alleviate the monotony of her life, but she envisages Tempest's mysterious appearance as a welcome opportunity to inhabit the kind of world she enjoys reading about. Willingly collapsing the distinction between Gothic author and Gothic subject, she entertains the fantasy that 'the new hero had come to play a part in the romance of her life'.⁸⁶

Furthermore, when Tempest eventually endorses her intentions to break society's rules, Rosamund thanks him for giving her 'the first word of encouragement I've had for years'.⁸⁷ Although this statement appears innocuous when read in isolation, Alcott revealingly echoed it a short while later in *Little Women*. In the scene in which Jo March receives a letter from the editor of the story paper, *The Spread Eagle*, praising her first efforts at writing 'a sensation story', Alcott writes that she 'valued the letter more than money, because it was encouraging; and after years of effort it was so pleasant to find that she had learned to do *something*'.⁸⁸ Reappearing in a highly reminiscent manner in this later work, it hardly seems coincidental that Alcott applied this phrasing to Jo's initially exhilarating, albeit ultimately problematic, entry into the sphere of sensational fiction.

⁸³ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, pp. 4, 6.

⁸⁴ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 16.

⁸⁵ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 9.

⁸⁶ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 17.

⁸⁷ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 259.

As Tempest initially predicts, Rosamund soon comes to regret the rashness of her behaviour. After discovering the illegitimacy of her marriage and realising her outcast status as a fallen woman, she flees from her seducer in the hope of seeking redemption. Prior to her fall, Rosamund gaily asserts that she is 'willing to pay for' her 'pleasure if it is necessary', asserting that 'Law and custom I know nothing of, public opinion I despise, and shame and fear I defy, for everyone has a right to be happy in their own way'.⁸⁹ After she has discovered her folly, however, her bitter repentance marks a dramatic departure from these early beliefs:

My delusion is gone, I know him now, and nothing can restore love, respect or confidence. He is my evil genius, and long ago when as a reckless girl I said I'd sell my soul to Satan for a year of freedom little I knew that I should be taken at my word in such fearful earnest. I've been happy, I've paid a high price for it, and now I have no desire but to expiate the impious wish by patience and submission.⁹⁰

Despite her bold declarations to the contrary, the pressure to submit to the exacting demands of public opinion is ultimately overpowering.

Importantly, Rosamund's rejection of her youthful disregard for conventional morality coincides with a major reversal in her attitudes towards Gothic fiction. In the days leading up to her discovery of Tempest's deception, for example, she chastises him for keeping a Gothic novel in his library: '*The Wandering Jew*. It's a horrible book. Why do you have it in the house, Phillip?'⁹¹ In response to Rosamund's censure, Tempest replies that 'It is a favorite of mine. I like horrible books if they have power'.⁹² Although Tempest is an increasingly unsympathetic character by this point in the narrative, it is interesting that his defence of such literature echoes Alcott's own vindication of *The Scarlet Letter*: 'I fancy "lurid" things, if true and strong also'.⁹³ Despite this similarity, which implies Alcott's metafictional, and even biographical, identification with the narrative's villain, this moment marks a major shift in how Gothic fiction is represented in the narrative. Rather than being aligned with freedom and pleasure, even to the extent that she embraces the potential for her own life to embody a Gothic romance, it becomes a source of repugnance to Rosamund, foreshadowing the disgust with which she will soon view the man who has stolen her virtue and destroyed her reputation. Whereas in the opening chapters of the novel, Rosamund's

⁸⁹ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, pp. 8, 9.

⁹⁰ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 278.

⁹¹ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 86.

⁹² Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 86.

⁹³ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 63.

love of reading and writing Gothic fiction acts as a signifier of her admirable individualism, she later comes to view the reading of Gothic material as an index of moral degeneracy. She comments negatively in one scene, for example, on the reading habits of Tempest's violent and sinister lackey, Baptiste. Observing that 'he always reads deaths and murders', Rosamund censures his prurient enjoyment of the kinds of sensational story papers to which Alcott contributed her own Gothic thrillers.⁹⁴ Echoing the gothicised discourse that was attached to many Gothic authors within nineteenth-century American criticism, Rosamund interprets his reading habits as an estimation of his own unnatural proclivities.

Read from a metafictional perspective, Alcott's novel presents a deeply pessimistic outlook on the act of Gothic authorship and its consequences. Whilst Rosamund's youthful romancing initially provides her with a source of creative fulfilment and cathartic escapism, she eventually internalises the pejorative, mainstream perception of this literary identity as a basic indicator of those who are beyond redemption. Starting out as a celebration of Gothic authorship, the narrative ultimately comes to embody many of the didactically cautionary characteristics of the anti-Gothic Gothic. In this instance, however, the genre poses a threat to its creators as well as its consumers. The outcome of Rosamund's social / literary transgression is catastrophic. Unable to let go of his obsessive passion for her, Tempest relentlessly pursues her throughout Europe until her eventual death by drowning. Despite her keenest efforts, Rosamund is never able to outrun a tainted past that is interwoven with the Gothic and the lure of its dark appeal.

Alcott's Negotiation of the Gothic Aspects of her Career

Alcott's journals, correspondence and fiction are littered with clues, all pointing to the conclusion that, despite her affinity with the Gothic, the pejorative discourses surrounding Gothic authorship and the culture of sensationalism shaped a relationship with the genre that was fraught with anxiety. Even more enlightening than this trail of biographical and metafictional breadcrumbs, however, are the insights that are gained from a more expansive mapping of the manner in which Alcott conducted the Gothic aspects of her career. By piecing together a wider picture of her approach to Gothic authorship, it is possible to observe distinct patterns that both corroborate and develop this case study's earlier findings. What stands out most is the consistency with which Alcott employed

⁹⁴ Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, p. 169.

strategies to negotiate her problematic identity as a Gothic writer. Systematically concealing, or, when this was not possible, disowning or sanitising her Gothic ventures, she conscientiously sought to minimise their potentially damaging impact on her personal and professional reputations.

The most obvious strategy that Alcott used to disassociate herself from her Gothic productions was her decision to publish them anonymously or pseudonymously. In his recent study of the previously understudied work of the British Gothic novelist, Mrs. Meeke, Anthony Mandal has examined the cultural factors that encouraged her to 'adopt a multifaceted persona in the marketplace', predominantly through the 'chameleonic use of a tripartite system of authorial attribution in her novels, which appeared nominally, pseudonymously, and anonymously'.⁹⁵ Mandal makes a convincing case for the argument that, within the context of the Minerva Press, 'personae splitting' was 'less a deliberate tactic than a convention', whereby 'readers were playfully encouraged to pursue authorial associations through title-pages, paratexts, and the other paraphernalia of print culture'.⁹⁶ In Alcott's case, however, this practice appears to have arisen from the perceived necessity of severing the connections between different works, especially between her Gothic and children's fiction. For the most part, her publishers appear to have empathised with the perceived necessity of this approach. In a letter that Alcott received from the editorial staff of one of the Frank Leslie papers, apparently in response to a letter expressing her concern that publishing Gothic fiction under her own name would be detrimental to her career as a children's author, she is given the reassurance that, 'if it woul[d be det]rimental to your [reputa]tion as a writer [for ch]ildren to have [your n]ame used on sensational stories Mr. Leslie would not desire any such sacrifice'.⁹⁷

Greatly impressed by Alcott's thrillers, however, and perhaps looking to capitalise on her emerging reputation as the up-and-coming author of *Hospital Sketches* (1863) (the book, which was based on the letters that Alcott wrote to her family describing her experiences as a nurse during the American Civil War, was well received by eminent figures such as Henry James, Sr.), James R. Elliott was less understanding of Alcott's desire to obscure the authorial origins of her thrillers beneath the pseudonym, A. M. Barnard. One of

⁹⁵ Anthony Mandal, 'Mrs. Meeke and Minerva: The Mystery of the Marketplace', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 42.2 (2018), 131-51 (pp. 147, 135).

⁹⁶ Mandal, p. 136.

⁹⁷ qtd. in Stern, 'Introduction', in *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked*, p. xv.

the most illustrative episodes in Alcott's Gothic career is documented in a series of letters that she received from Elliott between 1865 and 1866, imploring her to grant him permission to publish her works under her own name. In the first of these missives, following his rather defensive qualification that *The Flag of our Union* 'is now a literary paper that none need to blush for', Elliott offered to pay her '\$25. more' for her thriller, 'V. V.', 'provided' he could 'publish it under' her 'own name'.⁹⁸ Apparently undaunted by the failure of this first petition, Elliott approached Alcott on at least two more occasions with the same request. In a letter dated only two days after the first, he wrote:

I should be pleased to have you write me some stories for the Flag, of about 25 to 40 pages of such Ms. as 'V.V.' I want them over your own name of course, & I will give you \$2.00 a column (short columns you will notice) for them.⁹⁹

Whilst Elliott continued to pester Alcott in subsequent letters, he adopted a more accommodating attitude. Perhaps wary of scaring off his star contributor, he wrote to her again, assuring her that:

You may send me anything in either the sketch or Novelette line that you do not wish to 'father', or that you wish A. M. Barnard, or 'any other man' to be responsible for, & if they suit me I will purchase them [...] I will give you \$3,00 per column (run in inside length) for sketches under your own name.¹⁰⁰

In the final surviving instalment of this series of letters, the frustrated editor ceases his efforts to persuade Alcott to take public ownership of her thrillers. He does, however, appear to express his genuine confusion at the shame and embarrassment that she attached to them:

Have you written anything in the novel line you would like to have me publish 'by A. M. Barnard, Author of 'V.V.' 'The Marble Woman' &c. &c.? [...] my friends think the 'Marble Woman' is just splendid; & I think no author of novels need be ashamed to own it for a bantling.¹⁰¹

Although to the ears of the modern eavesdropper this dialogue between Elliott and Alcott is necessarily one-sided (Alcott's responses have unfortunately been lost), it is not difficult to re-construct, albeit in a rudimentary way, what her half of the conversation would have sounded like. As none of her Gothic contributions to *The Flag of our Union* appeared under her own name, the resounding negative with which Elliott's entreaties repeatedly met

⁹⁸ qtd. in Stern, 'Louisa M. Alcott in Periodicals', p. 373.

⁹⁹ qtd. in Stern, 'Louisa M. Alcott in Periodicals', p. 373.

¹⁰⁰ qtd. in Stern, 'Louisa M. Alcott in Periodicals', p. 374.

¹⁰¹ qtd. in Stern, 'Louisa M. Alcott in Periodicals', p. 374.

speaks for itself. Indeed, despite the loss of Alcott's part in this exchange, she recorded her adamant rejection of the editor's unwelcome propositions with some vehemence in a December 1864 entry in her journal: 'Sold my Novelle to Elliot for \$50. He offered 25 more if I'd let him put my *name to it*, but I wouldn't'.¹⁰²

Alcott's repeated refusal to grant her consent for Elliott to attach her real name to her Gothic publications is significant on two counts. Firstly, it is very telling that she resisted his efforts to tempt her with offers of increased financial remuneration. Given Alcott's abiding horror of poverty and the obsessive records that she kept of her earnings gained from literary endeavours, it is of some importance that she chose to prioritise the concealment of her Gothic exploits over the extra money that she was given the opportunity to earn from them. According to her judgement, what she stood to lose in the long term as a result of the revelation of her identity as a Gothic writer was far greater than the dollars she might have gained. Even more revealing is the fact that, while Alcott vetoed the possibility of publishing her Gothic thrillers under her own name, she did not attach the same caveat to her poetic contributions to *The Flag of our Union*. Whereas her sensation fiction was all published under the pseudonym, A. M. Barnard, her poetic pieces, 'In the Garret' and 'The Sanitary Fair', were both published under her own name in March and April 1865. Apparently unfazed, either by the paper's grubbier aesthetic or by the notion of taking public ownership of her works (anonymous or pseudonymous publication were very much the convention in the nineteenth-century periodical industry), her qualms were exclusively reserved for the Gothic.

Further light is shed on the significance of Alcott's determination to maintain the anonymity of her Gothic thrillers by comparing this vigilance with the more casual attitude that she adopted towards the publication of other potentially controversial material. Aside from the less flattering appraisals of critics such as Alfred Habegger and Teresa Derrickson, most studies of Alcott's Gothic corpus, including those by Judith Fetterley, Sarah Elbert, Madeleine B. Stern, Elaine Showalter, Cheri Louise Ross and Mary Chapman, have focused on her subversive treatment of racial and gender politics.¹⁰³ These readings are solidly

¹⁰² *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 134.

¹⁰³ Alfred Habegger, 'Precocious Incest: First Novels by Louisa May Alcott and Henry James', in *Henry James and the 'Woman Business'*, ed. by Alfred Habegger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 63-84; Teresa Derrickson, 'Race and the Gothic Monster: The Xenophobic Impulse of Louisa May Alcott's "Taming a Tartar"', *The American Transcendental Quarterly*, 15.1 (March 2001), 43-58; Fetterley; Sarah Elbert, *A Hunger*

bolstered by Alcott's biography. Born into a family that was both stridently suffragist and abolitionist, progressive politics played a central role in Alcott's day-to-day life from early childhood. She often commented in her journals upon her involvement with Concord's anti-slavery community. In one of her earliest entries, she records that 'Mr. Parker Pillsbury came, and we talked about the poor slaves', and in a November 1859 entry she jubilantly describes herself as being 'Glad' to 'have lived to see the Antislavery movement'.¹⁰⁴ She frequently noted down key anti-slavery events (both national and local) during the run-up to the American Civil War, such as 'The Harper's Ferry tragedy' and the 'Burns mob', and recorded her continued presence during the post-war years at events such as local 'Antislavery Festival[s]'.¹⁰⁵ Equally committed to the campaign for gender equality that had begun to accelerate and gain momentum in the post-bellum era, Alcott's feminism is epitomised both by her July 1879 diary entry, in which she proudly recorded the fact that she was '*the first woman to register*' her '*name as a voter*' in Concord, and by a letter that she wrote to Maria S. Porter in 1874, in which she delivered a tour-de-force, Wollstonecraftian critique of the doctrine of separate spheres.¹⁰⁶ As well as demonstrating her commitment to these political viewpoints in her Gothic thrillers, Alcott also explored them in examples of her non-Gothic fiction. Between 1863 and 1864, for instance, she produced three overtly abolitionist Civil War stories: 'M. L.', 'My Contraband' and 'An Hour'. The most polemical of these stories is 'M. L.', which offers a sympathetic perspective upon interracial love.¹⁰⁷ Given that many states, both slaveholding and abolitionist, still enforced anti-miscegenation laws at this time, Alcott's unapologetically tolerant narrative does not pull any political punches.

In his excavation of the previously underappreciated tradition of supernatural fiction produced by American female authors during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock argues that, as well as providing an effective medium for

for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1984); Stern, *From Blood & Thunder*; Showalter; Cheri Louise Ross, 'Louisa May Alcott's (Con)Temporary Periodical Fiction: The Thrillers Live On', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 38.5 (August 2005), 911-23; Mary Chapman, 'Gender and Influence in Louisa May Alcott's *A Modern Mephistopheles*', *Legacy: A Journal of Women Writers*, 13.1 (January 1996), 19-37.

¹⁰⁴ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 45, 95.

¹⁰⁵ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, pp. 95, 72, 164.

¹⁰⁶ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 216; *The Selected Letters*, pp. 189-90.

¹⁰⁷ Louisa May Alcott, 'M. L.', in *The American Prejudice against Color: William G. Allen, Mary King, Louisa May Alcott*, ed. by and introd. by Sarah Elbert (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2002), pp. 121-153.

commenting on the inequalities suffered by women within patriarchal society, the ghost story also constituted an 'acceptable' creative outlet.¹⁰⁸ Female writers could defuse the incendiary politics encoded within these narratives, he suggests, by packaging them within a literary form that was in high demand. A similar argument, specifically in relation to Alcott, has been made by Ann Daghistany Ransdell:

Alcott used gothic romance, like other female authors of the gothic, to disguise and to disseminate political themes [...] The astute choice of this method would allow her both to make a coded political statement within a favored genre, and to ensure her immediate publication and income.¹⁰⁹

When Alcott's publishing practices are taken into account, however, it is clear that her career went against the grain of this trend. Whereas she was uncompromising in her decision to publish her Gothic thrillers anonymously, she published all three of her most contentious anti-slavery narratives under her full name. Written during the same time period as the bulk of her Gothic thrillers, and dealing with similarly sensitive and polarising concepts ('M. L.' is arguably more openly radical, in fact, than the political subtexts present in much of her Gothic fiction), these texts had a great deal in common thematically. Given the rigorous compartmentalisation of these texts along generic lines, we can only surmise that Alcott's anonymous and pseudonymous publication strategy was the product of an anxiety surrounding Gothic authorship. Whilst, as Ransdell and Weinstock suggest, she saw the Gothic (albeit sensation fiction rather than the ghost story) as an economically rewarding genre, she certainly did not perceive it to be acceptable. She did not see the Gothic as a convenient cloaking device for disseminating subversively abolitionist and feminist material, but as something that needed to be cloaked in its own right. In her journal entry for February 1860, Alcott scoffs at an unnamed editor's refusal to publish 'M. L.': 'Mr. — won't have "M. L.", as it is antislavery, and the dear South must not be offended'.¹¹⁰ Similarly, in November 1864, she scornfully wrote that 'Ticknor accepted a fairy tale I sent him but refused "An Hour," because it was about slavery I suppose'.¹¹¹ Alcott's dismissal of these editors' wary attempts to avoid appearing overly partisan is a far cry from her scandalised response to Elliott's request that she put her '*name*' to the thrillers published in

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ann Daghistany Ransdell, 'Black Ghostliness and Historical Allegory in Alcott's "The Abbot's Ghost; or, Maurice Treherne's Temptation"', *Women's Studies*, 36.8 (November 2007), 573-96 (p. 575).

¹¹⁰ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 98.

¹¹¹ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 133.

his paper.¹¹² It was not political controversy that was the source of disquietude for Alcott, but the pejorative moral and aesthetic associations attached to one of the modes of writing that she used to disseminate controversial material.

As alluded to previously, Alcott's Gothic career was not nearly so secret during her lifetime as her fastidious concealment of her connection with the genre would imply. There were various slippages or moments of inconsistency where she shed a potentially costly light upon her shadowy alter-ego. Apart from admitting to her preference for the 'lurid style' in her interview with L. C. Pickett, Alcott, in the early, less self-conscious years of her career, published a handful of Gothic titles under her own name.¹¹³ Whereas she published many of her contributions to the *Saturday Evening Gazette* under the pseudonym 'Flora Fairfield', for instance, the gruesome and psychologically tortured 'Agatha's Confession' appeared under her full name. Likewise, the *American Union* appears to have advertised her contributions under the name 'L. M. Alcott'. Significantly, as Stern has pointed out, when the firm to which the *American Union* belonged was taken over by Elliot, Thomes and Talbot (who also published *The Flag of our Union*) in 1867, they 'issued in their series of Ten Cent Novelettes of Standard American Authors a fascinating thriller, *The Skeleton in the Closet* by L. M. Alcott'.¹¹⁴ Despite her best efforts to thwart him, Elliott seems to have pounced on the opportunity, provided by the legal loophole of purchasing the rights to material that had already been publically owned by Alcott, of publishing one of her Gothic thrillers under her own name.

It must have been a great thorn in Alcott's side that, as a result of these youthful indiscretions, critics and journalists frequently alluded in their reviews and biographies to the fact that she had dabbled in Gothic sensationalism prior to her breakthrough as a children's writer. In a November 1886 article in the *Christian Advocate*, for example, Jennit M. Bingham wrote that, during her early career 'Louisa wrote sensation stories, turning out ten or twelve stories a month full of "wrath, ruin, and revenge"'.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Sarah K. Bolton, in a 10 July 1886 article reprinted in the *Friends' Intelligencer* from the *Christian Register*, noted that 'she sent a story to the *Boston Saturday Gazette*, entitled the "Rival Prima Donnas"', and that 'Finding that there was money in sensational stories, she set

¹¹² *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 134.

¹¹³ Pickett, p. 42.

¹¹⁴ Stern, *From Blood & Thunder*, p. 67.

¹¹⁵ Jennit M. Bingham, 'Louisa M. Alcott', *Christian Advocate*, 25 November 1886, pp. 17-18 (p. 18).

herself eagerly to work, and soon could write ten or twelve a month'.¹¹⁶ One critic, in an article re-published in the *Maine Farmer* from the *Boston Herald* on 5 May 1881, even appears to allude to Alcott's tussle with Elliott:

After Miss Alcott became famous this publisher wanted to get out a volume of the stories in question, under her name, and the fear that it would be done haunted Miss Alcott for some while, but luckily, he had made a solemn agreement with her at the time that her name should not be used, so she was spared the infliction under which Mrs. Burnet suffered at the hands of a Philadelphia publisher.¹¹⁷

It is difficult to know which unfortunate author's fate this critic is referring to (perhaps Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849-1924), who also began her literary career by churning out potentially compromising pieces for story papers). However, what is clear from the ironically apt description of Alcott being 'haunted' by her literary past (and the possibility of its discovery) is the critic's recognition of the high personal stakes involved in the unveiling of this material.

As Janis Dawson has observed, following the publication of *Little Women*, 'Alcott's contribution to the domestic ideal was the source of her fortune and continuing literary fame'.¹¹⁸ Despite some crotchety pedagogical critiques of the slang which appeared in her fiction, Alcott's status as an icon of wholesome domestic femininity led many critics to place their unquestioning confidence in her ability to safely and expertly shape the minds of her youthful readers. 'The first requisite in a book for the children's library', one critic insisted, 'is a thoroughly healthful, moral tone [...] Now I think one can feel entirely safe in the hands of such writers as [...] Louisa Alcott'.¹¹⁹ The trust placed in Alcott as the ultimate children's role model was cemented by the widespread interpretation of her fiction as autobiography. As Bingham unequivocally states, 'What more can be said of Mrs. Alcott than she is the "Mrs. March," the dear mother of *Little Women*? Louisa is, of course, "Jo"'.¹²⁰ Correspondingly, in a biographical sketch published in December 1877 in *St. Nicholas*, pointedly entitled, 'Miss Alcott, The Friend of Little Women and of Little Men', the author is

¹¹⁶ Sarah K. Bolton, 'Louisa M. Alcott', *Friends' Intelligencer*, 10 July 1886, pp. 442-44 (pp. 442, 443).

¹¹⁷ 'Miss Alcott: The Friend of all Young People', *Maine Farmer*, 5 May 1881, p. 4 (p. 4).

¹¹⁸ Janis Dawson, 'Little Women Out to Work: Women and the Marketplace in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women and Work*', *Children's Literature in Education*, 34.2 (June 2003), 111-30 (p. 112).

¹¹⁹ S. R., 'Reading For Children', *Friends' Intelligencer*, 17 February 1877, pp. 827-29 (pp. 827-8).

¹²⁰ Bingham, pp. 17-18.

introduced to her juvenile audience as someone who has 'been able to write so many beautiful books' because they 'tell the story of her life'.¹²¹

The centrality of the presumed autobiographical origins of her work to her popularity, particularly the connection between herself and *Little Women's* protagonist, Jo March, was not lost on Alcott. As she commented in an interview with the journalist, Frank Carpenter, 'In the older books [e.g. *Little Women*] the events are mostly from real life, the strongest the truest'.¹²² Keenly aware of the widespread appeal that this perceived kinship between fiction and reality engendered, she very deliberately encouraged this interpretation in order to cultivate her cosily rose-tinted public persona of "Aunt Jo". It seems to have been a great source of consternation to Alcott, in fact, that she was unable to mirror the character of Jo March more closely. In particular, she was concerned about the disillusioning disappointment that the unavoidable disparity in age and physical appearance might cause. In a letter to Mary Mapes Dodge, her friend and the editor of *St. Nicholas*, for example, she responded to a request for a photograph to attach to a biographical piece about herself by wryly commenting that:

A pleasant one does not exist, & the picture of the forbidding woman photographers make me will carry disappointment & woe to the bosoms of the innocents who hope to see 'Jo young & lovely with hair in two tails down her back'.¹²³

Apparently in an effort to ameliorate Alcott's fears, the 1877 article that subsequently appeared in the children's magazine paired its inclusion of an engraving of the author with an explanation for her appearance intended to manage readers' expectations: 'The engraving shows you how Miss Alcott looks, — only you must recollect that it does not flatter her; and if you should see her, you would like her face much better than the picture of it'.¹²⁴

Exerting pressure on 'The Children's Friend', both to distance herself from the characters in her Gothic narratives (many of whom were morally subversive anti-heroines) and to resemble the protagonists in her children's fiction more closely, the biographical school of criticism and its influence upon the contemporary reception of nineteenth-century literature, might have proved a double-edged sword in the case of Alcott's career.

¹²¹ F. B. S., p. 129.

¹²² qtd. in Stern, *From Blood & Thunder*, p. 178.

¹²³ qtd. in Stern, 'Louisa M. Alcott in Periodicals', p. 380.

¹²⁴ F. B. S., p. 130.

Ultimately, however, this critical paradigm provided her with a much needed solution to the dilemma posed by her double identity as a Gothic writer. By exploiting the perceived autobiographical connection between herself and Jo March, Alcott used her protagonist's renunciation of Gothic sensationalism in *Little Women* as a means of minimising the damage to her reputation that the public knowledge of her earlier forays into the genre might cause.

After the unprecedented success of *Little Women's* first volume and Alcott's sudden elevation to celebrity status, she appears to have recognised the necessity for publically expiating her previous literary transgressions. As Karen Halttunen has argued, 'Through the character of Jo March, Alcott performed literary penance for her greatest sins against the cult of domesticity', especially 'her Gothic period'.¹²⁵ In *Little Women's* second volume, Alcott dedicates a significant portion of the text to Jo's authorial development. Following her decision to leave her family home in Concord, relocate to Boston and embark in earnest upon her literary career, Jo soon finds herself 'plunging into the frothy sea of sensational literature'.¹²⁶ Penning blood-and-thunders for the *Weekly Volcano* (a thinly disguised reference to *The Flag of our Union*), Jo profitably immerses herself in the European Gothic universe of 'banditti, counts, gypsies, nuns, and duchesses'.¹²⁷

Despite her financial success, Jo's plunge into Gothic sensationalism is plagued from the outset by nagging self-doubt. Mirroring Alcott's concerns, she is disconcerted by the possibility of being linked to her productions, opting to have them published anonymously. Anxious that her 'father and mother would not approve of her exploits', she is superficially comforted by the fact that 'It was easy to keep her secret, for no name appeared with her stories'.¹²⁸ It is also revealed that, regardless of Jo's reassuring mantra that this type of writing 'would do her no harm', her prolonged immersion in macabre and violent topics eventually begins to have a corrosive moral and psychological impact. This damage is exacerbated by the intensive research that she undertakes in order to write about Gothic themes more convincingly, a pursuit that begins to erode the barrier between creative detachment and lived experience:

regarding it in a business light [...] she searched newspapers for accidents, incidents, and crimes; she excited the suspicions of public librarians by asking for works on

¹²⁵ Halttunen, p. 243.

¹²⁶ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 335.

¹²⁷ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 335.

¹²⁸ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 335.

poisons [...] She thought she was prospering finely; but, unconsciously, she was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman's character. She was living in bad society; and, imaginary though it was, its influence affected her, for she was feeding heart and fancy on dangerous and unsubstantial food, and was fast brushing the innocent bloom from her nature.¹²⁹

With Jo's womanly virtue and innocence itself hanging in the balance as a result of her ill-judged literary pursuits, Alcott swiftly goes about rectifying her unwitting misdemeanours. 'Wrong-doing always brings its own punishment', her narrative voice sagely observes, 'and, just when Jo most needed hers, she got it'.¹³⁰

This timely punishment is delivered by Professor Friedrich Bhaer, Jo's friend, mentor and future husband. Concerned by his pupil's unsavoury creative endeavours, he seeks to reform her by instilling an overwhelming disgust for her chosen mode of writing. Dismissing Jo's, and indeed Alcott's, former defence of the genre as mere silliness, Bhaer delivers a devastating critique of Gothic sensation fiction's pernicious impact on youthful readers. Echoing the words of many of the contemporary critics discussed in chapter three, who expressed their concerns about the genre's effects by likening its consumption to ingesting toxic substances, he states that he 'would rather give' his 'boys gunpowder to play with than this bad trash', claiming that irresponsible writers have 'no right to put poison in the sugarplum, and let small ones eat it'.¹³¹ Duly horrified by the corrupting influence that she may already have exerted, Jo burns 'the whole bundle' of her pending sensational publications in 'her stove', and confirms her adoption of Bhaer's convictions by echoing his argument that 'I'd better burn the house down [...] than let other people blow themselves up with my gunpowder'.¹³² As she watches the last of her Gothic manuscripts, the "'Demon of Jura" whisk away', she is struck by the illusion that it is a 'little black cinder with fiery eyes'.¹³³ Momentarily perceiving the true demonic nature of her creation before its final disintegration into ash, this vision illustrates Jo's internalisation of the notion that Gothic literature and its creators are Gothic forces in their own right. From this moment onwards, we are informed, 'Jo wrote no more sensational stories'.¹³⁴ Recalling Rosamund's bitter

¹²⁹ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 336.

¹³⁰ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 336.

¹³¹ Alcott, *Little Women*, pp. 341, 342.

¹³² Alcott, *Little Women*, pp. 342-43.

¹³³ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 343.

¹³⁴ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 343.

repentance in *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, Jo's success as a writer of Gothic fiction is transformed from a source of encouragement to a badge of shame.

Numerous critics have expressed their perturbation at Alcott's portrayal of Jo's wholesale renunciation of sensationalism. Ann B. Murphy has described the 'book's uneasy closure', observing that 'the text itself resists Jo's linguistic power' by 'trivializing her early writing efforts' and undermining 'the authenticity of her voice'.¹³⁵ Eugenia Kaledin has similarly reflected that 'the conclusion of *Little Women* seems to sound' a 'false [...] note', whilst Carolyn Heilbrun has levelled the accusation that 'Alcott betrayed Jo'.¹³⁶ In their feminist deconstruction of Alcott's novel, Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant have even suggested that Jo's transformation constitutes a 'macabre subtext' that is chillingly similar to the representations of female oppression in Alcott's Gothic narratives.¹³⁷ Arguing in overtly graphic terms that Alcott 'mutilate[d] her own text', Estes and Lant charge her with perpetuating the patriarchal discourses that she had previously sought to destabilise.¹³⁸

The critical censure surrounding Jo's decision to turn her back on Gothic sensationalism is largely a response to the disturbing gender politics that it encodes. Almost immediately after the destruction of her Gothic manuscripts, Jo is called home to Beth's deathbed, where she makes the self-denying promise to take her most un-ambitious sister's place as the angel in the house. Following her transition from a boisterous and free-spirited tomboy to a tamed and domesticated 'Little Woman', Jo serendipitously discovers her 'true style' as a children's author, before finally accepting a marriage proposal from Professor Bhaer. Read from this angle, Jo's metamorphosis is not so much the triumphant conclusion to an uplifting *künstlerroman*, but the unavoidable fate of a once free-thinking woman, browbeaten into defending the status quo. Jo's transformation takes on a further layer of significance when read in light of the pejorative discourse of gender deviance or monstrosity which often accompanied the critical treatment of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects

¹³⁵ Ann B. Murphy, 'The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in *Little Women*', *Signs*, 15.3 (Spring 1990), 562-85 (pp. 565, 581).

¹³⁶ Eugenia Kaledin, 'Louisa May Alcott: Success and the Sorrow of Self-denial', *Women's Studies*, 5.3 (1978), 251-63 (p. 258); Carolyn Heilbrun, 'Louisa May Alcott: The Influence of *Little Women*', in *Women, the Arts, and the 1920s in Paris and New York*, ed. by Kenneth Wheeler and Virginia Lussier (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1982), pp. 20-26 (p. 23).

¹³⁷ Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant, 'Dismembering the Text: The Horror of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*', *Children's Literature*, 17 (1989), 98-123 (p. 115).

¹³⁸ Estes and Lant, p. 113.

(covered in chapter one). Although Jo's tomboyish character is never presented in monstrous terms, it is illuminating that her rejection of Gothic authorship coincides with her gradual movement away from a rebellious, masculinised identity (signified by the shortening of her name from Josephine to Jo), towards one that is increasingly defined by the traditionally feminine and domestic ideals of marriage and motherhood (in *Little Women's* sequels, Jo is often referred to as 'Mrs Jo' or 'Mother Bhaer').¹³⁹ The transgressive shedding of Jo's 'womanliest attributes', which accompanied her earlier foray into Gothic authorship, is reversed.

The notion that Alcott calculatedly staged Jo's renunciation of the Gothic to disassociate herself from the genre does not necessarily cast her actions in a more flattering political light. What her strategic manipulation of the biographical school of criticism does demonstrate, however, is her canny, entrepreneurial ability to use this discourse as a self-fashioning device. Whilst the public knowledge of her Gothic career was unavoidable, Alcott was able, through the supposedly autobiographical character of Jo, to enact a kind of literary damage control. By dismissing Jo's foray into Gothic authorship as a mere adolescent folly that had since been corrected, a pivot that is compounded by Jo's earnest resolution to 'be very good and proper now', Alcott implies that the same is true of her own Gothic ventures.¹⁴⁰ By presenting her (Jo's) decision to turn away from the Gothic as a didactic moral fable intended to prevent others from making similar errors of judgement, Alcott dodged the bullet of gothicisation by pre-emptively discussing her Gothic career on her own terms.

Although she drew a line under her Gothic past in *Little Women*, Alcott appears to have felt the compulsion to underscore it still further in later works. In her children's novel, *Eight Cousins; or, The Aunt-Hill* (1875), for example, the moral mouthpieces of the story, Aunt Jessie and Dr. Alec, discuss the perils of sensation fiction. Claiming that the genre is 'weak, when it is not wicked', Aunt Jessie argues that even when they cannot be classified as evil, such works are universally guilty of embodying the culturally corrosive intellectual and artistic inferiorities of popular sub-literature.¹⁴¹ Echoing Professor Bhaer's concerns about

¹³⁹ Louisa May Alcott, *Jo's Boys* (London: Hesperus, 2014), pp. 5, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Alcott, *Little Women*, p. 342.

¹⁴¹ Louisa May Alcott, *Eight Cousins; or, The Aunt-Hill* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1927), p. 200.

its harmful impact upon young readers, Dr. Alec endorses Aunt Jessie's designation of the genre as 'trash':

You have laid out a hard task for yourself, Jessie, in trying to provide good reading for boys who have been living on sensation stories. It will be like going from raspberry tarts to plain bread and butter; but you will probably save them from a bilious fever.¹⁴²

As Keren Fite has noted, 'reading and writing are symbolically viewed' in *Little Women* 'as nourishments of the soul which are expected to reflect one's lived moral standards'.¹⁴³ This didactically nutritional discourse is continued in *Eight Cousins*. Similar to the description of sensational fiction as 'dangerous and unsubstantial food' in *Little Women*, Dr. Alec likens the genre to appetising, yet fundamentally unhealthy, fare. Through this piece of dialogue, Alcott continues to reject her Gothic period, albeit in gentler terms. Presenting her youthful self not so much as the insidious poisoner of sugarplums, but as an irresponsible purveyor of sweet treats liable to cause a bout of indigestion, she nevertheless continues to make amends for her literary misdeeds.

Another damage control tactic that Alcott used to limit the reputational fallout of possible investigations into the darker side of her literary identity was her decision to republish select examples of her Gothic fiction under her own name. Given the overall consistency with which she maintained the anonymity of her Gothic corpus, we can only assume that there was a carefully considered rationale behind this apparently self-sabotaging deviation from her usually rigid policy. This rationale is hinted at by Alcott herself in the preface to her miscellaneous collection, *Proverb Stories* (1882), in which she included her Gothic romance, 'The Baron's Gloves':

As many girls have asked to see what sort of tales Jo March wrote at the beginning of her career, I have added 'The Baron's Gloves', as a sample of the romantic rubbish which paid so well once upon a time. If it shows them what *not* to write, it will not have been rescued from oblivion in vain.¹⁴⁴

Alcott uses this justification for the inclusion of 'The Baron's Gloves' in the collection to represent her decision as a personal sacrifice. By admitting her ownership of the story and citing it as an example of the kind of literature to avoid penning, Alcott demonstrates her willingness to face the prospect of humiliation and ridicule for the greater good of

¹⁴² Alcott, *Eight Cousins*, p. 200.

¹⁴³ Keren Fite, 'From Savage Passion to the Sweetness of Self-Control: Female Anger in *Little Women* and "Pauline's Passion and Punishment"', *Women's Writing*, 14.3 (December 2007), 435-48 (p. 441).

¹⁴⁴ Louisa May Alcott, *Proverb Stories* (Boston, MA: Roberts Brothers, 1887), p. 1.

subsequent generations of readers and writers. By appearing to offer herself up as a martyr for the anti-sensationalist cause, she demonstrates the absolutism of her literary conversion from Gothic author to children's author.

The calculated nature of the risk that Alcott took by re-publishing 'The Baron's Gloves' under her own name can also be surmised from its relatively mild content. Following the adventures of two young Englishwomen who become obsessed during their travels in Europe by the mysterious identity of the owner of a pair of found gloves, the Gothicism of 'The Baron's Gloves' never reaches a high pitch. Lacking the taboo themes of sexual abuse, deviant femininity, drug use, adultery and incest that Alcott used to season the raciest of her thrillers, this gently Radcliffean tale embodies a tamer Gothic aesthetic. It is possible, then, that Alcott strategically re-published 'The Baron's Gloves' to shape the public narrative surrounding her Gothic ventures, ensuring that she was read in the more respectable tradition of authors like Radcliffe, rather than the more problematic lineage of Matthew Lewis, Charlotte Dacre and Edgar Allan Poe. By pre-emptively satisfying the public's curiosity about her Gothic past, she was able to control the situation by revealing its most palatable aspects and deterring further journalistic detective work into the more shocking examples of her Gothic oeuvre.

In her final return to Gothic authorship, Alcott twinned her practices of anonymity and controlled, self-exonerating dissemination. Invited to participate in the Roberts Brothers' 'No Name Series' (1876-77), Alcott contributed a Gothic thriller, *A Modern Mephistopheles*. As its title suggests, the 'No Name Series' published works by famous American authors anonymously, and was intended, as one *Harper's* critic glossed, to 'prevent that trading on reputation which is the greatest vice of American *litterateurs*'.¹⁴⁵ By removing the commercial advantages enjoyed by established names, such a scheme would 'put the writers on their mettle to do their best'.¹⁴⁶ In her decision to publish *A Modern Mephistopheles* in the 'No Name Series' Alcott's Gothic career comes full circle. Publishing the novel within a context that was designed to showcase an author's talents, and perhaps their generic preferences, at the same time as providing the safety net of anonymity,

¹⁴⁵ 'Editor's Literary Record', in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine. Volume LIV. December, 1876, to May, 1877* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), pp. 148-51 (p. 149).

¹⁴⁶ 'Editor's Literary Record', p. 149.

Alcott's concluding Gothic venture epitomises her conflicted attitudes, both to the genre's innate literary value and to the disjunction between its moral and commercial reception.

From her position of anonymity, Alcott appears to have enjoyed this enterprise, expressing particular glee about her friends' failure to believe that the 'Children's Friend' could be its author: 'I enjoy the fun, especially when friends say, "I know *you* didn't write it, for you can't hide your peculiar style'.¹⁴⁷ When her publisher exhorted her to publish the story under her own name a decade later, however, she represented the project in a much more muted light. She agreed to her publisher's request, partly because of the widespread assumption that she had authored the text, but she strategically appended another Gothic story, 'A Whisper in the Dark', which had a prominent anti-Gothic discourse. In a manner identical to the didactically metafictional anti-Gothic Gothic stories discussed in the previous chapter, 'A Whisper in the Dark' presents the reading of Gothic texts as an inherently perilous pastime, even an addiction. Wrongly incarcerated in a lunatic asylum, the tale's heroine is temporarily driven genuinely insane by the Gothic library available to her in her isolation:

the books I read, a collection of ghostly tales and weird fancies, soon wrought my nerves to a state of terrible irritability, and wore upon my health so visibly that I was allowed at last to leave my room [...] I was inured to fear now, and an unwholesome craving for new terrors seemed to have grown by what it fed on.¹⁴⁸

Repeating the strategy that she had employed when publishing 'The Baron's Gloves', Alcott presented 'A Whisper in the Dark', and by extension, *A Modern Mephistopheles*, as deterrents against reading and writing Gothic fiction. Once again, she took public ownership of a Gothic text, but only under the auspices that she was not giving, but making, an example of the genre.

Conclusion

All of the cultural trends discussed within this thesis in relation to the gothicised discourse surrounding the figure of the Gothic author in nineteenth-century America, and the anxieties that this discourse engendered for practitioners of the genre, are borne out in Louisa May Alcott's career. Alcott's awareness of the pejorative discourses associated with

¹⁴⁷ *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, p. 204.

¹⁴⁸ Louisa May Alcott, 'A Whisper in the Dark', in *Louisa May Alcott Unmasked: Collected Thrillers*, ed. by and introd. by Madeleine B. Stern (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1995), pp. 32-58 (pp. 51-55).

the genre and those who practised it is consistently manifested in her efforts to shield herself, not only from the morally and psychologically compromising biographical assumptions that were routinely made about Gothic authors, but from the widespread censure surrounding Gothic sensationalism's impact upon youthful readers. Alcott's appropriation as a literary nationalist icon made it imperative that her Gothic career remained veiled. More so than Hawthorne, the Gothicism of Alcott's imagination had to be suppressed in order to preserve her wholesome, domestic status as America's leading literary light within the field of juvenile fiction. Predominantly shrouding herself in the cloak of anonymity, her only public ventures involving the genre employed sanctioned modes of Gothic authorship, ringed around with anti-Gothic caveats designed to disassociate the author from their chosen mode of writing.

The generic conflicts that underpin Alcott's literary life also shed light upon the frustrations experienced by authors who felt an affinity with the Gothic at the same time as recognising the limited scope for openly identifying with the genre. Throughout her later career, Alcott's much beloved children's stories were haunted by her Gothic corpus. It is telling that Alcott marked her departure from Gothic sensationalism, her strategic transition from 'Blood and thunder to hearth and home', with a text entitled *Little Women*.¹⁴⁹ Whilst it appears to denote an endearingly diminutive brand of femininity, this term ironically harks back to a phrase that Alcott repeatedly used in her Gothic thriller, 'Behind a Mask' (1866), to describe Jean Muir, the most depraved of her Gothic anti-heroines, who poses as a governess in order to ensnare a wealthy husband.¹⁵⁰ If Alcott had been truly satisfied with her literary metamorphosis, then it would have made much more sense for her to christen her debut children's novel, *Happy Women*, the optimistically visionary title that she selected for her 1868 feminist article published the same year. Instead, the flagship work of her literary career damningly shares its title with a Gothic fraud. Similar, possibly wistful, echoes are detectable in Alcott's children's novel, *Rose in Bloom* (1875), which borrows its apparently innocent title from the fourth chapter of her most sensational Gothic text, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. However, Alcott saved her most enlightening piece of metafictional commentary upon the moral and economic duties which burdened her literary career for

¹⁴⁹ Stern, *From Blood & Thunder*.

¹⁵⁰ Louisa May Alcott, 'Behind a Mask; or, A Woman's Power', in *Alcott Unmasked*, ed. by Stern, pp. 361-429 (pp. 367, 371, 386).

the closing instalment of her *Little Women* series. Finally published in 1886 after a torturous bout of writer's block, Alcott concluded the last chapter of *Jo's Boys* — wearily entitled 'Positively last appearance' — with a jarringly cynical revelation:

It is a strong temptation to the weary historian to close the present tale with an earthquake which should engulf Plumfield and its environs so deeply in the bowels of the earth that no youthful Schliemann could ever find a vestige of it. But as that somewhat melodramatic conclusion might shock my gentle readers, I will refrain.¹⁵¹

Recalling Jo's decision, prior to her stifling literary conversion experience, to wind up one of her early thrillers 'with an earthquake, as a striking and appropriate *dénouement*', Alcott's momentary tirade expresses her desire to return to her more creatively satisfying Gothic roots. This is a temptation, however, that she ultimately resisted, choosing, albeit reluctantly, to preserve her identity as the 'Children's Friend'.

¹⁵¹ Louisa May Alcott, *Jo's Boys*, p. 258.

Conclusion

The assumption, arising from the biographical school of criticism, that practitioners of the Gothic genre were Gothic subjects in their own right exercised a profound influence upon the perception and practice of Gothic authorship in nineteenth-century America. It generated a huge volume of critical accounts that pejoratively interpreted Gothic texts as extensions of their creators (many of which have become lastingly embedded in the cultural imagination), obliged critics to negotiate the Gothic elements in works that were otherwise deemed to be of significant cultural value, and encouraged the strategic adoption of evasive methods of authorship, especially pseudonymous publication and the use of didactically metafictional subgenres that were designed to performatively disavow their kinship to the Gothic tradition.

Collectively, the findings in this study call for a re-evaluation not only of our understanding of the American Gothic, but of American literature more broadly. As a discourse, the gothicisation of the Gothic author has played an often tacit, yet pivotal role in shaping, and sometimes distorting, America's literary and cultural history. On a basic level, the stigma that it engendered has left us with an incomplete understanding of individual literary careers. Whilst scholars and readers have been fortunate enough to gain a belated acquaintance with Louisa May Alcott's Gothic corpus, it is plausible that other, equally rich bodies of work will remain permanently lost. Most significant, however, is the impact that the gothicisation of the Gothic author has exerted in situating generic anxieties at the heart of notions of American national identity. Colliding, often problematically, with contemporary discourses surrounding popular culture, literary nationalism and, to a lesser degree, gender, the gothicised figure of the Gothic author became hauntingly synecdochic of the moral, psychological and intellectual anxieties that have threatened, from the moment of its independence, to destabilise America's self-conceptualisation as a successful nation. It is no wonder, then, that Gothic authors and their productions underwent such a rigorous programme — both self-imposed and critically manufactured — of de-gothicisation throughout the nineteenth century.

Legacy

The gothicisation of the Gothic author has had an enduring and visible legacy, not least within the academy. As Teresa A. Goddu has noted, the 'desire to quarantine the gothic from higher literary forms is especially prevalent in the scholarship devoted to American literature'.⁷⁸⁹ Anxious to decouple the prominent Gothic element in America's literary tradition from its 'generic baggage', Goddu observes, critics have frequently described it in euphemistic terms, including 'melodrama' and 'Dark Adventure'.⁷⁹⁰ In particular, Goddu suggests that the use of the adjective 'dark' has been used by American scholars to distance the Gothic aspects of America's canon from the genre's traditional low culture status: 'Unlike the term gothic, which connotes "popular," dark has come to signify "profound" in American literary criticism'.⁷⁹¹

In the wake of twentieth-century literary theories which sought to displace the figure of the author from the centre of textual exegesis — such as 'The Intentional Fallacy' and 'The Death of the author' — the critical tendency to treat Gothic writers as Gothic subjects has notably declined.⁷⁹² However, the temptation to mine Gothic narratives for murky, darkly romanticised or sensational biographical subtexts is still clearly visible in more recent Gothic scholarship, even to the extent that a number of critics have expressed their discomfort about the continued presence of this mode of interpretation within the context of modern academia. Whilst Edward Van Leer has actively censured the on-going proliferation of readings of Poe which 'confuse' him 'with his unhinged narrators', Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet has offered the somewhat wry, yet more equivocal observation that 'it is customary to begin any discussion of [Ambrose] Bierce with a comment about his mysterious death (he disappeared in Mexico in 1913) and unhappy existence'.⁷⁹³

⁷⁸⁹ Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 6.

⁷⁹⁰ Goddu, pp. 7, 6.

⁷⁹¹ Goddu, p. 7.

⁷⁹² W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *The Sewanee Review*, 54.3 (July- September 1946), 468-88; Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-48.

⁷⁹³ Edward Van Leer, 'Introduction', in *Poe, Selected Tales*, ed. by Edward Van Leer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; repr. 2008), pp. vii-xxi (p. x); Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, 'They Are Legend: The Popular American Gothic of Ambrose Bierce and Richard Matheson', in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 212-22 (p. 213).

The closely biographical interpretation of Poe's fiction that Van Leer so hotly contests is epitomised by Leslie A. Fiedler's treatment of the author in his seminal and now canonical contribution to American Gothic studies, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Despite his acknowledgement of the unhelpful tendency to over-mythologise the figure of the Gothic author, Fiedler nevertheless presents Poe's writing as the twisted product of his tormented interior existence. When discussing the themes of 'child-love, necrophilia, and incest' in Poe's writing, he asserts their 'personal' origins by referring to them, using medical terminology, as a 'syndrome'.⁷⁹⁴ Categorising Poe's Gothic narratives as 'symptoms rather than achievements', he locates their significance not in their literary merits, but in their function as an externalisation of their creator's psychoses and obsessions.⁷⁹⁵ Fiedler's diagnosis of the source of Poe's Gothicism even strays into the realm of the occult. In a manner reminiscent of numerous nineteenth-century critics, Fiedler opines that Poe 'was content simply to be possessed by his subjects'.⁷⁹⁶ Refusing Poe the status of an autonomous artist, he casts him instead into the passive role of a medium or, more disturbingly, the victim of demonic interference. This negation of the role of creative autonomy in the process of Gothic authorship is echoed in William Hedges's interpretation of Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*. Referring to a lengthy and disorientating sequence in which the somnambulist narrator encounters the nocturnal terrors of the frontier wilderness, gorges himself on raw panther flesh and brutally murders an Indian, Hedges unfavourably describes the escapade as the contents of a 'botched gothic thriller in which the author's unconscious mind apparently seizes control and hurls the reader into a sequence of unresolved nightmares'.⁷⁹⁷ More recent analysis of this ilk tends to assume a less accusatory stance. In her contribution to *A Companion to American Gothic* (2014), for example, Faye Ringel has opined that 'Courses could be taught from' Shirley Jackson's 'literary work and her life to define the Gothic history and literature of New England'.⁷⁹⁸ Whilst eschewing the aggressive, biographically inflected value judgements made in

⁷⁹⁴ Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 2nd edn (London: John and Cape, 1967), p. 416.

⁷⁹⁵ Fiedler, p. 423.

⁷⁹⁶ Fiedler, p. 423.

⁷⁹⁷ William Hedges, 'Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions', *Early American Literature*, 9.2 (Fall 1974), 107-42 (p. 122).

⁷⁹⁸ Faye Ringel, 'New England Gothic', in *A Companion to American Gothic*, ed. by Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 139-50 (p. 144).

Fiedler's and Hedge's evaluations of Poe and Brockden Brown, Ringel nonetheless treats Jackson's personal and creative lives indistinguishably — as a Gothic narrative.

Recent critical responses to the Gothic have also seen the transference of the gothicised discourse surrounding practitioners of the genre onto those who consume it. In *Nightmare on Main Street* (1999), for example (a piece of 'cultural diagnosis', which uses the Gothic's popularity in 1990s America as a barometer for the nation's troubling decline into a state of pre-millennial, fin-de-siècle malaise), Mark Edmundson begins by drawing an unfavourable connection between horror films and social outcasts.⁷⁹⁹ As well as stating that this model of entertainment is predominantly 'patronized by [...] the sorts of middle-aged men who have trouble keeping eye contact', Edmundson also makes the presumption that 'Horror films were for misanthropes, for people who lived in the cellars of their own minds and never wanted to come out. Horror flicks were for losers'.⁸⁰⁰ Sheepishly revealing the recent development of his own addiction to horror films, he admits that:

A penchant for horror films didn't fit in particularly well with my self-conception. I think of myself as an upbeat type, not entirely unworldly, but still optimistic; someone who, against volumes of current testimony, finds teaching English in a university a fully engaging and humanly useful thing to do; who has no qualms about bringing children into the world; whose often harsh views on America come out of a wounded but still somehow thriving love for the place. I teach the visionary poets, after all, Shelley, Blake, Emerson, Whitman.⁸⁰¹

For Edmundson, the attraction to horror films is not only at odds with his self-perception, both as an optimist and a relatively patriotic American citizen, but with his professional, academic identity. In order to emphasise this perceived dichotomy, Edmundson resorts to the use of archetypal Gothic tropes:

I was [...] left with what appeared to be an unresolved double life, not unrelated, I couldn't help seeing, to that of the standard Gothic hero-villain. During the day I was teaching Shelley, at night turning on the VCR to imbibe high horror films.⁸⁰²

Self-consciously invoking the sentiments of numerous nineteenth-century critics who conflated Gothic authors with Gothic character types, Edmundson applies this discourse, albeit in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, to his own viewing habits, imagining them in terms of a shadowy doppelgänger or a Dr Jekyll-and-Mr-Hyde-esque split personality.

⁷⁹⁹ Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997; repr. 1999), p. xvii.

⁸⁰⁰ Edmundson, pp. 3, x.

⁸⁰¹ Edmundson, pp. ix-x.

⁸⁰² Edmundson, p. xvi.

The gothicisation of the Gothic author is especially alive and well in the realm of the literary biography. Often appearing under seductively gothicised titles, such as *Edgar Allan Poe: The Strange Man Standing Deep in the Shadows* (2015) and *Prism of Night: A Biography of Anne Rice* (1991), many of these accounts beckon to the reader's appetite for insights into the personal experiences that inspired their favourite Gothic texts.⁸⁰³ Paul Roland's *The Curious Case of H. P. Lovecraft* (2014) is a case in point. Boasting a cover illustration which merges Lovecraft's features with a mass of evil-looking tentacles (an homage to the iconic, octopus-like centrepiece of his Cthulu mythos), the biography's overall thesis is unmistakable: that it is impossible to determine where Lovecraft ends and his fictional creations begin. The sensational expectations that this image invites are satisfied in the biography's opening paragraphs:

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was haunted by demons. They stalked him in daylight and darkness alike, from childhood until his premature death at the age of 46. They took the form of his earliest memories — of losing his father; of life with his hysterical, emotionally abusive mother.

They leered over his shoulder as he gazed at the distorted reflection in the glass. They taunted him as he struggled to endure blinding migraines, crippling fatigue and periodic breakdowns — debilitating psychosomatic disorders which threatened to suck his vitality and curtail his creativity. He fled from them in his sleep — in dreams so terrifyingly vivid that they left him fearing for his own sanity — and mocked him in the street in the form of 'evil-looking foreigners' who threatened to overrun his picturesque colonial hometown of Providence, New England.

They left him riddled with self-doubt, disappointment and despair, but like a man possessed, he drove them from his mind time and again in bouts of feverish activity.⁸⁰⁴

Embodying a tour de force of the kind of gothicised discourse which dominated nineteenth-century American literary criticism, Roland's initial portrait of Lovecraft demonstrates a clear conviction in the symbiosis between the 'demonic' character of his writing and his psychological instabilities and emotional traumas.

The clearest litmus test for determining the enduring influence of the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship is the degree of pressure that it continues to exert upon its practitioners. Throughout the twentieth century, and up until the present day, Gothic writers have gone to great lengths to discourage biographical readings of their work.

⁸⁰³ Charlotte Montague, *Edgar Allan Poe: The Strange Man Standing Deep in the Shadows* (New York: Chartwell Books, 2015); Katherine Ramsland, *Prism of the Night: A Biography of Anne Rice* (New York: Plume, 1991; repr. 1994).

⁸⁰⁴ Paul Roland, *The Curious Case of H. P. Lovecraft* (London: Plexus, 2014), p. 11.

In the preface to his popular Gothic novel, *The Devil Rides Out* (1934), for example, (which features extensive and detailed discussions about the workings of black magic and an orgiastic depiction of a satanic mass held at Stonehenge), Dennis Wheatley includes the following disclaimer: 'I desire to state that I, personally, have never assisted at, or participated in, any ceremony connected with Magic — Black or White'.⁸⁰⁵

In *Danse Macabre* (1981), his cultural history of the Gothic (specifically horror), Stephen King repeatedly expresses an awareness of the moral and psychological stigma that continues to cling to creators and consumers of the genre. In the forenote to his revised 2010 edition of the text he represents horror enthusiasts as a marginalised community, unfairly scapegoated for the societal ills of modern America:

I'm sure a lot of the so-called realists who run the world think we're cracked, pervo, and possibly ready to shoot up the local high school when they see us paying for a magazine with a decomposing monster on the cover ... but that's their problem.⁸⁰⁶

Passionately defending the Gothic against accusations that it not only stems from, but creates Gothic realities, King insists that 'people attracted to stories about monsters and mayhem are essentially pretty healthy (if sometimes morbid)'.⁸⁰⁷ King is so keen to discredit the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship that he dedicates a whole chapter of *Danse Macabre* to debunking it. In particular, he critiques a perceived double standard whereby Gothic texts, more so than texts belonging to any other genre, are subjected to biographical scrutiny:

Readers who find themselves inclining toward some genre on a regular basis — western, private-eye stories, drawing-room mysteries, science fiction, or flat-out adventure yarns — seem rarely to feel the same desire to psychoanalyze their favorite writers' interests (and their own) as do the readers of horror fiction. Secretly or otherwise, there is the feeling that the taste for horror fiction is an abnormal one.⁸⁰⁸

King goes on to provide testimony of his own encounter with this type of biographical interrogation at a horror convention, before offering the following explanation for the prejudices that motivated it:

⁸⁰⁵ Dennis Wheatley, *The Devil Rides Out* (London: Hutchinson, [n. d.]), p. 6.

⁸⁰⁶ Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, 3rd edn (London: Hodder, 2012), p. xii.

⁸⁰⁷ King, p. ix.

⁸⁰⁸ King, p. 101.

So when people say, 'Why do you write that stuff?' they are really inviting me to lie down on the couch and explain about the time I was locked in the cellar for three weeks, or my toilet training, or possibly some abnormal sibling rivalry.⁸⁰⁹

What King appears to object to most about this brand of generic stereotyping is the inbuilt assumption, as epitomised by Fiedler's and Hedges's respective interpretations of Poe and Brockden Brown, that Gothic authorship is a compulsive, rather than a creative or intellectual endeavour. As a direct rebuttal to this diagnostic approach to the analysis of Gothic texts, King argues that all 'writers are made, not born or created out of childhood trauma', and that 'becoming a writer [...] is a direct result of conscious will' and 'a constant process of honing'.⁸¹⁰

In addition to combating his readers' ingrained presuppositions, King's defence of Gothic authorship is also a response to the polarised critical reception of his work. Perhaps more so than any other contemporary American writer, the persistent contentiousness surrounding King's literary status is reminiscent of the anxieties which problematised the canonicity of Gothic texts in the nationalist criticism of the nineteenth century. Foremost amongst King's detractors is the critic and erstwhile arbiter of the western canon, Harold Bloom. Claiming that 'King's books [...] are not literary at all', and that they emerge 'from an American tradition one could regard as sub-literary: Poe and H. P. Lovecraft', Bloom clearly attributes their perceived inferiority to their Gothicism.⁸¹¹ Bloom's designation of King's corpus as 'sub-literary' primarily demonstrates an allegiance to the traditional consignment of Gothic fiction to the category of 'low' culture. Whilst he does not actively gothicise King on a personal level, it is nonetheless telling that this dismissal appears in a series of critical texts entitled *Bloom's BioCritiques*, all of which open with a foundational essay in which Bloom posits the following hypothesis: 'That the writer somehow is in the work, we need not doubt'.⁸¹² In contrast, King's greatest critical champion, Tony Magistrale, has argued for his canonical status as 'America's Storyteller'.⁸¹³ Unlike many nineteenth-century critics of Hawthorne's work, Magistrale does not elide the Gothic elements of King's fiction in order to justify its national importance. In a manner which recalls the literary nationalist

⁸⁰⁹ King, pp. 101-02.

⁸¹⁰ King, pp. 104-05.

⁸¹¹ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *Bloom's BioCritiques: Stephen King*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), pp. 1-2 (p. 1).

⁸¹² Harold Bloom, 'The Work in the Writer', in *Bloom's BioCritiques: Stephen King*, ed. by and introd. by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), pp. ix-xiii (p. ix).

⁸¹³ Tony Magistrale, *Stephen King: America's Storyteller* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

appropriation of Hawthorne's Gothic romances, however, Magistrale argues for 'the particular *American-ness*' of King's fiction, specifically citing his cultural significance as 'a New England regionalist'.⁸¹⁴ In an earlier study, Magistrale even names King's work as the direct descendent of Hawthorne's. Writing that 'King is a regionalist in much the same way that Hawthorne was', Magistrale locates the value of his writing in his ability to represent the dialect, customs and natural landscape of New England:

King captures the native speech patterns, the local raw materials of a cold climate, and the specificity of place that set his readers firmly in a rural Maine world. His north country is a region of a particular people, language, and customs.⁸¹⁵

Whilst celebrating his evocation of the New England landscape as a 'Landscape of Fear', Magistrale's approach to evaluating King's work, like Bloom's, nevertheless demonstrates the on-going legacy of the literary ideals that shaped the treatment of Gothic authorship throughout the nineteenth century.

Gothic Self-Fashioning

It would be remiss to conclude without acknowledging a seemingly paradoxical by-product of the gothicisation of the Gothic author. Whilst the pejorative overtones of this discourse have often been intrusive and damaging, the understanding of Gothic authors as Gothic subjects has played, and continues to play, a central role in the economy of Gothic authorship. Recognising the unique paratextual status that the figure of the Gothic author has been afforded in the genre's cultural reception, and the largely unintentional function that this has performed in boosting its appeal and mystique, Gothic writers have engaged in acts of Gothic self-fashioning just as frequently as they have sought to distance themselves from their creations.

Like many of the nineteenth-century critics discussed in the chapter one, Gothic writers have repeatedly woven biographical anecdotes into the Gothic mythologies attached to their fiction. Origin myths involving the dreams or, more accurately, the nightmares which have inspired the most iconic scenes in Gothic narratives, for example, have become a longstanding tradition of the genre. This convention can be traced back to the Gothic's inception, when Horace Walpole wrote a letter on 9 March 1765 to William Cole informing

⁸¹⁴ Magistrale, *Stephen King*, p. ix.

⁸¹⁵ Tony Magistrale, *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*, introd. by Kenneth S. Wagner (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), p. 19.

him that 'the origin of' *The Castle of Otranto* lay in 'a dream', in which he 'had thought' himself 'in an ancient castle' and seen 'a gigantic hand in armour' on 'the upper-most bannister of a great staircase'.⁸¹⁶ Perhaps the most famous nineteenth-century Gothic origin myth is to be found in the 1831 preface to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Recalling the now legendary story competition between herself, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and John William Polidori which provided the impetus to create a story fit 'to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart', Shelley describes how she was jolted out of her initial bout of writer's block by a terrifying waking vision:

I saw — with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, — I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion.⁸¹⁷

A more contemporary instance of this trend is to be found on Stephanie Meyer's official website. Whilst the bestselling author of the *Twilight* series tempers her act of Gothic self-fashioning with a reference to her maternal identity — 'I know the exact date that I began writing *Twilight*, because it was also the first day of swim lessons for my kids' — she immediately follows this up by tracing the source of her Gothic narrative to 'a very vivid dream' about an 'average girl' and a 'fantastically beautiful, sparkly [...] vampire' sitting in 'a meadow in the woods' and discussing the conflicting facts of their mutual attraction and the latter's crippling bloodlust for the former.⁸¹⁸ Despite urging his readers to resist the temptation to interpret Gothic fiction as autobiography, even Stephen King has relented and located the origins of his novel, *Salem's Lot* (1975), in a gruesome childhood nightmare that almost invites Freudian psychoanalysis:

the most vivid dream I can recall came to me when I was about eight. In this dream I saw the body of a hanged man dangling from the arm of a scaffold on a hill. Rooks perched on the shoulders of the corpse, and behind it was a noxious green sky, boiling with clouds. This corpse bore the sign: ROBERT BURNS. But when the wind caused the corpse to turn in the air, I saw that it was my face — rotted and picked by the birds, but obviously mine. And the corpse opened its eyes and looked at me. I woke up screaming, sure that that dead face would be leaning over me in the dark.

⁸¹⁶ *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. by W. S. Lewis, 48 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1937–83), I (1937), 88.

⁸¹⁷ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. by and introd. by M. K. Joseph (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; repr. 2008), pp. 8, 9.

⁸¹⁸ Stephanie Meyer, 2019, 'The Story of *Twilight* & Getting Published' <<https://stephaniemeyer.com/the-story-of-twilight-getting-published/>> [accessed 13 June 2019] (paras. 3-4 of 21).

Sixteen years later, I was able to use the dream as one of the central images in my novel *'Salem's Lot*.⁸¹⁹

Acts of Gothic self-fashioning have not always been restricted to the page. As epitomised by the crossovers between Horace Walpole's antiquarian and architectural lifestyles and the content of *The Castle of Otranto*, and later by the parallels between the fictional Caliph Vathek's tower and Sir William Beckford's Fonthill, Gothic authorship has also corresponded with the theatrical and often playful performance of Gothic lifestyle choices. In his online obituary to the twentieth-century Gothic writer, Les Daniels, Bob Booth fondly recalls his friend's espousal of an eccentric nocturnal lifestyle reminiscent of his most famous fictional creation, the vampiric Don Sebastian de Villanueva:

Les lived his entire adult life on Benefit Street [...] It was within a block of The Golden Ball Inn (where Poe drank after being rejected by Sarah Whitman) [...] and The Shunned House, famously used by Lovecraft in his story of that name. [...] During the day he stayed in his cool subterranean lair and rested. At night he prowled the bookstores, moviehouses, nightclubs, comics stores, and record stores of Providence.⁸²⁰

Situating Daniels within a historical tradition of famously quirky, Providence-based Gothic icons, Booth suggests his position within an elite lineage of American authors whose Gothic credentials were not only proven by their writing, but by the manner in which they conducted their everyday lives.

One of the most high profile living examples of this more literal form of Gothic self-fashioning is the carefully cultivated public persona of the filmmaker, Tim Burton. As Catherine Spooner has noted, 'Burton's personal appearance — his tendency to appear in public wearing sunglasses, black clothes and tangled hair — has been instrumental in fashioning his Gothic reputation'.⁸²¹ For Burton, the adoption of a Gothic lifestyle appears to have stemmed from professional as well as personal motivations, with his gothicised media personality actively contributing to the perceived idiosyncrasy and authenticity of his creative brand.

Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, the gothicised discourse surrounding Gothic authorship has dictated the terms of our relationship with the genre, filtering our judgements about its moral and literary value through the premise that it is an

⁸¹⁹ King, pp. 103-04.

⁸²⁰ Bob Booth, 2012 <www.lesdaniels.com/tribute/> [accessed 13 June 2019] (paras. 2-3 of 22).

⁸²¹ Catherine Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 51.

innately autobiographical mode of writing. For better or worse, the attribution of Gothic identities to Gothic writers has become such an endemic feature of the genre's cultural reception that the figure of the Gothic author has become a Gothic trope in its own right. Celebrated and fearfully shunned by its practitioners in equal measure, both responses to this discourse are an acknowledgement of the enduring expectation that the world of the Gothic author is one in which fact is just as strange, if not stranger, than fiction.

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