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## The family Gothic: Identity and kinship in the American Gothic tradition

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**The Family Gothic:  
Identity and Kinship in the American Gothic Tradition**

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An Honors Program Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Arts and Letters  
James Madison University

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by Meagan Elizabeth Riley

May 2016

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of English, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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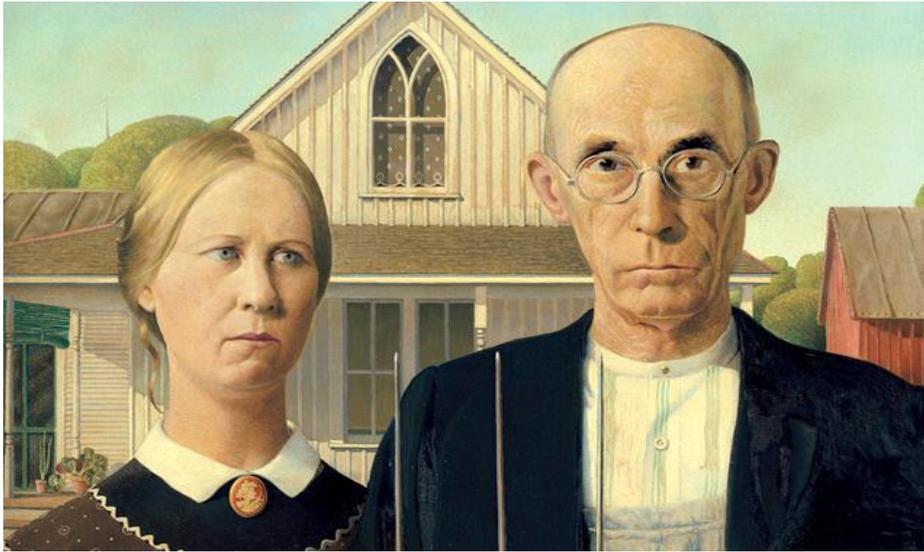
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## The Family Gothic: An Introduction



*American Gothic* by Grant Wood (1930)

In 1930, Grant Wood drew from three models as the inspiration for what would become an iconic painting of idyllic American life—a house, his sister, and his dentist. Over the years, critics have picked the painting over for symbolism—the pitchfork in the man’s hand symbolizes hard labor, their high collars symbolize a rigid tradition of conformity, and the geraniums on the porch over the woman’s shoulder represent a comfortable domesticity. Yet their sullen expressions and the painting’s title—*American Gothic*—invoke a discomfoting notion of the uncanny, a Gothic term for that which is familiar and wholly unfamiliar at the same time. In addition, their connection as a family unit<sup>1</sup> at the time of the painting, the Great Depression, gives these figures a meaning that extends beyond their existence in the frame. The trend that is established in *American Gothic*—the anxieties of a single family unit extending and elaborating on the anxieties of a nation—had also been established in literature, in the genre known as the American Gothic.

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<sup>1</sup> Grant seemed to confirm in a 1941 letter that the figures are father and daughter, though many viewers see them as husband and wife.

The American Gothic finds its roots in the Gothic tradition, which originated in the mid-1700s in opposition to the “classic” novel.

Where the classical was well ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where the classical was simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted... represent[ing] excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilized, a world that constantly tended to overflow cultural boundaries. (Punter and Byron 7)

Authors of the Gothic pulled from the style as a reactionary form of writing, reactionary against an increasingly modern and gentrified world. Over time, writers began to use elements that invoked shock or horror in the reader, producing a reaction of the same offense they felt about the world in which they were operating. The Gothic elicited reactions of “suspense and dread” through “a series of terrible possibilities,”—executions, possibly incestuous relations, and social isolation (Hume 282). Over time, many forms of the Gothic began to extend outward from the original, focusing on the terrors of particular tropes or themes.

One form of the Gothic placed particular emphasis on gender and gender relations, and critics later frame such stories as the Female Gothic. Authors of the Female Gothic wrote about women under duress in order to illustrate the pressures they saw in society at the time. Because of the Female Gothic, Gothic fiction “c[ame] to be understood, rather disparagingly and misleadingly, as ‘feminine’” (Wright 60). Yet the form also allowed authors to become involved with “revolutionary discourse,” as “the generic features of the Gothic—castles, imprisoned heroines, rapacious and tyrannical villains—came... close to the unfolding revolutionary events in France” (Wright 61). In that way, authors used a specific form of the Gothic to portray social issues surrounding the time in which they operated. The invocation of the Gothic style into other forms inevitably made its way across the Atlantic Ocean, finding root in the creation of the

American Gothic. Later, another shift in form would also work to portray social issues through features of the Gothic—the Family Gothic.

At the same time as the advent of the Gothic, American authors were beginning to form their own literary canon, independent of the European canon even before the country itself was independent. After the Revolutionary War, Americans sought to build up their history and literature to an even greater extent, even if that meant pulling from European forms and styles. The Gothic, a strain of literature “that is haunted by an insistent, undead past,” would not fit in a nation just starting to build its own past (Savoy 167). Yet Colonial Americans had capitalized on the fears of the wild land they lived in, the unknowable and unfamiliar, and horror had taken root in the fledgling nation easily with the threat of war. Thus, American authors developed the American Gothic, suited to the shores of the United States, “where the past constantly inhabits the present, [and] where progress generates an almost unbearable anxiety about its costs” (Savoy 167). The colonial horror fiction that demonstrated a fear of the unknown transformed into an exploration of Gothic techniques abroad in the works of Charles Brockden Brown. The nation continued to form its own literary tradition, separate from England, and the American Gothic bloomed into the dark romanticism of Edgar Allan Poe and, in the twentieth century, took its shape in the cosmic horror and the pulp fiction of H.P. Lovecraft.

Of course, authors had to apply the American Gothic style towards meaning in the early years of a developing national canon. Early American literature capitalized on the character of the “coherent national subject, a proper citizen of the republic,” which was contrasted with the figure of the Other (Savoy 171). The Other figure resided in the Gothic as a dark shadow that threatened to return and overwhelm. Using Freud’s notion of the “uncanny,” critics have located why the monstrous figure is drawn as such a terrifying figure in the American Gothic. In many

instances, the Other figure is present in a family structure, corrupting the safety of domesticity and disrupting not only one family, but also the entire nation. In “The Structure of Gothic Convention,” Eve Sedgwick states several tropes that reflect a terrible domesticity: “doubles; discovery of obscure family ties... possibilities of incest... the poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past” (Sedgwick 9). Several of these were necessary for the creation of this form, such as the tradition of inheritance, doubling, and the uncanny.

The tradition of inheritance was handed down from the British Gothic and remolded to fit the American Gothic. In the Gothic, inheritance is something to be feared, a reminder of a dark and secretive past, often one of an entire family. Inheritance therefore took the form of the family curse, which, when fully realized, contributed to “the old family’s eminent extinction” (Baldick 149). As a reactionary element of the American Gothic, authors used the trope of inheritance to illustrate a rejection of the outdated British tradition from which America wished to distance itself. Early American Gothic protagonists also sought an escape from their Gothic inheritance, while working towards American society’s undeniable acceptance of their family line. American Gothic authors viewed their Gothic inheritance as a “cultural legacy bequeathed to their protagonists by the Old World, leaving them suspended within the New” (Mandal 344). Even as family inheritance fell out of fashion, American Gothic authors continued to view the trope of the Gothic inheritance as something to be feared, with anxieties about the state of the American family growing rapidly. With a growing discourse about race in America extending from the nineteenth century and beyond, inheritance became a code for the blood of the family line. And in Gothic literature, if there is something wrong with that inheritance, then it can mean the

dismantling of an entire family structure. Therefore, inheritance as a threat to the family was fully realized as an American Gothic trope.

Known as the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud's association with the Gothic also helped critics develop many terms for what appears in the Gothic style and the meaning behind these terms. Freud's thought is valuable to literary critics because of his interest in the unknown becoming known—a repression revealing itself. Typically, the repressed thoughts that are the most terrifying to Freud involve family secrets or desires within the family structure. Freud demonstrated through his work that “what is most familiar” to the human experience are the “sheer repetition-compulsions and the castration anxiety born of desiring the mother and thus risking the wrath of the father,” which works its way into “some Gothic tales” (Hogle 6). However, Freud also helped to develop terms that apply almost specifically to the Gothic, which also pair with family in a grotesque way.

Doubling is the trend in Gothic literature where authors duplicate elements or characters to reflect a dark truth. Authors refer to the character that is the dark shadow, often of the protagonist, as a doppelganger, a “double-goer.” This figure appears in Freud's essay “The Uncanny,” in which he elaborates that a double can be found “with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death” (Freud 235). Within the Family Gothic, the double appears in the form of twin siblings. The *doppelganger* figure also emerges from the notion of the uncanny—something familiar and yet altogether Other. Freud's explanation of the uncanny is that we are quick to believe it is the opposite of “belonging to the house... familiar, tame, intimate,” but the horror of the uncanny is that it is simultaneously familiar and unknowable (Freud 222). When invoked in portrayals of the

domestic family, it becomes clear that what should be “belonging to home” instead belongs to a sphere of terror that holds a dark mirror up to the nation.

In the Gothic, nearly every image or event possesses a cultural significance. In many Gothic and American Gothic stories, characters commit the act of incest—even accidentally—which invokes immense shock and fear in the readership. However, this trope extends beyond its use of shock, as “incest can also be a stand-in for other activities—including... widely accepted social norms,” or anxieties about the state of society (Kahan 342). Many associate the taboo act of incest with other pairings that would be considered “off-limits” in certain time periods—namely, miscegenation, or mixed-race affairs. In other texts, “incest has also been used to suggest political and cultural [anxieties]”—perhaps, a reflection on “genetic inbreeding” as “cultural degeneracy” (Kahan 343). Whatever social trend the trope of incest reflects, authors capitalize on its use to promote anxiety in the reader about the state of affairs in American society.

Finally, scholars of the Gothic have also placed emphasis on the term “abject.” Gothic authors often create antagonists of their novels that are abject, an “adjective [that] qualifies contemptible actions (such as cowardice), wretched emotional states (such as grief and poverty), and self-abasing attitudes” (Bronfen 1). Yet when Gothic authors create a character that is abject, they imbue it as a wholly monstrous figure, often possessing “the fundamental inconsistencies that prevent [humanity] from declaring a coherent and independent identity” (Hogle 6). That is to say, abject creatures possess the most threatening manifestations of those qualities we wish to “throw off”. A useful model of the abject figure is Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The often monstrous body of the abject figure recalls previous terms of the Gothic—it can be uncanny, doubled, or wholly abject, “betwixt-and-between” (Hogle 7).

Therefore, the abject figure is also the source of family anxieties or national anxieties, or the representation of those anxieties.

Authors of the Gothic have relied on all of these terms and styles at one point, even across Gothic forms. In this thesis, I will focus on one form of the Gothic that three authors in particular occupy to express their ideals: the Family Gothic. Across the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century, authors have utilized the Family Gothic to create anxious, destructive families that amplify their concerns about the state of the nation at that time. In Chapter One, Charles Brockden Brown's works reveal a quest for citizenship in a new nation by depicting orphans struggling to retain a semblance of family structure. In Chapter Two, I will examine how Edgar Allan Poe's deadly families illustrate the racial anxiety about the growing American bloodline. Finally, in Chapter Three, I will consider H.P. Lovecraft's works, observing how his depictions of haunted inheritance in families also reflect the complex racial fears of his time. Therefore, just as Grant Wood's *American Gothic* family stood in for America under duress, the American Gothic families of the Family Gothic played out the fears of an entire nation throughout several centuries, even into modern times.

## Chapter One

### Charles Brockden Brown: An Orphaned Nation

"Perhaps, indeed, thou hast kindred or friends who will take care of thee?"  
"No," said I; "neither kindred nor friends. I am a stranger in the city. I do not even know a single being."

Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*

Throughout his three major novels in the American Gothic tradition, Charles Brockden Brown illustrates the concerns inherent in a nation just into its first period as an established entity. The Early National Period was a time of great inventiveness, and the dominant form of literature for the time, the novel, often reflects this. This form of writing, suddenly rising to popularity, "was particularly appropriate for a fledgling democratic society, a nation and a political system that was also in the process of 'becoming'" (Karafilis 20). Despite the adoption of a new style, however, the content often recalled a simpler time prior to the upheaval of the Revolutionary War. Novels of his time often "use[d]... narratives that suture[d] rifts in national identities, rifts caused by the pull of competing narratives of national belonging" (Karafilis 20). The nation's shaky uprising created a destabilizing sentiment in its people, and it fell upon the novelists to bring the nation together with a canon of literature that was wholly American.

Charles Brockden Brown was born in 1771, five years before the nation he would write for declared independence from Great Britain. His family was Quaker merchants in Philadelphia, and their religion placed them at odds with American forces during the Revolutionary War. The impact of "his family's experience as pacifist supporters of a [violent] revolution," and their subsequent internment when they refused to bear arms or take an oath of allegiance, placed Brown at odds with his culture from a young age (Chapman 17). Brown developed a keen mind quickly and flourished in a circle of his peers, but it was not until the death of a close friend from

yellow fever that Brown placed his view of the newly emerged America into writing. As Brown began “a frantic period of writing novels,” he imbued them with “violent threats to the personal and political body” by portraying families and individuals in distress (Chapman 20). If Brown had held onto any feelings about the birth of his nation at the cost of his family’s wellbeing, then his “quartet of novels can be read as revisiting the drama of the American revolution from a vantage point twenty years later” (Chapman 20). Finding the Gothic styling of literature compelling, Brown used the structure on his own works of American anxiety, essentially creating the genre of the American Gothic.

Despite his anxiety about America’s relationship to his own family, Brown’s works supplied American citizens with a reaffirmation of independence, though mired beneath paranoia and angst. Portrayals of anxiety with regard to identity, country, and family are all evident in Brown’s works. However, Brown also gives his characters the ability to tell their stories, their family histories, often within frame narratives. Through this act of retelling, Brown’s characters can fit together an understanding of their place in the new narrative—whether that is within their new family, their old, or acting as an independent individual. Joining a new family seems to end in the most overwhelmingly positive structure, whereas maintaining old connections of kindred seems too dangerous in this new nation—too alike to retaining European ties after the war. Acting as an independent is more viable, but no less dangerous—existing as a stranger in the hostile countryside of America, with no ties to define oneself by, breeds the mistrust of any one will encounter.

All of Brown’s protagonists make the choice of conscious affiliation with either independence or familial ties as they are telling their stories. The knowledge that they have a choice presents a look into the democratic theory that the new nation was involved in, and the

characters struggle with the freedom of the choice for the length of their respective novels. This, too, stems from Lockean theory, where “parenting... inheres not in procreative ability, in generation, but in nurture, in education” (Brown 22). It is within the ability of the child to choose the parental authority it follows, reaffirming that individuals in this new democracy can essentially choose their families. As the fledgling nation rejects its genealogical descent from the monarchy of England, it prizes those who foster education and intellect. Brown gives his characters aid, then, in the form of tropes that define the familial anxieties of the nation, so that they may better understand what it means to be a part of a family in this newly structured country. In three of Brown’s defining novels in the Gothic tradition— *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*, *Wieland or, The Transformation*, and *Arthur Mervyn or, Memoirs of the Year 1793*—the tropes that illustrate familial life in the eighteenth century American Gothic also illustrate the final choice of the protagonists with regards to the state of the new nation.

Charles Brockden Brown’s 1799 novel, *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*, easily illustrates the concerns of the entire nation concerning its new, independent identity. Brown divides the novel into two main narratives—firstly, the recollections of a man named Clithero, who is then pursued by the titular character until Edgar begins his frenzied homeward quest to return to his family before Native Americans set upon them. Both parts revolve around discussions of familial history, both Clithero and Edgar’s, and the desire in both men is simple: to return to the sense of peace they had when they were in their adoptive families. *Adoptive* is the key word here—Clithero’s parents “joyfully acceded to [the] proposal” of a wealthy benefactress who would ensure Clithero would “be educated with her child”... “an only son of [Clithero’s] own age” (37). However, as this woman’s son proves to be a disappointment to her, she quickly throws attention at Clithero, and “proposed to [him] to become a member of her own family”

(39). His benefactress, Mrs. Lorimer, is Brown's first example of a benevolent matriarch, but certainly not the last. On the other hand, Edgar's "parents and an infant child were murdered in their beds" in a sickening massacre "at the dead of night", and he and his sisters were spared only because they "were abroad upon a visit" (166). Orphaned and not yet of an age to live on their own, the siblings are sent to live at their uncle's house, which Edgar quickly begins to think of as home, switching his language from "turn[ing] [his] steps toward [his] uncle's habitat" to "turn[ing] [his] steps homewards" (12, 32). Brown has already begun to depict a pattern of the demolition of one family and the adoption of another to reflect the nature of this new America.

Elements of Brown's own biography would seem to logically flow into his dark portrayals of Early National family life, but Brown came from a Quaker merchant family in Philadelphia, strong in their beliefs of religion and class. Instead, "what often seems most personal and inward in Brown's work must... be seen as reflecting pervasive cultural tensions and anxieties" (Weinstock 12). In a time when "the American government was divided, as were the American people," Brown felt the need to remind his readers in the broader public what could tie them together as one—that is, a rejection of the old system of kindred, and an adoption of something new (Weinstock 18). To accomplish this, Brown drew from a way of thinking already deeply ingrained in the American consciousness—the fear of strangers, those with a lack of identity—those without a family name. This is evident in *Edgar Huntly* through Clithero's introduction. Edgar is immediately mistrustful for he "did not recognize in [Clithero] any one whom [he] knew" and this meant that "Clithero was a stranger, whose adventures and character, previously to his coming hither, were unknown to [them]" (10, 14). The importance of Clithero being able to share his story is pivotal, as it allows him to banish "the obscurity that hung over his origin and past life" and establish the connection that he has with a family (15). It is

interesting that through listening to this man's quest for family, Edgar "more or less turns into Clithero after hearing his story; his own odyssey parallels Clithero's in a number of ways" (Luciano 6). Essentially, "Edgar's absorption of [the story's] truth" allows him to attach himself "to his body double, Clithero" (Luciano 6). Here, we see the Gothic tradition of doubling come into play.

Brown often infused doubling into his works, creating a fear that an evil copy of something good can exist in the same space as the original. The logical way to work this into Brown's family narratives would be, of course, twins, and this trope persists through American Gothic literature as well as our broader culture still today. The "evil twin" appears in *Edgar Huntly* and, although he is quickly disposed of, his villainous presence would invoke an inherent mistrust of those who do not belong in families. Recalling the idea that Edgar and Clithero are doubled figures, we understand that "both Edgar and Clithero have foster parents... consonant with the mysterious lineage of the hero," and "both... fall into disgrace with Sarsefield, the key father figure" (Hughes 180). In fact, not only do their actions mirror each other throughout the narrative, and not only do they both possess several foster families—these families become complicatedly entangled, essentially making Edgar and Clithero brothers by the end of the narrative. Because Mrs. Lorimer was Clithero's matriarchal figure, and Edgar and his sisters are later adopted by both Mrs. Lorimer and Sarsefield, it is with the union of these two characters that "Clithero and Huntly become foster brothers, so to speak... parallel[ing] their psychic twinship" (Bernard 38). It is here that this Gothic intent to double melds with another idea inherent in Brown's literature—the rebellion against the patriarch, which falls back on Revolutionary-era mindsets.

Throughout *Edgar Huntly*, we see a preoccupation with the rejection of the patriarch and the adoption of a benevolent matriarch. If we are to read the patriarch figure as the stand-in for England, then the conjoined Edgar-Clithero hero can be “seen in standard revolt against paternal authority throughout the novel” (Hughes 180). Hughes posits that “the hero’s repressed desire is to eliminate, not venerate, the paternal authority figure” (Hughes 180). With Clithero, the reader understands that he is guilty of killing “the brother of [his] patroness, the father of [his] love,” and that he felt that “had the assailant been [his] father the consequence would have been the same” (70). Yet Edgar’s rebellion against patriarchs is more subtle, and can be connected to the fact that his quest for family in the second part of the narrative is largely associated with his return to a female-guided sphere. As he gets closer to home, he arrives at a house that “was the model of cleanliness and comfort” and thought he “could claim consanguinity with such beings” (217). However, he is frightened off from the concept by the arrival of the patriarch of the family, who carried “the accents of drunkenness, and denoted a wild and ruffian life” (219). This man had “resided several years in Europe” only to return to America, and now Edgar “seemed to have gained some insight into the discord and domestic miseries by which the unhappy lady suffered” (219-220). Edgar connects himself immediately to the feminine domestic, and fears the heavy hand of the European patriarch. Therefore, both Clithero and Edgar stand as representatives for the orphaned citizens of America, rejecting the oppressive forces of their old colonizer (England) and instead turning to the mothering presence of the natural countryside of the New World.

Throughout Brown’s works, he consistently connects his female characters with the countryside. In *Edgar Huntly*, Brown neatly links woman with the land through one character—Old Deb, or Queen Mab. While ultimately depicted as a vicious leader of the “enemy” rather

than a benevolent mother figure, Brown first portrays Old Deb in Edgar's narrative as a frontier woman who feeds him. She is a stubborn part of the landscape, an "aged and harmless" Native American woman who views "the English [as] aliens and sojourners, who occupied the land merely by her connivance and permission" (199). Many call her Queen Mab because of her "pretensions to royalty, the wildness of her aspect and garb, her... diminutive form...[and] her romantic solitude and mountainous haunts" (200). Brown uses this character as a reference to Shakespeare's Queen Mab, who "gallops night by night through lover's brains, and then they dream of love,"<sup>2</sup> a fitting allusion for a novel plagued by dreams of wish fulfillment. Over time, this appellation is more fitting than realized, as Brown reveals that despite being deemed harmless, Queen Mab has been urging members of her tribe to attack and raid the white settlers on her land. In his introduction to the text, Norman S. Grabo explains that "here is where Queen Mab fits into *Edgar Huntly*—as a symbol of property lost and family resentment" (Grabo xiii). The conflicting images of benevolent provider and violent leader are a dynamic presence in this secondary character, yet nonetheless firmly links woman to land. It is undeniable that the quest for a benevolent matriarch, such as Mrs. Lorimer, reflects the urge to bond with the new American nation, rather than turn back to the rejected patriarchal figure of England. Authors have long sought to connect female bodies to the land, often as a "symbolic substitution... for the male enterprise" (Samuels 3). Henry Nash Smith remarks in *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, that the "interior of the [American] continent" was viewed as fertile but simultaneously unknowable and unreachable (Smith 5). The "virgin land" of America was a conquest for the patriarchal regimes of Great Britain and other kingdoms, popularly characterized as dominating male figures.

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<sup>2</sup> Mercutio's lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, scene IV

However, this was not always to be the case. Samuels also references “a later Tory cartoon, ‘Britania and Her Daughter,’ which “finds America on her feet again, confronting her ‘mother’ in a charged crossing of anxieties about parenting and nationhood” (Samuels 7). Through his novels, Brown seeks to uplift England as a patriarchal figure rather than a mothering figure, yet still establishes the link between “familial and political scenarios” (Samuels 9). Then, the parent-child relationship depicted “contains the rebel justification that England’s abdication of parental responsibility could explain or excuse such revolt” (Samuels 9). Brown continuously implants images of the feminine into his illustrations of the countryside, both in the representation of Queen Mab and smaller characters like “a good woman, busy at her wheel, with two children playing on the ground before her” (196). The images, often what the protagonist yearns for most, heavily tie in the notion that America is now a matriarch of its own, the mother of its citizens, and every man woman and child should thus strive to attain their position in the new American family.

While Brown represents America as a matriarch, he also establishes that England truly is the rejected patriarch. In all three of his novels, Brown discusses the effects of patrimony on his characters. This “land-based economy arguably parallel[s] the most long-lived aristocracies of the Old World,” for the “patrimony of inherited property... support[ed] the insular economy of colonial America” (Hinds 52). Because this “colonial economy [was] still very much in the living memory of newly independent U.S. citizens,” Charles Brockden Brown “would have known... two worlds vying for ascendancy within a newly international marketplace”, the new American economy and the almost outdated “system of patronage... often determined by an elaborate network of kinship ties” (Hinds 52-53). In *Edgar Huntly*, the titular character is consistently defeated by patrimony, as he “cannot hope to inherit his uncle’s property” because a

male cousin “is named heir to this patrimony” and every disinheritance he suffers “recalls Edgar to his initial loss, the loss of his parents” (Hinds 54). Orphaned Edgar cannot stand a chance against this “old order of patriarchal protection,” and so because American citizens now share Edgar’s “orphaned status” they should be just as wary of a system left over from English rule (Hinds 57). Despite the family being involved heavily in this method of inheritance, Brown ultimately rules it as dangerous because of its ties to the patriarchy, just as all of Brown’s patriarchs are ultimately found dangerous. Luckily, Brown’s protagonists are able to be “suspended [from]... the ‘patriarchal scheme’ that surrounds [them]” as they are often “unmarried and unemployed” (Luciano 10). As we approach *Arthur Mervyn*, we will see that when it comes time to change this status, it is only by immersing oneself in the feminine sphere—the American sphere—that this can be safely accomplished.

Throughout the structure of Brown’s novels, particularly the frame narrative of *Edgar Huntly*, there exists an emphasis on the act of writing for the sake of the nation. Brown truly believed that “in a young republic, a little rhetoric can be a dangerous thing—especially if the rhetoric is novelistic, its style Gothic, and its intended audience the young republican” (Luciano 1). In his portrayal of the doubled orphans Clithero and Edgar, Brown presents the options that are available to the citizens of this “young republic”. Advocating for the eradication of the old patriarch’s effect on the land, Brown instead demonstrates the benevolent matriarch’s ability to accept the young republican—in this instance, Edgar Huntly. Edgar has journeyed through the narrative intent on returning to his old family, but finds that he has once again been adopted into a new one. Safe in the overwhelming presence of his sisters, Mrs. Lorimer, and Clarice, it seems that he has been enveloped in the benevolent matriarchy emblematic of America. Indeed, Sarsefield claims that he “owe[s] the power of being the benefactor and protector of [Edgar] and

[his] sisters” to Mrs. Lorimer, who “longs to embrace [Edgar] as a son” (252). In addition, if Edgar wishes “to become truly her son,” it “will depend upon [his] own choice” (252). At this point, Edgar has already been established in the narrative as a true American, one who “at a mature age, would prove himself useful to his country” (142). Truthfully, it seems that even in the presence of a patriarch, Edgar will thrive. All begins well, as Sarsefield treats Edgar “with paternal tenderness, and insists upon the privilege of consulting for [his] interest, as if he were [Edgar’s] real father” (269). However, Sarsefield quickly grows distant, and through his rebellious actions Edgar “fall[s] into disgrace with Sarsefield, the key father figure” (Hughes 180). Edgar has “managed to alienate Sarsefield... and the novel’s final words are Sarsefield’s expressions of disappointment in Edgar” (Hinds 62). This dissolution in the relationship between American citizen and patriarch directly correlates to the dissolve in the relationship between America and England during the Revolutionary Era. As Edgar’s last chance at a proper family structure diminishes, it is clear that he has not completed what Brown envisions as a successful narrative for individual and family.

Loss of family is the largest threat in Brown’s Gothic novels. It is why when Mrs. Lorimer hears the tragic news of Clithero and she suffers a miscarriage, both Clithero and Edgar suffer for it. In Brown’s novel *Wieland*, loss of family coincides with loss of identity, but also something deeper—a legacy. The 1781 murders committed by James Yates, seen as an inspiration for *Wieland*, were horrifying to the public not only in their brutality, but also because they were systematic eliminations of entire families. America, this new nation, was severely lacking in something its colonizing nation had before it—dynasties of sorts, names that became ingrained into the landscape, metaphorically and physically in the large manors and even castles. These structures of course also play a large part in the Gothic genre, and American Gothic

writers had to work around this as America lacked a substantial physical history of families. The loss of a family is tragic on American soil because it means the loss of American citizens. Yet in the case of the fictional Wieland family, isolated and almost foreign in their identity, it can also mean the elimination of an old family and the adoption of a new one.

As in Brown's other novels, Brown presents the dangers to the family internally in the patriarch—in this instance, the titular character himself. Clara details the fall of her noble European family and places the blame on not only the perpetrator of the massacre—her brother—but also the strange Englishman whose visit begins the sad tale. Because the family is so closely tied to Europe, we can read their downfall as a cautionary tale against not becoming “American” in this fledgling society. Clara works at becoming American but, without the support of her family, is forced to return to Europe at the end of the novel. It is clear through this representation, then, that family support really is everything when it comes to integrating oneself into the new nation. From the beginning, the Wielands do not identify as fully American—Clara begins the novel detailing her father's noble legacy in Europe, and the tragedies that befell him as soon as he set foot on American soil. Though originally from this family of European descent, Clara and her brother “were... reduced to the conditions of orphans” (20). To her, their American legacy has been only tragedy—whether that is the spontaneous combustion and subsequent death of her father and mother respectively, or the soon-to-be recounted massacre of her brother's family. The image of her father, consumed in flames of his own fervid creation upon praying, further illustrates Brown's demolition of the European patriarch.

After her family's fall, Clara attempts to insinuate herself into the new America, but cannot do it when she is only surrounded by those who still yearn for the old European way of life. She and her family often read together “according to German custom,” and in a “language

[that] was familiar to all of [them] but Carwin,” who they subsequently ignore (66). Carwin, isolated from the close-knit family, attempts to work his way into Clara’s good graces, but his own villainous heritage cannot be ignored. Though Pleyel originally states “that Carwin is ‘an Englishman by birth’ . . . the reader later discovers that he is Pennsylvania born” (Barnard and Shapiro 84). Despite acting as a lone figure, this fact makes Carwin arguably the most American out of these old European families—“the ‘biloquist’ is pointedly made a western Pennsylvanian” to demonstrate America’s “cultural regression, savagery, even villainy” (Justus 305). Like Pleyel, “being an outsider” means he is “untouched by the morbid inheritance” that “haunt[s] the Wielands,” yet somehow his presence only exacerbates their trauma. Carwin then might represent the dangers America presents to itself. Without the dynastical reassurance of a family name, there is the great risk of fraud in the unknowing countryside of the new America.

By revealing the intense trauma the Wieland family feels it has inherited, Brown comments on the growing fears of the new nation—after the “death” of their patriarch, how will America go on? Contextually, Brown released his novels shortly after a time when “the French monarchy was abolished and political stability [was] replaced by the Reign of Terror” (Chapman 18). This violent result of a revolution must have been watched anxiously by newly established American citizens—for with Europe as their opposite, perhaps they feared the “legacy of possible madness” that Clara fears as well (Manly 317). Brown understood that America needed to begin a period of healing with regards to their relationship with Europe, and even as his characters continued to reject patriarchs (England stand-ins) and turn to matriarchs (America stand-ins), he presented a return to Europe as a valid option for those too frightened by the notion of independence.

Clara's own associations with her family name demonstrate the anxieties regarding the lifeline of that notion in the new nation. When Clara refers to her brother as Wieland, she "emphasiz[es] his role as family patriarch and present[s] [all the male Wielands] only as representatives of a paternal line: 'the house and name of Wieland'" (Barnard and Shapiro 20). This serves again to emphasize the dangerous role patriarchs play when given too much power, too much of a legacy—just as England grew too dangerous for America. It is interesting as well the dynamics that these older Wielands contain within their relationships. The 'elder Wieland'—Clara and Theodore's father—"had been taken to England" and "was apprenticed to a London trader" (Frank 349). Already, his European descent has been intermingled with an English upbringing, connecting him more firmly to the notion of England as patriarch. Ultimately, however, "[Brown] has his second-generation Wieland turn against his noble ancestry"—the new patriarch rejects his own patriarch (Frank 353). The confusing amalgamation of revolt and recovery can be justified by this: "Theodore Wieland and his father may be considered the representatives of German Pietism in America"—the Old Way—while "they are superimposed by Pleyel and Clara Wieland, both rationalists," both true Americans (Frank 353). However, they are true Americans who, ultimately, "must flee to Europe for their health and sanity" (Justus 305). Through this presentation of rejected and dejected patriarchs, the subsequent elimination of them, and the upraising of rational civil-minded citizens as the heroes, Brown shows a surprising future for America: resolution with Europe.

In this novel we again receive a dual plot—first, a recount of family history (both the death of the elder Wieland and the subsequent massacre of the other Wielands), and then the story of the young Wieland daughter. We already know that Brown feminizes America in his later novels, but perhaps this first novel is what sets this precedent. If we are to read Clara's

female body as America, then we can see the family history as her escape from a patriarch and the attacks made against her as she attempts to live on her own. Conversely, when she becomes independent (unfortunately because of the elimination of her “old” family), we follow her journey through supposedly inherited madness until she bridges the gap with Europe and follows her remaining family over there to start a new life. This is perhaps the most cogent metaphor Brown creates for post-Revolutionary and newly independent America, where he posits that one must regain a sense of family lost from Europe. Some critics view Clara’s flight from America as an allusion to Eve’s flight from Eden, frightened from “[her] New World garden [by] Carwin, the bringer of evil in this tale, often referred to as a ‘snake’” (Kolodny 168). However, when juxtaposed with the messages in his later novels, Brown continues to stress the image of patriarch lost and matriarch regained. Therefore, we can also read Clara’s story not as one of a flight from America, but of the quest for independence as an American woman.

Whereas Charles Brockden Brown tells the male American hero’s story through Edgar Huntly and through Arthur Mervyn, Clara (who despite being the protagonist is not the titular character) reveals the heroine’s side of the story—one of fear and anxiety, lost in an overwhelming masculine presence in her life. She seeks a replacement patriarch, much as Arthur Mervyn will do, but because Brown has already established that patriarchs bode ill for the American public, she falls into danger. What she needs—what the American public, both male and female needs—is a matriarch, found in America itself. Whereas Huntly and Mervyn can find mothers or wives to supplant this need, the orphaned and alone Clara must look within. Her journey is not as detailed or strenuous as Huntly’s return home or Mervyn’s marriage plot, but it is arguably more difficult. When she finds her “children” massacred, alongside her own benevolent matriarch and sister, Clara rapidly falls into the inherited madness of her family.

However, as she rekindles a connection with Europe and finds herself married to Pleyel, she has the chance to become a matriarch herself. More than that, however, she becomes a matriarch to her readers who have shared this story with her. Her “symbolic inheritance” has been eliminated—“as it was fire which destroyed her father to begin the inexorable tragic chain of frustrations and fears... so it is fire that at last breaks that chain to allow Clara to return to a normal life” (Manly 321). Clara’s journey is emblematic of not only America, and not only of female American citizens, but of all her contemporary readers. They have made it through the tumultuous death of their father, the threats that prey on newly orphaned women-like nations, and have emerged through the trial by fire fully aware of their place in this new world. As Clara’s ending will suggest, this may deal with a reconciliation of sorts with paternal figures (like Pleyel and her uncle) and Europe alike.

Brown published his final major Gothic novel, *Arthur Mervyn*, in two parts—again, a dual narrative that contains several instances of the Gothic doubling tradition, as well as Gothic family dynamics. Arthur Mervyn begins his novel newly adopted into Dr. Stevens’ family as they nurse him back to health during Philadelphia’s yellow fever epidemic in 1793. Just as Clara Wieland represented both America and the American citizen, so too does Arthur Mervyn. As he tells his story, we immediately understand that the youth is escaping an unfair patriarch and hopes to establish his identity within a new family structure. Yet in everything he encounters in his travels away from home, he continuously compares the physical dwellings and structures he finds to his “father’s dwelling”... the structure of Pre-Revolutionary War America (37). Through this continual “rejection of paternal authority,” Brown reveals “Mervyn’s self-empowerment” narrative, representative of the “self-appropriation of authority that appears frequently in the writing of the Atlantic revolutionary age” (Barnard and Shapiro 20). Because “rightful social

authority and order were commonly symbolized as fatherly authority,” Brown’s portrayals of “the old regime of patriarchal order as flawed, tyrannical, and backward” clearly reflect American attitudes towards their previous patriarch, England (Barnard and Shapiro 20). Newly freed from the tyrannical bonds of his father, Arthur quickly understands that “to return to [his] paternal mansion was impossible,” just as America could no longer turn to England for immediate help in establishing itself as a new nation (21). Arthur’s patriarch is more firmly connected with Europe in the second part of the novel, which reveals “Sawny” Mervyn’s foreign background. Emerging from an ambitious childhood under his European father’s oppressive hand, Arthur Mervyn is easy to uplift as the ideal American citizen—and the text is quick to prove that his opinions on morality, family, and American identity are to be used as a measure from now on.

Arthur details the falling out he had with his father early on, and throughout the narrative, it seems that he attempts to find replacement father-figures, weighing the candidates by their moral fortitude. Arthur, “long since bereft of the affectionate regards of parents and kinsmen,” first encounters Dr. Steven’s family, headed by a rare kind patriarch and a clearly benevolent matriarch (8). Having “saved the life of this youth,” they very neatly adopt him as their own, and not even a chapter into Brown’s third Gothic novel we finally receive an accomplished goal: Mervyn has found his family (167). Arthur recounts to them his search for a family like this one, and the numerous replacement patriarchs he went through—most notably, Welbeck, who Arthur even hopes “would adopt [him] for his own son,” and whose villainy nearly spells the downfall of them both (46). Welbeck’s role in the story is poisoned with macabre family values—he invites Arthur into the fold because he resembles the deceased Lodi, and could play his part in a fraud where he would “personate a kinsman of Welbeck who had just arrived from Europe”

(190-1). Arthur is joined in this perverse family by Clemenza Lodi, the sister of Arthur's doppelganger, whose relationship to Welbeck is dubious—he claims she is his daughter, yet we quickly learn she has been seduced by him and is pregnant with his child. The pseudo-incestual doubling of a woman's role in the family (mother, wife, and daughter) will be repeated later in the novel, when Arthur refers to his wife-to-be as *mamma*. Ultimately, Welbeck fails as a replacement patriarch the same way all of Brown's patriarchs have failed—his penchant for violence and trickery overwhelms Arthur and leads them both into disaster. However, Welbeck is interestingly redeemed later in the novel when, as he dies, he “performs a generous deed prompted by Mervyn's benevolent example,” suggesting “in a society populated by individuals like Mervyn, the Welbecks of the world might be influenced to become more virtuous” (Barnard and Shapiro 261). If Welbeck's violent patriarchal status is in reference to England's treatment of America, then this could be more support that if American citizens like Mervyn become the moral majority, a reestablished connection with England would be possible.

Family dynamics are far more strained and complicated in this novel than any of his others, and as the narrative continues, we see episodes of “generational rivalry,” broken families, issues of patrimony, and adoptions (Cohen 364). Violence and death is common as usual in the narrative, and again we see the effect this has on families—during the time of the yellow fever, “wives were deserted by husbands, and children by parents” (99). Orphans, widows, and widowers populated the cities, and the countryside was not much better off. Though fleeing the city might save oneself from the epidemic, “with the physical departure... from the city came... the anxiety of *not knowing* where or how [a family] was” (Kafer 9) The uncertainty of identity outside of the general populace perpetuates the trend of the unknown stranger, lacking a family name, and, seemingly, a morality. Brown presents one rural family as “a healthy, happy family,

but the pettiness and weakness of old Sawny Mervyn and the brutality and selfishness of... the foulmouthed innkeeper” again assert the notion that even a female-populated countryside cannot escape the pitfalls of powerful patriarchs (Justus 312). Attaining or rejoining a family has always been a theme in Brown’s works, seen when Edgar attempts to “claim consanguinity” with a passing family, and when Arthur attempts to “embrace [a farmer] as a father” and enter into a house which “appeared like return to a long-lost and much-loved home” (95). The malleability of kinship may appear odd, but the journey for this orphaned protagonist seems to mimic that of the foundling child early in *Arthur Mervyn*, who is placed in the care of a mother who has recently lost her child. The foundling is given to the woman in the hopes that it “mayest find a mother where [Thetford] ha[s] found a wife,” and the mother is quickly “persuaded to take the babe to her bosom” (30-1). In fact, Arthur remarks that the swift transition between old family and new could be such that “no suspicion... would... occur with regard to its true parent” (32). The “replacement” of family here, as well as the replacement of patriarch with matriarch, is meant to reflect the push away from England and the embrace of America as true parent. Brown mimics this again in the narrative with the presentation of Ascha Fielding as benevolent mother and wife.

Ultimately, the answer lies not within finding a replacement patriarch, but in creating a true matriarch figure. Arthur does this through a symbolic marriage to his mother... “the hero weds his mother (symbolically), just as concurrently in real life Brown himself was getting married” (Hughes 189). Of course, with the benevolent matriarch as the ideal goal for the orphaned protagonist—the orphaned citizen—the bond formed with this mothering America becomes such a piece of obsession that it borders on Oedipal. Ascha Fielding, with her vaguely ethnic origins, strong will, and tragic past, represents the amalgamation of Queen Mab, Clemenza, and Clara... and finally, of course, her location in the countryside connects her and all

these characters firmly with America. By completing his transition into citizenship, Arthur finds his family in Ascha Fielding, both as a mother and a wife. By becoming the ideal citizen, Arthur has formed a relationship with America that extends beyond “winning” the land, as many other narratives of his time centered on—for he and Ascha enter into this relationship as equals.

Brown has already established through *Wieland* that the time to reconnect with Europe has come. These characters represent the firm American ideals that the new nation must exemplify, and this is often accomplished by putting down European characters and England’s stand-ins. However, Brown’s business and political senses understand that the only way forward for the nation is to reaffirm its ties with Europe. That is why he poses Europe as a sanctuary for Clara Wieland, and it is why Arthur Mervyn and Ascha Fielding “journey to Europe” not as an “escape[,] but part of [their] reward” (Justus 305). Brown concludes *Arthur Mervyn* with our ideal American hero arising from the narrative with his newly found family—his clear decision and its clear outcome, and an optimistic outlook at a future with rekindled ties to Europe. Yet Brown illustrates clearly that there are still hurdles to overcome.

This is because in each of Brown’s novels, the plot is mired down by a substance of Gothic import—blood. This stems from both blood relations, bloody injuries, bloody tragedies—and, most threatening of all, bloody diseases. Many of these threats come and go throughout the narratives—blood congealing on Edgar’s face to disguise him, his threat to drink the blood of an animal in the pit, and Arthur’s many bloody head wounds. However, in *Arthur Mervyn*, the threat of yellow fever carries connotations that extend into “the symbolic manifestation of moral ‘pollution’” (Justus 310). While not a blood born disease, yellow fever would often make its way through families, as described in the narrative. Both those who were and those who were not affected were abandoned by their families, and in the span of a few years a brand new set of

orphans, widows, and widowers were created. This immense loss of family, and subsequent loss of identity, as the two are so connected, was a massive threat to the internal structure of a new America. Blood in the physical sense as well as the familial sense would continue to preoccupy Gothic writers' minds, right up to and continuing through Edgar Allan Poe. Brown's writing boasts "consanguinity" as the answer for creating one national American identity. Perhaps in his time, this was simple—American citizens who shared the common experience of the Revolutionary War could claim consanguinity with each other. Over time, however, as the definition of American citizen broadened in meaning, the definitions of "consanguinity"—shared blood—had to be broadened as well.

Therefore, through the creation of the American Gothic, Charles Brockden Brown set a precedent for portraying the anxieties of an emerging nation through the evolution or devolution of a family. His own relationship with the fledgling American forces of the Revolution inspired him to write about the experience and its profound effect on the American mind and the American family, with the conclusion that the nation had to set itself on a path of enlightenment and forgiveness. The cautiously optimistic tone of his novels, despite the Gothic styling of terror and murder, enables the reader to feel the hope that in this newly orphaned country, citizenship was the answer to founding a nation of families.

## Chapter Two

### Edgar Allan Poe: The Expanding American Bloodline

“I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain.”

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher”

Edgar Allan Poe came to prominence in a time when the nation had a solid identity that was constantly at threat of being redefined. As American authors worked to establish a national familial identity, the literature of the time, and subsequently American citizens, did not have room for the multitudes of variation that were available in a complex time of gender and race. In both the Gothic and national discourses, “blood came to represent not the character of the individual, but the purity of the race or nation” (Dougherty 3). Early nineteenth century Americans found themselves in a nation that perpetuated the institution of slavery, an economically successful but intensely violating and violent practice. By 1833, the British Empire had abolished slavery throughout their kingdom, but it would take America another three decades, as well as four years of destructive fighting, to make the same decision. The rise of the abolitionist movement created a divisive atmosphere in America, yet blood was still on every citizen’s mind.

This atmosphere had much to do with the literature of the time, which amplified the differences in dialogue about the issue of race in America. In 1867, the author Buckner H. Payne remarked in his book *The Negro: What is his Ethnological Status?* that “the states and people that favor this equality and amalgamation of the white and black races, *God will exterminate*” (Payne, 48). His racist fears about miscegenation, though stated years after Poe’s works, were descended from a fear in the American public about racial status. Any resulting offspring of a

mixed-race couple were marked and labeled by their blood, and were considered tragic figures in the national canon of literature: a “tragic mulatto”. Their mysterious descent and “tainted” bloodline meant they were marked for God’s wrath, and popular narratives used this tragedy for both the sympathetic vote of its readers and as condemnation of those members of society. Working through this frantic discourse were the American Gothic writers, presided over by Edgar Allan Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe was born in 1809, a time when America as a nation was experiencing drastic changes. In the twenty years previous, the “young American Republic... had rapidly become a world power;” though many Americans “wanted to avoid being caught in the middle of European political conflicts” (Thompson xvi). Yet even “as the sentiment for a unique American tradition separate from European influences intensified, regional conflicts grew” (Thompson xviii). The divisiveness of Northern and Southern sentiments towards economics, governmental authority, and slave ownership would reach a crescendo that framed Poe’s life. The nation was not only becoming divided by its regions, but also by its class structures. The Industrial Revolution triggered the huge divide between lower and upper class, but also created an expanded middle class that had enough free time to fear death and, most importantly, read about that fear. Poe’s writing would capitalize on the anxieties of a nation that now had the ability to see their terror reflected in print, especially the terror that was based around their notions of family.

In Poe’s own writing, family structure was often torn asunder by the anxieties that surrounded blood. His most notable family is that of the House of Usher, which is destroyed in its own quest for blood purity. However, most of Poe’s writing supports the national sentiment that surrounded homogenous family structure and the “mixed” quality of many American

citizens is portrayed in his works as brutish, unnatural, and punishable by death. Poe also finds issue with the traditional and uplifted family structure, and his portrayals of a Gothic inheritance are equally as monstrous as his portrayals of the threat of the expanding American bloodline.

In exploring modes of inheritance, which reflect the gender and racial politics of Poe's time, Poe's own inheritance must be mentioned. Poe's own heritage has been presented as "thoroughly intertwined and confused with [his] works," as he possesses an almost "mythical life story" (Tally 5). Orphaned by his parents at a young age, Poe was placed in the foster home of John Allan of Richmond, Virginia. As Poe grew, however, their relationship was strained and eventually dissolved, resulting in an alienated Poe "leav[ing] the South to join the U.S. Army, carrying with him a sheaf of unpublished romantic poems" (Thompson xviii). For the rest of his life, Poe was "exacerbated by differences between the North, where he was born, and the South, where he grew up" (Thompson xiv). Though Edgar Allan Poe died in 1849, a decade before the turmoil of the Civil War, the foundation of tension was already present not only within the nation, but within Poe himself.

Poe's inability to settle in one particular place caused internal tension, but also fostered within him the unique ability to view America as a nation rather than narrow his view to one region in particular. Robert T. Tally Jr. argues that "one of the most noteworthy features of Poe's biography is his nearly constant movement... [which] actually set him apart from the mainstream American life" (Tally 5). Despite the fact that "migration was part of the national self-image in the United States in the nineteenth century... the real direction of all of this hustle and bustle was toward settlement," and "Poe was completely unable... to settle" (Tally 5). This lack of settlement is reflected in his writing, which presents an almost mythically Gothic world populated by equally nomadic or dynamic characters, such as Arthur Gordon Pym, or narrators

in several of his short stories. Sometimes, this migration involves an escape from the family—though descent seems to be inescapable in all of Poe’s tales. Another mode of Gothic inheritance that Poe molds into his stories is “reversals of fortune, peripatetic wandering and *peripeteia*” (Tally 4). As Poe’s families of means devolve into crumbling archetypes of horror, their loss of fortune—and especially, the means through which they lose this fortune— spells out a dark message for the American future. It is the obsession with family structure and descent that eliminates any glimmer of domestic hope in Poe’s tales. When applied to the national discourse surrounding the expanding American bloodline, it would seem that Poe’s own anxieties revolve around a nation that will soon be paralyzed by its inability to reconcile race into the family.

Poe’s first short story, “Metzengerstein,” actually details the feud between two families whose obsession with inheritance leads to one family’s downfall. The immediate emphasis on family, although a family outside of America, illustrates Poe’s own anxieties towards inheritance. The narrative begins abroad, where “horror and fatality have been stalking... in all ages” (81). Poe then gives the reader an example of two ancient houses, “the families of Berlifitzing and Metzengerstein,” who have been stalked by exactly these two themes (82). Despite the story taking place abroad in Hungary in an almost mythical time, there are several nuances that are reflected in Poe’s contemporary American life. Firstly, the protagonist is “a proprietor so young” who “at the decease of [his father], entered immediately upon his vast possessions” (83). This sudden emergence into wealth mimics the growing rigidity of class in early 1800s America. The young Frederick Metzengerstein exemplifies “a character who would frequently reappear in subsequent tales: the aristocrat for whom the historical present means loss and vulnerability” and who attempts to “elevate the self above that historical present” (DeNuccio 74). Poe seemed to believe that Americans of his time were getting lost in the historical

present—the anxieties of race and descent, and the emergence of an often-overlooked middle class threatening to overwhelm. In “Metzengerstein,” we are given a character that has the wealth to rise above—only to throw it all away as the result of superstition and the curse of descent. Metzengerstein’s downfall comes in the form of fire and a horse—the horse being a monstrous example of metempsychosis, or spirit jumping. As it ‘bear[s] on its forehead Berlifitzing’s brand” and “appears immediately after Berlifitzing’s death in his flaming stables,” it would appear that the horse that has arrived into Metzengerstein’s care is in fact his reincarnated rival (DeNuccio 76). Already, Metzengerstein’s inheritance has come in the form of a tapestry and an “ancient prophecy”: “A lofty name shall have a fearful fall, when, like the rider over his horse, the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing” (82). Upon studying the tapestry, Metzengerstein noticed that “his shadow [occupied] the form of his murderous ancestor”—which DeNuccio implies that this means “Metzengerstein orbits within a looped historical script, doomed to a repetition that dissolves subjective agency” (DeNuccio 76). Literally, he repeats his family’s fated mistake until the line dies out.

The portrayal of inheritance as a corruptor seems similar to Brown’s portrayals of the emerging middle class that steered away from the traditional inheritance cycle. Similarly, as the young Metzengerstein studies the tapestry that depicts his family line, Frederick’s obsession reflects a theme that will come later in H.P. Lovecraft’s writing, that of generational discovery. In addition, his orphan status may illustrate his need for a family history; something that is once again demonstrated in Poe’s own biography. Finally, Frederick’s story concludes in not only his death, but the death of his entire family line—the last in “a long line of princes” (89). In fact, “his family name is no longer to be found among the Hungarian aristocracy”—the old way of

inheritance has been eliminated, as the curse has come to pass (89). However, Metzengerstein is still swept up in his inheritance, in the need to escape the historical present. Ultimately, however, he destroys himself and his line—because instead of rising above the flow of history, he is submerged and drowned in it.

Applying this to the larger historical context, one can substitute America for the Metzengerstein family—or at least those that fit the Metzengerstein image, those of European descent. This means that those Americans are fated to a historical loop that might lead to their downfall. Without change and without disparity, families are fated to fall. Poe first published “Metzengerstein” on January 14, 1832. On January 11<sup>th</sup>, at the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832, “Samuel McDowell Moore... rose to speak on behalf of abolition,” though ultimately weeks later the “House of Delegates [voted] not to legislate on emancipation,” and instead moved to wait for a more appropriate time (Root). Still, the emergence of the abolitionist movement was working to eliminate slavery for good, and the American public that supported slavery was destined to occupy the place of Metzengerstein, who could not escape the tides of inherited destiny. With “Metzengerstein,” Poe was issuing a warning to the American public. Perhaps, as a migratory man, Poe’s only concern was being swept up by the tides of history, just as another orphan, the young Metzengerstein was.

Poe’s next endeavor in family structures occurs in what critics call Poe’s “marriage group”—stories about men and women at the precipice of becoming a family. It is in these portrayals of women that we see the darker domestic side of Poe’s works. These narratives predominately feature husbands and wives attempting to start a family, with incredible difficulties arising. Poe begins his marriage group with “Berenice,” a tale “in which much is made of teeth” (Hoffman 234). The eponymous Berenice, much like “Poe’s own wife, Virginia,

is the cousin of the poor fellow who tells the tale” (Hoffman 234). The Gothic mirror in the tale to Poe’s own life reveals the importance of close family structures to Poe. However, these “marriage group” tales are more about creating family than staying loyal to the pre-existing one. The “poor fellow who tells the tale” tells us that “[his] baptismal name is Egaeus; [and] that of [his] family [he] will not mention” (141). Like Metzengerstein, Egaeus must deal with the issue of inheritance, as “the noon of manhood found [him] still in the mansion of [his] fathers” (141). Here, inherited riches continue to represent something dangerous—for Egaeus, “it *is* wonderful what stagnation fell upon the springs of [his] life—wonderful how total an inversion took place in the character of [his] commonest thought” (141). The inability to move on from his place of origin, to migrate as Poe’s characters so often yearned for, causes him to reflect on his childhood, “ill of health and buried in gloom” (141). Ironically, it is in his cousin Berenice that he finds relief, despite having grown up with her “together in [his] paternal halls” (141). As he designs to marry her, her own condition, which included “a species of epilepsy not unfrequently terminating in *trance* itself”, ultimately takes its toll on her (142). As he “sat... alone” one night he “uplift[ed] [his] eyes and [he] saw that Berenice stood before [him]” (145). Looking “upon her person... its emaciation was excessive, and not one vestige of the former being, lurked in any single line of the contour” (145). What disturbs the narrator the most, however, is “the white and ghastly *spectrum* of the teeth,” and it invoked in him his “monomania”... “in the multiplied objects of the external world [he] had no thoughts but for the teeth” (145). Berenice’s visitation upon the narrator spells tragedy for the both of them, and as the narrator emerges from his meditation “a servant maiden, all in tears” tells him “that Berenice was—no more” (146). Accepting her death, the narrator completes preparations for her burial, and once he knows that “since the setting of the sun Berenice had been interred” his thoughts settle on a mysterious box,

“the property of the family physician” (147). The small memory of this domestic item, a recollection of his past family and the attempted present, causes “the blood of [his] body [to] become congealed within [his] veins”—literally, his family bloodline invokes horror (147). News of Berenice’s “violated grave—of a disfigured body enshrouded, yet still breathing... still *alive*,” provoked Egaeus to throw the box and reveal “thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor” (147). Here, again, Poe torments a family line with madness until it is inevitably destroyed. In addition, the sickliness of this family line, plagued by madness, seems to be a precursor to the infamous House of Usher.

In Poe’s “Ligeia,” we once again have the story of a family being torn apart by anxieties about descent and even race. Ligeia and her husband have a looser link than Berenice and Egaeus, who were united familiarly in more ways than one. In fact, the narrator “cannot, for [his] soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, [he] first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia” (159). The anxiety about her descent is evident from the start—“of her family” specifically “[he] ha[s] surely heard her speak,” and yet “a recollection flashes upon [him] that [he] ha[s] *never known* the paternal name of her who was [his] friend and [his] betrothed... and finally the wife of [his] bosom” (159). He explains the gap in his knowledge as “a test of [his] strength of affection, that [he] should institute no inquiries upon this point”—safe in the knowledge that his lack of anxiety about her family would keep them together (160). However, by the end this is clearly a fault on his part, for Ligeia is specifically “othered” by the text and her unknown descent spells out his downfall. Ligeia’s “features were not of that regular mould” and indeed the narrator “perceived that her loveliness was indeed ‘exquisite’ and felt that there was much of ‘strangeness’ pervading it” (160). Though her skin “rival[s] the purest ivory,” Ligeia’s “raven-black... glossy... luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses,” and eyes where “the

hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black,” may have contributed to some readings of Ligeia as distinctly “Other,” perhaps even mixed-race or “mulatto” (161). Leland S. Person clarifies that “this is not to say that Ligeia herself is really ‘black,’ but the ‘unspeakable horrors’ that arise ‘from the region of the ebony bed’ do make her... the ‘site for a crisis of racial identity’” (Person 137). This reading persists when her eyes are yet again described as “far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race” (161) Yet even the narrator admits that “the ‘strangeness’... which [he] found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must... [refer] to the *expression*” (161-162). In some criticisms, the expression of Ligeia’s “strangeness” is reflected in Freud’s theory of the uncanny, “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud 220). In “Ligeia”, this uncanny element is reflected in the “literary mist [that] appears to blur the narrator’s recollection of the facts, mainly those concerning Ligeia... which means that something unexplainable, and therefore uncanny, prevents him from accessing his full memories” (Lopes 40-41). Likewise, the familiarity of the uncanny is amplified because of their domestic relationship. Beyond the racial aspects of her physique, “Ligeia’s black eyes assume an inhuman proportion” (Lopes 41). Lopes argues that “the maternal female body, that homely place, works here as an Other, embodying the triad womb-tomb-home as ‘the site of death in an ambivalent way’” (Lopes 43). In the attempt to gain a family with this Other-ed woman, death is wrought before life. The racial reading of this text supports the anxieties of the time that surrounded the expanding bloodlines of America—and continues with the introduction of the narrator’s new wife.

In Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine, the narrator finds the antithesis of Ligeia. As he “led from the altar... his bride,” he observes how “fair-haired and blue-eyed” she is, an

unambiguous beauty where Ligeia was uncannily lovely (166). Eva Cherniavsky recognizes that “to replace the socially unplaced figure of Ligeia... [the narrator] purchases a bride whose title resonates with all the fine distinctions of social class” (Cherniavsky 55). Essentially, the narrator has now eliminated the mystery of descent that was present with Ligeia, and the reader’s fears should be eliminated as well. However, the dark twist of the narrative is that “it is to Rowena’s paternally inscribed body that Ligeia...lays claim” (Cherniavsky 55). Most ironically, Ligeia’s power lies in her blood, “three or four large drops of brilliant and ruby colored fluid” that institutes “a rapid change for the worse... in the disorder of [his] wife” (170). Ligeia has “trie[d] to appropriate Rowena’s body... by means of a figurative blood transfusion” (Lopes 45). The blood pollution metaphor that ransacked Antebellum discourse has quite obviously been written into this narrative—in “Ligeia,” the expanding American bloodline is clearly something to be feared.

Returning to the question of inheritance, the traditional narrative takes an even darker turn in “Morella”. In this short story, the mother who dies in childbirth actually lives on in her daughter. As Morella dies, she claims that “when [her] spirit departs shall the child live,” which the narrator, her husband, confirms for the reader (69). However, this child which “breathed not until the mother breathed no more... grew strangely in stature and intelligence” (70). Ultimately, the girl’s inheritance is that she is her mother, Morella, and when she is named she “fall[s] prostrate on the black slabs of [her] ancestral vault” and dies (71). When the narrator “with [his] own hands... bore her to the tomb... [he] found no traces of the first, in the charnel where he [laid] the second—Morella” (71). To some extent, this demonstrates the idea that the family name is only a placeholder, and the individual survives regardless of its name—in fact, it is the act of being named and placed in a family that kills the individual. This separation of parent and

child continues what we have seen in the stories previously discussed, where families are chosen through marriage rather than through name. Because the child in this story cannot escape the inheritance she has been given, she is stifled and suffocated and never given the chance to live. Applying this narrative to Poe's own life, this would reflect his ideal that continuing a family name would have eliminated his creative life, suffocating his spirit just as the daughter of Morella was suffocated as the vessel of her mother's spirit.

Poe's stories dramatize the all-consuming relationship between mother and child upon which Kleinian envy<sup>3</sup> is predicated: in each story, the male protagonist plays out unconscious moments of his birth and early experiences with female characters persistently identified with the images of procreteness. (Keetley 1)

The emphasis on motherhood in Poe's "marriage group," and the anxieties that surround it, binds together "women's procreativity and men's persecutory fear and violent aggression" (Keetley 1). Ultimately, "[Poe's] fiction emerged at an unprecedented high point in the growing cultural tendency to give the mother-child dyad primacy," and through "Morella" Poe problematizes this relationship (Keetley 12). The prizing of the individual over the family will be reflected later in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, where Pym attempts to escape his family name in order to make his way as an individual.

The last in the "marriage group," and perhaps the darkest of those tales, is "The Black Cat". It is also one of Poe's more racially charged narratives, and as it overlaps between domesticity and horror, it tells a warning tale about what occurs when race is introduced into the family structure. Again, there is an authorial connection to be made, even in this domestic horror

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<sup>3</sup> The definition of envy used by Klein is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something else desirable, often accompanied by an impulse to take it away or spoil it. Klein thinks that envious impulses, oral and anal sadistic in nature, operate from the beginning of life, initially directed against the feeding breast and then against parental coitus. (Spillius et al. 166)

tale. Mary Grove Nichols writes about a time she visited Poe's Fordham cottage in 1846, when "Poe's beloved wife Virginia [lay] sick in bed" (Hanrahan 40). There was a "large tortoise-shell cat on her bosom" which was "the sufferer's only means of warmth, except as her husband held her hands, and her mother her feet"—essentially, "in the Poe family's domestic space, a cat played an essential role, that of loving comforter to a dying woman" (Hanrahan 40). However, Poe takes the established domestic figure of the household cat and turns it into something monstrous in "The Black Cat". The narrator and his wife, both self-proclaimed animal lovers, possess a black cat named Pluto, who is the narrator's "favorite pet and playmate" (349). Over time, however, the narrator grows "more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others," and begins to take it out on both his wife and his pets (349). His beloved Pluto is spared until "[his] disease—for what a disease is like Alcohol!" causes "even Pluto [to] beg[in] to experience the effects of [his] ill temper" (350). After the spirit of Perverseness causes the narrator to destroy Pluto, the narrator gains a second black cat, "resembling [Pluto] in every aspect but one," which was "a large... indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast" (352). In an effort to eliminate this creature as well, driven by the spirit of Perverseness yet again, the narrator is interrupted in his chase by his wife, and "goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal... [he] buried the axe in her brain" and took to "the task of concealing the body" by "wall[ing] it up in the cellar" (354). After the deed is done, the cat disappears, until "a party of the police came" and, upon heading down to the cellar, were met by "a voice from within the tomb"—the wailing of a cat (355). Thus the narrator's deeds were discovered, for "the hideous beast whose craft had seduced [him] into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned [him] to the hangman," had been "walled... up within the tomb!" (355). The domestic figures of the husband, the wife, and the pet have been utterly decayed and

betrayed by each other, leaving this “series of mere household events” the perfect ground for horror (349).

The figure of the narrator is clearly the operator of this nightmare of domesticity, the patriarch at threat from the dark figure of the cat and his interfering wife. The narrator professes from the start his benevolence, and yet it becomes clear that “the safeguards and resources that... nineteenth-century readers put such faith in—a loving childhood, a kind wife, a comfortable home, loving pets—fail to keep this narrator’s baser impulses in check” (Hanrahan 52). This individual, however his family raised him to be “noted for the docility and humanity of [his] disposition,” cannot be safeguarded from madness (349). Therefore, “a story that begins with... good parenting of a sensitive, caring child ends with the obliteration of a family at the hands of a madman” (Hanrahan 52). This is further example of the child who cannot distance themselves from their descent (or upbringing) and causing the end of their family line. Poe’s “The Black Cat” is furthermore an example of a critique of domestic sensibilities that were so prized in this new Antebellum society, working to distort the ideals of domesticity. Families are not inherently good and pure creations in Poe’s tales, and this is evident in the fact that “happy pet owners [in nineteenth-century terms] were... balanced, kind, and productive citizens,” and yet the narrator’s ownership of either cat “fails to defuse his... perverse desires or to save his soul” (Hanrahan 47). The possession of a family does not immediately denote morality, and in “The Black Cat,” the narrator’s false domesticity cannot hide his awful secret—the bodies of his murdered wife and their beloved cat hidden in the family’s walls.

Domesticity is not the only target of nineteenth century ideals at which Poe takes aim. As “Poe understood the value of inexplicable evil to tales of terror,” he loaded each of his tales “with rich resonances of anxiety and terror in the antebellum period” (Lewis 2). To invoke the

racial reading of the text, Poe understood that the introduction of the black body (even a cat's body) into the narrative of a traditional white family structure would raise the anxiety of the traditional Antebellum reader. Even "without reducing the tale to a racial allegory, [readers] can appreciate its analogical relevance to the 'perverseness' of the master-slave relationship, especially when the narrator's self-confessed perverseness leads him to lynch the black cat by hanging it... from the limb of a tree" (Person 141). The modern reader's knowledge of Antebellum sentiments influences this reading heavily, but Poe's contemporaries would also feel the anxiety of their time reflected in the dimensions of this family. In fact, Poe worked to "reject[t] the idea that a loving home can ensure stability, [and] instead shows that even a seemingly wholesome and homely space can become a stage for devastating horror" (Hanrahan 53). Whether through the introduction of race into the family, or alcohol, or human morality, in "The Black Cat" Poe swiftly eliminates the notion that the family in itself is a pure entity. This further contributes to the distancing that his characters go through to eliminate the effects of their family descent and find independence.

In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Edgar Allan Poe's only novel, the eponymous narrator begins his tale noticeably distanced from his family. Pym tells us that his "father was a respectable trader in sea-stores at Nantucket, where [he] was born" and his "maternal grandfather... was fortunate in everything" (433). Already, this establishes a familiar trend of inheritance, though one that Pym wishes to leave behind. Pym embarks with his friend Augustus to leave the fortune of their families and find adventure independent from their inheritance. Pym's escape from his family is quite an ordeal, as he has to remain shut up below the deck as a stowaway. While in his prison-like box, he dreams of "a fierce lion of the tropics," and, upon awaking, feels "the paws of some huge and real monster... pressing heavily upon [his] bosom"

(447). Hearing “the peculiar whine of [his] Newfoundland dog Tiger, and the odd manner of his caresses [that] [he] well knew,” he “throw[s] [him]self upon the neck of [his] faithful follower and friend,” the remnants of a family he willingly abandoned (447). Pym is thankful for the reminder of his past, as now, “[Tiger] was with [him] to share [his] dreary solitude, and render [him] comfort by his caresses” (447). The animal acts as a surrogate brother to Pym, much as the black cat operated as a surrogate child for the narrator of “The Black Cat.” As the days stretch on, however, and food and water diminish in the dark, the domesticity of their relationship turns into horror. Tiger, now “snarling fearfully, although in a kind of under tone... grind[s] his teeth as if strongly convulsed,” and Pym is forced to fight him as the dog is driven to madness (455). Tiger, bonded to Pym through domesticity, “becom[es] a version of the wild, untamable beast for which he is named” once their ties of family have been stretched by strife and distance (Hanrahan 48). Additionally, “some critics question whether... the dream begets Pym’s hallucination of the sudden appearance of his dog Tiger” (Thompson 447). If Tiger is all in Pym’s mind, then this truly is the last vestige of Pym’s family fighting back against his rejection of them, and Pym is forced to escape yet again to retain his independent nature.

Augustus also remains a tie to Pym’s familiar childhood, and he too must grapple with his identity within his family structure. Augustus’s own father actually captains the ship that Pym uses to escape his family, and though the father and the son share a close bond, so much so that “several times... [Augustus] had made up his mind to let his father know of the adventure,” the generational gap is too far to bridge (456). In fact, after a mutiny on board the ship, the captain is ejected from the boat, “Augustus being... left in his painful position, although he struggled and prayed only for the poor satisfaction of being permitted to bid his father farewell” (460). With these families gone, the narrative then revolves around fraternal bonds over parental

ones, particularly with the introduction of the character Dirk Peters. Augustus, “injured in the mutiny,” leaves “Pym and Peters [as] the sole survivors,” and “Dirk Peters now completely displaces Augustus as the alter ego of Pym” (Hoffman 268-269). Interestingly enough, in the character of Peters, Pym finds one more tie to home: “Pym’s grandfather, whom he disowned on the dock at Edgartown, was named ‘old Mr. Peterson’” (Hoffman 271). As Peters is a man of dualistic imagery, especially in his being biracial, it is interesting to see “his dualistic imagination summoned up [to be] Pym’s double” throughout the text (Hoffman 271). Poe’s racial subtexts continue in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, through the “context of antebellum fascination with color and color changes as a drama... of color and racial confusion” (Person 137). The “color symbolism in *Pym*” emerges in the black/white binary, which Dirk Peters transgresses<sup>4</sup>. Poe makes the separation of black from white that occurs on the island Pym and Peters arrive at evident in one pivotal scene. Coming across a “small brook,” they observe the “distinct idea of the nature of this liquid, and cannot do so without many words” (531).

Upon collecting a basinful, and allowing it to settle thoroughly, we perceived that the whole mass of liquid was made up of a number of distinct veins, each of a distinct hue; that these veins did not commingle; and that their cohesion was perfect in regard to their own particles among themselves, and imperfect in regard to neighboring veins. Upon passing the blade of a knife athwart the veins, the water closed over it immediately... [and] all traces of the passage of the knife were instantly obliterated. If, however, the blade was passed down accurately between two veins, a perfect separation was effected... (531)

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<sup>4</sup> Hoffman points out that “white is a color of mystery, awe, and annihilation,” and “black is also the color of mystery and terror, and of annihilations from which Pym, with the aid of Peters... is saved” (Hoffman 269)

The division of these colored rivulets of water represents a reflection on the dialogue surrounding race and racial mixing that was prevalent in Poe's time. The veins (a careful choice of language, recalling images of blood) do not "commingle," giving the image of perfect cohesion. When a knife is passed between different veins, forcibly mixing the colors, the effect is "obliterated." When, however, the knife cuts along the same vein (the same color, blood, and essentially race) then it is replicated perfectly. The metaphor of miscegenation here would suggest that Poe wishes to reflect the "perfection" of separatism. However, the presence of the heroic Dirk Peters in the narrative, and his powerful ability to transgress, would be a strong case for the ability of mixed-race parentage to produce acceptable members of society (though, this society is outside of America and in a space viewed as 'wild'). In effect, Poe does not have much faith in family structures to produce meaningful citizens anyways, as evidenced by "Metzengerstein" and his "marriage group," so while separatism in the family is low-priority, separatism on the national scale is ideal for him.

Finally, all of Poe's narratives about family matters come to a head in "The Fall of the House of Usher". Within this short story, Poe utilizes Gothic tropes to reveal sinister modes of familial inheritance and relationships. Continuing the tradition of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, race relations on the national scale are scaled down and separated from racial matters in the family. At the time of the story's publishing, 1839, "the fear of miscegenation, or tainted blood, [revealing] deeper fears of disease and death," was growing in the national mindset (Dougherty 5). The portrayal of disease—particularly the diseased minds of the Usher household—is associated with a disease that would threaten the structure of the nation. By introducing into "the matrix of this collective racial/biological nightmare scenario" the "Gothic of cruelty [which] is obsessed with filiation and patrimonial inheritance," Poe translates national

anxiety onto the Usher family (Dougherty 6, 7). “The Fall of the House of Usher” begins with a nameless, migratory narrator visiting “the melancholy House of Usher,” and its occupants, his childhood friend Roderick Usher and Roderick’s twin sister Madeline (199). This migratory narrator represents Poe’s ideal individual, as he hardly mentions his own family—however, upon returning to the house of “one of [his] boon companions in boyhood,” he is now subject to the weakening of this independence under the authoritarian family structure that Poe fears (200). Indeed, the line of Usher is very much representative of everything Poe despises about domesticity, as well as a “reflect[i]on and reproduc[tion] [of] the fears of a newly hegemonic bourgeoisie” (Dougherty 8). These fears are “about the conditions of life and living, and how *these things* may become perverted and degenerated through... the botched management of the body’s forces and pleasures” (Dougherty 8). Because Poe portrays the Usher family as an inbred household, the incestual relationship of Madeline and Roderick represents a “failure to enhance the family’s fortunes by securing alliances with other aristocratic families,” as well as the sickness that is inherent in their family (Dougherty 9). The creation of this incestuous family is at once a critique of America’s obsession with pure and ancient bloodlines, and a denouncement of the taboo of incest and its equally taboo counterpart at the time, miscegenation. For all of these reasons, as well as because of “the strange affinity between these spooks and their creepy house” and “the incestuous attachment so strongly hinted between them,” the Usher line is doomed (Hoffman 302). In addition, if families in these Gothic works are meant to portray certain anxieties of the nation, then Antebellum America is equally doomed.

This is most evident in the House of Usher itself. There is an “eerie vitality of the house and... its status as an objective correlative for the family history” (Dougherty 10). If Roderick and his sister Madeline represent the ills that will drive a family (and a nation) to madness, then

the House of Usher is the effect these ills will produce. When the narrator first approaches the house, he admits that “a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction” (202). As the unfortunate events of the narrative unfold, the crack grows larger, until a resurrected Madeline brings down her brother as a tempest rends the House apart—“this fissure rapidly widen[ing]... and the deep and dank tarn at [his] feet clos[ing] sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘*House of Usher*’” (216). The fissure could easily represent the conflict between Roderick and Madeline, one threatening their line through madness, the other too weak to defend her line until the final moments of her life. However, the fissure could also portray the struggles of not a family, but a nation—specifically, the divide between the North and the South. From the familiar tale of blood comes a metaphor for race relations in the America of this time. As the “specter of blood presides over the final scene of ‘Usher’”—the blood-red moon—the reader recalls the nineteenth century anxiety of “the extinction of a white family, the collapse of a white nation” (Dougherty 17). In the context of the expanding American bloodline, Poe capitalizes on the shared anxieties of a country to create his own version of horror that plays into the popular opinion.

Poe’s anxiety about his descent led to his own life becoming a Gothic mirror of his tales. Operating in a nation that was also paralyzed by its inability to rework race into the national bloodline, Poe wrote this energy into his stories to portray family structures that were just as anxious about their descent as they were about their inheritance and their future. In the ultimate breakdown of this structure, and the push away from families and towards independence, Poe insinuates his concern about the importance America placed on family purity, despite expressing sentiments throughout his life and stories that could be construed as separatist and racist. Poe’s

families were clearly torn apart by the introduction of racial fears of inheritance and descent anxieties. However, Poe was also able to uplift characters such as Dirk Peters and other figures coded as racially ambiguous to demonstrate their legitimacy as people—albeit outside of the nation. While they receive power from the knowledge of their identity, Poe’s narratives still campaign for a separation. Interestingly, these transgressive characters are not always the villains of his pieces, but instead those who refuse to transgress the lines of race often are. This seemingly contradictory view (given Poe’s racial politics) can be reconciled with the notion that what may be right for the nation—separation and segregation—is not right for the family. In a nation torn asunder by racial matters, Poe does not see sanctuary in a pure family, but rather in a pure individual.

## Chapter Three

### H.P. Lovecraft: Uncovering Anxieties of Descent

“But as to this thing we’ve just sent back—the Whateleys raised it for a terrible part in the doings that were to come. It grew fast and big from the same reason that Wilbur grew fast and big—but it beat him because it had a greater share of the *outsideness* in it. You needn’t ask how Wilbur called it out of the air. He didn’t call it out. *It was his twin brother, but it looked more like the father than he did.*”

H.P. Lovecraft, “The Dunwich Horror”

Unlike many authors before him, grounded in concerns of the present or the future, H.P. Lovecraft seemed to set his sights solely on the past and what it meant to him. He took guidance from Gothic authors like Edgar Allan Poe, even drawing inspiration directly from some of his works. Lovecraft states in a 1916 letter to Reinhart Kleiner, “when I write stories, Edgar Allan Poe is my model” (Selected Letters I 19). This is not to say that Lovecraft was not involved with representing his own present circumstances on the page—his concerns about the time he lived in are evident in all of his writing, fiction or otherwise. In looking to the past, Lovecraft saw a time when lines were more defined, and mysteries of descent seemed non-existent. I have written of this concept with Brown—for example, Arthur Mervyn has no concerns about where he comes from, only where he is going. In Poe, the tradition of descent begins to change, and the rigid lines of ancestry become something dangerous. In Lovecraft’s writing, he demonstrates that descent has been forever changed, and if one goes looking too deeply into his or her family past, he or she may discover something monstrous. Through both the Gothic form and the horror genre, which is intended to startle its readers into feelings of terror, Lovecraft illustrates what frightened him most about his society. The haunting aspects of his life in twentieth century America ranged from racial anxiety to the inheritance of knowledge. Though his writing style rarely changed, the subjects with which he was interested shifted somewhat dramatically from 1917 to 1936.

The context of this time was a period of incredible change in America. In the early twentieth century, immigration changed the landscape of the nation, as cities increased their size to accommodate the influx of a diverse number of people. From the mid-1890s to around 1915, waves of immigrants found passage into America through New York's Ellis Island. In "the first decade of the twentieth century, the United States experienced its 'third wave' of immigration," resulting in a shifting demographic in immigrants as well (Moehling and Piehl 740). New immigrants "came predominantly from Southern and Eastern Europe rather than Northern Europe," where the "old stock" of immigrants had come from (Moehling and Piehl 740). The shift from conventional and now acceptable Western European immigrants to the Southern and Eastern European immigrants created a backlash in the "native" American public, which grew uncomfortable with the changes they saw in the faces of America. The "nativist" movement of the twentieth century operated on a popular anti-immigration rhetoric that encompassed both racist and anti-Catholic thought. The anxiety in the land was so severe that, "unlike previous nativist movements... this one succeeded in securing legislative restrictions on immigrant arrivals" (Moehling and Piehl 740). Therefore, the campaign of "nativism," that already had solid foundation in the land, grew to affect politics and popular sentiments even more.

Historians characterize American nativism by its notoriously "antiforeign" sentiments. It began in the mid-nineteenth century as "a reaction to the unprecedented immigration that the United States was experiencing from Europe" (Coker 13). Nativism ultimately created an "'us'/'U.S.' versus 'them'/'foreigner' mentality" that infected not only popular opinion, but also politics (Coker 14). Nativism continued for as long as immigration persisted—even influencing the "restrict[ion] [of] immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe in particular" through the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 (Hefner 654). Nativists throughout the nineteenth,

twentieth, and even twenty-first centuries idolize “an appeal to authenticity and purity regarding identity” (Coker 14). It was from the nativist sentiments of the 1920s that Lovecraft emerged, working through “debates about race, immigration, and ‘alien blood’” (Hefner 654). Operating under the influence of these anxieties, Lovecraft used his fiction to represent his “horror at what he perceived as the loss of tradition and the disintegration of American culture in the face of the moral, racial and scientific chaos of the twentieth century” (Evans 177). Therefore, the innumerable themes of his works can often be traced to these contemporary movements within the American nation.

Obsessed with inheritance as theme and condition, Lovecraft saw himself not only as a descendent of a pure line, but also as the inheritor of the Gothic form. As will be demonstrated throughout his works, Lovecraft possessed an anxiety about the knowledge of one’s descent. Lovecraft’s family line is an easy one to trace, founded back in the late eighteenth century with the New England families of Thomas Lovecraft (on his father’s side) and Asaph Phillips (on his mother’s). However, as a genealogist Lovecraft “failed to verify” much of his own line—particularly because there is little information “regarding the Lovecrafts prior to their coming to America in the early nineteenth century” (Joshi 1). Despite this underlying anxiety, Winfield Scott Lovecraft and Sarah Susan Phillips, Lovecraft’s parents, were strong in the knowledge of their American identity, and passed this to their son. However, knowledge could not save them from the complications of their descent, founded in the mind. In 1893, Winfield Scott Lovecraft began to suffer from hallucinations, and the family admitted him to a hospital in Providence, where he was diagnosed with “general paresis,” a type of paralytic dementia commonly associated with late-stage syphilis. Young Howard Phillips Lovecraft was left in the care of his mother, who was also committed to the same hospital decades later, in 1919. With this family

history looming over him, Lovecraft embarked on his writing career, safe in the assurance of his “pure” family line but unsure of what path it would lead him down. The threat of madness despite the purity of his family was exhibited in many of his short stories, and many of his protagonists seek out the quest for any knowledge about one’s line of descent, often with monstrous consequences.

Lovecraft’s work “inherited” Gothic traditions such as the horror of the family and used them to illustrate his ideals about the status of America. In 1927, Lovecraft published “Supernatural Horror in Literature,” a survey of horror fiction and Gothic elements. This text includes not only a short section on Charles Brockden Brown, but also a study of Edgar Allan Poe’s works. Lovecraft focuses particularly on “The Fall of the House of Usher,” where he praises the short story as having “superiority in detail and proportion” as it “displays an abnormally linked trinity of entities at the end of a long and isolated family history—a brother, his twin sister, and their incredibly ancient house” (Lovecraft 104). This formulaic detailing of the end of a family line will come into play in many of Lovecraft’s works as well—and though he begins with the corruption of the family as the result of outside forces, much like the Usher line’s downfall, Lovecraft shifts focus in his later works to the decline of the family as a result of internal strife. Ultimately, one of the largest themes throughout his works is the quest for forbidden knowledge, the attainment of which comes at a cost—often, the downfall of the entire family line.

Lovecraft’s precedent for the decline of the family at the expense of knowledge is set in one of his first short stories, written in 1917 and published in 1920—“Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and his Family.” The narrative details the rise and fall of several members of the Jermyn family, announcing from the very beginning that this is a story of familial tragedy—the

end of a line. Arthur Jermyn is deceased at the start, having “soaked himself in oil and set fire to his clothing one night” after “seeing the boxed object which had come from Africa” (7). The narrative constructs Arthur’s demise because of the object and not his “peculiar personal appearance” (7). Arthur does not mind his strange, inherited appearance, for his family also had “learning [...] in [their] blood,” thanks to his “great-great-great-grandfather, Sir Wade Jermyn... one of the earliest explorers of the Congo region” (7). The quest for knowledge that is inherent in his bloodline leads Arthur Jermyn to embark on a similar exploration. After the death of his “socially unrecognised” mother and his father’s brutal death at the hands of a circus gorilla, Arthur Jermyn decided to pursue the exploits of his ancestor Sir Wade Jermyn (11). After traveling to Africa, Arthur learns the history of a city of “hybrid creatures,” among them an “ape-princess... [who] became the consort of a great white god who had come out of the West” (11-12). The relationship had sired a son, “grown to manhood—or apehood or godhood... yet unconscious of his identity,” whose return was told in legends (12). When the “stuffed goddess”—or her mummy—is found, she is sent back with Arthur Jermyn to his estate, and he excitedly opens the box after sending out his servants (13). It is the servants who give the account of the resulting tragedy—the “horrible scream” and the end of the “house of Jermyn,” as the mummified corpse bore “certain resemblance... to none other than the sensitive Arthur Jermyn, great-great-great-grandson of Sir Wade Jermyn and an unknown wife” (14). The horror of his mysterious descent has finally unfolded, and with it comes the elimination of the Jermyn family altogether.

Many elements of the tale make it clear Lovecraft promotes external forces as the cause of the Jermyn family’s ruination. The hybridization of the Jermyn family “reflect[s]...wider American fears concerning miscegenation,” and Lovecraft’s own “deep-seated anxieties

concerning his own American nationality and subjectivity” (Simmons 13). There is little reason for concern about Jermyn’s descent—though his family has been plagued by mental illness and an odd appearance, Jermyn’s status in the community and his humanity are never questioned. The alarm may have been raised by “some neighboring families who had heard tales of Sir Wade Jermyn’s unseen Portuguese wife” claiming that Jermyn’s daydreamer ways are his great-great-great grandmother’s “Latin blood... showing itself,” while others place the responsibility on “his music-hall mother” (12). The concerns of the community resonate in the spheres of both race and class, yet Jermyn is still accepted by them despite whatever blood may be influencing his actions. Therefore, this still is not a line-ending tragedy—Lovecraft’s fears come into play with “what he perceived to be the increasing levels of racial hybridization within America during the twentieth century” (Simmons 14). The very notion that Arthur Jermyn could be unaware of his horrific descent is the source of Lovecraft’s own horror—Lovecraft, whose family line was also plagued by madness and tragedy of Jermynic proportions.

This short story also contains Lovecraft’s use of anti-immigration politics and several references to eugenics. Lovecraft scholar Bennett Lovett-Graff claims that “Arthur Jermyn” “resorts to the eugenicist image of the ancestor whose racial stock overwhelms that of descendents” (Lovett-Graff 188). Because the “white ape mother[’s]... simian heritage decides the fate of her (notably all male) weaker descendents,” the entire line is overwhelmed and eliminated by the end of the story (Lovett-Graff 188). This reflects the “racial paranoia inspired by the hard hereditarianism of the eugenics movement,” which theorized that once a line is stained with “tainted” blood it is essentially over (Lovett-Graff 188). Again, this was a part of the politics of the time, which Lovecraft thoroughly accepted—“the same Lovecraft who feared the Celtic taint of a great-great-great-great grandmother and her daughter and granddaughter”

(Lovett-Graff 188). The eugenics movement had close ties to anti-immigration politics and policies, which continue through Lovecraft's other works as well.

The quest for forbidden knowledge also emerges in H.P. Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook," written in 1925. The influence of the eugenics movement and Lovecraft's anti-immigration sentiments continue through this story, with autobiographical elements setting the precedent. When Lovecraft moved to New York to marry Sonia Greene in 1924, he soon found himself among "gangs of young loafers and herds of evil-looking foreigners that one sees everywhere in New York" (Selected Letters II 27). In "The Horror at Red Hook," he exposes his true feelings to a reading public, employing a surprising narrator to do so—a "New York police detective named Thomas F. Malone," who possessed "the Celt's far vision of weird and hidden things" (4). Similar to the acceptance of "Latin blood" in "Arthur Jermyn," the Irish descent of the narrator is considered to be a strength rather than a weakness in the diverse neighborhood that is Red Hook—and amongst the "new" foreigners, he seems to be written by Lovecraft as an authority. This is because he is descended from the "old stock" of now accepted Western European immigrants.

Malone's actions throughout the narrative unpack Lovecraft's own xenophobic sentiments and nostalgic longing for pure family lines. Malone laments the old Red Hook, where "long ago a brighter picture dwelt, with clear-eyed mariners on the lower streets and homes of taste and substance where the larger houses line the hill" (6). Lovecraft again relies on "the trope of investigation," placing Malone in this position along with "researchers and antiquarians seeking dusty manuscripts and forbidden books" (Hefner 656). When faced with a nostalgic longing, the investigator could "trace the relics of this former happiness in the trim shapes of the buildings, and occasional graceful churches"—but with the "population [now] a hopeless tangle

and enigma,” there can only be a xenophobic regret (6). Throughout the events of the narrative, the “sensitive Celt” observes the ongoing descent of Red Hook into a pit of broiling madness, desperately searching for missing—white—children (13). His investigation—representative of a common Lovecraft theme—brings him to the basement of a Red Hook house, where “strange dark men... chanted horrors” and opened up a literal portal to Hell—Lovecraft’s vision of the diverse New York neighborhood (19). Not only does evil exist in the modern, diverse city—“evil is... explicitly written all over the faces and bodies of immigrants and other nonwhites” (Hefner 661). Hybridity is again the enemy here, not necessarily localized in one person but localized in an entire space.

Lovecraft does offer up a relief to this hellscape, however—a return to the traditional family structure of the past, far outside of the city. The protagonist, no longer one of the “bad” immigrants, as nineteenth century politics would classify Malone, seeks to return white children to white parents. The children, victimized by hybridity, represent a desire to return to a homogenous family structure—a homogenous America. When “the face of a kidnapped child had been seen for a second at one of the basement windows” of a deserted building in Red Hook, it becomes clear that something sinister is meant to happen with the children (13). As Malone closes in on solving the case, he observes this:

Avenues of limitless night seemed to radiate in every direction, till one might fancy that here lay the root of a contagion destined to sicken and swallow cities, and engulf nations in the foeter of hybrid pestilence. Here cosmic sin had entered, and festered by unhallowed rites had commenced the grinning march of death that was to rot us all to fungous abnormalities too hideous for the grave’s holding. (18)

This sensationalist, reactionary statement creates a clear binary of “us”—Lovecraft’s reader, rooting for the protagonist Malone—and “them”—the abjectly hybrid villains of the text. The “contagion” of hybridity is one that has the ability to “swallow cities, and engulf nations”—a recall to the very fears of the eugenics and anti-immigration movement. The nefarious purpose for which the white children were kidnapped: to commence with “cosmic sin,” and “unhallowed” rituals that would infect the entire area with “abnormalities”—a sure sign of impure blood. The Babel of voices created by the numerous tongues is meant to invoke fear in the reader, but it can also be noted that they threaten to overwhelm each other as well. Regardless, Lovecraft is insinuating that hybridity is the enemy here, through the mixing of races (not a literal miscegenation, but a figurative one for sure).

Lovecraft is predicting not only the end of the “traditional” family, but also the end of humanity as he would like to see humanity. Malone survives the ordeal of the ritual, but “as for Red Hook—it is always the same...the evil spirit of darkness and squalor broods on amongst the mongrels in the old brick houses, and prowling bands still parade on unknown errands past windows where lights and twisted faces unaccountably appear and disappear” (22). In perhaps the most chilling endnote of all, Malone’s final account is of “an officer overhear[ing] a swarthy squinting hag teaching a small child some whispered patois” (23). The message: a call for the “friend and companion of night” to “look favourably on [their] sacrifices!” (23). The insinuation that no child is safe in the city populated with hybridity is Lovecraft’s goal: he did not feel safe in Red Hook, so why should any other American citizen? A return to the family was necessary, but a family’s close observance of their children was also necessary if America was to survive what Lovecraft perceived as a threat to the traditional family structure. Lovecraft returned to Providence within two years, but even there his anxieties about the urban family persisted.

Within the borders of yet another city, Lovecraft was haunted by the pressures of Providence, even in his native Rhode Island. This immense anxiety stemmed from “urban decay, immigration, and commercialism” (Evans 184). The evils of Providence are illustrated in depth in his novel, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, written in 1927 and not published during his lifetime. With *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, the titular character is studied through a narrative for the source of his insanity. Much like Arthur Jermyn, Ward begins a frantic search for his ancestor, looking to unlock some secrets to his family’s past. The autobiographical tendencies of this novel are heavily present throughout the narrative. While “the autobiographical protagonist spends much of his youth on antiquarian rambles through Providence,” he begins to unlock a troubling family history (Evans 189). Inevitably, Charles Dexter Ward suffers the Gothic consequences of seeking forbidden knowledge—he is punished with inherited sin. It is through this trope that “the protagonist is undone by the unwise actions of his ancestors”—in the case of Charles Dexter Ward, his ancestor’s penchant for murder and necromancy (Simmons 20). The Gothic form also emerges through the image of the double, seen in Ward’s risen ancestor Joseph Curwen.

However, this text offers a strange departure from Lovecraft’s earlier works, where the fall of the family was very much an exterior affair, brought on by outside forces of hybridity. Even Jermyn’s downfall was the result of his ancestors *leaving* “the confines of their native country”—America (Simmons 20). However, Lovecraft closely links Charles Dexter Ward’s downfall with Joseph Curwen, the patriarch whose lineage is traced back through “[Ward’s] maternal ancestors” (219). Curwen is “a certain very long-lived man... who had come from Salem in March of 1692”—undeniably linking him with a colonial heritage which both Ward and Lovecraft prize highly (219). However, Curwen holds dark secrets about the Ward family:

Joseph Curwen, as revealed by the rambling legends embodied in what Ward heard and unearthed, was a very astonishing, enigmatic, and obscurely horrible individual. He had fled from Salem to Providence—that universal haven of the odd, the free, and the dissenting—at the beginning of the great witchcraft panic; being in fear of accusation because of his solitary ways and queer chemical or alchemical experiments. He was a colourless-looking man of about thirty... and did not seem to grow much older than he had been on his arrival. (221)

The description of Curwen, and the passage at the start of the text, links that man to the nightmarish movement of necromancy. In a dark twist of fate, Ward summons his ancestor Curwen and, as they look so remarkably similar, right down to “a slight scar or pit in the smooth brow above the right eye,” Curwen is able to murder Ward and take his place (267). Thus, the madness that was inherent in the real Charles Dexter Ward was only a desire to uncover his genealogy, and the madness he was committed for was his anachronistic ancestor’s evil desires. While racial fears in this text are present, the downfall of this young man because of his family is undeniably internal—the result of his quest for forbidden knowledge of his ancestry. In addition, racial allegory for once does not seem to be fitting, particularly with Lovecraft describing Curwen as “colourless”.

Yet this narrative does approach some of Lovecraft’s fears that are more personal. There exists in this story a parallel to “Lovecraft’s own life: proud of his Puritan New England ancestors, he could not forget that both his parents died in psychiatric hospitals” (Evans 190). It is evident that “this profound dualism—nostalgia and terror, beauty and disgust—runs through Lovecraft’s attitude toward New England,” and therefore does not inhibit him from seeing the dangers inherent there (Evans 190). This hearkens back to his own descent—although he is

thoroughly uncorrupted by a collective ancestry of New Englanders, it was still not enough to save his parents, or even himself, from the corruption of modernity. Therefore, homogeneity is not always a safe haven, even if it delays the anxieties of the knowledge of descent. Lovecraft's horror at existence in an increasingly modern America can extend even to his beloved Providence, and New England as a whole.

The Gothic imagery of dualism and doubles persists in "The Dunwich Horror," and as Lovecraft navigates this tale, his nostalgic vision of the past becomes complicated. The tale is immediately reminiscent of a time gone by, evocative of everything Lovecraft seems to love about New England. Similarly to Poe's works, it opens with a traveler—a traveler who "comes upon a lonely and curious country" (80). The narrator remarks that "outsiders visit Dunwich as seldom as possible"—this is not Red Hook—and indeed, "the natives... have come to form a race by themselves, with the well-defined mental and physical stigmata of degeneracy and inbreeding" (82). Despite the homogeneity that is clearly present in the area, the way that the "average of their intelligence is woefully low, whilst their annals reek of overt viciousness and of half-hidden murders, incests, and deeds," makes it clear that these people are no better than the hybrid wasteland of Red Hook. The escape from descent is ingrained into the town, as "some of the Whateleys and Bishops still send their eldest sons to Harvard and Miskatonic, though those sons rarely return to the mouldering gambrel roofs under which they and their ancestors were born" (82). The indigent "mouldering gambrel roofs" of the nostalgic New England town lie in distinct contrast to the shimmering nostalgia of the old Red Hook, with its "trim" buildings (6). Lovecraft's nostalgia had kept him in one place nearly all his life, and yet here the almost colonial feel of the small town of Dunwich is something to flee from, just as he fled the decaying Red Hook that was only a shell of its former glory. As this New England town has nothing to

offer but a flawed nostalgia, the optimistic youth not only attempt to escape their location, but also their ancestry.

The morbidity of origin in this town is such a departure from the hybrid monsters of Lovecraft's earlier works, because it comes from a different source—something altogether familiar, and still otherworldly. It is in this town that Wilbur Whately is born, to a mother who “had no known husband,” leading the townsfolk to “speculate as widely as they chose” about the child's ancestry (84). Lavinia Whately was “one of the decadent Whateleys, a somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman... living with an aged and half-insane father” (84). The connotations of incest are evident in this relationship, culminating in the mysterious birth of Wilbur—as they are so neatly isolated from the rest of Dunwich that Wilbur could only be the product of an incestual coupling. However, Wilbur's “dark, goatish-looking” appearance led the elder Whately to declare, “I dun't keer what folks think—ef Lavinny's boy looked like his pa, he wouldn't look like nothin' ye expect” (84). This is the first hint we get at a monstrous origin to Wilbur Whately—the second being the rate at which he grows. Therefore, Wilbur's complexion and development insinuates Lavinia's relationship with a distinctly “Other” figure—and in either case of Wilbur's origin, horror is present.

The narrative of “The Dunwich Horror” continues to track Wilbur's growth, not only the rapidity of but also the reputation that emerges from him. Wilbur has been tutored by his elderly grandfather, and “twice a year they would light fires on the top of Sentinel Hill, at which times the mountain rumblings would recur with greater and greater violence” (90). The Whateleys have also been “boarding up a now apparently occupied outbuilding” on their property, but the occupant has later been moved to the house—“at some point Lavinia vanished, and some time later the old man died” (Burlison 118). Yet even as the family seems to dissipate, Wilbur's

reputation grows—“his dim, hideous aura... stretch[ing] from a dubious birth to a cloud of probable matricide” (94). All the while, Wilbur’s own intense desire for the knowledge of his true descent increases as well. Wilbur is ultimately able to make a trip to Miskatonic University in nearby Arkham—yet he is denied entry to the library. It is when he attempts to break into a library—a place of learning and understanding—that Wilbur is mauled to death by a guard dog. Often in Lovecraft’s texts, “knowledge produces revulsion, not enlightenment”— and as Wilbur’s dead body lies in this place of knowledge, it produces both (Sorensen 515). The librarians and professors who find him observe that “apparently Whately had had no skull or bony skeleton; at least, in any true or stable sense” (99). In fact, “he had taken somewhat after his unknown father” (99). When Wilbur “dies in the quest” for knowledge, his twin—“viewed as a single character” with his brother—“is symbolically reborn from the ‘womb’ of the farmhouse” (Burlison 124). At this monstrous rebirth, the insinuations of incest that presided in the minds of the townsfolk are gone—Lovecraft makes it clear here that Wilbur and his brother, “look[ing] more like the father than [Wilbur] did”— are the results of an extraterrestrial, hybrid coupling (120). In this homogenous town, hybridity creates a dangerous product that leads to ruination, and is therefore something to be feared.

Yet Lovecraft still deconstructs some of the messages of his previous works in this one. While modernity is still the enemy, nostalgia is a dangerous presence as well. The homogenous town that resembles a colonial stead lost in time is just as dangerous as the modern city to which immigrants flock. In some ways, this notion connects back to the very origin of the American Gothic— the fear of the “wild place,” bringing back colonial fears of an environment that holds every threat. Yet the threat of modernity is still in place as well, for with modernity comes knowledge, no longer forbidden because of increases in mechanization and science. With

Whately, Lovecraft continues a trend that it is not the presence of the foreign blood within the self that creates terror, but the knowledge of its presence. His quest for knowledge is his undoing, and upon his death, everyone learns of the true horror that was within him. Throughout “The Dunwich Horror,” Lovecraft carefully balances the nightmares of the past and the present, reflecting a bleak worldview. Yet there is one other short story that surprises its reader with an apparently optimistic presentation of monstrous descent.

“The Shadow Over Innsmouth” represents a significant departure from either exterior factors or interior factors destroying the American family—in fact, while both are involved, destruction is not the outcome, but rather an inexpressible change. Written in 1931, and first published as a standalone book in 1936, “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” recalls themes of antiquarianism, investigation of descent, and an otherworldly inheritance. Again, we open with a traveler. Poe’s traveler, of course, gave a comprehensive representation of all of America in their migratory patterns. Unlike Poe, however, “Lovecraft compensated for a lack of close human connections through a very strong sense of place,” and his travels extended no further than New England (minus those few years in New York) (Evans 178). Therefore, Lovecraft’s traveler is representative of himself, traveling around New England and therefore founded in one specific location, and the ideals of that place alone.

Lovecraft draws on his own experiences of antiquarianism and, similarly to *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, applies it to the notion of a genealogical quest. Our narrator arrives in Innsmouth, a coastal town similar to Dunwich in its isolation, while “celebrating [his] coming of age by a tour of New England [with] sightseeing,” both “antiquarian, and genealogical” (321). Lovecraft presents this story almost as a “travelogue,” in fact “Lovecraft’s ultimate transformation of travelogue into horror story” (Evans 188). As for the importance of location,

and the recurring theme of a town that “ha[s] changed little since Colonial times,” it would appear that “in these towns, the weight of the past is not a pleasure but a burden” (Evans 189). However, in Arkham, Innsmouth, and Dunwich, “poverty and isolation... [has] brought about ignorance, superstition, inbreeding and miscegenation (to Lovecraft, the worst horror of all)” (Evans 189). Innsmouth in particular is “shadowed,” “able to inspire [a] dislike in its neighbours” that draws the young antiquarian to it with curiosity (322).

With the same themes of “Dunwich Horror” repeating in “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” it would be difficult to see at first how this narrative could be much different. However, while “Dunwich Horror” still found a root cause of evil to be miscegenation (or the allegory of miscegenation), “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” takes a more benevolent look at hybridity, so often viewed as a precursor to death and madness. It is important to note that by 1932, “the eugenics and anti-immigration movements had already seen their heyday” (Lovett-Graff 175-6). Lovecraft’s involvement with a dying outlook clearly faded with the publication of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” which once more depicts a man’s genealogical quest, this time with surprising departures. In many ways, this makes “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” a rewriting of several of his previous tales, particularly “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family,” where the discovery of the protagonist’s lineage resulted in his fiery death.

This is not to say that “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” does not have complications, of course. Racial fears are still prevalent in the text—for instance, in 1846 “half the folks in Innsmouth was carried off... probably [by] some foreign kind of disease brought from China” (323). In addition, Innsmouth native Zadok—one of the few completely human inhabitants—tells the protagonist the history of the town, which coincides with the history of that young character. He describes a “volcanic islet” where “in some places they was little stones strewed

about—like charms—with somethin’ on ‘em like what ye call a swastika naowadays” (348). In “Shadows over Lovecraft: Reactionary Fantasy and Immigrant Eugenics,” Bennett Lovett-Graff analyzes the use of the swastika as one of the “symbols capable of restraining the Deep Ones”—an “oblique reference... to Nazism” (Lovett-Graff 183). The Lovecraft scholar infers that

the swastika that would come to stand for all that was wrong with the racial purification policies of Nazi Germany, was for Lovecraft in the early 1930s an opportunity to intimate, albeit quietly, his own sentiments about the very immigrants who threatened the eugenic and cultural soundness of America. (Lovett-Graff 183)

The protagonist of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” may return to the sea in the end to embrace his hybrid existence, an astoundingly more positive ending when compared to Jermyn’s self-immolation at the discovery of his hybridity. Yet this symbol’s presence in the narrative, even unknown as it was a decade before World War II, still carries racial connotations that resemble Lovecraft’s ideal America.

Ultimately, the American town of Innsmouth is completely isolated from the rest of the country, and once the narrator’s hybrid nature is uncovered, he immediately looks to return to the underwater city Y’ha-nthlei, along with his cousin who currently resides in a mental institution. The ending to “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” could carry many different connotations, demonstrated through the way the narrator plots his own course for dealing with his hybridity:

I shall plan my cousin’s escape from that Canton madhouse, and together we shall go to marvel-shadowed Innsmouth. We shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to Cyclopean and many columned

Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory for ever. (381)

Lovecraft's earlier works use hybridity as a scare tactic, a fate punishable with death or madness. This is briefly illustrated in the fate of the narrator's cousin, who lies in a "madhouse"—yet not for long. Instead, the narrator wants to return with him to the shadowy Innsmouth—shadowed by marvel, not horror—before diving into a life eternal. While a nativist reading may balk at the acceptance of a monstrous form, the invitation is still implicit that in this new hybrid state lies not death, but immortality. It is as though Lovecraft inevitably realized that an America that returned to the ideals of colonial times would only create new fears and disillusioned families, and so he attempts to reconcile his thoughts in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth." Overall, he emphasizes a return to one's roots even if hybridity is a factor, as well as builds an argument that hybrid creatures should return to where they come from— which is often far away from New England and America as a whole.

Through Lovecraft, we see the impact family has on an author's writing, and the way written families reflect the author's view of contemporary society. Lovecraft has become well known for his portrayal of protagonists who feel disconnected from their inheritance and are searching for the mysteries of their descent, only to become horrified and damaged by what they discover. The outcomes of these characters—be it death or an escape to one's roots—are very telling about Lovecraft's outlook towards miscegenation and mixed race families in an increasingly diverse America. His fears of urban settings drove him to romanticize the past, but in doing so he saw that even his own family tree was flawed, leading to both of his parents' unfortunate internments in mental institutions. The binary that Lovecraft attempts to place on his

native land is ultimately full of fallacies, and just like the characters who do not fall on one side or the other, neither, it seems, does America.

Lovecraft saw himself as an inheritor of knowledge, continuing the Gothic works of Edgar Allan Poe. As his protagonists search for their true inheritance as well, the outcomes of their quests differ widely. In the early instances, the uncovering of any mixed qualities within their blood lead to monstrous deaths. However, as Lovecraft's attitudes towards the anxieties of his time shifted, the protagonists' monstrous descents were no more horrifying than the macabre homogeneity of towns closed off from society. Lovecraft's conflicting views of race and regional status within his writings play out through his use of the Gothic form, just as they played out through Poe's works, and Brown's. In that sense, Lovecraft's inheritance was in fact the use of the Gothic to portray his contemporary family anxieties in a form that would be accepted and extensively read.

### **A Brief Conclusion: The Family Gothic Today**

“Epochs throw up the monsters they need. History can be written of monsters, and in them. We experience the conjunctions of certain werewolves and crisis-gnawed feudalism, of Cthulhu and rupturing modernity, of Frankenstein’s and Moreau’s made things and a variably troubled Enlightenment, of vampires and tediously everything, of zombies and mummies and aliens and golems/robots/clockwork constructs and their own anxieties. [...] All our moments are monstrous moments.”

China Miéville, “Theses on Monsters”

When China Miéville writes, “all our moments are monstrous moments,” he reiterates the notion that no sphere of life is separate from monstrousness—including the family sphere. The theme of the Gothic family can be traced throughout American literature—and depictions of fallen families extend across genres frequently. Because the state of the family can be so tied up into the state of the country, it is simple to infuse the anxieties of a time into a single family unit. However, the Gothic genre works best for this, already seething with the anxiety of a lost or dangerous inheritance, the imagery of doubles, and destruction brought on by humanity itself—in the case of the family, the family being the cause of its own destruction. Through the study of these three authors, we have seen the anxieties of the family emerge and continue from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, the Family Gothic continues as both a trend to study and to replicate.

Within the works of Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and H.P. Lovecraft, the family in distress worked as not only a plot device and metaphor for an entire nation, but also a representation of these authors’ personal contexts. Family, or even the lack of it, is a defining characteristic of humanity, and in these portrayals, we see immense meaning at both the surface level and under the surface. It was clear that their own inheritance and upbringing had a profound effect on these authors’ writings, but the families they chose for themselves also illustrate their personal vision of family. Charles Brockden Brown died in relative obscurity in

1810, having married Elizabeth Linn in 1804. They had four children together, but Brown himself would not have been able to see them through their lives. They would have had to find their way into American society just as Brown's protagonists had. Edgar Allan Poe married his young first cousin Virginia Clemm in 1835. The incestuous nature of this relationship, and his apparent need for close family ties, reflects the maddening desire for a family that occurs throughout his writing. Finally, H.P. Lovecraft's marriage to an older and independent widow, Sophia Greene, in 1924 brought him to New York, which he expressed great displeasure at despite being relatively happy in his marriage. Still, their union yielded no children, and Greene was absent due to travel for much of the marriage, acting as the provider for the struggling writer. The lack of true inheritors for all of these authors finalizes the idea that literature is where American inheritance truly lies, as Edgar Allan Poe looked to Brown's work, and Lovecraft looked to Poe. While unsuccessful in obtaining inheritance or finding inheritors, these creative minds found a refuge in illustrating their anxiety through writing, placing their concerns about family and the nation into words that have made their way into the American canon.

Through the works of previous Family Gothic authors, we saw the anxieties of the family move from the country to the city. In contemporary America, the anxious family resides in the suburban environment. Some will claim that horror still exists in domesticity, in the blind ignorance of the conventional nuclear family, the emphasis on conformity above all. However, the anxieties of previous generations, in particular the authors discussed in this thesis, have faded. Most noticeably, the layout of the twenty-first century American family is continuously expanding in its definition. The nuclear family has gradually shifted to accept single parents, mixed-race parents, same-sex parents, and other previously unconventional forms of family. The

mode of inheritance has shifted as well, and just as the traumatized Gothic authors chose their families in the end, the emphasis remains today on families chosen, not inherited.

Our modern family may still be the anxious kind, but the Gothic family novel has fallen out of contemporary discourse—and entered into a new realm of media. A current representation of the Family Gothic in film is Robert Eggers’s *The Witch* (2016). Instead of demonstrating modern anxieties in the modern family, Eggers returns to the drama of a seventeenth century Puritan family. Isolated and on the edge of the “wild” woods, the family quickly devolves into a cloud of anguish, anxiety, and panic. The tragedy of this Family Gothic lies not only in the unmanageable children, but also in the parents—the “shrew” mother, who can do nothing but mourn, and the impotent father, who fails to provide for his family anything except chopped wood. As the oldest daughter exercises her voice in the floundering boundaries of her family, she is accused of witchcraft and threatened by those who once loved her. Eggers manages to portray the teenage angst of transition (whether from England to America, civilization to wilderness, or child to adult) in Thomasin, while framing the narrative elements of the film in the Gothic tradition of terror and suspense. Ultimately, Thomasin leaves the hypocritical domesticity of her father’s house for the feminine sphere of the wood, inhabited by witches. The feminization of nature recalls Charles Brockden Brown’s attempt to do the same, yet in Eggers’s film, the woods are also associated with great power.

In *The Witch*, Eggers represents the tensions within our modern society very clearly through Thomasin’s escape from her family. The film has garnered a reputation as feminist in its portrayal of a new woman fleeing her patriarch in search of the sights and pleasures of the world. Interestingly, the impetus for her flight from the patriarchy is the household’s goat, Black Phillip, possessed by the devil. Black Phillip was already embedded in the household at the start of the

film, just as Thomasin was—implying that danger lurks in domesticity that extends beyond human morality and into the supernatural. Edgar Allan Poe utilized this trope in “The Black Cat,” where he illustrates the horror of domesticity in the body of the household pet. Eggers’s connection to Lovecraft extends beyond his attempt to revisit colonial America with a contemporary outlook. Thomasin’s flight from her family mimics the flight of the protagonist of H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Shadow Over Innsmouth.” As she leaves her homestead she joins her chosen kin—the witches who live in the wood. Though monstrous, they give her the freedom to explore the world and its delights—with power so great, it may rival the immortality that Lovecraft’s narrator achieves. It is a perverse outcome, which will invoke fear in those with strong family ties. The residual effects of this ancestral family on our modern one are evident—the frustrations of a domestic teen have changed little, and the pressures of freedom within the family are still a concern.

Our current society may have distanced the domestic notions of families and whatever anxieties they may feel about them from the tropes of the Gothic. However, in the American canon of literature the trend persists: the Gothic can be used to play out an anxious family drama, where the stakes are not only the lives of fictional characters, but also the sentiments of an entire nation. The terror that lies in the Family Gothic is truly derived from the motivations of all Gothic creators. The horror felt by the consumer of these pieces is amplified in the safe and familiar portrayals of families that are twisted and malformed to illustrate contemporary concerns and anxieties. In that way, the Family Gothic remains a faithful narrative option for anyone who wishes to reveal the true terrors of an entire nation in the domestic portrayals of mothers, fathers, siblings and children.

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