

EUROPEAN CONFIDENCE AND AMERICAN DAMNATION: THE GOTHIC ELEMENT IN SOME AMERICAN WRITERS

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When thinking of gothic literature, we tend to imagine a narrative with a haunted castle, a persecuted maiden, ghosts, cemeteries, etc. But gothic fiction is not just a compound of devices to frighten us, to chill our spines; these conventions originally answered to certain political, social and cultural attitudes.

In order to have a deeper knowledge of this kind of literature, we must study the role this fiction has historically played and we must trace the changes undergone since the time gothic literature was originated in Europe and then exported and adapted in America.

It was at the end of the 18th century when writers and philosophers wondered, for the first time, about the pleasurable effect of horror¹. What kind of effect does it produce a battle, an execution, a shipwreck, that people account for it in terms of terrific pleasure?, asked the theorists on the subject.

There was a growing taste for ruins and melancholy terror, for graveyard poetry and for wild and desolated scenery. But what kind of cultural background produced this hunger for the lurid?

Ironically, it was the Augustan period. In this period, the role of art was to supply 'rule and order' to our confused impressions of the world. Literature had to reflect reality but also to make sense out of it.

The most widely influential forms were public modes as the satire and the moral essay. They dealt with everyday experience of men and women in society and they addressed the reader with easy confidence. It was a polite art whose ideals were clarity, precision, order and harmony. A prescriptive art with banned words and taboo subjects. The writers of this age had an absolute reverence for the classics, but even Cicero was a bit too earnest for them.

To be Augustan was to be a reformer and an improver. Politics entered every corner of the national life at that time. With the development of the trading classes,

the weekly press started to be very important. Most of the 18th century writers had their journalistic moments: Defoe, Fielding, Smollet, Goldsmith and Boswell.

There was a hunger for the normal, the whole life in its ordinary aspects became a source of interest. The public of the time was interested in its own doings and asked less for substitutes for real life than for recognizable facts of its own experience.

It was a confident civilization, who found control over its experiences possible. It was an affirmative and convivial art. Swift, Pope, Richardson and Fielding raised deep issues regarding social morality but they never questioned the Order. It was the self-assurance of a polite world.

This public hunger for seeing reflected their own experience accounts in part for the rise of the novel. Defoe and Richardson are the first great English writers who deal with particular people in particular circumstances against the dominant literary outlook of the classical preference for the universal and the general.

We may be surprised at the fact that the Age of Reason, of balance and common sense could produce an imaginative type of literature, such as the gothic, a literature of exaggeration and violence. It is not so surprising once we have had a look at its history: two wars for colonial territories with Queen Anne (1.702-1.714); the Seven Years War with George II (1.727-1.766), the American Colonies Independence War with George III, and in 1.789, the French revolution and the subsequent threat of the guillotine.

Thomas Paine is an example of the singular mixture of the times between an extreme violent history and an obsessive admiration for order, balance, consensus. He wrote the second part of his book *The Age of Reason* (1.794) in daily expectation of death because of his outspoken disapproval of the execution of the king and queen of France during Robespierre's dictatorship.

That literature within the limits of reason is going to be replaced by a literature of exaggeration and strong emotions. The fad for sentiment and psychological states produced a lot of biographies, and the taste for the exotic produced a massive bulk of books of travels. The gothic novel was a product of the times. Its intention, to agitate the mind, its topic, a heroine at the mercy of malevolent powers.

The philosophers of the day were very much concerned about this change in aesthetic values, about the growing reliance on feeling as a means of insight. Among them, John Dennis.

Terror had never before received such a critical attention as Dennis gave to it. For him, among the passions "if it is rightly managed, none is more capable of giving a great Spirit to poetry".² *A Philosophical Enquire into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1.757) by Edmund Burke provided a complete study on the general interest in the irrational response to art and life. The sublime was

a term taken from Longinus, it referred to that state of emotional intensity in which the soul is filled with joy and exultation. But Burke defines the concept as:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime, that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling³.

Burke speaks of the delight arising from scenes of distress, of terrible joy from the contemplation of such objects as the silent night, the distant howling wilderness, the dark wood and hanging precipice. This is connected with the feelings of the 18thc travellers and with the poets of the so-called graveyard poetry, then in fashion.

Augustan aesthetics had been dependent on sharp definition, however, Burke emphasizes other uses of language: "A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea"⁴. He departs from the contemporary view of poetry, based on specific imagery and an avoidance of vague and obscure expressions to claim the power of suggestion.

These pre-romantic aesthetic attitudes may be illustrated by the unexpected productions of the painters of the late 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, compared to those of the Augustan period.

William Hogarth (1.697-1.764) and Thomas Gainsborough (1.727-1.788) in such pictures as "The Countess Levée" (from "Marriage à la Mode" series)⁵ and "Mr. and Mrs Andrews"⁶ respectively, represent 18thc taste for satire and moral humanity, they chose representative rather than specialized instances. Outdoors paintings show a quiet, ordered nature.

With the new attitude there is an invasion of melodramatic effects, there is not society, but an isolated individual, and the previous inanimate nature becomes alive. In "The Nightmare" (1.791) by Henry Fusely⁷, the sensations of terror and oppression experienced in a nightmare are given form as a ghostly dead horse, looming over the prostrate and tormented body of a sleeping woman.

Goya's "El Sueño de la Razón Produce Monstruos" (1.797), which is further explained by some contemporary manuscript, notes that imagination, abandoned by reason, produces impossible monsters⁸. These visions were given physicality in the bloodcurling visualizations of William Blake's paintings. "Ghost of a flea" (1.819) illustrates this uncontrolled display of imagination that produces symbolsofan almost exclusively personal significance⁹.

Christian ritual is compared to that of witchcraft, as in Goya's "Vision of the Pilgrims of San Isidro" (1.820)¹⁰. The imaginary worlds created in painting, like those of fiction, are worlds of nocturnal meetings, in which traditional values are inverted. They are characterized by an insane and hallucinatory atmosphere.

It was the attempt to portrait the other side of the coin, the hidden aspect of man. Caspar Friedrich's figures do not show their faces, they give their backs to the spectator. It is the character's attitude what matters, like in "Woman in the Morning sun" (1.811): the woman who stands before the rising sun opens her hands to the light, expressing the romantic yearning for the infinite. But even at dawn, the body of the woman is transformed into a ghostly silhouette¹¹.

The first gothic novel written in England was *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1.764, by Horace Walpole. It deals with the corrupted members of the aristocracy in the Middle Ages, with secret betrayals, and with ancestor's portraits that comedown from the wall to speak to their grandchildren.

Ann Radcliffe was one of the most popular gothic writers at her time. She wrote among others *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1.794) and *The Italian*. Her protagonists are persecuted maidens who flee in terror from their lustful and terrible persecutors through shadowy passages of castles and dungeons. The apparitions, strange groans at midnight and ghost are given an ingenious explanation in the end. (The supernatural receives a natural explanation: the "uncanny" according to Todorov)¹².

The novel *The monk* (1.796) by Mathew Lewis responds to this fashionable hunger for too much, for everything in excess. It was a scandal when it was published and for one hundred years it remained forbidden reading. A summary of the plot gives some sense of the provocative nature of the novel: a monk, considered the symbol of purity, is drawn by carnal appetites to commit all kind of atrocities, including the rape of his sister in a cemetery, and the murder of his mother. He suffers a terrifying death in the end.

This novel is more than the "pleasurable shudder" of the philosophers and we are almost forced to ask: what if the self is insatiable?

If the Augustan hero was urban, a sensible man of his age, polite and practical, another kind of hero is born, the hero-villain, a man who does not belong to a concrete political background, but to the world of his passions, set up not to improve his social environment but a solitary man- these characters always live in inaccessible castles or churches- damned to destruction because of his forbidden and criminal passions. Together with rationalization, the impulse towards destruction. Humanity is shown at the mercy of malevolent, disembodied powers. It was the same invading aggressiveness of the times that proved that freedom may not be rational, this type of literature showed the danger of breaking the rules.

"The guilt that underlines the gothic and motivates its plots" says Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Says Leslie in the American Novel*, is the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the paternal past which he has been striving to destroy; and the fear that possesses the gothic and motivates its tone is the fear that in destroying the old-ego

ideals of Church and State- the west has opened a way for the irruption of darkness: for insanity and disintegration of the self"¹³.

This vein of gothic romance runs together with the current of the domestic and sentimental novel. But whereas their themes may be similar, the flight of Clarissa and Pamela takes place in a real and contemporaneous world and the flight of the gothic heroine is out of the known world, the shadowy corridors of haunted castles. The sentimental reveals the power of redemption, the gothic is the portrait of the power of darkness, of damnation.

Gothic fiction attacks the institutions which might inhibit the freedom of the individual. Corruption, greediness, lust, are always projected in aristocrats or priests. And all the symbols of authority, secular or ecclesiastic, are in ruins: monasteries, churches, abbeys, castles, mansions, towers, ramparts. An age that had killed kings and Bishops was still afraid of the past: the dead could keep on causing harm. Those are the ghosts of the gothic fiction.

This ideal of absolute atrocity seems absurd to us nowadays, but rather than as second-rate novels, we have consider them attempts to redeem the improbable and marvellous, the stuff of fancy which Richardson had banned from the "new" novel. These gothic romances were not an analysis of contemporary manners, but a vehicle for the irrationality of experience. Gothic fiction was entrusted the task of conveying the impulses of the psyche, whose earlier practitioners had not found yet a satisfactory literary expression.

"It was necessary to call hell to rescue" had said Marquis de Sade. The gothic literature had turned to the night side of life, more appropriate to the horrors bred by the Age of Reason. It was a call to alert, the function of art was not only to console or sustain, but to disturb.

But gothic literature in England was soon overcome by the Romantic movement (whose poets, by the way, despised the gothic romances) and then by the novels of manners by Jane Austen, and, in the Victorian Age by Dickens, Thackeray, Wilde and Hardy and many other novelists. Gothic fiction was soon forgotten. However, what was just a fad in England, was taken by an incipient American literature and developed, becoming soon a mode of expression and a common point of view among the most important American writers.

Although, at first sight, it could seem really difficult to adapt a kind of fiction involved with the past and history to a country that didn't have any of these. The haunted castles and ruined abbeys had sense in the European gothic, they were symbols for a particular body of attitudes towards the past. But in America all this was quite improbable. How could the social status of the hero-villain be transplanted, and the aristocrats, the monks, the servants of the Inquisition. How could they be convincingly introduced in the classless American scene? How a country with so many future possibilities could be concerned with the past?.

America had not the gloom, the mysterious element, the decadence on which European writers fed. Hawthorne, in the preface of *The Marble Faun* refers to the poverty of materials in America by elaborating a catalogue of missing items:

"No shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity"¹⁴.

This makes the task of the writer of romances specially difficult. However, there are only ten years between the publication of the novels by Radcliffe and Lewis and the first American gothic romances.

Why, then, did the American writers choose gothic romance instead of other genres such as the sentimental novel, for example? This could be explained by an account of common features existing between gothic literature and the historical, social and literary conditions of America.

First, if the essence of the gothic hero is his lust for experience, that is exactly the foundation of America. Both the gothic hero and the earlier men of America are men on the run, who fled away from institutions and civilization to find a world of menaces. They share the frenzy of getting away, from Europe's control, from society's control.

Second, the gothic hero is a rebel, he challenges the rules and attacks institutions (including religion), he is, therefore, an enemy of heaven. The very act by which America was established is a gesture of defiance (a revolt against imposed rules). But this breach of the primal taboo, of breaking through the limits, produced a sense of guilt and anxiety, the guilt of the break through, whose punishment was spiritual isolation.

Third. If the gothic in England offered conventions to embody a violent past, it will also fit America. Although American past was recent, it didn't lack violence and bloodshed: the slaughter of the Indians, the revolutionist war, slavery. Through the gothic modes, the obsessive concerns of American life could find expression.

Fourth. Puritanism favoured and allegorical habit of mind that suited the symbolist nature of gothic romances and provided with a solid basis the problem of evil and damnation. Faust, the typical damned hero, is the protagonist of gothic fiction. The struggle between the absolute good and the absolute evil finds a suitable literary embodiment in the gothic fiction which is made of a language of static signs of tragedy in a vacuum.

And fifth. Gothic fiction provided the American writers not with a fiction in the novel form, but with romance. It was not likely that novels of manners found in America favourable conditions since America didn't have yet a fully developed complex society. In romance, experience has less to do with human beings as social creatures than as individuals. In romance there is no firm sense of social arena.

Romance and gothic fiction part from the analitic mode of the novel, there is in them an unexplained element, a mistery in the alteration of character, there is no development. Romance had another advantage for American writers: it does not confine itself to what is known, or even probale. Such writers as Cooper, William Gilmore Simms and Hawthorne believed that romance was the form offiction called for by American conditions.

Romance provided Hawthorne with that "neutral territory between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet" quoting his own words¹⁵.

Hawthorne's own words are illustrative of the different fiction affinities of the Europeans and the Americans. When *The Marble Faun* was published it suffered from many British attacks because of its abstract and remote nature. Hawthorne replied:

"These beer-sodden English beefeaters do not know how to read a romance"¹⁶

Charles Brockden Brown (1.771-1.810) exemplifies the role of the American writer at those times. He was a man in earnest to create an American literature and, in order to do so he chose the gothic form. He had to solve the problems of adaptation to the American conditions and instead of creating an exterior landscape of dungeons and castles, he internalized the narrative, he analized states of mind. He did not only substituted the haunted cattie by the haunted forest, or the lusful nobleman by the Indian, but he made evil come from the individual, not from external forces.

The heroine of the gothic fiction must confront evil, ghosts, aristocrats. But Brown's characters donot face external villainy, but the terrifying potentialities for villainy they discover within themselves. It is not costume gothics any more, evil is "within". This will be the basis of many of Poe's short stories later on. The gothic is rooted in human essentials.

The mysterious element does not come from the supernatural, but it is psychological. In *Wieland* the hero is Carwin, a ventriloquist who perturbs the lives of a quiet family, first by making. In *Wieland* go mad with his mysterious voices, forcing him to kill his wife and then by trying to seduce Wieland's sister, more by curiosity than by sensuality.

In *Edgar Huntly*, a romance already staged in American land-scape, the hero, Edgar, looking for the killer of his friend gets mixed with Clitheto, who is insane and walks about the countryside in sleep, hiding in caves and sobbing. Apparently by the power of suggestion, Huntly also becomes a sleep walker.

Brockden Brown is very influential in writers such as Poe and Hawthorne, and he sets, in American fiction, a tradition dealing with the exaggerated and grotesque.

The centre of the action is not the heroine (like in English fiction), but a hero, who is doomed to destruction by his obsessions.

Apart from setting the model for many American heroes, he also develops a certain attitude towards nature. Not as Eden, but as hell, where man is lost and in danger, in contrast with the romances by Cooper, where nature is the home of the innocent and honest man.

"Life is a nightmare through which we pursue or are pursued in a wilderness where the unexpected and the absurd, the irrelevance of what comes after, are the basic facts of existence". (Leslie Fiedler comments on *Edgard Huntly*)¹⁷

John Neal and G. W. Simms are writers of this kind of "atrocious" romances. Their ingredients are sensuality, hatred, delirium, rape, insanity and murder.

It was Edgard Allan Poe the first writer that made terror not just a matter of ingredients but the subject of proper art.

"If in any of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany but of the soul", (preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*)

Poe was concerned about the ease which those sensation tales could degenerate into the absurd and in a mechanical and imitative way. He satirized them in "How to write a Blackwood article" (1.838).

"Sensations are the great thing after all. Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make a note of your sensations. They will be worth to you ten Guineas a sheet"¹⁸

Poe continued Brockden Brown's vision of man as a victim of his own impulses and terrors. "How total is our blindness in regard to our performances. We are all sleepwalkers" had said Edgar Huntly. It is not the polite terror of Ann Radcliffe, men can really die of terror. And it is not women who feel scared, but, for the first time, men. Now there are trembling men scared by women in "the Fall of the House of Usher", "Berenice" and "Ligeia". So terror is not just something attributed to the typical weaknesses of the fair sex, but it is universal, and affects man, the traditional holder of power and strength.

Perhaps Poe tried to write in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* a book of travels, but he wrote a tale of violence. It is a chamber of horrors: in the mutiny the crew have their heads chopped off, Dirk Peters is about to die in the shipwreck because a rope is cutting his stomach, Arthur's friend rots away, what it looks a Dutch sailor turns to be a corpse being eaten by birds.

Life in the wilderness does not end up in innocence but in horror, violence and betrayal. Unlike English gothic, American horror is not supernatural but physical.

Arthur, rather than feeling like an explorer, seems to feel a lust for death, he does not look for a place to settle down. The book is an anti-western disguised as western, every cliché is ironically exposed: the dog-man's best friend turns into a monster which is about to kill master, the loyal crew are mutinies, the bird of hope drops a liver-like substance, the smile of hospitality of the captain of the ship is the smile of death.

In this book we find one major theme of the American gothic: the Negro, the half-breed. Brockden Brown had said of them: "I never looked upon, or called upon, the image of a savage without shuddering"¹⁹.

All the black characters in Poe's book are described as monsters or demons. In the last journey, when they are getting nearer the Pole, instead of finding Eskimos, Arthur finds a race of savages which are negroes by description (even their teeth are black). He has found a realm of the domination of the black, who try to kill him and his friends. Black people are not tame but a menace.

Melville in "Benito Cereno" shows a similar version of the black man. A whole crew of black men and women, who pretend to be loyal, kill most of the white men on board in cold blood. Captain Delano thinks evil can come only from European aristocrats, but trusts the negroes. And more than the third part of this short story is a fictitious plot imposed by the negro servant Babo. Atufal's chains are a charade.

The menace of Europe was its past, its symbols, the ghost and the haunted castle. But the menace for the American white people is the negro, who, in the fiction of the white man, rebels against him with the same violence with which the white man had subdued them. The negroes then, turned out to be, not faithful and tame, but cruel and brutal. Almost at the end of the story, Captain Delano asks Benito Cereno:

"What has cast such a shadow upon you?"

"The Negro"²⁰

That is the answer of the Spanish Captain. Even after Babo's death, he seems to hold the power, since his head, "fixed on a pole on the Plaza" omnipotently looks towards the places where Aranda and Delano were buried.

Apart from the Negro, the Faustian hero and the diabolic bargain are the other major themes of American gothic fiction. The gothic hero-villain, the haunted persecutor is blended into the image of Faust that stands for the lonely individual in the act of defiance. Selling one's soul to the evil is to choose to be damned (as long as forever is). Damnation means the acceptance of the eternal torment of the soul.

In the *Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne, a man of church is led by the desire of a woman to almost (Hawthorne repented at the last moment) sell his soul to the devil. Dimmesdale is about to be the prey of the "black man" who lives in the

forest, the black man carries a book with him and he makes people to have their names written with blood on that book.

The atmosphere of *The Scarlet Letter* is heavily gothic, its characters are fiendish, like Pearl or Chillingworth, there is witchcraft, secret sins. The characters are made of shadows, they even doubt of the other's reality. Hester appears described in the following way:

"It was only the darkened house which could contain her. When sunshine came, she was not there"(21) (Poe had advised incritical impatience, to "get a bottle of visible ink".)

At the heart of the book, in the episode of the forest, where the satanic bargain is about to take place:

"Am I mad? or am I given utterly to the fiend? Did I make a contract with him in the forest, and sign it with my own blood?"

Says Dimmesdale and the narrator comments :

"The wretched minister!. He had made a bargain very like it! Tempted by a dream of happiness, he had yielded himself with deliberate choice, as he had never done before, to what he knew was deadly sin."²²

However, it was Melville who fully developed the non-repentant Faustian hero. In him, like in Poe, the tale of adventures only reveals the illusion of heroism, defiance to the elements is the last diabolic temptation. The traditional hero's role is to abandon home in order to face difficulties and to return home with knowledge and power, but the gothic vision presents this quest as problematic, the gothic hero is damned and has not possibility of returning. After abandoning the good place, the utopian Kingdom of Serenia, Taji from *Mardi* says "Let me, then, be, the unreturning wanderer"²³.

All Faustian heroes must die with blasphemy on their lips and damnation in their souls, and so does Jackson in *Redburn*, Ahab in *Moby Dick*, and Pierre in the book by the same name. This last character says:

"Now, 'tis merely hell in both worlds. Well, be it hell."²⁴

Melville was well aware of the appeal of evil. "The infernal nature has a value often denied to innocence". He had written once.

The child-hero in *Huckleberry Finn* is imprisoned in his independence as well, he is doomed not to find a home. Flight is his goal, down the river he only finds violence, the river seems to be a stage for fugitives and persecutors.

Like Melville's characters, Huck chooses hell rather than heaven and because he is a child he does it for the sake of amusement. When Miss Watson, an old maid,

is trying to teach him to behave, and tells him she would like to go to heaven, to the good place, he thinks:

"Well, I couldn't see no advantage in where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it."²⁵

All Huck wants is going somewhere, as he says, he is not particular. Like in *Moby Dyck* song:

"In the Indian Ocean
Or Pacific Ocean
No matter what Ocean
Pull ahead, you heave"²⁶

Huck ends up as a wanderer, he cannot fit in the heaven that civilized society has created. More than that, he accepts damnation to be true to his nature. He thinks that he does evil in helping the slave Jim, but he does it nevertheless, not for altruism, but because he would go to hell for anything he liked, as smoking or cursing. He is a child-Faust that inspires tenderness because he has to accept his damnation within the simple world of childhood. When he has to make the decision, he says:

"All right then, I'll go to hell". And then he thinks:

"It was awful thoughts, and awful words, but they was said. And I let them said; and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head; and I said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't"²⁷

In the majority of English novels, characters at the start want improvement, are not yet defined and their self takes definition through what happens in society. That is why gothic literature, whose heroes escape from civilization, was not very important in England. If Robinson Crusoe abandons his home and finds isolation, he is not excited by this, but by the possibilities of economic improvement. Pamela, Clarissa, Tom Jones, Jane Austen's heroines, the characters of Dickens's, of Hardy's novels, can be victims of their own mistakes or of circumstances, but American characters are victims of their own wickeness or obsessions.

The complex and traditional system of rules in a society created an indoors novel in England, whereas the anguish of man facing wilderness created an outdoors gothic romance. If gothic fiction in England is almost just an historical curiosity, American literature used gothic conventions to invest with horror the vision of a chaotic and lost world, as a means of expressing such deep issues of American history as the guilt of the revolutionist, the relationships with the Indian and the Negro and with nature. Darkness is proclaimed the realm of literature on the basis that freedom is damnation.

Another example that illustrates the way in which the American imagination relates knowledge to the occult are the words Melville uses (referring to Emerson):

"I love all men who dive, and the whole corps of thought divers, that have been diving and coming up with blood-shot eyes since the world began"²⁸

American fiction first found its realm "not in a palatial stage whereon to play its part" says the narrator of *Billy Bud*, but "down among the groundlings, among the beggars and the rakers of the garbage", there, "profound passion is enacted."²⁹

Gothic conventions did not only provided writers with a literary channel to deal with their history: to give vent to the calvinistic sense of innate depravity, to translate into symbols an hostile nature or the cruelty to the Indian and the Negro. It was an ironic mode that attacked literary assumptions: the heroic ideals of native life are presented as equivocal or problematic, the tale of adventures becomes a descent to hell; romances are essays on moral diseases, experiments in which pure extreme human values are set loose; short stories are constructed on the basis on a situation that will be totally reversed, they portray the consequences of uncontrollable invading forces.

Characters are shadows (Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*). The boundaries between person and person are abrogated, people are always turning into each other (Brockden Brown's *Edgard Huntly*, *Wieland* or *the Transformation*). Or they suddenly turn into their opposite opposite (Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"). Or they are victims of their own fears (Poe's "Berenice", "The House of Usher", "The Tell-Tale heart"). Racial groups live in separate reigns (Poe's *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Melville's "Benito Cereno"). The environment is always a trap for the characters. The relationships between the characters are founded on misconceptions. Everywhere the revolt of traditional fixed concepts: the role of the hero, the behaviour of institutions, nature. It is the revolt of identity, of faith, of objects, of reliance on the characters's view. Reality is presented as a deceptive screen. The American dream turns into the Faustian nightmare.

This genre's social reference is not limited to abuses and hierarchies of the past: it supplied metaphors for human experience.

NOTES

1 Pleasurable, not cathartic. Aristotle suggested that piety and fear should be provoked so that the soul could be unburdened of these passions. The end was to purify, to alleviate. However, the aim of the writers of this period is to fill the reader's soul with passions. Emotional intensity as an end, not as a means. Anyway, Aristotle referred to "horror" as a consequence of witnessing a violent unexpected action in a tragedy, whereas pre-romantic philosophers meant "terror" as well, the fear that produces the supernatural.

2 DENNIS, John; *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, (1704) (Boulton, London, 1958), p.52

3 BURKE, Edmund; *A Philosophical Enquire into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, (University of Notre Dame Press, London, 1958), p. 39

4 BURKE, (1958), p.60

5 LEVEY, Michael; *From Giotto to Cézane. A Concise History of Painting*, (Thames and Hudson, 1985), p.241.

6 LEVEY, (1985), p.243.

7 VAUGHAN, William; *Romantic Art*, (Thames and Hudson, 1985), p.49.

8 LUCIE-SMITH, Edward; *Symbolist Art*, (Thames and Hudson, 1986), p.25.

9 VAUGHAN, (1985), p.79.

10 VAUGHAN, (1985), p.98.

11 VAUGHAN, (1985) p.144.

12 According to Todorov the fantastic seems to have occurred in a relatively narrow historical period, that of the gothic novel and in a brief aftermath. The basis of the fantastic based on the hesitation experimented by the reader and sometimes by the character as to how to interpret the weird element. If the supernatural receives a natural explanation, it becomes the "uncanny". If the supernatural has to be accepted as supernatural, the result is the "marvellous". In Ann Radcliffe's romances, the fantastic is, then, turned into the uncanny at the very end of the narrative, since all the strange facts are eventually attributed to trickery. See TODOROV, Tzvetan; *Introducción a la literatura fantástica*, (Ediciones Buenos Aires, 1982), p.43-44, and BROOKE-ROSE, Christine; *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986.

13 FIEDLER, Leslie A.; *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Paladin, 1970), pp.121-122.

14 HAWTHORNE, Nathaniel; *The Marble Faun*, (New American Library, 1961) p.vi.

15 HAWTHORNE, Nathaniel; *The Scarlet Letter* (Penguin English Library, 1983), p.66.

16 Quoted in LEASE, Benjamin; *Anglo-American Encounters. England and the Rise of American Literature*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), p.116.

17 FIEDLER, (1970), p.149.

18 Quoted in LEASE, (1981), p.73.

19 Quoted in LEASE, (1981), p.150.

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