1952

The Materials and Methods of American Horror Fiction in the Nineteenth Century.

Winfred S. Emmons

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation


https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/8027

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
THE MATERIALS AND METHODS OF AMERICAN HORROR FICTION
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Winfred S. Emmons, Jr.
B. A., Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, 1947
M. A., University of Virginia, 1949
June, 1952
MANUSCRIPT TESSES

Unpublished theses submitted for the master's and doctor's degrees and deposited in the Louisiana State University Library are available for inspection. Use of any thesis is limited by the rights of the author. Bibliographical references may be noted, but passages may not be copied unless the author has given permission. Credit must be given in subsequent written or published work.

A library which borrows this thesis for use by its clientele is expected to make sure that the borrower is aware of the above restrictions.

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author's thanks first go to his wife, Ethel Moore Emmons, who has endured the rigors attendant on a student's wife for six years and who typed this dissertation for him. He also appreciates deeply the aid and encouragement of Dr. Arlin Turner, who seemed to share the author's enthusiasm for his topic and who directed the study in such a manner as to promote intellectual growth as well as to produce a completed manuscript. Thanks are also due to Dr. H. B. Woolf and Dr. John H. Wildman for reading the study and for their valuable suggestions. Mr. McMullen and his entire staff of the Circulation Department and Mrs. Campbell of the Louisiana Room have been as helpful as possible in making the resources of this library available to the author; Mrs. Dyson and Miss Walling of the Reference Department have been equally helpful in securing books from other libraries, and the author wishes to express his appreciation to these as well. Finally, to Dr. Thomas A. Kirby and the entire graduate faculty of the Department of English, goes the author's gratitude for creating an atmosphere in which it is good to work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................. iv

CHAPTER I
Introduction .................................................. 1

CHAPTER II
Physical Horror ................................................. 20

CHAPTER III
Science and Pseudo-Science ................................... 46

CHAPTER IV
The Evil Genius ................................................ 74

CHAPTER V
The Use of Setting .............................................. 100

CHAPTER VI
The Sensor ...................................................... 141

CHAPTER VII
Abnormal Psychology .......................................... 179

CHAPTER VIII
The Other World ................................................ 207

CHAPTER IX
Witchcraft and the Dark Worship ............................. 230

CHAPTER X
Fear of the Malevolent Dead .................................. 251

CHAPTER XI
Minor Themes ................................................... 270

CHAPTER XII
The Object of Fear ............................................. 289

CHAPTER XIII
Résumé ......................................................... 331

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................. 347

VITA ............................................................ 358
ABSTRACT

The field of horror literature has been covered more than once; Miss Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* is recognized as an authority on the Gothic novel, Miss Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* is noteworthy for the number of titles it includes and for its synopses of stories, and Montague Summers's *The Gothic Quest* presents the Gothic novel with special reference to M. G. Lewis. In addition to these scholarly treatments, there is the brief, appreciative study by H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. Each of these studies has its own merit, but none of them is concerned with the development of the concept of literary horror over a period of time. Shifts from the supernatural to the psychological are noted, but a more minute analysis of theme has been lacking. In addition, no very satisfactory differentiation of the Gothic romance from the modern horror story has been made. The initial purpose of this study was merely to determine the materials and methods employed in the production of literary horror in nineteenth century American literature; a consideration of methods and materials has made it possible to set up a basis for differentiation between Gothic romance and horror story
in terms of increasing materialism and a more exact concept of the physical universe, both well-known contributions of the nineteenth century to human thought.

The study began with a review of horror literature already known to the author and continued with the American authors of horror stories mentioned by Lovecraft in his book. The primary concern of this study was not with materials—the supernatural, the psychological, and the physical—but with effects. The supernatural was not considered merely because it was supernatural or the psychological solely because it was psychological; each was considered only as it was treated to produce horror or allied emotions in the reader, or as it seemed to be so treated. The best horror stories were found in the collected works of the main authors dealt with in this study; others, whose merit ranges from reasonably good to beneath contempt, were discovered in files of Harper's Magazine, Graham's Magazine, The Knickerbocker, and The Southern Literary Messenger. Obviously, no pretense is made at complete coverage of the periodicals, but enough were consulted to give a representative picture of editorial and public tastes in horror fiction and fiction approaching horror.

Through the time of Edgar Allan Poe, the American horror story was a blend of psychological aberration with
atrocious physical descriptions of various aspects of
death; Gothic supernaturalism hung on rather strongly
till about 1860. After Poe, the bogie was reintroduced
by Fitz-James O'Brien and with the revived ghost it went
through a process of development in effect which culmi­
nated in the closing years of the century in "No. 252
Rue M. le Prince" of Ralph Adams Cram and The Turn of
the Screw of Henry James. The change in materials was
paralleled by a change in methods; the early aloofness
of the author from his material was corrected by Poe,
who brought his readers much closer to his literary
horror than any author had previously done; this success
was achieved by means of acute analysis of sensations in
Poe's curiously autobiographical central characters.

The greatest change, however, involves not materials
and methods but philosophical framework; it is on the
basis of a shift from the optimistic concept of the uni­
verse in the early years of the nineteenth century to a
pessimistic concept in the later years that the modern
horror story is primarily to be distinguished from the
Gothic tale. The optimistic tradition tended to center
about the science-fiction story, while the pessimistic
point of view found its outlet in the horror story, which
tended to be laid against an evil or at least an indif­
ferent universe.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

I

It is not likely that any definition of the horror story will meet universal approval, for each writer and each reader must regard horror in the light of his own peculiar complex of personality and experience. Material which evokes horror in one person may achieve much less profound effects in another. Hence, a completely satisfactory definition of the horror story in terms of material is impossible; but it is the effect that is important, and in the final analysis, it is in terms of effect that the horror story must be defined. This final analysis, unfortunately, must be made by each person in his own way, and is useless for a study such as this one. It is therefore necessary to return to material as the prime basis for definition, even though opinions must remain divided as to the effect achieved by a given body of material. Such disagreements, as a matter of fact, may be stated in terms of degree rather than as total oppositions. Most persons familiar with American literature would agree on certain authors generally classified as writers of horror fiction, though they would disagree as to the rank of these authors in terms of effect and which of their stories achieve the greatest horror.
In a sense this entire study may be considered a definition of the horror story, stated in terms of examples chosen largely from nine authors: Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fitz-James O'Brien, Ambrose Bierce, Robert W. Chambers, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Ralph Adams Cram, and F. Marion Crawford. But the stories of these authors vary widely in the profundity of the effects achieved, and other writers merit some discussion because of the effects they achieved on occasion. Since this study makes some attempt at evaluating the stories considered, the basis for evaluation needs to be stated. The author's criterion is borrowed from H. P. Lovecraft, a modern master of the horror tale, who states the material of horror as follows:

The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part. The phenomenon of dreaming likewise helped to build up the notion of an unreal or spiritual world; and in general, all the conditions of savage dawn-life so strongly conduced toward a feeling of the supernatural, that we need not wonder at the thoroughness with which man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition. That saturation must, as a matter of plain scientific fact, be regarded as virtually permanent so far as the subconscious mind and inner instincts are concerned; for though the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos,
whilst a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings round all the objects and processes that were once mysterious; however well they may now be explained.

This material of the unknown, Lovecraft goes on to say, is the material of horror fiction, or as he says, a "literature of cosmic fear."

Emotional effect, though untrustworthy as a criterion by which to select individual tales, is yet too valuable to be dismissed entirely, for it may be made to serve as a standard for distinguishing the modern horror story from its predecessors. Another statement of Lovecraft's concerning the effect of the horror story, or as he says in this passage, the "weird tale," may be useful in this connection:

... we must judge a weird tale not by the author's intent, or by the mere mechanics of the plot; but by the emotional level which it attains at its least mundane point. If the proper sensations are excited, such a "high spot" must be admitted on its own merits as weird literature, no matter how prosaically it is later dragged down. The one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim. And of course,

the more completely and unifiedly a story conveys this atmosphere, the better it is as a work of art in the given medium.²

It is partly on the basis of the emotional level attained that the modern horror story is to be differentiated from the older Gothic romance; Miss Edith Birkhead discusses the two types of stories as they were one, in her book, The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance, but it is the contention of this study that the two are distinct types. Although the ends of both are broadly the same and although the Gothic romance is indubitably the direct forerunner of the modern horror story, the two are distinct; the cleavage is most spectacularly apparent in America in the stories of Poe as differentiated from earlier stories aiming at horror or fear. Purely in terms of emotional level, Poe surpassed all who had come before him, but this achievement does not necessarily distinguish him from the Gothic romancers; from one point of view, as a matter of fact, it would tend to place him at the head of the writers of Gothic tales, for in his settings and in some of his actions, Poe is a lineal descendant of the Goths. It is rather in the totality of atmosphere of a Poe tale that the difference lies, and an important element of the atmosphere of Poe's stories is the sense of an evil and alien universe; Poe's Gothic

²Ibid., p. 16.
trappings have an atmosphere of their own, but it is a limited atmosphere and differs from those of the Gothic romancers only in artistic superiority. From the dismal castles of the Goths, however, there is escape into a world of sunlight and normality; superior to all the evil, there is God. But as an anonymous critic remarked of Poe's stories, "God seems dead," and it is in the deadness of God that the modern horror story is to be distinguished from the older Gothic tale.\[3\]

This is not to say that American Gothic tales have been ignored in this study, although no effort has been made to cover them completely; enough of them appear in the periodicals to indicate that their vogue did not come into immediate disfavor after the time of Poe, but with few exceptions, the most notable of which are some of the tales of F. Marion Crawford, the later Gothic tales have not appeared good enough to anthologists to warrant their inclusion in collections. Their immediate materials are not noticeably different from those of the horror stories, but their philosophic frame of reference, the romantically optimistic and benevolent universe in which they are placed, helps to prevent their achieving the high emotional level which is demanded by Lovecraft's criterion.

---

The title of Lovecraft's book, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, appears to limit literary horror somewhat rigidly. Yet, in the stories of Poe, whom Lovecraft recognizes as a master, the horror often stems, not from the supernatural but from the psychological. The madness of Egaeus of "Berenice" and the atmosphere of "Shadow: A Parable," to choose two examples at random, are based on states of mind, and it is therefore obvious that the material of horror fiction cannot be limited to the supernatural, but rather to the more inclusive area of the unknown, whether supernatural, psychological, or the purely physical but unfamiliar. Lovecraft also states that the horror of the unknown lies in its unpredictability, and in this unpredictability seems to lie the key to a satisfactory definition of the horror story, at least in terms of material.

Inability to predict postulates an inability to control, and faced with uncontrollable powers, man is reduced to nothing. His ego is annihilated, and to the Western mind, annihilation is one of the worst of all horrors. The material of a horror story, then, must somehow be related to man's helplessness and pitiable smallness in the face of cosmic forces; these may be leagued to destroy him, but more probably they ignore him completely, merely destroying him when his existence becomes impossible, for it is a well-known theorem that man and certain other entities cannot
occupy the same space at the same time, as the extinct dodo
bird might testify. In other situations, man himself is
weak and must yield to the same geometry; much of the
horror in literature has just such a soulless basis. On
the other hand, the destroying force may be overtly malevo-
lent, but such an attribute is not at all necessary to the
material of horror. The essential thing is that man shall
be helpless in the face of forces which may destroy him,
and a story based on this eternal and unequal struggle con-
tains the materials of horror.

The science-fiction story also deals with the unknown,
but it assumes man's ability to analyze it; through analysis,
the unknown can be predicted and eventually controlled.
Even in such stories, fine effects of horror may be achieved
before the analysis leading to control has been made, and
as Lovecraft says, such "high points" stand on their own
merits as horror literature. But in terms of total effect,
the victory over the unknown, which the formula for the
science-fiction story demands, cancels out the horror which
may have been built up earlier. These stories, however,
cannot be said to fail as horror stories, for the intention
is not to produce horror, except to serve as a contrast to
the final victory over the unknown. Other stories do ap-
parently aim at horror but fall short of it for various
reasons. Even though the material may be drawn from the
unknown, and the basic element of man's helplessness before unknown cosmic forces may be present, the method, if faulty, will prevent full exploitation of the material, and the effect will fall short of horror. The modern horror story, then, may be defined as a story dealing with the material of the unknown, supernatural or not; presenting man as helpless and threatened with destruction by mysterious forces; and treating its material in such a way that its potentialities are more or less fully realized. So considered, a horror story is an achievement within a genre which may be called the literature of the unusual.

II

In America, the tradition of the horror story may be considered to have begun with Charles Brockden Brown; and the trend away from the Gothic is already evident, particularly in his Wieland, which he considered to be a serious work, illustrating "some important branches of the moral constitution of man," rather than a novel in the Gothic tradition. William Dunlap, Brown's first biographer, concurs with Brown's own estimate:

In this work, the author, rejecting those events which flow from causes well known and constantly in operation, among men in society (which form the best and most useful groundwork for this species of composition), and discarding the hack-need machinery of castles, banditti and ghosts, took a new and untrodden ground. He made the events of his story depend upon, and flow from, two of those wonderful phenomena of the moral and
physical world, which, though known and established, were still mysterious and undefined; and though vouched for by unquestionable authorities, are of such rare occurrence, as not to be familiar, or even fully accounted for.  

Nevertheless, Brown was entirely conscious of the nature of the material he was dealing with, and was somewhat apologetic about it. "The incidents related are extraordinary and rare," he says. "Some of them, perhaps, approach as nearly to the nature of miracles as can be done by that which is not truly miraculous. It is hoped that intelligent readers will not disapprove of the manner in which appearances are solved, but that the solution will be found to correspond with the known principles of human nature." Continuing, he reviews the wonders he is to portray, one by one, stating that they are not to be denied, even though they are rare, and he concludes this portion of the "Advertisement" to Wieland with the remark: "If history furnishes one parallel fact, it is a sufficient vindication of the Writer."

Completely aside from this rather naive idea of what constitutes fit material for fiction, it is obvious that the objective cast of Brown's mind is no qualification for writing the type of horror fiction which Lovecraft states

---

to be the highest; it is further evident that Brown's reaction against the Gothic school is an intellectual one, a deliberate turning away from "hacknied" devices grown hoary with age. Nevertheless, Brown does make use, though briefly, of the "Gothic shudder," and thus demonstrates a certain definite though timid sympathy with the more blatantly Gothic of the romancers. Brown's effort to deviate from the trend of the Gothic romance is thus incomplete and lacks any substantial basis in attitude toward the older material; mere dissatisfaction with extravagant fiction and its excesses and a deliberate effort to turn away from them may not suffice to initiate a new trend. A different point of view is required, and Edgar Allan Poe was the first American writer to possess it.

In the writings of Poe, there is no deliberate effort to deviate from the practices of his Gothic predecessors; in fact, his debt to them is obvious and substantial. But in Poe's larger setting, for the first time, horror becomes the norm rather than an accident. His protagonists move through a world in which every element contributes to an unwholesome total effect. "Misery is manifold," says Egaeus of "Berenice." "The wretchedness of earth is multiform. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow, its hues are as various as the hues of that arch, as distinct
too, yet as intimately blended. . . . How is it that from beauty I have derived a type of unloveliness?” 5 This is the most comprehensive statement by one of Poe's characters about his total environment, but elements of it are seen in many of the other stories on which Poe's fame rests. The "large, old decaying city near the Rhine" where the narrator of "Ligeia" first met his loved one projects its influence through the entire story. Even in the beauty which Poe portrays at times there may be decay: "But one autumnal evening, when the winds lay still in heaven, Morella called me to her bedside. There was a dim mist over all the earth, and a warm glow upon the waters, and, amid the rich October leaves of the forest, a rainbow from the firmament had surely fallen." 6 There are, of course, the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grasses of "Eleanora" and "The Domain of Arnheim," but even these paradises which Poe depicts make evident the prevalent and normal evil and horror of his universe; they are too ordered, too artificial, to represent the normal in any sense, and seem to represent instead a pathetic attempt of man to construct beauty and order in the midst of a chaotic and malevolent cosmos.


6 Ibid., p. 30.
If this picture of the universe were confined to horror literature, it could be dismissed, perhaps, as an interesting phenomenon but not of any necessary importance. But two of the greatest of our native writers, neither of whom owes his reputation to his accomplishments as a writer of horror stories, reinforce Poe's picture of the evil universe, though from a moral and a philosophic point of view. One of these is Hawthorne. Discounting completely the melancholy which runs through all of his works, there is a complete though rudimentary philosophy of the universe in such stories as "The Minister's Black Veil" and "Young Goodman Brown," to name two of the best examples. Elsewhere, Hawthorne may probe into folly; often he is good-humored in his probing, as in "Feathertop" and elsewhere. In "The Minister's Black Veil" and "Young Goodman Brown," however, it is not folly with which Hawthorne is concerned, but sin and evil. He portrays them as universal, and instead of the usual all-pervasive melancholy, there is a profound despair in these stories, deriving from the universality of evil. Since Hawthorne's concept of evil is based on the concept of sin, it is closely related to Poe's view of the universe, which derives from the abnormal personality of the protagonist. Less closely related to humanity is the cosmic allegory of Melville, in which all the real universe is depicted as a mask covering a malevolent unknown. In Moby Dick this concept is closely bound
to the personality of Ahab, but does not depend on it so closely as do those of Poe and Hawthorne on their protagonist.

Important though both Hawthorne and Melville are to the differentiation of the modern horror story from the older Gothic romance, neither is to be considered as primarily a writer of horror fiction, although in the final analysis both dealt with horror in a purer form than have some other writers to whom horror has been the chief goal and concern. Both were relatively independent of the emotion which is allied to horror but must be distinguished from it, fear: and their horror is thus presented more starkly than is that of Bierce, for instance, in whose stories the horror must dispute the ground with an object overtly terrible. The horror of Hawthorne's stories derives from orthodox Christian theology and the universality of sin; his objects of fear are rather symbols of the ultimate evil than immediately fearsome in themselves, and as symbols they evoke horror rather than the specialized emotion of fear. Because of its close relation to the more florid utterances of evangelical preachers, Hawthorne's horror has probably experienced a wider acceptance than has that of any other writer, and in part because it is the byproduct of a broader purpose than the mere production of shudders, the presentation of a picture of the moral universe.
The more important American writers of horror fiction who came after Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville have tended to adopt their pessimistic view of the universe and to use it as a frame for their stories. Like Poe and Hawthorne, Bierce sees the universe darkly in terms of the humanity which inhabits it, though he is equally cognizant of man's utter insignificance; the despair which underlies his view of things is probably related to the determinism which runs so strongly through some of his stories. Robert W. Chambers differentiates between the normal world of men and another abnormal world of loathsome horror, which is capable of entering this one and destroying it; Ralph Adams Cram depicts a world similar to the abnormal world of Chambers as tangent to the known earth. There is no feeling that it is possible to escape evil in these stories, after one is entangled in it; the Gothic villain might succumb to cold steel and a brave heart, if a man, or to a wrathful and vengeful God, if a devil; but in these modern tales of horror, the evil will not down. At best, it continues co-existent with the normal world of men; at worst, it may destroy it.

III

The main portion of this study is analytical; broad themes are taken out of their contexts and discussed in whatever way seems most suitable. It has been impossible to go into the minute detail which some of the material
demands if full justice is to be done to it, and indeed, more than one sizable volume would have been required in order to present such a detailed study covering the entirety of nineteenth century American horror literature. Only in the twelfth chapter is the analytical method abandoned for the synthetic, and there all the material previously covered is related to the focus for horror-literature which is also fear-literature—the object of fear. Horror can and does exist without fear, as in a contemplation of the universe by Melville's Captain Ahab, but such horror is often not recognized, and as a matter of fact tends to be little read. Most horror literature does contain a large proportion of fear, and probably because it presents horror through the medium of fear, it possesses the merit of greater popularity.

This is to say that the story which attains the profoundest horror is not necessarily accorded the widest popularity, although the public loves the strange and the wonderful in literature, and anthologists see that these elements are supplied generously. The most popular writers of the nineteenth century, to judge from their tales which are anthologized, are those who deal with horror in their writings. The horror stories omitted from the anthologies, however, are as noteworthy as those included. Poe's "The Truth in the Case of M. Valdemar," which is probably his greatest achievement in horror literature, is rather
consistently passed over in favor of "The Gold Bug" and the other tales of ratiocination, or of "The Fall of the House of Usher" or "Ligeia." The last two stories mentioned are in truth horror tales, but not so obviously so as "Valdemar"; they tend to be considered as tales of atmospheric effect, dealing with the strange and wonderful, rather than primarily as literature of horror. "Valdemar" brings us into direct contact with the world of the dead, which is rather strong meat for the public, or so some anthologists have felt. Poe himself considered certain subjects too horrible to deal with in literature, or at least he said that he did, and concluded "Premature Burial" with the resolution to shun such morbid fancies in the future as too conducive to nightmare. Further, "The Death of Halpin Frayser," which is probably the highest achievement of Ambrose Bierce's art, is not nearly so well known as his stock anthology-pieces like "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" or "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot"; similarly, "The Damned Thing" is easier to come by in collections devoted entirely to horror or entirely to Bierce than in more general collections.

Although far from frequent, close relatives of the horror story occur fairly steadily through the periodicals consulted for this study; it is well known that Poe published his works largely in periodicals and in gift-books,
and Fitz-James O'Brien also contributed to the periodical literature of his day. Later, Ambrose Bierce, who was primarily a journalist by profession, saw many of his shorter and less completely finished pieces printed in periodicals, but his best-known tales achieved greater permanence by appearing in two volumes, *In the Midst of Life and Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, printed in 1892, and *Can Such Things Be?,* printed in 1893. Thus, the works of the major authors, not to speak of a host of minor ones who dealt with horror in literature, or who at least attempted to, were generally available throughout the century in periodicals, and most of them also appeared in collected editions.

The more ephemeral of this literature, particularly the Gothic survivals, may be paralleled with the romanticism prevailing through most of the century; the violence and blood of the Gothic tale found its counterpart in the literature of Indian massacres, which had its ultimate origin in such writings as Mary Rowlandson's narrative, published in 1682, and in accounts of the Indian wars. Such material was used, outside of the Gothic short stories, primarily in tales of adventure. The better stories, however, such as most of those which have survived, were closer to horror, tended to be essentially realistic in their philosophy, and constituted a counter-current to romanticism. The evil universe revealed by Hawthorne, Poe, and
Melville preserves all the pessimism of Puritanism while admitting almost none of its optimism, and stands at an antipode to the self-reliant courage called for by Emerson and his fellow Transcendentalists; what has been called the "noble drool" of Bronson Alcott must have rung curiously hollow on the ears of Poe's protagonists. Though the horror story is realistic in its insistence on the existence of the unknown, whether supernatural or existing within man himself, it is as out of touch with the modern apostles of material progress as with the historical romancers and the Transcendentalists.

Doubtless, errors of omission occur in this study. But it is unlikely that such omitted stories, even if included, would affect the conclusions very profoundly; the authors treated here are the best-known writers of the horror story and forms related to it in America, and their stories have received wider recognition than most of those which closer examination may reveal to have been omitted. Literature as a whole serves to mirror its age, and the horror story in particular reflects the sort of uneasiness to which its period is prone. One approach to knowledge of the character of a man is to determine what he fears; in this sense, the horror story is a part of social history, and trends in its history are related to stages in the thought processes of the people who read it. These are the
readily admissible *raisons d'être* for this study; there is one other, perhaps less respectable, which is merely that the author has had a lifelong interest in horror literature.
CHAPTER II

PHYSICAL HORROR

I

The mere juxtaposition of the words "physical" and "horror" poses a dilemma which it is impossible to escape, for the entire concept of horror, by definition, transcends the physical. Horror is also most subjective in the realm of the physical. It is possible that certain psychological archetypes might be found common to the race, or at least to particular communities within the race, and insofar as such archetypes might be identified, some of them would be found related to horror within the race or the community. But there is no predicting what archetypes individuals might associate with the physically objective, and therefore a complete catalog of objective stimuli to horror for all individuals would probably exhaust the catalog of all possible stimuli. In every case, the emotion of horror produced by a given objective stimulus consists of an irrational response, and being irrational, it defies analysis, as Poe recognized. The resulting horror, then, must always be ultimately supra-physical in nature, but it may be called forth by stimuli as objective and as common as a caterpillar in a garden or the act of dying.

Another difficulty in dealing with physical horror is that there is an exceedingly ill-defined area in which mere
thrill and full-blown horror are inextricably mingled. One example of such a situation is that in which Tom Sawyer finds himself in the same building with the murderous Injun Joe; others, which may be mentioned generically rather than individually, may be found in any reasonably competent mystery story and even in many detective stories. Needless to say, the degree of sophistication of a reader will always be a main factor in determining the horror content of such situations, or, indeed, of any situation.

A third difficulty is that of the sheer bulk of such peripheral material, which is found in works making no pretence to be horror fiction. Because such material is commonplace in fiction and most often has only a minor role, all such examples have been ignored in this study, although many of them achieve very fine effects. It might also be pointed out that those who achieve such occasional effects are amateurs of horror and not the writers who make it their business to deal in large part with horror and its associates, mystery and wonder.

Within the material of avowed horror fiction, the physical elements may be resolved into two main groups. The first of these, completely physical and involving tangible elements, is probably the most universal type of physical incitement to horror. All such material is related ultimately to death in some way. Within the
second group are the elements related to the senses and normally presented through description or analysis of sensations. Examples in this second category are treated in a later chapter, in context and consequently more effectively than would be possible here. This chapter, therefore, is limited to the first class of physical horror, that related to death.

II

Death is the ultimate physical horror, even in the abstract; death objectified in a dead body is more horrible yet; but the dead body in a state of decay and under the assault of lower forms of life is most horrible of all, as John Donne well knew. The body in a state of decay is capable of registering its effect on all the senses, and though the sense of taste is not actually used by any of the authors considered here, it is the only one which is not; there is an extremely close approach to it, however, in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym. The theme of putrefaction, so richly endowed with possibilities for literary horror, appeared early in the American novel, in Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland.

The putrefaction of Wieland is rendered more horrible by its taking place before he is dead. "Fever and delirium terminated in lethargic slumber, which in the course of two hours gave place to death. Yet not till insupportable
S3

exhalations and crawling putrefaction had driven from his chamber and the house every one whom their duty did not detain."¹ This rare circumstance of the premature putrefaction, we gather from Brown's note, was borrowed from current medical lore and did not originate with him.² Later we find Brown using putrefaction in a more ordinary manner in Wallace's narration, in Arthur Mervyn, of his awakening in the pest-house: "After a time I opened my eyes, and slowly gained some knowledge of my situation. I lay upon a mattress, whose condition proved that a half-decayed corpse had recently been dragged from it." As if this were not enough, fresh abominations are in the process of being added to the mattress: "My nearest neighbor was struggling with death, and my bed, casually extended, was moist with the detestable matter which had flowed from his stomach."³ In neither of these uses of putrefaction does Brown intend for it to stand alone, but merely to contribute to other and more important circumstances in producing a desired reaction. The putrefaction of Wieland is related to an event containing a strong element of the


² Ibid., p. 21.

³ Charles Brookden Brown, Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Year 1793 (Philadelphia: David McKay Publisher, 1887), I, 173.
supernatural, spontaneous combustion; that found in the pest-house, on the other hand, is entirely mundane, and seemingly aims as much at nausea as at anything else. The episode in Wieland is thus productive of a certain horror associated with the unknown; that in Mervyn comprises nothing completely alien to our experience, and only an awed disgust results.

Poe, who was probably as conscious of "the Conqueror Worm" as any man has ever been, wrought some extraordinarily effective horror out of his employment of the mechanics of putrefaction. In the story which he himself liked best, "Ligeia," the night preceding the climactic appearance of Ligeia in the body of Rowena of Tremaine is made horrid by the rhythmic efforts of Ligeia to possess and reanimate the dead body, which after each unsuccessful effort sinks into "a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death. . . . the colour disappeared from both eyelid and cheek, leaving a waness even more than that of marble; the lips became doubly shriveled and pinched up in the ghastly expression of death; a repulsive clamminess and coldness overspread rapidly the surface of the body; and all the usual rigorous stiffness immediately supervened." 4 To the physical and clinical description of the corpse and the horrors of

4 Poe, II, 265.
death, Poe then adds the revivification scene, piling the horror of the supernatural on that of the physical.

Another combination of the grossness of physical decay with a horror transcending the physical occurs in "The Black Cat." Here the cat has been previously depicted as a demoniac genius aiming at the destruction of the narrator, and serves almost as a supernatural climax to the physical horror. The police were demolishing the wall within which was the body of the murdered woman. "It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!"

It is in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, however, that Poe employs physical decay alone most effectively. He makes use of it twice; in one instance the horror is intensified by irony, in the other by physical proximity. The ironic use of putrefaction gives the more complete picture of the two. It occurs when the men are floating on the hulk of their ship, starving and despairing of

---

5 Ibid., V, 155.
The brig came on slowly, and no more steadily than before, and—I cannot speak calmly of this event—our hearts leaped up wildly within us, and we poured out our whole souls in shouts and thanksgiving to God for the complete, unexpected, and glorious deliverance that was so palpably at hand. Of a sudden, and all at once, there came wafted over the ocean from the strange vessel (which was now close upon us) a smell, a stench, such as the world has no name for—no conception of—hellish—utterly suffocating—insufferable, inconceivable... As she passed under our stern at the distance of about twenty feet, we had a full view of her decks. Shall I ever forget the triple horror of that spectacle? Twenty-five or thirty humans, among whom were several females, lay scattered about between the counter and the galley in the last and most loathsome stage of putrefaction. We plainly saw that not a soul lived in that fated vessel! Yet we could not help shouting to the dead for help! Yes, long and loudly did we beg, in the agony of the moment, that those silent and disgusting images would stay for us, would not abandon us to become like them, would receive us among their goodly company! We were raving with horror and despair—thoroughly mad through the anguish of our grievous disappointment.

The ship, we are informed later, remains a mystery. A derelict ship at sea with no one aboard is mystery enough, but such a ship manned by corpses is a mystery yet greater. Though it does not partake of the supernatural, it does partake of the wonderful, which is similar. Such a spectacle as the one described would nevertheless be open to serious criticism, were it done gratuitously, but the ghastly irony of a hoped-for rescue.

---

by what turns out to be a ship of death is entirely in keeping with the mood of madness and despair which Poe creates among his characters.

The other example, sans irony, derives its effect from the narrator's immediate contact with the putrefied body and from the fact that the corpse is that of a shipmate and companion in adversity. Augustus, the friend of the narrator, has finally died, after days of starvation, exposure, and endurance of the mortification which has set into a wounded arm and turned it black to the shoulder:

It was not until some time after dark that we took courage to get up and throw the body overboard. It was then loathsome beyond expression, and so far decayed that, as Peters attempted to lift it, an entire leg came off in his grasp.

The disintegration of the title character in "The Truth in the Case of M. Valdemar," however, is the most spectacular use which Poe makes of putrefaction, the spectacular quality deriving from its being instantaneous upon Valdemar's release from the mesmeric spell. Poe obviously intended the disintegration to be climactic, and it is very effective in emphasizing the length of time that the man has been dead under mesmerism, but as will be pointed out later, the greatest horror of the story does not lie in the climax; the physical is outweighed by the supernatural and metaphysical in this story.

---

7Ibid., p. 140.
Poe succeeds in getting nearer to all of his material than most of the other purveyors of horror in the nineteenth century; a partial confirmation of this statement may be seen by comparing his treatment of putrefaction with that of Ambrose Bierce. Part of the effect, of course, derives from Poe's willingness to linger over details, a quality which Bierce does not possess. In "A Tough Tussle," by Bierce, in which the principal actors are a soldier and a corpse, the corpse is examined after the soldier is found dead. "The dead do not wish to be moved--it protested with a faint, sickening odor. Where it had lain were a few maggots, manifesting an imbecile activity." 8 That is all. The same starkness of detail is apparent in "The Spook House," where it is merely stated that "The bodies were in various stages of decay, all greatly shrunken in face and figure. Some were but little more than skeletons." 9 Upon Judge Veigh's lifting one of the bodies to examine it, "A strong disagreeable odor came through the doorway, completely overpowering me." 10 Only the barest facts are given; the reader is at liberty to provide his own adjectives and purple prose.

---

9 Ibid., p. 396.
10 Ibid., p. 398.
Only in "A Holy Terror" does Bierce go beyond this meager-ness of description. Mr. Doman has upended the coffin in the grave in which he is seeking for gold, and is aroused by a faint sickening odor which he at first attributes to a rattlesnake. He then, however, becomes fully conscious of the coffin:

His creative imagination presented him a vivid picture. The planks no longer seemed an obstacle to his vision and he saw the livid corpse of the dead woman, standing in grave-clothes, and staring vacantly at him with lidless, sunken eyes. The lower jaw was fallen, the upper lip drawn away from the uncovered teeth. He could make out a mottled pattern on the hollow cheeks—the maculations of decay.

The revelation of the actual corpse, "the woman standing tranquil in her silences," adds nothing; the horror does not derive from the corpse but from Mr. Doman's imagination, which is obviously quite graphic. Here, as in "A Tough Tussle," it is imagination which endows the dead with their lethal quality, with which putrefaction has nothing to do.

Probably the most comprehensive statement of Bierce's attitude toward putrefaction, however, is his definition in The Devil's Dictionary:

EMBALM, v.t. To cheat vegetation by locking up the gases upon which it feeds. By embalming the dead and thereby deranging the natural balance between animal and vegetable life, the Egyptians made their once fertile and populous country

---

barren and incapable of supporting more than a meagre crew. The modern metallic burial casket is a step in the same direction, and many a dead man who ought now to be ornamenting his neighbor’s lawn as a tree, or enriching his table as a bunch of radishes, is doomed to a long inutility. We shall get him after awhile if we are spared, but in the meantime the violet and the rose are languishing for a nibble at his glutoeus maxima.12

True to his usual point of view, Bierce strikes through to the physical essence of the thing; there is no dignity in death, no matter how much mortals are disposed to grant it. The ultimate horror and indignity is that man, cast in the image of God by his own account, is finally destined to serve as manure, both for the utilitarian radish and for the esthetically attractive rose.

Brown made use of the premature putrefaction of Wieland, but the man, even though not dead at the time, is verging on death, and he remains decently in a bed throughout the process. Poe’s Valdemar, although capable of communication of a sort, is dead, though mesmerized into a static condition which does not permit decay. Robert W. Chambers, however, presents a dead man in an advanced stage of putrefaction who yet continues to walk about.

In “The Yellow Sign,” the narrator notices a peculiarly repulsive person who seems to be the watchman

12 Ibid., VII, 84.
for a cemetery overlooked by the narrator's studio. He first reminds the narrator of a coffin-worm, then of a fat grub in a chestnut, as he petulantly turns his head away upon feeling himself stared at. His voice has a peculiar oily quality, which is somewhat reminiscent of Valdemar's in hypnosis. His head is "soft and mushy," and one of his fingers comes off in the hand of a man who grapples with him. In the end, he collapses into a decomposed mass which has the appearance of having been dead for months. Considered separately, the watchman is merely disgusting and gruesome; as a personification of death or something worse, however, he is extremely effective as an objective correlative of something outside the ken of common terror.

Death and putrefaction in the earlier writers are merely death and putrefaction, objective, and horrible in their objectivity. Chambers's watchman is none the less horrible objectively, but the supernatural implications which hover about him are even more horrible than the object. These are apparent in the concluding passages of the story, when the watchman comes as the driver of the dream-hearse, seeking the Yellow Sign which the narrator possesses. Death and putrefaction are gruesomely poetic here.
III

Putrefaction as related to death comes stealthily; the slowness of its approach generally belies the power behind the process, so that the power goes unnoticed. Mutilation, however, indicates violent power; the physical power may at times be indicative of a correspondingly strong passion, but not always.

Wieland's slaughter of his family possesses an inherent shock quality which Brown fails to develop; the one instance of mutilation is veiled rather than revealed by the words of Clara Wieland, who says: "Louisa, whom I loved with so ineffable a passion, was denied to me at first, but my obstinacy conquered their reluctance. . . . I sought not in her visage for the tinge of the morning and the lustre of heaven. These had vanished with life; but I hoped for liberty to print a last kiss upon her lips. This was denied me; for such had been the merciless blow that destroyed her that not a lineament remained!"13 Since the murder and mutilation of the family serves no purpose other than showing the extent of the insanity of Wieland, however, perhaps it is as well that Brown did not attempt to relate the sight in detail. It would have served no particular purpose other than shock for its own sake.

---

13 Wieland, p. 178.
This very purpose is served in the mutilations on the bodies of the two women in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." The young woman's face is scratched, she has marks on her throat as if she has been throttled, and she has been stuffed bodily into the chimney. The old woman's head has been cut off completely, both body and head are fearfully mutilated (the details are not given), and several locks of her gray hair have been pulled out by the roots. From these and other facts, Dupin is able to deduce that the deed was done by an escaped orang-outang who fled from his master, brandishing a razor in his hand. Poe, then, makes use of the details of mutilation, or rather of such details as he chooses to give, to outline a picture which is then filled in by the ratiocinative powers of the hero of the story. One of Lovecraft's "high points" is reached, however, in the earlier portions of the story, while the mutilations remain mysterious, and the narrator's realization that the killer was not human is one of Poe's better effects. A similar employment of mysterious mutilations is found in Robert Montgomery Bird's Nick of the Woods; the hatchet-work discovered on slain Indians is thought to be the trademark of a supernatural forest-dweller until
the slayer is revealed to be a half-crazed Quaker.14

In both Brown and Poe, mutilation is incidental, but in Ambrose Bierce, it becomes more important. He employs mutilation as a major element in five stories, the most extended use being in "Chickamauga." In this story, the retreat of the wounded from the battlefield is described as seen by a child. He is lost and frightened until he sees the wounded creeping through the woods; when he recognizes them as men, he is no longer afraid, for his father's negroes have often walked on hands and knees for his own amusement, and he has ridden them like horses:

He now approached one of these crawling figures from behind, and with an agile movement mounted it astride. The man sank upon his breast, recovered, flung the small boy fiercely to the ground as an unbroken colt might have done, then turned upon him a face that lacked a lower jaw—

from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone. The unnatural prominence of nose, the absence of chin, the fierce eyes, gave this man the appearance of a great bird of prey crimsoned in throat and breast by the blood of its quarry. The man rose to his knees, the child to his feet. The man shook his fist at the child; the child, terrified at last, ran to a tree near by, got upon the farther side of it and took a more serious view of the situation. And so the

14 Robert Montgomery Bird, Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbennainesay: A Tale of Kentucky (New York: W. J. Widdleton, [c 1853]).
clumsy multitude dragged itself slowly and painfully along in hideous pantomime—moved forward down the slope like a swarm of great black beetles, with never a sound of going—in silence profound, absolute.  

The details of the picture of the wounded man are sufficient for any desired physical horror, and they are photographic in impact. But Bierce goes further; not only are his men wounded and mutilated, but they are dehumanized. The child mounts the man as if he were a horse; the man throws him as a colt would do. His face is like that of a bird of prey. And as he recedes into anonymity among his fellows, we see the whole: the group crawls, like a swarm of beetles driven by some occult urge to an unknown destination. Since man, in his infinite folly, has seen fit to dehumanize his brothers by shooting away that which made them human, Bierce seems to say, he himself has no scruples about depicting the patriotic result without glamor. But to the simplest understanding, that of the little boy, the facts are not yet clear; he continues to think of it all as a game, and taking up his wooden sword, he leads the crawling battalions until he comes upon the blazing homestead and finds his mother.

There, conspicuous in the light of the conflagration, lay the dead body of a woman—the white face turned upward, the hands thrown out and clutched

15 Bierce, II, 52.
full of grass, the clothing deranged, the long
dark hair in tangles and full of clotted blood.
The greater part of the forehead was torn away,
and from the jagged hole the brain protruded,
overflowing the temple, a frothy mass of gray,
crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles—the
work of a shell. 16

The child, who is a deaf-mute and therefore sub-human to
some extent, has not been able to sense the horror about
him in the bodies of the crawling wounded, but this sight
penetrates, and he sobs grotesquely as the story ends.
Pathos is rare in Bierce, but so are children; even this
one, pathetic though he be, sounds like a devil as he
cries in his deaf-mute voice.

In "The Affair at Coulter's Notch," there is a
similar procession of the wounded: "With the ruined
guns lay the ruined men—alongside the wreckage, under
it and atop of it; and back down the road—a ghastly pro-
cession—crept on hands and knees such of the wounded as
were able to move." 17  Like the mass march of the wounded
in "Chickamauga," however, this mutilation en masse does
not hold the climactic position in the story; that dis-
tinction is reserved for a little tableau in the cellar
of a house which had been shelled during the engagement.
"The dead woman clasped in her arms a dead babe. Both
were clasped in the arms of the man, pressed against his

16  Ibid., p. 57.
17  Ibid., p. 117.
breast, against his lips. There was blood in the hair of the woman; there was blood in the hair of the man. A yard away, near an irregular depression in the beaten earth which formed the cellar's floor—a fresh excavation with a convex bit of iron, having jagged edges, visible in one of the sides—lay an infant's foot."  

Again, as in Wieland and in "Chickamauga," the effect of horror is increased because of the presence of a loved one as a beholder; the man who held the bodies was the husband and father, who had shelled the house himself, under orders, a few minutes before. Such is another of Bierce's comments on the insanity which is war.

In "Coup de Grace," Bierce again makes use of mutilation to depict the same dehumanization in another fashion. One soldier seeks the body of a friend after a battle. "Scanning each one sharply as he passed, he stopped at last above one which lay at a slight remove from the others, near a clump of small trees. He looked at it narrowly. It seemed to stir. He stopped and laid his hand upon its face. It screamed."  

The screamer is not a man, to be dignified with the masculine he; it is neuter and it, a mere mass of pain.

18 Ibid., p. 120.

19 Ibid., pp. 124-25.
These uses of mutilation by Bierce perform the function of pointing out the rather profound but obvious truth, that the worst enemy of man is man. Two other examples seem to have less important reasons for being, and are probably used for their own sake. One of these, in "George Thurston," concerns the horrible end of the man who plays the title role. He has labored under the stigma of cowardice, but finally proves his bravery by propelling a huge grapevine swing to heights which the others have not dared; having made his point, he is shaken loose and falls from a great height to the ground. "Thurston's body lay on its back. One leg, bent underneath, was broken above the knee and the bone driven into the earth. The abdomen had burst; the bowels protruded. The neck was broken."20 A similar example, though not given in such detail, is in "The Man Out of the Nose," in which a lady falls from a high window to the pavement; a final fillip is given to this scene by her lover's clasping the broken body to his bosom and kissing the "mangled cheeks and streaming mouth."

After Bierce, for the period dealt with in this study, there is no significant use of mutilation for horror in the works of the major writers. Of those

20 Ibid., p. 217.
authors considered here, only Poe viewed mutilation objectively, and he in a detective story; even objectively, however, mutilation may still be horrible, particularly while it remains mysterious. Both Brown and Bierce, on the other hand, intensify their effects through the depiction of a loved one who views the mutilation, through whose grief the reader is brought into more intimate contact with the horror.

IV

As Bierce recognized the importance of the manure function of the human body in a state of decay with its concomitant diminution of human dignity, so did both Poe and Bierce recognize the peculiar horror that accompanies the human body considered as food. The manure function, undignified though it may be, is yet common; recognition of it may demand an effort, but once it is recognized, all would agree that we are well within the realm of the familiar. The food function, however, is different; one of the effects of civilization on the human ego has been to set man apart from the other animals in that his flesh does not serve as food for any of them. Any situation in which man is not so set apart thus partakes of an unfamiliarity that spells horror to our civilization. Putrefaction is a natural process; mutilation is the result of an application of force which may be accompanied by
passion; but anthropophagy has a demonic quality which may be observed throughout the folklore of Aryan civilization. Much as man may fear death, he usually fears being eaten more, and in spite of W. S. Gilbert's comic literary ballad, "The Yarn of the Nancy Belle," man-eating generally carries with it an archetypal horror.

Poe makes use of anthropophagy in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym to good effect in two episodes, the first being set on the death-ship from which the shipwrecked men hope to get help. They can see three seamen leaning on the rail of the ship, one of whom seems to see them too:

... the third, who appeared to be looking at us with great curiosity, was leaning over the starboard bow near the bowsprit. This last was a stout and tall man with a very dark skin. He seemed by his manner to be urging us to have patience, nodding to us in a cheerful although odd way, and smiling constantly, so as to display a set of the most brilliantly white teeth. As his vessel drew nearer, we saw a red flannel cap which he had on fall from his head into the water; but of this he took little or no notice, continuing his odd smiles and gesticulations. 21

It is at that moment that they see the ship for what it is, and they are immediately horror-stricken at the sight of so much death, but the worst is yet to come:

As our first loud yell of terror broke forth, it was replied to by something, from near the bowsprit of the stranger, so closely resembling the scream of a human voice that the nicest ear might have

21 Poe, III, 110-11.
been startled and deceived. At this instant another sudden yaw brought the region of the forecastle again into view, and we beheld at once the origin of the sound. We saw the tall stout figure still leaning over the bulwark, and still nodding his head to and fro, but his face was now turned from us so that we could not behold it. ... On his back, from which a portion of the shirt had been torn, leaving it bare, there sat a huge seagull, busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried, and its white plumage spattered all over with blood. As the brig moved further round so as to bring us close in view, the bird, with much apparent difficulty, drew out its crimsoned head, and after eying us for a moment as if stupefied, arose lazily from the body on which it had been feasting, and, flying directly above our deck, hovered there a while with a portion of clotted and liver-like substance in its beak. The horrid morsel dropped at length with a sullen splash immediately at the feet of Parker. May God forgive me, but now, for the first time, there flashed through my mind a thought which I will not mention, and I felt myself making a step toward the ensanguined spot. I looked upward, and the eyes of Augustus met my own with a degree of intense and eager meaning which immediately brought me to my senses. I sprang forward quickly, and with a deep shudder, threw the frightful thing into the sea.22

The second episode, in which the shipwrecked men actually draw lots and kill and devour Parker, pales into insignificance beside this one, which contains the very essence of cannibalism without the fact. When the actual cannibalism takes place, the dehumanization of the shipwrecked men has gone so far that the narrator himself gives only the

bare facts; in the episode of the feeding gull, he retains enough of his perspective to sense the horror of what is in all their minds. He fears to see the veneer peeled away and human life revealed as the hideous thing it is when reduced to the elemental activities related to survival. Human life in *Pym* may here be compared to the shipwrecked men's water supply, "now absolutely useless, being a thick gelatinous mass; nothing but frightful-looking worms mingled with slime..."23

Ambrose Bierce also makes considerable use of anthropophagy, though not of cannibalism, and he sees it as a more intellectualized thing than as immediately fraught with horror, though the horror is there in its basic concept. To Bierce, anthropophagy is more like Poe's cannibalism; the bare fact is related, and the emotions may generate themselves from the action. One example of Bierce's anthropophagy is implied rather than stated in "One of the Missing," in which Jerome Searing, trapped in the ruins of the shed, sees the rats scampering about. "The creatures went away; they would return later, attack his face, gnaw away his nose, cut his throat—he knew that, but he hoped by that time to be dead."24

---

23 Ibid., p. 140.
24 Bierce, II, 87.
horror of anthropophagy is completely subordinated in
the mind of Searing; he is familiar with it, and the
true horror of the tale appears only in connection with
the unfamiliar menace of his own unwinking rifle muzzle
which is aimed at his immovable forehead.

In "Coup de Grace," which has already been discussed
from the standpoint of mutilation, the anthropophagy is
not implied but is horribly evident. Captain Madwell
has found the torn body of his friend, Sergeant Halcrow,
which is strangely wounded with "a wide, ragged opening
in the abdomen," which is "defiled with earth and dead
leaves" and from which protrudes a loop of small intestine.

But when he looks up, the mystery is solved:

Fifty yards away, on the crest of a low, thinly
wooded hill, he saw several dark objects moving
about among the fallen men—a herd of swine.
One stood with its back to him, its shoulders
sharply elevated. Its forefeet were upon a
human body, its head was depressed and invisible.
The bristly ridge of its chine showed against
the red west. Captain Madwell drew away his
eyes and fixed them again upon the thing which
had been his friend.25

Madwell in no wise discounts the horror of what hogs have
done to his friend; he could not if he wished, for his
friend still lives and suffers. But again, Bierce
subordinates this horror to another; as Madwell administers

25 Ibid., p. 128.
the *soup de grace* of euthanasia to his friend, his action is observed by an enemy, and he knows what his fate will be. Men are greater swine to Bierce than hogs, and more horrible.

He points out no such obvious moral in the short sketch "John Mortonson's Funeral," in which the rites of lamentation for the dead are broken up by the sight of a cat which is feeding on the corpse under the glass coffin lid. In the resultant confusion, the coffin is overturned and the lid is broken, whereupon the cat escapes. The corpse may not actually have been dead, for the cat "tranquilly wiped its crimson muzzle" before leaving the room. If any lesson is to be drawn from this rather bare piece, it must be that life, in the form of the feeding cat, goes on while the mourners are mourning. Of all Bierce's treatments of anthropophagy, this one seems most gratuitously done and in the worst taste.

V

The physical horror dealt with in this chapter is all concerned with death, or to be more specific, with certain physical processes which are or may be related to death. Only in anthropophagy does a more metaphysical element enter, and there only in the psychology of cannibalism as depicted by Poe. All the horror related here to death might be described as clean, in that it is
depicted from the viewpoint of normality. Pym is properly horrified at the prospect of eating the sea-gull's morsel, and he is no less horrified at the thought of eating Parker, though by the time of the actual eating, his hunger has overcome his scruples.

Physically, no more is possible. The achievements yet to come lie in fresh insights into the facts of death. A man forced to eat human flesh is yet normal when driven by normal hunger, but one who had acquired a taste for it and considered it preferable to the more common meats would be a demon of sorts. Such cannibalism was ready to hand in the history of the fate of the Bonner party, for instance, but it did not appear in the fiction of the nineteenth century in America. The following century, however, was to see such aberrations and others involving gruesome employments of the bodies of the dead; nothing was to be barred save outright necrophilia. Ghouls were to speak and to describe the ecstasy of their gruesome lives, but first the horror of the corpse per se had to be exploited.
CHAPTER III

SCIENCE AND PSEUDO-SCIENCE

I

During the early nineteenth century a growing and increasingly more exact concept of science still fought a rear-guard action against the superstition and credulity which it was largely to replace later. Even though science was becoming popular, its popularity was spurious and did not differ essentially from that of the displaced superstitions. It merely provided a fresh set of wonders at which the populace might gape, as they had done at tales of witches and goblins and at the theological extravagances of the clergy; and in the new mysteries which it revealed there was material for literary horror. Superstition and credulity are still with us, of course, and they will always be with us, but in our time, the older forms of irrational belief imply a will to believe, while modern confidence and belief in the dicta of the scientists, though often no more rational than our ancestors' belief in witchcraft, makes a cult of disbelief and doubt.

Science, even the most legitimate, made its first appeal to the mass mind as a new superstition, and the
very concept of the scientist was not materially different, in many instances, from the concept of the sorcerer. The surgeon as researcher was a feared and often a shunned man, for in order to pursue his researches, he needed cadavers; such traffic with the dead was prolific of many stories and episodes in later literature in which the profession of grave-robbing is presented with every evidence of great abhorrence. The grave-robbing episode in *Tom Sawyer* provides an example of this popular attitude; another is found in "The Wicked Young Doctor and The Direful End That Him Befel," a pseudonymous story in which a good portion of the young doctor's wickedness is comprised of his efforts to get bodies for dissection. But aside from the admittedly macabre activities in the dissecting room, it seems inevitable that the cooks and scullery maids, not to mention specifically the middle-class merchants and their friends, who participated in the "march of mind" of the early nineteenth century, should have been much more taken with the wonders revealed by the new science than with the labor required to understand it and fit it into a coherent pattern. Thus, even the realm of the purely physical sciences was at first a relatively ill-known area and contained much mystery.

---

1 "Frank Fantome," *The Knickerbocker*, XLVIII (1856), 561-77.
But the rapid development of the so-called psychic sciences provided an area even more productive of the unusual, partly because they constituted a new endorsement of old superstition on grounds which were claimed to be scientific. Accordingly, hypnotism and spiritualism supplied new material for the imaginations of people in general and for the writers who dealt with the unusual in particular. The occult had already been rescued from the writings of the Rosicrucians and from those of the wise men of antiquity and the middle ages; with the rise of mesmerism and spiritualism, it was raised to the dignity of a science in the minds of many men, and it was strongly reinforced further by the importation of material from the Eastern religions. Not all of this material related to the occult sciences found expression in the literature of the nineteenth century, but it merely awaited later expositors.

II

Charles Brockden Brown, revolting against the excesses of the Gothic romance, found a quite usable device for the production of wonder in one of these mysterious near-sciences, the art of ventriloquism, and to a lesser extent, at least as expressed in the smaller number of pages devoted to it, in the phenomenon of spontaneous combustion in the human body. Devoted to wonder though
he was, however, he conceived of his miracles as susceptible of rational explanation. As one anonymous critic said of Wieland:

... we see very plainly that we are conversing with real men and women of this world, and that we are not introduced to the island of Prospero; that in such an every-day state of things as has been all along described, no reasonable author could introduce an order of events depending on unheard-of laws and on unnatural agencies.

Brown's first biographer, William Dunlap, also comments on this phase of Brown the novelist, making specific reference to his avoidance of Gothic machinery. "He made the events of his story depend upon, and flow from, two of those wonderful phenomena of the moral and physical world, which though known and established, were still mysterious and unidentified; and though vouched for by unquestionable authorities, are of such rare occurrence, as not to be familiar, or even fully accounted for." In this quotation is clearly stated the nature of Brown's material as he conceived of it: "wonderful phenomena of the moral and physical world" which are "mysterious and unidentified" but "vouched for by unquestionable authorities." The "unquestionable authorities" are an


inescapable reminder of the extent to which the old credulity and will to believe was mingled with the spirit of inquiry that was the essence of the new science.

Brown, however, had no intention of emphasizing the pseudo-scientific as such in his work; rather he says, in the "Advertisement" to Wieland, that he "aims at the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man." With this high purpose stated, he then proceeds to a near-apology for his use of the marvelous, defending himself with the assertion that "the solution will be found to correspond with the known principles of human nature." In other words, there is nothing wrong with using marvelous material in a novel, provided the material is suitably documented by authority, which must presumably be "unquestionable."

There is no doubt as to the documentation supporting rational belief in the spontaneous combustion which destroyed the elder Wieland. Brown himself provides a note on the case, referring the reader to "one of the Journals of Florence," and more specifically, to "similar cases reported by Messrs. Merrille and Muraire, in the 'Journal de Medicine' for February and May, 1783," and he adds that "The researches of Maffei and Fontana have thrown some light on this subject." The impression is given that spontaneous combustion was a matter of grave consideration to the sages of Brown's day. With exact
descriptions at his elbow, Brown presents a coldly clinical picture of the condition of Wieland after the discovery of his burned body. Presumably, judging from Brown's note, the concomitant circumstances are also documented:

The prelusive gleam, the blow upon his arm, the fatal spark, the explosion heard so far, the fiery cloud that environed him, without detriment to the structure, though composed of combustible materials, the sudden vanishing of the cloud at my uncle's approach—what is the inference to be drawn from these facts? Their truth cannot be doubted. 

Obviously, the inference to be drawn is that there are exceptions to the pragmatic philosophy of Horatio, even though they in turn are perhaps capable of becoming the foundations of more extended pragmatism. The same inference is gathered from the several episodes of the mysterious voices; the narrator, Clara Wieland, knows about the first two occurrences only through hearsay, and is told of the first voice which spoke to her brother, the younger Wieland, in the voice of his wife by Wieland himself; and of the second, also in the voice of Wieland's wife, to Pleyel. On both occasions, the purpose of the mysterious voice is benevolent, or apparently so, and Clara philosophizes on the phenomena:

I am at a loss to describe the sensations that affected me. I am not fearful of shadows. The

---

4 Wieland, p. 21.
tales of apparitions and enchantments did not possess that power over my belief which could even render them interesting. I saw nothing in them but ignorance and folly, and was a stranger even to that terror which is pleasing. But this incident was different from any that I had ever known before. Here were proofs of a sensible and intelligent existence which could not be denied. Here was information obtained and imparted by means unquestionably superhuman.5

Her total reaction is, in her own words, "an awe, the sweetest and most solemn that imagination can conceive which pervaded my whole frame." But when she herself hears the voice, she is stricken with terror, and each subsequent experience of it brings fresh terror to her. It is not, however, a terror of the supernatural unmingled with other emotions. She first hears the voices as she lies at midnight in her bed, musing on her father's mysterious death, and they appear to proceed from her closet. But they are unmistakably human voices, and furthermore, apparently those of two murderers who are plotting her death. On the second occurrence, in her rural bower by the waterfall, the impression of the supernatural is first created by the fact that the voice seems to proceed from a chasm in which no human body could have been situated; it is forthwith destroyed, however, by her realization that it is one of the voices that spoke in her closet. One of the murderers, it seems, has repented of his misdeeds.

5Ibid., p. 51.
This is the most clearly defined example of Brown's divided efforts in his handling of the voices. In the scene in the bedroom, we have the background of Clara's strange perturbation, caused by her having seen the mysterious Carwin previously and by her meditations upon the manner of her father's death. The voice by the waterfall also enjoins her to remember her father's fate, and thus a connection is established in the mind of the reader between one event which bears many hallmarks of the supernatural, documentation notwithstanding, and two other events which also might well be supernatural. But the voice proclaims itself to be only that of a murderer, who incidentally speaks in the well-remembered accents of Charles Brockden Brown:

"I leagued to murder you. I repent. Mark my bidding, and be safe. Avoid this spot. The snares of death encompass it. Elsewhere danger will be distant; but this spot, shun it as you value your life. Mark me further; profit by this warning, but divulge it not. If a syllable of what has passed escape you, your doom is sealed."

It would be mere repetition to give further examples; each occurrence of the voices of which Clara is a witness first astonishes with its inexplicability, then dwindles off into unmistakably human accents. Never is the element of wonder stressed sufficiently to produce any lasting

---

effect, except in that the manner of producing the voices is not explained until Carwin confesses his rather childish pranks near the end of the book.

What Brown considered to be the climactic horror of the book, the murder of Wieland’s family, comes as the consummation of another element, the instability of Wieland’s mind, which is what Brown must have in mind when he speaks of “branches of the moral constitution of man” as his concern in the novel. This event, incidentally, is as well-documented as is the combustion, as pointed out by Harry R. Warfel; a similar case occurred and was recounted in the New York Weekly Magazine, July 20, 1796.7 Wieland’s instability is inherited from his father, a religious fanatic of the most pronounced character, but it is not particularly prominent through most of the novel, merely taking the form of a recurrent moodiness. When the slaughter is revealed, it comes as a complete surprise, and so does Wieland’s insanity. Though Brown’s concern is with morbid psychology, he does nothing to explain it or to expand it artistically, as Poe and later writers do; we merely learn that the madman has believed the statement of a Katzenjammer who claims

---

to be God, and that he has followed his commands. It is quite possible that Brown might have written a better story if he had caused the unstable Wieland to tell his own tale, instead of relying on the limited capabilities of Clara; but it is also probable that Brown would have been incapable of doing so if he had tried, for such a character treated intensively would have needed a temperament more sympathetic than that of Brown.

We do know that a ventriloqual explanation of a mysterious voice is not enough to rob it of its effect, for we have the example of "An Incident in the Life of Madlle Clairon," an anonymous story first printed in Household Words. It purports to be the true account of a well-known French actress who was haunted by a mysterious voice. Unlike Brown's prosy murderers, this voice merely screams horribly, causing auditors to faint at times, and the effect of the supposedly supernatural is not relieved until the final tagged-on "explanation."

Poe's handling, for instance, of morbid psychology is another and a more familiar example of later improvements on Brown's general method; it will be discussed in a later chapter.

---

III

Poe was the first American writer who attempted any extended literary treatment of the material of science and related studies in literature, and his interests were rather wide. In "Biros and Charmion," which is primarily a protest against the iron age in which he lives, Poe describes the destruction of the earth by fire on scientific principles; a passing comet somehow strips all the nitrogen from the atmosphere, and the resulting concentration of oxygen speeds up all processes of oxidation. In "Some Words With a Mummy," the as yet exceedingly mysterious electric shock is used to animate a mummy, who then speaks words of wisdom to his hearers. In both of these stories, however, the element of wonder is used merely as a device to get at a philosophic disquisition, of which each story is largely composed. "Maelzel's Chess Player" is another evidence of Poe's interest in phenomena of the day; in this account he discourses learnedly and at length on the nature of the machine, and ends by proving by ratiocination that a human agency is necessary in its operation.

It is in the two stories dealing with mesmerism that Poe makes best use of the material of pseudo-science. Actually, the first, "Mesmeric Revelation," is similar to "Words With a Mummy" in that the mesmerism is merely a
gateway to the revelation of what Poe considered profound philosophic truth, which is stated elsewhere in his philosophic essay, "Eureka." The actual element of wonder, once the mesmerism has progressed into the revelatory trance, is confined to the concluding paragraph:

As the sleep-waker pronounced these later words, in a feeble tone, I observed on his countenance a singular expression, which somewhat alarmed me, and induced me to wake him at once. No sooner had I done this, than, with a bright smile irradiating all his features, he noticed that in less than a minute afterward his corpse had all the stern rigidity of stone. His brow was of the coldness of ice. Thus, ordinarily, should it have appeared, only after long pressure from Azrael's hand. Had the sleep-waker, indeed, during the latter portion of his discourse, been addressing me from out the region of the shadows?9

This tale is, of course, the first step in the production of the truly horrible "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." It will be noted, however, that the latter does not differ structurally from "Mesmeric Revelation" or "Some Words With a Mummy"; in all three stories the element of pseudo-science is used as a device to establish contact with something alien to ordinary human experience. In the two lesser stories, the alien element is merely a way of thinking which the author wishes to express. In "Valdemar," however, the contact is with the world of the

9Poe, V, 254.
dead; the nature of this world is emphasized in the description of the voice of the mesmerized Valdemar and in the physical corruption which his body undergoes. As death is considered a more horrible experience than the revelation of a better philosophy, so does "Valdemar" go further than Poe's other stories which make use of pseudo-scientific themes in achieving horror.

The difference in Brown's handling of the material of pseudo-science and that of Poe is easily seen: Brown was primarily interested in the material itself, and his novel Wieland is a mystery story, insofar as it deals with the mysterious voices, which are ultimately explained. Poe, however, assumes the validity of his material and does not bother with explanations; when he does strive for horror, as in "Valdemar," the effect does not derive from the pseudo-science but from the nature of what the pseudo-science reveals. Even the revelation of Wieland's madness in Brown's novel falls somewhat flat because of the lack of consistent or coherent background for it. Wieland's oratorical defense of himself at his trial, although it describes the condition of his mind before his commission of the deed, is entirely too brief and too objectively stated for the reader to participate very effectively in his emotions. This deficiency, of course, has nothing to do with Brown's handling of pseudo-scientific material, but it does show a contrast to Poe's
subjective method of revelation, to which the later writer was led in handling all of his material, including pseudo-science.

Further, the very possibility of an explanation rules out the attainment of the profound effects which may be discovered in the literature of the unusual, those of actual horror. Terror may be achieved and then explained, but the horror that Poe achieved in "Valdemar" is not susceptible of any explanation. The fact is that insofar as pseudo-science is scientific, it is not appropriate material to be developed for purposes of horror, though it may serve as an avenue to an area of mystery where horror may be found. Brown probably achieved his most profound effects in such scenes as the spontaneous combustion, in which superstition outweighs science completely, and in which the sense of the alien is strongest; these, however, are too few and too short for a generally satisfactory effect. Poe is never far from the alien, and even his least successful stories achieve an effect far more profound than anything in any of Brown's novels.

What mesmerism was to Poe, spiritualism was to Fitz-James O'Brien, who used it in two stories. In one of these, the often-anthologized "The Diamond Lens," the spirit of Leeuwenhoek is invoked to reveal the secret of the perfect lens. Once the secret is imparted, the
narrator constructs his microscope, and the rest of the story concerns his discovery of a beautiful girl in a drop of water, who dies when the water evaporates. This type of story has flourished during the present century, and has even been satirized in a work by George Shephard Chappell entitled *Through the Alimentary Canal with Gun and Camera* but seems not to have been followed through in the nineteenth century. Serious versions of it in more recent literature are often of the type involving a mad scientist and his sinister activities. "The Diamond Lens" is primarily a story of description of a fantasy-paradise, and Leeuwenhoek's ghost is a mere accessory.

In "The Pot of Tulips," however, O'Brien's use of spiritualism is more important. It might be called an ordinary ghost story, except that the description of the shade of old Van Koeren and of its materialization parallels similar phenomena which are said to occur among professed mediums. In short, Van Koeren's spirit is preceded by vagrant breaths of cold air, materializes out of a luminous cloud, and is accompanied by a strong corpse-like odor. It then reveals the hiding place of the fortune to which a descendant of Van Koeren's is heir.

---

10 New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1930.
and is seen no more. There is enough of the subjective in the narrator's description to give a reasonable contact between his emotions and those of the reader; he grows faint at the odor which accompanies the spirit, even though he is desirous of seeing what is taking place and does not wish to faint. Like M. Valdemar, the dead Van Koeren is not pleasant to associate with, benevolent though his intentions may be.

In general, O'Brien did not make so extended a use of pseudo-science as did Poe, nor did he do it so effectively; in "The Pot of Tulips" his technique is more like Brown's in that the emotional effect is in the device itself rather than in what it may reveal. It may be pointed out, however, that O'Brien dealt unabashedly in the supernatural and the ghostly, an offense of which Brown would never have been guilty in his own day, though he might have felt that the supernatural was sufficiently documented by the time of O'Brien to warrant his using it as material.

IV

Brief and relatively unimportant uses of the material of science are made by others than O'Brien during the middle years of the century; Hawthorne, for instance, in "Rappaccini's Daughter," uses controlled mutations in plants to move his allegory, which is concerned with the
unholy desire of man to lay bare the secrets of the universe. The same attitude toward science is also seen in "The Birthmark" and in "Ethan Brand." Like Poe, Hawthorne deals specifically with mesmerism in *The Blithedale Romance*, in the "Veiled Lady" episodes, but his didactic attitude toward the new "science" is made clear as he characterizes the entities with whom the spiritualists have commerce: "beings whom death, in requital of their gross and evil lives has degraded below humanity. To hold intercourse with spirits of this order, we must stoop and grovel in some element more vile than earthly dust." In addition to spiritualism, the motif of the fascination exerted by the snake belonged to the superstitious pseudo-science of the time and was used to good effect by Oliver Wendell Holmes in *Elsie Venner*. One rather full-fledged science-fiction tale turns up in *Harper's*, "The Atoms of Chladni," in which the action turns on the efforts of a jealous husband to prove his wife guilty of immoral liaisons by means of an extraordinarily complicated version of the concealed microphone familiar to today's student of the

---

literature of crime. Much space is devoted to a
description of the instrument and to its manner of
operation, which is not actually to record the sound
but to transcribe it into good, round script. On the
whole, however, no other author deals very seriously
with the material of science and the pseudo-sciences
until the time of Ambrose Bierce.

"Moxon's Master" is probably the best-known of
Bierce's stories which employ the material of science.
There has been speculation as to whether Bierce's robot
is a descendant of Maelzel's chess-playing machine, as
described by Poe. About the only points of similarity
are that both are allegedly machines and both play chess.
Bierce's creation is more versatile than Maelzel's
machine, however, for it kills people when annoyed as
well as playing chess; in this respect it seems to derive
more from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and the monster he
constructed out of the sweepings of the dissecting room
than from the harmless automaton described by Poe, though
it certainly cannot be said that the imagination of
Bierce was incapable of begetting such an offspring on
Maelzel's rather sedate machine.

---

12 J. D. Whelpley, "The Atoms of Chladni,"
Bierce emphasizes the mechanical nature of Moxon's robot with a good feeling for climax; as the narrator watched the chess game, he first noted the disproportion in the thing's form: its size and breadth of shoulder at first reminded him of a gorilla, and he noted that the right hand, which it used to move the pieces, was disproportionately long. Its motions were made with "a slow, uniform, mechanical and, I thought, somewhat theatrical motion of the arm, that was a sore trial to my patience. There was something unearthly about it, and I caught myself shuddering," says the narrator. Later, as the robot lost the game, the narrator heard "a low humming or buzzing" which seemed to come from the body of the automaton, giving him "the impression of a disordered mechanism which had escaped the repressive and regulating action of some controlling part." A moment later the thing shook and vibrated as if with palsy and attacked Moxon; in a final flash of lightning, the narrator saw upon the painted face of the robot "an expression of tranquil and profound thought, as in the solution of a problem in chess," while it was completing its task of strangling its creator.13 The net effect of

13 Bierce, III, 100-4, passim.
such emphasis is the creation of an air of the inhuman about the automaton, against which the more delicate organic life of Moron is ineffectual. Moron has unleashed an elemental force which he is unable to control, much as has Rappaccini, though Bierce points no moral with his tale.

Moron's robot is the ancestor or predecessor of a numerous progeny who gambol through the pulp magazines devoted to the so-called science-fiction of the present century. A pair of authors, writing under the pseudonym of Bando Binder, have felt the lack of appeal which such an inhuman creature as Bierce's creation had, and have corrected it in their own robot, whom they have endowed with the equivalent of a soul and the capacity for falling in love—with another robot, of course. The sinister robot, however, seems to continue as the most popular variety.

Bierce also touches briefly on phenomena of spiritualism. His Bayrolles the Medium is the agency through which the narrator of "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" speaks, and the narration of Julia Hetman in "One Summer Night"
is also spoken through the agency of Bayrolles. There is an element of a more reputable science in "The Damned Thing," in which the existence of an invisible monster is explained, in the notes of the man whom it kills, on the grounds that it is of a color invisible to the human eye. This explanation is prefaced by a few brief lines on the theory of light and vision, which though not prominent in the story do give it an element of the modern technique of science-fiction, in which many paragraphs may be used to describe principles and equipment designed around them.

It is in the series entitled Mysterious Disappearances, however, that Bierce's most interesting use of the material of science appears.15 The stories themselves are short and, like most of Bierce's stories, rather starkly narrated. In the first, "The Difficulty of Crossing a Field," a planter disappears between two glances of a spectator; he is never seen again and is declared legally dead. One would be gratified to know what were the "grotesque fictions" which Bierce says were evolved to explain the occurrence. The second, "An Unfinished Race," tells of a similar event which took place during a foot race. The third, "Charles Ashmore's Trail," is also similar, but adds the information

that Ashmore's steps were visible in the snow for a distance and then ceased abruptly. His voice was also heard by members of the family in the vicinity of the end of the trail for some months after the occurrence, but gradually grew fainter and finally disappeared entirely.

It is in his comment on these stories that Bierce imposes the material of science on what otherwise would have been merely "grotesque superstition," though to tell the truth, the "science" does not help a great deal. As a matter of fact, it is comparable stuff to the spontaneous combustion which Charles Brockden Brown dealt with. Bierce refers to a German author named Hern and a book of his entitled Verschwinden und Seine Theorie, in which such disappearances as Bierce describes are explained in terms of holes in space, "through which animate and inanimate objects may fall into the invisible world and be seen and heard no more." Further, "In such a cavity there would be absolutely nothing. It would be such a vacuum as cannot be artificially produced; for if we pump the air from a receiver there remains the luminiferous ether." 16 Bierce himself points out that Hern's theory would not account for the voice of Charles

Ashmore, which continued to be heard after the disappearance, for it postulated complete cessation of existence. This material which Bierce uses is interesting, not only because it is similar to the superstitions of the time of Brown in that it has a hazy sort of near-respectability, but also because of what it anticipates. There is a similarity between such disappearances as those described by Bierce and those described as due to "etheric vortexes" in some stories which have appeared in the pulp magazines of this century. Time-travel stories, based on Einstein's universe and making use of the concept of curved time, also involve similar disappearances, though these occur under control. 17

Frank R. Stockton's "The Great Stone of Sardis," published in Harper's for 1897, 18 combines a theme of reasonable antiquity, that of the existence of a habitable space within the earth's shell (as it was conceived), with the type of science-fiction written by Jules Verne and his followers. A "shell" is constructed, and when put into operation it penetrates the crust of the earth and comes to rest on an interior mass, which is revealed

18 xcv.
to be solid diamond. The hero then launches into a dissertation on the creation of the earth, based on the theory that this diamond once was a comet that somehow fell into an orbit about the sun and began to burn. Diamond, he remarks, is a "very original substance," and from the products of its combustion was formed the shell which is the visible world.

Finally, in one of the stories of Robert W. Chambers entitled "The Mask," there is a wonderful liquid that has the property of changing anything submerged in it to a beautiful translucent marble. The inventor's wife gets into it by mistake, and the rest of the story concerns her husband's death from grief and her subsequent marriage to the narrator, after the effect of the liquid has worn off. Such "science" is more akin to Dr. Heidegger's water from the fountain of youth or to the experiments of Aylmer in his laboratory in "The Birthmark" than it is to the more rational variety of the Verne school, as exemplified in Stockton, or even to the statements found in Verschwinden und Seine Theorie. Chambers's stock in trade was very definitely either saccharine romance or nauseating horror, often in the same story and inextricably wound together, and science as a theme for serious treatment had no attraction for him. He did, however, write
some reasonably good burlesques on it, usually involving an expedition by a pair of rather comic scientists into some remote part of the world.19

In concluding the discussion of the use of pseudo-scientific material in nineteenth century literature, two points seem worthy of note. First, two elements which were fused in the Wieland of Charles Brockden Brown, pride in man's intellectual conquest of the unknown and awe and terror at those large portions of the universe which continue mysterious, became differentiated by the end of the century. Second, all the writers of horror fiction after Brown show evidence of favoring and emphasizing the mysterious and the inexplicable over the scientifically demonstrable or logically plausible material which may also be grouped under the literature of the unusual.

Brown's sense of pride in man's intellectual prowess is evident in his own attitude and in that of Clara Wieland toward the mysterious voices; though she may feel a momentary terror toward the unknown when it manifests itself, in the next instant she is pursuing a long train

---

of analysis and possible explanation for the phenomenon. Finally, the mere fact that the mystery is cleared up by Carwin's confession sets the capstone on the thesis that a mystery is merely something which has not yet been explained. Wieland's confession of the reasons underlying his sacrifice of his family to his god is another piece of the same kind of evidence; his act, though irrational by normal standards, is yet susceptible of explanation if all the factors are at hand, and Brown sees that they are served up at the conclusion of his novel. The only mystery which lacks explanation is the spontaneous combustion, and the only reason that it remains a mystery is that Brown lacked an explanation for it. It will be noted that this episode is very briefly dealt with in the novel.

Poe continues this main aspect of Brown in his stories of ratiocination, but elsewhere he is concerned, not with knowledge and the wonders of the universe as revealed by the searching eye of science, but with the dark areas of the universe and the human heart. Even the coldly intellectual Dupin is fond of the night and converts his dwelling into a realm of darkness during the day.²⁰ Such is not the practice of a man who delights in

²⁰Poe, IV, 151-52.
the exercise of pure intellect.

Fitz-James O'Bri en made brief use of microscopy in order to get access to the micro-world within a drop of water, but actually the science in "The Diamond Lens" is no more scientific than is the alchemy in another story of his, "The Golden Ingot," and no contrast can be made of his use of mystery as opposed to knowledge in his treatment of the unusual. Ambrose Bierce, however, makes clear the distinction, even more than does Poe, for he wrote no stories of ratiocination to confuse the issue. The robot of "Moxon's Master" seems mechanically plausible as we read; yet the effect produced is not one of pride at such an achievement but horror at an uncontrollable agent of destruction which has been loosed. So it is with "The Damned Thing"; one may explain its invisibility in terms of colors to which the human eye is not responsive, but the explanation does not relieve the horror of the man who explains.

And so with the stories of disappearance; a hole in space may serve as a pat explanation of such phenomena as Bierce describes, though he doubts it, but the explanation will not restore the man who has vanished. The sub-space postulated by Hern has become more real, and its mystery has become more horrible because men have entered it and remain there.
For the other side of the picture, we may turn to Frank R. Stockton's "The Great Stone of Sardis," which is in the Verne tradition of man's conquest of the universe. But here there is no basis for a comparison, as with the other writers, for Stockton did not deal with the mysterious, as the others did.

Now both types of stories, those of knowledge and those of mystery and the unknown, are to be grouped under literature of the unusual; even in our own enlightened period, knowledge cannot be said to be the norm. Stories of the type now called science-fiction are stories of pride and of confidence in the mind of man; those dealing with the dark areas of the cosmos express rather a fear of the things that man does not know and something other than confidence in his intellect. This is neither the place nor the time to evaluate the two attitudes, for not only each person but each age will make its own evaluation, a fact which is apparent in the shift of emphasis from the time of Charles Brockden Brown to that of Robert W. Chambers.
CHAPTER IV
THE EVIL GENIUS
I

An evil genius is an enemy whose operations are cloaked in mystery, usually a person, at least in American literature, but not always. The agency of such a person extends over a considerable period of time, and he is more or less closely associated with the victim. Often, or even usually, the workings of the evil genius are made possible because of some vulnerability, some moral or spiritual Achilles' heel, in the person to whom harm is intended. When the effect is sudden or when the effect is produced by some inanimate object, it is not here considered to have been brought about by the agency of an evil genius, but by some other agent of evil, and is treated elsewhere in this study. Further, when the evil which befalls a man is clearly a product of his own weaknesses, any external human influence is not considered to be exerted by an evil genius. The Hangman's Daughter of Voss and Bierce, although certainly an inciting factor in the Monk's fall from grace, is hardly to be described as an evil genius; the entire situation is fraught with evil for the Monk, and no such localization of the source of evil is possible.
In this study, it is assumed that a rather definitely malicious course of action, intentional or otherwise, must be performed by an agent in order for him to be classified as an evil genius; the actions of the Hangman's Daughter are not malicious, and it is her presence rather than her actions that helps to bring the Monk to destruction. What evil there is about her inheres in her mere being, and must be referred to the entire spiritual and intellectual environment of the tale.

The evil genius usually works by means which are supernatural, or which are at least considered to be so. By this criterion, merely human evil, profound though it may be, is excluded from the definition. For instance, Craig of Charles Brockden Brown's Ormond, although his villainy reduces his employer to penury and makes possible all the misery which follows, is merely an absconding clerk, and the results of his actions are entirely explicable in terms of cause and effect. The workings of the evil genius, in brief, are mysterious, and the best early example of him in American fiction is Carwin, of Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland.
II

The appearance of Carwin and his attempt, made in the spirit of eighteenth century reasonableness, to seduce Clara Wieland in her bower have no bearing on the atmosphere of horror which is created in the novel Wieland; his effect as a seducer is one of mere uneasiness. His person, entirely aside from his damnable purposes, may well be examined, however, with reference to the entire tone of the novel.

I had snatched a view of the stranger's countenance. The impression that it made was vivid and indelible. His cheeks were pallid and lank, his eyes sunken, his forehead overshadowed by coarse straggling hairs, his teeth large and irregular, though sound and brilliantly white, and his chin discoloured by a tetter. His skin was of coarse grain and sallow hue. Every feature was wide of beauty, and the outline of his face reminded you of an inverted cone.

And yet his forehead, so far as shaggy locks would allow it to be seen, his eyes lustrously black, and possessing in the midst of haggardness, a radiance inexpressibly serene and potent, and something in the rest of his features, which it would be vain to describe, but which served to betoken a mind of the highest order, were essential ingredients in the portrait.¹

Commentators on the character of Carwin have been largely content to dismiss him as an example of the proto-Byronic hero, which is to say, as a late and degenerate type of Gothic villain. This label is entirely admissible, but

¹ Wieland, pp. 60-61.
it does not take into account the effect he has on Clara, who is so impressed with his appearance and with the rich, compelling tone of his voice that she is moved to draw his portrait from memory after he has gone. The following day is filled with storm, designed to complement the tumult in the bosom of Clara in the manner of Mrs. Radcliffe, and the next night is filled with melancholy reflections until the episode of the voices in the closet. From a later comment of Clara's, that the gravity, "inscrutableness," and uncertain potentialities for good or evil in Carwin tended to sadden the whole group, her melancholy would appear to have been produced as much by the proximity of Carwin as by the weather.

The whimsical genesis of Carwin's ventriloqual machinations has been adversely criticized by some commentators, but had his actions been less whimsical and more deliberate, he would have appeared more as an abstraction of the evil genius than as a human type of it, and Brown had committed himself to working within the known principles of human nature. The clay feet, which are a part of Brown's conception of Carwin, seem to have a definite bearing on the villain's classification as Gothic. Miss Birkhead sees the Gothic villain, as exemplified in Montoni of The Mysteries of Udolpho and Schedoni of The Italian, as a volcano of evil passions
whose prototype may well have been Milton's Satan; his descendant, as found in the villains of Lewis and Maturin and the heroes of Scott and Byron, is distinguished by an air of world-wearyness. Carwin fits neither of these categories very well; he has intellectual force, it is true, but his life is that of an escaped felon, a tramp, and a peeping Tom, and no one seems so horrified as he when the results of his ventriloqual pranks have been made known. In his speech to Clara, during their last interview, he says:

"Great heaven! what have I done? I think I know the extent of my offenses. I have acted, but my actions have possibly effected more than I designed. This fear has brought me back from my retreat. I come to repair the evil of which my rashness was the cause, and to prevent more evil. I come to confess my sorrows."

Objectively, then, Carwin is only a rather melancholy Katzenjammer Kid whose pranks serve as the trigger that explodes the latent madness of the younger Wieland. But because of the emphasis given to the apparently supernatural agency in the voices and because of Wieland's acceptance of them as the voice of his deity, Carwin works as an evil genius on two levels. His work in the case of Wieland is complete; what he accomplishes in attempting to seduce Clara is less complete and serves only as

\[\text{Ibid., p. 220.}\]
an irritant and an annoyance. His weakness, which is
due to too much humanity being mingled with his evil,
is inevitable, once it is remembered that a completely
developed evil genius with truly superhuman powers was
alien to Brown's principles, as stated in the preface
to Wieland.

III

Similar to Carwin only in that he too works as an
evil genius is Hawthorne's Roger Chillingworth. Carwin
is seemingly unconscious of being an agency of evil,
but Chillingworth has as his sole purpose in life the
destruction of the soul of Arthur Dimmesdale. There is
an irony, however, in that the uncalculated pranks of
the rather pitiable Carwin lead to so much evil, while
the Satanic intentions of Chillingworth actually lead
to nothing, though Dimmesdale's escape is narrow. There
is also a great difference in the manner of their presen-
tation. The mysterious whispers of Carwin convey a sense
of blatant shock to the sensibilities of Clara; Chilling-
worth, on the other hand, manifests himself much less
openly, not only in his first appearance but in the total
impact of his activities in the story. Though presenting
him subtly, Hawthorne leaves no doubt as to his nature
from the beginning; as Chillingworth first sees Hester,
"A writhing horror twisted itself across his features, like a snake gliding swiftly over them, and making one little pause, with all its wreathed intervolutions in open sight." The description from which this sentence is taken is much less specific than Brown's catalog of the distinctive features of Carwin, but it does inform the reader immediately of the essential horror in Chillingworth, as Brown never does with Carwin—probably because he does not conceive of him as possessing it.

Later, Hawthorne uses his gift of innuendo quite effectively in developing Chillingworth and his purpose more fully. His reputation among the people is invoked to create an air of mystery about him; he is said by one old man to have been seen in the company of a famous conjurer, under another name, some thirty years before. Others claim that he has dwelt with the Indian pow-wows and has added their dark lore to his own. And practically everyone agrees that Chillingworth's face has taken on an air of ugliness and evil since he came to dwell with Dimmesdale; the vulgar conception is that commerce with the infernal regions is blackening his face with soot from hell. Dimmesdale himself comes to feel that there

---

is something evil and loathsome about the old man, though he can assign no reason for his belief. Hester also, though she knows who Chillingworth is, senses an evil about him which is greater than that of a mere cuckolded husband seeking vengeance. As he gathers herbs in the forest, she marvels that the grass does not wither under his footsteps, and wonders what sort of herbs he gathers. "Would not the earth, quickened to an evil purpose by the sympathy with his eye, greet him with poisonous shrubs, of species hitherto unknown, that would start up under his fingers? Or might it suffice him that every wholesome growth should be converted into something deleterious and malignant at his touch?" It is interesting to note Hawthorne's use of fanciful flora in depicting evil, here and elsewhere. "Would he [Chillingworth] not suddenly sink into the earth, leaving a barren and blasted spot, where in due course of time, would be seen deadly nightshade, dogwood, henbane, and whatever else of vegetable wickedness the climate could produce, all flourishing with hideous luxuriance?" Elsewhere, Dimmesdale questions him concerning a certain herb "with a dark, flabby leaf," and receives the answer that it grew

---

5Ibid., p. 211.
6Ibid., pp. 211-12.
from the heart of a man who lies in a nameless grave. The "hideous luxuriance" is here applied only to noxious vegetation, and the same is true in "Rappaccini's Daughter," but much later H. P. Lovecraft is to use such luxuriance with reference to vegetation in general as an objective correlative of evil.

Hawthorne is never specific in denoting the exact nature of the evil which Chillingworth intends to Dimmesdale, but it has something to do with his soul's damnation. Hester thinks that he uses his influence as a physician to keep the minister's "spiritual being" disorganized and corrupted, leading him to insanity on earth and alienation from God in the world to come. Certain it is that Chillingworth would have rejoiced in the minister's mood as he returns from the forest, when he longs to blast the ears of the old deacon and the pious old granddam with blasphemy and atheistic arguments. Nevertheless, the agency of Chillingworth has no actual part in the minister's backsliding, and the very thing in which he would have rejoiced most, Mistress Hibbins's recognition of Dimmesdale as a fellow in the worship of the Black Man, is actually a factor in his regeneration.

---

Though Chillingworth is an evil genius in intention and in his manifestations, the evil that he does is ultimately bottled up within his own soul and accomplishes nothing against his enemy.

The Phantom of *The Marble Faun* is more efficacious in his operations against Miriam in that he does succeed in bringing her and Donatello to profound sorrow through his own death, but it is questionable whether he should be considered an evil genius on this basis; there is too great a parallel with the fortunate fall in Eden, for through being brought to sorrow, Miriam and Donatello are also brought to spirituality and find themselves completely. As he moves mysteriously about through the earlier parts of the novel, however, the Phantom does appear as an evil genius, casting a shadow over all the members of the group and over Donatello and Miriam in particular. His effect is similar to that of Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* and of Westervelt in *The Blithedale Romance*.

IV

Poe's use of the evil genius theme departs from that of Brown and Hawthorne in that his evil geniuses tend to lie within the persons upon whom the evil falls; the evil genius and the protagonist are the same. This statement has been frequently made with reference to Poe himself.
in such forms as "He was his own worst enemy." Poe's enmity to himself, however, worked in a very general way; its corollary in his stories is more specialized in its operations, taking the form of a pathological perversity. Poe gives a philosophical disquisition on perversity in "The Imp of the Perverse," but makes his best use of the theme in other stories.

In the earliest of the stories which deal with this theme, "The Tell-Tale Heart," the perversity is first shown in the narrator's disavowal of any reason for killing the old man. He actually loved him, he says, and yet could not bear the sight of the clouded eye. Therefore he determined to kill him. This perversity was in part unconscious, but during the inspection by the police, it assumed a more conscious form:

I smiled—for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search—search well. I led them, at length, to his chambers. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room and desired them to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which rested the corpse of the victim.9

9Poe, V, 93.
First the perverse self commits the murder; second it entertains the police in gloating hospitality over the body of the victim, and the protagonist's weakness, his sensitivity, forges the last link in the chain of his destruction by causing him to hear the dead heartbeats which drive him to confession. The mechanism of "The Black Cat" is very similar, except that the cry of the entombed cat is an objective signal to all within hearing that something needs investigating; it is the perverse self's beating on the wall with a cane that rouses the cat to outcry and brings discovery of the crime.

These, of course, are evil geniuses only in the subjective sense; objectively, there is nothing evil in the discovery of crime, but rather in the incitement to it. Again subjectively, the double in "William Wilson" may be taken as an evil genius, but only because of the perversity of Wilson; in reality, the conscience is no evil genius.

There is one evil genius of the more ordinary variety, however, in "The Black Cat," the cat itself, or better said, both cats. A lover of animals in his youth, the narrator falls into the clutches of the Demon Rum, and the first evidence of his disintegration is seen in the hate he comes to have for his cat, which leads him to gouge out one of its eyes. The process of
disintegration continues until he hangs the animal, although, as he says, he knows that in so doing he is putting himself outside the mercy of even the infinitely merciful God. If this statement may be taken seriously, then his perverse evil genius has already accomplished the damnation of his soul, with the first cat as a focus for the perversity. The main emphasis on the cat as evil genius, however, falls on the second animal. First the narrator feels an inexplicable loathing for it; then he localizes the feeling in an irregular splotch of white on the animal's breast, which, he thinks, forms the outline of a gallows:

Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and in the latter I started hourly from dreams of utterable fear, to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight—\textit{an incarnate night-mare} that I had no power to shake off—incumbent upon my heart.\footnote{Ibid., p. 151.}

Beneath the weight of such torment, says the narrator, the remnant of good in him succumbs, and the murder of his wife is the final result. Any prohibitionist, of course, could point out that he would probably have murdered her anyway, in the throes of drunken madness, and various psychological interpretations of the whole
story have been advanced. For our purposes, however, it suffices to say that the oat serves as a focus for the degeneration of the protagonist, or at least is felt by him to be such a focus, and as such it is an agent of the evil that he commits and that befalls him. He himself endows the animal with the qualities of a veritable demon.

The demon-horse in "Metzengerstein" serves a purpose similar to that of the cat, though in an objective way, for the spirit of an enemy has been metempsychosessed into the creature. There is the same reluctance to have anything to do with the animal that we find in "The Black Cat," though not so pronounced. A little page reports that Metzengerstein shudders upon vaulting into the saddle, but his inordinate pride, similar to that in the protagonist of "The Tell-Tale Heart," drives him on to ride the beast; "an expression of triumphant malignity" distorts every muscle in his face when he returns from a ride. But in the end, the animal, intent on his own purpose and completely out of control, carries Metzengerstein to his death in the flames of his own burning castle, as the old Count Berlifitzing had died in the flames of his burning stables.

All of Poe's uses of the evil genius, it will be noted, are peripheral to something else more fundamental;
the ordinary type of the evil genius works more from the outside than do Poe's. Any of Poe's victims have within themselves the materials, complete and ready, for their own destruction; the black cat is objectively passive, and the perverse selves are designed as psychological aberrations rather than as malign forces working in a direct way for evil.

V

Two rather obscure uses of the evil genius theme seem worthy of note here; one, "The Toad's Curse," reprinted from Fraser's in Graham's Magazine, is an Oriental tale of revenge, and is important mainly as evidence of a continuing taste for the older tale of terror. A young German boy expels a gaudily-colored toad from the house; it swells horribly and spits slime over him, and he feels that he is cursed. Later we find him with an Arab slave girl whom he has bought but who calls herself his mistress; she taxes him with his first sin, visited on the toad, and threatens him with a magical paralysis. He breaks through the paralysis and strikes her down with a sword, but does not kill her; she bites him and then escapes, threatening revenge. In a third

episode he has become a Carmelite monk; the slave girl comes disguised as a boy, hears his confession of his sins, and then stabs him to death and flees with her Arab lover. The lushly overdone manner of the story and its rather ill-knit and episodic structure prevent the effects the author intended from coming off, at least for the modern reader. The story is stated to be a translation from the German; as such it indicates the survival of a taste for the Gothic and the Oriental which parallels the newly-developed horror story, of which Poe is as yet the sole exponent.

"The Wicked Young Doctor: and the Direful End That Him Befel" is another example of the continued taste for the Gothic. The young doctor is too wicked to be quite believable, for not only does he wait vulture-like for the body of an old man, which he wishes to dissect, but he also robs graves in person in order to secure cadavers. As the climax to his villainy, he seizes the body of the girl whom he has hounded to her grave with unwanted attention, and uses it for his hellish purposes. He then forecloses the mortgage which he holds on her parents' home, thus perpetrating the final melodramatic cliche. Other patently Gothic devices are the black form which is seen dancing about the flaming cabin of his first victim, the old man, and the mysterious dog. Finally he
burns to death in his own office, and his calcined heart
is found clutched in the skeleton fingers of the old man.
The young doctor and the old man are reciprocal evil
geniuses, but the relationship is nowhere made clear
enough to be very satisfactory.12

Both of these stories may well be contrasted with
those of Poe, even though Poe never dealt with the theme
of the evil genius as these did. The difference in
quality, however, is not to be attributed to the differ­
ence in concept of the evil genius; rather the two obscure
tales just discussed would appear to be more obviously
horrible in theme than Poe's tales in which the evil
genius is the protagonist's own perverse self because
they deal with the unknown more obviously. It is in the
analysis of sensations that these two stories fail to
come off; at no time does the reader feel the intimacy
with the protagonist which is necessary in order for the
intended horror to be revealed to him. The problem is
properly one involving the use of the sensor, a device
which Poe brought to a high degree of perfection and
which will be fully discussed in a chapter of its own.

12 "Frank Fantome," "The Wicked Young Doctor: and
the Direful End That Him Befel," The Knickerbocker, XLVIII
(1856), 561-77.
VI

No actual type of the evil genius appears in the writings of Fitz-James O'Brien; the man in the garden of "The Lost Room" by his mere appearance portends the narrator's loss of his room to the enchanters, but his role is too brief to admit him as an evil genius according to the definition set up at the beginning of this chapter. Neither does Ambrose Bierce, with his manifold devices for the production of horror, make any use of the evil genius. Its next important appearance is in two of the stories of Robert W. Chambers.

The volume in which these appear is concerned, in the first four stories, with a body of myth that is revealed in a sinister play entitled The King In Yellow. "In the Court of the Dragon," the second story, tells of a man who goes into the church of St. Barnabe to listen to the organ music one Sunday morning; he is disturbed by horrible discords from the organ, though strangely enough no one else seems to notice, and after a time he sees the organist leave his seat at the instrument. To his surprise, he later sees the organist pass out a second time, when he fixes on the narrator a look of intense and deadly hate. The narrator is upset, but succeeds in convincing himself that he has imagined the experience; a moment later the whole thing strikes him as
comic and he has to leave the church lest he interrupt the service with loud laughter. Outside, he walks with the crowds in the spring sunlight and is joyous and gay until the organist passes him again, from the rear; in the man's profile is the same malignity he saw in the church. The very lines of his back indicate that he is bent on some mission of destruction for the narrator, who then experiences a stirring of buried memory; he seems to half-remember some forgotten guilt, and the organist is to punish him for it. Still he cannot remember what he is being held responsible for, but he knows that he will remember it, and fears the memory. As the day passes, he encounters the organist once more, and experiences the same feeling of being the object of hate and evil intention. That night, however, as he goes to his lodgings in the Court of the Dragon, he meets the organist again, and as he feels himself trapped in a corner, the enemy comes to him, menace blazing from his eyes. Then the narrator wakes in his pew, and he knows that he has only dreamed; but when the organist passes again, the submerged memory that gives the organist power over him rises out of oblivion, and he knows that while he has been sleeping, the other has been hunting his soul.

I crept to the door; the organ broke out overhead with a blare. A dazzling light filled the church, blotting the altar from my eyes. The people faded away, the arches, the vaulted roof
vanished, I raised my seared eyes to the fathomless glare, and I saw the black stars hanging in the heavens, and the wet winds from the Lake of Hali chilled my face.

And now, far away, over leagues of tossing cloud-waves, I saw the moon dripping with spray; and beyond the towers of Carcosa rose behind the moon.

Death and the awful abode of lost souls, whither my weakness long ago had sent him, had changed him for every other eye but mine. And now as I heard his voice, rising, swelling, thundering through the flaring light, and as I fell, the radiance increasing, increasing, poured over me in waves of flame. Then I sank into the depths, and I heard the King in Yellow whispering to my soul: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."13

The meaning of the evil genius here is not at all plain; the organist of the dream is clearly the same as the real organist, but whether there is any further direct link with the anonymous person represented only by pronouns in the passage quoted is not clear. The central meaning of the story, however, seems to be involved in some sort of theological allegory, based on the concept of original sin or something similar. If this interpretation is allowable, the evil genius would be either an agent or the person of a vengeful God, as hinted in the quatrain which heads the story:

"Oh Thou who burn'st in heart for those who burn
In Hell, whose fires thyself shall feed in turn;
How long be crying, --'Mercy on them, God!'
Why, who art thou to teach and He to learn?"

It may be noted that there is a considerable shift in the concept of great strength and power that the narrator sees in the organist from that which Clara Wieland perceives in the warning voices, which she ascribes at first to a benevolent presence. "... The idea of superior virtue," she says, "had always been associated in my mind with that of superior power."14 Chambers's narrator, however, finds not only no virtue in his enemy, but not even human feelings; the organist is cold and passionless, and is possessed of a rather mechanical malignance toward the narrator; he may symbolize either a hostile universe or a demon-god. Either of these concepts represents a grand shift from the sentimental deism of Clara Wieland, and demonstrates the extended opportunity for the evocation of horror out of concepts relatively new to the mind of America. This conception of the evil god or an evil universe implies that horror lies all about us. Hawthorne saw the universal evil and dealt with it frequently, though he made use of witchcraft rather than the evil genius to symbolize it. Melville also saw the evil, and focused it in one of the most impressive evil geniuses in all literature,

14 Wieland, pp. 51-52.
from the standpoint of Ahab, the White Whale. Both Hawthorne and Melville, however, stand apart from the main current of horror fiction, and this example from Chambers is the first sign of the evil universe or the evil god, symbolized in the organist, in what is usually considered horror literature.

The other example from Chambers is found in the fourth story of *The King in Yellow*, "The Yellow Sign." The evil genius here is the strangely repulsive church-yard watchman, who has an objective reality not present in the dreamlike presentation of the organist in "In the Court of the Dragon." The repulsiveness of the watchman lies in the fact that he is rotten; he first reminds Scott, who watches him from the window, of a fat grub or a coffin-worm as he turns his head petulantly upon being stared at. The bell-boy, Thomas, tells of his encounter with him, on one occasion, when he punched the watchman in the head, which was "that cold and mushy it ud sicken you to touch 'im."

"... when I 'it 'im 'e grabbed me wrists, sir, and when I twisted 'is soft, mushy fist one of 'is fingers come off in me 'and."

The utter loathing and horror of Thomas' face must have been reflected in my own for he added: "It's orful, an' now when I see 'im I just go away. 'E makes me hill."

When Thomas had gone I went to the window. The man stood beside the church railing with both hands on the gate, but I hastily retreated.
to my easel again, sickened and horrified, for I saw that the middle finger of his right hand was missing. 15

Scott next sees him when returning from an all-night party; as he passes, the watchman mutters something that Scott does not understand, and he has a wild desire to smash his stick over the fellow's head. In bed, the voice of the watchman keeps ringing in his ears. "It filled my head, that muttering sound, like thick, oily smoke from a fat-rendering vat or an odor of noisome decay." 16 Finally he makes out what the words were, and the recognition is similar to the emergence of the buried memory in "In the Court of the Dragon." The voice had asked repeatedly, "Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

The words make no sense to Scott; he falls asleep and dreams of riding in a hearse driven by the watchman. Next day his sweetheart comes, bringing him a strangely-embossed trinket she has found. The two together read the evil book, The King in Yellow, and in the melancholy which it induces, he realizes that the trinket with its gold embossing is the Yellow Sign. The pieces have all fallen into place, and now they await only the coming of the dream-hearse. It comes, and the watchman-driver

16 Ibid., p. 117.
ascends the stairs, bolts and guards rotting at his touch, to take the Yellow Sign. When others come in response to the screams they hear, they find Scott dying, his sweetheart dead, and the watchman a heap of corruption which seems to have been dead for months. 

"... I knew that the King in Yellow had opened his tattered mantle, and there was only God to cry to now."\(^{17}\)

So says the narrator, Scott, after the evil has fallen, an evil from external sources, merely aided in some obscure way by the knowledge of the Yellow Sign which he possesses.

VII

The workings of the evil genius are either psychological or supernatural, and often there is a blend of the two. To Wieland, the voice of Corwin is the voice of God, but Wieland is a melancholic and a madman. In Corwin's activities, he appears to Wieland as an evil genius in the guise of a god; to Clara, he seems at times to take the form of an omnipresent and powerful protector, though with a human voice. The effect through most of the story is supernatural, but in explanation, the workings of Corwin are through psychological channels. The supernatural appearance of Corwin's operations is

\(^{17}\)

Ibid., p. 126.
most closely related to the Gothic element in the story; the psychological explanation is a more modern addition. With the exception of Metzengerstein's horse, the evil genius as used by Poe is entirely psychological and thus non-Gothic; either perversity alone or perversity aided by some external focus, namely a black cat, excavates the human soul and reveals the horror which lies there, manifesting itself as a negation of ordinary human virtue and the light of day.

Chillingworth is an embodiment of evil, and he labors amain to procure the final damnation of the soul of Dimmesdale. His methods are those of the psychologist rather than of the dealer in the occult and the supernatural, though the rumors of darker powers that he possesses indicate his Gothic ancestry; perhaps his skill as a conjurer and a witch-doctor is closely related to his activities in the realm of the spirit. However that may be, the effect of Chillingworth in the story is more atmospheric than actual; he seems the embodiment of Satan, who seeks to snare a soul, but actually the possible damnation and the actual salvation of Dimmesdale stem from within his own being.

Chambers blends the two types of operation of the evil genius in the story "In the Court of the Dragon;" the experience is presented in a purely subjective manner,
and the narrator emphasizes the fact that the other people in the church do not hear the discordant chords from the organ which so alarm him in his dream. A certain knowledge is required to be in the narrator's possession before he is vulnerable to the attack of the organist who seeks his soul; in this story, the knowledge comes out of a submerged memory which finally comes to the surface, and in doing so dooms the narrator.

The subjective portrayal of the organist leaves him open to suspicion of being psychological in his manifestation. The churchyard watchman of "The Yellow Sign," however, is presented objectively as supernatural—at least supernatural to the extent that carrion must be supernatural in order to move about. His final advent, as driver of the dream-hearse, has been thrice adumbrated in the dreams of Scott and Teasie, his sweetheart; and the narration of the dreams has been well interwoven with the realistic and commonplace descriptions of the working-days of an artist. The contrast between the real and the unreal is completely non-Gothic in these stories of Chambers; even the supernatural elements have a symbolic function that distinguishes them from the mere sensation-machines employed by the Gothic romancers. This re-interpretation of the supernatural is only one of several features which distinguish the modern horror story from the older Gothic tale.
CHAPTER V

THE USE OF SETTING

I

Poe was the earliest among the writers of the modern horror story to exploit the interrelation of setting and action, thus occupying a position similar to that of Mrs. Radcliffe among the Gothic novelists. When setting exerts an influence that pervades the entire story, there is often a difficulty in distinguishing it from the characters, since it serves to complement them and extend their effect. At other times the setting may take its color from the characters; that is to say, it may be interpreted in terms of their actions and personalities. Nevertheless, the sheer physical characteristics of the setting, shorn as much as possible of the color taken from or given by the characters, may be illuminating. In this chapter the physical settings employed by the chief American authors of the horror story will be examined and evaluated when evaluation is possible.

II

In accordance with his purpose of writing a romance without the elaborate trappings of a Gothic tale, Charles Brockden Brown sets the action in Wieland in scenes which are essentially commonplace, or which at least have none
of the elaborate mechanism necessary to the performance of the classic Gothic melodrama. The same statement may be made of his other romances which contain any element of the unusual in the sense of remoteness from common human experience; the cave scene in Huntley, for instance, must be considered such a commonplace setting, for it is a commonplace cave in every respect, except that it very conveniently contains a panther and has a convenient outlet. If Poe was influenced by Brown's cave in writing "The Pit and the Pendulum," the difference between the commonplace cave of Brown, which merely happens to contain a hungry panther, and the quite un­commonplace inquisitorial dungeon of Poe is rather striking. Similarly, in the sleep-walking scenes, there is nothing more mysterious than the night itself, although the physical description takes a certain color from Clithero's weird digging in the shadow of the tree; what there is of the unusual derives rather from the phenomenon of sleep-walking and from Huntley's speculations on the sleep-walker's actions.

On the other hand, Brown had a definite predilection for romantic wildness in setting, in which he would have seen nothing of the unusual. This quality is tempered, however, by the architectural features of the elder Wieland's temple in the setting for the spontaneous
Combustion scene. A ruinous old chapel with sliding panels and a subterranean passage might have been a more likely setting for the event as described by another writer, but not so with Brown, even though such Gothic apparatus would have offered possible explanations for an event otherwise inexplicable. The description of the temple, which is representative of Brown's descriptive manner, runs as follows:

At the distance of three hundred yards from his house, on the top of a rock whose sides were steep, rugged, and encumbered with dwarf cedars and stony asperities, he built what to a common eye would have seemed a summerhouse. The eastern verge of this precipice was sixty feet above the river which flowed at its foot. The view before it consisted of a transparent current, fluctuating and rippling in a rocky channel, and bounded by a rising scene of corn-fields and orchards. The edifice was slight and airy. It was no more than a circular area, twelve feet in diameter, whose flooring was the rock, cleared of moss and shrubs, and exactly leveled, edged by twelve Tuscan columns and covered by an undulating dome. My father furnished the dimensions and outlines, but allowed the artist whom he employed to complete the structure on his own plan. It was without seat, table, or ornament of any kind.¹

Here it is that the combustion takes place, followed by the putrefaction and death of the elder Wieland. There is nothing in the nature of the temple to suggest the fate which he is to meet there, unless it is the fact

that it is the shrine where he worships a deity who manifests himself in curious ways. The nature of this deity is nowhere revealed early in the story, except that Wieland conceived him to be of a rigorous and demanding disposition, and thus to have little if anything to do with the nature of the place where he is worshiped.

The mysterious voices, the most prominent device Brown uses in creating the air of the unusual in this novel, are heard both indoors and in the open air; that which Wieland hears first seems to proceed from the house as he is climbing a hill; the second, heard by both Pleyel and Wieland, is in the temple, and seems to proceed from the roof. Both of these manifestations take place in broad daylight, and their effect is wonder and a certain awe, rather than horror or even fear.

Terror first comes to Clara when she hears the voices coming from her closet at midnight; we may even grant a somewhat intellectualized horror in her reaction, for the sound of the clock, which had been owned by her father, has caused her to reflect and ponder over the manner of his death. His fate, she recalls, overtook him at this very hour that the clock is striking immediately before she hears the voices. A bedchamber, particularly one's own bedchamber, is commonplace enough; but we may
grant a certain effect to be produced by midnight and
the emanations from Clara's own reflections. All this
is very well, and it produces, in combination with the
first occurrence of the voice itself, what is probably
the best single effect in the novel. The effect is
promptly spoiled, however, first by Clara's elaborate
attempt at rationalization, and second by the introduction
of two "murderers" represented by the voices, who for
overdone melodrama might have escaped from the Grande
Guignol.

The voice by the waterfall where Clara has her
bower produces an effect similar to that of the voice
in the bedroom, and depends little on setting. There is
picturesque wildness without the chastening effect of
Tuscan columns, as in Wieland's temple, but although
there is a rough similarity in the descriptions of the
two places, no point is made of it; the natural beauty
seems to be introduced for its own sake. There is, of
course, the double isolation conferred on this setting
by distance and darkness; such isolation might conceivably
make the place more suitable for the creation of emotions
of horror than is the bedroom, which has the benefit of
darkness alone; but such a difference is minor. On this
occasion the voice is heard out of a chasm from which no
human voice could come, she says, but again the effect
is nullified by her realization that it is not only human but is also one of those she has previously heard speaking in her bedroom closet.\(^2\)

All the other manifestations of the voice which are described take place in Clara's house, with minor variations in the psychological atmosphere but none in the physical. Brown's method of handling setting may be summed up, then, by saying that no particular place or sort of place is necessary for him to work his effects, though darkness is frequently a part of it. The thoughts of the person who experiences the effects are usually disturbed by melancholy reflections of some sort, and are thus made theoretically susceptible to any emotions of terror or horror which are about to be invoked.

**III**

If anything about American literature may be considered well-known, it is the atmosphere of a Poe horror story. As a typical example, "The Fall of the House of Usher" has been analyzed and dissected by whole generations of teachers in order to demonstrate to gaping high school students wherein its effect lies. "During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in

\(^2\) See p. 52, this study.
the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. " The atmosphere can be described in great detail, as in the words I have italicized here, and yet, though it contributes to the effect produced and at times comprises the greater part of it, we cannot say exactly why. A statement of Poe's own seems as apt as any that can be made here: "I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting me, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth." Nevertheless, though the entire power to affect cannot be fully analyzed, since it depends to such an extent upon subjective factors, his settings are susceptible of analysis.

The greater number of Poe's horror stories are set in a building, and their physical setting can be summed up in a description of architecture and decor.  

---

3 Poe, III, 273.
4 Ibid., p. 274.
5 Margaret Kane, "Edgar Allan Poe and Architecture," The Sewanee Review, XL (1932), 149-60.
Kane has made such a summation, pointing out that the most salient features of Poe's buildings are age, dilapidation, and remoteness; even the Paris dwelling of C. Auguste Dupin and the narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is in "a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain." The exterior is commonly magnificent, though crumbling, and the size of the building is usually large. As to the interior, the "intimate portion," in which the action of the story takes place, is located in an especially remote part of the building; a person arrives at it only through a series of corridors which are characterized by blackened and decaying woodwork, tattered draperies, and other evidences of departed splendor. The room may also be unusual in shape, as is the pentagonal room in the tower in "Ligeia." The ceilings are carved and vaulted and are very lofty; the floors are dark. The furniture is presented vaguely as it is needed, and often has an air of antiquity and cheerlessness in common with the rest of the house. The beds, for instance, are gloomily magnificent, as in "The Oval Portrait," "Ligeia," and "The Fall of the House of Usher." There are tapestries and hangings which may be either

\[6\] Poe, IV, 151.
ornate or ancient and dark, but magnificent in any case, though the magnificence may be tarnished; those in "Ligeia" are embroidered with "arabesques" which seem to do a weird dance as the tapestries are put in motion when a current of air is introduced behind them. If even greater remoteness and a more concrete symbolism of horror is desired than such Gothic stage-settings, there is a vault which is dank, dreary, and grave-like, and which may actually contain a tomb.

Besides these reasonably well-defined attributes of Poe's houses, there are others which also appear rather frequently. One is an atmosphere of decadent luxury appearing in several of the stories. For instance, in "The Assignation":

Although, as I say, the sun had arisen, yet the room was still brilliantly lighted up... In the architecture and embellishments of the chamber, the evident design had been to dazzle and astound. Little attention had been paid to the decor of what is technically called keeping, or to the proprieties of nationality. The eye wandered from object to object and rested upon none—neither the grotesques of the Greek painters, nor the sculptures of the best Italian days, nor the huge carvings of untutored Egypt. Rich draperies in every part of the room trembled to the vibration of low, melancholy music, whose origin was not to be discovered. The senses were oppressed by mingled and conflicting perfumes, reeking up from strange convolute censers, together with multitudinous flaring and flickering tongues of emerald and violet fire. The rays of the newly-risen sun poured in upon the whole, through tinted glass. Glancing to and
In a thousand reflections, from curtains which rolled from their cornices like cataracts of molten silver, the beams of natural glory mingled at length fitfully with the artificial light, and lay weltering in subdued masses upon a carpet of rich, liquid-looking cloth of Chili gold.  

Not only the perfumes but also the colors oppress the senses. Unusual lighting evidently intrigued Poe, for in "Ligeia," in the pentagonal room, "the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window, an immense sheet of unbroken glass from Venice,—a single pane, and tinted of a leaden hue, so that the rays of either the sun or moon fell with a ghastly lustre on the objects within," a bit of description that calls to mind the "ghastly and inappropriate splendor" that bathes one of the weird paintings of Roderick Usher. From the ceiling there "depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out, as if endowed with serpent vitality, a continual succession of parti-coloured fires."  

Further, in the suite of Prince Prospero of "The Masque of the Red Death," all the illumination comes through a tall, narrow Gothic window in each room, each window looking out over a

---

7 Poe, II, 116.

8 Ibid., p. 259.
closed corridor. "The windows were of stained glass whose colour varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened." In six of the rooms, the decorations are of blue, purple, green, orange, white, and violet; but in the seventh, the furnishings are of black, and here the color of the lighting fails to correspond, being blood-red. "And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the firelight that streamed upon the dark hangings, through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all." 9 Allied to this love of insane color, however, is the devotion to darkness shown by C. Auguste Dupin and the narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue":

It was a freak of fancy in my friend (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamoured of the Night for her own sake; and into this bizarre, as into all his others, I quietly fell; giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect abandon. The sable divinity would not dwell with us always; but we could counterfeit her presence. At the first dawn of the

---

9 Poe, IV, 251-52.
morning we closed all the massive shutters of our old building; lighting a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays.

The total effect of architecture, decor, and decadent atmosphere is one of withdrawal from reality; the effect is not unearthly in most cases, but it does approach very near to the unearthly in the pentagonal turret room of "Ligeia," with the dancing figures of the arabesques on the cloth-of-gold tapestries capering in the "ghastly lustre" produced by the lead-hued window.

Most of these houses are without inhabitants except for the people of the story; only in "The Fall of the House of Usher" do we see enough of other people to know anything of what they are like or whether they even exist.

"A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me in silence through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master." "On one of the staircases I met the physician of the family. His countenance, I thought, wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity. He accosted me with trepidation and passed on." Neither valet nor physician is necessary to the story, but they lend an added air of unwholesome personality to the totality of unwholesomeness, which is the atmosphere of the house.

---

10 Ibid., p. 151.

11 Ibid., III, 277.
In only one story does there seem to be an effort to use particulars of a house deliberately as objective correlatives to the horror within it. In "Berenice" the narrator says:

Our line has been called a race of visionaries; and in many striking particulars— in the character of the family mansion— in the frescoes of the chief saloon— in the tapestries of the dormitories— in the chiseling of some buttresses in the armory— but more especially in the gallery of antique paintings— in the fashion of the library chamber— and lastly, in the very peculiar nature of the library's contents, there is more than sufficient evidence to warrant the belief.

None of these items is described, with the partial exception of the contents of the library, which are merely "very peculiar." Here is innuendo hinting at vague abnormality, but no statement; the language drapes a mist over the ancestral home of the narrator, that lends it an air of mystery capable of concealing any horror.

The general vagueness in which Poe couches the descriptions of his settings lends an additional air of the unknown to their basic abnormality, and thus adds a great deal to their effect. Even when he uses the names of actual places, he contrives to shroud them in mystery. Venice, in "The Assignation," is "that city of dim visions," "a star-beloved Elysium of the sea," "the wide

12 Ibid., II, 16-17.
windows of whose Palladian palaces look down with a deep and bitter meaning upon the secrets of her silent waters." 13 The narrator of "Ligeia" meets the lady, he believes, "in some large, old decaying city near the Rhine"; after her death he leaves that place and goes to take up his abode in "an abbey, which he shall not name, in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England." 14 The House of Usher is located vaguely in "a singularly dreary tract of country," 15 and so on through most of Poe's tales. No place is localized, save Venice, except in the stories of ratiocination; they seem "out of space, out of time."

IV

Even as Hawthorne was an allegorist first and a writer of horror fiction only incidentally to his allegory, so do his backgrounds generally tend to be commonplace; to him as well as to Poe, the human heart is the seat of the greatest horror. There are several exceptions to this statement, however, and most of them seem to occur in the stories in which the element of horror is strongest and tends to overshadow the allegory.

13 Ibid., p. 109.
14 Ibid., pp. 249, 258.
15 Ibid., III, p. 273.
In *The House of the Seven Gables*, the significant feature with regard to the slight thread of the supernatural which runs through the story is related to the site of the house rather than to the house itself; the Pyncheon mansion is built on the spot formerly occupied by Matthew Maule, a reputed wizard whose execution was thought to have been urged by the first Colonel Pyncheon in order that the site of Maule's hovel might be the more quickly made available for his own luxurious dwelling. The house itself, however, is old and haunted by the memories of dead Pyncheons, especially those who seem to have died in accordance with the terms of Maule's curse on the family. As Clifford Pyncheon says:

> There is no such unwholesome atmosphere as that of an old home, rendered poisonous by one's defunct forefathers and relatives. I speak of what I know. There is a certain house within my familiar recollection,—one of those peaked-gable (there are seven of them), projecting-storied edifices, such as you occasionally see in our older towns,—a rusty, crazy, creaky, dry-rotted, damp-rotted, dingy, dark, and miserable old dungeon, with an arched window over the porch, and a little shop-door on one side, and a great melancholy elm before it.16

Elsewhere, especially in *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne also recognizes the malignity of sheer age, and in so doing makes use of the "psychic residue" concept of the occultists, which had not at that time been so defined.

---

16 Hawthorne, III, 309-10.
This aspect of Hawthorne is later amplified tremendously in the work of H. P. Lovecraft, who may be said to have carried on the task of creating a New England legend begun by Hawthorne, and to have carried it to its logical conclusion; decayed and malevolent New England buildings are frequent and essential in many of these later stories. The atmosphere of Dr. Heidegger's suite, on the other hand, is not unwholesome but rather whimsically Gothic. The place is dim, cobwebbed and dusty; there are bookshelves full of ancient books; there are a bust of Hippocrates (which is reported to speak rather more frequently than the Brazen Head of Friar Bacon), a skeleton, and a mirror which is said to reflect the images of all the doctor's deceased patients. Finally, there is an old folio with silver clasps which is known to be a book of magic. Dr. Grimshawe's study, in the house by the burying-ground, is somewhat similar, with the possible exception of the huge spider which may be intended as a familiar or an evil genius of some sort; and Aylmer's laboratory in "The Birthmark" is yet another example of the same thing. A good-humored uneasiness, suitable to a Hallowe'en party rather than to the serious business of evil, seems to be the usual intention in such settings.

\[17\] Ibid., I, 259-60.
of Hawthorne's, though it goes deeper in "The Birthmark."

When we move to Hawthorne's settings outside of buildings, however, we find them constructed more explicitly to complement the powers of darkness that manifest themselves there. The very mention of the forest is likely to call immediately to mind a picture of the Black Man, as is the case with Little Pearl in the forest with her mother; Mistress Hibbins, the old witch, is also intrigued to know where the minister has been:

"So, reverend Sir, you have made a visit into the forest," observed the witch-lady, nodding her high head-dress at him. "The next time, I pray you to allow me only a fair warning, and I shall be proud to bear you company. Without taking overmuch upon myself, my good word will go far towards gaining any strange gentleman a fair reception from yonder potentate you wot of!" 18

Another and a more specifically described spot where this potentate was wont to come is described in "The Hollow of the Three Hills;"

Three little hills stood near each other, and down in the midst of them sunk a hollow basin, almost mathematically circular, two or three hundred feet in breadth, and of such depth that a stately cedar might but just be visible above the sides. Dwarf pines were numerous upon the hills, and partly fringed the outer verge of the intermediate hollow, within which there was nothing but the brown grass of October, and here

and there a tree trunk that had fallen long ago, and lay mouldering with no green successor from its roots. One of these masses of decaying wood, formerly a majestic oak, rested close beside a pool of green and sluggish water at the bottom of the basin. Such scenes as this (so gray tradition tells) were once the resort of the Power of Evil and his plighted subjects; and here at midnight or on the dim verge of evening, they were said to stand round the mantling pool, disturbing its putrid waters in the performance of an impious baptismal rite.19

The worship thus darkly hinted at is presented in a far more specific form in "Young Goodman Brown," and again the setting is extremely important in establishing the atmosphere. Brown, in his forest journey to the site of the Dark Worship, "felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind."20 Eventually he arrived at the scene and gazed upon it.

At one extremity of an open space, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, arose a rock, bearing some rude, natural resemblance to an altar or a pulpit, and surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting. The mass of foliage that had overgrown the summit of the rock was all on fire, blazing high into the night and fitfully illuminating the whole field.21

There Goodman Brown could see practically everyone whom he knew or had ever known, both saints and sinners. All united in a hymn of blasphemy, sung to the organ-like music of the forest, until a rushing, roaring, howling sound betokened the arrival of the object of the worship, while the four blazing pines blazed afresh. "At the same moment the fire on the rock shot redly forth and formed a glowing arch above its base, where now appeared a figure. With reverence be it spoken, the figure bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New England churches." 22

In this story the congregation definitely forms part of the background, and it may be said that this is one of the few stories in which the background is, to a large extent, the horror. Here the pious have flung off their masks and stand revealed as the true fiend-worshipers they are; good is a delusion, and evil reigns triumphant over all creation. Poe deals with the horror of the human heart, but in terms of the individual; the evil and horror in his stories is felt to constitute an abnormality. Here and running like a major theme through many of Hawthorne's other stories, evil is not merely normal, but well-nigh universal; thus, in "Young Goodman

---

22 Ibid., p. 102.
Brown," the fear evoked by the writer approaches the dimensions of the cosmic, for the entire cosmos of Goodman Brown is evil.

By comparison, the garden of Rappaccini, studied though its effects be, conveys nothing of the same effect; it is an abnormality whose evil has been brought into being by the impious hand of man tampering with a benevolent creation:

There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer, straying by himself through a forest, would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of the thicket. Several also would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness indicating that there had been such commixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty.23

Two entirely different points of view may be seen in the contrast made between these stories; "Rappaccini's Daughter" is essentially a Gothic tale, but "Young Goodman Brown" is a modern horror story. Hawthorne passes beyond the limitation of conceiving evil and horror as an abnormality, as in "Rappaccini's Daughter," to conceiving it as the norm in "Young Goodman Brown" and elsewhere. It cannot definitely be said that it is universal,

23 Ibid., p. 128.
however, even in "Young Goodman Brown," for Brown resists the blighting influence of the Dark Worship, at least in his hope that Faith has resisted, though allegorically Faith cannot be doubted. The universe, then, is a seething mass of corruption, in which a tiny group of the faithful (who may not actually be faithful at all) are enabled to survive only through vigilant watchfulness and constant attention to efforts from the other side to break down the barrier. Considering the picture as a whole, of course, Rappaccini is a part of it as well; his experiments with poisonous plants and people constitute just such an effort to break down the barrier, as do even the actions of the stale villains of Gothic romance. Hawthorne thus brings a new perspective to the field of horror fiction, which later writers who are not concerned with moral allegory exploit more fully.

V

In all three of the authors so far considered, setting is important, either in contributing to the mood of the story or in subtracting from it. Charles Brockden Brown makes use of commonplace settings as a part of his policy of leaning backward to avoid the excesses of the Gothic romancers; Poe has no fear of excess, but lays on his background with an intense gusto that often belies
the excessive languor and ennui affected by his protagonists; Hawthorne makes a similar use of background and setting, but adds to it a symbolic significance oriented to a whole philosophy of evil. By way of contrast, we may now consider two authors who made little use of setting at all, Fitz-James O'Brien and Ambrose Bierce.

Fitz-James O'Brien, like Poe, is more concerned with action which takes place in interiors, but as a rule the surroundings are not important in establishing the mood of the story. "The Wondersmith," for instance, is laid in a nondescript building in a city slum; there is one scene in a neighboring bird-fancier's establishment, but the action might as well have taken place in an isolated rural dwelling with the side episode in a neighbor's henhouse. "Mother of Pearl" shifts its setting from India to Maine, but only in the fact that the wife's addiction to hashish was acquired in India is either place in the least necessary to the action. "The Pot of Tulips" is set in a villa, which subsequently turns out to be haunted by the ghost of the previous owner but is otherwise undistinguished, and "What Was It?" is laid in a house believed to be haunted but in which nothing remarkable is experienced until the night of the attack by the invisible thing. "Milly Dove," an over-sentimental love story with nothing of the horrible about it, is laid
in an old house that has some similarity to the House of the Seven Gables. Only in one of O'Brien's stories, "The Lost Room," and in one of his poems, "Sir Brasil's Falcon," do the settings complement or seem necessary to the action.

Poe's houses are decayed and over-ornate; that in which "The Lost Room" is located is rather characterized by "an unearthly nakedness," though the net effect of the atmosphere is one of gloom.

It was Hood's haunted house put in order and newly painted. The servants, too, were shadowy and chary of their visits. Bells rang three times before the gloomy chambermaid could be induced to present herself; and the negro waiter, a ghoul-like looking creature from Congo, obeyed the summons only when one's patience was exhausted or one's want satisfied in some other way. When he did come, one felt sorry that he had not stayed away altogether, so sullen and savage did he appear. He moved along the echoless floors with a slow, noiseless shamble, until his dusky figure, advancing from the gloom, seemed like some reluctant afreet, compelled by the superior power of his master to disclose himself. When the doors of the corridor were closed, and no light illuminated the long corridors save the red, unwholesome glare of a small oil lamp on a table at the end, where late comers lit their candles, one could not by any possibility conjure up a sadder or more desolate prospect.24

Such a passage in Poe could be taken as typical; in O'Brien it is exceptional. The bareness of the building

---

itself, however, is compensated for to some extent by
the color it takes from the people in it; the compari-
son of the negro to a ghoul is especially significant,
for O'Brien was fond of such comparisons, and the mouth-
conformation of the invisible thing in "What Was It?" is
said to be ghoul-like. The air of desolation is pointed
up by the mad, feverish gaiety found by the narrator in
his rooms, where the enchanters have established them-
selves, and which might have been drawn from the Arabian
Nights.

O'Brien's other portrayal of setting in the poem
is equally atypical, though it is somewhat overdone, as
contrasted with the reserved but adequate treatment of
the lodging house. "Sir Brasil's Falcon," an undistin-
guished narrative poem in blank verse, deals with the
discovery of a horrible dragon that dribbles venom in a
thin, green stream. The landscape is distinguished by
withered, leafless trees, slimy swamps, and dismal barren-
ness in most places. The following description of vege-
tation may be compared or contrasted with Hawthorne's
use of vegetation in "Rappaccini's Daughter" and with
the noxious herbage gathered by Chillingworth in The
Scarlet Letter:

Huge, fleshy weeds
Grew in black groups along the ragged edge
Of a tall beetling cliff, whose steep face sloped
With slabs of rock, adown whose pallid sides
The thin, white moss spread like a leprosy. 25

But while Hawthorne makes use of the fleshy-leaved herb
gathered by Chillingworth to objectify the evil human
heart out of which it might have grown, O'Brien employs
his flora here merely to create an unpleasant prospect
for the errant Sir Brasil to gaze upon.

With these two exceptions, O'Brien's settings
neither are especially interesting for their own sake,
nor contribute to the effects in his stories.

Except in The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter,
which by his own acknowledgement is not entirely his
own work, Ambrose Bierce reduced description of setting
to an absolute minimum. For instance, the real physical
framework of "The Death of Halpin Frayser" is established
in the following words: "One dark night in midsummer a
man waking from a dreamless sleep in a forest lifted
his face from the earth..." and a few lines further
along, we are informed that "He had been all day in the
hills west of the Napa Valley, looking for doves and
such small game as was in season;" 26 and that he lost
his way because of cloudy weather. Then the story begins,

25 Ibid., p. 6.

26 Bierce, III, 13-14.
and there is no more background description until the end, when the body is discovered in the fog-shrouded and deserted graveyard, which is also described in very few words. In "The Secret of Macarger's Gulch," the action of the ghosts takes place in an old house: "It lacked a door and a window frame, and the chimney of mud and stones had fallen into an unlovely heap, overgrown with rank weeds. Such humble furniture as there may have been and much of the lower weatherboarding, had served as fuel in the fires of hunters; as had also, probably, the curbing of an old well. . . ." 27 In other words, a very ordinary deserted house stood there. The account of Julia Hetman in "The Moonlit Road" describes her situation prior to the attack by the unseen assailant; it takes place in her bedroom, which is as uninteresting as most bedrooms and is, specifically, no more attractive to creeping horrors such as she experiences there than is Clara Wieland's to voices from invisible lips. There is no necessity for further examples; in each story Bierce supplies the reader with the irreducible minimum of setting necessary to localize the story, and with that mechanical function accomplished,

27 Ibid., pp. 45-46.
it is of no further importance, with one or two partial exceptions.

Even in Bierce's haunted houses, where one would expect some care to be taken with establishing a proper atmosphere through setting, there is a terse and journalistic manner of treatment. They are all ordinary. Apparently, the only qualification a house needs to be termed haunted, whether truly or not, is that it be deserted; local gossip and small boys will take care of the rest, and Bierce's action generates its own atmosphere. Variations on this theme are few; one, in "The Suitable Surroundings," provides the coincidental appearance of a small boy's white face at the lamplit window simultaneously with the cry of a screech owl. These occurrences, combined with the loneliness of a deserted house in a forest and the effect of having read a horror story, prove sufficient to give the sole inhabitant heart failure.

Another exception occurs in "The Spook House"; it is a true exception to Bierce's rule and not a variation played on it. Here the only atmosphere of importance is related, not to the whole house, but to a mysterious room discovered once but never found again:

This apartment was suffused with a faint greenish light, the source of which I could not determine, making everything distinctly visible,
though nothing was sharply defined. Everything, I say, but in truth the only objects within the blank stone walls of that room were human corpses. In number they were perhaps eight or ten—it may well be understood that I did not truly count them. They were of different ages, or rather sizes, from infancy up and of both sexes... The bodies were in various stages of decay, all greatly shrunken in face and figure. Some were but little more than skeletons.28

The narrator also notes that the door is sheathed with riveted iron plates, and that it closes with a spring look which cannot be released from within. His companion pushes past him to investigate; while he is within, the narrator feels faint, and as he falls he allows the door to close on his companion. He awakes miles away with no knowledge of how he got there, but his companion has completely disappeared. Subsequent visits reveal no sign of such a room.

With these two exceptions, Bierce's characters haunt their own houses; even when there are real ghosts, as in "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot" or in "A Fruitless Assignment," they have no aid and comfort other than very conventional dilapidation, dust, and the bad reputation which the house has acquired.

28 Ibid., p. 396.
In *Wieland*, Charles Brockden Brown made use of commonplace settings as a reaction against Gothic excess, but in so doing he almost defeated his purpose by smothering the element of wonder and horror which accompanied the mysterious voices and other phenomena. Two later writers managed to handle setting as contrast much more artistically, blending it with the element of horror so as to produce a unified effect which Brown failed to achieve.

One of these was Robert W. Chambers, who made use of a formula for the physical setting of his horror tales as much as did Ambrose Bierce in describing a haunted house. The effect is different, however, because there is what seems to be a conscious opposition between the real settings of Chambers's stories and the unreal or other-worldly ones; these other-worldly settings will be discussed in a later chapter, where their contribution to the creation of horror will be pointed out. The real settings, on the other hand, are everything that horror is not. They are filled with sunlight and spring, the song of birds and the light-hearted badinage of young artists who seldom think very seriously of anything. This world is linked with the other by the evil book, *The King in Yellow*, which reveals the loathsome and sickness
of soul which is of the other world, yet is intertwined with this. Hildred Castaigne, the mad protagonist of "The Repairer of Reputations," combines an awareness of both worlds. He appreciates the heroic and the picturesque; the shop of Hawberk the armorer he loves because he is fond of the sound of steel striking and rustling against steel. A regiment of cavalry is quartered near his apartment; their quarters are picturesque with sallyports, nattily-clad officers, and the cheery sound of privates grooming horses. These, however, merge in the mind of Castaigne with the vision of the glory which is to be his when he assumes the Imperial Crown of America, under the aegis of the Yellow Sign, protected by the abominable horrors which it is to loose on the world.

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's ghost stories achieve their effects in large part because of the impingement of the ghostly on the commonplace. Her method differs from Charles Brockden Brown's in that his wonderful occurrences are superimposed on the setting and the society which he creates; those of Mrs. Freeman grow naturally out of the setting and society. Brown's voices burst with an initially shattering effect upon the protagonist; Mrs. Freeman's ghosts show themselves in terms of the
familiar, such as the smell of cabbage cooking which comes from a house that no longer exists in "The Vacant Lot." Miss Rebecca Flint, spinster, in "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," is not certain that she has witnessed ghostly phenomena until she returns home and receives a letter informing her that her niece has been dead for months. And always, even in the midst of ghostly occurrences, life goes on as usual: pies continue to be baked, clothes to be mended, the trivia of housekeeping to be attended to.

Ralph Adams Cram returns to the general method of Poe in matching setting to action and of complement rather than contrast. His stories take place in an old castle, which is appropriately dilapidated, though strangely enough no trace of rats or insect life is found there; in a haunted villa, also appropriately tattered and mildewed; in a convent, which is in a good state of repair, since it is occupied and active; and in an old church of mixed Norman and general Gothic architecture. In these stories, Cram's settings are adequate but not particularly noteworthy. In two others, however, he achieves something memorable.

"No. 252 Rue M. le Prince" is set in an old house formerly occupied by one Mlle. Blaye, an old lady who was known to have practiced witchcraft and to have
celebrated Walpurgisnacht and other festivals at the appropriate times. She also consorted with warlocks, one in particular, and the house takes its distinctive coloration from her activities.

The night on which the story takes place is moonlit when the clouds allow the moon to shine; a hot wind drifts in dead puffs over the city. The group arrive at the house, known in the neighborhood as "la bouche d'enfer," where they are to spend the night, and investigate it.

The courtyard, lit by the fitful moonlight and their four lanterns, seems completely isolated from the street just beyond the wall. Inside the house there are four rooms that appear very ordinary, known as the "bad" rooms, and some others which appear less ordinary. Old Mlle. Blaye's "unholy of unholies" is comprised of several rooms, the first being covered, floor, ceiling and walls, with black lacquer, giving the impression of a room of mirrors. The second is more surprising:

The room was circular, thirty feet or so in diameter, covered by a hemispherical dome; walls and ceiling were dark blue, spotted with gold stars; and reaching from floor to floor across the dome stretched a colossal figure in red lacquer of a nude woman kneeling, her legs reaching out along the floor on either side, her head touching the lintel of the door through which we had entered, her arms forming its sides, with the forearms extended and stretching along the walls till they met the long feet. The most astounding, misshapen, absolutely terrifying
thing, I think, I ever saw. From the navel hung a great white object, like the traditional roe's egg of the Arabian Nights. The floor was of red lacquer, and in it was inlaid a pentagram the size of the room, made of wide strips of brass. In the center of this pentagram was a circular disk of black stone, slightly saucer-shaped, with a small outlet in the middle. Finally, a third room is sheathed in plates of brass and contains an altar of porphyry and a pedestal of black basalt.

These details are more significant than similar ones would be in Poe. The element of horror which is about to be introduced is not to come out of the mind of the sensor; it is a very real, very objective horror, and it has to come from somewhere. One element in its production is a curse which has been put on the house by one of Mlle. Blaye's associates, a professed sorcerer, who had hoped to inherit it. The other element is doubtless the pentagram of brass in the second room, a device familiar to students of sorcery as a part of the machinery for the evocation of demons. It is a demon which attacks the protagonist during his vigil in one of the haunted rooms, and worship of demons is implied in the presence of the altar and in the circular disk of black stone with the

outlet, which was probably used in blood sacrifices. Other details, such as the nude in red lacquer, may have an equally definite purpose, but they also serve, with the pentagram itself and the altar, to create an atmosphere of the baroque, in the general manner of Poe.

The other memorable setting of Gram's is an outdoor one, found in "The Dead Valley." Here there is also a demon, but we know it only from its voice and from the evidences of its activities. Of two descriptions of the place, the second is the more complete, and even at the risk of an over-long quotation, it can best be described in Gram's own words:

There lay the Dead Valley! A great oval basin, almost as smooth and regular as though made by man. On all sides the grass crept over the encircling hills, dusty green on the crests, then fading to ashy brown, and so to a deadly white, this last color forming a thin ring, running in a long line around the slope. And then? Nothing. Bare, brown, hard earth, glittering with grains of alkali, but otherwise dead and barren. Not a tuft of grass, not a stick of brushwood, not even a stone, but only the vast expanse of beaten clay.

In the midst of the basin, perhaps a mile and a half away, the level expanse was broken by a great dead tree, rising leafless and gaunt into the air. Without a moment's hesitation I started down into the valley and made for this goal. Every particle of fear seemed to have left me, and even the valley itself did not seem so terrifying. At all events, I was driven by an overwhelming curiosity, and there seemed to be but one thing in the world to do,—to get to that tree. As I trudged along over the hard earth, I noticed that the multitudinous voices of birds
and insects had died away. No bee or butterfly hovered through the air, no insects leaped or crept over the dull earth. The very air itself was stagnant.

As I drew near the skeleton tree, I noticed the glint of sunlight on a kind of white mound around its roots, and I wondered curiously. It was not until I had come close that I saw its nature.

All around the roots and barkless trunk was heaped a wilderness of little bones. Tiny skulls of rodents and of birds, thousands of them, rising about the dead tree and streaming off for several yards in all directions, until the dreadful pile ended in isolated skulls and scattered skeletons. Here and there a larger bone appeared,—the thigh of a sheep, the hoofs of a horse, and to one side, grinning slowly, a human skull.

I stood quite still, staring with all my eyes, when suddenly the dense silence was broken by a faint, forlorn cry high over my head. I looked up and saw a great falcon turning and sailing downward just over the tree. In a moment more she fell motionless on the bleaching bones.

Horror struck me, and I rushed for home, my brain whirling, a strange numbness growing in me. I ran steadily, on and on. At last I glanced up. Where was the rise of hill? I looked around wildly. Close before me was the dead tree with its pile of bones. I had circled it round and round, and the valley wall was still a mile and a half away.

I stood dazed and frozen. The sun was sinking, red and dull, toward the line of hills. In the east the dark was growing fast. Was there still time? Time? It was not that I wanted, it was will. My feet seemed clogged as in a nightmare. I could hardly drag them over the barren earth. And then I felt the cold chill creeping through me. I looked down. Out of the earth a thin mist was rising, collecting in little pools that grew ever larger until they joined here and there, their currents swirling slowly like thin blue smoke. The western hills halved the copper sun. When it was dark I should hear that shriek again, and then I should die. I knew that, and with every remaining atom of will I staggered towards the red west through the writhing mist that crept clammyly around my ankles, retarding my steps.
And as I fought my way off from the Tree, the horror grew, until at last I thought I was going to die. The silence pursued me like dumb ghosts, the still air held my breath, the hellish fog caught at my feet like cold hands.

But I won! though not a moment too soon. As I crawled on my hands and knees up the brown slope, I heard, far away and high in the air, the cry that had almost bereft me of reason. It was faint and vague, but unmistakable in its horrible intensity. I glanced behind. The fog was dense and pallid, heaving undulously up the brown slope. The sky was gold under the setting sun, but below me was the ashy gray of death. I stood for a moment on the brink of this sea of hell, and then leaped down the slope. The sunset opened before me, the night closed behind, and as I crawled home weak and tired, darkness shut down on the dead valley.

In this passage and in the other earlier and less complete description of the Dead Valley, we have horror which is the setting, as is the case in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" and to a lesser extent in "The Hollow of the Three Hills." There is also a sense of the evil pervading the universe, though here in Cram's story it is localized and distinct, as is not the case in Hawthorne's, where it is diffused through all of life. Yet it cannot be said that the limitation weakens Cram's horror, for it is concerned with physical death and with an overwhelming sense of loathsomeness; these elements are not so strongly emphasized in the more abstract and more philosophical horror of Hawthorne's, which is related ultimately to theology.

---

30 Ibid., pp. 146-50.
In the Dead Valley, some entity which is alien and hostile to the life of earth has taken up its abode. Perhaps it might be better to say that the Dead Valley is a point of common contact between the earth and another world in which the alien entity has its being, as in the well-known sand-island of Algernon Blackwood's "The Willows."31 Its lethal powers are focused somehow about the dead tree, the center from which a psychic force capable of overpowering will is exerted. The creeping and low-flying creatures of earth somehow sense the evil of the place and will not go beyond the valley's rim, but birds are often trapped, and occasional larger animals as well. The mist that rises from the valley floor near sunset is related to the entity, and the unearthly cry is said, in the first description, to stir the level surface of the fog to tumultuous boiling and billowing.

No American author up to Cram's time had accomplished anything like this, although Bierce approached it in the green-lit room of "The Spook House," where a definitely unearthly evil may be sensed. But it is not developed in a definite pattern as it is here; personality of a

31 Algernon Blackwood, The Listener and Other Stories (London: E. Nash, 1907).
sort may be synthesized for the entity of Cram's tale, but there is no material for such a synthesis in Bierce's, for it is too short and too sketchily done. The other world is dealt with elsewhere in this study, but in "The Dead Valley" Cram effects a point of contact between the other world and this, and describes one manner whereby forces of the other world may affect the one upon which we live.

Finally, in the stories of Francis Marion Crawford, there is something of the emphasis on action that makes setting definitely secondary, as in those of Bierce, but often he embroiders and emphasizes the action by means of setting, much in the manner of Poe. There is not so much emphasis on detail for its own sake, however; for instance, in the following passage the integration of setting with action and the subordination of the setting is easily seen:

And when the men gave the last and loudest cheer of all there was a voice not theirs, above them all, higher, fiercer, louder—a scream not earthly, shrieking for the bride of Ookram Hall. And the holly and the green boughs over the great chimney-piece shook and slowly waved as if a cool breeze were blowing over them.32

Elsewhere the details of the building are presented so as to give a picture of great age and gloom, but usually in such a manner as here, with the Christmas decorations, to underline the action and point it up. A good use of setting in the manner of Poe, for general atmosphere and tone, may be seen in the following passage from "By the Waters of Paradise":

The place was gloomy. The broad basins of water and the tall evergreen hedges gave it a funereal look, and the damp-stained marble causeways by the pool might have been made of tombstones. The grey and weather-beaten walls and towers without, the dark and massively furnished rooms within, the deep, mysterious recesses and the heavy curtains, all affected my spirits. I was silent and sad from my childhood. There was a great clock-tower above, from which the hours rang dismally during the day and tolled like a knell in the dead of night. There was no light nor life in the house, for my mother was a helpless invalid, and my father had grown melancholy in his long task of caring for her.33

The effect here is comparable to that produced in the opening paragraphs of "Berenice," although there is not the air of inhuman isolation present in the Poe story; Egaeus, so far as we know, has neither father nor mother, and there is neither the presence nor absence of normal affection.

33 Ibid., pp. 238-39.
VII

Reaction against the Gothic romancers caused Charles Brockden Brown to de-emphasize setting as a factor in producing his effects, although he uses much description of place. With Poe, the importance of setting is again recognized, though rather in terms of the production of atmosphere than of actual necessity to the action. Bierce again subordinates setting, but not in the manner of Brown; he usually gives very few details, and what color they have is largely lent by the action. At the close of the century, Mrs. Freeman, making use of her local-color technique, presents her stories in settings which seem at first to contrast with the horror evolved out of them, but which actually complement it and make it easier of acceptance.

All of these authors deal with more or less earth-bound horrors; the ghosts tend to be home-loving, and Poe's horror is pretty well localized in the mind of man. The first author to conceive of horror as more than earth-bound is Hawthorne, who saw evil as permeating all creation; since the horror he saw was a moral horror, however, it still remained closely bound to man as a race, much as Poe saw it as bound to man as an individual. The practical severance of the concept of horror from earth's creatures comes in the stories of Ralph Adams Cram, with
a faint foreshadowing of the severance in "The Spook House" of Ambrose Bierce.

In "The Spook House," there is the merest hint of the unearthly, found in the weird greenish light of the mysterious room and in the fact that the room cannot be found again; in later stories, this latter phenomenon might be explained on the basis of dimensional barriers. Other uses of the disappearance motif may be found in Fitz-James O'Brien's "The Lost Room" and Madeline Yale Wynne's "The Little Room," though these are based only on the disappearance theme and contain no hint of the other world. In the Bierce story, there is a slight element of personality introduced in the narrator's removal by some unknown agency from the house in which the room is located. The fact that the narrator suffers no harm indicates that the unknown power is not entirely malevolent. But in Cram's "The Dead Valley," it is entirely malevolent and entirely inimical, not only to human life, but to that of lower forms as well. Some other space is tangent to that occupied by earth, and its inhabitants or inhabitant is completely alien. This concept is to see much fuller and more explicit development in later stories, particularly in those of H. P. Lovecraft.

---

34 The Little Room and Other Stories (Chicago: Way & Williams, 1895).
Between the completely objective treatment of a story and the extreme subjectivity of the stream-of-consciousness method, there are many degrees, and part of the artistry of a story consists in its being presented from a properly objective or subjective point of view. Thus, in the general field of literature of the unusual, the stories of knowledge, which are identical with or related to the modern science-fiction story, demand a more objective approach than do some other types, for they are concerned with tangibles or with things assumed to be tangibles. They demand a certain illusion of exactness; as a mystery is anathema to the scientist, so is it also to the science-fictioneer, who deals with the same pragmatic sort of material as does his colleague of the laboratory. Thus, science-fiction tales and their predecessors tend to be related in the third person, and subjective reactions are limited to small areas, such as the "Eureka!" and other exclamations indicative of happiness which may be emitted by the scientist upon his discovery of a new death ray or
some other benefit to the human race. Such a statement is an over-simplification, of course, and as a matter of fact, science-fiction is often mingled with the cliches of other types of literature. To a limited extent and in a crude sort of way, such a mixture is found in Brown's *Wieland*; it is found in a state of rather exact balance in Poe's "Valdemar"; and during the present century, many stories have been written in which there is no clear differentiation between the element of science and other elements present in the story.

Within the general field of literature of the unusual, the area other than science, or knowledge, is mystery. It is within this area that the supreme achievement in literature of this type has most often been made, the production of an emotion allied to horror in the reader. This statement may be verified by checking the table of contents of almost any anthology of the best short stories. Since mystery cannot be approached rationally and continue to be mystery, even allowing for the attempts to do so by Clara Wieland, economy demands that it be dealt with emotionally, and in order to do so, a rather special type of character is demanded. His task is to observe as well as he can the material with which the author deals and to react in such a way as to produce in the reader the effect which the author intends.
to produce. Such a special type of character is here
denominated the sensor, and this chapter will be con-
cerned with the use made of him by nineteenth century
American writers who created literature of the unusual.
The function of the sensor is particularly important
when the material of the story is supernatural, and
much good material has been spoiled because of its
being experienced by characters whose reactions failed
to aid the reader to achieve an emotional contact with
the story, and thus to experience fully what the author
intended.

II

One fairly frequent use of the sensor is to establish
a pattern of contrast against which the theme of mystery
is worked out. Generally the pattern of contrast is
presented briefly, and such is almost always true in the
tales which actually do attain the stature of horror
stories; too much emphasis placed on the contrast may de-
tract from what is to follow, or else make it appear out
of place when it is introduced. This is one general fault
which may be found with Wieland as a story of mystery
which aims at horror.

Clara Wieland, who tells the story in large part,
sets its tone; first by the grave Latinized cast of her
language; second by the account she gives of the composition
and nature of the entire little society of which she is a part. There is the grave and scholarly Wieland, whose tastes run to Cicero and his *opera*; there is Pleyel, who is said to be of a boisterous and mirthful disposition, though the reader never sees any of it; there are the two women. The amusements of the entire group are religious discussions, debates on politics, and literature and music; such matters as spooks and mysterious occurrences occupy none of their time, except as they may be inferred to have been considered under the head of "the history and metaphysics of religion." As for Clara herself, the intellectualistic cast of her mind may be clearly seen in her reaction to the first of the mysterious voices:

As to myself, my attention was engaged by this occurrence. I could not fail to perceive a shadowy resemblance between it and my father's death. On the latter event, I had frequently reflected; my reflections never conducted me to certainty, but the doubts that existed were not of a tormenting kind. I could not deny that the event was miraculous, and yet I was invincibly averse to that method of solution. My wonder was excited by the inscrutableness of the cause, but my wonder was unmixed with sorrow or fear. It begat in me a thrilling, and not unpleasing solemnity. Similar to these were the sensations produced by the recent adventure.¹

¹ *Wieland*, p. 39.
Similar to this are the other reflections in which she indulges following each fresh manifestation of the mysterious voices. A seeming miracle occurs, and Clara analyzes and ponders. The remaining residue of wonder is not sufficient to sustain any lasting emotional impression, not to mention horror, which seems to be, at times, the author's aim.

The narrator of Poe's "MS. Found in a Bottle" is only formally similar to Clara Wieland, since he merely states that he is uncommonly phlegmatic; the reader is then at liberty to withhold belief in such statements as the following, if he wishes: "I have often been reproached with the aridity of my genius; a deficiency of imagination has been imputed to me as a crime..."; and "Upon the whole, no person could be less liable than myself to be led away from the severe precincts of truth by the ignes fatui of superstition." These and other words of preamble are briefly posited as a device to intensify the assertion which follows, that the events of the story are factual. Two short paragraphs later, the story gets under way with the appearance of the peculiar cloud, and it continues without let, hindrance, or speculation as distinct from the narration until the final

\[2\] Poe, II, 1-2.
words. Although a short story, as a rule, should not be compared to a novel, it seems evident enough that Poe here makes a far better use of the sensor as a contrasting element to the effect of approaching horror than does Brown, in part because there is a proportionately greater element of horror in Poe's story, but also because the sensor does not stand in the way of it. Poe's narrator devotes the greater part of his time to experiencing and relating sensation; Brown's devotes her time to futile and rather vague analyses and speculation.

Ambrose Bierce was the next writer of any stature to make use of the sensor as contrast, and he did so often enough that we may state his formula. Bierce's contrasting sensor is a man of fortitude, strong of heart, brave, lacking in superstition, and somewhat boastful of these admirable qualities. There are certain things, however, which even such men cannot face; and when they are led to do so, they die of terror. This formula, with slight variations, is observable in all of the characters discussed in the following paragraphs.

In addition to possessing the qualities stated in the formula, Private Jerome Searing, in "One of the Missing," is a battle-toughened soldier who is accustomed
to the thought of sudden death. But when he finds himself trapped in a collapsed building, unable to move, his forehead within an inch of the muzzle of his rifle, which he believes to be at full cock on a hair trigger, he reveals that he also has an imagination. When his imagination has ceased to function, Searing is dead, killed by the workings of his own mind in response to the stimulus of an unfamiliar aspect of death.

Very similar is the fate of Harker Brayton, in "The Man and the Snake," except that here a snake is substituted for the rifle. The element of fascination which a snake exerts is introduced in the form of a quotation from an old book which Brayton is reading; he wonders that wise men formerly believed such balderdash. Shortly afterward, he discovers that a snake is in the room with him, becomes fascinated, and dies horribly of fright and fascination. The similarity of Searing's reaction to the muzzle of the rifle and Brayton's reaction to the snake is no coincidence; the rifle has already been fired, and the snake is stuffed. That which is horrible and which kills lies in neither rifle-muzzle nor snake.

---

3 Bierce, II, 71-92.
4 Ibid., pp. 311-23.
but in the minds of the men who find themselves apparently in danger.

Parker Adderson, spy, of "Parker Adderson, Philosopher," is a much more flamboyant person than either Searing or Brayton; for when captured by the enemy, he jokes throughout, though facing the hangman's noose on the following morning.\(^5\) He speaks jestingly of death itself, a subject rather basic and fearsome in Bierce's metaphysic, until he learns that he is not to be subjected to the torture of waiting to be hanged at dawn, but is rather to be shot immediately. He then goes berserk with fear, and in spite of his struggles, the orders for his immediate execution are carried out.

The common denominator in all of these three stories is the lethal quality of the unfamiliar. Regardless of a man's strength, he is strong only when in contact with a definite and known set of factors; when he faces the unknown, he is unable to cope with it. The deadly portions of the unknown lie in the man himself, and within Bierce's characters is enough of horror to eliminate the necessity for seeking further for it in in these stories. The case of Marsh, of "The Suitable Surroundings," is identical

\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 133-45.
with those of the other three protagonists mentioned here, except that he glimpses the boy's white face at the lamplit window and hears the screech of the owl at the exact moment when he has been warned to expect the visit of a friend who was to have committed suicide. The double coincidence merely serves as a trigger to the fear which has built up within him, but which the mere weirdness of the surroundings has not released. It is in Bierce's use of the inward horror that he shows his greatest similarity to Poe, though the horrors they deal with are entirely different.

Each of the weird stories of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman has not only one sensor but at least two, and often several; each tends to experience the sensation in a different way. All tend to be matter-of-fact about the phenomena they experience; the sensors who serve as contrasts attempt or pretend to ignore what is going on, except when an attitude of complete innocence prevents their noticing what is occurring. One of this sort is Miss Rebecca West of "The Wind in the Rose-Bush," a rather typical Freeman spinster. She observes the manifestations of her dead niece about the house, ranging from

---

6 All of Mrs. Freeman's stories mentioned here are in The Wind in the Rose-Bush, and Other Stories of the Supernatural (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1903).
the agitation of the rose bush to the spectral music from
the piano in the dead of night, but she does not realize
until she has returned home and has been informed by
letter that her niece has been dead for some time that a
ghost was present in the house. On the other hand, the
dead girl's step-mother, an equally typical Freeman char-
acter who is domestic and whose interests run to sewing
and the making of pies, is deeply sensitive to the real
nature of the manifestations, but though she experiences
horror and terror from them, she stolidly refuses to
admit that she is occasionally perturbed. Part of her
reticence is derived from her sense of guilt, but another
part is merely characteristic of the people of New England,
at least as Mrs. Freeman depicts them.

The sensor who recognizes the supernatural but con-
sistently refuses to recognize it as such appears in
several of Mrs. Freeman's stories. In "The Shadows on
the Wall," the stoic sensor is Henry Glyn, who has poisoned
his brother; he attributes the shadow on the wall to
natural causes and slashes through the air with an old
sword in an effort to discover what casts the profile of
his dead brother on the wall of the study. Presumably he
too is convinced and is led to believe with his more
superstitious sisters, for he finally kills himself, and
then his shadow joins that of the murdered brother on the
Meanwhile the three ladies carry on their domestic duties as usual, but they are nonetheless conscious of the horror in their midst, which takes on a quiet insistence directly proportional to their efforts to pretend that nothing is amiss.

In "The Southwest Chamber," there are three incredible sensors: Miss Sophia Gill, Mrs. Elvira Simmons, and the Rev. Mr. John Dunn; the ghost of Aunt Harriet manifests itself to each in a different way. Mrs. Simmons, who only intrudes in Aunt Harriet's room, wakes to find that she is being strangled by a ghostly nightcap which is being forcibly tied over her face; the Rev. Mr. Dunn, a male intruder, lends a grim note of humor to the situation, for when he attempts to enter the room he is repelled by what seems to be a physical force. The old lady continues prudish even in death. Miss Sophia, however, who is bound by ties of blood to the dead lady, sees the face of Aunt Harriet in the mirror when she looks into it; the dead woman is trying to possess her, and is experiencing more success than she did with the room's first occupant, the boarder. Miss Sophia has been the most diehard of the unbelievers, and her decision to move out of the house and sell it is similar to that of David Townsend, another doubter, in "The Vacant Lot."
Mrs. Freeman's sensors are extremely important parts of the background, and their first function is to establish an impression of homely normality; no mood of disbelief is stated or even implied, and yet the net impression is a more complete disavowal of wild superstition than that achieved by any author before her. Up to a point, at least, the effect of the horror which grows out of the most commonplace objects renders it more effective; the experience of being slapped in the face by a spectral wet sheet, the shadow of which is visible on the ground, is easier of acceptance than a gibbering, blood-dabbled, shrouded specter, for it is less likely to be a figment of the imagination. The ghost of Aunt Harriet in "The Southwest Chamber" first makes itself known by the unexplained presence of an old dressing-gown which everyone thinks has been put away; in "The Last Ghost," the little ghost first appears pulling a cat's tail; after the wet-sheet episode in "The Vacant Lot," the next spectral manifestation is the smell of cabbage cooking. These are the things which are sensed by Mrs. Freeman's sensors, and they are extremely common things, though brought about by no common means.
The narrator of F. Marion Crawford's "The Upper Berth" makes no significant variation on the practice of Poe and Brown; he is similar to Bierce's contrasting sensor in character, though he does not meet a dire fate. In Crawford's story, the contrasting element is presented largely by implication. Brisbane, the narrator of the frame portion of the story says, is "a large, strong-looking fellow who is much stronger than he looks," but there is no use going on, for "everyone knows Brisbane." Since he is so very well-known to everyone, it is a foregone conclusion that anything he has to say on the subject of the supernatural is the result of observation and meditation by a familiar figure, who is also a sophisticated man of the world.7 His purpose is thus the same as that of Poe's narrator of the "MS. Found in a Bottle." Nevertheless, while the elaborate simplicity of the opening remarks of Poe's sensor about himself may lead us to postpone belief in the rigidly intellectual cast of his mind, the diction and manner of Crawford's frame narrator as he speaks of Brisbane make the contrast of the matter-of-fact sensor with the marvel which he is about to relate more definite. Crawford's sensor is

7 Crawford, Wandering Ghosts.
therefore more effective as contrast than Poe's, though perhaps no more successful in terms of total effect.

No particularly consistent pattern seems to run through the uses which have been made of the sensor as a contrasting element. Only Brown attempted to make his sensor serve the dual function of a sensor of emotional elements and an analyst of phenomena in need of explanation; and Clara Wieland is the only one who seems inadequate, at least so far as she functions in a novel which purports to deal with wonderful and horrible events, for she stifles the element of mystery. The most successful contrasting sensors, on the other hand, are those of Mrs. Freeman and Marion Crawford, largely because of the effortless manner and the lack of insistence with which they are presented.

III

More frequently used than the sensor as contrast is the sensor as complement. The sensor who serves as a contrast tends to stand outside the action and merely observe. The sensor who serves as a complement, on the other hand, is more commonly a part of the action; he may be its initiator or a center about which it moves. Such a structure has a more closely-knit unity than the other, though it cannot be said to be inherently better on that account.
The complementary sensor may be classified as to several types. One of the most common is the man who has committed a crime, whose guilt makes him peculiarly vulnerable, peculiarly sensitive, or both, to some horrible retribution. He may not have committed the deed personally, but he bears the responsibility, nevertheless. Wieland is an example of a man possessed of such inherited guilt; his father refused to render up the demanded sacrifice to his deity, and the necessity of fulfilling the father's duty has devolved on the son. Another type of sensor is the one whose tastes merely run to the baroque and the bizarre, common elements in Poe's settings of horror. Such a taste, of course, may be merely indicative of a type of sensitivity which is able to perceive things barred from the multitude, and the unfamiliar is often found to be horrible. Such sensitivity may be innate, permanent, the result of illness, or a temporary condition brought about by some peculiar set of circumstances. Or again, the protagonist may be consumed with a desire for revenge and thus reveal the blackness and horror of his own soul. The treatment of the sensor by the author may determine in large measure the success of the story, and in the stories here discussed, the nature of what is revealed often seems to be a function of the peculiar characteristics of the sensor.
Poe made frequent use of the guilty sensor, the earliest being in "Metzengerstein." Metzengerstein is recognizable as a sensor only at infrequent intervals, as when he shudders at contact with the demon horse. He is a simple, arrogant soul, who avenges an old family grudge against the neighboring Berlifitzing family by burning down their stables and all the horses, except one which escapes from the flames; none of the Berlifitzing grooms remember having seen it, however, and Metzengerstein takes it for himself. It is readily apparent that the old Count Berlifitzing, who also died in the burning stables, has somehow taken the form of a horse, and he takes his own revenge in the end by galloping madly with Metzengerstein on his back into the flames which are enveloping Metzengerstein's castle. The protagonist of "Metzengerstein" is an extremely rudimentary sensor, and the story is narrated in the third person. All of these characteristics belong to the very earliest Poe of which we have any knowledge, and all are dropped in his later stories dealing with the unusual.

"William Wilson" is another of Poe's stories in which the guilt of the sensor plays an important part.

---

8 Poe, II, 185-96.
9 Ibid., III, 299-325.
In fact, taking the story as the moral allegory it is, the existence of the double implies a potential guilt in Wilson in the very beginning, and the greater Wilson's actual guilt becomes, the more does he hate and fear the double. Finally he kills him, and knows himself to be damned indeed in doing so, completing the allegory of conscience.

The two best uses of the guilty sensor by Poe, however, are in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat." In the first of these, the guilt acquired in the murder of the old man further extends the abnormal sensitivity of the narrator and sensor to produce the thudding sounds which he recognizes as the beat of the dead man's heart. The horror revealed in this story is all within the character of the sensor, and could not have been portrayed in any other way than as Poe wrote it. The sensor is essential to "The Tell-Tale Heart," and so is it with "The Black Cat."

"The Black Cat" is very similar to "The Tell-Tale Heart" in structure, but goes beyond it in some respects. First, as the sensor tells the story, he describes a change in his character; no such change occurs in the

---

10 Ibid., V, 88-94; 143-55.
sensor of the earlier tale. His youthful fondness for animals emphasizes the later perversity he shows, after his character has deteriorated because of overindulgence in strong drink, and there is a further and more powerful emphasis on his abnormality as he first gouges out an eye of his pet cat, Pluto, and later hangs the animal, knowing, like William Wilson, and glorying in the knowledge that in so doing he is condemning his soul to everlasting torment. Later he regards the second cat as an incubus which has fastened upon his spirit, and he sees the shape of a gallows in a spot of white hair on the animal's breast. All these facts are narrated in the peculiarly intense manner common to Poe's sensors and constitute the background for the denouement, which is brought about by more artful means than in "The Tell-Tale Heart." No sensitivity combined with a feeling of guilt animates an imagination to betray him; rather he continues to feel an overweening sense of accomplishment and pride in his act, and it is this feeling that leads him to pound on the wall over the crypt and rouse the imprisoned cat to outcries which reveal the hiding place of the murdered wife. Such a working-out is much more clearly related to normal psychology than is that of "The Tell-Tale Heart," in which the sensor is pretty clearly insane, in
spite of his vehement denials. Neither is there anything of the supernatural in "The Black Cat" outside of the superstitious regard the sensor has for the second cat. As a rule, horror is most easily produced in literature dealing with the supernatural, but of these three stories, "Metzengerstein," the most supernatural, is least successful, and "The Black Cat," which deals most nearly with normal psychology, achieves the most profound horror. The difference seems to be largely one of a more competent exploitation of the sensor.

Guilt of the sensor is a factor present in many ghost stories. An anonymous story, published in 1852, entitled "A Ghost of a Head" relates the tale of one Desalleux, a prosecutor, who engineers the conviction of a man named Peter Leroux on insufficient evidence, merely to advance his professional career. The convicted man is guillotined; some time later, Desalleux is made aware while working late one night that he is being stared at, and a head appears in a corner, but proceeds with a hopping motion to the table at which the prosecutor is working, leaving bloodstains on his papers. He faints, but sees the thing no more till his wedding night, when

---

11 Harper's Magazine, VI (1852), 52-56.
upon retiring, he finds it on his pillow next to that which supports the head of his bride. This time he resolves to be a man, and grasping a poker, he does battle with it until it disappears. Next morning he discovers that he has battered his bride to death in the process, and he is confined to an institution for care of the insane. Desalleux is the center of the piece and the narration is from his point of view, although in the third person. Poe could have made a great story out of it with a more competent handling of the sensor, and it is a good story as it is, although the greatest horror, Desalleux's discovery that he has killed his bride, could have received more emphasis.

Still another story, "A Dead Man's Face," by Hugh Conway, published in 1884, involves a prospective guilt of the sensor which can yet be avoided. A black sheep brother has disappeared some years before, and a younger one has fallen in love with a beautiful but mysterious woman. He has also come to be haunted by a vicious, demoniac face, with eyes which are dead and yet possess a certain horrible vitality. He never sees the face except when in the presence of the lady, and on the last occasion on which he sees it, the narrator sees it too and recognizes

12 Harper's Magazine, LXX (1884), 143-52.
it as the face of the long-lost black sheep, whom the younger brother has never seen. Eventually it develops that the lady is the wife of the older brother, and has killed him because of his cruelty and brutality toward her. Then she too becomes conscious of the presence of the face, and becomes insane. Here the ghost has served to prevent the marriage of a man to the woman who murdered, or at least killed, his brother, and the main theme thus seems to be avoidance of a sort of guilt, rather than punishment for a crime already committed.

The motif of guilt in a sensor is used several times in the ghost stories of Ambrose Bierce, including "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot," "The Haunted Valley," and "Beyond the Wall." In each of these stories, the mere sense of the presence of the ghost, whether real or fancied, leads to death, following Bierce's pattern of the unfamiliar situation and the stoic sensor. Only in "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot," however, does the sense of horror extend to the reader. In two other stories, "Staley Fleming's Hallucination" and "The Night-Doings at Deadman's," death results from corporeal causes, being inflicted on Staley Fleming by the teeth

13 Bierce, III.
14 Ibid.
of a spectral Newfoundland dog, and on the man in the cabin at Deadman's by a pistol-shot fired by an unidentified individual who is probably Death himself. "Staley Fleming's Hallucination" is very sketchy in treatment, while "Night-Doings" has too much of the fatal Bierce facetiousness to give a very free reign to the emotions of fear and horror which are present in embryo, as in the picture of the dead Chinaman seeking to secure his queue. Though the sensor is readily identifiable in these stories of Bierce as the person who has the most intimate sensation of what is going on, he does not, like Poe's, also describe it; and the result is that a certain detachment from the effect produced is always discernible, and tends to weaken the horror. In these stories, only "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot" entirely overcomes this handicap.

The only sensor in Bierce's ghost stories who approaches the stature of Poe's is the narrator of "The Spook House." In this story, which has been previously summarized, the sensor describes the arrival of himself and his friend at the old house in which they take refuge from a storm. All of the horror which may be inferred from the facts narrated takes on an added intensity from the more intimate contact afforded by the agency of the

15 Bierce, III, 393-99.
narrator as sensor. The element of guilt here, of course, exists only after the sensor has accidentally looked the door on his friend, and strictly speaking, there are no ghosts in the story, even though it is included among Bierce's collected works in a group called "Some Haunted Houses."

In F. Marion Crawford's "Man Overboard!" the negligent brother is haunted by the watery ghost of his twin brother, for whose drowning he is responsible, and the old sea-captain of "The Screaming Skull" is a rather pathetic figure; he recognizes his responsibility for the death of the lady to whom the skull formerly belonged, and yet knows that in reality he wished the poor lady no harm.\(^\text{16}\)

In the first story, the narration is by a friend of the haunted brother; in the second, the entire story except for the frame is related in a long monologue of the old captain's, and the weirdness and tension of the storm-swept night, punctuated at intervals by the screams of the skull, are lent a confirmatory air by the captain's ready admission that he has known of strange things during his career. Formally, the captain belongs to the group of contrasting sensors, at least during the first part of his

\(^{16}\) Crawford, *Wandering Ghosts.*
narration when he insists that the screams are susceptible of some rational explanation, but even when he insists that the screams are entirely normal, his manner belies his statement. His speech, prolix and matter-of-fact, also constitutes a contrasting element, but Crawford skilfully portrays the captain's real inner perturbation, even when he sounds most doubtful.

Mrs. Dent of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" and Henry Glynn of "The Shadows on the Wall" are two other guilty sensors, but the reader cannot identify himself with them as he can with Poe's. Their excellence is due rather to the extreme sensitivity of the third-person narration than to direct contact through the sensor; the author derives a quiet but pervasive horror from the weirdness of small elements. On the other hand, the more flamboyant ghosts of "The Vacant Lot" in their draperies and with their dead-white faces are much more obviously horrible as they enter an invisible door beneath the "Sign of the Leopard" which hangs on the wall. The guilt here, however, is not that of David Townsend but of an ancestor who kept a wicked and sinister inn at the same sign. Though David himself suffers no punishment or harm, aside from having his sensibilities severely shaken up by the sights he sees, he is clearly in the pattern of Wieland, who suffers for the guilt of
his father, and of Judge Pyncheon, of The House of the Seven Gables.

Such guilt as that of the Judge is entirely clear in its nature, and so is that of his ancestor whence the curse derives. Actually, in Hawthorne's story there is the formal guilt of the father which is transmitted to the son, and there is the actual guilt of the son himself. In two of the stories of Robert W. Chambers, however, guilt of a different sort is introduced; the best expression of it is in the following, from "In the Court of the Dragon":

There began to dawn in me a sense of responsibility for something long forgotten. It began to seem as if I deserved that which he threatened: it reached a long way back—a long, long way back. It had lain dormant all these years; it was there, though, and presently it would rise and confront me.17

In this story the sense of guilt, once remembered, renders the sensor vulnerable to the attacks of a gentleman in black who serves as a church organist and who may be almost anything horrible which the reader cares to name. We know only that the danger concerns the soul of the narrator, and that he shrinks from it with a deathly loathing, made poignant by a manner of narration which rises at appropriate times to the intensity of Poe's.

17Chambers, The King in Yellow, p. 91.
In the other story, "The Yellow Sign," a similar revelation, though probably not of guilt, comes about through the sensor's reading the evil book called The King in Yellow. We never know exactly what this guilt consists of, but its horror may be gauged from the unearthly, repulsive, unhealthy hints as to the nature of the King and his haunt in Carcosa.

In Poe's stories, the sensor often has a taste for the baroque and the bizarre, elements of an atmosphere in which Poe delights to place some of his best effects of horror. The insane decor of the apartments of the unnamed nobleman in "The Assignation" are a reflection of the insane intensity of his own being and are a fit setting for the consummation of his portion of the suicide pact. Much the same thing may be said of the decorations of the abbey in "Ligeia"; here a certain horror is deliberately built into them. The "ghastly lustre" of the light through the pane of leaded glass, the carvings of the ceilings "with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device," the pierced censer which throws its light in such a manner that "there writhed in and out, as if endowed with a serpent vitality" the fiery glow—these might seem sufficient to the average decadent, but not to the lover of Ligeia; he continues
with the wall-tapestries, embroidered with arabesque figures. "To one entering the room they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities, but on a farther advance this appearance gradually departed, and, step by step, as the visitor moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk."

And for the final fillip, a current of air is introduced behind the same hangings, "giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole." In such an atmosphere as this, anything might happen, and the equally "hideous and uneasy animation" of Rowena seems hardly out of place at all.

Concomitant with this taste for the grotesque and the bizarre is a sense of withdrawal. "With one exception," says the nameless nobleman of "The Assignation," "you are the only human being, besides myself and my valet, who has been admitted within the mysteries of these imperial precincts since they have been bedizened as you see."

The abbey of "Ligeia" is situated "in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England," and the

---

18 Poe, II, 259-61, passim.
19 Ibid., pp. 117-18.
pentagonal room lies in a high turret of the abbey which is still more inaccessible. It seems to be Poe's intention that the withdrawal and the atmosphere of the unearthly shall constitute a setting for action not related to the world of normal men, and in which horror may be perceived through a sensor who has peculiar tastes. Used with a different purpose, and yet containing much of the same element, is the abode of C. Auguste Dupin and the narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; it is in "a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not inquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain." There the two dwell in darkness, closing the house during the day and only "lighting a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays" at night. This atmosphere, incongruously enough, is only a background for the analytical powers of Dupin, but it would seem to be even more suitable for reanimations of the dead or strange perversions of almost any kind.

Another quality possessed by several of Poe's sensors is an excessive sensitivity; it may be either specialized or quite general. The broad inciting factor in "Berenice"

---

20 Ibid., IV, 151.
is the peculiar affliction that renders the sensor abnormally contemplative of trivial objects; one such object which he comes to contemplate is the teeth of Berenice, until he eventually goes to the grave where she has been prematurely buried and removes them. Such sensitivity may be called general, for prior to the sensor's obsession with the teeth, any object whatsoever, provided it were trivial, sufficed as an object of contemplation. In "Morella," however, the perception is directed to one object only, Morella herself, in whom the sensor and narrator detects something mysterious which estranges him from her; "... one instant my nature melted into pity, but in the next I met the glance of her meaning eyes, and then my soul sickened and became giddy with the giddiness of one who gazes downward into some dreary and unfathomable abyss." This apprehension of something nameless but horrible causes him to cease to love her, and because he has ceased to love, Morella enters the body of her daughter, born at the moment of her death, in order to win back the lost love. The very obscurity of that which is seen in Morella's "meaning eyes" contains a very potent horror, as expressed in the

\[\text{Ibid., II, 29-30.}\]
words of the sensor; the more objective elements of the possession of the living by the soul of a dead woman and the absence of Morella's body from the tomb are more independent of the sensor in this story.

The peculiar sensitivity of the sensor in "Ligeia" is to some nameless quality which he finds in the eyes of the woman he loves; he also finds it, he says, in the sight of a rapidly growing vine, a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, and other objects, including "the sixth-magnitude star in Lyra." There is a weirdness in his grouping, but nothing of the horrible is felt until a later sensation is described. The horror is first felt by Rowena, who becomes conscious of slight sounds and peculiar motions among the tapestries. The narrator does not notice these things himself, at first, but shortly after Rowena has become conscious of another presence by the occurrence of slight sounds and strange motions, the narrator and sensor feels the presence of some "palpable but invisible object" near him; he sees a faint shadow on the carpet, and finally sees some drops of a red liquid fall into a glass of wine which he is preparing for Rowena. These perceptions are adumbrations of the subsequent animation, which is objectively as well as subjectively horrible.

\[22\text{Ibid., p. 263.}\]
The sensitivity of the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" consists of a state that some people call madness, he says, but which he does not consider such because of the very hyperactivity of the senses that characterizes his condition. This sensitivity is a direct avenue to the effect of horror, which is produced in two stages. First the sensor lovingly describes each step of his crime, achieving an effect similar to that of "The Cask of Amontillado"; second he tells of his increased sensitivity of hearing and makes his crazed confession. There is no necessity to describe the terror in the soul of the sensor, for he himself presents it to the reader as he has sensed it.

All of these varieties of sensitivity are related to some definite abnormality of the sensor: illness, outright insanity, or possibly addiction to drugs in the narrator of "Ligeia." To these may be added a certain artificially induced sensitivity possessed by the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum." At the opening of the story, he informs us that he was already sick to death of the long imprisonment, and that after hearing the sentence of death, "the sound of the inquisitorial voices merged into one dreamy, indeterminate hum."\(^{23}\) Everything appears

\[^{23}\text{Ibid.}, V, 67.\]
exaggerated and grotesque; he sees the lips of the judge
writhing in locution, but no sound proceeds from them; the
seven candles first appear as angels who will rescue him,
then as "meaningless spectres, with heads of flame." This
is the condition of morbid sensitivity which he carries
with him into the dungeon, and which accentuates the very
real horror of the pendulum. The horror of the pit is
less clearly stated, though no less real, but presumably
it too is heightened by the peculiar sensitivity acquired
by the sensor during his trial.

One of the best of Poe's tales, "The Cask of
Amontillado," is built around a theme of revenge, and it
is an excellent example of Poe's ability to evoke horror
out of the portrayal of a human soul. It is an exception
to most of Poe's stories in that Montresor, the narrator,
seems not at all sensitive to the horror except as it is
objectified in the entombed Fortunato. Fortunato, if
anyone, is the sensor in the story, but his role is brief
as he conveys his impressions to the reader, who really
needs no other mediator than his own ability to identify
himself with the two men as they creep through the bowels
of the earth to Fortunato's horrible end. The horror
consists in the revelation of the intensity of Montresor's

24 Ibid., VI, 167-75.
desire for revenge, his inhumanly acute analysis of Fortunato's weakness and his Satanic subtlety as he entices his victim farther and farther into the catacombs, and finally in the diabolic glee and insane abandon with which he savors his triumph and wrings the last particle of agony out of his victim. The gloatingly casual In pace requiescat is his ironic and blasphemous final boast.

The complementary sensors of Bierce are best characterized by their peculiarly morbid states of mind and will be discussed in the next chapter. The sensors in one story of Robert W. Chambers and in one of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's, however, though their states of mind do go beyond morbidity to actual insanity, may well be considered here, since their mental condition alone does not fully characterize them.

In Chambers's "The Repairer of Reputations," the sensor is a monomaniac who intends to make himself the Emperor of America. His mental condition makes him peculiarly sensitive to the true nature of the revelations of the evil book, The King in Yellow, and he discusses them with the greatest freedom, though he tends to be more poetic than clear in his language. One day he has opened his safe and is admiring himself, wearing the Imperial
Crown of America and bedecked with the crown jewels:

The diamonds flashed fire as I turned to the mirror, and the heavy beaten gold burned like a halo about my head. I remembered Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of Garcosa. They were the last lines of the first act, and I dared not think of what followed--dared not, even in the spring sunshine, there in my own room, surrounded with familiar objects, reassured by the bustle from the street and the voices of the servants in the hallway outside. For those poisoned words had dropped slowly into my heart, as death-sweat drops upon a bedsheet and is absorbed. Trembling I put the diadem from my head and wiped my forehead, but I thought of Hastur and of my own rightful ambition... 25

Later, Castaigne sits with his fellow-madman, Wilde, listening to him read the matter of Carcosa to one of Wilde's victims, Vance:

He mentioned the establishment of the Dynasty in Garcosa, the lakes which connected Hastur, Ald EBARan, and the mystery of the Hyades. He spoke of Cassilda and Camilla, and sounded the cloudy depths of the Lake of Hali. "The scolloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever," he murmured, but I do not believe Vance heard him. Then by degrees he led Vance along the ramifications of the Imperial family, to UOHT and Thale, from Naotalba and Phantom of Truth, to Aldones, and then tossing aside his manuscript and notes, he began the wonderful story of the Last King. 26

To finish the picture, Castaigne says:

The city, the state, the whole land were ready to rise and tremble before the Pallid Mask.

25 The King in Yellow, p. 37.

26 Ibid., p. 45.
The time had come, the people should know the son of Hastur, and the whole world bow to the Black Stars which hang in the sky over Carcosa. 27

These are the things to which Castaigne is sensitive; an analysis of the abominations underlying the things he speaks of is impossible, but pertinent hints concerning them are found in the other stories dealing with the Yellow Sign, particularly in the story of that title. His entire acceptance of the horror he sees and his readiness to make use of it to further his "rightful ambition" make him complementary to the horror he reveals in a most unusual way.

In Mrs. Gilman's often-anthologized story, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," published in 1896, the lady who is imprisoned in the room is often taken to be merely insane, and she will be considered as such in the chapter on abnormal psychology. But there is also her feeling that the house is strange, if not haunted, and such feelings are not restricted to insane people. Once this initial sensitivity is granted, there is a whole parallel interpretation to the insanity, that of her actual sensitivity to the land that lay behind the pattern of the wallpaper, and of her actually seeing the woman who crept about behind the pattern. The identification which she later

27 Ibid., p. 46.
makes with herself and the creeping lady is pure insanity, but it is preceded by a feeling of mere kinship with her as she confesses that she creeps, too, when it is dark. At any rate, it is a weird and fearsome land that she senses, and her growing love for the pattern in the paper, which she found so repulsive at first, contributes to the reader’s fear of it and of her.

IV

The concept of the sensor evolves easily out of that of the first-person narrator, but some deliberate artistry is required in order that the first person narrator be a satisfactory sensor; on the other hand, first person narration is not essential if rapport may be achieved otherwise. The success of the chief sensors dealt with in this chapter may be briefly summarized as follows.

Clara Wieland fails of much success, in large part because she is presented as too intellectualized to give a satisfactory reaction to situations through which Brown intends to produce horror. Her mind is analytical and matter-of-fact, in spite of a capacity for awe and some slight tendency to indulge in mystical speculations. Such characteristics in a reader tend to prevent his appreciating a horror story, and they are even more detrimental when they are a part of the story itself. Thus, even though
she makes a valiant effort to describe horror, Clara Wieland is basically unqualified to do so.

Poe's sensors succeed where Clara fails because they all possess minds which are sensitive to impression; they feel more than they analyze, and their stories are of sensation rather than of fact or speculation. They revel in strangeness and in weird surroundings; they prefer the occult and the mysterious to the commonplace and the demonstrable. These are the areas in which horror is most likely to occur; a mind attuned to them is capable of recognizing them wherever they exist, which in Poe's stories is everywhere. Wieland's madness is the result of a hereditary trait which is stimulated by a mysterious voice; that of Egaeus in "Berenice" merely exists, and the horror that grows out of it is the greater because it originates in mystery.

Ambrose Bierce worked with subjective elements as much as possible, but his sensors are usually presented in the third person. The method works quite well in some stories; "Chickamauga," for instance, in which the reactions of the deaf and dumb child are central to the story, suffers very little if at all from objective observations and editorial comment. Often, however, Bierce obtrudes himself between the reader and the horror which
underlies most of his stories, and a certain sensitivity in the reader is necessary to penetrate the objective correlates of horror which are not interpreted through a sensor. One of his best stories, "The Spook House," leaves third person narration, however, and "Noxon's Master" is as close to Poe's masterful handling of the sensor as the material permits. In this story, Bierce deviates from the usual practice in both his own stories and Poe's, in that the horror is external rather than within the sensor. On the whole, Bierce achieved his effects more objectively than most other writers of horror fiction; though the sensor is often present in some form, he is not so essential to the telling of a Bierce story as he is to one of Poe's.

The same may be said of the other writers of the period, with the one exception of Charlotte Perkins Gilman; for in "The Yellow Wall Paper" she not only returns to a method requiring the sensor as Poe conceived him, but refines it. The florid decoration which is Poe's is absent in Mrs. Gilman's story, and the cataclysmic and sometimes crude denouement of Poe is replaced by a gradual revelation of the dehumanization and retrogression which takes place in the sensor. At the same time, the illusion of actual experience through abnormal senses, which is one of the most admirable elements in Poe's stories, is maintained to a high degree.
States of mind which deviate markedly from the normal are a common ingredient in the literature of the unusual. The most obvious and the crudest way to use such states of mind is to present them for their own sake as something to be wondered at, but a more refined method involves the use of the abnormal mind as a recorder and a narrator of experiences which may be extraordinary, or merely ordinary but seen from an abnormal point of view; such abnormality characterizes Poe's sensors. If the abnormality of the point of view is pronounced enough, such narration will be classifiable as literature of the unusual, and since the tendency of normal people is to regard with abhorrence that which deviates very markedly from the average which they know, much of such literature belongs to the literature of horror.

Charles Brockden Brown uses psychological states as part of his background, especially in *Wieland* and in *Edgar Huntly*. In *Huntly*, the sleep-walking serves as an inciting factor to a large portion of the action,
and is finally explained as due to the sleep-walker’s believing himself guilty of a crime. The incipient insanity of Wieland, manifesting itself in an air of fine-drawn tension and restraint if it manifests itself at all, is not to be very clearly distinguished from a similar air in most of the other characters; we first become fully conscious that Wieland’s mind is abnormal when we discover that he has killed his wife and children. In both novels, Wieland and Edgar Huntley, the emphasis on psychological aberration is rather on the spectacular than on any very definite description of the state itself or any use of it as a point of view. Wieland’s point of view, for instance, is presented once, quite briefly, when he describes it in pompous and oratorical language, but any penetrating comment is lost in the inflated language. Brown, though concerned with psychological aberrations, thus handled them crudely and on the simplest level.

II

The earliest type of mental aberration found in the tales of Poe is what may be called possession by an idea. This type of morbid psychology is related to the sensitivity of Poe’s sensors, in some cases quite clearly but in others less so. Sensitivity, however, in the general sense is related to things rather than to ideas, and
although possession by an idea certainly indicates a sensitivity to it, the possession is the result of some sort of selection out of a group of things to which the person may be sensitive. Egaeus of "Berenice," for instance, is widely sensitive to trivia of all sorts, but his obsession with Berenice's teeth is a selective sensitivity. Further, Roderick Usher's sensitivity to light and sound is not identical with his possession by certain ideas, though the two are undeniably associated.

Poe's favorite theme of abnormal psychology is perversity, which he dignifies by discussing as a prime mover in human affairs in "The Imp of the Perverse." This story, which is in large part a philosophical disquisition on perversity rather than a story in the usual sense, is his final treatment of the theme. Earlier, he employs it less philosophically and more artistically in several stories. "Metzengerstein," though primarily built around themes of revenge and metempsychosis, uses perversity as a sub-theme in describing Metzengerstein's relationship with the demon-horse. A little page "had the effrontery to assert that his master never vaulted into the saddle without an unaccountable and almost imperceptible shudder . . ."; even without this effect of contact with the animal, he knows that the horse is the exact image of the one which glared at him with eyes of hate
before disappearing from the tapestry on his wall. All such knowledge of the diabolic in the steed, however, does not prevent his determining to master it, and his perverse pride enables the horse to avenge the Berlifitzing family on Metzengerstein in the most thorough way. Besides this clear use of perversity in "Metzengerstein," there is an incident in "The Fall of the House of Usher" which may contain an element of the same theme. As Roderick Usher reveals to his companion, the narrator, that his buried sister yet lives, he says: "I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them—many, many days ago—yet I dared not—I dared not speak!"¹ This is a cryptic statement and no explanation, it may be, can be entirely satisfactory; there would seem to be, however, a rather perverse belief in fatality, or an obsession with the idea that no action could be taken until the time for the approaching triple dissolution of the house and the two Ushers.

The perversity theme is most important in two closely related stories, "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat." In the first of these, the perversity is seen initially in the narrator's statement of his motive for the murder:

Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it

¹Poe, III, 296.
was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees very gradually I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.2

It is not merely that he has an overpowering subjective urge to kill out of fear when any good objective motive is lacking; in the sentence "I think it was his eye," there is the distinct impression that the whole matter of the eye may be an inadequate rationalization of a completely inexplicable impulse to kill, and in the inexplicability of the perverse lies its alien quality and its capacity for horror.

This seems to be an unconscious perversity, but that displayed when the policemen come to make the search is conscious; here it is blended with a pride inflated to hybris-like proportions, a pride so ill-proportioned to humanity that it confers a further inhumanity on the protagonist and makes of him a very demon. The ending of the story is eminently satisfactory from a moral point of view, as the suave assurance of the murderer gives way to mad terror and his crazed confession, but the total effect, like that of Montresor of "The Cask of Amontillado," is a sickness of soul that such beings can exist within our familiar world.

2Ibid., v, 88.
The treatment of the theme is practically the same in "The Black Cat," in the revelation of the crime because of the perversity and pride of the narrator as he pounds on the wall with his cane and arouses the entombed cat to outcries. The most pronounced manifestation of perversity, however, is probably that which he shows in killing the first cat:

One morning in cool blood I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart; hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardise my immortal soul as to place it, if such a thing were possible, even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Terrible and Most Merciful God.3

This is similar to the explanation of motive made by the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," but it lacks the alienation from humanity found in the earlier story; evil as the protagonist of "The Black Cat" may be, he continues to maintain his bond with humanity, even if the relationship be that of the reverse side of the coin. One may pity him, even though for nothing more than his self-pity as he hangs the cat. In this sense, "The Black Cat" does not achieve the effect of horror found in "The Tell-Tale Heart," though on the whole it is a more

3 Ibid., pp. 146-47.
finely-wrought story, and achieves a greater total horror through the use of other devices.

III

Another extremely loose classification of morbid mental states is compulsion of some sort. Poe makes use of compulsion as stemming from within in five stories which have only the vaguest connection as a group.

In two of these, "Berenice" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," the compulsion is directed toward some external object. Egaeus of "Berenice," once his attention has alighted on Berenice's teeth, is consumed with a desire to possess them: "... I more seriously believed que toutes ses dents étaient des idées. Des idées!---ah, here was the idiotic thought that destroyed me! Des idées---ah, therefore it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession alone could ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason." The reasoning is sufficiently insane in itself, and the teeth as an object of the train of thought would be only grotesque, were it not for the sensation he experiences in their contemplation and the means which he later takes of securing them. Nevertheless, at least one critic finds what he calls the "dental climax"

---

4 Ibid., II, 24.
of "Berenice" comic, and there are probably others who share his opinion in this unsusceptible age.  

The function of the old man's eye in "The Tell-Tale Heart" is similar, at least formally, as an object toward which the protagonist feels compelled to take action; having decided on murder, he goes with the dark-lantern to the door of the old man's room and shines the light on his eye. "And this I did for seven long nights—every night just at midnight—but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye." The infinitely methodical approach and the mad logic behind the narrator's inability to do the deed unless he is able to see the eye are part of the compulsion he feels toward it, and contribute strongly to the effect of the story.

Both of these stories concern a compulsion to take action toward an external object; in two others, the compulsion is to retain life and being after death. This compulsion is less fully developed in "Morella" than in "Ligeia"; Morella is greatly interested in the doctrine of Identity as discussed by Schelling and as commented

---

5 The Other Worlds: 25 Modern Stories of Mystery and Imagination, p. 327. Mr. Stong, the editor, mistakenly places the "dental climax" in "Eleanora."

6 Poe, V, 89.
upon by Locke, but she manifests no consuming desire for continuation of life (or Identity), and she is not therefore to be numbered among the characters in fiction whose psychological states are abnormal; that distinction is reserved for her counterpart, Ligeia, in another tale.

The narrator of "Ligeia" first discusses the person of the title character, then her mind; she possesses a gigantic intellect and is characterized by great "intensity." "An intensity in thought, action, or speech, was possibly in her a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence." As her time comes to die, however, she does give some evidence of it, though she is later to give further evidence that is even stronger:

There had been much in her stern nature to impress me with the belief that, to her, death would have come without its terrors, but not so. Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. I groaned in anguish at the pitiable spectacle. I would have soothed, I would have reasoned; but in the intensity of her wild desire for life—for life—but for life—solace and reason were alike the uttermost of folly.

There is an awe in the contemplation of sheer force, and there is force in the struggle of Ligeia against the

---


Conqueror Worm, in her compulsion to defeat death. This comes to its culmination, of course, not here, but in her spirit's reanimation of the dead Rowena.

The compulsion of Roderick Usher takes an almost diametrical opposition to that of Ligeia; his compulsion is rather toward a fierce passivity induced by his superstitions, a passivity which is yet mingled with apprehensions. "In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence—an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy—an excessive nervous agitation." Later Usher himself says: "I have indeed no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR." The superstition which enchains him concerns some shadowy influence exerted over his family by the house itself, and on the last night he seems to apprehend its approaching dissolution as the narrator reads to him from the Mad Trist: "His eyes were bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But, as I placed

---

9Ibid., III, 278.

10Ibid., p. 280.
my hand upon his shoulder, there came a strong shudder over his whole person; a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and I saw that he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence. Bending closely over him, I at length drank in the hideous import of his words. They concern his confession that he has known that his sister was entombed alive and that he has heard her struggles to escape for the past half-hour, and conclude with his screaming revelation that she stands just outside the door. There is a sense of Usher's consciousness of weird forces hastening to a climax that is exceedingly powerful, as he first sits passively and then babbles wildly; in this sense is the source of much of the power of "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Such is Poe's use of compulsion; in three of the five stories discussed here, it lies within the soul of the individual possessed by it, though it is related to external factors as well. The three stories which will be discussed next also deal with compulsion, but with a compulsion, imposed in large part from outside, to do something distasteful.

---

11 Ibid., p. 295.
"John Bartine's Watch," by Ambrose Bierce, is the story of a man who feels a strange desire to look at his watch as the hour of eleven approaches; the desire, however, is accompanied by a strange feeling of approaching catastrophe. After the hour of eleven has passed, the feeling disappears. One night a practical joker sets the hands of the watch back an hour; a few minutes before eleven, Bartine looks at his watch, is greatly agitated, and then dies on the stroke of the hour, with a strange blue mark about his neck. The main theme here is the unity of soul which exists between Bartine and his grandfather who formerly owned the watch and who was hanged at eleven o'clock. Besides possessing his grandfather's watch, Bartine also resembles his grandfather physically. The effect of this story, compulsion theme and all, is rather strange than horrible; it is told in Bierce's bare manner, in which the effect is journalistic rather than literary.12

F. Marion Crawford's "The Dead Smile" deals in part with the power exerted over a son and his sweetheart by the dead father, who wishes the damnation of both. The sweetheart, who is also the unacknowledged child of the dead man, feels the compulsion exerted from the grave, to

12 Bierce, III, 268-79.
go into the vault and to look upon the corrupting body of the old man:

... as she grew sick with fear of the frightful unknown evil to which her soul was bound, she felt a bodily something pressing her and pushing her, and forcing her on, and from the other side she felt the threads that drew her mysteriously; and when she shut her eyes, she saw in the chapel behind the altar, the low iron door through which she must pass to go to the thing.13

The concept of the dead exerting such influence on the living is horrible in the extreme; the old man's evil will is projected into the minds of his children and threatens to become insanity if denied. Strangely enough, however, it is in yielding to the will and going to the tomb of his father that Gabriel Ockram finds release from the power of his dead father, for clutched in the mummified hands is a written confession of the relationship between Gabriel and Evelyn, and with the relationship revealed, the damnation which the old man had hoped to bring upon them by allowing an incestuous marriage is averted.

In Crawford's "For the Blood Is the Life," the compulsion exerted on Alaric by the walking spirit of the murdered Christina is that of a vampire on her victim, and is mingled with a sense of profound revulsion; it is stock vampire-lore, which Crawford uses very effectively.

13 Crawford, Wandering Ghosts, p. 29.
In the evening, Alario feels an unconquerable desire to walk near the gorge in which Christina lies buried, and there she comes to him and walks with him and kisses his throat; in the morning he awakens on her grave, feeling drained and depleted. The classic treatment of this sort of thing is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, but Stoker nowhere stated more effectively the reaction after the vampire kiss than does Crawford in describing Alario's realization of what is happening to him:

Then came the fear, the awful nameless panic, the mortal horror that guards the confines of the world we see not, neither know of as we know of other things, but which we feel when its icy chill freezes our bones and stirs our hair with the touch of a ghostly hand.14

**IV**

Sensitivity as a condition of mind is capable of revealing other-worldly arcana and of thus being a channel to whatever horror may be found there, but it also contributes elements of its own to the stories in which it occurs. All of Poe's stories, or at least all of his better ones, profit from such a sensitivity in the author; he sees horror and to some extent reveals it in what to other eyes might be merely a ruinous, dampish old house or in an apartment fitted out in arabesque fashion. A more extended sensitivity is implied in the reachings of his imagination.

further afield, and in the resulting fantasy, which is generally horrible. But it is with Poe's use of sensitivity as a theme rather than with its presence in his own personality that we are concerned here.

One of the most obvious symptoms of the mysterious complaint which wastes Roderick Usher is his excessive sensitivity:

He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odours of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror.15

This type of sensitivity is indicative of a sort of inhuman withdrawal of Usher from all that is tolerable to other men; the more extended sensitivity is also indicated in the description of his recreations. "An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphurous lustre over all. His long improvised dirges will ring forever in my ears. Among other things, I hold painfully in mind a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber."16 "Perversion" and "amplification" seem to be the key words here, but

15 Poe, III, 280.

16 Ibid., pp. 282-83.
for his paintings, a further reach of the imagination is demanded. The narrator says of one picture: "Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch, or other artificial source of light was discernible, yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor."17

This is an example of other-worldly vision, which is described so vaguely here that it has not been included in the chapter dealing with the other world. But Usher's sensitivity of hearing is also the gateway to the fear of which he has such a horror: "The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more, and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance... I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound."18 This takes place after the interment of Madeline Usher; we later learn that the sounds to which he listened were not imaginary, but were the stirrings of the buried woman within

17 Ibid., p. 283.

18 Ibid., p. 289.
her tomb. His actions, though inexplicable at the time, are the objective correlatives of terror: "I felt creeping upon me, by slow and yet certain degrees, the wild influence of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions." 19

The sense of hearing is also the important one in "The Tell-Tale Heart." The story opens with the narrator heatedly avowing that he is not mad: "The disease had sharpened my senses— not destroyed— not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How then am I mad?" 20 Here in one statement the sensitivity which invests the normal with abnormality is blended with the other-worldly sensitivity, but it is the specific sensitivity to sound that enables the narrator to hear the sounds of the old man's dead heart, and also impels him to confession of his crime.

While Poe endows many of his protagonists with sensitivity on a fairly permanent basis, usually as a result of some disorder, Ambrose Bierce uses it to heighten terrifying temporary experiences. Peyton Farquhar was

19 Ibid., p. 290.

20 Ibid., V, 88.
endowed with such sensitivity, as he felt himself rise from the water into which he seemed to have dropped. "He felt the ripples upon his face and heard the separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves, and the veining of each leaf. . . ."21 He noted individual insects upon the leaves, the prismatic colors in the dragon-flies' wings, the strokes of the water-spiders' legs, the rush of a fish through the water.

This sensitivity of Farquhar's is formally, of course, an imaginary sensitivity; the things to which he responds by sensing them do not exist except in his own mind. They do not differ, however, except in actual detail, from the things sensed by Mr. Doman of "A Holy Terror," who finds himself confronting the decayed coffin of Scarry, the old mining-camp prostitute; "His hearing took account of a gopher's stealthy tread in the cactus. He was intensely observant; his senses were all alert; but he saw not the coffin."22 Farquhar never brings his mind back to the noose, even when his amplified time-interval is up and his neck snaps at the end of the rope; Mr. Doman does note the coffin again, against the sight of which he had

21Bierce, II, 37.

22Ibid., p. 341.
acquired a temporary block, but these variant perceptions have little to do with the outcome, for at the end of both episodes, the protagonists are dead. Death in each case is an anticlimax to a previous horror.

Heightened sensitivity, as discussed in this chapter, is a reasonably common device for the production of horror, or of states conducive to it, by means of exaggeration of the normal or even of a penetration through the normal into something beyond it. In one of his best stories, however, Bierce makes use of the antithesis of sensitivity; the sensor of "Chickamauga" is a deaf-mute child, and all the action is presented through his eyes. The silent motion of the crawling wounded through the "haunted forest," like huge black beetles, could not be presented in so thoroughly dehumanized a manner were the normal sounds present. The silence of the wounded contributes to the coldly soulless picture which the child perceives; not only is he insensitive to sound, but his general insensitivity renders him incapable of comprehending the suffering about him. It further renders him incapable of responding in human fashion to the sight of his dead and mutilated mother before his burning home; when his sub-juvenile soul finally understands what he sees, the sound of his grief is expressed in "a series of inarticulate and in-describable cries—something between the chattering of
an ape and the gobbling of a turkey—a startling, soulless, unholy sound, the language of a devil." This example of insensitivity from Bierce may contribute to a proper conception of the function of the senses in producing horror or allied states; not only an exaggeration of the normal, but a diminution of the normal as well—in short, any distortion of the normal point of view—contains in it the unusual, and if the distortion is carried far enough, horror is achieved.

V

The most thoroughly morbid psychological state of all is that which may be broadly called madness in the layman's sense, and it has been used in American fiction since Wieland. In Wieland, the madness is employed in large part as an object of wonder, something to marvel at. As such, Brown devoted about all the space he could possibly afford to it; some twelve pages are devoted to Wieland's story, but there is much more of oratory than of madness in them.

There is a considerable advance in the use of madness to produce horror in Poe's stories, in part because of his concept of the sensor, but also in part because of his

---

23 Ibid., p. 57.
peculiar concept of madness. In a passage from "Eleanora" which sounds oddly autobiographical, the narrator says:

Men have called me mad, but the question is not settled whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence—whether much that is glorious—whether all that is profound—does not spring from diseases of thought—from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect. They who dream by day are cognisant of many things which escape those who dream only by night. In their gray visions they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in waking, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret. In snatches they learn something of the wisdom which is of good, and more of the mere knowledge which is of evil.24

There is not one of Poe's best stories which does not make use of such madness as is implied in this statement; it is an afflatus which is at times divine but more often infernal.25

Poe's most clearly drawn insane people are two of his best sensors, the protagonist of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Egaeus of "Berenice." Egaeus is predominantly depressive in temperament, as is apparent in his first statement of the story; "Misery is manifold," he says, and then elaborates the statement. He then describes

24 Poe, IV, 236.

25 Poe's "best stories" are here considered to be those found in the Modern Student's Library collection, Tales of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James Southall Wilson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), or any equivalent collection; and to these should be added "The Truth in the Case of M. Valdemar."
his mental vagaries as follows:

To muse for long unwearyed hours, with my attention riveted to some frivolous device on the margin or in the typography of a book; to become absorbed, for the better part of a summer's day, in a quaint shadow falling aslant upon the tapestry or upon the floor; to lose myself, for an entire night, in watching the steady flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire; to dream away whole days over the perfume of a flower; to repeat monotonously some common word, until the sound, by dint of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind; to lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of bodily quiescence long and obstinately persevered in: such were a few of the most common and least pernicious vagaries induced by a condition of the mental faculties, not, indeed, altogether unparalleled, but certainly bidding defiance to anything like analysis or explanation. 26

Here indeed are "moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect," and at the end is a trivial bit of "the mere knowledge which is evil." In this passage, as elsewhere in Poe, the net effect of a particular device is to achieve an air of isolation, of inhumanity, in the protagonist; certainly a great deal of what horror he conveys is due to this very inhumanity.

Egaeus diminishes his senses, and he is thus akin in some respects to Bierce's deaf-mute child; the protagonist of "The Tell-Tale Heart," on the other hand, is rather manic than depressive, and his senses, as he informs us repeatedly, are in an exalted state of sensitivity.

---

26 Poe, II, 19.
especially that of hearing. But again, an inhumanity is achieved; the normal is distorted, positively rather than negatively in this story, and thus the final effect is much like that of "Berenice," though the protagonists are diametrical opposites.

There is a didactic use of madness in the best-known of Oliver Wendell Holmes's "medicated novels," Elsie Venner. Elsie, an extremely moody, high-strung young lady who is prone to bite when displeased, is to the ignorant observer a hell-cat whom it is necessary to place in seclusion at times because of her disposition. The didactic element enters when Holmes takes up cudgels against the clergy, saying that it seems hardly just that Elsie should go to Hell for her misdeeds, or indeed "sins," when the original fault lay in the fact that her mother was bitten by a rattlesnake shortly before she was born, and that she came into the world with the stigmata of the snake, both physical and spiritual, upon her. Ambrose Bierce makes an identical use of the same theme in "The Eyes of the Panther," in which the situation is duplicated except that a panther replaces the rattlesnake. Bierce, however, in his short story, lays little emphasis on the didactic and emphasizes the wonderful and the weird. Just as Elsie Venner when a child squirmed
across the floor in a manner to make her father almost faint, and when a woman is rumored to be able to flatten her skull, snake-fashion, when angry, so do the eyes of the girl in "The Eyes of the Panther" shine in the dark, and she goes about peering into windows and seemingly seeking entrance. When she is shot she screams like a panther, and the taint leaves her only as she dies. These stories, incidentally, are the nearest thing in nineteenth century American literature to stories of were-creatures, except for some relatively inferior pieces which remain deservedly buried in old periodicals. 27

Madness in the form of monomania appears in one of Robert W. Chambers's stories, "The Repairer of Reputations," in the person of Hildred Castaigne, the protagonist. From the standpoint of total horror effect, Castaigne's madness is handled unfortunately; it does not appear in his narration except in the calm acceptance of his destiny to be Emperor of America, and in his account of his supposed cure in an insane asylum. Castaigne is particularly sensitive on the subject of asylums and the opprobrium that

attaches to insanity, and he says of his friend, Wilde:

. . . the most remarkable thing about Mr. Wilde was that a man of his marvelous intelligence and knowledge should have such a head. It was flat and pointed, like the heads of many of those unfortunates whom people imprison in asylums for the weak-minded. Many called him insane but I knew him to be as sane as I was. 28

This bit of tongue-in-the-cheek tends to detract from the stature of Castaigne as a sensor; nevertheless he is not ineffective, since his revelations of horror are best presented in a poetic rather than in a rational manner.

The essence of Wilde, the other madman, is contained in the passage just quoted; there are other details, however, which enter into the picture of him. His profession is that of a "repairer of reputations," and by Castaigne's account, he carries on a highly successful business in blackmail; this is the one normal factor in him, however, for otherwise he is nothing of the successful business man. His sport is to play with a large and irascible cat until the maddened creature springs into his face, biting and clawing. He has no ears, but wears pink-painted wax ones which contrast oddly with his yellow complexion. He is grotesque in the extreme; "I thought I had never seen him so hideously fascinating," says Castaigne in describing

28 Chambers, The King in Yellow, pp. 21-22.
his appearance on one occasion. To Castaigne, Wilde is the conduit through which the horror lying in Carcosa and the Yellow Sign is to pour; he is in possession of the genealogical records which trace Castaigne’s claim to the Imperial Crown of America back to Hastur himself. There is some difficulty in accepting the menace which Castaigne believes to lie behind the hideously and grotesquely insane Wilde, when the man is presented in terminology which is laughable; for horror and humor are not compatible. Yet, when read in context with the other stories of the Yellow Sign, the King in Yellow is not to be taken as an insane fancy.

Madness as treated by the authors considered so far has been handled in a very general way, but in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s "The Yellow Wall Paper" the progress of delusion is carried out in an almost clinical manner, step by step; from the initial abhorrence of the lady for the wall paper, to her half-perception of shadowy shapes hiding behind its pattern, to her final full vision of those who creep behind it and her identification with them. The whole psychological action is constantly related to the norm in the form of the lady’s husband, a matter-of-fact physician, and the actual progress of insanity is most clearly observed in her subterfuges and
deceits with him; otherwise, she is merely an extremely effective sensor. The mysteriously creeping shapes which she perceives are among the most suggestive creations in the literature of horror, though they denote nothing.

VI

The progression in use of abnormal mental states in horror literature through the nineteenth century may well be stated in terms of the sensor. Beginning with Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, in which insanity is viewed externally, for the most part, and exploited for the spectacular, the century closes with Mrs. Gilman's calm but minutely subjective portrayal of the process of mental disintegration. But it is not the madness of her protagonist which Mrs. Gilman depicts as horrible; it is rather the weird land with its creeping figures that the crazed woman is able to see because of her madness, that is the vehicle of horror. Between the crudity of Brown's treatment of mental abnormality and the artistry of Mrs. Gilman, however, is a midway stage, occupied by the pioneering Edgar Allan Poe.

Even as Brown exploited the spectacular in his treatment of mental abnormality, so does Poe also, but with much more success. *Wieland* presents himself in what purports to be an explanation of his mental condition, but
it is too oratorical and shot through with theological bombast to reveal anything of the state of his mind. Egaeus of "Berenice," on the other hand, analyzes himself minutely; and even through the excessively florid language to which so many critics object, an exceedingly vivid picture of a diseased mind is visible. The picture is not one that may be analyzed, but it is the more effective for the mystery it contains. In "Berenice," Poe does not use the technique of extended vision in the sense of the mad woman in "The Yellow Wall Paper," for the sensor is more conscious of himself than of anything else; it is in him that the chief horror lies, at least if we agree that the teeth in the box are grotesque rather than truly horrible. Thus, Poe's greatest achievement, at least speaking quantitatively, was to accomplish superbly what Brown attempted to do and failed—-to evoke horror out of the spectacular side of insanity or mental abnormality. And in his method of minute analysis of sensation, he set a pattern followed by most of the writers of horror literature who came after him.
What is most familiar is most comfortable, and as Lovecraft has pointed out, the most successful element in the production of horror in literature is a sense of the unearthly, of remoteness from the things with which earth-dwellers are familiar. Such an air of the unearthly may be attached to a veritable man; many of Poe's protagonists, for instance, seem isolated from the familiar passions of human kind; but though they are inhuman in certain respects, they are nevertheless human in form and in mode of expression. Such isolation as is achieved in Poe's stories is largely a result of over-development of some one faculty at the expense of the others: in Egeus of "Berenice" the contemplative, in the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" the sensitive, and so on. Such an unearthliness is nevertheless related to the familiar, for it consists in an intensification of a familiar element, strange though that element may seem when so intensified.

Such an intensification of the familiar is the essence of tales of the other world that deal with the paradisiacal rather than with the horrible; they depend
on a normal and even a conventional esthetic which is then intensified and isolated. Only as a sense of the totally alien is introduced does the element of horror become strongest. A very practical matter, of course, eliminates the possibility that revelation of this principle may impel some author to write the very quintessence of horror into a story that would make gibbering idiots of its readers, for it is impossible to convey a sense of the totally alien, which is incapable of being understood. The best that any author can do is to present the totally unfamiliar in the cloak of earthly things, but in so doing refrain from making the cloak too effectually concealing. The mask, to borrow a figure from Melville, must not be too rigid, or it will distort what it shrouds into the semblance of something else.

II

The paradisiacal type of other-worldliness is rarer than the horrible in fiction of the unusual during the nineteenth century. Probably the best example is Poe's "Eleanora," the scene of which is laid in the "Valley of the Many-Coloured Grasses." It is the scene of a love-idyll that is intensified in the manner of "Annabel Lee" and has a similar conclusion, though the death of Eleanora is a more gradual process than is that of Annabel Lee in the poem. Similarly, the isolation so noticeable in
many of Poe's other stories is intensified by the cloud which settles over the valley when the love of the couple is made known, while the trees, leaning fantastically to the light, blossom forth in strange, fragrant flowers. The valley is "a magic prison-house of grandeur and of glory," but the grandeur and the glory are expressed in terms of trees, birds, and fishes.\footnote{Poe, IV, 237-39.} It might be the garden of Eden, except that there is no serpent, although death does enter.

Generally similar is the sub-microscopic world of Fitz-James O'Brien's "The Diamond Lens," a story whose setting is roughly similar to the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grasses and is filled with strangely beautiful plants and scenes. There is also a woman in "The Diamond Lens" whom the microscopist calls Animula and with whom he manages to fall in love. This paradise literally evaporates, in spite of the efforts of the microscopist to protect the drop of water which contains it.

O'Brien's story is the last of importance, during the period with which we are concerned, to deal entirely with the paradisiacal; in Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," however, there is an element of the paradisiacal in Peyton Farquhar's first impressions after
his fancied escape from the hangman and his landing on
the river-bank. "He dug his fingers into the sand, threw
it over himself in handfuls. . . . . It looked like diamonds,
rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful
which it did not resemble. The trees on the bank were
giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their
arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A
strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among
their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music
of aeolian harps."2 But on his subsequent journey, it is
soon revealed that this other world is not like paradise,
but full of nameless menace.

III

"Silence--A Fable" is Poe's only complete development
of the other world, and it stands in obvious contrast to
"Eleanora," although the first quality of the strange lands
in both is their isolation. The setting of "Silence" is
"a dreary region in Libya, by the borders of the River
Zaire." It is a region of strange life unlike that of
earth; the water-lilies have an animation that is foreign
to those of this world. "They sigh one unto the other
in that solitude, and stretch towards the heavens their

2Bierce, II, 42.
ghastly necks, and nod to and fro their everlasting heads."

Alone, this description of the water-lilies might be taken as mere figurative language or as evidence of disorder in the imagination. But there is also the forest, where "the low underwood is agitated continually. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And the tall primeval trees rock eternally hither and thither with a crashing and mighty sound." As if these evidences of strange life were not sufficient in the plants of the region, there is also the water of the river itself—the first of the mysteries of the strange land to be mentioned in the story: "The waters of the river have a saffron and sickly hue; and they flow not onward to the sea, but palpitate forever and forever beneath the red eye of the sun with a tumultuous and convulsive motion." A sense of the horror of all primeval life—which is alien to the average man of the twentieth century and was only slightly more familiar in the nineteenth—is present in this description; the palpitant waters might be one mass of protoplasmic slime, a gigantic amoeba, out of which grow the sentient water-lilies. Such a world as this might be merely strange, and not hostile, were it not for the floor of the forest, where at the roots of the trees "strange poisonous flowers

---

3 Poe, II, 220-21, passim.
lie writhing in perturbed slumber." And dews drop from
the summits of the trees, and when it rains, the rain
falls as blood.

This world seems to have no particular controlling
principle other than the fact that there is never silence;
the murmuring of the lilies, the crashing sounds of the
forest are incessant until silence is invoked by the
Demon for a specific purpose. It might be possible to
establish a relation of some sort between the sentience
of the plants and the superstition of Roderick Usher's,
"that of the sentience of all vegetable things," which
he extends to the "kingdom of inorganisation," but any
such relation must probably remain conjectural.

In Poe's other stories, the element of the unearthly
which is occasionally present is of that sort deriving
from isolation and intensification in the minds of his
curiously sensitive sensors, with the exception of "The
Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." Here Poe has created
an instrument which by the aid of mesmerism is able to
report, in a vague way, impressions of the world beyond
death, in which the sense of the unearthly is very strong.

Structurally, Poe doubtless intended the cataclysmic
putrefaction of M. Valdemar to be the climax of the story,
but a more profound and cosmic chord of horror is touched
in the earlier description of the mesmerized body:

There was no longer the faintest sign of vitality in M. Valdemar; and concluding him to be dead, we were consigning him to the care of the nurses, when a strong vibratory motion was observable in the tongue. This continued for perhaps a minute. At the expiration of this period, there issued from the distended and motionless jaws a voice—such as it would be madness in me to attempt describing. There are, indeed, two or three epithets which might be considered as applicable to it in part; I might say, for example, that the sound was harsh, and broken and hollow; but the hideous whole is indescribable, for the simple reason that no similar sounds have ever jarred on the ear of humanity. There were two particulars, nevertheless, which I thought then and still think, might fairly be stated as characteristic of the intonation—as well adapted to carry some idea of its unearthly peculiarity. In the first place, the voice seemed to reach our ears—at least mine—from a vast distance, or from some cavern within the earth. In the second place, it impressed me (I fear, indeed, that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended) as gelatinous or glutinous matters impress the sense of touch.4

The element of the unearthly is presented completely in the statement that the sound is indescribable because none other like it has ever been heard before—a device which also serves to maintain an illusion of objective and scientific description. The success of the device may be gauged by the fact that the story was widely believed in Poe's day, and thus served as a successful though not a deliberate hoax.5

4Poe, VI, 162-63.
5Ibid., pp. 290-91.
Verisimilitude was a great success, but the slight feeling of the nature of the other world which is implied in the description of the voice is an even greater one. It is an infinitely horrible and loathsome world, that in which the mesmerized Valdemar finds himself. We do not comprehend, as the narrator fears, but for the purpose of the story, we half-comprehend, and half-comprehension is better for Poe's purpose.

This other world, revealed vaguely in the voice of Valdemar, seems to be roughly parallel to that which is to be inferred from "Ligeia," consisting of *arcana* in which the souls of the dead exist for a longer or a shorter period. It is roughly equatable with the Greek underworld, but there is a sickness of spirit in the one Valdemar reveals that is different from the infinite sterility and hunger in which Homer's ghosts wander, wailing. This other world of Poe's is a necropolis, and partakes of the phenomena of physical death and decay; the "gelatinous or glutinous" quality of Valdemar's voice might be imagined as proceeding from a partially decayed set of speech organs.

"Silence--A Fable" is pure fantasy, as is O'Brien's "The Diamond Lens," but the revelation of M. Valdemar is related to death, and so are most of the other stories of the other world, which deservedly slumber in periodicals.
"The Spirit's Mirage," an anonymous moral allegory published in 1848, opens with Poe-like musings on the nature of death; then "Clairvoyant" comes and takes the protagonist on a journey which is strongly similar to that of Lucifer out of Hell in Paradise Lost.  "Beyond the Grave," by John B. Schaad, published in 1854, describes the passing of a Christian into the great beyond. In this story, the universe is presented in terms of unearthly splendor and awesomeness. The effect sought in both of these tales, in the descriptions of the unearthly, is something of a Doré-like quality, which is seldom completely attained and then only briefly. "A Dream By a Desolate Hearth," published anonymously in 1859, is somewhat better. A man muses on the horrors of death immediately after the burial of his wife, falls asleep, and dreams; the bellowing echoes and glimpses of the space-demons that inhabit remote parts of the universe contain some reasonably well-done description. The space-demons are reminiscent of the denizens of space described in Bulwer-Lytton's Zanoni, and the narrator's sojourn in the flames calls to mind

6 The Knickerbocker, XXXI, 387-96.
7 Ibid., XLIV, 146-53.
8 Ibid., LIII, 376-83.
the professed Rosicrucianism which Bulwer-Lytton built into his novel. There is no real horror in any of these stories from the periodicals, however; the nearest approach to it is an awe such as Clara Wieland was prone to feel when considering mysterious occurrences.

Excellent as is the other-worldly picture which Poe draws in "Silence," he pursued his vision of the unearthly no further, and thus we cannot discover a pattern of the other world in his stories. In Ambrose Bierce, however, such a pattern is established fairly clearly, and another is presented in embryo, which later writers were to develop and elaborate upon.

The gateway to Bierce's other world is through peculiar psychological states. Peyton Farquhar, during the moment of time-compression before the breaking of his neck, enters it, and finds it of a paradisiacal nature at first, a sort of reaction against the death which he expected at the end of the rope. As he travels along a road that leads through the strange wood, however, the impression changes:

It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating in the horizon in a point, like a lesson in perspective. Overhead,
as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great, golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.9

Like Poe's land in Libya by the River Zaire, this one is also isolated; in spite of the voices Farquhar hears, there is no sense of humanity, and the voices, like the strange constellations, bode malice and alien life. In this passage is contained the essence of Bierce's other world.

In "The Man and the Snake," the peculiar psychological state is fascination, as the man looks into the glittering eyes of the serpent. Here the entrance into the other world is announced by sound effects:

He heard, somewhere, the continuous throbbing of a great drum, with desultory bursts of far music, inconceivably sweet, like the tones of an aeolian harp. He knew it for the sunrise melody of Memnon's statue, and thought he stood in the Nileside reeds hearing with exalted sense that immortal anthem through the silence of the centuries.

The music ceased; rather, it became by insensible degrees the distant roll of a retreating thunderstorm. A landscape, glittering with sun and rain, stretched before him, arched with a vivid rainbow framing in its giant curve a hundred visible cities. In the middle distance a vast serpent, wearing a crown, reared its head out of its voluminous convolutions and looked at him with his dead mother's eyes.10

---

9Bierce, II, 43-44.

10Ibid., p. 319.
This sounds like a dream, particularly in the sense of flux; the mood changes from elements which might be paradisiacal at first to others directly related to the snake, which is the object of fear. The aeolian harp comparison links this fantasia to the early paradisiacal elements of Peyton Farquhar's; the mother-eyes of the serpent are a link with "The Death of Halpin Frayser," in which the dreaming Frayser meets death at the hands of his dead mother.

Frayser's world, however, on the whole, is most like that of Peyton Farquhar, and he too follows a road through a forest. It leads, he thinks, to something evil, but like Childe Roland of the Dark Tower, he feels compelled to follow it. He also hears voices, "broken and incoherent whispers in a strange tongue which yet he partly understood," and like Farquhar, he feels the presence of "invisible existences whom he could not definitely figure to his mind." One element which might have been drawn from the rain of blood in Poe's "Silence" is the bloody dew in "The Death of Halpin Frayser," with which Frayser writes in his notebook. The enveloping fog shrouds the whole in an isolation that lends more of complementary atmosphere to this story than could any summation of details; in it Frayser stands alone, facing the evil of a malevolent universe whose apotheosis is the soulless body of his mother.
Two of Bierce's stories, "Haita the Shepherd" and "An Inhabitant of Carcosa," are important because they contain the germ of a myth which later writers were to develop. The deity to whom Haita prays, a completely benevolent shepherd-god, is named Hastur, and the city of Carcosa also appears in later literature.

In addition to these links to other literature, "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" is connected to other-worldly elements in some of Bierce's other stories. As the narrator, standing on the strangely bleak plain, views the rocks, they seem "to have an understanding with one another and to exchange looks of uncomfortable significance," while a few blasted trees seem to be "leaders in this malevolent conspiracy of silent expectation." The reader is reminded of the strange constellations in "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and their malign significance to Peyton Farquhar; in this story all of the weird surroundings indicate such a conspiracy—the sight of Aldebaran and the Hyades which indicate night, the barbarian with a torch who speaks in a barbarous chant, the ruinous and old-looking earth. Only when the sun rises and the narrator sees that he casts no shadow does

11 Ibid., III, 306-9, passim.
he realize that he exists in spirit only, and that Carcosa, his city, exists only as a cluster of tumuli. In a sense, this is only a time-travel story, and yet the world of the distant future in which the narrator finds himself is only remotely bound to the world of ordinary experience.

The main significance of these stories, however, is their position in the lineage of the later myth-development, but only one later stage, that developed by Robert W. Chambers, falls within the period covered in this study. The first example of Chambers's borrowing from Bierce is found in a passage of verse which also serves to indicate the atmosphere of Chambers's other world, employed like the quotations from "Hali" that Bierce uses to open "The Death of Halpin Frayser" and "An Inhabitant of Carcosa." The story the verse introduces is "The Repairer of Reputations:"

"Along the shore the cloud waves break,
The twin suns sink behind the lake,
The shadows lengthen
In Carcosa.

Strange is the night when black stars rise,
And strange moons circle through the skies,
But stranger still is
Lost Carcosa.

Songs that the Hyades shall sing,
Where flap the tatters of the King,
Must die unheard in
Dim Carcosa."
This is described as "Cassilda's Song in 'The King in Yellow,' Act 1, Scene 2," and it sets the tone for the first four stories in the collection The King in Yellow--a work which though excellent in parts does not approach the mythical play in any of its malevolent effects. The peculiar astronomical features are reminiscent of the strange constellations seen by Peyton Farquhar, and the Hyades are also mentioned in Bierce's "An Inhabitant of Garcosa." But the "strange constellations" of Bierce, which probably refer only to unfamiliar arrangements of the stars, have been rendered even stranger here; there is at least an effort to create the effect of a universe so alien that even the laws of optics are suspended. Twin suns would seem unearthly enough, but Chambers goes even further; the moons are also multiple, and the stars are black.

The city itself is described only in brief impressionistic phrases. It borders on the Lake of Hali (Bierce's author is transformed into a lake) with its "cloudy depths," which is never described but only alluded to: 
"... I saw the lake of Hali, thin and blank, without a ripple of wind to stir it, and I saw the towers of Garcosa behind the moon," says the narrator of "The Mask"; in

---

12 Chambers, The King in Yellow, p. 72.
In the Court of the Dragon," there is another brief glimpse: "And now, far away, over leagues of tossing cloud-waves I saw the moon dripping with spray; and beyond, the towers of Carcosa rose behind the moon."\textsuperscript{13} Chambers's Carcosa has, besides Bierce's city, several possible relatives, including Poe's evil metropolis in "The City in the Sea"; the repeated use of water in describing Carcosa is the most apparent link to Poe's city, though not a very substantial one. Even granting the similarity, Carcosa seems to be in large part Chambers's creation, with the borrowed name from Bierce as his most obvious indebtedness.

Carcosa is somehow but very nebulously related to Aldebaran and the Hyades, but it is not certain what these represent. There are also repeated references to Hastur, who is the benevolent shepherd-god in Bierce's "Haita the Shepherd," but here is something less pleasant. "At last I was king," says Hildred Castaigne, the monomaniac protagonist of "The Repairer of Reputations." "King by right in Hastur, King because I knew the mystery of the Hyades, and my mind had sounded the depths of the Lake of Hall,"\textsuperscript{14} In "The Yellow Sign," Scott says, in relating

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 53.
his conversation with Tessie: "We spoke of Hastur and Cassilda, while outside the fog rolled against the blank window-panes as the cloud-waves roll and break on the shores of Hali." Most of the time, however, Hastur seems to be the deity worshiped by a sinister cult: "The time had come," says Castaigne, "when the people should know the son of Hastur, and the whole world bow to the Black Stars which hang in the sky over Carcosa." The implication is that those who bow before the horror and worship it will be known by their possession of the Yellow Sign, and that the others will be destroyed by the horrors unloosed from Carcosa by the cult.

The tongue-in-the-cheek references to the insanity of Castaigne in "The Repairer of Reputations" could easily cause the reader to dismiss the whole thing as the ravings of a madman, especially if he were familiar with Chambers in such a completely spoofing mood as in the stories of In Search of the Unknown. Taken with the other stories in The King in Yellow, however, "The Repairer of Reputations" cannot be so dismissed; and even without the other stories, the dimly-viewed Carcosa and the horrors that lurk there would still constitute an achievement in horror fiction.

15 Ibid., p. 125.

16 Ibid., p. 46.
In the three stories that immediately follow "The Repairer of Reputations," the narrators are at least reasonably sane; the worst they can be suspected of is borrowing the poetry of another race in describing what they have seen, as Barris says of himself in "The Maker of Moons." There he describes Yian, the city of a thousand bridges, which lies "across seven oceans and the great river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."\(^{17}\) Regardless of poetic diction, however, Carcosa, even if not Yian, is presented as a source of the most abominable horrors, which are made manifest not only in descriptions but also in the emotions of the people in the stories.

The mass horror envisaged by Castaigne, which is to come from Carcosa and give strength to his claim to the Imperial Crown of America, is not the prime concern in these stories; when there is pronounced horror, as there is not in the mind of Castaigne, it is related to personal fear. Agents and emissaries from the King in Yellow, whose throne is in Carcosa, threaten the narrators of "In the Court of the Dragon" and of "The Yellow Sign." One may fear death, but he only feels an intense loathing of the King in Yellow and his associates, whom he actually fears only when he is vulnerable to them. Vulnerability seems

to consist in part of the mere knowledge of their existence, but in part it also consists of a realization of guilt or of mere recognition of the Yellow Sign by the one who is threatened.

"In the Court of the Dragon," the third story of the collection, tells of the search for the soul of the narrator by a man in black, an agent of the King in Yellow. At first the narrator shows only curiosity, but soon comes fear as well. "There began to dawn in me a sense of responsibility for something long forgotten," he says, and the sense of responsibility makes the narrator feel that he deserves the destruction that threatens him.18 This sense of partial remembrance is akin to the half-understanding of Bierce's Halpin Frayser when he hears the whispers in an unknown tongue; as Frayser dreams the whole occurrence, although dreaming it vividly enough to be killed by it, so does Chambers's narrator here also dream of his pursuit. The fatal knowledge is not presented as part of a dream in "The Yellow Sign," however; in this story the narrator, Scott, comes to know too much as a direct result of reading The King in Yellow, and

18 Chambers, The King in Yellow, p. 91.
when he receives the Yellow Sign he knows what it means—that the churchyard watchman is to come for him, driving the hearse of which both he and Tessie have dreamed, to bear him away to the other world, to Carcosa, "Where flap the tatters of the King."

Finally, when considering the other world in fiction, it is necessary to recognize the disappearance stories of Ambrose Bierce. Most are very short, and are rather the material of which stories are made than actual stories themselves. One of them is a ghost story, "At Old Man Eckert's." Here a man walks into the house which is supposed to be haunted, silently walks out the front door again, and into the snow, where his tracks disappear. In this story his disappearance is related to the fact that the house is haunted, or is said to be, by Old Man Eckert, who "reached out and pulled him in." However, the other disappearance stories are quite similar and involve no ghosts; people merely disappear, sometimes while others are looking at them. The theory behind these disappearances has been discussed in the chapter on pseudo-science in literature, and there is little to be added here. The only thing that need be said is that since it is logical

to suppose that such persons who have disappeared have been transported elsewhere, the mysterious disappearance has since served in fiction as the entrance, sometimes on the principles of multiple space in some form, into other worlds; and stories dealing with such material have had almost infinitely varied forms during the present century. During the nineteenth, however, this material was barely noticed, and was confined, apparently, to the Bierce stories.

IV

Poe's world of strange life which he depicts in "Silence" stands alone within the period dealt with in this study; in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," however, he sets a pattern for entrance into the other world which later writers followed pretty consistently. Valdemar is mesmerized, and while in this state he is able to retain consciousness and to maintain physical communication with the world of the living while dead. Other peculiar psychological states are used by later writers; Bierce makes use of dream in "The Death of Halpin Frayser," of the time-compression theory in "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," and of fascination by a snake in "The Man and the Snake." Actually there is little difference to be noted in the general pattern of the other world in these stories, and the presentation
of the other-worldly picture in "The Man and the Snake" is more obviously dreamlike than is the dream of Halpin Frayser. The one common factor is the concept of increased or completely altered sensation because of some abnormal state of mind.

There is some partial carryover of the use of abnormal mental states as the gateway to the other world in Robert W. Chambers's stories. Hildred Castaigne, of "The Repairer of Reputations," and the narrator of "In the Court of the Dragon" are of unstable mind; there is no mental instability in "The Yellow Sign," however. Where Chambers departs most from Bierce's concept of the other world is that he does not make it necessary for a person to enter the other world to encounter its horror; under the right conditions, the other world pushes tentacles out into this one, and the horror portrayed by Chambers is thus rendered more aggressive than is Bierce's. Man need not be betrayed into the power of other-worldly forces, for they are capable of seeking him out in his own world and destroying him.

Further, especially in the disappearance stories of Bierce, if we may consider them related to the stories of the other world, other-worldly horror is brought near to the most prosaic sort of people. Those who disappear
are a schoolteacher, a planter, a shoemaker, and a sixteen-year-old boy in humble circumstances. Similarly, the people in Qhambers's stories are in no wise remarkable, beyond the fact that they live in a world peopled by artists and models, presented in a reasonably moral and normal way. It would seem that the writers who dealt with the other world in the latter part of the century felt it to be nearer to the normal earth and more menacing to the people of earth as a whole than did Poe, for instance, who did not even place a recognizably human figure in the land by the River Zaire. The increased intimacy between this world and the others was to give way to an even closer relationship in the horror literature of the twentieth century.
CHAPTER IX

WITCHCRAFT AND THE DARK WORSHIP

I

George Lyman Kittredge has pointed out the nature of witchcraft in England and New England as consisting, first, of a system of folk beliefs, and second, of a more sophisticated demonology superimposed on the common superstition by the clergy and others. His statement of the essence of the belief in witches is as follows:

Now the mere creed—the belief that witches exist and that they can work supernaturally to the injury and even to the destruction of their enemies—is the heritage of the human race. The Englishman of the sixteenth or seventeenth century did not excogitate or dream it for himself, or borrow it from the Continent, or learn it from his spiritual advisers whether before the Reformation or after. He inherited it in an unbroken line from his primeval ancestors. And along with it came another dogma, likewise of abysmal antiquity—the theory that all diseases are of supernatural origin. . . . In brief, the ordinary Elizabethan, in this essential particular—the doctrine of maleficium and its application to disease—had not yet emerged from barbarism. And it was the doctrine of maleficium, and nothing else, that made the witch-creed terrible.1

In America, the demonological side of witchcraft was imported with the same people who believed in the doctrine

of maleficium, and there is no question of separating the two in this country. Both elements are present in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, and in the *Wonders of the Invisible World* Mather lays heavier stress on diabolism than on the mischief wrought by witches. In accounts of the witch trials by Mather and others as well, the negress, Tituba, introduces a West Indian element, deriving ultimately from Africa, into American witchcraft; and in addition there was the completely native contribution of the Indian powwows or wizards, held by Cotton Mather to have been possessed of great powers. Of all these elements, however, the English tradition of maleficium mingled with diabolism was strongest in the writings of the nineteenth century. Neither element was exploited for effects of true horror, however, during this period, but the groundwork of horror literature on witchcraft themes was being laid.

There was a continuous historical interest in the early American witchcraft, as shown in the periodicals, through most of the century. "Christian Lacy. A Tale of the Salem Witchcraft," by G. P. R. James, published in 1857, makes use of a witch trial in a story which is extremely conventional romance in the large, rather than basically a tale of witchcraft.² The mother of Christian

²*Graham's Magazine*, XXXVIII, 17-27.
is pointed out as a witch by a group of possessed children and is sentenced to be executed; her son aids her to escape from prison and hides her in the forest until the affair blows over. Like the other stories discussed here, this one is largely historical, with a thin and loosely applied veneer of fiction.

"Voudoo Violet," by Lizzie W. Champney, published in 1877, tells of a West Indian negress who was servant in the house of the Rev. Mr. Deepegrove; because she was privy to some messages passed between the Rev. Mr. Deepegrove's daughter and a Royalist refugee who was later inferred to have been hidden in the village, she was tried as a witch and was saved only because the daughter made a clean breast of the affair from the distance of England. It is a highly contrived and romantic tale, but there is no witchcraft in it save for the general temper of colonial New England toward the unknown or the suspicious. Other appearances of historical witchcraft are designed to be merely amusing or to hint at the fraud which underlay the delusion. "Johnny Marsden," an anonymous story published in 1838, tells of an humble peddler of food who has a complete belief in witches, and his tale deals with the bewitchment of his cow and his cat, and with his efforts

---

to release them from the spell. In both cases, he applies a home remedy, cutting off the tail, but neither animal survives the treatment for long, though both do recover from the bewitchment. "The Lunatic and His Turkey," also anonymous, and published in 1840, is the story of a man who falls ill and is considered to be bewitched; efforts are made to make the witch reveal herself by killing a lamb and then sticking its heart full of pins and burning it in a fire, but to no avail. The man finally recovers enough to walk about, and he does so on a fairly rigid daily schedule; a turkey-cock takes to joining him on his daily rounds, and the neighbors decide that the fowl probably has something to do with the man's indisposition. The turkey-cock is killed and his heart is stuck full of pins and burned, but the only result is that the man is rendered despondent over the loss of his companion. Finally the man is bled and some of his blood is heated in a closed jar; the vessel explodes, and an old lady who dies in the next town at about the same time is considered to have been the witch, although the man also dies soon afterward. And in "The New Science; Or The Village Bewitched," published in 1846, James K. Paulding tells of

4"Johnny Marsden," The Knickerbocker, XII (1838), 325-32.

5Ibid., XVI (1840), 466-69.
the efforts of a discarded suitor's mother to bewitch the guilty young lady; these efforts cause the guilty party to go through several phases, the last being a partnership with a tinker turned mesmerist with whom she makes her fortune, and whom she finally marries.⁶ As background there is the belief in the neighborhood that witchcraft is rampant, and certain strange noises in the hills indicate to the villagers the presence of evil spirits. The background details give this story a local orientation that is lacking in most of the fictionalized extracts from witchcraft history, and look forward to the use of similar devices in H. P. Lovecraft's stories and those of his followers.

The emphasis in all these stories is on the historical or pseudo-historical side of witchcraft, and of the two main elements, maleficium alone is recognizable; the effect intended seems to be quaintness rather than horror. In addition to these more or less fictionalized accounts, articles on the purely historic side of the witchcraft delusion also appeared, but differ only slightly in tone from the fictionalized history. "Grace Sherwood, The One Virginia Witch," by John Esten Cooke,⁷ is a historical

account of the accusal and trial of the Virginia witch, and there is another article, "On Witchcraft Superstition in Norfolk," by Charles Roper, published in 1893.\textsuperscript{8}

Besides these evidences of interest in early American witchcraft, one article, "In the Heart of the Hartz," by Marion Mitchell, published in 1878, indicates some interest in general witchcraft.\textsuperscript{9} It describes the completely credulous attitude of the Hartz peasantry toward the 

Walpurgisnacht rites. Another article, published in 1883, "The Morning Star," by Benjamin Alvord,\textsuperscript{10} is presented as folklore rather than history; it describes an Indian superstition that sorcerers, through the performance of certain rites, are able to imprison the souls of men while the victims are asleep. The rites must be performed before the rising of the morning star, however, if they are to fulfill their purpose.

Historically, then, there continued to be considerable interest in witchcraft throughout the nineteenth century, the attitude toward it appearing to be one of curiosity rather than abhorrence or even fear. We may now turn to a consideration of witchcraft in imaginative literature.

\textsuperscript{8}Harper's Magazine, LXXXVII (1893), 792-97.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., LVI (1878), 684-96.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., LXVI (1883), 606-8.
II

Of the two main elements of witchcraft, maleficium seems to have been most widely used in fiction. Since it is related to the superstition of rather simple people, it is understandably more common than the diabolism; the more exotic varieties of witchcraft, such as voodoo, though recognized as existing, found no extended employment in the horror literature of the period.

Indian magic, or at least magic and witchcraft labeled as Indian, did enter in, though no real horror literature is based on it. "The Pezhootah Wechashtah," published in 1836, is an anonymous story about an Indian medicine man who practices various charlatanries on his enemies in order to maintain his ascendancy over them; he has their guns loaded with frangible clay bullets, and then he braves their fire; he causes a pair of moccasins in which rattlesnake fangs have been placed to be given to one enemy, who dies horribly while on a journey.11 In the end, he is slain by a knife, having demonstrated repeatedly that he is immune to bullets. "The Lady of Belisle," by J. D. Whelpley, published in 1858, tells of a girl who leads the normal life of a daughter of culture for half the year, but for the other half is wilful.

11 The Knickerbocker, VII (1836), 170-79.
disobedient, and cruel; she even changes physically to some extent. The change is finally explained as a result of her having been stolen as a baby by an Indian woman, who died in the presence of the child. The Indian woman's own child was also found dead, and the explanation of the mystery is that she somehow caused the soul of her own child to enter into the body of the white baby, and that there is constant conflict, with each soul supreme for about half the time. This story has a happy ending in that the soul of the Indian is rendered weak and ineffective. It may not involve maleficium in the sense of the doing of conscious evil, but the results are similar enough to the common state of possession to make it reasonable that this tale be placed in a class with the other maleficium stories. The story is not ineffective, but earlier introduction of the twin-soul theme would have reinforced the descriptions of the metamorphosis, which approach closest to horror.

It is the European tradition which is strongest, however, in the tales involving maleficium. One tale, comic rather than involving any horror, employs a schoolteacher instead of a witch, but it is nevertheless in the

---

tradition of mischief-making witchcraft; this is "Modern Magic," published in 1840, by one "Anagram Ferran." A young girl who is left orphaned with her stepmother is bequeathed the father's property; upon her stepmother's remarriage (to the hired man), a concerted effort is made to prevent the girl's being educated or married, with the purpose of keeping her property in the family. The greedy step-parents make the mistake of taking the schoolmaster in to board, however, and as he teaches the girl in private, romance blossoms. The family's opposition to education and marriage is overcome by a succession of practical jokes in the Katzenjammer Kid tradition; many of them involve explosives and highly combustible materials, while some of the others have all the appearance of poltergeist manifestations. As a result, the family is brought to heel, and love conquers all, with the aid of "witchcraft."

There are traces of maleficium in Hawthorne's stories. In The House of the Seven Gables, Maule's curse on the Pyncheon line is a good example, although the intent to do evil was certainly justified under the circumstances. The air of satisfaction in the mere doing of evil is an example of general maleficium in the witch of "The Hollow of the Three Hills," and the last look which the Phantom

13 The Southern Literary Messenger, VI (1840), 628-40.
gives Donatello in *The Marble Faun* carries the force of a curse, though again, as in the case of Maule, circumstances might seem to warrant it. The theme of the curse is repeated, under much the same circumstances as Maule's, in "Bathsheba Carew's Curse," by Jane G. Austin, in 1870. The old woman here, however, is being forced from her home in order to prevent the landlord's son from marrying her daughter; her curse is more immediately efficacious than Maule's, for the landlord falls dead on the spot from apoplexy.

One of the most striking characteristics of *maleficium*, as described by Kittredge, is that it so often involves petty mischief. Cows go dry, butter will not churn, people have nightmares, and so on. Even when sickness and death result from witchcraft, such misfortune is often invoked because of petty offences. Someone refuses to pay a laundry bill, or to give an old crone food, or to do something else equally trivial. Thus it may be summed up by saying that at least in modern times, witchcraft is the tool of the most ignorant people, and these are the persons against whom it is most effective. Hence, most of the tales of *maleficium* deal with minor matters, and most of them lack real horrors; the exception with which

we now meet extends Kittredge's use of maleficium as dealing with bodily injury to the breaking point, but it seems better to extend it than to seek another term.

"The Wondersmith," a reasonably obscure tale by Fitz-James O'Brien, deals with maleficium applied, not to a person but to a whole civilization, and the actual harm which is intended is meant to be inflicted by entirely corporeal means although supernatural elements are present. Herr Hippe, the Wondersmith, has a dual purpose in mind: revenge against the race of Christians for introducing his son to hard liquor, which killed him, and the restoration of the ancient rulers of the earth, the Gypsies, to their rightful lordship. These purposes are to be brought about by means of certain dolls constructed by Hippe, but not by the usual puppet technique of pushing pins into them. These dolls are to be animated by actual souls, and then released to go on their errands of death, to slay the whole race of Christians.

"The Wondersmith" is not as good a story as it might have been, in part because of the Dickens-like whimsicality of which O'Brien was entirely too fond, and in part because it is in essence a horror story and O'Brien fails to relate all parts of the narrative to that horror. It is important, nevertheless, because of the themes which it introduces.
One of the classic horror stories of the twentieth century, A. Merritt's *Burn Witch Burn*, makes use of the animated dolls in exactly the same way that O'Brien does; the theme of a deposed ruling race attempting to resume its rule over the earth is particularly strong in another of Merritt's stories, *Creep Shadow*, and the entirety of the Lovecraft mythology is based on the universal myth-pattern of a deposed group of elder gods, seeking to regain their lost power. These later developments, however, except for *Burn Witch Burn*, belong rather to the Satanic aspect of witchcraft than to that of maleficium.

In all the negro stories which deal with superstitions, there is an element of maleficium, probably as pronounced as anywhere in "Sosrus Dismal," by William W. Archer. Sosrus, a virtuoso on the six-string banjo and a favorite at all the merrymakings among the colored, becomes involved in a discussion with Black Prophet, a preacher, and worsts him in debate. Although Sosrus makes his point that banjo-playing is not necessarily sinful per se, Black Prophet puts a "blight" on Sosrus, and the blight aided by the whiskey Sosrus has consumed causes him to go over the falls in his boat. The injuries he receives kill him, but as he

dies he plays his favorite piece for the six-string banjo, "Mississippi Sawyer," and calls the figures for the dance; a pious old sister in attendance at his bedside interprets them all to the glory of God. Two of the Devil Tales of Virginia Frazer Boyle were also published in Harper's before the end of the century; both of these, "Dark er de Moon" and "Asmodeus in the Quarters" deal with the feud between Uncle 'Jah, a "Hoodoo," and the devil, who entices Uncle 'Jah's neighbors into contracts and then persecutes them for wishing to break their agreements. In all of these negro tales, the emphasis is on quaintness and local color, and there is no apparent intention of evoking horror.

III

In common with Cotton Mather and his own witch-hunting ancestors, Hawthorne was more concerned with diabolism than with maleficium or mischief in witchcraft, and he achieves some of his best effects in dealing with the diabolic in his stories. One of the best is found in "The Hollow of the Three Hills."

Lonely places, particularly the forest, are seen in The Scarlet Letter and elsewhere to be favorite places

\[16\] Ibid., C (1900), 58-68.

\[17\] Ibid., pp. 216-22.
of rendezvous for the devil and his subjects. "The Hollow of the Three Hills" is placed in such a lonely setting, and there is a fuller description of it than Hawthorne usually gives. The hollow is surrounded by dwarf cedars, and there is a decaying oak trunk which lies beside a pool of green and stagnant water. "Such scenes as this (so gray tradition tells) were once the resort of the Power of Evil and his plighted subjects; and here, at midnight or on the dim verge of evening, they were said to stand round the mantling pool, disturbing its putrid waters in the performance of an impious baptismal rite." Such witch-gatherings were originally in the Continental tradition, as Kittredge points out, but were believed to occur in England early in the Stuart period, and they are mentioned in the Salem witch-trials. Their worshipful nature is indicated clearly by the old woman's actions in this story: "Again the withered hag poured forth the monotonous words of a prayer that was not meant to be acceptable in heaven." 

The emphasis in "The Hollow of the Three Hills" is on private sin and one particular worshiper of Satan, though we know that there are others; in "Young Goodman Brown,"

18 Hawthorne, I, 228-29.
19 Ibid., p. 231.
however, sin is no longer private, and the reader wonders whether virtue exists at all. Satan is no mere bogie who serves as a sort of scoutmaster to a group of feeble-minded Prometheans in this story; he is the symbol of universal evil, and that he is not an empty symbol is shown by the size of the congregation to whom he preaches. Everyone whom Goodman Brown has ever known is there. In short, here is witchcraft raised and expanded into literature in every respect. One might cavil, perhaps, at "The Hollow of the Three Hills" because of its being a sketch rather than a story and because it deals with private sorrow rather than with more weighty themes; but of "Young Goodman Brown," there can be no such criticism. One must not judge a story on the basis of profundity or importance of theme, of course, but by what it accomplishes; on this score, both of these stories are high accomplishments in that they bring the reader face to face with the evil in the universe, and in a very graphic way.

"Feathertop" is interesting, in part for its parallel with O'Brien's "The Wondersmith" and in part for itself. Mother Rigby, the witch, complete with her pipe and her familiar named Dickon, is quaint but not horrible, for she has a sense of humor. The scarecrow that she constructs crazily out of sticks, old garments, and a pumpkin,
she whimsically decides to animate and to send into the city to make his fortune. There he is universally admired except by dogs and little children, and only a mirror, which can reflect nothing but the truth, prevents his making a brilliant marriage. The purpose here is social satire, however, which excludes "Feathertop" from the class of Hawthorne's other stories involving witchcraft. Only formally is the animated scarecrow allied with diabolism, by the infernal fire which relights his pipe when the vital smoke threatens to stop, and Mother Rigby is too kindly an old soul to be connected with anything actually diabolic.

The satanic element in "The Wondersmith" derives less from actual worship of demons than from traffic with them in another form. The dolls are to be animated by souls, but just any souls will not do:

"Are they of the right brand,—wild, tearing, dark devilish fellows? We want no essence of milk and honey, you know. None but souls bitter as hemlock or scorching as lightning will serve our purpose."

"You will see, you will see, Grand Duke of Egypt! They are ethereal demons, every one of them. They are the pick of a thousand births. Do you think that I, old midwife that I am, don't know the squall of the demon child from that of the angel child, the very moment they are delivered?" 20

20 O'Brien, p. 183.
Hippe, who also claims to be the "Grand Duke of Egypt," says that he invoked the aid of "Abigor, the demon of soldiery," in making the dolls, and their martial evolutions seem to bear out his statement. Further conversation about the poison with which the swords and daggers of the dolls are anointed reveals one further detail concerning demons in this story:

"It is made," said the wondersmith, swallowing another great draught of wine as he replied, "in the wild woods of Guinea in silence and in mystery. But one tribe of Indians, the Maeoushi Indians, know the secret. It is simmered over fires built of strange woods, and the maker of it dies in the making. The place, for a mile around the spot where it is fabricated, is shunned as accursed. Devils hover over the pot in which it stews; and the birds of the air, scenting the smallest scent of its vapour from far away, drop to the ground, with paralyzed wings, cold and dead.21

Though the first of these passages is especially objectionable because of Dickensian whimsicality, there is apparent in them another important contribution which O'Brien made to American witchcraft tales. O'Brien has broken with the English witchcraft tradition, which is the American tradition as well. The souls of the demon children and the devils who hover over the pot of poison, which is in itself an exotic, are as new in American fiction as the dreary activities of idiotic old women

21 Ibid., pp. 214-15.
and delinquent juvenile girls are old in the history of witchcraft. Further development of the witchcraft theme in the next century was to lean much more to imported practices; even the revival of the New England witches by the Lovecraft school was to see much new and highly exotic material grafted on the historical facts, producing results which would no doubt have been most entertaining to Captain Hathorne and his colleagues of the bench.

As a matter of fact, one exotic did not wait for the next century; "The Maker of Moons," by Robert W. Chambers, introduces the Chinese secret society of the Kuen-Yuin—"the terrible Kuen-Yuin, the sorcerers of China and the most murderously diabolical sect on earth," as Barris, an ancestor of Sax Rohmer's Nayland Smith, says to Roy Cardenhe, the narrator. Their leader is one Yue-Laou, the Moon-Maker, and their headquarters is in the heart of China. Their purpose is apparently world conquest, which relates them to Mr. Hearst's Yellow Peril, but their reputation in the story is more sinister than their performance, for the group of Kuen-Yuin tools in the north woods falls a fairly easy prey to the guns of Barris and his men.

Yue-Laou, Barris says, will eventually be destroyed by Xangi, who is God, even though Yue-Laou says God
does not exist. Yue-Laou does wield sufficient power to cause him to feel rather independent; he has learned to synthesize gold, for instance, and this is the crime that brought down the wrath of Barris as an agent of the Treasury Department upon him. A previous crime, committed against Barris himself, was to fashion a woman out of a lotus flower, with whom Barris fell in love; Yue-Laou later turned her back into a flower. He has also created a hideous monster which lives in the lake adjoining the woods in which the action takes place; its purpose is not stated, though it finally destroys Barris.

Here we have an entirely exotic type of witchcraft, going considerably farther from the European pattern than did the earlier pioneer, O'Brien. Prototypes for Yue-Laou and the Kuen-Yuin must be numerous; one comes immediately to mind, the Old Man of the Mountain and his Assassins. But without searching through all possible sources dealing with alchemy and the creation or evocation of strange life, it is sufficient to say that Yue-Laou and his activities are comparatively new. His progeny, however, were to be many, ranging from The Sinister Doctor Fu-Manchu of Sax Rohmer (pseudonym of an English author, Arthur Sarsefield Ward) to Doctor Death Magazine, a short-lived pulp of the early thirties. Barris also has his counterparts in the
supersucks who relentlessly dog the footsteps of these later menaces. Even the triangle motif is established in "The Maker of Moons"; the villain is accompanied by a beautiful young lady, Ysonde, who falls in love with the not-very-bright friend of the detective, Cardenhe, and as a consequence the detective (with friend) is generally able to foil the villain in the end. Sometimes the fair marplot escapes, sometimes not. The irrepressibly romantic Chambers insists on the escape of Ysonde, who is revealed to be the daughter of Barris and the lotus-lady, from Yue-Laou to Cardenhe's waiting arms.

IV

The use of witchcraft in nineteenth century American horror fiction may be rather easily summarized. Hawthorne took the records of the Salem cases and made effective use of the material found there in a general allegory of evil, in which some very effective horror is produced as a by-product of the allegory. Immediately following him, Fitz-James O'Brien left the familiar witchcraft of his literary forebears and introduced exotic elements, including what he termed Gypsy and Macousha; the demon-souls seem to be either O'Brien's own or borrowings from folklore. Thenceforth, the familiar type of witchcraft was left largely to negro dialect stories, where the devil
appears in large part as the rather pathetic victim of a colored conjure-doctor. The exotic blossoms anew in Robert W. Chambers's "The Maker of Moons," in which O'Brien's theme of world conquest is re-introduced in a different guise. This theme used by O'Brien, that of the resurgence of a deposed ruling race, and the triangular situation of villain, villain's protegee, and friend of the detective, are to recur frequently in the literature of witchcraft of the following century. That is to say that much of it stems from O'Brien and Chambers, who added new material to the old witchcraft lore and made it capable of evoking true horror.
CHAPTER X

FEAR OF THE MALEVOLENT DEAD

I

Fear of the dead is to be distinguished from fear of ghosts or of death itself, for there is a horror which attaches to the corpse per se. Poe often deals with death, but seldom with dead bodies, and when he does, as in "The Truth in the Case of M. Valdemar," it is not with a mere corpse but with one that is fearfully decomposed that he is concerned.

Ambrose Bierce, however, who was acquainted with war, was consequently acquainted with death and, more immediately, with the dead themselves. Fear of dead bodies is a frequently recurring theme in his stories; he not only makes use of the material but philosophizes about it through his characters. Byring, of "A Tough Tussle," who was annoyed by the presence of a dead body as he was on guard duty, experienced a sense of the supernatural—"in which he did not believe."

"I have inherited it," he said to himself. "I suppose it will require a thousand ages—perhaps ten thousand—for humanity to outgrow this feeling. Where and when did it originate? Away back, probably, in what is called the cradle of the human race—the plains of Central Asia. What we inherit as a superstition our barbarous ancestors must have held as a reasonable conviction. Doubtless they believed themselves justified by facts.
whose nature we cannot even conjecture in thinking a dead body a malign thing endowed with some strange power of mischief, with perhaps a will and a purpose to exert it.1

This belief is also stated by the practical jokers in "A Watcher by the Dead" and by Jaretté, the watcher himself.2 It will be noted in the quotation that the dead are malevolent in the minds of those who fear them; the feeling that they are malevolent is entirely irrational, but none the less real. It merely defies analysis, being archetypal in nature and, according to Bierce, present in all of us.

II

In "A Watcher by the Dead," Jaretté has just settled himself in the room with the corpse on the table, and has put out the candle. He is completely without superstition, in his own mind, and yet he feels that the darkness circumscribes him. "He could not go blundering about in absolute darkness at the risk of bruising himself--at the risk, too, of blundering against the table and rudely disturbing the dead. We all recognize their right to lie at rest, with immunity from all that is harsh and violent."3

The first step toward full irrationality has been taken

1Bierce, III, 113.

2Ibid., II, 294-300, passim.

3Ibid., 297-98.
in admitting to himself, no matter how inadvertently, that the dead have enough personality to be deserving of respect. Next he thinks he hears a sound. "He did not turn his head. Why should he—in the darkness? But he listened—why should he not? And listening he grew giddy and grasped the arms of the chair for support." Personality in the dead body has now had motion added to it, leaving only volition to complete the pattern believed in by the dead ancestors. This element is not long withheld: "Distinctly, unmistakably, Mr. Jarette heard behind him a light, soft sound of footfalls, deliberate, regular, successively nearer." The fact that the whole thing is a practical joke does not lessen the horror of the moment, for in Jarette's mind the dead man is walking toward him, and probably not out of idle curiosity. The emotion produced in him is of the type which leads to violent action, for which few could blame him.

Elsewhere Bierce uses real corpses, although nowhere is the fear of them objectively justified, for they are all entirely harmless. Mr. Doman, in "A Holy Terror," excavating the grave of Scarry, the old mining town prostitute whose tombstone proclaims that she was a holy

4 Ibid., p. 298.  
5 Ibid., pp. 300-1.
terror, visualizes the scarred face within the up-ended coffin and reacts physically to the image he conjures up. His situation differs from Jarett's in that the latter had aural evidence of the approach of some entity which was necessarily the corpse he was guarding, while Mr. Doman has imagination alone, at first. But the coffin seems to be advancing upon him, and he attacks it with his bowie knife: "There was a sharp ringing percussion, and with a dull clatter the whole decayed coffin lid broke in pieces and came away, falling about his feet. The quick and the dead were face to face—the frenzied, shrieking man—the woman standing tranquil in her silences. She was a holy terror!"6 The end of it all is the end of Mr. Doman, who dies of fright and his own imagination.

In "The Boarded Window," there is a situation somewhat similar to that in "A Watcher by the Dead." Murlock, alone in his cabin with the corpse of his wife, which is also on the table, is awakened by something, and as he listens he too hears footfalls:

He was terrified beyond the power to cry out or move. Perforce he waited—waited there in the darkness through seeming centuries of such dread as one may know, yet live to tell. He tried vainly to speak the dead woman's name, vainly to stretch forth his hand across the table to learn if she were there. His throat

6Ibid., p. 344.
was powerless, his arms and hands were like lead. Then occurred something most frightful. Some heavy body seemed hurled against the table with an impetus that pushed it against his breast so sharply as nearly to overthrow him, and at the same instant he heard and felt the fall of something upon the floor with so violent a thump that the whole house was shaken by the impact.⁷

Then the spell is released sufficiently to permit him to feel with his hands; the dead woman is no longer upon the table. "There is a point at which terror may turn to madness; and madness incites to action." Murlock, crazed with fear, fires the gun he holds, and in the flash he sees a panther dragging the corpse toward the window. This is the sight that causes him to faint, but it is almost a relief to the reader.

There is no malevolence implied in any of the details narrated; no approaching footsteps, as in the case of Jarette, not even a coffin which seems imbued with motion as in the case of Doxoan. There is, however, a preternatural energy in something which should have none. When the dead move, one has a right to expect that they shall creep, but Murlock has heard the dead woman apparently leap from the table. Though she was his wife and beloved by him in life, now she is but the walking dead and

⁷Ibid., p. 371.
endowed with a malevolent energy. Similarly, in "The Moonlit Road," Joel Hetman is seized with a panic when he sees the wife he has killed appear before him in the moonlight; he can take no action other than flight, because it is a ghost he sees, but Byring in "A Tough Tussle" slashes the offending corpse severely with his sword before dying of terror.  

Of all Bierce's treatments of fear of the dead, however, the supernatural tale "The Death of Halpin Frayser" is the best and contains the most complete development of the fear. The other stories tend to be bare; they are built around the most commonplace objects and are set in commonplace settings. The fact that they are reasonably successful is a tribute to Bierce's ability to evoke terror out of man's imagination, even when there is little to excite it except the essential dead body. In "Halpin Frayser," however, the entire atmosphere is unearthly and the action takes place in a dream. All this serves as background to the actual corpse and amplifies its effect.

The story is introduced by a quotation from a mythical author named Hall which contains these words:

---


9 *Ibid.* , p. 120.
"And it is attested of those encountering [the walking dead] who have lived to speak thereon that a lich so raised up hath no natural affection, nor remembrance thereof, but only hate. Also, it is known that some spirits that in life were benign become by death evil altogether. The lich that Halpin Frayser is to meet is indeed evil, and its evil is made the more poignant because in life it was Frayser's mother, who had been exceedingly close to him—close in a sense which seems Freudian.

The general weirdness of the background is first intensified by a hideous laugh out of the gray silence about him, followed by a sense of the presence of something horribly malevolent. Suddenly Frayser raises his eyes; "he found himself staring into the sharply drawn face and blank, dead eyes of his own mother, standing white and silent in the garments of the grave!"

The apparition confronting the dreamer in the haunted wood—the thing so like, yet so unlike his mother—was horrible! It stirred no love nor longing in his heart; it came unattended with pleasant memories of a golden past—inspired no sentiments of any kind; all the finer emotions were swallowed up in fear. He tried to turn and run from before it, but his legs were as lead; he was unable to lift his feet from the ground. His

---

10 Ibid., p. 13.

11 Ibid., p. 20.
arms hung helpless at his sides; of his eyes only he retained control, and these he dared not remove from the lusterless orbs of the apparition, which he knew was not a soul without a body, but that most dreadful of all existences infesting that haunted wood—a body without a soul? . . .

For a time, which seemed so long that the world grew gray with age and sin, and the haunted forest, having fulfilled its purpose in this monstrous culmination of its terrors, vanished out of his consciousness with all its sights and sounds, the apparition stood within a pace, regarding him with the mindless malevolence of a wild brute; then thrust its hands forward and sprang upon him with appalling ferocity!12

A partial clue to Bierce's concept of fear of the dead may be found in the simile of the lich's spring; it is like that of a wild brute, mindless, and therefore dehumanized. Dehumanization, as has been pointed out earlier, is an essential feature in Bierce's pictures of horror, and it is even more sharply drawn here by its occurrence in the thing that was the mother of Frayser.

III

Except in "The Death of Halpin Frayser," Bierce uses little atmosphere; as a result, his stories, with this one exception, lack the intensity and concentration attained by F. Marion Crawford in three of his best stories which deal with the dead. Unlike Bierce, Crawford is capable of conceiving of the dead as without

malevolence, overt or imagined. In "The Upper Berth," one of Crawford's most familiar stories, fear of the dead alone without any sense of harm impending from the dead thing is the emotion produced. In the other two stories, the dead are malevolent as in Bierce.

In "The Dead Smile," the first story in the collection entitled *Wandering Ghosts*, malevolence is the humour of old Sir Hugh Ookram, even before his death, and death only fixes and intensifies it. For background there is the legend of Sir Vernon Ookram, beheaded for treason under James II; he was buried in an iron coffin, although no coffin will hold an Ookram, and on subsequent openings of the grave the coffin was found open and the body standing in a corner, with the head smiling at it from the floor. This legend of Sir Vernon may also serve as an example of the heavy neo-Gothic trappings of the story, all of which, however, are handled in a completely supernatural way, with no explanations as last minute destroyers of effect.

The first picture of any dead person of whom there is reason to have any fear is that of the curiously compound being appearing at the window to Nurse MacDonald:

... outside the window there was a face, and violet eyes were looking steadily at the ancient sleeper, for it was like the face of Evelyn Warburton, though there were eighty feet from the
sill of the window to the foot of the tower.
But the cheeks were thinner than Evelyn's, and
as white as a gloam, and the eyes stared, and the
lips were not red with life; they were dead and
painted with new blood. . . . Then the face at
the window changed, for the eyes opened wider
and wider till the white glared all round the
bright violet, and the bloody lips opened wide
over gleaming teeth, and stretched and widened
and stretched again, and the shadowy golden
hair rose and streamed against the window in
the night breeze. And in answer to Nurse
MacDonald's question came the sound that freezes
the living flesh.13

All the material here presented about the apparition
indicates that it is supernatural and not flesh, with
the exception of the blood on the lips; there are elements
of ghost, banshee, and vampire in it, and the presence
of the latter is the sole warrant for including it under
a treatment of fear of the dead. The vampire element is
not explained. We are told why she waits, however; old
Sir Hugh is on the verge of death, and when he dies she
is to repay him an evil he did her years before.

But the main theme of the malevolent dead concerns
the malice of old Sir Hugh. Unlike Bierce's malevolent
dead, he does not walk by night nor does he commit any
act whatsoever after his death; his influence is entirely
psychic. During his final illness, a certain evil smile
is often seen on his lips; it is there when he dies, and

13 Crawford, Wandering Ghosts, pp. 11-12.
he is buried still smiling, having refused to divulge a certain secret to Nurse MacDonald. His power is exerted, first in the concern of Gabriel Ockram and Evelyn Warburton to know what the secret is; second in the fact that both feel a compulsion to go to the tomb and enter it to see whether the smile is still on Sir Hugh's lips. Gabriel especially feels that he will go mad if he cannot see. One night he goes, followed by a ghostly breeze that blows his candle-flame into a sputtering blue spark, and in the tomb, where the head of Sir Vernon smiles at his headless body, he finds his father, still smiling, clutching a packet of papers in his dried fingers. In it is the revelation of the secret, that he and Evelyn are half-brother and half-sister, and then he knows that it was Sir Hugh's intention that his two children should marry, half-suspecting the truth, and suffer through a lifetime concealing a partial secret. As the truth is revealed, the smile fades from Sir Hugh's lips and the power of the dead over the living ceases. The morals of the story and the theology which is implied are probably somewhat Victorian to the modern mind, but the concept of evil wielded from beyond the grave is exceedingly old, whether actually archetypal or not. Unlike Bierce's stories, this one is romanticized; not only in setting, but also in the happy ending of sorts
which is given it. The evil here is an evil which a man can fight, and with courage, defeat; its spirit is thus identical with that of the older Gothic tales. In Bierce's stories, there is no recourse, once the victim is caught in the web.

In "The Screaming Skull," as indicated by the title, the dead person of whom there is fear figures only in part; the malevolence of the dead is exerted over an old sea captain, whose innocent remark was the ultimate cause of the murder of the lady to whom the skull belonged. The revenge is completed by the skull's biting the captain in the throat, an action more physical than those common to the malevolent dead. A similar revenge has been taken earlier on the husband of the murdered lady, the man who actually committed the crime. The motive is simple revenge, not the damnation of a soul, as in the case of "The Dead Smile." This fact combined with the garrulous narration of the old sea captain prevents any such high points of horror as are found in "The Dead Smile," but on the other hand, the local-color effect conferred by the person of the narrator is extremely effective in lending verisimilitude and avoiding the theatrical, a fault which might be imputed to the other Crawford story.

The skull, though corporeal enough to be handled and to bite and scream, is yet capable of escaping from
a sealed box and of rolling uphill and knocking on doors. It manifests a preference for the bandbox in which it is ordinarily kept in the lady's former bedroom, and screams when removed. These habits indicate a survival of personality, as do the screams themselves, which the captain says are exactly like a scream he once heard from the lady when she was still alive. There is thus a blend of the supernatural with the remnants of live personality in the skull; of the blind and mechanical malevolence of the lich in "The Death of Halpin Frayser," there is none.

The most ordinary corpse, however, of those used by Crawford is the Thing in "The Upper Berth." It is surrounded with ghostly phenomena, but it is quite solid and may therefore be considered as the dead man himself, not as his ghost. The lantern will not burn in his presence; Crawford is fairly conscientious in taking care that the lights behave in the approved manner when in the presence of the supernatural, for Gabriel Ockram's candle burned blue as he went into the tomb. Other spectral manifestations of the Thing are the odor of sea water which precedes its coming, the mysterious opening of the port cover in order that it may enter the cabin, and the chill wind that blows out of the berth in which it lies. The wind is also reminiscent of the breeze which blows behind
Gabriel as he goes to the vault, and of the current of air that precedes the coming of the ghost in O'Brien's "The Pot of Tulips." Nevertheless, the Thing is material:

I remember that the sensation as I put my hands forward was as though I were plunging them into the air of a damp cellar, and from behind the curtains came a gust of wind that smelled horribly of stagnant sea-water. I laid hold of something that had the shape of a man's arm, but was smooth and wet, and icy cold. But suddenly, as I pulled, the creature sprang violently forward against me, a clammy, oozy mass, as it seemed to me, heavy and wet, yet endowed with a sort of supernatural strength. I reeled across the stateroom, and in an instant the door opened and the thing rushed out.14

The wetness and ooze of the Thing form an organic and artistic whole with the musings of the narrator on the fate of his late roommate, who at the time is floating hundreds of miles astern in the long swell; the physical horror of death by water pervades the story. Such details are also used in Crawford's "Man Overboard."

The supernatural strength of the Thing is dealt with fully in the second encounter:

It was something ghostly, horrible beyond words, and it moved in my grip. It was like the body of a man long drowned, and yet it moved, and had the strength of ten men living; but I gripped it with all my might—the slippery, oozy, horrible thing—the dead white eyes seemed to stare at me out of the dusk; the putrid odour of rank sea-water was about it, and its shiny hair hung in foul wet

14 Ibid., p. 219.
curls over its dead face. I wrestled with the dead thing; it thrust itself upon me and forced me back and nearly broke my arms; it wound its corpse arms about my neck, the living death, and overpowered me, so that I, at last, cried aloud and fell, and broke my hold.

As I fell the thing sprang across me, and seemed to throw itself upon the captain. When I last saw him on his feet his face was white and his lips set. It seemed to me that he struck a violent blow at the dead being, and then he, too, fell forward upon his face, with an inarticulate cry of horror.

The thing paused an instant, seeming to hover over his prostrate body, and I could have screamed again for very fright, but I had no voice left. The thing vanished suddenly, and it seemed to my disturbed senses that it made its exit through the open port, though how that was possible, considering the smallness of the aperture, is more than anyone can tell.

The success of this story is due in large part to the use of physical details such as those in these two passages. Bierce assumes the horror of a dead body and tends to present it as an abstraction, a method with which he is able to achieve a certain success. Crawford, however, assumes nothing; we go with the sensor into the cabin and there meet the dead thing, literally face to face.

The attack on Halpin Frayser by the lich must have been similar to the dead thing's assault on Crawford's narrator, but there is no description of the assault on Frayser, other than the description of the leap as beast-like. Here we can feel the dead thing, and smell it, and look

into its dead eyes, and see its wet hair, and sense the supernatural strength of it. The horror in Crawford's story is truly that which derives from fear of the dead in physical contact; in "The Death of Halpin Frayser," the effect derives at least as much from the weirdness of the background of the haunted forest as it does from the lich itself, and the imagination of Frayser is an important factor. We hardly know that Crawford's sensor has an imagination, and less imagination is needed in the reader.

III

In all the stories considered so far, the malevolent dead are at some time considered to be endowed with superhuman if not supernatural strength, and it is to be assumed that they are in a reasonable state of completeness and soundness of flesh. In Robert W. Chambers's "The Yellow Sign," however, the watchman of the churchyard is neither well-preserved nor of any great physical strength. Thomas, the bellboy, describes an encounter with him in a passage quoted earlier, referring to him as "cold and mushy" and stating that one of the watchman's fingers came off in his hand as they struggled. In the other stories discussed in this chapter there is fear, but it may be described as a clean fear; in "The Yellow Sign" there is an intense
loathing, the essence of which may be seen through the Cockney dialect of Thomas. While the walking dead of Bierce and Crawford are complete and entire in themselves, the churchyard watchman is but a portion of a loathsome whole. The sickness of soul which he evokes is merely a detail from a larger and probably even a more sickening abstraction.

The other corpses come in mysterious fashion: Halpin Frayser glances up to see his dead mother, who seems to have materialized out of the fog; the Thing in "The Upper Berth" enters the cabin by an impossibly small port, and the skull that screams escapes from sealed boxes and knocks at doors for admittance. But the watchman comes heralded by the crunching of the wheels of a hearse which has been seen in a dream:

The gate below opened and shut, and I crept shakily to my door and bolted it, but I knew no bolts, no locks, could keep that creature out who was coming for the Yellow Sign. And now I heard him moving very softly along the hall. Now he was at the door, and the bolts rotted at his touch. Now he had entered. With eyes starting from my head I peered into the darkness, but when he came into the room I did not see him. It was only when I felt him envelop me in his cold, soft grasp that I cried and struggled with deadly fury, but my hands were useless and he tore the onyx clasp from my coat and struck me full in the face.

---

16 See pp. 95-96, this study.

The power of this creature is more than that of the Thing of "The Upper Berth"; horror was there, but it was a horror of the strength and the dead eyes and wet hair of the dead thing. Here nothing is visible, but the watchman is horribly palpable, and decay follows his touch. His strength is not merely that of ten men, but rather that of the omnipotent decay which he embodies.

V

Three general uses of the fear of the dead may be observed in these three authors. In Bierce, the dead themselves, with the exception of the lich in "The Death of Halpin Frayser," are static; the action takes place in the imagination of the sensor. Fear of the dead itself is an active force, arising out of the racial subconscious, and it only needs the stimulus of a passive corpse to arouse it into activity. Other elements may serve as an aid to imagination, such as the footfalls of the "corpse" in "A Watcher by the Dead," but the imagination alone is the important factor in most of Bierce's stories.

F. Marion Crawford conceives of the dead as active and as exerting actual force, either psychic or physical. Unlike Bierce, who tends to deal with abstractions, Crawford supplies a wealth of details; his corpses are not ideal but actual. The reader can see, feel, and smell them, and consequently the Crawford corpses are much more
real than are those of Bierce, although at times more contrived and smacking more of artifice.

Robert W. Chambers uses the rottenness of a dead body as a symbol of a more general decay, the nature of which is dealt with in Chapter II. It is used as antithesis to the life, sunlight, and joy of Chambers's physical settings, and as an objective correlative of that other darker world which lies just beyond this. The horror in Chambers is not the horror of the corpse per se in its entirety, as is the case in Crawford, where the physical repulsiveness of the corpse is all. Neither is it a mere inciting factor to an active imagination as in Bierce; it is rather a symbol of something outside but related to our common experience.
CHAPTER XI

MINOR THEMES

In the preceding chapters, the major elements of nineteenth century horror fiction have been discussed, but it has been necessary to omit certain minor themes which occurred only occasionally in the period. Some of these, nevertheless, need to be treated, though briefly; their complete omission would violate the intention of this study, for some of them take on new importance in the horror literature of the twentieth century. Besides these minor themes, there is also the gradual displacement of the Gothic tale, which has perhaps been dismissed too cavalierly to give a true picture of its demise.

It is generally recognized that Wieland is in essence a Gothic tale which makes desperate efforts to be something else but does not succeed entirely in the attempt. Alonzo and Melissa, or The Unfeeling Father, by Daniel Jackson, published in 1811, was an unabashedly Gothic work, and George Lippard's The Quaker City; or The Monks of Monk Hall, published in 1845, was a blend of the Gothic and Godwinian humanitarianism; according to Cowie, it evidences a consciousness of the evil universe that
parallels that of Hawthorne in "Young Goodman Brown." The Gothic atmosphere persists in Poe's stories, and it experiences a glorious resurrection in some of the tales of F. Marion Crawford; besides Crawford's short stories already mentioned in which the Gothic atmosphere is present, The Witch of Prague, a novel published in 1890, and other novels of his are strongly Gothic in spirit. Crawford, however, is an isolated phenomenon as a re-invigorator of the Gothic. For actual persistence of the old tradition, we must return to the periodicals and to some rather obscure fiction.

Some of these survivals are the work of Washington Irving, and others are imitative of his legends of medieval Spain. "Don Juan: A Spectral Research," is Irving's, as is "The Legend of Don Roderick." The theme of each is lust which leads to crime and supernatural intervention as punishment. The Spanish locale is retained in "The Legend of the Haunted Castle," and the theme


2 The Knickerbocker, XVII (1841), 247-53.

3 Ibid., XXIII (1844), 262-75.

4 The Southern Literary Messenger, VIII (1842), 211-15.
continues to be lust, though there is no punishment for the crime. Two tales with a similar theme are laid in Germany: "The Black Baron," an anonymous story published in 1840, and "Hildegarde," by Donald McLeod, published in 1852. These tales are characterized by the usual Gothic stigmata: old castles as settings, ghosts, bloody action, and flamboyant villainy. There is also a strong moral element in all these stories, which continues in some others of the Gothic stamp which are not Irving's or by Irving's imitators. "The Vision of Wagner" continues the Faust legend with Mephistopheles as villain, and "The Wicked Young Doctor and The Direful End That Him Befel," previously cited, is presumably to be taken as a warning against wickedness. "A Ghost Story by a Ghost," by J. Hyatt Smith, avoids the didactic rather completely, however, but abounds in Gothic devices; the action takes place in an American tavern, but local legend speaks of the lonely grave on which a tree grows; the tree bleeds when cut, and the face of a dead man is often seen in the bottom of a glass by frequenters of the tavern.

5 *The Knickerbocker*, XVI (1840), 394-99.


7 *The Southern Literary Messenger*, XI (1845), 118-26.
The ghost appears one night in the tavern, spins the yarn of his murder, and the tavern-keeper, who murdered him, leaves the country and becomes feeble-minded. Probably the two best tales of this type which have been discovered during the course of this study are translations. One, "The Demon's Game of Chess," translated from the Flemish of S. Henri Berthaud, returns to the old lust motif; the lady in the story makes the mistake of succumbing to the blandishment of Satan himself; the demon returns to hell, taking the lady with him. The chess theme enters in the second part of the story; the demon has taken up chess, and he is defeated and his power is broken by a pious monk. And in "The Toad's Curse," previously discussed as a story using the evil genius theme, there are strong Gothic elements.

All the Gothic stories mentioned here appeared before the Civil War, and though the magazines have not been searched for the entire century, about 1860 would seem to be the terminal date of the Gothic story in America.

---


9. The Southern Literary Messenger, X (1844), 281-86.
According to Poe, the theme of greatest horror which can be dealt with in fiction is premature burial, for in discussing the occurrences most harrowing to human sensibilities, he says: "to be buried when alive, is, beyond question, the most terrific of these extremes which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality." The tale from which this statement is taken, "The Premature Burial," begins as a mere essay on its topic, citing numerous examples of premature burials. The narrator then proceeds to dwell on his own fear of the horrors of the tomb and on the precautions he has taken to avoid such a terrible fate. Concluding, the narrator fancies himself awakening in a tomb, but the resolution of the tale is a hoax. Other and more artistic uses of the theme by Poe are familiar to his readers: "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Berenice," and "The Cask of Amontillado" make obvious use of the theme, while "The Pit and the Pendulum" derives part of its initial horror from the narrator's fear that he has been buried alive. These are among Poe's most successful horror stories, and their success is in some part due to exploitation of the premature burial theme.

The theme also occurs in Ambrose Bierce in a modified form, but never goes so far as actual inhumement. In

10 Poe, VI, 256.
"The Boarded Window," it is only in the last sentence that the supposedly dead lady is revealed to have a piece of the panther's ear in her teeth. The theme of fear of the dead has already been exploited almost beyond endurance; this final turn of the screw seems anticlimactic. Similarly, in "John Mortonson's Funeral," the shock of observing the cat feeding on the corpse has been thoroughly exploited before the mention of the red stain on the cat's nose. The difference in the importance of premature burial in the stories of Poe and Bierce is thus obvious, and seems to deny that Poe influenced Bierce in the use of this theme. It should also be realized that the theme of premature burial is in no wise limited to Poe and Bierce. As a matter of fact Poole's Index lists the title "Buried Alive" six times, at dates ranging from 1821 to 1853, with one "Nearly Buried Alive" in 1879. Needless to say, not all the literary uses of the premature burial theme are under such an obvious label. The theme seems to have been most popular during the nineteenth century, but occurs occasionally in the twentieth with little if any evidence of Poe influence.11

Death was the ultimate horror, apparently, to many of the writers of the nineteenth century, and Poe's use of premature burial was only one aspect of his concern with death. Another theme beloved of Poe was a philosophy of death in which the individual is reabsorbed into a mass, composite personality. In "The Colloquy of Eiros and Charmion" this metamorphosis is described in a way which leads from the horror of the sentient corpse, reinforced by the morbid sentimentalism of the mourners, to a rather pleasantly optimistic conclusion. Enough personality is retained by the individual, however, to make the colloquy possible; there is total obliteration of personality in "Shadow: A Fable," for the Shadow speaks in the voice of all the people the narrator, Eiros, has ever known, striking a cold horror to his soul. "Shadow" is one of the most effective of all Poe's stories, but not because it is an allegory of death; it is rather the perfection of atmosphere and setting and the sense of strain and uneasiness they create which lend the story its memorable quality.

One of the better death-allegories of the periodicals is "Despair: A Fantasy," an anonymous story published in 1859. The story has Poe-like overtones, besides the

\[12\text{ The Southern Literary Messenger, XXVIII (1859), 217-21.} \]
similarity of the title to "Shadow: A Fable" and to "Silence: A Parable," in the use of the criminal protagonist, his arrogance, and his rather strained search for sensation; he is most like the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" in this respect, but unlike any of Poe's protagonists, he openly sneers at religion. One day, however, he wonders what will be his fate after death, and at this point the story becomes concerned with the world of the future. He strolls into a green wood, but as he wanders about, the wood becomes old and dead; the forms of the trees assume gnarled shapes that twist horribly; a storm arises and the dead forest fills the air with flying branches, but the narrator sneers at the danger. He leaves the wood in a wan twilight, emerging onto an infertile plain. After walking upon it for some time, he thinks that the dreary forest was loveliness itself compared to the plain. The air seems dead, and the time is running into centuries. There is no life but himself, and he cannot die. He seeks the wood, but finds only the sterile mountains; he seeks the sea, but finds only the "ashes of water." The story closes with the narrator's realization that he is to be the horror used as a threat to frighten the rebel angels into submission, and he shall live in the torment forever.
Theology is predominant in this story, and also in "The Lost Soul," an anonymous story published in 1858.13 "Beyond the Grave," by John E. Schaad, published in 1854, is specifically concerned with the passing of the soul of a Christian into the Great Beyond. There are elements of the other-worldly in all of these tales, and also in "The Spirit's Mirage," an anonymous story published in 1848, which shows the influence of Milton's Hell and Chaos; traces of Dante's Inferno are also apparent in the picture of the world's evil men in Hell, including the famous conquerors of history and Lord Byron. "A Dream by a Desolate Hearth," another anonymous story, depicts among the horrors of death a trip through the universe, in which the grandeur of space and the raging energies of the suns are presented rather effectively.14

Metempsychosis was another widely-recurring theme, but only as an accessory to horror. Poe used it in three horror stories, "Metzengerstein," "Morella," and "Ligeia," and again in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," which is not intended to be a horror tale. In "Metzengerstein" and "Morella," the metempsychosis is of the

13 The Knickerbocker, LI (1858), 331-50.

14 See p. 214, this study.
usual type, in which the soul of a dead person enters a living body. In "Ligeia," however, it is a dead body that is entered and reanimated; the horror content springs rather from the reanimation than from the metempsychosis proper. Other uses of metempsychosis in the first part of the century are found in the periodicals; the only one of any considerable length is a translation from the German of Tschokke, entitled "The Transfigured." In this story the Countess Hortensia is possessed by an alien spirit at times, and while possessed is clairvoyant; she creeps over roofs, and performs other odd actions. The narrator, an artist, is discovered to be in psychic communion with her, and by his power he is enabled to liberate her from the alien spirit possessing her. The nature of the spirit is never revealed, and the tale is concerned with the wonderful rather than with the horrible. In "Professor Henneberg," an anonymous story published in 1857, the theme of metempsychosis is paralleled with one of reincarnation. The protagonist discovers to his dismay that he is literally the same person as an ancestor of his

15 The Southern Literary Messenger, V (1839), 225-54.
who lived in the previous century.  

"The White Queen," by M. E. Philips, published in 1859, tells of the mystic bond between a girl named Blanche and the white queen of a set of chessmen; in a careless moment she allows herself to be beaten at chess by a despised suitor, one Rufus Lenoir, whereupon she falls dead. The game is replayed each St. John's Eve, however, under the direction of the white queen and the black king.  

Interest in the psychic is also manifested in the tales of doppelgängers and wraiths found in the periodicals. In "A True Ghost Story," published in 1853, a servant girl sees the wraith of her sister, who is some distance away; the girl fears the sister is dead, and it transpires that she is. This is the basic wraith-theme, and it is repeated in "My Theory, and A Few Facts Against It," by A. H. Guernsey, published in 1858. In this story, identical twins love sisters; one sister dies, and the remaining sister marries her betrothed. The twins die on a business trip, but the bereaved wife sees their deaths

17 The Knickerbocker, LIV (1859), 455-64.
19 Ibid., XV (1858), 350-55.
in a dream before the news comes. The wraith generally portends death, but not always; in "A Hallowe'en Wraith," by William Black, published in 1890, Hector MacIntyre sees the figure of his sweetheart on a dark night, although she is miles away; he hastens to her and finds her extremely ill, but after he comes she rallies and recovers. The doppelgänger theme appears in "Wed in the Morning—Dead at Night," by C. W. Mason, published in 1872; Treloar's sight of his own form portends his death that night. "The Doppelgänger," an anonymous tale published in 1856, combines the doppelgänger theme with mesmerism. While the protagonist is in a mesmerized state, he is capable of projecting a sort of astral body; this astral body acts as the doppelgänger, once the protagonist is no longer able to control it and it can escape at will. When he sees it at last, he dies almost immediately.

The wraith theme also occurs in one of Bierce's stories, "A Wireless Message." This tale makes no

---

21 Ibid., XLII (1872), 385.
22 Ibid., XII (1856), 662-66.
23 Bierce, III, 335-39.
pretence at being a horror story, and the material is not developed beyond Bierce's most journalistic, barest style.

Another group of Poe's tales is concerned with the horror of water, either as a primary theme or as strongly subsidiary. Horror of water per se is strongest in the well-known "A Descent into the Maelstrom," though it is also a strong theme in the "MS. Found in a Bottle" and in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym. In the stories of Poe as elsewhere in the literature of the nineteenth century, the horror of water is related to the elemental force which it contains; the Maelstrom is most impressive and fearsome when lashed to a white fury, though the picture of the swirling funnel, deceptively smooth in its power, is hardly less effective. In the "MS. Found in a Bottle" and A. Gordon Pym, the fearsome aspect of water is combined with storm; the emphasis is again on rather spectacular manifestations of energies. Other examples of horror of water in tumult are seen in two stories from periodicals, "The Old Bridge," by Mrs. Ann S. Stephens, published in 1846,24 and "Flood and Fog," an anonymous tale published in 1854.25


25 *The Knickerbocker*, XLIII (1854), 238-43.
two lovers are drowned on their wedding day in the boiling currents of a swollen creek; the sheer power of the floodwater with the horror inherent in it is heavily diluted with pathos and sentimentality. "Flood and Fog" accomplishes more because it deals with less; the protagonist finds himself loose in an oarless boat on a tidal bore and is swept out to sea into the fog. In addition to the power of the tidal stream, there is the quieter but even more effective horror of the silent fog. Such employments of the fear of water are essentially Gothic in spirit, and contribute a great deal to the success of "The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter" of Voss and Bierce, in the form of the sullenly tumbling mountain streams, though there is also the Hawthorne-like rumor of water-demons in this story.

Only one variant on this horror of water in turmoil has presented itself in this study, the waters of the River Zaire in Poe's "Silence." In this sketch, the first picture of the water is not of wild motion, but rather of an obscene and uneasy palpitation, hinting at a strange life possessed by the water itself. The trees of the forest also have an animation of their own, as do the water-lilies. In Poe's writings, besides the hint of strange animation in the waters of the Zaire, there is
the belief of Roderick Usher in the sentience of vegetable things and other objects generally considered to be lifeless, and there is also the constitution of the Ship of Eld in the "MS. Found in a Bottle"; it appears to have grown in size during its lengthy voyage with its strange crew, as Poe indicates in the quotation ascribed to the old Dutch navigator: "It is as sure . . . as there is a sea where the ship itself will grow in bulk like the living body of the seaman." These phenomena are not parallel to organic life in any sense, and in the element of the alien, they contain a horror which is not present in, for instance, the invisible thing of O'Brien's "What Was It?," in which the organism, though mysteriously invisible, is yet anthropomorphic in shape, and in that way parallel to the life of earth. There is less of this element of the known in Bierce's "The Damned Thing," and the effect of horror is thus greater, though the thing makes tracks and produces sounds like those of fighting dogs. Another author to derive literary horror from strange life is Robert W. Chambers, who uses it frequently. The stories of In Search of the Unknown make use of material which is admirably adapted to the

---

production of literary horror, though Chambers chooses
to direct his emphasis elsewhere. The episode of the
harbor-master is a good example; it is described as
"... a man—or a thing that looks like a man—as big
as you are, too—all slate-colored—with nasty red gills
like a fish. ... "27 Rumor has it that the thing is one
of a race of sea-dwelling men who inhabit the great deep
about a quarter of a mile offshore. A later, clearer
dpicture of the harbor-master could have presented him
admirably as a monster, but Chambers depicts him as com­
paratively harmless; his most sinister activity apparent­
ly is following a pretty nurse about and flirting with
her, in an odd fish-like way. Another example of strange
life in Chambers's stories is the gigantic, snow-white
figure of the woman in the second tale, who is vaguely
reminiscent of the gigantic white figure seen at the end
of Poe's fragmentary A. Gordon Pym. The fourth story in
the volume deals with a race of invisible human beings
inhabiting the Everglades, while the fifth makes use of
the theme of the survival of a supposedly-dead prehistoric
reptile, and the sixth is concerned in a facetious way
with metempsychosis. There is a background of facetious­
ness in all these stories, in fact, which renders it

27 Chambers, In Search of the Unknown, p. 25.
impossible for any of the latent horror inherent in alien life-forms to emerge. In "The Maker of Moons," however, the theme is used to better advantage, in the thing which creeps out of the jeweler's pocket: it is "soft and yellow with crab-like legs all covered with coarse yellow hair... It is... the connecting link between a sea-urchin, a spider, and the devil. It looks venomous, but I can't find either fangs or mouth." 28 The observation concludes with the statement that "a Japanese sculptor might have produced such an impossible beast, but it is hard to believe that God did... I have a mad idea that the thing is only one of the parts of some larger and more grotesque organism,—it looks so lonely, so helplessly dependent, so cursedly unfinished." 29 It has a dampish, acrid odor that is particularly obnoxious around great numbers of the things. Later it is revealed that the thing and its counterparts are indeed portions of a mysterious monster called the Xin, which has been created by the sinister Yue-Lauc, the master of the Chinese order of the Kuin-Yuen. Its purpose is obscure, but the description of the monster rising out of the lake in the

28 Chambers, _The Maker of Moons_, p. 3.

29 Ibid.
north woods is one of the more effective scenes in the horror literature of the nineteenth century, diluted though the horror be by romanticism and sentimentality in this, as in all of Chambers's stories.

The theme of strange life is the most important of these minor themes, for it becomes a major theme in the twentieth century, both in the horror story and in science-fiction. In the horror story, it is often linked with the fear of water, though not with the thundering, raging water of Poe's storms or of the Maelstrom; it is more closely akin to the palpitant waters of the River Zaire. Water takes its place in literature as the primeval womb out of which all earthly life sprang; in addition, there are also the amphibious hybrids of man and fish-like creatures, such as those found in H. P. Lovecraft's The Shadow Over Innsmouth and in other stories of the Lovecraft school. Other and even more fearsome cross-breeding also occur in these stories, stemming directly from Arthur Machen's The Great God Pan, but with American ancestry in certain strange births recorded in the Magnalia Christi Americana of Cotton Mather, and in the peculiar botanical experiments of Hawthorne's Rappaccini.
Flowing into the strange life theme, we also find witchcraft of a far more exotic stamp than that employed by either O'Brien or Chambers. The blending of all these elements was to contribute to an amazing flowering of the horror story during the twentieth century.
CHAPTER XII
THE OBJECT OF FEAR

I
Thus far, this study has been concerned with analysis of stories in which the emotion of horror is achieved or at least approached. Analysis is valuable in isolating parts for close examination, but it has a scattering effect which is not so desirable when the whole is to be viewed. One purpose of this chapter is to provide a sort of synthesis, in which the focus for the emotion produced is isolated in turn and examined.

The emotion may be generalized as fear, and yet this generalization, like most others, oversimplifies. At times the emotion is not fear, in any active sense at least, but is rather merely an uneasiness, a sense of strain, or some kindred emotion. In many such instances, there is no object proper to which the emotion may be related; when such is the case, then the complex of factors upon which the emotion produced relies will be examined. Another purpose of this chapter, then, is to state in brief the effect produced in the more important stories and the nature of the factor or factors most intimately concerned in producing it.
From the standpoint of progression, this chapter will be able to demonstrate more than most of the other chapters in the study. Fashions change, in fear as well as in manners and garments. That which Charles Brockden Brown considered fearsome will be seen to differ greatly from the more ambitious creations of Ralph Adams Cram, to name only the most extreme examples.

II

In America's first two important writers of fiction dealing with horror, the object of fear tended to be rather fine-drawn; this statement may be substantiated statistically in spite of some of the crudities into which both Brown and Poe fell. In Brown's Wieland, the first two centers about which fear gathers are the spontaneous combustion of the elder Wieland and the mysterious voices; the third is the bloody slaughter of the innocents, though the intended effect here is probably not fear but rather wonder and awe. The fourth, which Brown may not even have intended, is the deity worshiped by the younger Wieland. Brown's other crudities such as the pest-house in Arthur Mervyn, like the slaughter, aim at disgust and pity rather than at fear. Similarly, in Poe's tales the vague but omnipresent tension in, say, "The Assignation" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," is found in varying degrees;
glossiness, such as that of Berenice's teeth and the blood and physical violence of "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," though well-known, is relatively infrequent. The early concept of fear in our first two domestic writers to deal with it to any great extent was that it stemmed from sources not necessarily related to physical harm.

In Wieland, the spontaneous combustion with its attendant circumstances arouses in the mind of Clara, not fear but other emotions more suited to an enlightened young lady of the late eighteenth century. She says of the spontaneous combustion: "I was ill qualified to judge respecting what was then passing; but as I advanced in age, and became more fully acquainted with these facts, they oftener became the subject of my thoughts... Was this the penalty of disobedience? this the stroke of a vindictive and invisible hand?" The emotion here is a sort of wondering awe, and the effect of the reports of the mysterious voice is the same. Of the first, heard by her brother, she says: "I could not deny that the event was miraculous, and yet I was invincibly averse to that method of solution. My wonder was excited by the inscrutableness of the cause, but my wonder was unmixed with

\[1^{\text{Wieland, p. 21.}}\]
sorrow or fear. It begat in me a thrilling, and not unpleasing solemnity."² Such is the effect of the voices until Clara hears them herself in the silence of her bedroom at midnight; here they purport to be the voices of murderers hidden in her closet, and the fear aroused is not of the unknown, but rather of physical harm. The human quality of the voice is repeatedly stressed; nevertheless, Clara feels that the power behind it is more than human. "It would be difficult to depict, in words, the ingredients and hues of that phantom which haunted me. An hand invisible and of preternatural strength, lifted by human passions, and selecting my life for its aim, were parts of this terrific image. All places were alike accessible to this foe, or if his empire were restricted by local bounds, these bounds were utterly inscrutable to me.³ Even after Carwin's confession, the sound of the voice has something of its old power, particularly when associated with the sight of his face on one occasion. "Every muscle was tense; the forehead and brows were drawn into vehement expression; the lips were stretched as in the act of shrieking, and the eyes emitted sparks, which, no doubt,

²Ibid., p. 39.
³Ibid., p. 96.
if I had been unattended with a light, would have illuminated like the coruscations of a meteor. The sound and the vision were present, and departed together at the same instant; but the cry was blown into my ear, while the face was many paces distant." This experience delays her discovery of the mutilated body of her sister-in-law, and the terror which Clara has of the voice and person of Carwin changes to the horror felt before physical things.

Through the madness of Wieland, however, is revealed the most potent horror of the novel, though he himself does not fear it, but rather adores it. This is what he conceives to be his deity, who seeks from him a sacrifice which his father refused, and who strikes him down by fire for his disobedience. The very fact that Wieland does not fear it but worships it makes it the more an object of fear to the observer:

"I was dazzled. My organs were bereaved of their activity. My eye-lids were half-closed, and my hands withdrawn from the balustrade. A nameless fear chilled my veins, and I stood motionless. This irradiation did not retire or lessen. It seemed as if some powerful effulgence covered me like a mantle.

"I opened my eyes and found all about me luminous and glowing. It was the element of heaven that flowed around. Nothing but a fiery

\[4\text{Ibid., p. 167.}\]
stream was at first risible; but, anon, a shrill voice from behind called upon me to attend. . . .

"As it spoke, the accents thrilled to my heart. 'Thy prayers are heard. In proof of thy faith, render me thy wife. This is the victim I choose. Call her hither, and here let her fall.'--The sound, and visage, and light vanished at once."5

The deity itself, however, is not to Brown the object of horror; the focus for all the fear centers in the mental instability of Wieland and the powers of Carwin, which when misdirected are capable of producing such woe as is depicted in the novel.

Like Brown, Poe makes use of mental instability, but unlike Brown, he renders it unmistakable from the beginning. Sometimes Poe's instability is frankly madness, but more often it is not. The atmosphere of "The Assignation," for instance, is not insane, but its lushness, ornateness, excess, and overblown intensity produce uneasiness; the fact that the setting is to serve as a backdrop for the consummation of a suicide pact does not affect the setting or its effect in the least. This effect is beyond analysis, and so is the illness of Berenice: "Disease, a fatal disease, fell like the simoom upon her frame; and even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and in a manner

5

Ibid., pp. 188-89.
the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person." This might perhaps be taken as demon-possession or as something like Ligeia's entering into the body of Rowena, but on the other hand it might be taken for almost anything. The same may be said of Morella: "... the time had now arrived when the mystery of my wife's manner oppressed me as a spell. I could no longer bear the touch of her wan fingers, nor the low tone of her musical language, nor the lustre of her melancholy eyes." This is all, but it is sufficient to produce abhorrence in the narrator and sensor. The manner of Roderick Usher and that of the narrator of "The Black Cat" partake of a similar vagueness and intensity of perception; this intensity is elevated into a species of madness in the character of Egaeus of "Berenice," and also in the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," but the fact that it can be called madness contributes nothing to its effect. This intensity which transcends the ordinary senses of humanity is the main characteristic of all of Poe's stories, and as such it produces a background of uneasiness against which horror is readily evident. Setting, as pointed out in a previous chapter, may also contribute to this uneasiness.

---

6 Poe, II, 18.

7 Ibid., p. 29.
With such a background, ordinary objects may be made to take on extraordinary significance. Berenice's teeth are a good example of the extraordinary effect of the commonplace:

The teeth!—the teeth!—they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them, as in the very moment of their first terrible development. . . . In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a frenzied desire.8

Similarly, the cat in "The Black Cat" is endowed with the powers of a demon by the narrator; the clouded eye of the old man in "The Tell-Tale Heart" is seen with superstitious horror by the narrator and sensor. With the background of tension which Poe supplies to his unstable and over-sensitive protagonists, anything may be viewed as an object of fear.

Allied to the indescribable something in the manner of Poe's characters is the more deliberate employment of vagueness in "The Pit and the Pendulum," in which the horror of the pit is hinted:

I rushed to its deadly brink. I threw my straining vision below. The glare from the enkindled roof illumined its inmost recesses. Yet, for a wild moment, did my spirit refuse to comprehend the meaning of what I saw. At length it forced—it wrestled its way into my soul—it burned itself in upon my shuddering reason. Oh! for a voice to speak!—oh, horror!—oh! any horror but this!9

---

8Ibid., pp. 23-24.

9Ibid., v, 85.
It is as if Poe had distilled the ultimate quintessence of all horror in his own soul, then realized the impossibility of describing it, and resorted to vagueness and incoherence; in actuality, he probably employed the mechanics to indicate such a consciousness of the nature of ultimate fear without actually possessing it. At any rate, the suggested quality of the incoherence and vagueness accomplishes more than most writers are able to do with more definite details. The same is true of the veil which is drawn between what M. Valdemar sees and the reader; the peculiar voice-quality suggests more than the full senses could take in. Of prime importance among Poe's virtues as a writer of horror stories is his recognition of the importance of suggestiveness and of the danger of over-description of the object of fear.

Even Poe's most definitely drawn objects of fear are endowed with a shadowy quality which makes it impossible to analyze them completely. The demon-horse of "Metzengerstein" is a good example: "... it is said there were times when the animal caused the gaping crowd who stood around to recoil in horror from the deep and impressive meaning of his terrible stamp--times when the young Metzengerstein turned pale and shrunk away from the rapid and searching expression of his earnest and human-looking
We know that the spirit of the dead Count Berlifizting inhabits the body of the horse, and yet that knowledge does not help us to understand the "meaning" of his stamp. The sight of Roderick Usher's sister, Madeline, after she has risen from her cataleptic trance in the tomb, undoes him completely; the peculiar horror which attaches to her is noticeable only through the perturbation of Usher. The oat of "The Black Cat" is endowed with demonic properties by the sensor, who sees in it a nemesis whose purpose it is to bring him to the gallows. Objectively, no horror attaches to any of these foci of fear, but the shadows cast by the tension of the background endow them all with horror.

So far, only the horse has anything of the avowedly supernatural about it. The metempsychosis of "Morella" is also supernatural, though it is not that quality which is emphasized in the story; rather it is the reactions of the sensor to finding the first Morella so completely duplicated in the daughter—a situation depending entirely upon state of mind, for many daughters closely resemble their mothers. Only in the last revelation, that the corpse of the mother is not in the tomb, is the supernatural element emphasized as such. In "Ligeia," however,
the efforts of Ligeia to possess the newly-dead body of Rowena of Tremaine are more palpably supernatural and more objective in their manifestation. But the most definitely supernatural of all the objects of fear in Poe's stories is the apparition that appears at Prince Prospero's masque:

The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But this mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. But when seized by a group of the masquers, the mummer proves disappointingly intangible; they "gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form." Even this definitely supernatural apparition, however, is surrounded by the tension and over-wrought atmosphere which is the hallmark of a Poe story, and the success of the apparition itself is due in part to the background against which it appears, Prospero's masque and the insanely-decorated suite of rooms.

11 Ibid., IV, 256.
Thus, in the first two major writers of the United States to deal with the material of horror, psychological aberration plays a great part in discovering or creating horror in the midst of the commonplace. Wieland creates it; Poe's characters sense it, and also create it, in a manner of speaking, out of their own over-sensitive personalities. It may seem to be straining the word "commonplace" beyond endurance to make it fit a Poe story, and yet it is only the backgrounds which are strange if we may except "The Masque of the Red Death," "Metzengerstein," and "Ligeia"; in the other stories, the object of fear itself is commonplace, and is made into an object of fear through the people who sense it.

III

Such objects of fear as have just been discussed are made so by a refinement of the sensibilities of an observer, and the observer himself is thus made a part of the mechanism of fear. The most extreme example of this method is perhaps Montresor of "The Cask of Amontillado." Bierce also makes frequent use of the overwrought observer, but after Poe, there is a tendency to return to bogies as objects of fear. Since they are more objective, bogies must have been the more primitive mechanism; the psychologically aberrant observer who
creates bogies is a more sophisticated form, and finds one of its most complete developments, according to one school of thought, in the governess of The Turn of the Screw.

A favorite form of ghost yarn is that in which a ghost, after scaring everyone thoroughly, turns out to be something else. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is a familiar example, and the manner of its telling leaves no residue of dissatisfaction; it is manifestly a humorous ghost story, and a completely successful humorous ghost is almost of necessity fraudulent or imaginary. Other efforts, which remain deservedly buried in old periodicals, are not so well done, for though some of them build up to horror, or at least fear, with reasonable success, they taper off into a fraudulent jocosity. "The Haunted House in Charnwood Forest," by William Howitt, published in 1850, tells of an old gentleman who is benighted near a house rumored to be haunted, and insists that the inmates lodge him in the haunted room.12 He is duly visited by the specter, which reclines on his breast in bed, and he reveals it to be nothing more than a large dog which has been trained by the inmates of the house to perform this trick for the sole purpose of giving

12 In Howitt's Country Year-Book; reprinted in Harper's Magazine, I (1850), 472-76.
the house the reputation of being haunted; the rent is kept lower by the ruse. A rather elaborate tale of a fraudulent ghost, translated from the German of Heinrich Zschokke and also published in 1850, is "A Night of Terror in a Polish Inn." The narrator, having found the tax-collector whom he was to have assisted, dead of knife-wounds, goes to bed in the building where the corpse lies; during the night, he hears the corpse getting out of the box and coming to bed with him. Morning reveals it to have been only a guard who had got drunk and gone to sleep in the coffin, and had then grown cold and desired to be more comfortable. "One of the Nights of My Life," an anonymous story published in 1854, after presenting a hair-raising series of occurrences in a lonely house, explains them by presenting a prankish brother somewhat in his cups, who is most remorseful at having frightened his fiancée into a faint. With the exception of the Zschokke story, which is an exotic, these are all reasonably bad and are not particularly convincing or evocative of any horror, even prior to the explanation.

13 Harper’s Magazine, II (1850), 41-46.

14 The Knickerbocker, LIII (1854), 362-75.
Of the real ghost stories, a few are worth mentioning. "The Ghost of a Head," previously cited in Chapter VI, tells of one Desalleux, a prosecutor, who secured a conviction on circumstantial grounds and succeeded in having the convicted man guillotined. The first appearance of the head to Desalleux, out of the shadows of his room, is rather well done, and its final appearance on the pillow beside the head of Desalleux's bride is also convincing. The head is the object of fear, but the greatest horror is in Desalleux's accidental slaying of his bride as he battles the head. In "The Knocker," by W. D. O'Connor, published in 1855, a pattern is built up of an ancestral curse and the weird knockings which are heard in the house in which the Barrys live; an ancestor of theirs is thought to have lived there, and as the child dies, Mrs. Barry's face becomes hideous as though something were possessing her body and forcing other lineaments through her features. It is in reality a tale of psychic residue, though not fully developed as such. In both of these stories, the ghosts are allowed to be ghosts, and the handling is sufficiently deft to make them convincing.

---

15 *Harper's Magazine*, VI (1852), 52-56.

Other potentially good stories are ruined, however, by moralizing. "The Tread of Invisible Feet," an anonymous story published in 1871, tells of a man who is haunted by the audible footsteps of a South Sea Island girl who had been his mistress and then had drowned herself when he left her.\textsuperscript{17} The afflicted man tells all to his affianced bride, and she, with womanly sympathy, exorcises the spirit. "My Visitation," by Rose Terry Cooke, describes the efforts of a dead lady, who is manifested merely by a sense of her presence and a cold horror, to reveal herself to a friend whom she had betrayed in life; when the spirit succeeds in making itself known, forgiveness is granted and it does not return.\textsuperscript{18} Others of the stories in periodicals are mere sketches in which ghosts show themselves in various guises, one of the most common being \textit{poltergeist} manifestations. The wraith and the \textit{doppelganger} also occur from time to time, as do the vampire and supernatural were-animals.\textsuperscript{19} For the most part, however, the stories which have not

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, XLII (1871), 409-12.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, XVII (1858), 232-39.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
been collected and made generally available do not deserve to be; the best writers of ghost tales are pretty generally recognized.

Fitz-James O'Brien makes use of but one ghost in his stories, in "The Pot of Tulips," previously cited. The repentant shade of a cruel father has returned to reveal to his descendants where he has hidden the family fortune; the spirit comes preceded by a cool breeze, is accompanied by a sickening odor, and appears in a luminous cloud. Its purpose is benevolent and the element of fear is thus kept at a minimum.

Ambrose Bierce's ghosts are for the most part not benevolent, and they are therefore more fearsome; the more memorable bogies of all classes do not go about doing good deeds, and they are generally more versatile in their activities than mere chain-rattling and rustling of garments in the dark. One of the more memorable of Bierce's ghost stories, "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot," however, presents the ghost of a murdered wife and her children with no more potent weapon than the fear and guilty conscience of the murderer when he faces them in the house.

---

20 O'Brien, pp. 332-54.
21 Bierce, III, 235-51.
where they died. The same is true of "Beyond the Wall" and "The Haunted Valley," though the ghost in the latter story does not really exist. As a matter of fact, very few of Bierce's ghosts are actually necessary, provided the person haunted has a sufficiently vivid imagination. There is some objective reality, however, to the ghost of the Newfoundland dog which bites the man to death in "Staley Fleming's Hallucination," and in the tales in which there is least artistic embellishment, the ghosts are presented as realities. Several of these make use of the revenge motif, as in "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot." "Present at a Hanging" tells of the ghost of a murdered peddler which is seen on a bridge near the house of the suspected murderer by a minister who drives by in his buggy; when a party investigates the following morning, the suspected murderer is found hanging by the neck from a rope which is tied to the bridge, and the peddler's decomposed body is found buried nearby. In "An Arrest," Orrin Brower, who has escaped from jail by bashing in the head of his jailer, is recaptured in flight by the jailer

---

22 Ibid., pp. 210-26.
23 Ibid., pp. 134-54.
24 Ibid., pp. 169-73.
25 Ibid., pp. 327-30.
himself, who bears a livid mark across his head; on arriving at the jail, walking just ahead of his captor, Brower sees the jailer laid out on a table, dead, and his captor is nowhere in sight.26 Other stories of Bierce's are quite conventional. "A Cold Greeting" tells of a friend's being hurt at another's failure to speak to him on the street, and of his later learning that the friend had been dead for four days at the time;27 in "A Wireless Message," the wraith motif is used as a man sees his wife and child, who are in a city some distance away, outlined in a red glow in a hotel window; the next morning he learns that they have burned to death in a fire.28 In these shorter tales, the element of fear is small, and the material is presented rather as examples of the supernatural in action than as the raw material of fear. When he places his ghosts in haunted houses, however, Bierce waxes more spectacular; in "The Isle of Pines," unseen carousers make the night hideous in the old Deluse house.29 When investigators come, they find nothing until one of them discovers the body of another

26Ibid., pp. 340-42.
27Ibid., pp. 331-34.
28Ibid., pp. 335-39.
29Ibid., pp. 369-76.
clutching a bag of money which seems to have fallen from a cavity in the wall. A ghost of some sort agitates the vine which grows over the house in "A Vine on a House." When the ground is dug up, the roots of the vine are found to have grown into the shape of the lady of the house who had disappeared some years before; even her lack of a leg is reproduced in the shape assumed by roots of the vine.

But what is probably Bierce's best ghost story is "A Fruitless Assignment," in which a reporter is sent to spend the night in a house rumored to be haunted, and into which forms are seen to enter but never to leave. On entering an upper room, he strikes something on the floor with his foot; on examination, it turns out to be a human head. As he examines it, he becomes conscious that people are entering the room, and thinking they are some of the watchers from outside, he explains his equivocal situation:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said coolly, "you see me under suspicious circumstances, but--" his voice was drowned in peals of laughter--such laughter as is heard in asylums for the insane. The persons about him pointed at the object in his hand and their merriment increased as he dropped it and it went rolling among their feet. They danced about it with gestures grotesque and attitudes obscene and indescribable. They struck at it with their feet, urging it about the room from wall to wall; pushed and overthrew one another in

---

their struggles to kick it; cursed and screamed and sang snatches of ribald songs as the battered head bounded about the room as if in terror and trying to escape. At last it shot out of the door into the hall, followed by all, with tumultuous haste. That moment the door closed with a sharp concussion. Saylor was left alone, in dead silence.31

These ghosts are not particularly menacing; they might not even be ghosts, but really the maniacs to which they are compared. Their horror is that of dehumanized human beings and not that of the supernatural, though the air of the haunted house, with the mysterious figures entering and mysterious footsteps moving through the house, is more elaborate than most of Bierce's haunted houses and provides a convincing frame for the story. On the other hand, there is a sort of inhuman malice in the ghost inferred to be present in "At Old Man Eckert's," in which one of a party who has gone to the house to spend the night disappears and is never seen again; it is as if Old Man Eckert had "reached out and pulled him in."32

There are also Bierce's struggling ghosts, in "The Secret of Macarger's Gulch," in which two ghosts reenact the fight in which they died;33 it is an old theme, as

31Ibid., p. 381.
32Ibid., pp. 389-92.
33Ibid., pp. 44-57.
are most ghost themes, and appears in Ralph Adams Cram's "The White Villa." These ghosts are not menacing either, and seem to wish only to perform their ritual and be left alone. Like most others, Bierce's ghosts are most effective when they have a purpose, and that purpose is commonly revenge.

Ralph Adams Cram, in his "In Kropfsberg Keep," presents a good example of what artistry may accomplish with a bare legend, which he found ready to hand, telling of two rash young men who dared to sleep in a haunted castle. Given the skeptical young men who dare the ghost of the nobleman who formerly had his seat in the old castle, with the dream of the dance of death which one of them has, and his waking to find that he has killed his companion, Cram amplifies all elements tremendously, and not least among them the dance of death:

Around the long, narrow hall, under the fearful light that came from nowhere, but was omnipresent, swept a rushing stream of unspeakable horrors, dancing insanely, laughing, gibbering hideously; the dead of forty years. White, polished skeletons, bare of flesh and vesture, skeletonsclothed in the dreadful rags of dried and rattling sinews, the tags of tattering grave-garments flaunting behind them. These were the dead of many years ago. Then the dead of more recent times, with yellow bones showing only here and there, the long and insecure hair of their hideous heads writhing

---

34 Cram, Black Spirits and White.
in the beating air. Then green and gray horrors, bloated and shapeless, stained with earth or dripping with spattering water; and here and there white, beautiful things, like chiseled ivory, the dead of yesterday, locked, it may be, in the mummy arms of rattling skeletons.  

The young man who dreams, Rupert, is commanded by Count Albert to dance, but refuses: "Count Albert swept his vast two-handed sword into the foetid air while the tide of corruption paused in its swirling, and swept down on Rupert with gibbering grins."  

Then, in the dream, Rupert fires, and wakes to find his comrade dead beside him.

This is an intense and a somewhat flamboyant way of treating ghosts, smacking of the intensity and the feeling for atmosphere of Poe but unlike him in choice of material. Rather similar are the ghosts of F. Marion Crawford, at least in the intensity of their portrayal, though Crawford makes no use of nauseous detail as does Crane. In a passage quoted earlier, the face which looks through the tavern window at Nurse MacDonald is described, and its similarity to the face of Evelyn Warburton is pointed out. The description continues:

But the cheeks were thinner than Evelyn's, and as white as a gleam, and the eyes stared, and the lips were not red with life; they were dead, and painted with new blood. A few seconds later

---

36Ibid., p. 51.
the face at the window changed, for the eyes opened wider and wider till the white glared all round that bright violet, and the bloody lips opened over gleaming teeth, and stretched and widened and stretched again, and the shadowy golden hair rose and streamed against the window in the night breeze. And in answer to Nurse MacDonald's question came the sound that freezes the living flesh.

That low-moaning voice that rises suddenly, like the scream of a storm, from a moan to a wail, from a wail to a howl, from a howl to the fear-shriek of the tortured dead—he who has heard knows, and he can bear witness that the cry of the banshee is an evil cry to hear alone in the deep night.37

Besides the sight of this blend of banshee, vampire, and wronged mistress, ghostly manifestations in this story, "The Dead Smile," are confined to the mysterious waving of the branches above the mantel at the Christmas feast, and the scream that rings through the air. This is a reasonably conventional ghost, or rather is a blend of two conventional ghosts, banshee and vampire, with the added element of a woman wronged in life who intends vengeance after death. There is a variation on the usual revenge motif, however, for the usual manner of ghosts in taking revenge is to visit it on the living. This one waits just outside the barrier for her victim to come to her.

The ghost of "Man Overboard" is also conventional, but there is one fine little touch in Crawford's handling

37Crawford, Wandering Ghosts, p. 12.
of the ghost, who leaves his pipe in the old spot where he had left it in life; it is swollen and split with sea-water and spotted with seaweed. This too is a vengeful ghost, which returns to lead the guilty person to death by drowning on the day of his wedding to the dead man's sweetheart. Less conventional is the ghost in "For the Blood Is the Life," in which a human form can be seen by moonlight, lying on the grave of a vampire who is buried there with a stake through her heart.

Conventional vampire lore, as stated in Dracula, says that proper burial disposes of a vampire, but this one of Crawford's can emerge from the grave, though she can not depart from it. As an object of fear, she first appears to the man whom she had loved in life, and as she sucks his blood she saps his will. Gradually he becomes conscious of the power she wields over him. "Then came the fear, the awful, nameless panic, the mortal horror that guards the confines of the world we see not, neither know of as we know of other things, but which we feel when its icy chill freezes our bones and stirs our hair with the touch of a ghostly hand." Later, and within the frame narrative, she is the object of fear in a different way. The narrator has told his friend, Holger, of

---

38 Ibid., p. 187.
the grave, and he has gone to see it. Watching from the
top of the old tower, the narrator has seen the figure
on the grave, invisible to Holger, no longer lying down
but "on its knees... winding its white arms about
Holger's body and looking up into his face." When called,
Holger leaves reluctantly, or perhaps with difficulty.
"The Thing's arms were still round his waist, but its
feet could not leave the grave. As he came slowly forward
it was drawn and lengthened like a wreath of mist, thin
and white, till I saw distinctly that Holger shook him-
self as a man does when he feels a chill. At the same
instant a little wail of pain came to me on the breeze--
it might have been the cry of the small owl that lives
among the rocks--and the misty presence floated back from
Holger's advancing figure and lay once more at length
upon the mound." Then the narrator remembers how he him-
self had gone and stood upon the mound as Holger did:
"And now I knew it in a flash, and I shuddered as I re-
membered that I had heard the night owl then too. But
it had not been the night owl. It was the cry of the
Thing."39 This fear in retrospect is intensified, not in
shock quality but in its ability to fasten on the mind
and be sustained there.

39Ibid., p. 171.
The same quality of delayed fear characterizes some of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's ghosts and their revelation. Rebecca Flint sees the agitated rosebush; she sees the mysterious rose laid on her niece's clothes and hears the piano played mysteriously in the dead of night, but she does not realize that the niece is dead until she returns to her home and receives a letter which tells her of the death. Often the signs of the ghost are so commonplace that they are not recognized as such; in "The South-West Chamber," an old dressing gown which had belonged to the dead aunt and which has supposedly been put away continues to be found in odd places. This is one of the more menacing ghosts of Mrs. Freeman's because of its efforts to possess the bodies of some of the people who sleep in the haunted room; the first efforts to possess, however, only make one lady see another brooch in the mirror than the one she is wearing, and she merely thinks her mind is giving way. In another story, one ghost appears as a shadow on a wall, and is regarded with horror by the family as a whole but in particular by the man who killed his brother, whose shadow it is. Its appearance forecasts the death of the killer, whereupon his shadow joins the first on the wall. In "The Vacant Lot," there is a company of ghosts, black-shrouded and horribly pale, who appear to a descendant of the man
who murdered them. "Luella Miller" is a weird tale of a woman who seems to drain the vitality from all who love her or even do her a good deed; on the night of her death, her ghost is seen being led from her house by the ghosts of those who have died in her service.

The things seen by the governess in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* also appear to her as ghosts by a delayed action; she describes the ghost of Quint thoroughly before being told that he has been dead for some months. But in this story, there is no mere delayed-action fear, and in fact the emotion goes beyond fear to horror. The two ghosts, as the governess sees them, are completely evil in the abstract sense, and though the reader is never sure exactly how they are evil, there is no doubt of their nature. In the mind of the governess, they are spiritual vampires, battening on the souls of the children in some obscure but horrible way. These ghosts, if they are ghosts, are supreme among their kind, but they have little or nothing in common with their brethren of the sheet, the clanking chain, and the nocturnal groan. As Hawthorne and Melville stand apart from the main current of horror literature, even while contributing so much to it; so does Henry James stand aloof from the ghost story, even though he probably created the most effective ghosts in all the literature of the English language.
These are the more important ghosts of nineteenth century American literature. Only one new technique appears in their use by story-tellers, the delayed-action fear, as employed by Mrs. Freeman and F. Marion Crawford, and the same types of ghosts tend to be repeated. Without much opportunity for variation, some of these writers dealt with bogies other than ghosts in some of their stories, and as bogies, a few of these creations go far beyond the traditional ghost in evoking horror.

IV

Closely allied to fear of ghosts is fear of the dead, and at times it is difficult to determine where the boundary exists. In this study, it has been considered that a ghost is a non-material apparition, while the dead are material in their manifestations. In Ralph Adams Cram's "In Kropfsberg Keep," the characters in the dance of death are manifestly risen corpses, but as they occur in a dream and are non-material, they have been treated as ghosts rather than as walking corpses. On the other hand, the body of Halpin Frayser's mother, though she kills Frayser in a dream, is treated as walking dead, partly because of the author's insistence that she be considered such and partly because at the end of the story, Frayser is dead, not only in dream but in actuality. As a rule, however, the two are reasonably easy to
keep apart. The stories which make use of fear of the dead have been discussed in a previous chapter; but it may be appropriate to point out here that two stories which make use of this theme, Bierce's "The Death of Halpin Frayser" and Crawford's "The Upper Berth," are numbered among the best of all horror stories that have been written. "The Upper Berth" is frequently anthologized, and for the excellence of "The Death of Halpin Frayser," we have the word of such critics as H. P. Lovecraft and Frederic Taber Cooper. 40

Bierce's disappearance stories, though they do not deal with bogies, do introduce a new type of fear into American literature, that of being swallowed up into nothingness, or perhaps of crossing over into another world which is usually concealed by dimensional barriers. The sheer disappearance theme has never caught on to any great extent, but extra-dimensional or other hidden worlds as lurking-places for various sorts of bogies have been in use in America since the time of Fitz-James O'Brien, either by statement or by implication. One particular type of bogie, the invisible monster, stems from O'Brien's "What Was It?" in which the other-worldly home of the

40 Lovecraft, Supernatural Horror in Literature, p. 68.
thing is to be inferred only from the fact that it has not
been previously known in this world.

It attacks the narrator as he lies in bed unable to
sleep because of the effects of opium. Its first noticed
characteristic, after it has been subdued, is its invisibility—a quality which strikes the narrator with horror
so that he screams. Afterward a plaster cast is made of
it, and the description follows:

It was shaped like a man,—distorted, uncouth,
and horrible, but still a man. It was small,
not over four feet and some inches in height,
and its limbs revealed a muscular development
that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in
hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustave
Doré, or Callot, or Tony Johannot, never con­
ceived anything so horrible. . . . It was the
physiognomy of what I should fancy a ghoul
might be. It looked as if it was capable of
feeding on human flesh.41

The discussion which the thing evokes centers around
the manifestations at seances and spiritualistic phenomena;
so in a sense O'Brien does consider the possibility that
it and its kind are perhaps in part of this world. At
least it is anthropomorphic, and that quality binds it,
though perhaps remotely, to humanity. It is also compara­
tively harmless, being unable to subdue a man in bed, al­
though it can and does bite. Its fearsomeness, then,

41 O'Brien, p. 405.
consists largely in its mystery, but the next invisible monster in American literature, in Ambrose Bierce's "The Damned Thing," is more formidable.42

It is also less fully described, and partly because of that fact, it is more fearsome. Whatever its shape may be, it is not anthropomorphic. The first recorded sign of it is seen in the diary of the man who was killed; his dog is sensitive to something which is invisible, and gives the appearance of being temporarily mad. Next, as the man looks at the stars, he notes that those lying just above the ridge of hills are momentarily eclipsed, as if something were coming between him and them. The last entry of the diary formulates a theory to explain the thing's invisibility; it is merely of a color which is invisible to the human eye. The more spectacular features are related by a friend of the victim.

First there is a thrashing sound in the chapparal, at which Morgan, the keeper of the diary, seems agitated. Then a peculiar motion in the field of wild oats attracts the friend's attention; they seem pressed down by a movement that prolongs itself slowly toward the two men. Morgan raises his gun and fires: "Before the smoke of

42 Bierce, III, 280-96.
the discharge had cleared away I heard a loud savage
cry—a scream like that of a wild animal—and flinging
his gun upon the ground Morgan sprang away and ran
swiftly from the spot. At the same instant I was thrown
violently to the ground by the impact of something unseen
in the smoke—some soft, heavy substance that seemed
thrown against me with great force."43 Before he is
able to rise, he hears the shouts of Morgan in agony,
and mingled with them are sounds such as one may hear
from fighting dogs. At times Morgan's body seems par-
tially blotted out, but at others is completely visible.
Finally, when he lies still, the same movement in the
wild oats prolongs itself back to the thicket. Morgan's
body, as revealed to the coroner's jury, is literally
shredded, and the condition of the throat is particularly
horrifying.

This is a more unearthly creature than is O'Brien's,
in part, perhaps, because it does not allow itself to be
captured and analyzed or described. The motion in the
wild oats which "prolongs" itself along indicates a some-
what snake-like method of locomotion; on the other hand,
Morgan once mentions the thing's footprints in his diary.
It would be helpful if he had described them; H. P.

43 Bierce, III, 287-88.
Lovecraft achieves great suggestiveness with footprints in several of his stories. Nevertheless, there are ties with the creatures of earth, especially the sounds made by the thing, which are likened to those of fighting dogs, although Morgan's dog certainly recognized no kin-dred in it.

These two monsters, O'Brien's invisible dwarf and Bierce's invisible monster of unknown appearance, with the Horla of De Maupassant, were the nineteenth century forerunners of a fairly numerous brood of invisible monsters of the nineteenth century. What is probably the most ghastly achievement in the development of nineteenth century monsters, however, does not belong to the invisible tradition; it appears in the former residence of the late Mlle. Blaye, in the "No. 252 Rue M. le Prince," of Ralph Adams Cram.

Part of the house, known as "la bouche d'enfer" to the neighbors, has been described in the chapter on settings; the narrator has settled himself down in one of the haunted rooms to spend the night, with his three companions in the other three rooms which are haunted. Nothing had ever actually been seen in the rooms; people merely had the horrors when they slept there, and the narrator gets to the bottom of it during his vigil.
The first of the horror is a numbness in his limbs and a feeling of paralysis as he sits in the dark; he remembers Bulwer-Lytton's "The Haunters and the Haunted" as he feels the strength being drained from him, and like the narrator of that story, he feels that if he can only keep his will free, he can be saved from the danger that is approaching. But the monster that is coming is no Rosicrucian who possesses superhuman powers and yet has a tie to humanity because of his human origin. It is completely alien, and it comes soon after the last flicker of the lantern has left the narrator in total darkness:

Then the end began. In the velvet blackness came two white eyes, milky, opalescent, far away, --awful eyes, like a dead dream. More beautiful than I can describe, the flakes of white flame moving from the perimeter inward, disappearing in the centre, like a never-ending flow of opal water into a circular tunnel. I could not have moved my eyes had I possessed the power: they devoured the fearful, beautiful things that grew slowly, slowly larger, fixed on me, advancing, growing more beautiful, the white flakes of light sweeping more swiftly into the blazing vortices, the awful fascination deepening in its insane intensity as the white, vibrating eyes grew nearer, larger.

Like a hideous and implacable engine of death the eyes of the unknown Horror swelled and expanded until they were close before me, enormous, terrible, and I felt a slow, cold, wet breath propelled against my face, enveloping me in its fetid mist, in its charnel-house deadliness.

With ordinary fear goes always a physical terror, but with me in the presence of this unspeakable Thing was only the utter and awful
terror of the mind, the mad fear of a prolonged and ghostly nightmare. Again and again I tried to shriek, to make some noise, but physically I was utterly dead. I could only feel myself go mad with the terror of hideous death. The eyes were close on me,—their movement so swift that they seemed to be but palpitating flames, the dead breath was around me like the depths of the deepest sea.

Suddenly a wet, icy mouth like that of a dead cuttle-fish, shapeless, jelly-like, fell over mine. The horror began slowly to draw my life from me, but, as enormous and shuddering folds of palpitating jelly swept sinuously around me, my will came back, my body awoke with the reaction of final fear, and I closed with the nameless death that enfolded me.

What was it that I was fighting? My arms sunk through the unresisting mass that was turning me to ice. Moment by moment new folds of cold jelly swept around me, crushing me with the force of Titans. I fought to wrest my mouth from this awful thing that sealed it, but, if ever I succeeded and caught a single breath, the wet, sucking mass closed over my face again before I could cry out. I think I fought for hours, desperately, insanely, in a silence that was more hideous than any sound,—fought until I felt death at hand, until the memory of all my life rushed over me like a flood, until I no longer had strength to wrench my face from that hellish succubus, until with a last mechanical struggle I fell and yielded to death. 44

The nightmare quality of this description would render it possible that the author meant the experience to be regarded as a nightmare, but for one bit of circumstantial evidence. When his comrades, alarmed at his silence and at his locked door, batter down the door to see what is the matter, they find him lying in the middle of the floor.

44 Cram, Black Spirits and White, pp. 24–27.
"The floor and walls to the height of six feet were running with something that seemed like stagnant water, thick, glutinous, sickening. As for me, I was drenched with the same cursed liquid. The odor of musk was nauseating." 45

O'Brian's dwarf had teeth and could bite; Bierce's Damned Thing had both teeth and claws and could rip a man to shreds; but the thing which Cram has assembled here transcends the physical in two ways. First, it exerts a psychic force which is capable of paralyzing a man's body, and eventually, his will also. Second, in spite of cuttle-fish mouth and eyes of fire, it is largely immaterial, and that material which it does have is of a jelly-like consistency. Its strength, besides the psychic, is in its passive mass; wild physical struggles are simply smothered in folds of jelly. As a tangible bogie, this demon of Cram's probably needs to be recognized as the supreme creation of nineteenth century American literature.

There is another bogie, however, also Cram's, which though not tangible is if possible even a more abhorrent object of fear. It is the unseen entity of "The Dead Valley." The difficulty of dealing with it is that it

is hard to disengage from the setting, which has been previously discussed. But it does have a voice, which the two boys hear as they skirt the fog-filled valley, carrying the dog which has died of the fear they all feel.

"In the depth of the silence came a cry, beginning as a low, sorrowful moan, rising to a tremulous shriek, culminating in a yell that seemed to tear the night in sunder and rend the world as by a cataclysm. So fearful was it that I could not believe it had actual existence; it passed previous experience, the powers of belief, and for a moment I thought it the result of my own animal terror, an hallucination born of tottering reason. . . ."

The very fear that crushes them is an emanation either from the region or from that which screams; the fog that fills the valley responds to the voice when it cries again:

"I put one foot into the ghostly fog. A chill as of death struck through me, stopping my heart, and I threw myself backward on the slope. At that instant came again the shriek, close, close, right in our ears, in ourselves, and far out across that damnable sea I saw the cold fog lift like a waterspout and toss itself high in writhing convolutions toward the sky. The stars began to grow dim as thick vapor swept across them, and in the gathering dark I saw a great, watery moon lift itself slowly above the palpitating sea, vast and vague in the gathering mist.

46 Ibid., p. 139.
"This was enough: we turned and fled along the margin of the white sea that throbbed now with fitful motion below us, rising, rising, slowly and steadily, driving us higher and higher up the side of the foothills. . . ."47

But even more horrible is the force the thing exerts on the human will from what appears to be a center, the lone dead tree in the valley. Horror stricken, the narrator describes his attempt to run out of the valley, only to find that he has run in a circle about the tree, held there by some psychic power. Only by the utmost exertion of will is the narrator able to drag himself that mile and a half before darkness comes and the fog covers him.

V

With only a slight violation of chronological order, this chapter begins and ends with the entity behind a mysterious voice as an object of fear. There, however, resemblance between earliest and latest ceases. Between the voice of Carwin the Biloquist and that of the dweller in the Dead Valley lies a century of existence and a growing sophistication in horror. The Gothic villain, already grown shabby in Brown's hands, is replaced by an indescribable essence of evil, an unearthly something to which life is antithetical; and the burning, melancholy, compelling eyes of Carwin give way to an insidiously

47Ibid., pp. 142-43.
creeping inundation of sheer psychic force. The change may be explained partly in terms of Brown's deistic philosophy that everything is capable of being explained and of Cram's that there are some things which cannot be explained. But there is more to it than this.

Brown's attitude was basically optimistic; capacity for being explained implies a cognate capacity for being controlled. With Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, however, came a realization of the unknown, and probably the unknowable, that impinges so closely on the universe which is known and which may some day be controlled. To Poe, this unknown region was found in large part in the human heart; to Hawthorne, it was the realm of moral values, or rather the realm in which evil flourished and moral values did not exist; to Melville, it was the entire real universe which hides behind the mask of the material and which denies man's vaulting but puny ambitions. Perhaps it is this real universe of Melville's that Cram considered to be the lair of the thing in "No. 252 Rue M. le Prince," and perhaps the Dead Valley is meant to be a portion of this earth which is tangent to that universe.

There are other indications along the way which show a deviation from the Deist optimism of Brown's novels, in which things work out in the end and the
unexplained is made clear. One example is found in Fitz-James O'Brien's "Mother of Pearl," a tale not particularly noteworthy for horror, but containing one fine touch at the end. The narrator has discovered that his wife has been a slave to hashish all her life, and while in its thralls has slain their only child. He concludes his story:

O hasheesh! demon of a new paradise, spiritual whirlwind, I know you now! You blackened my life, you robbed me of all I held dear, but you have since consoled me. You thought, wicked enchanter, that you had destroyed my peace forever. But I have won, through you yourself, the bliss you once blotted out. Vanish past! Hence present! Out upon actuality! Hand in hand, I walk with the conqueror of time, and space, and suffering. Bend, all who hear me, to his worship!48

That which was formerly abhorrent now appears infinitely desirable; the narrator recognizes and appreciates the beauty of evil. The narrator of "No. 252 Rue M. le Prince" also sees the beauty of the horrible eyes, though he does not appreciate it. The mad Hildred Castaigne knows the horror that lies behind Hastur and the Yellow Sign in Carcosa, but he does not fear it or abhor it, for to him it is power. There is an even earlier example of the love for evil, again by a madman, in "Sold to the Devil,"

48 O'Brien, p. 280.
by "Nav Enob," published in 1856. \(^{49}\) In prison, he reminisces over his life and his selling his soul to the devil, in return for which he received immunity from death. His sport is to ride the wings of the Bird of Death and to wrestle the spirits of darkness; he has kissed a new-drowned maiden and carried her lover's head away for a plaything. There is a gloating ghoulishness here that is a good foreshadowing of the same sort of thing, done better by H. P. Lovecraft in the next century. This delight in evil, however, remains only a dark undercurrent throughout the nineteenth century; the triumph of pessimism in the horror story, with the forces of evil conquering and apparent joy being expressed over their conquest, is yet to come.

\(^{49}\) The Southern Literary Messenger, XXIII (1856), 414-16.
The progress of the nineteenth century American horror story may be stated in terms of two major trends: the shaking off of the remnants of the Gothic and the evolution of the evil universe as a larger setting. The two are not to be thought of as entirely disparate, for the same forces doubtless underlay both trends, but it seems more convenient to consider them separately in concluding this study.

The Gothic element in American fiction is basically the same as that in English literature, though tending to occur in short tales rather than in novels. It is characterized by a straining for the sensational, as is English Gothic fiction, and is not to be distinguished from the English Gothic when it employs European settings. Examples of American Gothic stories with European settings are the tales of Washington Irving and others, cited in Chapter XI. The Gothic tales taper off into stories involving horrid experiences; a good example of these is "A Night in an Old Castle," by G. P. R. James, printed in 1854, in which the screams and mysterious sounds heard in
the old castle turn out to be nothing more than the activities of a madman who has killed his daughter.\textsuperscript{1} One would be justified in setting up a lunatic sub-theme within this group of near-Gothic tales, for it also occurs in "Horror: A True Tale," an anonymous story published in 1861,\textsuperscript{2} and "A Night at Haddon Hall," another anonymous story published in 1842.\textsuperscript{3} In each of these two stories, a lady who is sleeping in an isolated room of an old but inhabited mansion is frightened almost to death by a lunatic who enters her room and performs weird actions. In "A Night at Haddon Hall," the lunatic even enters the bed where the lady lies, but appears to desire nothing more than a good night's sleep. Another madman figures in "Aetna: A Thrilling Tale," published in 1854.\textsuperscript{4} In this story a tourist does battle with a madman who claims to be the Lord of Etna, on the brink of the volcano, and barely escapes being carried to the "home" of the lunatic, who plunges into the depths. These stories, though dealing with a lunatic as the object of fear, illustrate the whole trend of the Gothic or semi-Gothic tale before Poe; the sensational is introduced

\textsuperscript{1}Harper's Magazine, IX (1854), 804-10.

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., XXII (1861), 514-23.

\textsuperscript{3}Graham's Magazine, XXI (1842), 194-98.

\textsuperscript{4}The Knickerbocker, XLIV (1854), 126-30.
for its own sake, and the setting is of a rough-hewn variety intended to complement the action.

The method of Charles Brockden Brown differs from the outright Gothic only in his naive insistence on historical verification for his wonders and in his determined opposition to the Gothic type of setting. The insistence on historical verification is a mere formality, for sensational material was quite available in the news of the day for the use of any writer who wanted it. Premature burials, one gathers from reading Poe and other authors, occurred frequently enough to give people subject to cataleptic fits something to think about. Brown's effort to avoid the excesses of Gothic setting, however, does show an inclination to try new paths, although it is questionable whether his sensational actions would not have appeared more harmonious in a setting less deliberately and formally chaste. His materials are the plague, Indian uprisings, and attempted seductions, and each is exploited for its maximum sensation value; in Wieland, where the author's intention seems to be to produce horror or allied emotions, he also deals with mysterious voices,

---

5 See James F. Otis, "Buried Alive: An Ower True Tale," The Southern Literary Messenger, III (1837), 338-40. Several other similar titles occur in Poole's Index.
the slaughter of a family, and spontaneous combustion of the human body. The settings are not particularly appropriate to these occurrences, and neither are the characters, who seem much more at home pursuing their classical studies and engaging in their chastely correct amusements than caught in webs of intrigue or dealing with the mysterious. There is thus a gap between the characters and the action, and another between the action and the setting; these hiatuses help to produce another between the reader and the story, at least judged by twentieth century standards.

It was this lack of unity which Edgar Allan Poe so deplored in the literature of his day, and to which he contributed a remedy, by both precept and example. It is only with the example that we are concerned here; whether he wrote by precept or derived the precepts later from his own practice, we do not know, but it is certain that Poe did achieve a unity of tone and effect in his stories which had not been known up to his time. Part of this unity probably sprang from his own personality; his writing gives the impression of being the result of a creative act rather than the fruit of long hours with the lamp. If a rather subjective statement be allowed, the "I" of Poe's stories seems autobiographical; the author appears to be fused with the sensor, and thus he
unities the setting and action with his own peculiar point of view. Even though the personality of Poe did enter into his method to a great extent, authors who followed him were able to profit by it, at least to the extent of achieving greater unity; the short story after Poe owes this most desirable characteristic to him, and the horror tale in particular owes him a heavy debt for his contribution of the sensor, an element necessary to any successful horror story. The sensor is not always the type of the first-person narrator used by Poe, but if not, the intimacy Poe achieves through his use of the first-person sensor must be attained by the use of some other type of character, who senses the action and transmits its implications to the reader.

Besides method itself, attitude toward the materials of the story must also be considered, and it too is related to the enthusiasm or lack of enthusiasm with which the author approaches his work. It is obvious that Brown and most of the other authors who deal with horror before Poe—that is to say, the Gothic writers—are telling stories, and telling them in a very conscious and at times condescending way. In Poe and those who benefited by his example, the reader is able to sense a rapport between author and story, and this unity helps him to enter into a more intimate relationship with the tale.
he is reading. For material as subjective as horror, aloofness, whether deliberate or not, is fatal, and there is less of it in fiction aiming at horror after Poe. Brown deals with madness in Wieland, but as a freak; the reader finds it difficult to believe in it, even after it has been revealed, because of the distance maintained between the madness and Brown. The mad sensor of Poe, on the other hand, might easily be identified with the author and the reader more readily identifies himself with it, for Poe speaks directly to the germ of madness that lies in everyone, not to the vulgar desire to gape at the abnormal.

II

Parallel to the development of an improved method for the evocation of literary horror was the recognition of new materials related to science. In the beginning of the century, such materials were so imperfectly known that they were often not to be differentiated from superstition, but as science progressed, it tended to impart a more materialistic tinge to thought. Processes formerly regarded as divine came to be regarded more and more as mechanical or at least mechanistic; the seeds of Darwinism had been sown for some time before the actual publication of The Origin of Species, and the revolt against the orthodox interpretation of the scriptures
and the supremacy of the clergy had been going on in America in some form since the publication of Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* in 1637. These forces combined to produce a literary reaction against revealed religion, which became obviously manifest in the horror story.

But in most of the authors of horror fiction, the reaction seems anything but deliberate, and in the beginning, with Charles Brockden Brown, it hardly exists; behind the verbal posturings of Clara Wieland, we sense the blandly paternal and benevolent god of the Deists, and at times Clara thinks the mysterious voice may proceed from this deity. The type of "science" with which Brown is concerned—prodigies of nature—leads to belief in miracles (which may later be documented and explained) rather than to outright disbelief or even to any great change in one's earlier convictions. Such science contains little philosophic depth; Brown displays his small stock of marvels as the master of a side-show presents his array of two-headed calves and other curiosities. Such material contains a certain capacity for producing sensation, but after the sensation is achieved, there is little more to be done with it. Whatever the initial effect may be, it falls short of horror.
Probably without having the slightest intention of dealing with science, Poe took one of the well-documented phenomena with which Brown wrought his effects, mental aberration, and by making use of it as a point of view rather than as a marvel to be gaped at, he revealed a whole world of horror in ordinary things. Primarily, however, Poe's horror lies in the soul of humanity—in the strangely brooding Egaeus of "Berenice," in the monstrous and inhuman cruelty of Montresor of "The Cask of Amontillado" and the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," in the perversity and overblown self-pity of the narrator of "The Black Cat," and elsewhere in lesser proportions. When God is recognized in these stories, it is with an entirely hopeless yearning; Poe's protagonists are the apotheosis of damned humanity. Poe's other horrors, outside of the abominable M. Valdemar, have only the vaguest relation to science, real or spurious, but their effects are based in part on some conception of the nature of the universe, which is a concern of science. The strange life that pervades the House of Usher hints at completely alien modes of being, as does the monstrously swollen ship of the "MS. Found in a Bottle;" and in "Silence: A Fable," a whole new world of alien and malignant life is revealed. Death itself takes on a
loathsome sort of life in "The Truth in the Case of M. Valdemar." To cite an anonymous critic who has been quoted earlier, "God seems dead" in Poe's stories, and his people stand in awful isolation facing a malignant universe.

There was nothing new, of course, in a malignant universe, but there are gradations of malignity. The fact that Calvinistic theology held the vast majority of humankind predestined to fry in hell might argue a certain malignity in the Divine plan; yet as any theologian could point out at great length, the ways of God are inscrutable and not to be understood by mere humanity. So long as it was understood that God was good, He could do no evil, for what appeared evil, when done by Him, appeared so only because of imperfect eyesight in the critic. And so long as God was held to be good, he was held to be endowed with a certain personality, and thus to be capable of taking an occasional hand in human affairs, as Cotton Mather pointed out so thoroughly in the *Magnalia Christi Americana*. With such a neighborly (though jealous) God in His heaven, the evil-doer had remarkably short shrift; he faced condemnation and punishment for his misdeeds at the judgment seat, whither he had been sent by God's emissaries on earth. Against such a
picture of the moral universe, Poe's actions would vary little from those of the Gothic writers who preceded him; as it is, they borrow from their godless background and thus their effect is intensified many times. To the religious mind, there is a horror in godlessness, and this is the horror that walks in the tales of Poe.

Thus, Poe's use of the godless universe is thorough, though rather passive; it is brought into life by the actions of humanity who exemplify it. But a universe still more alien is found in the land by the River Zaire, in "Silence: A Fable," for here there is not only no god but no humanity either. The horror of such a universe is abstract in its alienation from humanity, and is thus akin to the universe of Melville, visible in symbols of evil like the White Whale, just as Poe's is made visible in Egaeus and Montresor. The function of the evil universe, then, is on two levels: first, on the abstract, in which the most profound philosophic horror may be achieved because of its very alienation from other emotions, such as fear; second, on the abstract made visible in some symbol. The symbols must be carefully chosen if they are not to be too familiar, and thus fail to achieve the sense of the alien. Poe's protagonists are good symbols because they not only are formally human but are
characterized by elements which though carefully sup-
pressed in human beings, nevertheless exist rather ob-
viously; at the same time these elements are so exag-
gerated that they very successfully achieve the sense
of alienation.

This universe of Poe's is akin to that of Hawthorne
and also to that of Ambrose Bierce, insofar as Bierce's
is made manifest in human beings; the nature of each is
revealed by human actions. Hawthorne's may be called a
purely moral universe, while both Poe's and Bierce's are
moral in large part but are also related to fantastically
conceived physical universes. The horror of the moral
universe reached its greatest heights in Poe's and
Hawthorne's stories; the horror of the evil physical
universe first began to be exploited by Ambrose Bierce in
such stories as "The Death of Halpin Frayser" and "An
Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge."

The horror of the universe of these two stories by
Bierce lies in the mere fact that it is alien and malev-
olent, and threatens physical harm to human beings who
find themselves in it. Had Bierce worked out any meaning
of the strange constellations whose very arrangement bodes
evil, and had he linked the voices whispering in unknown
tongues from the haunted forest to anything definite, he
would have achieved a great deal more than he did; "The Death of Halpin Frayser" would probably stand as the greatest horror story of the century. As it is, the fear of the evil universe seems at cross purposes with the fear of the malevolent dead; there is an added horror when the lich is introduced, but it does not reinforce the earlier horror of the evil universe. Nevertheless, the fate which befalls Frayser in this universe removes it from the realm of the abstract and translates it into physical terms, which though not necessarily related to the nature of Bierce's evil universe, are forcibly associated with it in the story. Thus, to the sheer horror of Hawthorne's, Poe's, and Melville's moral universe is added the fear of its being translated into physical terms; a man who wanders into it is faced with destruction.

The process is carried further in Robert W. Chambers's extension of Bierce's universe; in the tales of the King in Yellow and Carcosa, the evil universe does not wait passively for a victim to wander into it, but extends its agency into the world of normality. It is linked with this world by the cult of Hastur, whose members are able to summon the abominations from Carcosa to this earth in order to further their own plans; the possession of
certain evil knowledge renders a man vulnerable to the King in Yellow, the daemon of the evil universe. The King in Yellow supplies what is lacking in "The Death of Halpin Frayser," a controlling principle. Exactly why the King in Yellow sends the Watchman, the decaying corpse that walks, to Scott and Tessie in "The Yellow Sign," is far from clear; but the fact that the Watchman is sent presupposes a malice that is easier to grasp than is the mere mechanistic grinding of forces whereby Halpin Frayser is destroyed by his dead mother in the fog.

The monstrous abomination of Ralph Adams Cram's "No. 252 Rue M. le Prince" is like the lich in "The Death of Halpin Frayser" in that we do not know exactly why it has come, except to kill; instead of being placed in an evil universe, like Halpin Frayser's dead mother, it appears in a house reputed to be haunted. It is thus a variation on the ghost theme in a sense, but is much more formidable than most of the ghosts of literature, and exceeds the specter of Bulwer-Lytton's "The Haunters and the Haunted" as much as that specter goes beyond "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal." Unlike the Bierce story, however, there is a vague background of witchcraft and sorcery, in addition to the house's being haunted, which
serves as a frame of reference, much as the King in Yellow and Carcosa do for Chambers's stories. We may suppose that the monster has been called out of its own universe by sorcery, much as Wilde and Castaigne of Chambers's "The Repairer of Reputations" intended to loose the horrors from Carcosa upon the earth. This pattern of calling up demons, employed by Faust and most other magicians of literature, has shaken off its theological trappings almost completely in Cram's tale; there is no prospect of frightening the demon away with the sign of the cross or holy water, and no good angel is available to protect the victim. The pattern has yet to evolve into concrete myth in the stories of Lovecraft and his followers, but the outline of the myth is already established in these tales of Bierce, Chambers, and Cram. What remains to be done is only a matter of degree.

III

Flamboyant though its methods may have been at times, the horror fiction of the nineteenth century in America fulfilled the very important function of constituting a counter-current to the prevalent philosophy of optimistic democracy. The horror story sprang from the Gothic tale, that nethermost sag of the Romantic
spirit, but it presented the demonstrable realities of being in a way impossible to literature devoted to sentimentalism, whether theological, historical, or ideological.

Three of the writers with whom this study is primarily concerned expressed as dark a view of democracy as of the universe about them. They were the skeletons at the feast, the devil's advocates, and their contribution to the thought of the century may easily be seen in the matters with which they were most concerned. The casual reader cannot help being struck by the importance of death in the stories of both Poe and Bierce; to them, it was the ultimate certainty, the final reality. The Worm, to Poe was the conqueror; Bierce, taking a less emotional point of view, saw the manure function as the last thing which might be posited of humanity. Religion he defined as "A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable," and it is this insistence on the existence of the Unknowable that characterizes the modern horror story. The unknown and the mysterious were stock hallmarks of the Gothic, but they were presented in relation to certain concepts held to be known and stable—the benevolence of God, the virtue and eventual victory of the downtrodden. To the
writers of horror fiction, God was indifferent, and the
downtrodden had better not count on His aid to extricate
them from their troubles. And as for that latest senti­
mentality, the inherent virtue of democracy, it was
probably more suspect than the older ones, especially to
Ralph Adams Cram.

Thus, the horror story in the purest form, express­
ing the clearest recognition of the Unknowable and taking
the darkest view of man's place in the universe, has never
been widely popular, although in dilution, as in the
Gothic tale, it is popular and perennial. It is essen­
tially realistic in its recognition of the Unknowable; as
a literary phenomenon, it may be considered a reaction
against optimistic materialism, just as the Gothic romance
was a reaction against the Age of Reason. But its material--
the fear of the unknown--belongs to no time nor place, but
to all who walk the waste places and listen to elemental
voices impassively denying the majesty of man.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

I

Fiction

The periodical files covered for fiction in this study were the following: Graham's Magazine, XX-XLIX (1842-56); Harper's Magazine, I-9 (1850-1900); The Knickerbocker, V-LX (1835-60); and The Southern Literary Messenger, I-XXXVIII (1834-64).


__________ Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker. Philadelphia: David McKay Publisher, 1831.


Butler, Mrs. Caroline H. "Fanny: A Narrative Taken from the Lips of a Maniac," Graham's Magazine, XXXVI (1850), 258-62.


__________ The King in Yellow. New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1895.


"A Dream by a Desolate Hearth," The Knickerbocker, LIII (1859), 376-83.

Enob, Nav (pseud.). "Sold to the Devil," The Southern Literary Messenger, XXIII (1858), 414-16.

Fantome, Frank (pseud.). "The Wicked Young Doctor; and the Direful End That Him Befel," The Knickerbocker, XLVIII (1856), 561-77.


"Flood and Fog," The Knickerbocker, XLIII (1854), 238-43.


"Ghost Stories," The Southern Literary Messenger, XVII (1851), 143-47.


"Hans Swartz," The Knickerbocker, XII (1838), 108-12.


"An Incident in the Life of Mad'lle Clairon," *Harper's Magazine,* I (1850), 183-86.


_______. "The Legend of Don Roderick," *The Knickerbocker,* XXIII (1844), 262-75.


"Johnny Marsden," *The Knickerbocker,* XII (1838), 325-32.


"The Lost Soul," *The Knickerbocker,* LI (1858), 331-50.


"The Lunatick and His Turkey," *The Knickerbocker,* XVI (1840), 466-69.


McLeod, Donald. "Hildegard," The Knickerbocker, XL (1852), 245-52.


"Maurice Ellison," The Knickerbocker, VI (1835), 145-58.


"A Night of Terror," The Knickerbocker, XXIV (1844), 554-60.

"Jubal the Ringer," *The Knickerbocker*, LIII (1858), 230-34.


"One of the Nights of My Life," *The Knickerbocker*, LIII (1859), 362-75.


"Rudolph and Alice," The Southern Literary Messenger, IX (1843), 263-75.


Schaad, John E. "Beyond the Grave," The Knickerbocker, XLIV (1854), 146-55.


Smith, J. Hyatt. "A Ghost Story by a Ghost," The Knickerbocker, XXVIII (1846), 227-34.


"A Tragedy of the Mammoth Cave," The Knickerbocker, LI (1858), 111-21.


Van Schaik, Barent (pseud.?). "Guests from Gibbet Island," The Knickerbocker, XIV (1839), 342-50.


"The White Queen," The Knickerbocker, LIV (1859), 455-64.


"Winderhaus and the Gentleman in Black," The Southern Literary Messenger, XVII (1851), 558-64.

Wynne, Madeline Yale. The Little Room and Other Stories. Chicago: Way & Williams, 1895.


"The Transfigured: A Tale from the German," The Southern Literary Messenger, V (1839), 225-54.

"Walpurgis Night; or, The First Night of May," The Southern Literary Messenger, XI (1845), 287-78.
Secondary Materials


VITA

Winfred S. Emmons, Jr. was born on February 9, 1920, near Sikes, Louisiana. He attended the elementary school at Sikes and graduated from Sikes High School in 1936. He attended Louisiana State University and Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, and served in the Army from January, 1941, to December, 1945. He then re-entered Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, and received the B. A. in English in 1947. In the same year he was admitted to the Graduate School of the University of Virginia; there he held a Philip Francis Du Pont Senior Fellowship for the year 1948-49, and received the M. A. in English in 1949. In the same year he entered the Graduate School of Louisiana State University as a teaching fellow, and he is now a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

In June, 1942, he was married to Miss Ethel May Moore, of Minden, Louisiana. They have two children, Winfred S. Emmons, III and Jeanne Carter Emmons.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate:  Winfred S. Emmons, Jr.

Major Field:  English

Title of Thesis:  The Materials and Methods of American Horror Fiction in the Nineteenth Century

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:  May 9, 1952