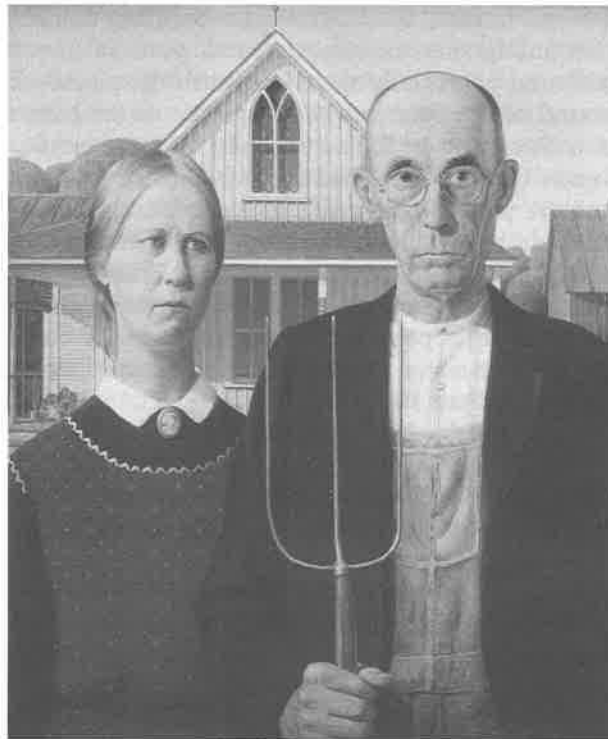


The uses of the American Gothic

*The politics of a critical term in post-war American
literary criticism*

Agnieszka M. Soltysik

University of Geneva, Switzerland



Grant Wood, *American Gothic*, 1930
Copyright © Art Institute of Chicago

One of the earliest and certainly one of the most famous uses of the term 'American Gothic' is Grant Wood's painting of a late 19th-century farmhouse. Yet most people probably would *not* describe the painting the way I just have: as that of a late 19th-century *farmhouse*. The painting is famous rather for the grim-faced and ambiguous figures that stand before the farmhouse, the farmer and a woman that could be his wife but that Wood identified as the man's daughter.¹ It is in them that most viewers and critics attempt to locate the 'Gothic' of the title. And yet, strictly speaking, it is the house and more precisely the design of its second-storey window that inspired Wood and gave the painting its name. The historically material house that Wood found in Eldon, Iowa in the late 1920s and subsequently painted in *American Gothic* was built in the 1880s in a style called 'Carpenter Gothic'. By replacing the architectural term 'Carpenter' with the national designation 'American', Wood seemed to gesture toward a wider significance for the painting than the regionalism for which he is known. The figures seem to represent not just an Iowa farmer and his daughter, but two Americans in some essentially American situation. Or at least this is the way we have come to think about this image. At the time, though, the debate was not so much about what the painting implies about America as a whole but about farmers in general, and Iowans in particular. The debate the painting initially generated concerned the ambiguous expressions and pose of the two figures: unsmiling, stiff, and potentially menacing with the pitchfork held firmly in the foreground of the painting. Many people at the time felt that the painting was unflattering to Iowan farmers, and the sense of the word 'Gothic' as 'crude' or 'primitive' has been cited to suggest that Wood was making fun of the provincialism of rural Americans, but the idea that America itself could be 'Gothic' in the sense that we currently understand the term (as dark, irrational, tainted by hidden crime or systemic injustice) does not figure in contemporary critics' responses.

Wood denied that the painting was a negative portrait of the two figures (modeled on his sister and dentist), and claimed that his intention was not satire but realism. He writes in a letter in 1941 that he hoped to reveal something 'true to American life' in these two 'faces'. He also asserts that there is a 'significant relationship' between the couple and 'the false Gothic house with its ecclesiastical window'.² The relationship is first of all one of contrast: Wood was fascinated by the incongruity between the modesty of the house and its inhabitants and the 'pretentiousness' of the Gothic window. The title initially gestures towards this incongruity since, in 1930, the terms 'Gothic' and 'American' were oppositely connoted, and each pulled the painting toward a different register: the latter towards a celebration of national characteristics such as determination, fortitude and moral uprightness, and the former towards an evocation of ignorance, superstition and even fanaticism and moral ambiguity. While the initial effect of the title may have been based on the contrast between the two terms, the conjunction inevitably creates a

semantic leakage, leading to the possibility that 'American' and 'Gothic' might actually be related in some covert or figurative way. Wood's painting also alludes on a visual level to the relationship between the figures and their house: the two people literally resemble the house in their stiff, vertical poses and dour, oblong faces (e.g. the woman's hairline actually repeats the arched shape of the Gothic window).

If Wood's title played on the oxymoronic resonance of the term, it is because the way we currently use 'American Gothic' – as a concept designating the 'Gothicness' of America – did not emerge until the late 1970s or 1980s. Before this time, the term 'American Gothic' was a conjunction of two distinct and autonomous concepts, even when combined. The idea of the 'Gothic' was firmly rooted in the British genre of horror fiction, and if occasionally an American version of it appeared, it was still defined in relation to the British norm. To understand the critical genesis of the 'American Gothic', we have to look at the literary politics of the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, the idea of an American Gothic literature arose simultaneously with the 'Romance Thesis' associated with Richard Chase, but the two terms took different critical turns after the 1960s. Leslie Fiedler and Irving Malin were not the only critics to describe American literature as Gothic in one way or another, but they were virtually alone in using the term 'Gothic' prominently in their work. The need and desire to differentiate American literature from the British (and the popular women's romances called 'Gothics' in the 1960s) was so strong that most critics preferred a variety of less tainted words to describe essentially the same texts and same traits: blackness, darkness, romance, the grotesque, etc. Yet the Romance Thesis itself leaned very much toward the Gothic. Richard Chase's argument in 'The Broken Circuit: Romance and the American Novel' (1960 [1957]) could have easily been made using the term '[the] Gothic' in place of 'Romance'. In order to understand why, and why the term 'American Romance' initially eclipsed the 'American Gothic', it is helpful to recall the institutional and cultural context in which the Romance Thesis arose.

There were roughly three major paradigm shifts in the critical orientation of American literary study in the first half of the 20th century: what was once called the Genteel Tradition gave way in the first decades of the century to a criticism grounded in 'reality' and politics (associated with Vernon Parrington, Granville Hicks, Edmund Wilson, V.F. Calverton and Van Wyck Brooks), which in turn gave way to the American Romance paradigm of Richard Chase and the Myth and Symbol School critics (e.g. Leslie Fiedler, Daniel Hoffman, Kenneth Burke, Stanley Hyman, Joseph Campbell, R.W.B. Lewis and Henry Nash Smith). This second transition is what concerns us here. As late as 1948, an edition of the *Literary History of the United States* was asserting that American literature was 'mainly an optimistic literature, made virile by the criticism of the actual in comparison with the ideal' (quoted in Van O'Connor, 1960 [1954]: 50). This phrase deftly joins a code word for realism ('the actual') with a vague

allusion to social progress ('the ideal') and masculinizes its potentially sentimental 'optimism' with a clear assertion of its manliness ('virility'). Here is the Parrington school of criticism in a nutshell: realism, politics, manly hard-headedness and the essentially democratic nature of American literature.

In his 1954 essay, 'Traditions in American Literature', American literary critic William Van O'Connor takes issue with the editors of the 1948 edition of the *Literary History*. He argues that while the editors of the *Literary History* may 'desire a literature in the service of democracy', most literature, 'however, is written out of the author's vision of the nature of things' (Van O'Connor, 1960 [1954]: 50). For Van O'Connor, the 'nature of things' that most, if not all, American writers have depicted is evil and terrifying rather than optimistic and progressive. This is the 'version of the world' depicted by Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren, according to Van O'Connor. Two things are interesting about Van O'Connor's argument: one is that he posits a 'continuity' (a 'tradition' no less!) of American literature concerned with 'worlds of terror or horror', defined as Gothic 'in something like direct descent from Mrs. Radcliffe and Charles Brockden Brown', yet, for the reasons I suggested earlier, he calls it 'Grotesque' instead of Gothic (Van O'Connor, 1960 [1954]: 54).³ The other interesting thing about Van O'Connor's argument is that it casts the Gothic (or, as he calls it, the Grotesque) on the side of realism or reality ('the nature of things') and opposes it to the tendentious wishful thinking of the editors of the 1948 edition of the *Literary History*, whom he aligns with the sentimentalism and 'cult of innocence' of the Genteel Tradition. This casting of the Gothic on the side of 'truth' rather than national myth reveals how much cachet 'things as they are' still possessed at the precise moment when American literature was being redefined as non-realistic. In fact, the movement toward the 'Romance Thesis' was not initially defined against realism, but as a critical gesture towards a more sophisticated kind of realism.

Lionel Trilling's essay 'Reality in America' (1960 [1950]) provides an instructive example of this point. In his 1940 essay, Trilling attacks Vernon Parrington for his view of 'reality' in the *Main Currents of American Thought* (1927-30), which Trilling excoriates as simplistic, positivistic and naïve. In contrast, Trilling conceives of reality as complex, subjective and highly mediated by culture, which he defines as 'struggle, or at least debate' (1960 [1940]: 49). Accordingly, Trilling claims that an 'unusually large proportion of its notable writers of the nineteenth century . . . contained both the yes and the no of their culture' (p. 49). While this is clearly not the unqualified 'yes' of the 1948 *Literary History*, it is not exactly the 'No! in thunder' that Leslie Fiedler (invoking Melville) attributes to American fiction in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960: 502).

What is interesting here also is that Trilling, like Van O'Connor, sees novelists like Hawthorne and Melville reflecting the true 'dialectic' of

their times, and thus aligned more on the side of a true 'reality' than on the side of fantasy and imagination. For example, Trilling takes Parrington's claim that Hawthorne was 'forever dealing with shadows' (meaning intangible and therefore insubstantial ideas) and deliberately inverts its meaning by saying that a world without 'shadows' would not be a 'real' world, and therefore Hawthorne was 'dealing beautifully with realities, with substantial things' (Trilling, 1960 [1940]: 49). Here the word 'shadows' undergoes a semantic shift from its original sense of 'ephemeral' and 'intangible' (Parrington's use of it to indicate Hawthorne's psychological and philosophical fiction) to being a vague metaphor for evil (Trilling's use of it). In this way, Trilling's deliberate misreading of Parrington makes the latter seem naïve while his own apperception of the moral complexity of the world comes across as lucid and mature.

Trilling's essay itself does much to invest the word 'romance' with a strongly positive charge. Though he initially mocks Parrington's use of the word 'romance' for being too vague and indiscriminate, Trilling eventually claims to discern a pattern in it: describing something potentially good or noble but unrealistic or impossible (e.g. utopianism, sentimentalism, the fear of change, the love of innovation, ebullience, idealism, etc.). Trilling concludes that Parrington uses the term to describe any idea or writer that he disagrees with but to whom he concedes a measure of respect or admiration. In the course of his essay, the ambivalence that Trilling sees in Parrington's use of 'romance' eventually transfers to the word itself, but with a highly positive valence. 'Romance' becomes a vague signifier for ambivalence itself, thereby assuming a synecdochal relationship to the complexity of 'reality' and literature. In short, one could say that all the elements of the so-called Romance Thesis were in place already with Trilling, but Chase would bring them together with a manifesto-like forcefulness that Trilling's quarrel with Parrington and Van O'Connors quarrel with Spiller's *Literary History* lacked.

Before I discuss Richard Chase's influential essay, 'The Broken Circuit', I would like to point out that throughout the 1950s critics used the word 'gothic' with a small 'g' to describe the Gothic strains in American literature but did not use the term 'American Gothic'. For example, R.P. Blackmur wrote in 1955 (in *The Lion and the Honeycomb*) that the 'spirit of the gothic novel ran frothily through the popular literature of the first half of the nineteenth century' and that Melville used these Gothic 'conventions of language' in an effort to make *Moby Dick* and *Pierre* more 'popular' and accessible (Blackmur, 1960 [1955]: 112). This argument will startle those of us who have been taught to think of the Gothic as that part of Melville that is 'resistant' and that says 'no' to his culture (and in 1851 caused the commercial failure of the novel). But the fact that we like to think this is part of the legacy of the Romance Thesis. It is important to note also that Blackmur attributes the Gothicism of these two novels (one of which he thinks 'worked' while the other did not) not to their

subject matter or philosophical or epistemological orientation, but to their 'gothic conventions of language', defined as archaisms, inflated rhetoric and excess. In a word, the Gothic for Blackmur is nothing more than a matter of *style*, a highly artificial style, and a set of 'conventions'. The important point here for us is that the Gothic is defined as some kind of 'machinery' (a common term among critics of this time discussing the Gothic) or a set of devices, something purely technical or artificial. It is therefore essentially superficial, as the term 'frothily' reinforces. These assumptions about the Gothic are important to keep in mind when we reflect on how the term 'Romance' came to carry so many of the original meanings of the Gothic but was viewed as organic and natural to the literature and culture from which it emerged, whereas the 'Gothic' continued to have a more limited meaning in American literary criticism (connoting at times foreignness, or psychosexual issues, or the generically conventional).

Richard Chase is widely considered the father of the Romance Thesis. In 'The Broken Circuit' (originally appearing in *The Anchor Review* in 1957 and then published as the first chapter of *The American Novel and its Tradition* in 1959), Chase takes up the idea of 'traditions' already discussed by Van O'Connor (explicitly in reaction to F.R. Leavis' influential 1948 study of Anglo-English fiction, *The Great Tradition*). While Van O'Connor posits merely one tradition of 'Grotesque' or Gothic literature in America, Chase's claim is bolder: the 'best and the most characteristic American fiction . . . has been shaped by the contradictions and not by the unities and harmonies of our culture' (Chase, 1960 [1957]: 270). We can hear an echo of Trilling's culture of 'conflict', as well as Trilling's assumption that the contradictions of the novels reflect the contradictions of the culture. In short, Chase claimed the texts he was canonizing were both 'romances' and, in a certain sense, 'realistic' depictions of something unique to American culture. He initially locates this 'romance' element of American fiction in quintessentially historical causes: the American's 'dual allegiance' to the Old World and New World, his solitude vis-à-vis the state and mankind in general, and finally, to the 'special character of New England Puritanism', which is Manichean and melodramatic in its conception of the eternal struggle between Good and Evil (Chase, 1960 [1957]: 270-1). These historical claims, once made, remain undeveloped and have virtually no concrete influence on Chase's argument besides allowing him to appropriate the 'romance' as a uniquely American genre rooted in these culturally exceptional circumstances. Thus, the English novel is notable for its 'great practical sanity' (whatever that means) while the American novel is a fiction of extremes from which the middle is missing (p. 271). Chase's great genius in this essay was to make the definition of the romance appear uniquely American while being inclusive enough to accommodate virtually any novel he wished to consider. Thus, the romance does 'not plant itself solidly . . . in the midst of the actual', but neither does it 'escape into the purely imaginary' (p. 275). It needs to

belong to a specific time and place, but can be more 'generic or archetypal' than the novel (p. 270). Finally, romance becomes more subjective, as the point of view needs to be specific and limited by the character who bears it (p. 276), but romance is also basically plot-oriented and action-filled.

It is important to note that, although he discusses Charles Brockden Brown, Hawthorne and Melville, Chase systematically avoids the word 'Gothic'. Nevertheless, his critical vocabulary derives from Gothic criticism: 'alienation, contradiction, and disorder', 'mystery and bewilderment', and 'disconnected and uncontrolled experience', etc. (Chase, 1960 [1957]: 272, 276, and 278). Defining the American romance's 'special virtues' as Melville's 'blackness of darkness', a 'radical skepticism about ultimate questions' and a 'certain rapidity, irony, and abstraction', Chase modulates the term 'romance' toward the darker end of the spectrum so that it becomes synonymous with the Gothic (p. 279).

This so-called 'Romance Thesis' has been the subject of much revisionary criticism in recent decades. For example, according to John McWilliams, the influence and institutionalization of Chase's argument had little to do with its historical or literary accuracy. Instead, it was welcomed wholeheartedly by a generation of Americanists who were able to shore up their disciplinary prestige and funding by pointing to the 'Romance Thesis' as a rationale for separate American Studies departments (McWilliams, 1994: 73). The 'Romance Thesis' was conveniently vague, or as McWilliams puts it, 'admirably capacious', and this very looseness made it an effective umbrella term for critical studies of otherwise diverse theoretical approaches. For example, Harry Levin's *Power of Blackness* (1958), Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), Richard Poirier's *A World Elsewhere* (1966), Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* (1979) and John Irwin's *Lacanian American Hieroglyphics* (1980) have little in common except for a vague commitment to 'romance' over 'realism' as the defining term for American fiction. It also proved conveniently complementary to the New Critical interest in imagery and in textual rather than contextual analysis. Finally, the Romance Thesis has been critiqued recently on ideological grounds by critics such as Russel Reising (1986), who see it as part of the post-war liberal effort to depoliticize literature and its study, removing it to the safer territory of so-called universal truths, myths, symbols and psychological insights. The actual picture may be a little more complex. As I mentioned before, critics like Trilling and Chase were reacting to what they saw as a partisan and aesthetically simplistic critical regime. Their emphasis on the 'darker' and less 'realistic' aspects of American literature was done in the name of a higher kind of cultural 'realism', one which granted both literature and its critic a vaguely oppositional role. On the other hand, one of the concrete consequences of the Romance Thesis was a radical narrowing of the range of writers and texts to be read, so in this sense the charge of cultural conservatism appears justified.

It is also worth pointing out that while the Romance Thesis arose partly out of a desire to acknowledge the 'darker' aspects of American cultural history, it became synonymous with a denial of American history as a factor in American literature. This is related to the psychosexual turn in American criticism in the 1960s, where the cultural and historical dimensions of American literature were often overlooked in favor of psychological analyses of characters and authors. For example, Harry Levin's *Power of Blackness* (1960 [1958]) might be regarded as a forerunner of the current critical representations of the American Gothic, but to do so would be a mistake. Although Levin sees American literature as the antithesis of the American 'thesis' of a 'practical and prosperous culture', he calls the writers he discusses 'visionaries' rather than 'materialists', and 'symbolists' rather than 'realists', displacing their dark vision from American history to the underworld of the American psyche (Levin, 1960 [1958]: 35). In Levin's hands, the term 'blackness' becomes a master trope for a literature of powerful symbolic images, such as the 'skeleton in the closet' or the 'camera obscura'. Each image functions as a kind of archetype, reinforcing Levin's argument that the 'black' tradition he is describing should be regarded as cultural 'fabulations' or collective 'fantasies'. In this way, Levin's argument departs radically from Chase's claim that romance is defined by its preference for action and plot. Instead, Levin's focus on the 'darker musings' of American writers fixes the main interest of this literature in psychological terms far removed from history.

Of the early 'Romance Thesis' critics, Leslie Fiedler and Irving Malin were unique in using the term 'American Gothic', but their work should also be distinguished from the contemporary use of the term 'American Gothic'. In Malin's title, *New American Gothic* (1962), and in Fiedler's chapter title, 'Charles Brockden Brown and the Invention of the American Gothic', the word 'American' remains a simple adjective modifying the word 'Gothic', and the two terms are not fundamentally linked. In both cases, the texts they examine represent simply an American variant of the British Gothic. Both also fundamentally depart from Chase's definition of the romance. For example, as I mentioned before, Chase claims that action is far more important than character. In his view, the romance is melodramatic and plot-driven, and while the protagonists may be 'morbidly special cases' (as Chase quotes from Henry James' description of what a protagonist should *not* be), they will nevertheless be two-dimensional and tending toward abstraction.

In contrast, both Malin and Fiedler focus mainly on character and psychosexual criticism. Fiedler's argument in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) is that at the core of American literature is the homoerotic relationship between a white male and a dark (African-American, Native American or other ethnic) male partner, a relationship that represents for Fiedler a privileging of death and terror over love in American fiction. Irving Malin is even more homophobic in *New American Gothic* (1962), and focuses on the psychoanalytic notion of

'narcissism', using it as a common denominator in the 'school' of post-war writers he identifies as 'New Gothic'. Like Levin, Malin sees the American Gothic as more concerned with image than plot and describes it as a 'poetry of disorder' (quoting from Chase, 1960 [1957]: 13). What is at stake for Malin in the term 'Gothic' is an emphasis on what he calls 'the buried life' – that is, the inner workings of the mind. But not just any mind. For Malin, the Gothic is an exploration of the distorted subjectivity of 'cripples and homosexuals' and other 'weaklings' and 'grotesques' (Malin, 1962: 5–6). Excessive self-love is the deformity that unites all the 'freaks' populating Malin's New Gothic.

Malin's is the first book-length study using the term 'American Gothic', and as such, it epitomizes a tendency in the 1960s toward psychological, and specifically psychoanalytic, interpretations of Gothic fiction. Malin undoubtedly chose the term 'Gothic' because there existed already a psychoanalytic connotation created by earlier generations of critics (Edmund Wilson, André Breton) who had written about the 18th-century British Gothic novel in psychoanalytically-inflected terms. What is important to notice here is that the Gothic at this point is associated overwhelmingly with psychological issues such as repression, the unconscious and immaturity – and not at all with history. In fact, Malin explicitly attributes to the Gothic the 'belief' that the 'psyche' is more 'important' than society (Malin, 1962: 5). Most critics of this period actually use the concepts of 'Gothic' and 'history' as inversely related and antithetical terms. This is notable because it is easily forgotten in our contemporary re-evaluation of the Gothic as a subversive, historical and ideologically-charged genre. As critics' theoretical interests have shifted from psychology to ideology, the perceived function of the Gothic has shifted from being a repository of psychic disorders to a repository of ideological conflicts. Two critical movements are crucial to this shift: the 'Female Gothic', and what could be called the 'historical turn' of the 1980s.

By Female Gothic, I refer to the many critical studies of the 1970s and 1980s which focused on the role of women in the Gothic: Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Juliann Fleenor's *The Female Gothic* (1983), and Kate Ferguson Ellis' *The Contested Castle* (1989). All focused mainly on British fiction and specifically on the female characters in Gothic fiction written mainly by women. Most of these studies applied a mixture of sociopolitical with psychosexual criticism, and most viewed the Gothic as a genre that registers, reveals and often resists the systemic silencing and oppression of women. Indirectly, this criticism set the terms for the current use of the American Gothic, insofar as it attributed to Gothic literature a complex ideological engagement and interdependence with the injustices faced historically by women.

An equally important trend for the current understanding of the American Gothic was the rediscovery of history in the 1980s through the parallel development of New Historicism and Cultural Studies. In 1981,

Fredric Jameson called on critics to 'historicize' (1981: 9). And, for the most part, they did. By 1986, J. Hillis Miller could lament in his Presidential Address to the MLA that

literary study in the past few years has undergone a sudden, almost universal turn away from theory in the sense of an orientation toward language as such and has made a corresponding turn toward history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base. (Montrose, 1992: 395)

It is no coincidence that 1986 was also a watershed year for studies of the new 'historical' American Gothic. Studies such as Lawrence Buell's *New England Literary Culture* (1986) and Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word* (1986) began to describe the way American Gothic literature engaged with American political and social history. For example, Davidson argued that the early American Gothic 'emphasized the class divisions within American society while questioning the advent of liberalism, with its ideology of a classless society' (Davidson, 1986: ix). For Davidson, the Gothic represents a coherent ideological intervention in early American cultural politics, namely a 'double warning' against the possible excesses of both aristocracy and 'mobocracy'. Two years later, Louis Gross was able to write in *Redefining the American Gothic* (1988: 8) that American Gothic literature represented no less than 'an alternative history of the American experience', often written by and about marginalized groups such as women, gays, and blacks.

What I would like to underscore here is that the American Gothic has not only become a tool for reading the presence of history in American literature, but has come in some sense to figure that history itself because of the way we have come to think of the American historical past in terms of its Gothic characteristics: repressed crimes, institutional and individual injustice, political and religious fanaticism, physical and psychological torture, confinement and terrorization of marginalized populations, etc. In particular, the historical experience of African-Americans has captured the attention of American literary critics in recent decades, and it is not surprising that the latest editions of literary histories tend to be dominated by African-American and ethnic/minority texts and issues. It is also no coincidence that American Gothic criticism has followed this trend. Inaugurated by Toni Morrison's chapters on the Gothic features of early American literature in *Playing in the Dark* (1992), most recent book-length studies of the Gothic focus on its role in representing and engaging with racially-marked experience in American literature. For example, in *Gothic America* (1997), Theresa Goddu asserts that 'the American gothic is haunted by race', and uses texts by Edgar Allan Poe, John Neal and Harriet Jacobs, among others, to show how the American Gothic is permeated by racial issues. Similarly, Justin Edwards's *Gothic Passages* (2003) focuses on race and regards the American Gothic as distinct from the British precisely because of its

rootedness in a specifically American type of racism related to the institution of slavery.

To conclude, the American Gothic as a critical category has followed the main vectors of American Studies and literary criticism since its inception. This does not diminish its value, but, on the contrary, makes it a revealing example of the pressures influencing critical categories in the humanities in general.

Notes

- 1 Wood specified in a letter in 1941 that the 'prim lady' at the farmer's side is his 'grown-up daughter' (http://www.campsilos.org/mod2/students/wood_letter.htm).
- 2 This letter can be found at the following site: http://www.campsilos.org/mod2/students/wood_letter.htm.
- 3 Although this quotation is taken from Van O'Connor's discussion of Nathaniel Hawthorne, it is representative of the way he describes each of the authors he mentions as using 'Gothic form' (Faulkner) or writing 'tales of Gothic horror' (Brown), etc. The word 'Gothic' appears in each individual discussion, which is why the use of 'Grotesque' to describe them collectively appears all the more striking.

References

- Blackmur, R.P. (1960 [1955]) *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, excerpted in Lewis Leary (ed.) *American Literary Essays*, pp. 102–15. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- Buell, Lawrence (1986) *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chase, Richard (1959) *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. Garden City.
- Chase, Richard (1960 [1957]) 'The Broken Circuit: Romance and the American Novel', in Lewis Leary (ed.) *American Literary Essays*, pp. 270–9. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- Davidson, Cathy (1986) *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Edwards, Justin (2003) *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Ellis, Kate Ferguson (1989) *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Fiedler, Leslie (1960) *Love and Death in the American Novel*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Fleenor, Juliann E. (1983) *The Female Gothic*. Montreal: Eden Press.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan (1979) *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Goddu, Theresa A. (1997) *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gross, Louis S. (1988) *Redefining the American Gothic: From Wieland to Day of the Dead*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press.
- Irwin, John (1980) *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian*

- Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Leavis, F.R. (1948) *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Levin, Harry (1960) *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Malin, Irving (1962) *New American Gothic*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- McWilliams, John (1994) 'The Rationale for the American Romance', in Donald Pease (ed.) *Revisionary Interventions into the American Canon*, pp. 71–82. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Montrose, Louis (1992) 'New Historicisms', in Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (eds) *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, pp. 392–418. New York: MLA.
- Morrison, Toni (1992) *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Parrington, Vernon Louis (1954) *Main Currents of American Thought*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Poirier, Richard (1966) *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reising, Russel (1986) *The Unusable Past: The Theory and the Study of American Literature*. New York and London: Methuen.
- Slotkin, Richard (1973) *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Spiller, Robert E. and Willard Thorp et al., eds (1948) *Literary History of the United States*. New York and London: Macmillan.
- Trilling, Lionel (1960) 'Reality in America', reprinted in Lewis Leary (ed.) *American Literary Essays*, pp. 45–50. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.
- Van O'Connor, William (1960 [1954]) 'Traditions in American Literature' [*London Times Literary Supplement*, 17 Sept. 1954], reprinted in Lewis Leary (ed.) *American Literary Essays*, pp. 50–7. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.

Agnieszka M. Soltysik is *Maître-Assistante* of American Literature at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She is the author of *American Gothic: Its Uses and Effects from the Revolution to the Cold War* (forthcoming, University of Iowa Press) and is currently working on a project linking queer theory and the ethical turn in literary criticism. Address: L'Université de Genève, Faculté des Lettres, Département de langue et littérature anglaises, CH-1211 Genève 4, Switzerland. [email: agnieszka.soltysik@lettres.unige.ch]