

Unit 6

GOTHIC UNDERCURRENTS

Ambiguity and Anxiety in the Nineteenth Century

Authors and Works

Featured in the Video:

Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown” and “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (short stories)
Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (essay) and *Moby-Dick* (novel)
Emily Dickinson, poems #258 [There’s a certain Slant of light], #315 [He fumbles at your Soul], #465 [I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—], and #1129 [Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—]

Discussed in This Unit:

Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* (novel)
Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (short stories)
William Gilmore Simms, “The Edge of the Swamp” (poem) and *The Forayers* (novel)
Edgar Allan Poe, “Ligeia” (short story)
Henry Ward Beecher, “The Strange Woman” (sermon)
Ambrose Bierce, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” (short story)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-paper” (short story)

Overview Questions

■ Gothic undercurrents writing tends to question and analyze rather than offer helpful answers. How do these texts critique the common nineteenth-century assumption that America stands as the unique moral and social guiding light for the world (that it is, as John Winthrop said in 1630, “a City on a Hill”)?

■ If the gothic explores what we might call the “dark side” of American life, what cultural fears and anxieties do we find expressed here? How does the

form of this literature (especially narrative voice and point of view) help convey these anxieties?

■ Gothic writers addressed key nineteenth-century cultural trends such as westward expansion, technological and scientific progress, romantic individualism, the cult of true womanhood, and the debate over slavery and abolition. How can you see some of these trends reflected in the texts of this unit?

■ Who are the inheritors of the gothic mode today? Do they share similar concerns with these writers or are their concerns new to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

■ How do these writers explore and critique the ideas of self-reliance, free will, and the self-made man that you saw expressed by Franklin and Emerson in Unit 4?

Learning Objectives

After students have viewed the video, read the headnotes and literary selections in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, and explored related archival materials on the *American Passages* Web site, they should be able to

1. define what “gothic” means;
2. understand which American hopes, fears, and anxieties are explored and critiqued by writers in the gothic mode;
3. recognize the centrality of gothic literature to nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature and culture;
4. evaluate the generally skeptical, pessimistic, or critical positions adopted by gothic writers;
5. discuss the role of gender and race in shaping the forms and themes of the Gothic undercurrents tradition.

Instructor Overview

Americans saw many reasons to be optimistic in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Philosophically, much of the nation had abandoned the bleak, deterministic theology of Calvin and had embraced either the Enlightenment faith in the power of human reason or a more gentle Protestant faith in a generous and forgiving God, or both. The election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 proved that a self-made man could rise from humble origins to the presidency. Requirements that voters own land were being relaxed or eliminated, so that democracy became a more achievable ideal. Spurred by a widespread belief in “Manifest Destiny,” the young nation was expanding rapidly, growing well into the Midwest and eventually reaching the Pacific Ocean by the 1840s, gathering momentum and resources along the way. Industry became a powerful economic force, and cities began to bulge with immigrants eager for work. Reform and improvement (of daily life and labor by technology, and of social conditions by progressive activists) were spreading. And in the world of letters, writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were arguing that Americans were in a perfect situation to cast off the fetters of European prejudice and habit and create a culture full of self-determined, empowered, and enlightened beings.

But if this picture represents one truth about nineteenth-century America, there are others as well. Almost 15 percent of the population was legally considered property (there were about 900,000 slaves in 1800 and about 3,200,000 by 1850). Only white, male property owners could vote. Women were largely confined to the home and certainly not expected to rise to positions of social authority. Native Americans were losing most of the power—and virtually all of the land—that they once held. How could all of these conditions exist, many asked, in the world’s one modern nation created with the explicit purpose of establishing freedom and equality for all? In addition, rapid change was causing anxiety about the future: Where was America heading? How could it both grow exponentially and retain its unity and coherence? What if it lost its agricultural self-reliance and became beholden to the whims of European trade? Were the millions of immigrants good for the country, or did they bring dangerous and contagious influences? What were

the human costs of city life and urban labor conditions? Was the Mexican War justified, or was it only a base attempt to grab more land and resources for European Americans?

It is this spirit of anxiety, fear, and even despair that writers in the gothic mode tap into. The three writers treated in the video, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson, as well as the others represented in this unit, explore the “dark side” of nineteenth-century America. Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Ward Beecher, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ambrose Bierce, and William Gilmore Simms, among others, ask probing questions of their nation, challenging its tendency toward blind faith and unrelenting optimism. Although these authors do at times write in styles that are not easily called “gothic,” they illuminate their mutual concerns when they compose in the gothic mode. For the purposes of this unit, it will be useful to think of gothic literature as that which plunges its characters into mystery, torment, and fear in order to pose disturbing questions to our familiar and comfortable ideas of humanity, society, and the cosmos.

Sometimes these questions are asked in explicitly socio-political forms: for example, Gilman portrays a woman so oppressed by the patriarchal assumptions of her husband that she is driven insane; and Hawthorne rejects the promise that science will ameliorate the human condition when he tells the story of one researcher’s obsessive and destructive botanical experiment on his daughter. But at least as often, these writers unveil their dark prophecies only by indirect glimpses—in the words of Dickinson, they “tell it slant.” Sometimes by couching their insights in allegories, sometimes by focusing on the uncertainties and contradictions of the psyche, and often by combining allegory with psychological investigation, gothic writers often challenge America’s optimism only by implication, forcing the reader to come to his or her own ethical conclusions. Thus, Melville’s *Pequod* becomes not only a whaling vessel but also the American ship of state as a fractious and multicultural crew is led to a terrifying fate by a dangerous and potentially insane demagogue. Similarly, Hawthorne’s Young Goodman Brown is both a tormented seventeenth-century Puritan and a representative of America’s heritage of religious intolerance and self-righteousness. Charles Brockden Brown and Poe offer us charac-

ters who may be encountering the supernatural or may only be experiencing the projections of their own worst selves, their most base and uncontrollable prejudices and desires. In Dickinson's poems, a speaking subjectivity wonders how many of its sensations it can trust, and whether there is any comfort to be found beyond the visible world. It is best, then, not to look for direct political pamphleteering in these writers—no polemics against slavery or imperialism here. Rather, we see the cheery political *assumptions* of the nineteenth century challenged by the *staging* of characters and situations that seem impossible or out of place in an America of autonomy, optimism, and freedom. Finally, these writers urge us to ask: What is an American? What are our ideals, and to what extent does it seem within our power to realize them? What power, if any, rules us? How much are we in control of ourselves? How well do we even know ourselves? To what extent can we ever be sure of anything?

"Gothic Undercurrents" contextualizes these questions in terms of five nineteenth-century cultural trends: (1) the image of the swamp; (2) interest in the occult; (3) the image of America as a "ship of state"; (4) abuse of reason and science; (5) the sentimentalization of death. Other *American Passages* units that bear comparison to this include Unit 3, "Utopian Promise," and Unit 4, "The Spirit of Nationalism," which lay out the forward-looking ideals established by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Unit 7, "Slavery and Freedom," which explores the explicitly political literature of the most serious challenge to American ideals in the country's history; Unit 13, "Southern Renaissance," which shows how much of twentieth-century southern writing follows in the gothic tradition; and Unit 16, "The Search for Identity," which emphasizes literature that stages the fractures and contradictions of our own time.

Student Overview

"Gothic Undercurrents" explores the "dark sides" of nineteenth-century American culture and identity. In a time of hope characterized by a widespread belief in America's **Manifest Destiny**, the rise of industry, increasing political freedom, and social reform movements, writers in the gothic mode speculate on the costs and dangers of the country's unbridled optimism. Sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, they draw upon and explore the social anxieties of their time: the evils and threats of slavery, the cultural dominance of white men, the immigration of diverse and often mistrusted people, the possibility that Americans are fundamentally incapable of manifesting, in Abraham Lincoln's words, "the better angels of our nature"—indeed, the possibility that such angels are our own wishful delusions.

As you will see in the video, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson, along with other writers of the **American Renaissance**, counter what they fear is America's smug, self-confident certainty not with conflicting certainties, but with potentially unanswerable questions. What is human nature? How much does selfish or uncontrollable desire, as opposed to altruistic or reasonable objectivity, motivate us? To what extent can America break from its European heritage of social caste and superstitious belief? What can Americans do about the massive contradictions involved in a country that was founded in the name of freedom and equality but sanctions the owning of black Americans, the dislocation of Native Americans, and the disenfranchisement of all but white male Americans?

In stories of obsessive or tormented characters who find their most basic assumptions about the world turned upside-down, these writers challenge their readers to question their own values and beliefs through exploring the ever-evolving character of American identity.

Video Overview

- **Authors covered:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson
- **Who's interviewed:** Karen Halttunen, professor of history (University of California, Davis); Priscilla Wald, associate professor of English (Duke University); Emory Elliott, professor of English (University of California, Riverside); Nina Baym, general editor, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, and professor of English (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign); Robert Stone, author, poet, and professor of English (Yale University)
- **Points covered:**
 - The gothic explores the dark or uncertain sides of human nature.
 - Rapid social changes in the nineteenth century cause anxiety in America, nurturing a gothic sensibility in literature.
 - Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" and "Rappaccini's Daughter": "Goodman" as working through the painful inheritance of rigid Puritan faith; "Rappaccini" as expressing anxiety about both science and the oppression of women.
 - Melville's "Hawthorne and His Mosses" and *Moby-Dick*: Melville's laudatory review of a book by Hawthorne shows their similar interest in the dark truths of humanity; Melville's adventurous life; the white whale as a symbol of ambiguity and uncertainty, and the ship as a microcosm of mid-nineteenth-century society; Ahab's hunt as a rage against God.

- Dickinson's poetry: Dickinson composes the terror of ordinary life; her Melville-like insistence that, because it is dangerous, the "truth" must be revealed only carefully and by glimpses; her use of the dash and popular verse; brief discussions of three poems.

PREVIEW

- **Preview the video:** Alongside the optimism of writers like Emerson, the nineteenth century produced a body of writing meant to question Americans' essential goodness. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson wrote narratives and poems in which they asked difficult questions about God, truth, and humanity. They rarely provided hopeful answers.
- **What to think about while watching:** How do these writers expect their work to be received by the reader? How do they express the social and personal anxieties of their time? What assumptions or beliefs do they challenge? Why do they remain compelling today? What do they hope to achieve through their writing?
- **Tying the video to the unit content:** These writers are only three of the most important practitioners of the gothic mode in the nineteenth century. Many others also explored the disturbing or repressed aspects of American life, asking questions like: What are we afraid of? What is the worst we are capable of? What do we have a right to believe in? To what extent can our will and reason evade the lures of habit, prejudice, ignorance, and desire?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE VIDEO

	<i>What is an American? How does American literature create conceptions of the American experience and identity?</i>	<i>What is American literature? What are its distinctive voices and styles? How do social and political issues influence the American canon?</i>	<i>What characteristics of a literary work have made it influential over time?</i>
Compre- hension Questions	How did America's Puritan heritage influence Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"? Describe Rappaccini's scientific experiment with his daughter. In what sense is the <i>Pequod</i> a microcosm of American society?	How is gothic literature different from other kinds of writing that are contemporaneous with it? What were some nineteenth-century social conditions that contributed to the critical outlook of gothic literature? Why is the dash important in Dickinson's poems?	What happens to Young Goodman Brown in the forest? Describe Ahab's quest: what is he looking for, and why? What themes or topics does Dickinson tend to write about?
Context Questions	How did the Civil War and the tensions that precipitated it influence these three writers?	In what sense are these texts "pessimistic" compared to others of the nineteenth century?	Many of the gothic's concerns apply as well to the twenty-first century as to the nineteenth. What do these writers have to say about human nature and the human mind?
Exploration Questions	What do you think constitutes "an American"? Do these writers support or challenge your views about America?	All three of these writers are now considered "canonical," or essential for a complete understanding of American literary history, and many would call <i>Moby-Dick</i> the most important American novel ever. Melville's book was widely condemned during his lifetime, however, and only found broad appreciation by readers in the twentieth century. Why do you imagine so many people rejected it in the nineteenth century? How can a literary work be considered worthless at one time and great at another? Do you think <i>Moby-Dick</i> is a great novel? Why or why not?	Why wallow in the swampy regions of human nature? Are these works merely depressing, or do they have any positive or useful effects?

TIMELINE

	Texts	Contexts
1790s	Charles Brockden Brown, <i>Wieland</i> (1798)	
1800s		United States purchases Louisiana Territory from France (1803) Foreign slave trade outlawed (1808)
1810s	Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle” (1819)	Second war against England (1812–14)
1820s	Washington Irving, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820)	Second Great Awakening, a Christian revivalist movement, spreads across the country (1820s–30s) Monroe Doctrine warns European powers against future colonization in the Americas (1823) First U.S. railroad (1827) Andrew Jackson is president; the “Jacksonian impulse” urges westward expansion among whites (1829–37)
1830s	Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown” (1835) Edgar Allan Poe, “Ligeia” (1838)	Economic depression results in joblessness for one-third of labor force (1837)
1840s	Henry Ward Beecher, “The Strange Woman” (1843) Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844)	Samuel Morse invents telegraph (1844) United States annexes Texas (1845) Mexican War; Southwest is ceded to the United States (1846–48) California Gold Rush (1848–49)
1850s	Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850), <i>Moby-Dick</i> (1851)	Fugitive Slave Act requires free states to return escaped slaves to slaveholders (1850) Dred Scott decision denies citizenship to African Americans (1857)
1860s	Emily Dickinson, 258 [There’s a certain Slant of light] (1861), 315 [He fumbles at your Soul], 465 [I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—] (1862), 1129 [Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—] (1868)	Civil War (1861–65) First transcontinental railroad (1869)
1870s		Thomas Edison invents electric lightbulb (1879)
1890s	Ambrose Bierce, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” (1890) Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-paper” (1892)	Wounded Knee ends Native American armed resistance to U.S. government (1890)

AUTHOR/TEXT REVIEW

Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810)

Born in Philadelphia to wealthy Quaker parents, Charles Brockden Brown was initially pressured by his family to study law. However, he had no real interest in the profession and would write in the evenings while studying law by day. After he finally admitted to his parents that he felt unable to appear before the bar, he began his writing career in earnest. Brown felt guilty for disappointing his family, but was rewarded with positive responses to his writing from Philadelphia literary circles.

Moving to New York in 1798 (and contracting and surviving yellow fever, an event which later found its way into his writing), Brown cultivated friends who were engaged in the fine arts and read widely. He was prolific in the following years, publishing the novels *Wieland* (1798), *Ormond* (1799), *Edgar Huntly* (1799), and the first part of *Arthur Mervyn* (1799). Supplementing these projects with work in journalism, Brown founded three different periodicals and became increasingly interested in politics and history.

Brown's **gothic** romances, which delve into the uncertainties and contradictions of human nature, were among the first important novels published in the United States. Fascinated by states of altered consciousness, such as sleepwalking and religious enthusiasm, he influenced the later psychic excavations of Edgar Allan Poe. He died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-nine.

TEACHING TIP

■ Allow a free-ranging discussion of the metaphorical resonance of “hearing voices.” You might begin by asking your students if any of them believe in ghosts and then expand the question to have them reflect on the idea of “ghosts” as one that stands for anything that haunts us (our past, our conscience, our conflicting values).

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: In Chapter IX of *Wieland*, we are privy to the complexities and subtleties of the thoughts of the narrator, Clara. How would you describe her state of mind?

Context: In what sense is Clara, as she says, “tormented by phantoms of [her] own creation”? How might Clara's words be applied to the interaction of spiritualism and gender described in the Core Context “The Spirit Is Willing: The Occult and Women in the Nineteenth Century”?

Exploration: How might the image of pausing at a closed door, debating whether or not to open it for fear of what might reveal itself, invite allegorical interpretations? Can you think of an experience in which a dilemma between knowledge and comfort presented itself? That is, are there ever times in real life when *not* knowing the truth seems preferable to knowing it?



[7265] Anonymous, Charles Brockden Brown (c. 1925), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-124378].

BROWN WEB ARCHIVE

[7053] A. J. Dewey, *There's a Charm about the Old Love Still* (1901), courtesy of Duke University and the Library of Congress. Sheet-music illustration of a man and woman using a Ouija board. The nineteenth century witnessed a growing interest in spiritualism and the occult.

[7265] Anonymous, Charles Brockden Brown (1900–1950), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-124378]. Portrait of Brown, whose novel *Wieland* is a precursor to the psychological novels of the Victorian era.

[8645] Emory Elliott, Interview: “The Gothic in Literature” (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Emory Elliott, professor of English at University of California, Riverside, discusses the gothic in nineteenth-century American literature.

[9007] Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland; or, The Transformation, an American Tale* (1799), courtesy of Project Gutenberg. *Wieland*, along with Brown's other novels *Edgar Huntly* and *Arthur Mervyn*, helped bring the gothic style to American literature.



[7243] Currier & Ives, *Washington's Head-Quarters 1780: At Newburgh, on the Hudson* (1856), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC2-3161].

IRVING WEB ARCHIVE

[3108] John Plumbe, *Washington Irving* [Half-length portrait, three-quarters to the left] (1855), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-110044 DLC]. Daguerreotype portrait of popular American author Irving. Best known for stories in his *Sketch Book* (1819–20), namely “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” Irving is recognized as America’s first professional writer.

[3694] Thomas Cole, *The Falls of the Kaaterskill* (1826), courtesy of the Warner Collection of the Gulf States Paper Corporation. Cole was one of the first American landscape artists and a founder of the Hudson River School of painting. Romantic depictions of wilderness became popular as the United States expanded westward.

[5932] Thomas Doughty, *In the Catskills* (1835), courtesy of Reynolda House, Museum of American Art. Landscape painting of river and boulders framed by trees in the foreground. A member of the Hudson River School, Doughty painted the vast American landscapes that writers such as Washington Irving described in their novels.

Washington Irving (1783–1859)

America’s first international literary celebrity, as well as its first fully professional writer, was born in New York City, the eleventh child in a close-knit family. After writing satirical sketches and essays for his brother’s newspapers for some years, Washington Irving captured the nation’s attention with the fictitious *A History of New York*, supposedly written by a curious old gentleman named Diedrich Knickerbocker. In this work, which was accompanied by a publicity campaign involving newspaper reports on the putative whereabouts of the fictitious Knickerbocker, Irving made fun of the pretensions of bourgeois culture and democracy (including

Thomas Jefferson), as well as American parochialism and history writing. In May 1815, Irving left the country for what would be a seventeen-year sojourn in Europe, where he worked first as an importer in Liverpool, then as an attaché to the American legation in Spain, and finally as secretary to the American legation in London. His diverse works range from *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828) and *The Alhambra* (1832), both written during his stay in Spain, to *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835) and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A.* (1837), studies of the American West written on his return from Europe, to a five-volume life of George Washington.

Irving’s *Sketch Book* (1819–20), which included “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” remains his most recognized and influential contribution to American literature (he is often credited with inaugurating the modern genre of the short story). He is sometimes read as a political reactionary, nostalgic for European aristocratic culture and disgusted with the American rabble. His work and life, however, complicate this view; for example, it is true that he seems to have preferred that art remain aloof from commercialism and beyond the world of utility, but he also was America’s first commercially successful writer, who not only was very popular but depended for his living upon the mass consumption of his writing. Stories like those from *The Sketch Book* often display this tension, pitting an aesthetically oriented pre-Revolution America against a crass and utilitarian post-Revolution one—yet it is not always clear that the former is meant to be morally superior to the latter.

TEACHING TIP

■ You might begin exploring “Rip Van Winkle” through the “reader response” approach. Ask students which characters are sympathetic and why. Some students will see Rip’s flexibility as admirable and his oppression by Dame Van Winkle as pitiable, while others will see Rip as a good-for-nothing. Explore how these different points of view change interpretations of the story: Is it good or bad to sleep through catastrophic historical change? To what extent should the masses actively be involved in the construction of society?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Describe Rip Van Winkle as husband and as citizen. As you articulate his relationship with his wife, consider whether you think Irving means us to feel more sympathy for Rip or for Dame Van Winkle.

Comprehension: How are we supposed to feel about Ichabod Crane? To what extent should we feel sympathy for him? On which of his characteristics or habits do you base your judgment?

Context: Note that Rip sleeps through the Revolutionary War; that is, he sleeps through America's transition from colony to nation. Why does it matter that Rip sleeps through these particular eighteen years? Describe his village before and after his fateful nap: which do you think Irving prefers? What is different and what is the same in the village before and after Rip's sleep?

Context: Like "Rip Van Winkle," "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" suggests a distinction between Dutch colony and American nation (in the figures of Brom and Ichabod, respectively). What is Irving saying about the difference between the two communities?

Exploration: In 1820, Sydney Smith asked, "In the four corners of the globe, who reads an American book?" In *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1820), Irving responds by formulating America—and Americans—as a site of interest and inspiration. As you read "Rip Van Winkle," consider how Irving formulates national identity, particularly in relation to Europe. How do race, culture, and historical context figure into this formulation?

[7242] John Plumbe, *Washington Irving* (1861), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs [LC-USZ62-4238]. Portrait of Irving. Irving's work suggests nostalgia for European aristocratic culture over early-nineteenth-century American commercialism, but his position as America's first commercially successful writer complicates this view.

[7243] Currier & Ives, *Washington's Head-Quarters 1780: At Newburgh, on the Hudson* (1856), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC2-3161]. Painting of stone farmhouse and bucolic surroundings along the Hudson River. General George Washington, his wife, officers, slaves, and servants occupied this modest house during the Revolutionary War. Washington Irving set many of his stories in this area.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864)

Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, a descendant of the first Puritan colonists, including one of the judges of the Salem witchcraft trials, an ancestry that would haunt him throughout his life and provide a tormented inspiration for much of his writing. He graduated from Bowdoin College in Maine, where he had become friends with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Franklin Pierce, who later became president of the United States. Hawthorne had already begun writing at this point, acting as writer, editor, printer, and publisher of his own newspaper. In 1828 he published his first novel, *Fanshawe*, at his own expense. Soon thereafter, however, in a gesture of repudiation that he would later repeat with a collection of short stories, he tried to have all copies of the novel destroyed. In 1840 he joined the socialist-utopian commune of Brook Farm, but was unhappy with the drudgery of farm life and left after six months.

Hawthorne returned to Salem as Surveyor of the Custom House in 1846 and continued to write. His early endeavors were mostly short stories, which appeared anonymously in magazines and literary annuals. Only when he published these stories in collections, as in *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) and *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), did Hawthorne become a recognized literary force. In 1842 he married Sophia Peabody of Salem and began to focus on his new family, eventually moving them from Salem. His masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*,



[1549] T. H. Matteson, *The Trial of George Jacobs, August 5, 1692* (1855), courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

HAWTHORNE WEB ARCHIVE

[1029] Wilfred A. French, *The Old Manse* (n.d.), from F. B. Sanborn, *Emerson and His Friends in Concord* (1890), courtesy of Cornell University Library, *Making of America* Digital Collection. Ralph Waldo Emerson loaned his home at the Old Manse to Nathaniel Hawthorne for three years.

[1544] E. Percy Moran, *A Fair Puritan* (1897), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-4290]. A young woman stands in the snow with a bundle of ivy. Hawthorne found inspiration in his Puritan ancestors for a number of his works, many of which explored the inescapable and often malign influence of the past upon the present.

[1549] T. H. Matteson, *The Trial of George Jacobs, August 5, 1692* (1855), courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. Painted 163 years after the trial, this painting depicts Salem girls fainting, screaming, and attempting to fly as George Jacobs is convicted and sentenced to death for practicing witchcraft.

[2106] Thomas Phillibrown, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1851), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-93807]. This portrait was used as the frontispiece

appeared in 1850 to international acclaim, with critics in Great Britain and the United States proclaiming Hawthorne America's finest romance writer. His philosophy of literature appears in that novel's introduction: "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other." His works explore the construction of reality through subjective perception, the past's inevitable and often malevolent hold on the present, and the agonizing ethical dilemmas encountered by individuals in society. Hawthorne frequently requires the reader to make a moral judgment, rather than passively receive a ready-made one. Hawthorne's other novels include *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), and *The Marble Faun* (1860).

TEACHING TIPS

■ To help your students contextualize "Young Goodman Brown," supply excerpts from Puritan writings—for example, one of Cotton Mather's trial descriptions in *Wonders of the Invisible World*—and ask them to determine exactly what in Puritanism Hawthorne seems to be criticizing (e.g., rigidity, right-and-wrong thinking, moral arbitrariness).

■ For "Rappaccini's Daughter," have the students discuss current ethical issues of science and "progress." Is Rappaccini a twisted and perverted emblem of the scientific method or does he stand for a general ethical failure of science?

■ Highlight the idea of "the beginning" in *The Scarlet Letter* both in terms of "The Custom-House" (i.e., how the frame narrative affects our understanding of Hester Prynne's story) and in terms of the novel as a foundation for American literary identity (i.e., how we might see it as establishing an American literary tradition).

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What happens to Goodman Brown in the forest? Why does Hawthorne leave it up to the reader to decide whether the entire experience of Brown is a dream or real? To what extent does it matter that we decide one way or another?

Context: What does "Young Goodman Brown" seem to be saying about the ethics of American Puritanism? Hawthorne struggled with his own ancestors' roles in prosecuting the 1692 Salem witchcraft trials; what does the ironic revelation of "evil" hidden behind a façade of "good" suggest about Hawthorne's judgment of the Puritan worldview?

Context: Notice how the rational and objective pursuit of scientific truth blurs into the obsessive and personal pursuit of individual

desire in “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (this is true in different ways for all three of the male characters, Giovanni, Rappaccini, and Baglioni). Why might Hawthorne deliberately challenge the distinction between science and passion in this story?

Context: What are we to make of Rappaccini’s final justification to Beatrice of his perverse experiment: “Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil, and capable of none?” Why does it matter that Beatrice is a woman? How would the story be different if Rappaccini had endowed a male child with the venomous powers of the poison plant? How can you relate this story to the nineteenth-century “cult of true womanhood” discussed in the Core Context “The Spirit Is Willing: The Occult and Women in the Nineteenth Century”?

Exploration: *The Scarlet Letter* has connections to both “Young Goodman Brown” and “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” Like the former, *The Scarlet Letter* deals with the wrenching implications of Puritan conceptions of sin; like the latter, it concerns the torments of gender inequality. Consider the representation of the human body in each of these texts to develop a theory that links these two themes. What, according to Hawthorne, is the relationship between the female body and sin?

William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870)

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, and remaining near his birthplace throughout his life, Simms was well-known as the author of romances such as *The Yemassee* (1835), *The Lily and the Totem* (1850), and *The Forayers* (1855). Some of the raw material for these works no doubt came from Simms’s father, who was a soldier of fortune, wandering the South for years (leaving Simms in the care of a grandmother), eventually growing rich, and collecting stories and observations. Simms’s novels represent the history of the American South and are influenced by Simms’s knowledge of and affection for the region, including his respect for its landscape, institutions, and social structures. Perhaps his view of his homeland is best embodied in one of his protagonists (in *Voltmeier* [1869]), who at one point cries out, “I have the strength to endure, I *have* endured!” Capturing a vision of a defiant and exotic South, Simms’s novels are frequently macabre, displaying characters living in harsh but strangely glamorous conditions.

Simms was politically active, helped develop the proslavery argument (he believed firmly that humans were part of the Great Chain of Being, with whites in a superior position to blacks), and submitted elaborate battle plans to the Confederacy during the Civil War. Like Charles Brockden Brown, he pursued literature rather than the law, with which he had flirted in his early adulthood. A prolific author, he wrote poetry, plays, histories of the South, novellas, biographies, magazine essays, medleys, and literary criticism. In an attempt to support his impoverished family late in life, he worked feverishly at various writing projects, eventually destroying his own health.

of the 1851 edition of *Twice-Told Tales*, a collection of Hawthorne’s short stories that was originally published in 1837.

[7241] Eric Muller, *Custom House, South Front and East Side* (1958), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey [HABS, MASS, 5-SAL, 48-1]. This brick Custom House in Salem, Massachusetts, is an example of the Federal style of architecture. Much of Salem’s wealth in the early nineteenth century was in the maritime trade.



[7245] *The International Magazine of Literature, Art and Science*, William Gilmore Simms (1852), courtesy of the Making of America Project, Cornell University Library.

SIMMS WEB ARCHIVE

[2742] Anonymous, *The Old Plantation* (c. 1790–1800), courtesy of © Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA. Slaves dancing and playing music

on a plantation, possibly in South Carolina. Writers such as William Gilmore Simms believed that slavery was justified by God.

[4308] Alfred Rudolph Waud, *Pictures of the South—Jefferson Davis’s Mansion in Mississippi—Negro Quarters on Jefferson Davis’s Plantation* (1866), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-116582]. These sketches show a plantation owned by Davis, president of the Confederate States of America.

William Gilmore Simms believed that the discrepancy between the lives of slaves and those of their masters was part of the Great Chain of Being.

[4735] Anonymous, *Gloucester, Near Natchez, MS* (n.d.), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-58888]. A neoclassical plantation house designed as an expression of the good taste and prosperity of the owner.

[7245] *The International Magazine of Literature, Art and Science*, William Gilmore Simms (1852), courtesy of the Making of America Project, Cornell University Library. Simms, the antebellum South’s most prolific author, was an astute observer of the cultural, social, and intellectual traditions of the region.

[9004] William Gilmore Simms, *The Life of Francis Marion* (1844), courtesy of Project Gutenberg. Simms was the most prolific southern writer of the antebellum period. This biography tells the story of Brigadier General Francis Marion, nicknamed the Swamp Fox, an American soldier in the Revolutionary War.

[9005] William Gilmore Simms, “The Edge of the Swamp” (c. 1853), courtesy of Coastal Carolina University. Simms’s meditation on a swamp depicts it as a place of mystery and danger.

[9012] William Gilmore Simms, Introduction and Chapter I from *The Forayers; or, Raid of the Dog Days* (1855), courtesy of Belford, Clarke, Chicago, New York, 1885. The sixth in a series of eight novels set in the South during the Revolutionary War, *The Forayers* describes events leading up to the Battle of Eutaw Springs in the Orangeburg, South Carolina, area.

TEACHING TIP

■ Have students sketch out images of various natural environments with an eye toward moving the emotions of their classmates in particular directions. How do their classmates respond to an open prairie, the ocean, a forest? Now have them sketch (or use the images of) a swamp, and evaluate their responses. Stress that the swamp is often “in-between”: both threatening and concealing, both beyond civilization and a final sign of civilized resistance to tyranny.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why is the swamp mysterious and dangerous in the poem “The Edge of the Swamp”? How does the swamp connect to the moral or message of the poem?

Comprehension: In what ways are the swamps in *The Forayers* symbolically different from the swamp in “The Edge of the Swamp”? In what ways are they similar?

Context: Consider this passage from *The Forayers* describing a path through a swamp: “The path grows sinuous and would be lost, but for certain marks upon the branches of the trees under which we are required to move. You would not see these marks. No one could see them, were they not shown, or decipher their mystic runes, were they not explored.” How does this discussion of knowledge (of how a traveler might or might not be able to read the signs of passage through the swamp) relate to the many other examples of characters knowing, not knowing, or wrongly knowing that we have seen in this unit? Compare this swamp with the images in the Core Context “Swamps, Dismal and Otherwise.” Which of the images does it most resemble? To what effect?

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

Born to the teenage actors Elizabeth Arnold and David Poe Jr. (in a time when acting was a highly disreputable career), Edgar Allan Poe was raised by a Richmond, Virginia, merchant named John Allan after both his parents died. Allan sent Poe to the University of Virginia, but Poe left after quarrelling with Allan in 1827. Allan had no patience for Poe’s literary pretensions, and Poe found Allan cheap and cruel. Poe then sought out his father’s relatives in Baltimore, where he published his first volume of poems, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, and later secretly married his thirteen-year-old cousin, Virginia Clemm. He moved with his wife and her mother to Richmond, Philadelphia (where he wrote several of his most famous works, including “Ligeia,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”), and then to New York City. Throughout these relocations, he worked editing magazines and newspapers, but found it difficult to hold onto any one job for very long. Poe’s horror tales and detective stories (a genre he created) were written to capture the fancy of the popular reading public, but he earned his national reputation through a large number of critical essays and sketches. With the publication of “The Raven”

(1845), Poe secured his fame, but he was not succeeding as well in his personal life. His wife died in 1847, and Poe was increasingly ill and drinking uncontrollably. He died on a trip to Baltimore, four days after being found intoxicated near a polling booth on Election Day.

Poe was influenced by the fantastic romances of Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. However, unlike most of his famous contemporaries, Poe rarely described American life in any direct way in his writings. Often set in exotic, vaguely medieval, or indeterminately distant locations, Poe's work seems more interested in altered states of consciousness than history or culture: his characters often swirl within madness, dreams, or intoxication, and may or may not encounter the supernatural. His literary reputation has been uneven, with some critics finding his extravagant prose and wild situations off-putting or absurd (and his poetry pedestrian and repetitive). Poe's defenders, however (including many nineteenth- and twentieth-century French intellectuals), see him as a brilliant allegorist of the convolutions of human consciousness. For example, there are many "doubles" in Poe: characters who mirror each other in profound but nonrealistic ways, suggesting not so much the subtleties of actual social relationships as the splits and fractures within a single psyche trying to relate to itself.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Poe works very well for spatial analysis and analyses of setting—that is, for considering the importance of the stories' spaces (e.g., houses, prisons) and the locations (e.g., "exotic" or medieval places and times). In preparation for class discussion, have students draw a picture of the setting of one of Poe's stories and ask them to annotate it with what each aspect of the setting symbolizes.

■ What is haunting Poe's houses? Ask students to contextualize Poe's use of the haunted house through comparing his use with Henry Ward Beecher's "haunted house" in "The Strange Woman."

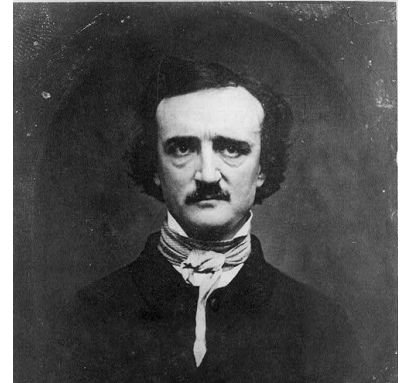
■ Students are often quick to pick up on the "unnatural relations" between Usher and his sister in "The Fall of the House of Usher," but are unclear what to make of them. It can be helpful to point out that incest is a common theme in early national literature (Melville's *Pierre* is another famous example). Why would early national writers in general, and Poe in particular, be interested in incest as a theme?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Does "Ligeia" represent supernatural events? What difference does your answer make to our understanding of the story?

Comprehension: How does the setting of "Ligeia" affect your understanding of the story?

Context: In an essay about composing literature, Poe wrote the following: "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably,



[7244] W. S. Hartshorn, *Edgar Allan Poe* (1848), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-10610].

POE WEB ARCHIVE

[3111] James William Carling, *The Raven* (c. 1882), courtesy of the Edgar Allan Poe Museum, Richmond, Virginia. This illustration, by James Carling for an 1882 edition of "The Raven," reflects the dark and foreboding tone of Poe's classic poem.

[7064] Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard, *Poe's Bedroom in Philadelphia* (1967), courtesy of the Library of Congress [HABS, PA,51-PHILA,663A-4]. This photograph shows Poe's bedroom on the second floor of the building now known as the "Edgar Allan Poe House." Poe wrote many of his most famous works during the six years he lived in Philadelphia.

[7244] W. S. Hartshorn, *Edgar Allan Poe* (1848), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-10610]. Poe developed the detective story genre but was also known for his poetry, critical essays, and sketches.

[8643] Emory Elliott, Interview: "Mid-Nineteenth-Century America" (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Emory Elliott, professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, discusses the climate of fear which characterized much of mid-nineteenth-century American life and culture.

[8648] Emory Elliott, Interview: "The American Gothic" (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Emory Elliott, professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, discusses the influence of the occult on nineteenth-century American writers.

the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of a bereaved lover.” What do you think he meant by this? How does “Ligeia” fit into this philosophy of literature? Consider how the narrator describes Ligeia, how he feels and what he thinks about her: what does the story suggest about the proper roles or characteristics of men and women? How is Ligeia like and unlike the ideal woman as conceived by adherents of the cult of true womanhood?

Exploration: The narrator is unsure about many things in “Ligeia,” including when and where he met Ligeia, her last name, and whether he is mad. In fact, it is possible to say that the story is *about* uncertainty: “Not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it,” says the narrator at one point. How does Poe explore the dilemma of **ambiguity** in “Ligeia”? What does he seem to be saying about the mind’s attempt to establish certainty?

Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

Born in Litchfield, Connecticut, Henry Ward Beecher was the son of the preacher Lyman Beecher and the brother of the novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe. He added to the discursive fame of his family by becoming a well-known preacher, orator, and lecturer. Beecher graduated from Amherst in 1834 and attended Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati. After two pastorates in Indiana, he moved in 1847 to the newly organized Congregational Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York.

Publicly vocal on contemporary issues, Beecher was a leader in the antislavery movement, a proponent of women's suffrage, and an advocate of the theory of evolution. He regularly attracted some twenty-five hundred auditors to his Sunday sermons, and he published an early pamphlet, *Seven Lectures to Young Men* (1844). In 1854, he raised money among his congregation for weapons to be used in the antislavery cause; these rifles came to be called "Beecher's Bibles." Beecher became editor of the *Independent* in 1861 and of the *Christian Union* in 1870. He visited England in 1863, spreading sympathy for the Union in a series of lectures.



[7240] James E. Cook, *Testimony in the Great Beecher-Tilton Scandal Case Illustrated* (1875), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-121959].

In 1875, one of Beecher's parishioners (and a popular speaker in his own right), Theodore Tilton, brought a lawsuit against him for adultery with Tilton's wife—a charge first made by Victoria Woodhull in her newspaper *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*. After a long trial, this suit ended with the jury in disagreement; Beecher's friends claimed that he won. Despite being publicly embarrassed by the trial, Beecher remained influential for the rest of his life. His works include *The Life of Jesus, the Christ* (1871) and *Evolution and Religion* (1885).

TEACHING TIP

■ Try applying the kind of gothic images Beecher uses to decry prostitution to another current social problem such as factory conditions in underdeveloped countries, child abuse, or the current “epidemic” of obesity in American children. Which of these problems lends itself to a gothic treatment that would likely persuade an audience of its injustice or intolerableness? Which aspects of each problem can be “gothicized,” and which do not seem to work? Think in particular of how the gender and ages of the people involved affect your ability to perform this task.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: According to Beecher, how exactly does the prostitute lure her young men? What exactly are the consequences for men who have a sexual encounter with the prostitute? In what sense are these elements “gothic”?

Context: Consider the gender politics of the sermon. How does Beecher draw on stereotypes and assumptions about women in general in order to make his point about prostitutes in particular? How does he invoke the cult of true womanhood?

Exploration: Why does “The Strange Woman” open with an attack on Chaucer, Shakespeare, and other famous writers? How is this section related to the main argument of the sermon? How would Melville (in “Hawthorne and His Mosses”) disagree with Beecher about the aims and effects of literature?

Herman Melville (1819–1891)

Herman Melville’s father was a New York City merchant who, when he died suddenly, left his family heavily in debt. Melville was only twelve at the time, but he was forced to leave school to go to work. After working in a variety of low-paying jobs (clerk, laborer, schoolteacher), in 1841 Melville joined a whaler sailing for the South Seas. Aboard a series of ships, he was away for three years. Ishmael, the narrator of Melville’s 1851 *Moby-Dick*, surely speaks for the author as well when he says that “a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.” In addition to learning the dangerous and difficult business of whaling itself, Melville also gained an unusually diverse cultural education. At one point, he and a crewmate jumped ship and lived for several weeks with a native tribe; upon his return to America, Melville transformed that experience into *Typee* (1846), a popular adventure tale that established him as a literary celebrity. A sequel, *Omoo*, soon followed, but Melville’s appeal was dampened by his more philosophical works such as *Mardi* (1849), *Pierre* (1853), and even *Moby-Dick*. Some critics of these novels declared Melville unbalanced; the *New York Dispatch* charged him

BEECHER WEB ARCHIVE

[7239] Thomas Nast, “Get Thee Behind Me, (Mrs.) Satan!” (1872), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-74994]. Print depicting tired woman, with children and drunken man on her back, speaking to winged woman carrying sign reading, “Be saved by free love.” The winged figure represents suffragist and spiritualist Victoria Woodhull.

[7240] James E. Cook, *Testimony in the Great Beecher-Tilton Scandal Case Illustrated* (1875), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-121959]. Cartoon satirizing Henry Ward Beecher’s scandalous court case. Depicts Beecher kissing Mrs. Francis Moulton, who is sitting on his lap.

[9013] Henry Ward Beecher, *The Strange Woman* (1892), from *Addresses to Young Men*, published by H. Altamus, Philadelphia. In this sermon Beecher warns young men against the dangers of female sexuality, which he saw as a force possessing near-supernatural power over an unguarded man’s will.



[1540] William Huggins, *South Sea Whale Fishery* (1834), courtesy of The New Bedford Whaling Museum.

MELVILLE WEB ARCHIVE

[1540] William Huggins, *South Sea Whale Fishery* (1834), courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

Colored aquatint of sperm whale and boats in rough seas. This popular scene was drawn on by American artists, such as author Herman Melville and painters Albert van Beest, R. Swain Gifford, and Benjamin Russell, as they played with the symbolism of America as “ship of state.”

[2232] Rockwell Kent, *Whale beneath the Sea* (1930), courtesy of the Plattsburgh State Art Museum. This illustration dramatizes the smallness and vulnerability of the *Pequod* in relation to the whale and the vast ocean.

[2377] Rodney Dewey, *Herman Melville* (1861), courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Picture of Melville while he was living at Arrowhead, his home in the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts. All of his best-known works, including *Moby-Dick*, were written during the thirteen years that he lived at Arrowhead.

[2378] Anonymous, *Herman Melville* (c. 1885), courtesy of the Gansevoort-Lansing Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Picture taken around the time of Melville’s retirement from his job as a customs inspector for the New York Customs House, where he worked for over twenty years.

[2386] The International Magazine of Literature, Art and Science, *Herman Melville’s Whale* (1851), courtesy of the Making of America Project, Cornell University Library. This review of *Moby-Dick* appeared in December 1851. *Moby-Dick*’s unusual narrative structure and philosophical underpinnings were disliked by readers as well as critics.

[2387] *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art*, “Our Young Authors”—Melville (1853), courtesy of Cornell University, *Making of America* Digital Collection. This review of Melville’s work is typical of the way in which it was received by his contemporaries. The author praises Melville’s early adventure novel *Typee*, while disparaging the philosophical bent that characterizes many of his later novels.

later in his career with having “indulged himself in a trick of meta-physical and morbid meditations until he has perverted his fine mind from its healthy productive tendencies.”

Melville had to struggle to regain the economic and critical popularity he had enjoyed with his earlier writing. After *Pierre*, he primarily wrote short stories for magazines like *Harper’s*. Financial concerns burdened the family for years, but an inheritance late in life allowed Melville to work on his final narrative, *Billy Budd, Sailor*, the manuscript of which was found upon his death in 1891. Only after his death did Melville rise from the ranks of second-rate adventure novelists to his present status as one of America’s most important writers. Many recent readers have praised his piercing social criticism; they point, for example, to his condemnation of racism in “Benito Cereno” (1855) and his critique of dehumanizing labor in “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853) and “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (1855). Many have also found compelling the self-reflective and multi-layered nature of his narratives—narratives that continue to speak to the complexities of creating meaning in the American literary tradition.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Using illustrations of *Moby-Dick* from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and selected passages from the novel, ask your students to write a character sketch of Ahab.

■ Divide your students into two (or more) groups and pose some current ethical issue of debate. Have one group respond as if it were Ahab, sharing his assumptions about the universe and people; have the other group speak as Ishmael, employing his beliefs and attitudes. What are the cores of their differing perspectives? How would they each respond to one of today’s ethical questions?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Note the description of the *Pequod* in Chapter 16, “The Ship,” in the archive. How does Ishmael characterize the ship and its crew? What does he mean when he says that the *Pequod* is “a cannibal of a craft”? How is this related to the idea of the “ship of state”?

Comprehension: How would you describe the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg in Chapter 10, “A Bosom Friend,” in the archive? Why should the two of them be “a cosy, loving pair”? How does Ishmael seem to feel about Queequeg’s religious beliefs?

Comprehension: Why might Melville have chosen to tell the story of Ahab and the white whale from Ishmael’s point of view? How do Ishmael’s judgments and perspectives affect your understanding of Ahab’s quest? And why begin the novel with the line “Call me Ishmael,” as if the reader is not privy to the narrator’s true name?

Context: Read carefully Ahab’s diatribe against *Moby-Dick* in “The Quarter-Deck.” He says that “all visible objects, man, are but as

pasteboard masks,” that the whale is like “the wall” that hems in a prisoner, and that “that inscrutable thing [in the whale] is chiefly what I hate.” In the midst of a whale-hunt, why bring up pasteboard masks and prison walls? What does Ahab mean by “inscrutable”? What is the relationship between Ahab’s speech and Ishmael’s later assertion that Ahab identifies Moby-Dick with “all [Ahab’s] intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them”?

Context: In “The Whiteness of the Whale,” Ishmael continues his assessment of Moby-Dick. He concludes that the whiteness presents “a dumb blankness, full of meaning.” According to Ishmael, what is the significance of the whiteness of the whale?

Context: In what sense does *Moby-Dick* fit Melville’s discussion of literature in “Hawthorne and His Mosses”?

Exploration: Melville wrote many texts that can be considered social critiques in a more clear-cut way than *Moby-Dick*. Read “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” *Billy Budd*, *Sailor*, and *Benito Cereno*; then use the social critique in those texts to develop an interpretation of *Moby-Dick* as a social critique.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

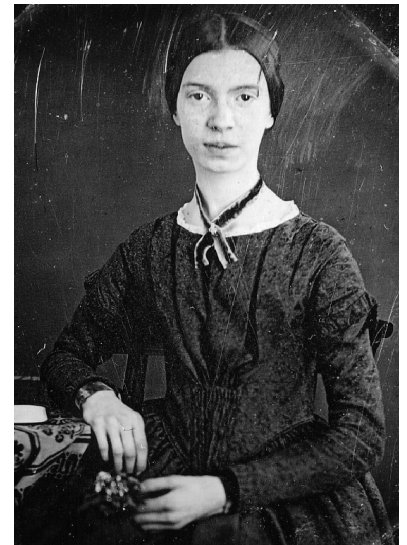
A lifelong resident of Amherst, Massachusetts, Emily Dickinson left her hometown for only one year, when she attended Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary. She was raised in an intellectual and socially prominent family and at the age of eighteen had received a better formal education than most of her American contemporaries, both male and female. Yet Dickinson led a largely sequestered existence, reading widely among works of classic and contemporary literature, devoting much of her time to writing poetry. She produced close to eighteen hundred poems, which are characterized by terse lines, “slant” rhymes, and keen observation. Because of the compressed and ambiguous nature of her work, where any given word can have multiple significations, Dickinson is sometimes called the first “modernist” poet. Most prominent in her style, which is quite unlike her contemporaries’, is her use of the dash: she simultaneously separates and links words and ideas in complex ways, rather than allowing traditional punctuation to determine meaning absolutely. Dickinson’s work often grapples profoundly with topics and ideas which would have been unacceptable to her community. Her poems are often skeptical and angry, challenging many of her contemporaries’ assumptions about God, death, gender, nature, and the human body.

Except for a dozen poems, most of Dickinson’s work was not published in her lifetime. She did, however, carefully collect her poems into handmade booklets, or “fascicles,” of about twenty poems each. Her purpose in organizing her poetry this way remains unclear; she may have desired a private archive for retrieving poems she wished to revise, and it has been suggested that the fascicles are organized by theme. Scholars have long been fascinated by this and other mysteries

[2611] Walter Monteith Aikman, *The Tontine Coffee House, Wall & Walter Streets, about 1797* (n.d.), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-98020]. The Tontine Coffee House was a place where the financial men of New York City met to discuss money matters. Melville depicted the potentially dehumanizing effects of life on Wall Street in works like “Bartleby, the Scrivener.”

[9009] Herman Melville, Chapter 16 of *Moby-Dick*, “The Ship” (1851), courtesy of Project Gutenberg. In this chapter Ishmael describes how he decided to sign aboard the *Pequod*, following Queequeg’s superstitious insistence that Ishmael choose the ship to which they would commit themselves. Rife with foreboding, this chapter also includes the first description of Ahab.

[9010] Herman Melville, Chapter 10 of *Moby-Dick*, “A Bosom Friend” (1851), courtesy of Project Gutenberg. In this chapter Ishmael cements his friendship with future shipmate Queequeg. “I’ll try a pagan friend,” Ishmael says, “since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy.”



[1617] Anonymous, *Emily Dickinson* (n.d.), courtesy of Amherst College Library.

DICKINSON WEB ARCHIVE

[1617] Anonymous, *Emily Dickinson* (n.d.), courtesy of Amherst College Library. Portrait of Dickinson sitting at table. Until recently, this was the only known image of Dickinson, a notorious recluse who rarely left her lifelong residence in Amherst, Massachusetts.

[2390] Anonymous, *Emily Dickinson* (n.d.), courtesy of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Recently discovered photo of Dickinson. Dickinson is often considered the first modernist poet, despite the fact that she wrote most of her poetry decades before the movement began.

[8659] Priscilla Wald, "Dickinson Reading" (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Wald, associate professor of English at Duke University, reads Dickinson's "Tell all the truth but tell it slant."

[8662] Priscilla Wald, "Dickinson Reading" (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Wald, associate professor of English at Duke University, reads Dickinson's "I heard a fly buzz."

[9011] Johnson, "The Yellow Rose of Texas" (n.d.), courtesy of the Library of Congress, American Memory Collection [CW106920]. The first known copy of the lyrics are dated 1836, around the time of the battle of Santa Ana in Texas. The song is credited to a black soldier; the "yellow rose" is most likely an endearing name for a mulatta woman named Emily West. "Yellow" was a common term for light-skinned mulattos, and women were often referred to as roses or flowers in popular music of the time.

[9016] John Newton, "Amazing Grace" lyrics (c. 1760–70). One of the most popular hymns in the English language, the words were written by English pastor John Newton, himself a "saved heathen." Newton was a vagrant, indentured servant, petty criminal, and slave trader before his religious epiphany.

of her intensely private life, including her sexuality. Dickinson never married, and the evidence suggests that she felt some variety of passionate affection for both men and women, especially for her sister-in-law, Susan, one of only a few people to whom she privately sent poems. A half-century after her death, the three volumes of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955) and two volumes of *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1958) appeared.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Have your students sing one of Dickinson's poems to the tune of a favorite ballad or hymn. For example, "I could not stop for death" works nicely with the tune of "Yellow Rose of Texas," "Amazing Grace," or even Lou Reed's "Sweet Jane." Why does Dickinson use these forms? How does she change or challenge them?

■ Focus on the "slant" (indirection and ambiguity) as the ruling trope of Dickinson's poetry.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Notice Dickinson's frequent use of dashes in place of more standard punctuation like commas and periods. Why did she rely so heavily on dashes? How do they affect your experience and understanding of the poems? How would the poems change with different punctuation?

Context: Unlike many of her contemporaries, Dickinson does not write poems with clear moral or ethical messages. Are her poems trying to "teach" us anything? What seems to be the purpose of these poems? Do they make you feel (and if so, feel how)? Do they make you think (and if so, think what)?

Context: Dickinson's most famous poem, #465, draws on the nineteenth century's fascination with deathbed scenes in literature. Unusually, however, this scene is described from the point of view of the deceased. What exactly does the poem's narrator experience, both sensuously and psychologically? How does the fly affect the narrator's experience of death?

Exploration: What might Dickinson mean when she writes "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" (#1129)? Why is there a danger that Truth will blind us unless it "dazzle[s] gradually"? Why does the narrator refer to children in supporting this thesis?

Exploration: What, in poem #258, might "internal difference" mean? What are "the Meanings," and why are they contained in internal difference? Why does the natural experience of a certain winter light provoke reflection on internal difference?

Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914?)

Ambrose Bierce spent an unhappy childhood in Ohio and left home as a bitter and pessimistic young man. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Bierce joined the Union Army; he later brought his military experi-

ence vividly to life in some of his best stories. Bierce moved to San Francisco after the war and embarked on a career as a journalist. His “Prattler” column, originally printed in the *Argonaut* and then the *Wasp*, was picked up by William Randolph Hearst’s *San Francisco Sunday Examiner* in 1886 and provided Bierce with an excellent outlet for his biting wit and his short stories. After divorcing his wife in 1891 and losing one son in a gunfight and the other to alcoholism, Bierce disappeared in Mexico in 1913, where legend says he was killed in the Mexican Revolution. His works include *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891; later retitled *In the Midst of Life*) and *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1906).

TEACHING TIP

■ “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” is a textbook example of irony, with a surprising “twist ending.” Have students practice this literary technique by writing brief narratives with unexpected, ironic endings. Briefly explore which ones work the best and what elements allow them to do so.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: How does the ending of “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” change your sense of what happens earlier in the story?

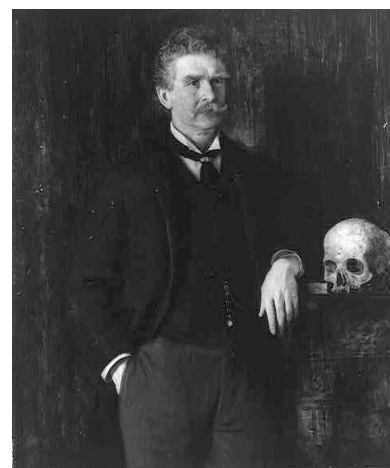
Context: How might it matter that this story takes place in the South? How does this story relate to the Core Context “Swamps, Dismal and Otherwise” and the South’s conflicting senses of identity?

Exploration: What does this story seem to be saying about perception and knowledge? We typically assume that perception precedes knowledge: I know the truth because I have seen it. To what extent does “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” argue that the opposite is sometimes true? You might compare it to the stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne in this regard.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935)

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Charlotte Perkins was raised by her mother. Her father abandoned the family shortly after her birth (her father was the nephew of siblings Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher). Gilman’s mother moved her two children to her original home, Rhode Island, where she withheld physical expressions of love from them in an attempt to steel them against the future pain of broken relationships. Gilman worked as a governess, teacher, and greeting-card designer before reluctantly marrying Charles Stetson in 1884—she had become increasingly aware that women did not receive equal rights, and she was concerned that as a new wife and mother she would have difficulty beginning a writing career.

After the birth of her daughter, Gilman became depressed and was



[3230] J. H. E. Partington, *Ambrose Bierce* (1928), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-20182].

BIERCE WEB ARCHIVE

[3230] Anonymous, *Confederate and Union Dead Side by Side in Trenches at Fort Mahone* (1865), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-B8171-3181]. Civil War photograph of the aftermath of the siege of Petersburg.

[3320] J. H. E. Partington, *Ambrose Bierce* (1928), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-20182].

Partington’s painting features Bierce leaning next to a human skull. Bierce’s satires often commented on the dark side of nineteenth-century America.

[7357] Sarony and Major, *View of San Francisco, Taken from the Western Hill at the Foot of Telegraph Hill, Looking toward Ringon Point and Mission Valley* [detail] (1851), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC2-1716]. Less than two years after the Gold Rush began, San Francisco had become a sprawling boom town that drew people from all over the world.

[7505] Anonymous, *Music in Mexican Isurrecto Camp* (1911), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115488]. This photo, of musicians and armed men in a camp during the Mexican Civil War, shows the close relationship between music and politics in the borderlands.



[5361] Frances Benjamin Johnston, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (c. 1900), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-49035].

GILMAN WEB ARCHIVE

[3161] C. F. Wieland, *Dr. Wieland's Celebrated Sugar Worm Lozenges* (1856), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-102488]. Patent medicine label with an illustration of respectable-looking women supervising children in a sitting room and smaller illustrations of laboring women (and one man). As science and medicine gained acceptance in the mid-nineteenth century, such medications became popular. This one was marketed for female consumers.

[5313] Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Kitchen Design, Illustration in the American Woman's Home: Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (1869), courtesy of the Library of Congress. This illustration shows the Beecher sisters' interpretation of an efficient kitchen layout. Books on middle-class women's roles in managing households were popular during the Victorian era, but writers such as Gilman railed against the so-called cult of true womanhood.

advised to seek bed rest and to limit her intellectual endeavors. This “cure” so frustrated Gilman that she nearly went mad, recovering by thrusting her energies into the American Woman Suffrage Association. Soon after, she composed “The Yellow Wall-paper” (1892), which was based on her experience with depression. When her marriage broke up, Gilman sent her daughter to live with her ex-husband and his new wife, Gilman's former best friend. She married her first cousin, George Houghton Gilman, in 1900 and continued her writing career, producing books that advocated reform, including *Women and Economics* (1898), *Concerning Children* (1900), and *The Man-Made World* (1911), as well as the novels *Moving the Mountain* (1911), *Herland* (1915), and *With Her in Ourland* (1916). We can see that same reformist spirit in Gilman's most famous text, her critique of women's oppression under patriarchy, “The Yellow Wall-paper.”

TEACHING TIPS

- Have students debate about whether or not the narrator emerges “victorious” in “The Yellow Wall-paper.” This question highlights different assumptions about the value of material and psychic freedom.

- Emphasize the many ways in which John's treatment of the narrator in “The Yellow Wall-paper” is based on patriarchal assumptions about women—especially considering that postpartum depression is now recognized as a legitimate (and common) ailment. What are the signs of postpartum depression? How does knowledge of this condition help us understand the story?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Describe the narrator of “The Yellow Wall-paper” as precisely as you can. Why does she spend all of her time in the nursery? What is “wrong” with her? To what extent does she change over the course of the story?

Comprehension: Describe the wallpaper. Why is the narrator both fascinated and repulsed by it?

Comprehension: By the end of the story, the narrator seems to believe she has achieved a victory: “‘I've got out at last,’ said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!’” Do you agree that she has emerged victorious? If so, in what sense?

Context: How does the narrator's husband, John, treat her? She notes, “He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency.” Why does he emphasize her “imaginative power,” and to what extent do you think Gilman wants us to agree with John's opinion? Think about this in terms of both nineteenth-century anxieties about the supposed promises of science and the ideals of the cult of true womanhood.

Exploration: Look at the advertisement for “Dr. Weiland’s Celebrated Sugar Worm Lozenges” featured in the archive. In what sense can Gilman’s story be seen as a response to the mid-nineteenth-century reverence for science?

Suggested Author Pairings

HERMAN MELVILLE AND WASHINGTON IRVING

In their texts treated in this unit, Herman Melville and Washington Irving arguably present veiled allegories of American experience. In *Moby-Dick*, the *Pequod* can stand as the mid-nineteenth-century ship of state, America’s diverse and contentious community navigating treacherous waters and wary of the designs of its captain. Ahab might be the inverse of the messianic Andrew Jackson, the latter as confident of the divine sanction of westward expansion as the former is confident of the transcendental necessity of flouting God’s cruelty. Aboard, too, are the African American Pip and the Native American Queequeg, members of two American groups who suffered during the Jacksonian expansion. Meanwhile, Irving constructs two conflicting worlds in his stories: the colonial Dutch community of easy aestheticism and the liberal-progressive United States of base commercialism. Rip Van Winkle has to construct a new identity when earthy colony becomes political country; and Ichabod Crane, the venial, craven representative of Yankee self-delusion, is punished for his blind hypocrisy.

EMILY DICKINSON, EDGAR ALLAN POE, AND CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

Dickinson, Poe, and Brown all ask us to explore a consciousness that doubts and questions its own reflections. All three employ death as the focal point of self-consciousness, the unknowable center around which our thoughts inevitably swirl (whether we are aware of it or not). Dickinson, in poem #315, emphasizes that our uncertainty about God is perennial, because only at or after death (“the Ethereal Blow”) do we have any hope of sureness. She also ends her meditation on the subjective experience of winter light by suggesting that it withdraws “like the Distance / On the look of Death—.” Neither Poe’s nor Brown’s narrators can be fully sure of the evidence of their senses: in each case, the narrative suggests that what the characters experience could be at least in part the projection of their own desires (“Ligeia”) or fears (*Wieland*). And in each case, the threat of death looms large: the narrator of “Ligeia” cannot bear that death will have robbed him of his beloved, and Brown’s Clara fears her own possible implication in the homicidal tendencies of her brother. (Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” can also fit with this grouping.)

[5361] Frances Benjamin Johnston, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (c. 1900), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-49035]. Photograph of novelist and suffragist Gilman. In both her writing and her personal life, Gilman challenged Victorian gender roles and notions of women’s place in the domestic sphere.

[5605] L. Prang & Co., *Representative Women* (1870), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-5535]. Individual portraits of leaders of the women’s suffrage movement. Those pictured are Lucretia Mott, Grace Greenwood, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anna E. Dickinson, Mary Ashton Rice Livermore, Lydia Maria Francis Child, and Susan B. Anthony.

**NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, CHARLOTTE PERKINS
GILMAN, AND HENRY WARD BEECHER**

These authors, each in wildly different ways, reflect on how gender influences the supposedly objective progress of reason. For Hawthorne in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Giovanni’s desire for Beatrice distracts him from the pursuit of scientific truth; and Rappaccini claims to perform his botanical experiment on pseudo-feminist grounds (so that Beatrice can now have some power in the world). Precisely what Hawthorne is saying about gender is debatable, although he seems to position the men as dangerously self-deluded and Beatrice as a social victim. Gilman’s feminism is much more clear: her narrator is oppressed and psychically annihilated by the “objective” inhumanity of patriarchal psychiatric medicine. It is precisely her own creativity, thwarted as John forbids her from writing, that returns to assault her sanity in the form of the wallpaper. Henry Ward Beecher, equally unambiguous but far from feminist, depicts the seductive devilry of the female body in his lecture. If they are to succeed in their social ambitions, suggestible young men must be careful to avoid the satanic snares of prostitutes. The female body here is the gothic threat, the dangerous and irrational force that threatens the American man.

AMBROSE BIERCE AND WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS

These authors each depict the American South in gothic terms. For Simms, the South is the region of persevering self-reliance but, after the Civil War, also a shattered and beleaguered community that needs to rebuild its identity. When his characters journey through the swamps, they are both wandering in dangerously ill-defined territory and proving their mettle. In Bierce’s “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” the southern Farquhar intends to burn a strategic bridge in order to thwart the Union forces. However, he is deceived twice: first by a mendacious Union scout, and second by his own imagination, as it conjures for him an elaborate scenario of heroism and bravery. Like so many other characters in the works treated in this unit, he cannot trust his own senses or awareness—even when he feels “preternaturally keen and alert.” Unlike many of the other characters, though, his self-delusion provokes socio-historical questions: Was the South fooling itself in the face of the inevitable? Did slavery render the South ethically dead even as the region imagined it was heroically struggling to free itself from northern bondage? What, after all, is the identity of the South?



[2767] H. L. Stevens, *In the Swamp* (1863), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-2522].

CORE CONTEXTS

Swamps, Dismal and Otherwise

According to David C. Miller in his book *Dark Eden*, the idea of the swamp underwent an important change in the mid-nineteenth century. The swamp, he says, had long been full of theological and folk-

loric implications: “It was the domain of sin, death, and decay; the stage for witchcraft; the habitat of weird and ferocious creatures.” But the **Romanticism** of Emerson and Thoreau in the first part of the century had changed how nature was viewed. For many, nature was neither an impediment to be overcome by rational social progress nor a howling “wilderness” to be cultivated by Christian piety. Rather, nature became an object of human experience, a field of signs in which the apprehending consciousness could see analogies to his or her (usually “his”) truest “nature.” So the swamp, too, began to exhibit shifting associations as it became a screen on which the observer could project his or her own fears or desires. It was potentially threatening and consuming, but also potentially generative, creative, and thrilling. One could get lost and swallowed up in the swamp (could get, that is, “swamped”), or one could find a new source of energy and power. This shift was associated with socio-cultural issues, as Miller observes: first, with “the erosion of patriarchal patterns of culture, motivated by an urge to control or suppress a ‘female’ nature as the source of heretical and potentially anarchic meaning”; second, with the South’s power, conceived either as thrillingly resilient (as the South is assaulted by the North for its practices) or as cruelly inhuman (insofar as it practices slavery). The swamp, then, acts during this time as a figure for a variety of social and philosophical issues. And insofar as it tends to blend the threatening and the thrilling, it can be associated with gothic themes in general.

Swamps are part of the symbolism of slavery’s suffocating evil in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Dred, A Tale of the Dismal Swamp*. Swamps can also be seen as symbolic of the problems of knowledge and repression in Herman Melville’s *Pierre* and *The Confidence-Man*. According to Miller, however, swamps are most prominent as a symbol for, depending on the text, either the best or worst of southern society. They figure prominently in the work of southern writer William Gilmore Simms, for whom, in such novels as *The Forayers*, *The Scout*, and *Woodcraft*, the swamp stands for the conflicting connotations of the South. On the one hand, we have slavery and defeat, with their associations of stagnation, infirmity, self-pity, and lassitude. On the other hand, we have stalwart and fraternal community, with its associations of vigor, power, fecundity, and renewal. In the alternation between these two poles much of the gothic springs forth: When does comfort become stagnation? When does vigor become violence?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Which of the texts in Unit 6 contain swamps?

Context: Why was the swamp important in mid-nineteenth-century life and culture?



[1876] François Régis Gignoux, *View, Dismal Swamp, North Carolina* (1850), courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Copyright 2002 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, François Régis Gignoux; American (born in France), 1816–1882. *View, Dismal Swamp, North Carolina*, 1850; Oil on canvas; 78.74 x 120.01 cm. (31 x 47 1/4 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Henry Herbert Edes, 1923, 23.184.

“SWAMP” WEB ARCHIVE

[1876] François Régis Gignoux, *View, Dismal Swamp, North Carolina* (1850), courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Copyright 2002 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, François Régis Gignoux; American (born in France), 1816–1882. *View, Dismal Swamp, North Carolina*, 1850; Oil on canvas; 78.74 x 120.01 cm. (31 x 47 1/4 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Henry Herbert Edes, 1923, 23.184. Oil on canvas; southern swamp at sunset. As notions of nature changed in the mid-nineteenth century, the swamp began to be associated with the human potential to effect change on social problems.

[2719] Alfred Rudolph Waud, *Pictures of the South—Negro Quarters on Jefferson Davis’s Plantation* (1866), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-116582]. Sketch of slave quarters and slaves on the plantation of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy.

[2767] H. L. Stevens, *In the Swamp* (1863), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-2522]. The swamp could be a refuge, especially for escaped slaves, displaced Native Americans, and exiled white communities such as the Acadians.

[3356] War Department, Overseer Artayou Carrier whipped me. I was two months in bed sore from the whipping. My master come after I was whipped; He discharged the overseer. The very words of Poor Peter, Taken as he sat for his picture. Baton Rouge, Louisiana (1863), courtesy of the Still Picture Branch, National Archive and Records Administration. For slaves, escape became increasingly difficult over the course of the nineteenth century because of the rigid laws enacted in response to abolitionist activity.

[5931] Worthington Whittredge, *The Old Hunting Grounds* (1864), courtesy of Reynolda House, Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The decaying Indian canoe among birch trees symbolizes the death of the Native American culture sentimentalized in Cooper's work and other frontier literature.

[8095] Alfred R. Waud, *Cyprus Swamp on the Opelousas Railroad, Louisiana* (1866), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-108302]. The image of the swamp—dark, mysterious, and potentially dangerous—provides an apt allegory for many social and philosophical issues faced by the United States during the nineteenth century.

Context: What is the swamp's relation to society? What is its relation to more obviously threatening natural forces or objects such as storms, mountains, and volcanoes? Is the swamp a force or an object?

Context: Consider François Régis Gignoux's 1850 painting *View, Dismal Swamp, North Carolina* in relation to the opening pages of William Gilmore Simms's novels *The Scout* and *The Forayers*. How are these three swamps similar and different? What significance do Gignoux and Simms give them?

Context: To what extent does Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" draw on the symbolism of the swamp? In what ways does this story respond to the archive image of the runaway slave, "In the Swamp"?

Context: Analyze the significance of the swamp, or "tarn," in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Exploration: Have you ever seen a swamp? What was your reaction? What representations of swamps have you seen in the media or popular culture? What response did those images inspire?

Exploration: What comparisons can you make between Simms's swamps and other natural objects or phenomena in this unit: Melville's ocean or whale? Hawthorne's forest? Dickinson's winter light? Irving's Catskill Mountains? Gilman's botanical-motif wallpaper? What generalizations can you make about gothic literature's vision of nature?

The Spirit Is Willing: The Occult and Women in the Nineteenth Century

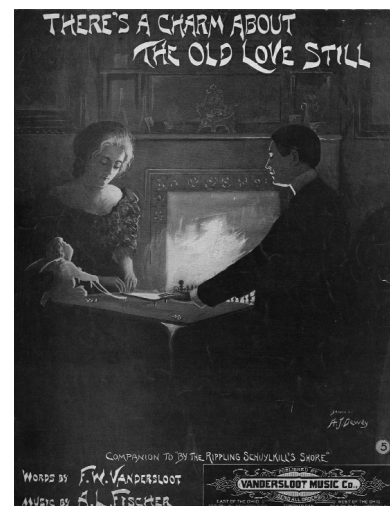
The nineteenth century saw an upsurge of interest in occult and supernatural phenomena, especially attempts to contact the spirits of dead loved ones. Enlightenment reason had by now taken its toll on the Calvinist faith of early America and its belief in **original sin**: far fewer people believed in a God who directly intervened in the affairs of the world, dispensing generous or harmful miracles as appropriate to convey his judgment. Indeed, the "invisible world," as Cotton Mather called the realm of divinity and spirits in 1693, had by the 1850s largely receded from the daily thoughts of many Americans. The Deist God was now prominent: this was the famous "clock-maker," who established the laws of the universe at the creation, but who never interfered with the mechanism after winding it up.

Our current notions of a clear distinction between science and religion did not exist much before the twentieth century. At least until the eighteenth century, science was called "natural philosophy" and was only one way of deepening one's understanding of self, nature, and divinity. Cotton Mather had also been a scientist, fascinated by God's creation as a way of reading the attitudes of the Creator; and Sir Isaac Newton wrote a lengthy treatise on the Book of Revelation. As Ann Braude argues in her book *Radical Spirits*, it should not be surprising, then, that many nineteenth-century Americans saw no less reason

to believe in ghosts and mediums than they did to believe in what seemed like the equally improbable idea of the telegraph: both involved communication that crossed apparently insuperable barriers. **Spiritualism**, as the spirit-contacting movement was called, allowed Americans who were becoming more inclined to trust science than miracles to retain a belief in the afterlife based on what appeared to be repeatable, objective evidence and experiment.

It is not accidental that women were the main agents of nineteenth-century spiritualism. A science/religion that allowed direct contact with the invisible world without institutional hierarchy, it carved a place for women to provide religious leadership. In 1848, the Fox sisters, Margaret, Leah, and Catherine, reported hearing spirit rappings in their Arcadia, New York, home and went on to be the driving force in American spiritualism. They organized “performances” in which they demonstrated their abilities as mediums and drew condemnation from some male clergy. Women interfering with established religious structures had been an American anxiety at least since Anne Hutchinson in the seventeenth century—an anxiety especially apparent in the heavily gendered accusations of the Salem witch trials. Perhaps in response to the women who attempted to cross patriarchal boundaries, a social phenomenon sometimes called the **cult of true womanhood** developed and began to have widespread influence in nineteenth-century America. This ideology, or set of assumptions and beliefs, solidly relegated women to the home and explicitly rejected the possibility of women engaging in public leadership. Scholar Barbara Welter suggests that, through such vehicles as women’s magazines and religious literature, the cult of true womanhood prescribed four cardinal virtues for women: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Women, it was thought, had as their proper roles nurturer, comforter, and homemaker. In the public realm—whether political or religious—women, like children, were meant to be seen and not heard. “True” women in this sense were patriotic and God-fearing; anyone who opposed this ideology was seen as an enemy of God, civilization, and America itself. One of the most famous women to challenge this idea of womanhood was Victoria Woodhull, who combined a belief in spiritualism with crusades for women’s suffrage and free love. She was also the first woman to address a joint session of Congress and ran for president in 1871 (an attempt that ended in failure when her past as a prostitute was exposed).

For all these reasons, we should not be surprised to see gothic writers reveal concerns about how gender relates to the spirit world. The narrator of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Ligeia” imputes a witchlike, supernatural willpower to his beloved. He imagines that she is able to transcend the boundary between life and death and is therefore both exciting and threatening. Henry Ward Beecher, in his sermon “The Strange Woman,” displays a similar fear as he warns against the almost supernatural power women’s sexuality can wield over



[7053] A. J. Dewey, *There's a Charm about the Old Love Still* (1901), courtesy of the Library of Congress and Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.



[2498] Currier & Ives, *The Age of Brass; or, The Triumphs of Women's Rights* (1869), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC2-1921].

"THE SPIRIT IS WILLING" WEB ARCHIVE

[2245] Alexandre-Marie Colin, *The Three Witches from "Macbeth"* (1827), courtesy of the Sandor Korein. Paintings like this resonated with the mid-nineteenth-century American interest in the occult and the fear of what some saw as the supernatural power of women.

[2498] Currier & Ives, *The Age of Brass; or, The Triumphs of Women's Rights* (1869), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC2-1921]. In this lithograph one woman scolds a cowed man, and another, in pantaloons, holds a sign reading "Vote for the Celebrated Man Tamer." Such cartoons played to predominantly male fears about the reversal of men's and women's public and private roles and were designed to reinforce the cult of true womanhood.

[2503] Unknown, *The Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives Receiving a Deputation of Female Suffragists* (1871), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-2023]. Victoria Woodhull, backed by a group of women suffragists, is shown reading a speech to a skeptical judiciary committee. Her speech, about the legality of women's suffrage, was based on the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Constitutional amendments.

[7053] A. J. Dewey, *There's a Charm about the Old Love Still* (1901), courtesy of the Library of Congress and Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. This sheet music illustration shows a man and a woman using a Ouija board. The nineteenth century witnessed a growing interest in spiritualism and the occult.

[7248] N. Currier, *Mrs. Fish and the Misses Fox: The Original Mediums of the Mysterious Noises at Rochester*, Western N.Y. (1852), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-2586]. The sisters, who claimed to communicate with the dead, are credited as the originators of modern spiritualism.

[9013] Henry Ward Beecher, *The Strange Woman* (1892), from *Addresses to Young Men*, published by H. Altamus,

impressionable young men. He comes close to suggesting that prostitutes, devil-like, are capable of mesmerizing and entrapping otherwise rational males. Arguably, Emily Dickinson exploits the association of the female with the mystical as she interrogates the assumptions of the largely patriarchal nineteenth-century worldview: although one must tell the truth "slant," Dickinson implies that she has access to it. Ironically, perhaps, given Beecher's social moralizing, spiritualism, whose proponents also critiqued marriage and advocated alternative medical treatments, became closely associated with the antebellum social reform ethos in general. The reform movements had always attracted many women who had a particular interest in creating a more equitable culture. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry's sister, was the most famous nineteenth-century literary woman to argue, through *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), for social reform. It is useful to compare her reform ethos with the spiritualist one: for Stowe, it is the mystery of Christianity that shows the way to truth and justice.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why was spiritualism threatening to some men? In the image "The Age of Brass, or the Triumph of Women's Rights," how are the women represented? What did the social empowerment of women have to do with spiritualism?

Context: What different emphases are provided by a reform movement that focuses on spirits, rather than one that focuses on traditional Christianity? What kind of reforms were Victoria Woodhull and the Fox sisters associated with? How can you relate women's reforms and spiritualism to Henry Ward Beecher's "The Strange Woman" or Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia"?

Context: Why would women have a particular interest in social reform movements?

Context: Why might spiritualism appeal to so many people (over one million Americans by 1855)? How might this popularity relate to the contemporaneous popularity of the gothic mode?

Exploration: Do you believe in spirits? Is it possible to reconcile such a belief with orthodox faiths?

Exploration: Is it fair to say that Dickinson presents herself as a latter-day mystic in her poems? How would this approach revise your reading of her work?

Exploration: What are the similarities and differences between Poe's character Ligeia and Beecher's "Strange Woman"?

Exploration: In what sense could you say all gothic literature is interested in social reform?

America on the Rocks: The Image of the "Ship of State"

Writers often create coherence in their writing by employing literary motifs—themes, characters, or verbal patterns that recur throughout the work. Sometimes writers draw these motifs out of their imagina-

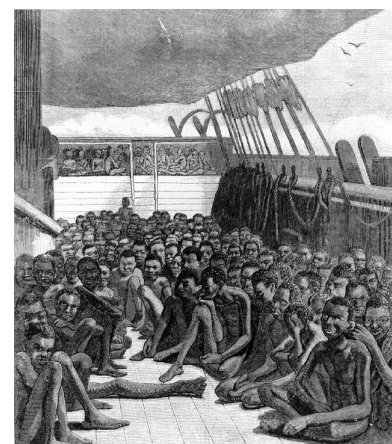
tion, but other times they are popular symbols from a writer's era. One important cultural motif for nineteenth-century political discourse was the image of America as the **ship of state** and its history as a voyage. As David C. Miller observes, this is an ancient trope, reaching back at least to Sophocles, in whose *Antigone* Creon says to the chorus that "our Ship of State, which recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come safely to harbor at last, guided by the merciful wisdom of Heaven." And in the United States, the figure goes back at least to Roger Williams and John Winthrop, in the seventeenth century, who exploited its association with the Israelites' journey into the wilderness toward the promised land of Canaan. But in the years around *Moby-Dick's* composition, as the nation seemed more and more headed toward sectional conflict over the issue of slavery, many voices warned that the ship of state was threatening to strike the rocks of civil war. For many Americans, America was not so much sailing into harbor as nearly foundering in treacherous socio-political seas. In 1850, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote his poem "The Building of the Ship," which became popular with Unionists as it reminded Americans of the "blood and tears" that went into the creation of the Union. Significantly, in the same year Daniel Webster defended the Compromise of 1850 in these terms: "The East, the North, and the stormy South combine to throw the whole sea into commotion, [. . .] I have a part to act, not for my own security or safety, for I am looking out for no fragment upon which to float away from the wreck, if wreck there must be, but for the good of the whole, and the preservation of all." The Compromise was meant to unite once and for all the North, the South, and the West, newly acquired in the Mexican War of 1848–49. Among other provisions, it allowed the admittance of California into the Union as a free state but required northern states to return escaped slaves to their former masters. However, it eased tensions between North and South only temporarily, and the Civil War came eleven years later. In fact, in 1851 Melville's own father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, enforced the Fugitive Slave Act, putting the law officially into practice. One commentator responded to abolitionists who decried this law by figuring slavery as an implacable force: "Did you ever see a whale? Did you ever see a mighty whale struggling?"

It is possible to argue, then, as Alan Heimert did forty years ago, that Melville's epic consciously allegorizes America as the ship of state. He points out not only that the *Pequod* is manned by thirty isolates all "federated along one keel" (there were thirty states in the Union by 1850), but also that each of the three mates stands for one of the three major regions of the country: North, South, and West. Moreover, each one employs as harpooner the precise racial minority that the region he represents was built upon: a Pacific Indian serves Starbuck, the Yankee; a Native American throws for Stubb, whom Melville describes

Philadelphia. In this sermon Beecher warns young men against the dangers of female sexuality, which he saw as a force possessing near-supernatural power over an unguarded man's will.



[7261] Currier & Ives, *A Squall off Cape Horn* (1840–90), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-5632].



[2603] *Harper's Weekly*, *The Africans of the Slave Bark "Wildfire"—The Slave Deck of the Bark "Wildfire," Brought into Key West on April 30, 1860—African Men Crowded onto the Lower Deck; African Women Crowded on an Upper Deck* (1860), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-41678].

"AMERICA ON THE ROCKS" WEB ARCHIVE

[1541] Unknown, *Ship William Baker of Warren, in the South Atlantic Ocean* (1838), courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. Page from a ship's logbook. Whaling ship logbooks provide insight into the whaling industry's impact on the international market, the changes in population and behavior of whale species, and the cultural changes whaling brought to different social and ethnic groups.

[1666] Anonymous, *The Harpers Ferry Insurrection—The U.S. Marines storming the engine house—Insurgents firing through holes in the doors* (1859), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-126970]. This illustration from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* depicts the end of the raid led by John Brown on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. The raid deepened beliefs in both the South and the North that there could be no compromise over slavery.

[2603] *Harper's Weekly*, *The Africans of the Slave Bark "Wildfire"—The Slave Deck of the Bark "Wildfire," Brought in to Key West on April, 30, 1860—African Men Crowded onto the Lower Deck; African Women Crowded on an Upper Deck* (1860), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-41678]. The importation of slaves from Africa was outlawed in 1820, but continued illegally until the Civil War. Such depictions of the inhumanity of slavery helped strengthen the abolition movement in the United States.

[7261] Currier & Ives, *A Squall off Cape Horn* (1840–90), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-5632]. This print captures the popular ideal of America as "ship of state," as well as the sense of nationalism and exploration that fueled the expanding physical and economic borders of the country.

as "essentially Western"; and the African Daggoo carries Flask, who represents the South.

But even if the symbolism is not as tight as Heimert suggests (many readers might find this reading a little claustrophobic), there is no question that the spirit of the "ship of state" was in the air as Melville wrote. Other important literary texts of the time to evoke this image are Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Of course, the other symbolically prominent vessel of the age was itself horribly literal: the slave ship. Its significance can be seen in images like *The Africans of the Slave Bark "Wildfire,"* which was the kind of visual rhetorical statement that abolitionists seized on to decry the cruelties of slavery. The two ships were symbolically inextricable, as the repeated but direct voyages of the one had much to do with the single but tumultuous journey of the other.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why was there national tension in the 1850s?

Comprehension: In what sense might Melville's *Pequod* be allegorizing America?

Context: What aspects of a country are emphasized when it is thought of as the "ship of state"?

Context: How did the outcome of the Mexican War add to anxiety about the "voyage" of America?

Context: How do you imagine a typical northern white American of the mid-nineteenth century would react to the image of the slave bark *Wildfire*? A typical southern white American?

Exploration: Do you see any way to have avoided the Civil War? What advice would you have given Americans about the ship of state in 1850?

Exploration: In what ways is a country *not* like a ship? Why might employing the image of the ship of state actually be politically dangerous?

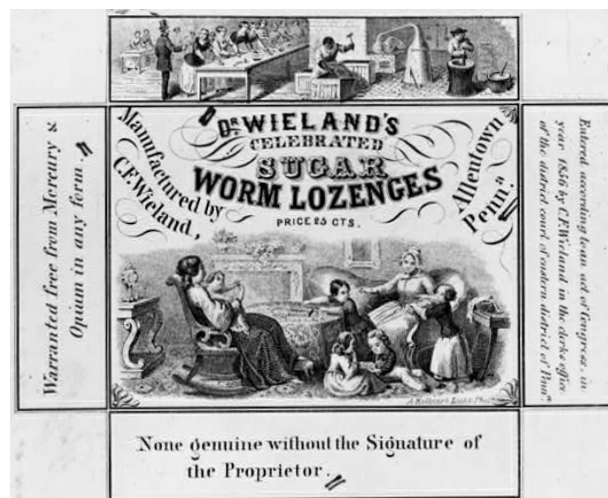
Exploration: Closely examine the details of the *Pequod* as described in Chapter XVI of *Moby-Dick*, "The Ship." What details support the idea that Melville intended this novel—at least in part—to represent America's voyage in the mid-nineteenth century?

EXTENDED CONTEXTS

Unnatural Reason/Weird Science

Alongside the enthusiasm for technological progress and the Industrial Revolution, the nineteenth century experienced widespread anxiety about the costs of technology and resulting urbanization and alienation. Herman Melville, in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," and Rebecca Harding Davis, in *Life in the Iron*

Mills, wrote of the dehumanizing potential of industrial labor. Melville, in “The Bell-Tower,” and Hawthorne, in works like “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and “The Birth-Mark,” followed Mary Shelley’s lead in *Frankenstein*, suggesting that scientific ambition can be easily associated with hubris—dangerously overweening pride that inevitably led to the destruction of the scientist. Moreover, industrial labor was seen by some as a challenge to republican individualism: the worker became a cog in the machine, no longer an autonomous producer. Many felt technology as a threat, a kind of monstrous “machine in the garden”—to borrow Leo Marx’s term—one that invaded people’s lives, producing potentially catastrophic side effects.



QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What sense do you get of the factory in view of the “Architectural Iron Works, 13th & 14th Sts., East River, New York”? Does this seem like an inviting place to work? Why or why not? Compare this image with the depiction of the factory in Herman Melville’s “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids.”

Context: How could you see “Molten Metal to Casts,” in the archive, as an argument against industrial labor? How is this argument similar to and different from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s abolitionist stance in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*?

Exploration: The archive images of “Dr. Wieland’s Celebrated Sugar Worm Lozenges” and “Moorhead’s Improved Graduated Magnetic Machine” implicitly promise that technology can improve daily life. Do you see these promises explored in any of the texts of Unit 6? In your own life? Do you trust these promises? Do these promises bear any resemblance to Rappaccini’s experiment?

“Sleeping Beauty”: Sentimentalizing Death in the Nineteenth Century

In the mid-nineteenth century, death was less often seen as the occasion for a final judgment of the sinning soul and more often as the passage to a comforting “home.” As it had always been in America, death was still a family affair, much more a part of everyday life than in our own day; rather than in hospitals, people died at home, cared for by women relatives. With events like Unitarian Minister William Ellery Channing’s repudiating the Calvinist theory of infant damnation in 1809, however, death—especially the death of children—became more an occasion for melancholy than an opportunity for pious reflections on depravity.

The **cult of sentiment** that continued from the eighteenth into the nineteenth century suggested that sympathy with another human was

[3161] C. F. Wieland, *Dr. Wieland’s Celebrated Sugar Worm Lozenges* (1856), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-102488].

“UNNATURAL REASON” WEB ARCHIVE

[3159] Sarony, Major & Knapp, *View of the Architectural Iron Works, 13th & 14th Sts., East River, New York* (1865), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-2787]. D. D. Badger and Company Architectural Iron Works in New York City. Cast-iron building facades were an industrial alternative to those made of the more traditional, and more expensive, hand-carved stone.

[3161] C. F. Wieland, *Dr. Wieland’s Celebrated Sugar Worm Lozenges* (1856), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-102488]. Patent medicine label with an illustration of respectable-looking women supervising children in a sitting room and smaller illustrations of laboring women (and one man). As science and medicine gained acceptance in the mid-nineteenth century, such medications became popular. This one was marketed to female consumers.

[3162] Bald, Cousland & Co., New York & Philadelphia, *Proof for Bank Note Vignette Showing Men Carrying Molten Metal to Casts* (1857), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-99585]. This engraving for a bank note proof

shows iron workers transferring a crucible of molten metal to the casting area. Many states, and some private companies, printed their own notes prior to the nationalization of currency during the Civil War.

[7249] Anonymous, *Carter's Little Liver Pills* (c.1860), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Samuel Rosenberg Collection [LC-USZ62-75898]. Trade card advertisement for liver pills, depicting a woman with a "wretched nervous headache" who is amazed that her husband could be chipper after a late night. The success of such nineteenth-century medications was due to the growing belief that science could improve the daily life of Americans.

[8650] Emory Elliott, Interview: "Hawthorne's Relation to the Puritan Past" (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Emory Elliott, professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, reads an excerpt from Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter."



[2651] N. E. Talcott and J. H. Bufford, *Allegorical Representation of the Dying Christian* (1847), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-3150].

"SLEEPING BEAUTY"

WEB ARCHIVE

[2651] N. E. Talcott and J. H. Bufford, *Allegorical Representation of the Dying Christian* (1847), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-3150]. This lithograph shows a man on his deathbed making a peaceful transition to the afterlife. He is surrounded by Jesus Christ, angels, and women.

a paramount virtue. Especially associated with literature written by and for women—and the cult of true womanhood in general—the sentimental tradition taught that the homely virtues of empathy and pity were the route to moral edification for both sexes. This movement produced many tearful deathbed scenes in literature and art: the death of little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is only one of many examples of angelically innocent children dying gracefully in order to rend the hearts of the onlookers and readers (in fact, childhood mortality was 30 to 50 percent in this era). On the other side of the Atlantic, Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* and Charles Dickens in *The Old Curiosity Shop* employed this image as well. Through a sympathetic reaction to such a death, it was hoped that people would become more virtuous by tapping into their sentimentality, which would ease the demands of callous reason. Starting in the 1830s, "consolation literature"—roughly comparable to today's self-help books on dealing with grief—became popular, and life insurance companies took root. As Stanley B. Burns shows in *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America*, by 1841 the brand-new technology of the daguerreotype was encouraging a vogue in post-mortem photography. In an age without public records, the dead could, in a way, be captured and held onto indefinitely.

Gothic literature responds to this era of sentimental death in a number of ways. Some writers, like Stowe, exploit the trend for socio-political purposes. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the sentimental deaths of Eva and Uncle Tom are meant to edify the reader: as Stowe wrote in the novel's concluding chapter, "the man or woman who *feels* strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race." Writers like Poe and Brown inject death scenes with graphic physical descriptions to transfer the intense emotionality of sentiment into an aesthetic effect of horror. Dickinson, however, frequently writes about the moment of death—or its anticipation or aftermath—in decidedly unsentimental terms, as if to undercut the usual effect of the sentimental death.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What seems to be the message of the "Allegorical Representation of the Dying Christian"? How do you imagine it meant to make its viewers feel? How do Dickinson's "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died" or Melville's *Moby-Dick* (e.g., the death of Pip) challenge this allegory?

Exploration: Can you spot the use of sentimental death-scenes in literature or film today? How do they function in films like *Titanic*, *Steel Magnolias*, and *Terms of Endearment*? Why are films like these sometimes called—sometimes with affection, sometimes with disdain—"chick flicks"?

ASSIGNMENTS

Personal and Creative Responses

1. *Journal*: Write a letter to Goodman Brown, Rappaccini, Ahab, or Emily Dickinson in which you try to soothe their anxieties. What could you say to these tormented figures that might comfort them and ease their fears about people, society, or God? Do you think you could persuade them to adopt a more optimistic outlook? What points would you have to emphasize? Do you believe your own arguments?
2. *Poet's Corner*: First, try summarizing the “argument” of Dickinson’s poem #1129 [Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—] in prose form. What problems do you encounter in doing so? Can you take into account *all* of the words and punctuation of the poem as you write your summary? If not, what do you have to leave out in order to make the argument coherent? Second, try writing a poem in the style of Dickinson that expresses one of your beliefs. Imitate her spare style, use dashes, and see how briefly and efficiently you can express your views. Are you able to translate the belief into a Dickinson-like poem? What problems do you encounter?
3. *Doing History*: Consider some gothic “texts” of our own day: you can find myriad examples in literature, film, television, and video games. Do you find in the current upsurge in gothic subject matter the spirit of Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickinson? Why or why not?
4. *Multimedia*: American gothic representation has always been interdisciplinary: as a mode that is meant to affect the emotions as well as the intellect, it can be seen in painting, photography, drama, film, television, and video games. Using the *American Passages* image database, construct a multimedia presentation in which you use visuals to develop a definition of “gothic.” What elements or characteristics cause these images to cohere into an identifiable set of concerns, ideas, or assumptions?
5. *A Woman's View*: In 1999, Sena Jeter Naslund published *Ahab's Wife, or, The Star-Gazer*. In this novel Naslund imagines what life was like for Ahab’s young wife. Write a response to one of the works you have read using the perspective of someone who is not given voice in the text. For example, you might rewrite the opening of *Moby-Dick* from Queequeg’s perspective or a scene from *The Scarlet Letter* from Pearl’s point of view.

Problem-Based Learning Projects

1. Because you have just studied the writers in this unit, you have been asked to help organize a new course being offered by the psychology department of your school, “Gothic Psychology.” The idea is to introduce students to human psychology as represented by writers in the gothic tradition. Referring to the texts of this unit, outline the syllabus for the course.

[2654] James S. Baille, *The Mother's Grave* (1848), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-1842]. Here a rosy-cheeked brother and sister dressed in mourning are joined by a dog at their mother's tombstone.

[2656] D. W. Kellogg, *Woman Mourning by Tomb* (c. 1842), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-1840]. Painting of crying woman leaning on tomb inscribed with the words “to the memory of Capt. John Williams, died April the 1, 1825.”

[3111] James William Carling, *The Raven* (c. 1882), courtesy of the Edgar Allan Poe Museum, Richmond, Virginia. This illustration, created by James Carling for an 1882 edition of “The Raven,” reflects the dark and foreboding tone of Poe’s classic poem.

[8658] Priscilla Wald, “Dickinson Reading” (2001), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Wald, associate professor of English at Duke University, reads Emily Dickinson’s “There’s a certain Slant of light.”

2. Congress is commissioning you to prepare a study about the effects on readers of violent, disturbing literature—e.g., gothic literature. You are told that among sociologists there are two schools of thought: one is that such literature acts to “purge” the violent tendencies of people, allowing them to vicariously “let off steam” in a safe environment; the other is that such literature only desensitizes people and therefore makes them more prone to violence. How would you evaluate this problem, and what recommendations would you make? What information would you need, and what resources would you have to consult? Who would you ask?

GLOSSARY

ambiguity Doubtfulness or uncertainty of interpretation. Much gothic literature is considered ambiguous insofar as it rarely presents a clear moral or message; it seems intended to be open to multiple meanings.

American Renaissance Standard if limiting description of the flowering of American art and thought in the mid-nineteenth century. The restricted “canonical” version is usually thought to include Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, and Dickinson.

cult of sentiment Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultural phenomenon in which emotions and feelings, as opposed to reason and logic, were seen as the routes to moral and social improvement. Sentimentality emphasized the ability to empathize with another’s sorrow or to experience profound beauty. It was associated especially with literature written by and for women.

cult of true womanhood Influential nineteenth-century ideal of femininity that stressed the importance of motherhood, homemaking, piety, and purity. While men were expected to work and act in the public realm of business and politics, women were to remain in the private, domestic sphere of the home.

gothic In the eighteenth century and following, generally used for “of the Middle Ages.” Then, through negative association with the medieval—often seen as the “Dark Ages” following the intellectual and social flowering of Rome—the term “gothic” shifts to literature, art, or architecture which attempts to disturb or unsettle the orderly, “civilized” course of society. Gothic works probe the dark side of humanity or unveil socio-cultural anxiety.

Manifest Destiny Prevalent in America from its early days through the nineteenth century, the belief that divine providence mandated America to expand throughout the continent and to stand as a social model for the rest of the world.

original sin The Calvinist belief that, because of the fall of Adam and Eve, all humans are born inherently sinful. Only God’s free grace can save us from hell.

Romanticism European American late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century intellectual movement that stressed human

creativity, sensation, subjectivity, emotion, and fulfillment. Often associated with nature as an inspiring force, Romanticism emphasized the radically innovative individual, as opposed to the Enlightenment focus on the rationally ordered society. Gothicism is sometimes called “dark Romanticism.”

ship of state A metaphor for conceiving of society and government, in which the state is seen as a ship traversing treacherous waters (i.e., social conflict) and needs the steady guiding hand of a trustworthy captain (i.e., leadership) to steer it to safe harbor (i.e., peaceful consensus) before it founders (i.e., fails as a unified society). This metaphor represents part of the American tendency toward thinking via analogy (comparing how two apparently unlike things might clarify or explain each other) and typology (seeing cosmic or national history expressed or symbolized in everyday details).

spiritualism A more comforting and optimistic idea of the afterlife than that offered by Calvinism: the belief that the human personality or soul continues to exist after death and can be contacted through the aid of a medium. Many in the mid-nineteenth century were hopeful that science would eventually prove the existence of spirits.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

American Decorative Arts: Gothic Revival Library (1859) (virtual and actual exhibit). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street, New York, NY 10028-0198. General Information: (212) 535-7710. TTY: (212) 570-3828 or (212) 650-2551.

American Photographs: The First Century (exhibit). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC 20560-0970. Phone: (202) 275-1500.

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