

Episode: #6

Gothic Undercurrents

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Produced by Oregon Public Broadcasting for
Annenberg/CPB

Time Code	Audio
01.00.00.00	A/CPB ANNOUNCER
01.00.20.00	EMORY ELLIOTT: People were really quite frightened who were living in America in the mid-19 th century. They felt that it might be an experiment gone horribly wrong. And our writers explored that fear.
01.00.33.10	MELVILLE READER: <i>By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike...what is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me.</i>
01.00.55.22	NINA BAYM: When you look at what Melville says, when you look at what Hawthorne says, when you look at what Dickinson says, you see them saying over and over again, there is good reason to be afraid. We should be afraid. We can't trust the universe and we really can't trust ourselves either.
01.01.34.10	EMORY ELLIOTT: In the 19 th century, the gothic

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	<p>went from being ghost stories to being stories about the darkest aspects of humanity, the mysterious problems that we never can solve.</p>
01.01.50.13	<p>NARRATOR: AMIDST THE TURMOIL OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, SOME OF AMERICAN LITERATURE'S GREATEST WRITERS EMERGED.</p> <p>NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, HERMAN MELVILLE AND EMILY DICKINSON USED THE GOTHIC DEVICES OF TERROR, MYSTERY AND EXCITEMENT TO CROSS THE LINE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL, BETWEEN THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN...BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT.</p> <p>IN A FRAMEWORK THAT GRIPPED THE READER'S ATTENTION, THESE AUTHORS PROBED THEIR NATION'S DEMONS...AND THEIR OWN.</p>
01.02.30.05	<p>KAREN HALTTUNEN: Americans during this period were in a state something like what we call "future shock." Change was so rapid.</p>
01.02.39.10	<p>NINA BAYM: Americans are committed to the notion of themselves as the forming of a perfect union based on-choice on the free choice of the citizens. It is going to be a perfect nation and it is going to be a perfect nation because the people in it are going to be perfect. So this is a very tall order and of course one is</p>

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	failing— everywhere you look there are failures.
01.03.02.00	NARRATOR: UNCERTAINTY AND OPTIMISM WERE ENTWINED IN AMERICAN LIFE IN THE 1800'S.
01.03.08.00	KAREN HALTTUNEN: Westward expansion is an excellent example of the optimism fueling American culture the sense of manifest destiny, the American faith that God must have intended the Americans to occupy the entire continent all the way to the Pacific. Why else would He have put it here. That generated tremendous excitement and enthusiasm about the American future and about the American mission
01.03.40.00	PRISCILLA WALD: Meanwhile there were political struggles going on. Was this nation going to survive politically? How were you going to unite a very disparate group of people and how were you going to deal with divisive questions like Indian removal and slavery.
01.03.58.00	NARRATOR: CHANGE CAME SWIFTLY IN ALL AREAS OF AMERICAN LIFE.
01.04.03.00	KAREN HALTTUNEN: This is a period of dramatically rapid urbanization...It's a period of early industrialization.

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01.04.1.10	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: ...rapid immigration,... a rise of slavery and worry about where that was going, the abolition movement was starting, a woman's movement was starting in the 1820's, and there was a bank crisis and an economic depression that destroyed many people's lives in the late 1820's and 1830's.</p>
01.04.33.23	<p>NARRATOR: AMERICAN GOTHIC WRITERS REFLECTED AMERICA'S CHALLENGES AND UNCERTAINTIES: WASHINGTON IRVING, CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN, EDGAR ALLEN POE AND OTHER WRITERS TRANSFORMED AN EARLIER EUROPEAN GOTHIC TRADITION THAT HAD FEATURED CASTLES, MONKS AND MEDIEVAL RUINS.</p>
01.04.53.00	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: The American gothic, it took a very special American direction but it was part of a much larger movement of writers concerned with the supernatural, with the mysterious and with the dark evil aspects of life.</p>
01.05.11.00	<p>NARRATOR: AMERICAN GOTHIC AUTHORS WROTE IN RESPONSE TO THE CHANGES PRESENT ALL AROUND THEM...BUT PERHAPS MORE THAN OTHERS, NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE RESPONDED TO THE PAST: HIS OWN AND HIS COUNTRY'S.</p>

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	<p>BORN IN SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS ON THE FOURTH OF JULY 1804, HAWTHORNE WAS A DESCENDANT OF PURITANS.</p>
01.05.33.28	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: So, many of his works explore that feeling of inheriting a tradition that one does not want to have</p>
01.05.46.05	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: I think Hawthorne's greatest strength as a writer is his ability to understand the power of the past and to understand the power also of stories about the past. How to re-write them, how to rethink them, the holds they have over our imagination.</p>
01.06.05.15	<p>NARRATOR: IN THE SCARLET LETTER AND IN HIS SHORT STORY YOUNG GOODMAN BROWN, HAWTHORNE CONFRONTS HIS PURITAN PAST.</p>
01.06.13.13	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: <i>Young Goodman Brown</i> is one of those stories in Hawthorne, like most, that's very ambiguous. It begins by giving us a young couple who seem very happy and they're both very devout and good Puritans, good Christians, the young man goes off on an adventure in the woods</p>
01.06.33.22	<p>NINA BAYM: He is accompanied by a figure who, we are led to believe by</p>

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	<p>certain symbols, is the devil and he goes to a witch's Sabbath and there he sees every good person in his community turns out to be in league with the devil</p>
01.06.51.20	<p>HAWTHORNE READER: <i>...the fiend worshippers were seen; the smile of welcome gleamed darkly on every visage.</i></p> <p><i>"There," resumed the sable form, "are all whom ye have revered from youth. ...</i></p> <p><i>"Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race."</i></p>
01.07.31.17	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: In his interest in the Puritans, Hawthorne was really interested in what happened when absolute faith governed...human existence.</p>
01.07.42.17	<p>NARRATOR: HAWTHORNE'S INTEREST IN ABSOLUTE FAITH DID NOT END WITH PURITANISM.</p>
01.07.47.06	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: Hawthorne clearly viewed science and the 19th century emphasis to control nature as being not that much different from Puritanism... I think he was suspicious of anybody who believed they had the answer to</p>

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	life and death, whether that was someone who had a religious answer or someone who believed they had a scientific answer.
01.08.12.00	<p>NARRATOR: HAWTHORNE SCRUTINIZED 19TH CENTURY AMERICA'S FAITH IN SCIENCE AS A WAY TO PERFECTION. IN HIS SHORT STORY <i>RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER</i>, A FATHER EXPOSES HIS DAUGHTER TO THE TOXIC PLANTS IN HIS GARDEN, HOPING SHE WILL BECOME IMMUNE TO ALL POISON. HAWTHORNE DESCRIBES A YOUNG MAN WHO OBSERVES THE FATHER AT HIS WORK...</p>
01.08.35.00	<p>HAWTHORNE READER: <i>It was strangely frightful to the young man's imagination, to see this air of insecurity in a person cultivating in a garden, that most simple and innocent of human toils – Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? – and this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow, was he the Adam?</i></p>
01.09.04.20	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: ...and this her father saw as a way of preserving her virginity, preserving her identity, and what does is to destroy her finally.</p>
01.09.15.00	<p>NARRATOR: HAWTHORNE'S INFLUENCE CAN BE SEEN TODAY IN THE</p>

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	<p>HORROR AND MYSTERY WORKS OF WRITERS LIKE STEPHEN KING AND ANNE RICE. IN HIS OWN TIME, HAWTHORNE HAD AN IMPACT ON HIS CONTEMPORARIES – ESPECIALLY HERMAN MELVILLE.</p>
01.09.31.10	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: Melville got a great deal from Hawthorne as a writer. Primarily what he got was a recognition of their shared concern about the dark side, the blackness in life, the presence of evil, the questions about where it comes from. Why does a good God allow evil in the world? But then he went far beyond Hawthorne in exploring those questions. Hawthorne showed him the way. He opened the door. But, then, once Melville went through that door he went far, much farther, than Hawthorne.</p>
01.10.11.22	<p>NARRATOR: IN HIS REVIEW OF HAWTHORNE'S SHORT STORY COLLECTION <i>MOSES FROM AN OLD MANSE</i>, MELVILLE DESCRIBES THE DARKNESS, THE GOTHICISM THAT BOTH WRITERS EXPLORE.</p>
01.10.26.10	<p>MELVILLE READER: <i>Now it is that blackness in Hawthorne that so fixes and fascinates me... Perhaps he does not give us a ray of his light for every shade of his dark. But however, this may be, this blackness it is that furnishes the</i></p>

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	<i>infinite obscure of his background.</i>
01.10.49.18	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: <i>For in this world of lies, truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands. Only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great art of telling the truth, even though it be covertly and by snatches."</i></p> <p>In this passage in which Melville is writing about Hawthorne's work, he's really writing about himself too. And what he is saying is that the truth is so terrifying, it's so hard for people to take, it's so radical to express that you can never tell it straight on.</p>
01.11.43.22	<p>NARRATOR: MELVILLE USES THE STRATEGY OF TELLING THINGS "BY CUNNING GLIMPSES" IN HIS GOTHIC MASTERPIECE MOBY DICK.</p>
01.11.52.00	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: <i>Moby Dick</i> is certainly both a great adventure story and a story about interior struggle and the genius of Melville is pulling the two together, and in showing how every adventure story is also an internal struggle but even, more importantly, how every interior struggle is an incredible adventure story.</p>
01.12.15.12	<p>NARRATOR: HERMAN MELVILLE PLUNGES READERS INTO THE HIGH SEAS AS THE MONOMANIACAL AHAB AND</p>

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	HIS CREW HUNT FOR THE ELUSIVE WHITE WHALE.
01.12.24.10	PRISCILLA WALD: The white whale in <i>Moby Dick</i> is about ambiguity, uncertainty, and interpretation.
01.12.30.24	EMORY ELLIOTT: It's a blank slate for each person to read on to their own worst fear.
01.12.37.25	NARRATION: IN THE WORDS OF CAPTAIN AHAB...
01.12.40.25	MELVILLE READER: <i>This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds...And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol.</i>
01.13.03.19	NARRATOR: MELVILLE'S EARLY LIFE WAS AS DRAMATIC AS ANY OF HIS FICTIONAL STORIES. HE WAS BORN IN 1819 TO A FAMILY WITH MONEY AND SOCIAL STATUS. BUT WHEN MELVILLE WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD, HIS FATHER DIED SUDDENLY AND DEEPLY IN DEBT. HERMAN MELVILLE'S LIFE OF PRIVILEGE ENDED.
01.13.22.00	ROBERT STONE: His father's failure and death, his family's circumstances drove

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	him to be an outsider. He went to sea in a day when really nobody, no respectable people were at sea
01.13.36.27	EMORY ELLIOTT: He said that was his Harvard and Yale, a sailing ship.
01.13.42.14	NARRATOR: AT AGE 21, MELVILLE SAILED ON A WHALER TO THE SOUTH SEAS. TWO YEARS LATER, HE PUBLISHED TYPEE, BASED ON HIS EXPERIENCES AND IT WAS A SENSATION! BY AGE 28, MELVILLE WAS A WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR OF ADVENTURE STORIES...
01.13.58.10	EMORY ELLIOTT: He was obviously a very optimistic and positive young...man and his early works are full of that kind of promise of the future. But <i>Moby Dick</i> is...one of the turning point works and you see there him questioning everything. <i>Moby Dick</i> is a book that explores all of the darkest, most troubling, unresolvable questions that human beings have ever asked,
01.14.24.16	MELVILLE READER: <i>All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks., the undoubted deed – there, some unknown but still reasoning thing put forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting</i>

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	<i>through the wall? The white whale is that wall, shoved near to me.</i>
01.15.02.03	NARRATOR: CAPTAIN AHAB IS A MADMAN WILLING TO SACRIFICE EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE AROUND HIM TO ACHIEVE HIS GOAL.
01.15.09.03	ROBERT STONE: Our sympathies go 'round and 'round. They go between Ahab and the whale. It's a real moral quandary and it is constructed as a moral quandary.
01.15.20.21	MELVILLE READER: <i>Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! And since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale!</i>
01.15.39.18	NARRATOR: IN ATTACKING THE WHITE WHALE, AHAB IS ULTIMATELY CHALLENGING GOD HIMSELF.
01.15.45.28	NINA BAYM: Ahab's relationship to God is as an adversary, as an antagonist, and in chasing the white whale and hoping to kill that white whale, he really means to strike out against God.
01.16.00.15	MELVILLE READER: <i>To the last, I will grapple with thee. From hell's heart, I stab at</i>

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	<i>thee. For hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee.</i>
01.16.18.16	NARRATOR: BUT MOBY DICK IS MORE THAN A METAPHYSICAL CHALLENGE TO THE CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS OF GOD AND MAN. IT'S ALSO A COMMENT ON THE CHANGING NATURE OF AMERICA IN THE 1850'S.
01.16.29.25	EMORY ELLIOTT: America was in a very precarious place...slavery was a very troubling problem for people in the North especially, ...many people felt that the country was headed towards civil war.
01.16.47.05	NINA BAYM: You cannot have free people in one part of the country and...enslave people in another. You cannot have a working class that is being crowded into new slums and that is mainly made up of immigrants and also talk about this is a land of opportunity.
01.17.06.03	NARRATOR: ALL AMERICA'S DIFFICULTIES RUMBLE THROUGH MOBY DICK – EVERY CHALLENGE, EVERY PROBLEM AMERICA FACED WAS USED BY MELVILLE AS AHAB AND HIS SAILORS FACE THE WIND, THE SEA, AND THEIR FEARS ABOARD THEIR SHIP, THE PEQUOD.
1.17.21.02	EMORY ELLIOTT: Putting this group of individuals

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	<p>who are from all over the world—these sailors—on to this one ship, the Pequod, and putting it in the middle of the ocean on a mission that Ahab is leading them on, opens up the possibility for Melville to look at every kind of human psychological, social, racial, gender kinds of problems in that one little microcosm of that ship.</p>
01.17.47.27	<p>ROBERT STONE: This is life reduced to an elemental scale and it lends itself to stories that have a reverberation beyond just the characters involved.</p>
01.18.04.13	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: It's one of the first great books of our literature to tackle the issue of what is America about, how is it doing, where is it going, can it succeed or not? It doesn't answer those questions but it raises them all and it makes us think hard about what we're really up to as Americans.</p>
01.18.31.06	<p>NARRATOR: LIKE HAWTHORNE AND MELVILLE, POET EMILY DICKINSON WAS ALSO TRACING A LINE BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARK – BUT IN A MUCH MORE CONTAINED AND PERSONAL REALM.</p>
01.18.41.27	<p>NINA BAYM: The 19th century, contrary to what many people think, was a century full of active women of letters. There are hundreds, indeed thousands, of them. But the questioning that Emily</p>

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	Dickinson does in her poetry is almost without precedent and without equal.
01.19.03.03	<p>NARRATOR: AT FIRST GLANCE, WE MAY NOT RECOGNIZE DICKINSON AS A GOTHIC WRITER, BUT HER POETRY OFTEN TAKES ON THE BIG, WEIGHTY QUESTIONS OF LIFE – AND DEATH.</p>
01.19.12.26	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: Emily Dickinson is linked to a tradition of the gothic in her exploration of the terror of the ordinary.</p>
01.19.21.27	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: ...many of Dickinson's poems do this, particularly her poems about death, her poems in which God is present and where she's struggling with that question of what is God.</p>
01.19.35.25	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: <i>There is a certain slant of light, Winter afternoons -- That oppresses like the Heft Of Cathedral Tunes -- Heavenly Hurt it gives us -- We can find no scar, But internal difference, Where the Meanings, are --None may teach it -- Any -- 'tis the Seal Despair -- An imperial affliction Sent us of the Air -- When it comes, the Landscape listens -- Shadows -- hold their breath -- When it goes, 'tis like the Distance On the look of Death.</i></p>

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01.20.20.14	<p>NARRATOR: BORN IN 1830, DICKINSON LIVED A VERY ORDINARY LIFE FOR HER TIMES. AFTER HER SCHOOLDAYS, UNMARRIED, SHE RARELY LEFT HER SMALL NEW ENGLAND TOWN OF AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS. SHE DESCRIBED BOOKS AS "THE STRONGEST FRIEND" AND THE DICTIONARY AS HER "ONLY COMPANION". USING A SPARE, COMPACT FORM, DICKINSON CREATED POEMS THAT APPEAR TO SAY ONE THING BUT ARE WIDE OPEN TO EACH READER'S INTERPRETATION.</p>
01.20.50.04	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: <i>Tell all the truth but tell it slant, success in circuit lies too bright for our infirm delight, the truth's superb surprise. As lightning to the children eased with explanation kind, the truth must dazzle gradually or every man be blind.</i></p>
01.21.10.22	<p>NINA BAYM: When she writes, "tell all the truth but tell it slant," she is telling you to be ambiguous. Don't tell the truth directly.</p>
01.21.20.09	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: The truth is not circulating in much daily conversation, Dickinson suggests. She talks about circuit lies as being what people really want. Most of the time we don't want the truth.</p>

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	The truth is too hard.
01.21.37.01	<p>NARRATOR: DICKINSON FILTERED ENORMOUS QUESTIONS THROUGH THE SMALL, SHIFTING LENS OF HER INTENSELY PRIVATE LIFE. HER POEMS ARE ALWAYS A STUDY IN AMBIGUITY.</p>
01.21.47.01	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: You read her poem again and it suddenly seems to mean some entirely different, completely opposite of what you just read. That's what exciting about her, that's what's provocative and alluring about her as a writer.</p>
01.22.01.28	<p>NARRATOR: DICKINSON'S POETRY, RARELY PUBLISHED IN HER LIFETIME, LOOKS AND SOUNDS DIFFERENT FROM ANYTHING WRITTEN IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA –HER POEMS ARE PUNCTUATED BY DASHES AND SLASHES WHICH PUSH THE READER TO EXPERIENCE HER WORDS IN A NEW WAY.</p>
01.22.18.20	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: Sometimes the dash brings contradictory things together. Sometimes it pulls similar things apart.</p>
01.22.26.22	<p>NARRATOR: DICKINSON'S POETRY WAS OFTEN BUILT ON A</p>

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	<p>TRADITIONAL STANZA FORM LIKE THAT OF NURSERY RHYMES, BALLADS OR HYMNS. HER POEMS CAN EASILY BE SET TO MUSIC AS WITH THE POEM <i>HE FUMBLES AT YOUR SOUL</i>.</p>
01.22.39.00	<p>GRANT HIGH SCHOOL ROYAL BLUES SINGS:</p> <p><i>HE FUMBLES AT YOUR SOUL...</i></p>
01.23.18.15	<p>PRISCILLA WALD:</p> <p>In Dickinson's poetry she's breaking with formal conventions of poetry and of literary expression and allowing the word to explode onto the page and the image to explode for the reader.</p>
01.23.40.28	<p>NARRATOR:</p> <p>IN HER POEM <i>I HEARD A FLY BUZZ</i>, WE SEE THIS EXPLOSION AS SHE TAKES THE SMALLEST OF CREATURES – A FLY – AND INFUSES IT WITH MEANING.</p>
01.23.51.08	<p>PRISCILLA WALD:</p> <p><i>I heard a fly buzz when I died, the stillness in the room was like the stillness in the air between the heavens of storm. The eyes around had rung them dry and breaths were gathering firm for that last onset when the king be witnessed in the room. I willed my keepsakes, signed away what portion of me be assignable, and then it was their interposed a fly with blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz</i></p>

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	<i>between the light and me, and then the windows failed and then I could not see to see.</i>
01.24.40.04	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: ...the people, the tears, the house that she's in, the bed—it strips all this away and leaves her mind, her senses, in the light with this fly absurdly buzzing between her and her last moment of life.</p>
01.25.02.00	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: There are no bright lights. There is no great revelation. She just cannot see to see.</p>
01.25.10.18	<p>NARRATOR: WRITTEN IN 1862, I HEARD A FLY BUZZ CAN ALSO BE READ AS A REFLECTION OF DICKINSON'S EXPERIENCE OF THE CIVIL WAR.</p>
01.25.19.03	<p>NINA BAYM: The most important thing that happened in Dickinson's lifetime, for Dickinson herself, was the Civil War. She was a young person when the Civil War broke out. She lived in the town of Amherst, which boasted at that time a men's college...and a lot of those young men went off to the war and a lot of them didn't come back.</p>
01.25.46.00	<p>NARRATOR: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA WAS A CHAOTIC AND CONFUSING TIME. A TIME OF WAR AND SOCIAL CHANGE. THE WRITING OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, HERMAN MELVILLE AND</p>

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	<p>EMILY DICKINSON CAPTURES THIS TROUBLED ERA WITH ENDURING POWER AND INSIGHT. AND IN CONFRONTING THE CHAOS OF THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY CAME TO CHALLENGE CONVENTIONAL NOTIONS OF GOOD AND EVIL, AND THE NATURE OF GOD AND MAN.</p>
01.26.17.29	<p>PRISCILLA WALD: Dickinson, Hawthorne, and Melville were all really interested in exploring the ambiguities of meaning and getting at the deep uncertainty that for them is human life.</p>
01.26.34.02	<p>EMORY ELLIOTT: What they know, what they're exploring, the truths that they believe can't be given directly to the reader and that's what these writers are doing. They're saying, you know, I'm putting my meanings in this text but only the people who are ready for them will discover them.</p>
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