

Psychos' Haunting Memories: A(n) (Un)common Literary Heritage

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In his homage to Edgar Allan Poe, Lou Reed attached a text to the album entitled *Raven* (2003), where he says: “Edgar Allan Poe is that most classical of American writers – a writer more peculiarly attuned to our new century’s heartbeat than he ever was to his own. Obsessions, paranoia, wilful acts of self-destruction surround us constantly. Though we age we still hear the cries of those for whom the attraction to mournful chaos is monumental.” Because of this common contemporary feeling, our age can be called, what Teresa Brennan has termed “the age of paranoia” (Brennan 20). Everything we experience seems to belong to a global world of technological information that gives us access to instantaneous “contact,” giving also the feeling that we live in a reality that does not exist, or only exists in our minds as a kind of imaginary construct, leading to what Freud called a fixation in a narcissistic state of being. Our postmodern paranoia is a result of this speculative imagination which justifies the will to a paranoiac perversity that characterises both contemporary modernity and its representations in the American Gothic.

Nowadays, there is an enormous interest in psychic pathology, which has led to the creation of literary works full of deep uncertainty and epistemological doubts, where an optimistic interpretation of the world is totally impossible, as Freud had also showed in *The Spiritual Problem* us about the case of the American criminal, Albert Fish, who possessed, at the moment of his arrest, a volume of Poe’s *Extraordinary Stories*, in which the pages referring to “The Pit and the Pendulum” were visibly very worn and tattered due to the fact that they were looked through very often, perhaps with the purpose of learning something from this long narrative of torture. It seems that, in this case, there was a mutual attraction. The murderer was very interested in the author’s creative process, but the writer was also curious in everything that could possibly happen inside the criminal’s mind. They were both united by the common interest in learning more about the psychological experience involved in human perversity and the terrifying effects it could cause. If there was no moral sense associated to the aesthetic intention in Poe’s writing, we could never, for example, distinguish the terror effects calculated in cold blood by the narrators in “The Black Cat” or in “The Tell-Tale Heart” from those provoked, for example, by the famous Jeffrey Dahmer, the cannibal serial killer from Milwaukee. It is, then, completely understandable that Edgar Allan Poe

can be considered a master of the macabre. He was one of the first writers to explore the mysteries hidden in the psychotic mind, a mind always troubled by the guilt of certain past actions.

What Poe's short stories show is that the gratuitous act of perversity does not solve any interior conflict or psychological disintegration, because the characters project onto their victims their own "dark side," which becomes stronger and makes their psychological drama even more terrible, as it is proved by the narrators in "The Black Cat" ("The fury of a demon instantly possessed me" (598) and "The Tell-Tale Heart" ("It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage" (557)). In this last short story, the projection of the narrator's fears and terrors is the very origin of the perverse act. The "Evil Eye," that he feels is the source of his disturbance in the old man's appearance ("it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye" (556)), can correspond to his "Evil I," as his victim's heartbeat echoes the sound of his heart. This gives authenticity to the extreme terror of his soul created by an obsessive fear of death: "I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me" (556). This seems to prove that Poe's terrors are not of Germany, but of the soul, because he uses Gothic devices – especially the threatening sound from the *Doppelgänger's* theme and all the descriptions of atmospheres – as a means to express psychic terrors. The Gothic mode was transformed by Poe into a symbol of the essential human experience, where a simple description of a room, "black as pitch with thick darkness," (556) can become an objective equivalent to the individual's torments.

That "Evil Eye" is also another example of the renewal introduced by Poe in the Gothic genre, because it usually only characterizes the villain, but in Poe's tale its meaning is inverted, referring both to the victim and the victimizer. This led Pamela Shelden to conclude: "Although the typical Gothic pattern is one in which an innocent is hounded by an evil pursuer, in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat," Poe inverts the central Gothic situation as he shapes narrators who are at once self-deceived and self-destroyed" (1976, 75). The gratuitous and perverse act that leads the characters to commit their crimes is the same that makes them confess, which demonstrates that they are simultaneously agents of the action and its victims.

In Baudelaire's preface to his translation of "The Imp of Perverse" titled "Le Démon de la Perversité" which was placed at the beginning of a group of texts that were published as *NouvellesHistoiresExtraordinaires par Edgar Poe* (1857), he states that perverseness is a primitive

and irresistible force that turns man into a murderer and hangman. The narrator's final recognition in "The Black Cat," complemented by some others from "The Imp of Perverse" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," is quite clear about this matter: "The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman" (Poe 606). Poe's transgressive instinct takes him to invert the concept of perversity refusing to define it according to utilitarian theories. He prefers to defend the idea that the actions of moral consequence are motivated by an "unfathomable longing of the soul to *vex itself* – to offer violence to his own nature." (599).

In "The Imp of Perverse," this impulse to perversity is defined as being one of the most primitive human impulses that gives direction to man's character. The narrator recognizes that this spirit of perversity is not recognized by Philosophy or by rational minds that would reduce it to a mere succession of causes and effects. It is a criticism on the limits of reason to reach certainties about human personality. This definition of perversity translates the author's scepticism and the paradoxical nature of his thought that systematically refuses to define human nature by principles different from those of duality and paradox. Transformed into true essays about the perverse impulse, the three short-stories mentioned above present the criminal as a passive victim as opposed to the stereotypes circulated around the figure of the perpetrator of violence. Harry Levin was, about this subject, very clear: "At a more subliminal level, Poe seems to be punishing himself for his dipsomania. Under its confounding influence, his criminals become victims, more passive, masochistic rather than sadistic." (1958, 147). This critic noticed that while Hawthorne wrote about the ethics of guilt, Poe preferred to go deep into the psychology of crime, turning his criminals more authentic than his lovers.

However, Poe's work is not dispossessed of ethics, the question is that his ethics has simultaneously a psychological and an aesthetic purpose. One can only desire to transcend life through art, if one is confronted with his condition of being a prisoner facing the terror of existence. In "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections Between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology and Moral Vision" (1968), Joseph Moldenhauer remarks that in Poe's stories, the terrible anxieties and physical torments are necessary stages towards Unity, as the poet also has to suffer anguish and frustration to achieve the perfect poem. This torment of creation, a central anxiety in Poe's work, very often culminates with the destruction of the character-artist, which also symbolizes the

author's aesthetic death as he loses his individual identity in a kind of universal fusion that depends on the process of artistic creation. Moldenhauer comments: "Life in its customary categories – time, space, matter, the body, sex, birth. Motion, variety, change – life is, in Poe's vision, the thing to be defeated, to be transcended, or to be evaded in acts of an aesthetic character. These acts are simultaneously the destruction of the self and the creation of the perfect poem" (297). If terror is necessary for the creation of the work, "the imp of perverse" has, then, an important role in the creative process because it can dramatize that author's death. By assuming an impersonal and aesthetic attitude, it allows the author to better confront that "terror of the soul" which is produced by a perversity that is not praised or condemned, but rather accepted as a fact and gives its artistic form. Lovecraft understood this important mark of modernity in Poe's writing, saying that "Poe (...) perceived the essential impersonality of the real artist (...) to express and interpret events and sensations as they are (...) good or evil, attractive or repulsive, stimulating or depressing (...) as a detached chronicler rather than as a teacher, sympathizer, or vendor of opinion" (1973, 53).

Another author involved in the creation of a famous "psycho" is Robert Bloch, a direct inheritor of these two major American Gothic writers. We can feel the influence of Edgar Allan Poe in many of his works, namely in "The Man who collected Poe." He was at the very beginning encouraged to write fiction by H. P. Lovecraft, to whom he paid homage in many of his short stories. Bloch was known by his black humour and his well structured plots, which had the intention of provoking the maximum suspense thus attracting the reader's attention to a totally unexpected and unpredictable ending, which reminds us of the famous technique invented by Edgar Poe - called "the unity of effect." His unforgettable psycho, Norman Bates, was a taxidermist, who ran a small motel, but who didn't let the business interfere with the love he dedicated to his mother, especially when a beautiful but frightened girl, a runaway from the law, threatened his sanity. The plot is simple and there are no superficial descriptions. There are not many differences between the story written by Robert Bloch and the film directed by Alfred Hitchcock, in spite of some changes in the order by which certain episodes are narrated. We can even say that this is one of the few cases in which the film surpasses the literary work. However, Bloch is capable of letting us enter Bates' mind much better than Hitchcock in his movie, giving the reader many enlightening clues to the true nature of the psychopath's mental structure. The book also gives more emphasis to the relation between Sam and Mary, presenting Norman as a fat motel manager and not as a good-looking young man as in Hitchcock's version.

One of the best examples is the scene where Norman tries to socialize with Mary, before he kills her. Through this conversation we come to know that this psycho is also a very sensitive man, quite able to practice self-conscious acts of introspection that allow him to speak like a philosopher. He says: “We’re all in our private traps, clamped in them, and none of us can ever get out. We scratch and claw but only at the air, only at each other. And for all of it, we never budge an inch.” However, Bloch’s writing and his book are very far from being uninteresting.

Also important to mention are the influences on Hitchcock’s version of *Psycho*: Ed Gein’s case, the famous American serial-killer from Plainfield, Wisconsin; Fritz Lang’s movies like *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *M.*; *Diabolique* by Henri-Georges Clouzot; the famous *The Laurel and Hardy Murder Case*; *Touch of Evil* by Orson Welles starring Janet Leigh, Charlton-Heston and Welles - himself; the quite popular and very famous films about haunted houses by William Castle; and all the terror films produced after 1957. Published in 1959, *Psycho* raised questions about the dangers of madness and the archive of its commonsensical representations among the most “normal”. As Lila concludes at the end of the novel: “We’re all not quite as sane as we pretend to be.” Similarly, Norman Bates also says: “I think perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times” (Bloch 44). He could have his reasons to say this, but it is this ambivalence and the absence of boundaries between madness and sanity that turned out to be the most important subject of this literary work. So, it is completely understandable that Bloch has always been respected among other writers or famous people such as Buster Keaton, Fritz Lang, Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, Harlan Ellison and other representatives of the fantastic and horror fiction. He also wrote several scripts for the series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Thriller*, *Star Trek*, *Night Gallery*; *Lock Up*, *Journey to the Unknown* and *Dark Room*. Consequently, his stories influenced many young writers, as perhaps it was the case of Bret Easton Ellis, when he decided to call one of his most controversial and famous books *American Psycho*.

Bloch’s *Psycho* could have been a reference to Ellis, but he also considered himself to be in debt to Hemingway, John Didion, James Joyce, Flaubert, Dennis Cooper, Don DeLillo, TV films and *rock and roll*. His works try to ridicule the way people, nowadays, develop obsessions about appearances, glamour and status. To capture these traits with authenticity, the author uses, most of the times, the first person singular and the present tense. With this he is able to create ironically ambivalent characters that are at the same time enviable and terrible, and whose projections and fantasies make them cross the feeble line that separates sanity from madness.

In *American Psycho* (1991), Patrick Bateman is a stylized villain, an investment banker in Wall Street, who often goes to luxury restaurants, wears brand-name clothing and, at intervals, is also a serial-killer. According to the author, he is a big metaphor for all that he wanted to say was wrong in the 80s in America: consumption, yuppies, avarice, serial-killers' chic sophistication, etc. So dispossessed of morals, as the main character in *Clockwork Orange*, Bateman is a human being dispossessed of humanity, who kills women without any other apparent motive than filling the void caused by the superficiality of false appearances of an unhealthy materialism, where the prestige of a business card provokes more emotion than a child's murder. The detailed descriptions of sexual torture can make us believe that we are in the presence of a pure pornographic work, or of a simple gratuitous act of promoting violence, but they can also be interpreted as a clear denouncement of the structural madness of the violent world we live in. It is, then, completely understandable that Ellis could be interested in creating an apparently normal character - a rich young man from New York, with a girlfriend and an expensive car – but who is simultaneously a murderer.

Bateman's correct social image seems to legitimate all his crimes, rendering them banal and turning them into the most natural effect of a certain socio-cultural system, that is gradually going to suffer from even more psychopathologies, producing each time a higher number of psychos, who could be anyone of us. Bateman's crimes can never be real and his condition, as a character of fiction makes us doubt his existence, but Ellis's power of observation leaves the disturbance of that possible reality in the air. His memories can be real or just a product of a disturbed mind, but they are told with such authenticity that they end up showing the danger of their terrible possibility. They not only haunt Bateman's mind, but all the readers' minds by the impossibility of escaping them. That is why the beginning and end of the novel tell the reader that there is no way out, no hope to be safe from the negative aspects of contemporary civilization. Bateman's final statement about the fact that there is no catharsis in his confession – because he isn't able to extract any meaning from it – gives us evidence of his despair, that can be read as a clear warning about the impossibility of human regeneration:

There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed. (...) My pain is constant and sharp. And I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact I want my pain to be

inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this – and I have, countless times, in just about every act I’ve committed – and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I go in no deeper knowledge of myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. This confession has meant *nothing*.... (Ellis 377)

This incapacity for finding a way out, a possibility to escape their own demons, leads these dangerously disturbed characters to a feeling of entrapment that is as destructive as the one expressed by Norman Bates in the cinematic version of *Psycho* by Hitchcock, as previously mentioned, and where he says that we are all in our private traps. This feeling of loss and bewilderment can find an escape not by destroying or murdering them, but by self-destruction as in committing suicide.

This is what *4:48 Psychosis*, by Sarah Kane, is about. The title refers to a specific time in the morning, 4:48. She retained this moment, the darkest hour before sunrise, and felt it as a moment of great clarity, when the confusions of psychosis disappear. The paradox in the play is that this is a moment of clarity in the psychotic mind, while others understand it as a moment of strong delusion. In the play there aren’t separate character voices or any indication about their number or genre. The same fragmentation of the self and the loss of borders, felt by the psychotic mind, are reflected in the structure of the play, which describes the internal drama caused by an inescapable and tragic psychosis that takes possession of all the characters and dominates all the action. The play becomes an exorcism of this psychotic energy that can only be escaped by death or suicide. We can call it a theatre of psychosis, where the mind is the central character: “And my mind is the subject of these bewildered fragments,” says the voice of the play. A mind that is the author, but also more than the author, because the open form of the play lets the members of the audience come in so that they can recognize themselves in the feelings expressed.

The play can be divided into three voices: two women and a man. In a way, the three voices represent, in part, a person’s division into victim, perpetrator and spectator. In Kane’s writing, the three figures, always contained within a single body, are used to clearly objectifying the several aspects involved in the experience of suffering. As T.S. Eliot once said about one of his plays, “suffering is action,” and it seems that Sarah Kane knew that quite well. That is why, in Kane’s work, the “I” is something complex that flows through many voices. *4:48* is like a report from the

underworld that makes us remember *Notes from the Underworld* by Dostoevsky. There is someone who speaks from a dark zone of the mind, where it is very dangerous to enter and from which, most of the times, nobody succeeds in exiting. The interest of this play does not consist in finding out all the details about the story of a depression or about the author's life behind the words. Its importance remains in finding there a correspondence to our own fears and self-destructive impulses. Sarah Kane's play refuses to accept the trivialization that could turn the experience of pain and its expression into a commonplace. Her words are a very expressive and strong proof that something very personal but also very universal is here in question:

I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the
Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for
mercy, the killing fields are mine, everyone left the
party because of me, I'll suck your fucking eyes out
send them to your mother in a box and when I die
I'm going to be reincarnated as your child only fifty
times worse and as mad as all fuck I'm going to make
your life a living fucking hell I REFUSE I REFUSE I
REFUSE LOOK AWAY FROM ME

(Kane 227)

The more recurrent themes explored by Kane are: death, sex, violence, violation, mental collapse and love. Her belief was that writing about violence, death and psychosis could redeem an empty life without meaning. Kane defended the premise that there was a connection between a violation in a hotel in Leeds and the infernal devastation of a civil war. Her very personal psychological breakdown, that led her to suicide, should enlighten our consciousness.

After 4:48 I shall not speak again
I have reached the end of this dreary and repugnant
Tale of a sense interned in an alien carcass and
lumped by the malignant spirit of the moral majority
(Kane 213-214)

What seems common to all these psychos is the loss of human identity and the state of being haunted by an inescapable inherited past that invades the present enclosing each individual in an

unreal world of appearances and illusions, where no one knows where the past ends and the present begins. To recover the sense of time implies the recuperation of the sense of human existence, because, as Heidegger said in his work *Being and Time*, the true sense of being is time. That is what the main character, in *Spider* by Patrick McGrath, tries to do at the risk of losing himself in his own web of chaotic memories. His despaired and lonely search for his past, through the process of maintaining a diary, is a good metaphor for the importance of writing regarding its power in bringing to the surface of conscience our ultimate fears and dark impulses, which remain obscure in the most unconscious levels of our minds. In his journal, the author confesses: “Look at me *now*, scribbling *out of terror* in this lonely room, engaged in some pitiful attempt to drown out the voices from the attic” (McGrath 2002, 148). These are the voices from his past that terrify him so much, but with which he desires to confront himself, so that his life could make sense. Even if this sense comes from a chaos of thoughts and feelings each one contradicting the other as Dennis Cleg, nicknamed “Spider”, contradicts himself inside a divided personality troubled by his schizophrenia. The novel is built from unorganised pieces of memories without chronological order, that parallels the effort Spider makes in putting together the broken pieces of his own fragmented personality: “But as regards the order and meaning of those scraps: that was what I pieced together, like a shattered window, in the quiet years that followed, fragment by fragment until the picture was whole. And oddly, as my childhood took shape, so did I, Spider, become more coherent, firmer, stronger – I began to have substance” (McGrath 147). He could have quoted one of the last verses from T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* and say: “These fragments I have shored against my ruins.”

What we really see through Spider’s opaque eyes are the ashes of a ruined life, though how it was destroyed becomes clear only gradually. This process of enlightenment happens while he writes his diary and someone reads the book. The narrator does not seem to know more than the reader, because he is as interested in discovering the truth about his mysterious past and his mother’s death as the reader is. This fact gives more authenticity to the novel, because this parallel process of discovering leads to an identification between the ‘psycho’ and reader - who begins to feel a certain empathy with the drama of a mad man. This tendency of projecting onto the “Other,” and the possibility of really becoming the “Other,” lets him take possession of one’s personality. This is one of the symptoms of Spider’s psychopathology which shows that the reader, himself, is not very far from this terrible possibility. This is due to the tremendous authenticity we can extract from each page written by Patrick McGrath, who, as the son of the medical inspector of Broadmor Hospital for the criminally insane, knew very well that these nightmares can turn into terrible realities, and no

one is free from becoming a psycho. Jacques Lacan argued that a certain paranoia is the mode by which we all obtain intersubjective knowledge about relations, about our reality. By using projective thinking and his own power of deduction, putting himself in the Other's place, the paranoid draws affinities between all the knowledge he has of objects, he makes connections, he creates a plot by taking the place of the Other. This is the reason why Spider is driven by an urge to figure things out, and it also explains his obsession for systematising, his need to discover and account for things, which identifies his tale with the tradition of detective fiction.

Trapped between imagination and reality, Spider's world is subject to distortions. His memories, however concrete they may appear, are actually highly suspect, and so is the world of his present. We can never be completely sure whether what is being described is the horror of the real world or Spider's nightmares. McGrath wrote the novel in the first person, from Spider's viewpoint, and this should advise us not to trust the narrator. However, the reader ends up trusting his tale, because, in contrast to his inarticulate surface persona, Spider's descriptions are witty and vivid. These unreliable narrators are very common in gothic stories that portray psychotic characters. One of the first writers to use this technique was Edgar Allan Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." Through Spider's voice, McGrath presents a tale whose structure is itself paranoid, where the hero sees signs of conspiracy everywhere and the whole story reflects a paranoid scenario, a nightmare where the murderer is oneself. The extreme desire to tell the truth, develops Spider's obsessive attention to detail, but the high level of this obsession warns the reader he should read the truth as a lie, because he is receiving all the information in an inverted form. That is why in his "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'," Jacques Lacan argued that Poe's detective Dupin relied on paranoid reasoning to arrive at the truth. Deciphering all the clues his imagination created, Spider, like Oedipus, made an uncanny discovery in the labyrinthine web of his mind: the individual, he suspects is none other than himself. His Oedipal condition leads us to the conclusion that he may also have killed his mother, because he developed an extreme jealousy for his father, whose crime he wants to believe and investigate obsessively.

In *The Psychoses* (1993), Lacan stated that "all human knowledge stems from a dialectic of jealousy, which is a primordial manifestation of communication" and that "the object of human interest is the object of the other's desire" (39). According to this idea, all knowledge is, in the beginning, paranoid, an effect of projection and identification, but Lacan insists on the difference *in level* between alienation as the general form of the imaginary and alienation in psychosis, where

“from the moment the subject speaks, the Other ... is there (*ça parle*) Analysis says it’s the unconscious ... something that speaks ... beyond the subject ... and that says more about him than he believes” (41). And what reveals more about Spider is his past, the childhood memories that he rejected thus creating another parallel story to the one he lived in reality. That is why Lacan considers psychosis as a hole in reality, a point of rupture in the structure of the external world that the psychotic fantasy tries to compensate for.

All this justifies Leslie Fiedler’s opinion that “the whole tradition of the gothic is a pathological symptom rather than a proper literary movement” (1997, 5). These symptoms are recurrent in many famous gothic psychos. All of them are victims of several forms of obsession or compulsion. For them the world is already ruined, as the fissure of “The Fall of the House of Usher” indicates. Their obsessive actions are the ruin of action. Melmoth’s quest for souls in *Melmoth, The Wanderer*, and Patrick Bateman’s serial murders in *American Psycho* show that these characters are forever trapped in a closed circle. The origins of their psychopathologies seem to be all hidden in their past, buried in the subconscious, because it is something their conscience rejects and that comes to the surface in frightening forms and terrible actions, which are never quite intelligible.

Usually, the dominating figure of the father or mother is the source of evil and the cause for a psychosis. If this seems to be the case with Spider, it is also true for the central character in *Psycho* by Robert Bloch, and the female character in *Twin Peaks* by David Lynch. Richard Chase also noticed this interest in psychotic states of the mind, when he identified the main characteristics of Gothic fiction as being “the Gothic tone, the highly wrought effect of horror, surprise, victimisation, and the striving for abnormal psychological states.” (36) Many comparisons and associations could be established between Norman Bates from *Psycho* and Spider, in what concerns the irruptions of the unconscious that turn both characters into victims.

We can also establish a comparison between McGrath and Poe, departing from *Spider*. Beyond the psychopathology common to Spider and Roderick Usher, there is also that “house of terror”, that decadent and ancestral house, similar to a museum, where every memory is kept untouchable, and through which we can diagnose the main character’s obsessions. These are projected in the house and contaminate it with all their horrors and feelings of guilt.

Kitchner Street was blackly contaminated long before any of these events occurred, every brick of the place oozed time and evil, and not only Kitchner Street, the whole festering warren was bad, bad from the day it was built. So no, it wasn't that, perhaps it was the very *reverse* of that, the prospect of seeing (as only I, only I, could see) how much darker the brickwork was, how much more it oozed, how much more it had absorbed of the moral squalor such an architecture invariably breeds in its tenants. (McGrath 92-93).

For that reason, the Gothic houses are usually inhabited by a past always alive or never dead, being symbols of that psychic imperative that is the impossibility to forget. In "The Face of the Tenant," Eric Savoy defends that those ancient mansions personify that Freudian uncanny (*das Unheimliche*), which, after remaining for a long time obscured, returns and becomes uncanny. According to this author, these houses are an allegory to the narrative mode that is transformed into a kind of "Strange House of Fiction," because the narration also represses what is forced to express. Consequently, Savoy concludes that: "the house is the most persistent site, object, structural analogue, and trope of American Goth's allegorical turn" (9). The list of the gothic houses, in the English and American literatures, could constitute an endless catalogue, in which we could find the old family houses of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, Poe's House of Usher, Hawthorne's House of Seven Gables, Henry James' house in "The Jolly Corner," Norman Bates' house in *Psycho*, Stephen King's Castle Rock, etc. That is why Eric Savoy conceptualises the Gothic tradition as the attempt to invoke 'the face of the tenant' – the spectre of Otherness that haunts the house of national narrative (...) a double talk that gazes in terror at what it is compelled to bring forward but cannot explain, that writes what it cannot read" (14).

Common to all psychos is the final diagnosis that we can find in Robert Bloch's *Psycho*: "Then the horror wasn't in the house," Lila murmured. "It was in his head." (Bloch 217). This happens because we are dealing with minds equally tormented by the same cause: the feeling of guilt for a committed crime and consequent haunting of the present by the past that returns recurrently and repeats itself in terrible torments. The movie directed by George Romero, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), is a metaphor for this endless return of memories that are impossible to kill and that permanently haunt the world of the living. In a study influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, entitled *New American Gothic*, Irving Malin tells us that all gothic writers are used to abolishing the borderline between reality and dream, which usually becomes a nightmare. The effect is that "order

often breaks down, chronology is confused, identity is blurred, sex is twisted, and the buried life erupts. *The total effect is that of a dream*" (1962, 9).

Consequently, the narrative results into something suggestive but never conclusive. This presence of the uncanny produces, in the Gothic, what Anne Williams described as "a pattern of anxiety towards the Symbolic" and reveals the fragility of our normal systems of making sense of the world, because, as this author concludes: "an extraordinary number of Gothic conventions, including certain narrative techniques, plots, and characters, imply disorder in the relations of signifiers and signifieds" (1995, 71). This disorder, that introduces ruptures in the narrative structure, comes from a psychic disorder provoked by unspeakable terrors, that produce characters like Spider, turning each of them into "a desperate man tormented by messages that issued from he knew not where, the attic above him, the light bulb over his head, or some deep hole in the back reaches of his own sick mind" (McGrath 155). This is what haunts these psychos, something that lies deeply buried in the past and subconscious. Something that is ungraspable and difficult to represent through language, but which the gothic writers make us see, because they think we cannot see everything, and that the unrepresentable exists. That is why Robert Bloch once said that "horror is the removal of masks." This is what horror fiction has always been striving to do through different ages. To accomplish this task completely, every contemporary author should feel the "anxiety of influence" transmitted by certain works of gothic fiction written in the past. This led David Punter, in *Gothic Pathologies*, to conclude that "what haunts Gothic, we might provisionally say, and more especially in contemporary contexts, is Gothic: a ghost haunted by another ghost, almost as eighteenth-century Gothic was haunted by Jacobean tragedy, and Jacobean tragedy by the horrors of Greek drama; and as all these textual manifestations are themselves further haunted by a world which comes prior to text" (14).

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