

Wide Webs of Fear: Nineteenth-Century American Gothic Fiction and its British Counterparts

*Helen Sutherland
University of Glasgow*

Taking as its starting point Jerrold Hogle's assertion that the 'longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries and sources of anxiety'(1), this paper considers the development of a specifically American Gothic from the end of the 18th century onwards. As Hogle suggests, this Gothic enables the emergent nation to address and disguise the sources of anxiety, discomfort and dis-ease which were peculiar to it as a new state, and which set it apart from its European parent states. If we accept Hogle's argument the differences between American and European or British Gothic are hardly surprising, but there are within these differences many similarities or shared Gothic traits, and it is these features which American Gothic shares with its British and - especially - its Scottish counterparts which are the main focus of this paper. The work of Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe will be placed within the context of Freud's discussion of the uncanny in his 1919 essay, 'Das Unheimlich' ("The Uncanny"), and Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. Parallels will then be drawn between this corpus of work and the Gothic tradition of British writers such as Mary Shelley, James Hogg, Wilkie Collins and Sheridan Le Fanu. (1) Jerrold E Hogle (Ed), Introduction. 'The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.4.