Abstracts

1. Experience Claimed: The Trauma of Knowing in Poe’s Angelic Dialogues
Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock

In Cathy Caruth’s famous formulation, trauma—as characterized by the title of her book central to 1990s trauma studies—is “Unclaimed Experience.” Using an understanding of trauma derived from Freud’s studies of shell-shocked WWI soldiers, Caruth discusses trauma as a kind of missed event—an experience so overwhelming that it bypasses conventional integration into narrative memory. Although not remembered, trauma nevertheless asserts itself through symptoms including nightmares and neurotic behavior. Recollection then becomes key to resolving the debilitating symptoms associated with trauma.

In Poe’s “angelic dialogues,” however—“The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion,” “The Colloquy of Monos and Una,” and “The Power of Words”—he inverts this formulation by associating trauma not with forgetting but with recollection and knowledge. In “Eiros and Charmion,” Eiros recalls for Charmion the destruction of the earth as a consequence of a collision with a comet (over 50 years earlier than H.G. Wells’s similar story, “The Star”). In “Monos and Una,” Monos recalls for Una the experience of death and his postmortem sensations. And in “The Power of Words”—like “Eiros and Charmion,” a post-apocalyptic narrative—Agathos reveals to the “fledgling” spirit Oinos a picture of the universe in constant flux and motion.

In each of these three tales, recollection and knowledge do not resolve psychic trauma, but rather precipitate a more profound crisis of knowing. The revelations of “Eiros and Charmion” and “Monos and Una” are essentially Lovecraftian—and very modern—in their articulation of cosmic dread: In “Eiros,” the world is literally destroyed by cosmic forces, while in “Monos” the human is humbled by the notion of duration—what we might call today “deep time.” Put into the terms introduced by contemporary philosopher Timothy Morton, one might say that each narrative stages a confrontation between the human and a “hyperobject”—something vastly extended in space and time that humiliates human knowing. And “The Power of Words” introduces what is essentially chaos theory through the notion that even the tiniest of vibrations and motions have eternal ripple effects. The knowledge revealed in each of Poe’s three angelic dialogues as the spirits recall their past lives and their new revelations therefore results in a profound rupture—the traumatic undoing of anthropocentrism. Knowledge claimed thus undercuts assumptions of human autonomy or special status in the universe. We are undone by knowing.

2. Traumatic Re-Enactments: Edgar Allan Poe and the Gothic Vicious Circle
Cristina Băniceru

Both in his seminal book, *The Literature of Terror* (1996) and in his Introduction to *A New Companion to the Gothic* (2012), David Punter defines the Gothic as a response to trauma. This connection is not far-fetched since the Gothic has always been a metaphorical ‘re-enactment’ of personal, domestic or historical traumatic events. Invariably, it speaks of various ghosts and
‘hauntings’: transgenerational hauntings, the ghosts of the past and of history. Thus combining the psychoanalytically-derived trauma studies with Gothic criticism might prove to be a valuable tool in analysing Gothic fiction. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), Sigmund Freud writes about the compulsive re-enactment of traumatic events experienced by patients in an attempt to heal themselves. Gothic fiction is inherently repetitive and retrospective as the ghostly traumatic past haunts the present, creating “a sense of imminent doom” (Punter & Byron 2004: 284). Therefore, linking Poe’s traumatic personal life with his macabre stories has become a critical trope. The following paper argues that Poe’s Gothic fiction, while definitely influenced by his life (the deaths of his parents and foster mother, his wife’s long battle with tuberculosis, followed by her premature death), is also the reflection of a deeper wound - the fear of personal annihilation. Poe is also the product of a historical malaise, an industrial, post-Christian modernity that witnessed the secularization of death and the rise of individualism. Since people who suffered “a traumatic experience do not find closure easily”(Binion 2011: 5), in Ligeia, Morella, The Black Cat, The Masque of the Red Death, Poe re-enacts his traumatic life and fears under various guises. Within the frame of the Gothic vicious circle, traumatic experiences are metaphorically reiterated through images of entrapment, buried women that refuse to stay buried, reincarnation, vampirism and contagion. In the reiterated death of the other and in the detailed descriptions of decaying or diseased bodies, Poe relieves the death of his family and experiences the horror of his subsequent annihilation. “Trauma implies a crisis of representation”(Nadal 2016: 178) and Poe tries to solve this crisis by resorting to Gothic vicious circles.

3. Repetition, Race, and Trauma in “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,” Post-Charlottesville

Bill Hunt

In August 2017, Charlottesville, Virginia, became less of a place and more of a chronology. Recent American history has since been divided into the “pre-Charlottesville” and the “post-Charlottesville.” For those of us with school ties to the University of Virginia, the mayhem of August prompted a return to the Charlottesville of memory, a regression that revealed our social proximities (in classes, in clubs) to the current leader of the Alt Right Movement.

Read post-Charlottesville, “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” demands some recognition that colonial and racial traumas of the past will never remain inert or forgotten. Rather, memory makes them manifest in the lived experience of the present moment. Trauma Theory had to catch up with Poe in this respect: Freud’s wiederholungszwang understands compulsive repetition as the restaging of a trauma scenario, meant to serve as evidence that a psychic wound has been fully conquered. “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” is nothing if not a chain of re-visitation and re-performance: the narrator’s 1845 remembrance of Augustus Bedloe’s 1827 re-visitation and virtual reenactment of Sutsugua Oldeb’s 1782 murder amidst the chaos of the Cheyte Singh Rebellion. The narrative forces the question of how sins of the past (both personal and national) refuse quietus, instead rematerializing in our present to assert their primacy. Bedloe’s morphine-fueled Charlottesville flashback to a past life lived in brown skin (the surname Oldeb gestures to the Arabic Aldeberan, meaning “the Follower”) connects him intimately, in both lifetimes, to the ongoing misdeeds of the Anglo-American opium trade in Southeast Asia. “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” and the events of August 2017 force us to confront, once again, the grave historical failures and omissions of Jeffersonian democracy in the United States and the world.
4. Color as Contagion in “The Fall of the House of Usher”: Translating Trauma and Social Degeneracy to the Graphic Novel

Amy Braun

In Matthew Manning and Jim Jimenez’s graphic novel “The Fall of the House of Usher” (2013), the tale’s narrator stands in a darkly-shadowed room facing a florescent-green portrait of his childhood friend, Roderick Usher. The young Roderick has bright eyes, a broad smile, and a healthy, rounded face—a very different individual than the man now hosting the narrator. With his emaciated form, sunken-in cheeks, and eyes darkened with melancholy, Roderick contaminates all that he touches, causing letters, sheet music, and other objects to glow neon green through his touch. After staring into Roderick’s portrait and gazing upon his own reflection in water that later engulfs the Usher home, the narrator realizes that his own skin has also taken on a toxic green glow.

This paper explores the translation and transference of trauma across mediums and from individual to individual. Using affect theory and nineteenth-century theories of social degeneration, I show how Manning and Jimenez’s adaptation of Poe’s story uses color to highlight the narrator’s psychological trauma when facing degenerate “otherness.” I suggest that florescent green images and speech bubbles create an interrelationship between the two texts and generate meaning in the hypertext. I first compare both tales’ portrayals of the Usher twins to illustrate how Poe’s descriptions of a “deficiency” in the family’s “direct line of descent” draw upon contemporary theories of biological heredity (Lamarck; Darwin) and prefigure theories of human degeneration (Morel; Lombroso). I then explore how the artists’ use of green takes up Poe’s insinuation of the negative impact of interacting with degenerate individuals, whose corrupted family lineage and prolonged exposure to toxic physical environments exacerbates homicidal tendencies. In conclusion, I show how color signals the process of traumatic transference from Roderick to the narrator, as well as from the narrator to the audience through the reading act.