

The Female Body, Male Subjectivity, and Narratives of Affect

— Reexamining the Gothic and Comic Tales of Hawthorne and Poe —

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Abstract

This paper explores representations of the female body and its relation to male subjectivity in both the gothic and comic tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. Specifically, the paper examines Hawthorne's "The Birth-mark" (1843) and "Mrs. Bullfrog" (1837), as well as Poe's "Berenice" (1835) and "The Spectacles" (1844). By attending to recent developments in body studies and affect theory, along with the new interest in the comic and comedic, this paper applies Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, which the studies of the American gothic have referred to, to the analysis of not only horror but also laughter in these tales. Narrated from male perspectives, these tales of gender relations center on female bodies and dramatize the removal of real or artificial body parts. Against the background of contemporary gender ideology and the disembodied domestic angel ideal, both Hawthorne and Poe explore the female body's potential to destabilize male subjectivity and men's domination over women. The two authors, while making their narratives of gender relations affectively complicated, critique the gender politics of antebellum America.

Representations of women have been among the major subjects of scholarship on Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. For example, in "Thwarted Nature: Nathaniel Hawthorne as Feminist" (1982), Nina Baym explores this subject in Hawthorne's works and demonstrates that his representation of women illuminates their victimization by a male "thwarted nature," borrowing a phrase from "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844). In Baym's follow-up article, "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism" (2004), she

reviews a number of responses offering various perspectives on her original article, illustrating the lively debate that has developed over this subject. Meanwhile, in *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature* (2014), David Greven states: “The most controversial issue in Edgar Allan Poe’s work, other than his attitudes toward race, remains his representation of women, as embodied by his infamous statements about the death of a beautiful woman” (69).

As Baym and Greven suggest, previous scholarship has mainly focused on the two authors’ gothic tales that deal with the death of a woman. Although both Hawthorne and Poe wrote comic tales in which female characters do not die, they have not attracted as much critical attention as their gothic counterparts. Poe’s comic vein has received some consideration, such as in Stephen L. Mooney’s “The Comic in Poe’s Fiction” (1962) and Daniel Royot’s “Poe’s Humor” (2002). By contrast, Hawthorne’s comic tales have been little discussed. In recent years, however, interest in the comic, or comedic, has been growing with the development of body studies and affect theory. This trend is exemplified by the 2017 special issue of *Critical Inquiry* titled “Comedy, an Issue,” in which the issue’s editors, Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai, stress that they treat “the question of genre not just as an aesthetic topic but also as a scene of affective mediation and expectation” (239).

At the core of these new studies is a “more clear-cut move away from dualist conceptions of the self” (7), according to the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature* (2015). More generally, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes this as “thinking other than dualistically” (1). Its aim is to destabilize and reconsider the long-held hierarchical dualisms, including those of mind and body; subject and object; human and nonhuman; male and female; and public and private. While the gothic and the comic are not necessarily regarded as dualistic, it could nonetheless be fruitful to reexamine these genres together, along with horror and laughter as the specific affects that characterize them, thereby opening up new possibilities of reading.

This paper explores representations of the female body and its relation to

male subjectivity in both the gothic and comic tales of Hawthorne and Poe. I take up Hawthorne's "The Birth-mark" (1843) and "Mrs. Bullfrog" (1837), along with Poe's "Berenice" (1835) and "The Spectacles" (1844). These four works are stories of male-female relations narrated from male viewpoints; they center on female bodies and dramatize the removal of real or artificial body parts. To consider these works, I refer to Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva conceptualizes the abject as what is "radically excluded" from the subject yet never safely kept outside, as "the abject does not cease challenging its master" (2). She also describes the abject as "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). In their studies of the American gothic, Teresa A. Goddu, Robert K. Martin, and Eric Savoy apply this notion to their analyses of horror that America's national narrative and its abject — racial, gendered, and sexual — provoke. However, the notion of the abject is particularly helpful for understanding not only the horror but also the laughter evoked in, and by, the two authors' tales of gender relations. In the following discussion, I aim to demonstrate that both Hawthorne and Poe, while making their narratives of gender relations affectively complicated, engage in a pointed critique of the institution of gender in their time and society.

Gender Ideology of Antebellum America and Its Paradox

Scholars have argued that the gender ideology of "separate spheres" emerged in antebellum America along with the rise of the middle class, assigning men and women to opposite "spheres": the public sphere of politics, commerce, and labor for men; the private sphere of domesticity for women.³⁾ Within this dualistic framework, normative masculinity and femininity, characterized as the "self-made man" and the "domestic angel," were also allotted to their respective spheres and rigidly aligned with other categories.

In accordance with the critique of dualistic thinking in recent years, this separate spheres ideology has been reconsidered in various ways. For example, in *No More Separate Spheres!* (2002), Cathy N. Davidson and Jes-

samyn Hatcher analyze the “intertwining relations” not only among different categories of the two spheres of men and women but also of gender and such factors as race, class, and sexuality (14). Meanwhile, David Greven emphasizes the importance of keeping in mind the “compulsory” dimension of this gender ideology. Rather than simply reiterating the separate spheres scheme, Greven foregrounds gender as “lived experience” (15), investigating what he calls “gender protest” — “an expression of frustration and dissatisfaction with the normative demands of gender identity” — in the works by antebellum authors including Hawthorne and Poe (5).

Indeed, neither Hawthorne nor Poe felt comfortable with normative self-made manhood, nor did they ever successfully conform to the normalizing pressure of their society. It is well known that Hawthorne spent a decade after his 1825 graduation from Bowdoin College in the Mannings’ house — the home of many of his maternal relatives to which he had moved at age three with his mother and sisters following his father’s death. Thus, young Hawthorne chose seclusion and literary apprenticeship in domesticity, rather than an independent life and his own work in the public sphere. A “singular dream,” recorded in his notebook in 1854, illuminates his persistent sense of deviation from normative manhood: “It is, that I am still at college — or, sometimes, even at school — and there is a sense that I have been there unconscionably long, and have quite failed to make such progress in life as my contemporaries have” (XXI: 148). The fifty-year old author confides that this dream of failed manhood, “recurring all through these twenty or thirty years,” still torments him with the “feeling of shame and depression” (XXI: 148⁴).

With regard to Poe, his mother’s death when Poe was two years old, his troubled relations with his foster family, and his childhood in Richmond, Virginia had defining influences on his life and works. Never legally adopted by the Allans and without any inheritance from his affluent foster father, Poe lived on his slim income from writing. Nevertheless, Poe had a sense of himself as a Southern gentleman, as scholars such as Joan Dayan, J. Gerald Kennedy, David Leverenz, and Leland S. Person point out.⁵⁾ Person asserts that Poe’s biographical background placed him at odds with normative mas-

culinity, setting him “between genteel and self-made models of manhood” (130). According to Leverenz, this background even led to “Poe’s profoundly skeptical play with social fictions of self-making” (“Poe” 218). Certainly, many of Poe’s works dramatize the moment in which such “social fictions” are shaken and collapse. Although not explicitly set in America, they are doubtlessly rooted in its culture: as Kennedy states, Poe’s “foreign subject” is “to defamiliarize decidedly local, antebellum anxieties” (*Strange* 65).

It is unsurprising that these situations enabled Hawthorne and Poe to critically analyze the institution of gender. Moreover, a significant prevailing condition in antebellum America impacted representations of women. Justine S. Murison points to this condition when writing of “the potential paradox of women’s embodiment in domestic ideology”: she affirms that women were required to be “both the spiritualized ‘angel of the house’ and corporeal womanhood excluded from the abstracted, incorporeal citizenship of the public sphere” (77). By focusing on the gothic and comic tales of Hawthorne and Poe, I attempt to elucidate that they were well aware of this paradox and made full use of it in their critique of contemporary gender ideology. In their stories, both authors explore the female body’s potential to undermine and destabilize not only the separate spheres ideology but also the male domination over women implicit therein. They probe the gender politics specific to antebellum America and incorporate their understandings into their unique narratives of horror and laughter.

Gothic Tales and the Female Body as the Object

Hawthorne’s “The Birth-mark” and Poe’s “Berenice” thematize the male mind beset by the female body as the object. In each of these gothic tales, the male protagonist is obsessed by part of his fiancé’s or wife’s body. By removing that part, he attempts to disembody his partner in accordance with the ideal of the domestic angel and gain mastery over her. However, the entire process leads him to an unexpected outcome.

Turning first to Poe’s “Berenice,” important gender relations, as well as

notable descriptions of the female body, appear in the library. Egæus, the male protagonist and first-person narrator, underscores the significance of this library in his account of himself: “Here died my mother. Herein was I born”; “I loitered away my boyhood in books, and dissipated my youth in reverie” (71). As the room of Egæus’s birth and his growth in the world of imagination, the library is closely linked with the male mind; on the contrary, it is incompatible with the female body and sexuality, as his mother died there upon his birth.

Such opposition between the male mind and the female body is also evident in the relations between Egæus and his cousin Berenice. Egæus describes them growing up in his hereditary mansion together, but “differently”: “I ill of health, and buried in gloom — she agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy; hers the ramble on the hill-side—mine the studies of the cloister” (72). Actively going outside, Berenice is characterized by her corporeality; meanwhile, Egæus engages in mental activities inside. He acknowledges one thing, however: it is “singular” that “the noon of manhood found me still in the mansion of my fathers” (71). This reveals an inverted image of the self-made man and the domestic angel, with the house belonging to the fathers on whom Egæus depends.

Despite his own singular manhood, Egæus cannot tolerate Berenice’s corporeality. “I had seen her — not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream,” he confesses; “not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being — not as a thing to admire, but to analyze — not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation” (73-74). Egæus thus rejects Berenice’s body, reducing her to “a thing ... to analyze,” or even to a “theme of ... speculation.” In other words, he creates his “Berenice of a dream” by excluding her “earthy” body as the abject. Not until Berenice is physically emaciated does Egæus propose marriage to her.

However, this conflict drives the story to the crucial moment when Egæus encounters Berenice in the library. As I discuss above, this library is incompatible with the female body. Confronted by Berenice’s intrusion into this sanctuary of the male mind, Egæus is beset by a “sense of insufferable anxi-

ety” (74). It is then that he sees her “thin and shrunken lips” part; “in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view” (74). As scholars have argued, Berenice’s teeth embody her sexuality.⁶⁾ At the same time, they are body parts with such actualities as “speck[s] on their surface” and “indenture[s] in their edges,” all of which seize Egæus with a “ghastly” feeling (74). The teeth take hold of him: “The teeth! — the teeth! — they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me”; thus, they become — in his “monomania” — “the essence of [his] mental life” (74). Metaphorically, Berenice’s teeth devour Egæus, who admits: “I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason” (75).

Egæus’s attempt to possess is ultimately unsuccessful. The structure of “Berenice,” which is divided into four sections, highlights the fact that Egæus’s narrative is disconnected chronologically and logically. His untold story — excavating Berenice’s prematurely buried body and removing her teeth — is relegated to such a lapse in the narrative, suggested rather than explained by “horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity” (75). Finally, Egæus faces the abject: Berenice’s teeth, contained in a box but scattered on the library floor, confront and collapse his subjectivity.

Identifying “convertibility” as one characteristic of Poe’s works, Joan Dayan states: “The superior male mind, erected over the bodies of women continuously purified or defiled and blacks alternately sentimentalized or cursed, turns into the very objects once posited as external to it” (190). “Berenice” is a drama of such a “superior male mind” that proves to be affectively dominated and toppled by the female body.

In Hawthorne’s “The Birth-mark,” the protagonist Aylmer similarly exhibits a “superior male mind.” Unlike in “Berenice,” however, the relation between the male mind and the female body is complemented by the presence of a third character. In addition, the story is told by a third-person narrator, whose view differs from Aylmer’s. Like Egæus’s library, Aylmer’s laboratory is a place for the male mind, and it is where the scientist performs his experiment of female disembodiment.

By hyphenating the term “birthmark” in his story, Hawthorne highlights the connection of “birth” with female sexuality⁷⁾. The narrator affirms that Aylmer “thought little or nothing” of Georgiana’s birthmark before their marriage (X: 38). As a newlywed husband, however, Aylmer begins to take a distinctively “[m]asculine” view: his wife would become a “living specimen of ideal loveliness” but for her birthmark (X: 38). This view is strongly suggestive of the disembodied domestic angel ideal⁸⁾.

Hawthorne specifies the hand-shape of Georgiana’s birthmark, and repeatedly refers to it using the word “hand.” Hawthorne thereby underscores its function as a body part, as well as its power to grasp. For example, when Georgiana asks Aylmer about his dream, he acknowledges that her birthmark has “taken a pretty firm hold of [his] fancy” (X: 40). This symbolic dream depicts his operation to remove the birthmark: “the deeper went the knife, the deeper sank the Hand, until at length its tiny grasp appeared to have caught hold of Georgiana’s heart” (X: 40). While the birthmark is inseparably linked with Georgiana’s life, it keeps Aylmer under its control. Regarding it as a “frightful object” that evokes “horror” in him, he cannot help but feel its “tyrannizing influence” (X: 39-40). To free himself from such influence and realize his image of “ideal loveliness,” Aylmer attempts to remove Georgiana’s grasping “hand” as the abject.

Georgiana, by contrast, originally considers her birthmark as a “charm,” but becomes affectively influenced by her husband’s “[shock]” (X: 37). Knowing that it is the “object of [Aylmer’s] horror and disgust,” she comes to call it the “hateful mark” (X: 41). Georgiana internalizes Aylmer’s view of her birthmark as the abject, which causes her abjection. This is why she declares that “life is a burthen which I would fling down with joy” (X: 41).

Therefore, Aylmer and Georgiana plunge into the operation to remove the birthmark. However, this operation is also observed from the perspective of Aminadab, Aylmer’s servant. In comparison with Aylmer, Aminadab is described as follows: “With his vast strength, his shaggy hair, his smoky aspect, and the indescribable earthiness that incrustated him, he seemed to represent man’s physical nature; while Aylmer’s slender figure, and pale, intellectual face, were no less apt a type of the spiritual element” (X: 43). Like

Georgiana then, Aminadab is characterized by his corporeality and set opposed to Aylmer's mind. His "smoky" complexion, along with his "brute"-like speech and subjection to his "master" as a "human machine," is suggestive of contemporary images of slavery (X: 46, 51). For the purpose of my discussion, I underline here that Aminadab's ambiguous body — crossing the lines between white/black, human/animal, and human/machine — makes him the abject, which illuminates Georgiana's similar condition. Hence Aminadab's aside: "If she were my wife, I'd never part with that birth-mark" (X: 43).

Eventually, Aylmer succeeds in removing Georgiana's birthmark, but his operation takes her life too. Ironically, Aylmer has turned his wife into what he abhors most: the body, specifically, the corpse that is "the utmost of abjection" (Kristeva 4). He had wished to re-create her as an ideal being like the domestic angel. However, Hawthorne's final description of Georgiana — the soul of "the now perfect woman," "lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight" — attests that such a being cannot exist on earth (X: 56). Aminadab's "hoarse, chuckling laugh" is the body's sharp criticism against the mind (X: 56). Challenged by the abject, Aylmer can only remain silent, which strongly suggests the collapse of his subjectivity.

It is noteworthy that in "Berenice" and "The Birth-mark," the scenes of profound horror are respectively preceded by Berenice's smile — a "diminutive of laughter" (Critchley 108) — and Aminadab's laughter. As Kristeva states, "laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection" (8). In each of these gothic tales, laughter displaces abjection from the abject body to the mind of the male protagonist, collapsing his subjectivity through the horror that is deeply rooted in the separate spheres ideology.

Comic Tales, Artificial Parts, and the Acknowledgment of Abjection

Hawthorne's "Mrs. Bullfrog" and Poe's "The Spectacles" deal with the male mind confronted by the female body with artificial parts. The social context of these comic tales features the development of prosthetic technologies in nineteenth-century America. According to Stephen Mihm, artificial

body parts were increasingly demanded not only for practical purposes but also to enhance the wearer's personal appearance. Regarding appearance as "the very foundation of an emergent middle-class identity," Mihm states: "In an age of appearances, members of the middle class necessarily hid their deformities and weaknesses, for fear that first impressions might deny them opportunities in marriage, employment, and social advancement" (287-88). In his study on humor, Simon Critchley points out its "*critical* function with respect to society": "'True' humour changes the situation, tells us something about who we are and the sort of place we live in, and perhaps indicates to us how it might be changed" (10-11). Hawthorne and Poe's comic tales suggest to their readers who "we" are and how "we" might change "our" common situation, provoking the affective triplet of horror, abjection, and laughter.

"Mrs. Bullfrog" presents a "topsy-turvy" picture of gender relations through the stagecoach accident on the first day of marriage between Thomas Bullfrog and his wife Laura (X: 133). Thomas — the protagonist and first-person narrator — is a dry-goods store clerk, who introduces himself as a "very lady-like sort of a gentleman" with a "feminine sensibility" as a result of handling such goods as satins and ribbons (X: 130). As a man of the "age of appearances," Thomas engages in the fashioning of women's appearances. Although he is "feminine," he nonetheless expects his wife to be an ideal woman.

Indeed, Thomas expresses unrealistically high expectations of his wife: "if a young angel, just from Paradise, yet dressed in earthly fashion, had come and offered me her hand, it is by no means certain that I should have taken it" (X: 130). Thus suggesting the ideal of the domestic angel, he itemizes the requisites as follows: "fresh bloom of youth, pearly teeth, glossy ringlets, and the whole list of lovely items, with the utmost delicacy of habits and sentiments, a silken texture of mind, and, above all, a virgin heart" (X: 130). Thomas met and hastily married Laura during his travel, considering her just such a woman. However, her appearance is torn off when their stagecoach is overturned.

Thomas discovers Laura to be "a person of grisly aspect, with a head al-

most bald, and sunken cheeks, apparently of the feminine gender, though hardly to be classed in the gentler sex” (X: 133). In the confusion, he perceives the alignment of Laura’s “person,” “gender,” and “sex” to have been dislocated. Besides, she has “no teeth to modulate the voice” (X: 133). The accident removes her false hair and teeth, revealing that her femininity is formed of these artificial parts. Laura hits the coachman, shouting, “You have ruined me, you blackguard!” (X: 132). Once her appearance is removed, Laura’s corporeality and the violence hidden beneath it are exposed. The accident also reveals her past. The confusion newly directs Thomas’s attention to an old newspaper covering her basket, in which he reads that Laura sued a man for breach of promise of marriage. It is reported that she “personally appeared in court, and [bore] energetic evidence to her lover’s perfidy, and the strength of her blighted affections” (X: 135). Thomas learns that she stepped out of domesticity to speak publicly in defense of herself.

Thomas calls Laura an “apparition”; she confronts him as the abject that disturbs the middle-class world of appearances founded on the separate spheres ideology (X: 133). Therefore, he is driven to the “terror and turmoil of mind” and cries out, “Horror! horror!” (X: 133, 135). This destabilizes his subjectivity and causes his abjection: “Covering my face with both hands, I emitted a deep and deathlike groan, as if my tormented soul were rending me asunder” (X: 136). However, Laura responds to him as follows:

Mr. Bullfrog ... let me advise you to overcome this foolish weakness, and prove yourself, to the best of your ability, as good a husband as I will be a wife. You have discovered, perhaps, some little imperfections in your bride. Well — what did you expect? Women are not angels. If they were, they would go to Heaven for husbands — or, at least, be more difficult in their choice on earth. (X: 136)

This echoes the message given in “The Birth-mark”: the domestic angel is an ideal, and therefore cannot exist on earth as a real woman. In “Mrs. Bullfrog,” however, it is a female character, not the male narrator, who speaks

out and embodies this critique.

At the beginning of the story, Thomas designates as “fools” those who distort their judgments about their wives “by a most undue attention to little niceties of personal appearance, habits, disposition, and other trifles,” acknowledging that he was one of those “fools” (X: 129). He transforms his abjection into a comic tale to “advise the reader not to be” one (X: 129).

Poe’s “The Spectacles” is a story of “love at first sight,” and therefore also entails the themes of gender relation and appearances (333). However, the story is dually twisted with confused identities. First, the protagonist and first-person narrator have two surnames: Napoleon Bonaparte Simpson, originally Froissart, who adopted his current surname to inherit his relative’s legacy. Second, there are two Madame Lalandes: Eugénie Lalande is Simpson’s object of love but turns out to be his eighty-two-year-old great-great-grandmother, who has come from France to America to make him her heir; whereas Stéphanie Lalande is Eugénie’s young relative, whom Simpson eventually marries.

Simpson’s personal weaknesses create further complications: he is “sanguine, rash, ardent, enthusiastic,” and a “devoted admirer of the women” (333-34). Compounding matters, Simpson does not wear glasses to correct his poor eyesight. “Being youthful and good-looking,” he justifies, “I naturally dislike [glasses], and have resolutely refused to employ them” (333). This young man of twenty-one, who frequently disturbs his mind with excessive feelings, reveals his myopia and high regard for appearances.

It is because of this temperament that Simpson, upon seeing Eugénie in the theater for the first time, is struck by her appearance. The beautiful shapes of her body parts, complemented by her fashionable dress and accessories, prompt him to believe she is “the *beau idéal*” (334). Gaining her recognition and observing her “faint smile, disclosing a bright line of her pearly teeth” makes him rapturous (337). The miniature given by Eugénie allows him to closely regard her “surpassingly beautiful” face with “large luminous eyes,” “proud Grecian nose,” and “dark luxuriant curls” (343). However, it depicts Eugénie aged twenty-seven, some fifty-five years earlier.

Simpson's proposal of immediate marriage is first dismissed as improper but later accepted by Eugénie on condition that he wears her glasses, by which she intends to correct her young kin's imprudence. When they are finally together in a village inn after their secret (actually, simulated) marriage, Simpson rapturously regards his "wife" as the "angel by my side" (343). As this is his first opportunity to look upon her in daylight, Simpson seemingly reiterates the domestic angel ideal without much thought. Donning glasses at Eugénie's request, however, he is greatly shocked by the sight of what he has considered the "angel": "were those — were those — were those *wrinkles*, upon the visage of Eugénie Lalande? ... what — what — what — *what* had become of her teeth?" (344). Simpson is so shaken that he becomes "utterly speechless and helpless with terror and with rage"; yet, criticized by Eugénie, he calls her a "villainous old hag!" (344).

Affectively influenced, Eugénie is also driven to rage. Contrary to Simpson, however, she begins to speak voluminously, but in her unique mixture of French and English. She reveals her two marriages and family history, with a special mention of Monsieur Froissart — Eugénie's great-granddaughter's husband and Simpson's father, who left France for America — as a "fool" and Napoleon Bonaparte Froissart as his "*ver* stupide sonn" (345). Her excitement is manifested as follows:

Once upon her feet, she gnashed her gums, brandished her arms, rolled up her sleeves, shook her fist in my face, and concluded the performance by tearing the cap from her head, and with it an immense wig of the most valuable and beautiful black hair, the whole of which she dashed upon the ground with a yell, and there trampled and danced a fandango upon it, in an absolute ecstasy and agony of rage. (345)

This is Eugénie's embodied expression of rage. She removes her own false teeth and hair. Thus, tearing off her appearance that forms the "angel," she confronts her great-great-grandson who unfaithfully changes his attitude according to the woman's appearance.

Simpson faces not only Eugénie's aging, violent, and violating body as

the abject but also his “stupid” self. He responds, “that’s *me e e!*” with a “[scream] at the top of [his] voice” (345). He acknowledges he is stupid, but not without abjection: the painful split of his subjectivity, expressed by his screaming “*me e e.*” In the end, all the plots are exposed to Simpson. He subsequently turns his abjection into a comic tale of “confession” to make to “the reader” (333, 337).

In “Mrs. Bullfrog” and “The Spectacles,” Hawthorne and Poe critique gender relations against the antebellum American background of middle-class faith in appearance and the separate spheres ideology. Originally, Thomas and Simpson respectively regard Laura and Eugénie as the domestic angel. By mentioning such items as “pearly teeth” and “ringlets” or “curls,” the two works suggest that these are normal components of femininity in their time and society, and that both men and women are preoccupied by such appearances. However, once the women’s artificial body parts of false teeth and hair are removed, the male protagonists face abject female bodies that cause horror and abjection. Here, too, laughter displaces abjection, but this time it is not directed to the other. Simon Critchley states that “humour consists in laughing at oneself” (95): “The subject looks at itself like an abject object and instead of weeping bitter tears, it laughs at itself and finds consolation therein” (102). Explaining the role of humor, Critchley asserts: “humour recalls us to the modesty and limitedness of the human condition, a limitedness that calls not for tragic-heroic affirmation but comic *acknowledgement*, not Promethean authenticity but a laughable inauthenticity” (102). Hawthorne and Poe force their male protagonists acknowledge their abjection and turn it into comic tales to share with their readers so that “we” may laugh at “our” undue faith in appearance under the separate spheres ideology.

Coda

Both Hawthorne and Poe created gothic and comic tales of gender relations in which male mind preoccupied with the domestic angel ideal is affectively dominated by the female body. In “Berenice” and “The Birthmark,” the male protagonists are obsessed with their partners’ body parts: in

their imagination, Egæus is “devoured” by Berenice’s teeth while Aylmer is grasped by Georgiana’s “hand.” By removing these parts, Egæus and Aylmer attempt to disembody their partners and ultimately put them to death. However, they face the female body as the abject, which causes their abjection and collapses their subjectivity. Meanwhile, in “Mrs. Bullfrog” and “The Spectacles,” male subjectivity is shaken by the female body that is hidden beneath the appearance of ideal femininity. Although Thomas and Simpson originally consider Laura and Eugénie as domestic angels, these male protagonists face the abject body of their partners once their artificial body parts such as false teeth and hair are removed. While real body parts are deeply connected to female sexuality, artificial body parts disclose the fiction of the domestic angel ideal in the age of appearances. The female body destabilizes not only the separate spheres ideology but also male domination over women implicit therein. Although horror and laughter are respectively considered as characteristic of the gothic and the comic, both affects play important roles in all four of these works. Hawthorne and Poe make their narratives of gender relations affectively complicated. They illuminate their culture’s common anxiety under the separate spheres ideology and make readers feel it through their embodied experiences of horror and laughter. By doing so, Hawthorne and Poe present their unique critique of gender politics in antebellum America.

Notes

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- 1) Some of these works are compared in previous scholarship, although “Mrs. Bullfrog” is little considered. For example, see Pfister 13-58; Person. My aim is to bridge the gothic and the comic, as well as horror and laughter, by paying attention to affective influence, and thereby offer some new readings.
- 2) See Goddu 1-12; Martin and Savoy.

- 3) Studies of the separate spheres and gender norms under this ideology include, for example, Cott; Davidson and Hatcher 7-26; Kimmel; Rotundo; and Ryan.
- 4) Fujimura performs a more detailed analysis of this passage from Hawthorne's notebook in relation to "The Story Teller."
- 5) See Dayan; Kennedy 36-72; Leverenz "Poe," "Spanking"; and Person.
- 6) See Person 139; and Weeks 156.
- 7) Pfister considers Hawthorne's hyphenation of this word "unusual" and reads it as the "mark of the mother" (30-31).
- 8) Pfister 13-58. Pfister also pays special attention to the hand shape of the birthmark, which he considers to embody "creative force" (32). I agree with Pfister that the story is based on the middle-class gender ideology, and that the hand shape of the birthmark is of significance. I hope, however, to add a different interpretation by foregrounding the hand's power to grasp.
- 9) Benesch considers Aminadab as a "human machine" in his study on the relation of American romanticism and technology. He notes that Aminadab is "completely dependent on Aylmer's 'mental' work" and that "Aminadab's protest remains purely rhetorical," and therefore without any critical power (77). I attempt to foreground the critical power of Aminadab as the abject. See Benesch 63-96.

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