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The Nature of Fear: Edgar Allan Poe and Posthuman Ecology

What is the place of fear in ecocriticism? Simon Estok addresses this question at length in a recent issue of *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, arguing that the West's longstanding "fear . . . [of] the agency of the natural environment" and its potential to harm us should be the central concern of ecocritical study. Labeling this fear *ecophobia*, Estok contends that it is the foundation of the modern worldview that sees nature as "the hateful object in need of our control, the loathed and feared thing that can only result in tragedy if left in control."[1] Our attempts at dominating nature, in other words, are the inevitable reflex of our fear that it can destroy us; we, supposedly ontologically superior, must control or be controlled, kill or be killed, progress or die. Like racism or homophobia, then, ecophobia is a prejudiced fear born of an uncertain power, an uncertainty exorcised through the impossible obliteration of that which occasions it. According to Estok, the payoff for an ecocriticism that attends to the ecophobia evident in everything from Shakespeare's *King Lear* to recent doomsday coverage of global warming is both methodological focus and activist agency, qualities that Estok finds wanting in current ecocritical discourse. Thus, by exposing ecophobia, so might we end the environmental destruction it entails, individually and globally. Such, at least, is the hope.

It is hard to take issue with this hope, and I will not attempt to do so here.[2] I would, however, like to suggest that Estok's model is incomplete in two crucial ways. First, his basic formula, wherein fear of nature results in trying to dominate it, is a decidedly circumscribed way of viewing the different modalities of what we might call "natural fear,"

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one that forecloses on alternative registers—such as the awe, reverence, and submission connoted by the biblical phrase "Fear the Lord your God, serve him" (Deuteronomy 6:13). It is to explore the nature (and ecocritical potential) of such a fear that I conclude this essay with a discussion of tales by Edgar Allan Poe. I will begin, however, by examining the second, and related, oversight of Estok's emphasis on the pernicious effects of ecophobia, which is that it ignores the ways in which some forms of ecophilia—from late-eighteenth-century romanticism to early-twenty-first-century posthumanism—represent not a solution to ecophobia, or even a real difference, but rather an extension of the same problem under another name.

The Thin Line between Phobia and Philia

If ecophobia can lead to domination, then so, too, can ecophilia. Take, for instance, the British Romantics, long-contested exemplars of an ecoconscious worldview.[3] Explicitly opposing the Enlightenment's radical estrangement of human subjects from their nonhuman environments, poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge attenuate self-world distinctions via a universal pantheism: "the one life within us and abroad / Which meets all motion and becomes its soul" in Coleridge's formulation; the "intertwin[ing]" of "human soul[s]" with the "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe" in Wordsworth's.[4] Yet as critics since John Keats and William Hazlitt have noted, these claims to cosmic kinship are premised on an idealist subsumption of the external world to the individual ego, a metaphysical reduction that parallels not only the physical exploitation of the earth but also the subjugation of "naturally" passive women and racial others.[5] Far from refuting Enlightenment anthropocentrism and its fearfully exploitative relationship to the natural world, the Romantic ideal of "knowing ourselves" as "parts and proportions of one wondrous whole" works toward "the sublim[ity]"—and thus the continued exaltation—"of man."[6]

The same charge can be made against many US transcendentalists and their intellectual descendants, frequently invoked as forebears of modern environmentalism. Consider Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Over-Soul" ("that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other"); Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" ("I know I am solid and sound / To me

the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow / . . . . I know I am deathless"); or Henry David Thoreau's "Walking" ("I believe that there is a subtile magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright").[7] All would seem to model a form of holistic interconnectedness that rebukes "degenerate" modernity's "discord . . . between man and nature."[8] But like their British Romantic counterparts, such détentes are established only by subordinating the natural world to an occasion of the self's realization.

We can see the environmental implications of this mode of thinking by attending more closely to Thoreau's "Walking," which combined two of his most frequently given lectures into a posthumously published *Atlantic Monthly* essay (July 1862). It is here that Thoreau famously claims that "in Wildness is the preservation of the world" ("W," 239), a phrase destined to become a mantra for twentieth-century environmental preservationism.[9] However, the line's primary emphasis rests on preserving not "Wildness"—much less wilderness—but rather "the world." The distinction is important because "the world," for Thoreau, is that of nations and races, implying that "Wildness" is not a value in itself so much as a precondition of healthy human life. More specifically, wildness is a synonym for "absolute freedom" ("W," 225), for "shak[ing] off the village" ("W," 229), an antidote to the "tame[ness] and cheap[ness]" of the "improvements, so called," of city life, itself a "deform[ation]" of a "landscape" ravaged by "the cutting down of the forest and of all large trees" ("W," 230). Here, at least, wilderness and wildness partially overlap, an alliance forged in the fires of civilization's approach. But the remainder of the essay makes clear that Thoreau views the pairing to be contingent rather than necessary, and his defense of the latter soon entails the destruction of the former: "Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him. One who pressed forward incessantly and never rested from his labors, who grew fast and made infinite demands on life, would always find himself in a new country or wilderness, and surrounded by the raw material of life. He would be climbing over the prostrate stems of primitive forest-trees" ("W," 240–41). What begins as an affirmation of the vitality of wildness ("Life consists with wildness," "The most alive is the wildest") ends with an assertion that a wild life manifests itself through the prostration of wilderness ("climbing over the prostrate stems of primitive forest-trees"), where prostration is a dialogic pro-

cess involving the labor of man and, arguably, the forest's submissive capitulation. At the ever-receding line of the frontier ("always . . . in a new country or wilderness"), man is "refresh[ed]" by "subdu[ing]" and then feeding upon "the raw material of life."

Lest this refreshment seem innocuously abstract or spiritual, detached from actual, material consumption and therefore without ecological or social consequence, Thoreau endorses the belief that "it is . . . the task of the American 'to work the virgin soil'" and the destiny of "the farmer [to] displac[e] the Indian . . . because he redeems the meadow, and so makes himself stronger and in some respects more natural" ("W," 243).[10] In an all-too-common trope, man here becomes "more natural" through the redemption, which is to say the domination, of nature. And what is true of the individual farmer holds for nations as well: "The founders of every State which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a . . . wild source" ("W," 239). Thoreau refers to Rome in this passage, but his focus is on America's future as the world's next great empire, the latest and perhaps final embodiment of the "general movement of the race" to the West: "We go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure" ("W," 235). Adapting a line from George Berkeley's "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America" (1752), Thoreau concludes, "'Westward the star of empire takes its way'" ("W," 238), where "The West . . . is but another name for the Wild" ("W," 239). Rather than preserving wilderness, then, Thoreau conscripts it into the forward march of man, the spatial border of the frontier merging with the temporal horizon of the nation's soon-to-be-manifest destiny.[11]

How to reconcile this colonizing, imperialist attitude with Thoreau's dismay over "the cutting down of the forest," his celebration of forests "not yet subdued to man," or his claim that "hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps" ("W," 241)? The answer lies in the paradox at the heart of "Walking": consumption of wilderness is necessary to realize our natural, "wild" selves, but by consuming we end it, thereby precluding further self-cultivation. Man extracts "naturalness" from nature and "wildness" from wilderness, leaving in his wake the desiccated, domesticated affairs of men ("church and state and school, trade and commerce, and . . . politics" ["W," 230]). Civilization thus becomes both the marker of a culture's past engage-

ment with wildness—Rome rose because it was "suckled by a wolf"—and evidence of the engagement's present death: Rome fell, was "conquered and displaced," because its "children . . . were not suckled by the wolf" ("W," 239). Culture, that is, inevitably "wean[s]" us too "early from [Nature's] breast to society" ("W," 248). Hence the personal and national need to move ever-Westward, to seek out the last, secreted deposits of wildness in the bosom of the earth (our "savage, howling mother" ["W," 248]), constantly fleeing the specter of what happens when no West is left: "When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable, and, to the citizen, most dismal swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place,—a *sanctum sanctorum*. There is the strength, the marrow of Nature. . . . These are the strong meats on which [man] feeds" ("W," 242).[12]

A vampiric logic, to be sure. Wildness, the lifeblood of self-becoming, is not a renewable resource but we cannot preserve it without starving ourselves. Thoreau thus draws sustenance from "the marrow of nature" to "recreate" himself, penetrating the dark, "sacred" heart of existence itself, the violation of life here its purest human expression. It is also, finally, an expression of love, because like wildness "love is the profoundest of secrets. Divulged, even to the beloved, it is no longer Love." And yet divulged it must be, if not in words then in that "pure hate" that "underprop[s] / Our love" as guarantor of its "sympathy" and "truth."[13] It is this "dark Thoreau," this self-affirming love that must become by consuming its object, that we perhaps should fear.[14]

Self-Sustaining Networks

Were the excesses of Thoreau's or Romanticism's ecophilia limited to a past imaginary, Estok might be right to recommend fearing nothing but fear itself. But the idea that we should love the natural world because it is rightfully an extension of ourselves, a reservoir of personal and collective becoming, extends throughout the twentieth century and into our own moment. From Husserl's phenomenology (and certain recent incarnations of ecophenomenology) through New Age nature spiritualities and Goddess ecofeminisms to various articulations of the posthuman, the Enlightenment self-world divide is overcome only through the assimilation of the world into the self.[15]

Elaborating on a few examples from posthumanist discourse will

illustrate this ironic reinstantiation of our all-too-human selves. Though often associated with near-future machines and advanced information technologies, posthumanism is part of a larger para-Enlightenment project: like Romanticism and much modern ecocentrism (particularly specific strands of deep ecology), it integrates supposedly discrete persons into larger networks of being.[16] This emphasis on integration is one aspect of what differentiates posthumanism from the antihumanism of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak, among others, and it applies to both popular "posthuman-ism" (imagining entities, such as cyborgs, that supersede the perceived shortcomings of human beings) and philosophical "posthumanism" (critiquing humanism and its reliance on exclusionary definitions of the human and the individual).[17] The two perspectives are often in tension, as when theoretical posthumanism deems popular posthuman-ism to be unequal to its name because it "expand[s] [the] prerogatives" of the "autonomous liberal subject . . . into the realm of the posthuman," but they are not mutually exclusive, as evidenced by critical posthumanism's own configurations of what might properly constitute posthuman being.[18]

The question is whether or not these latter configurations escape the humanism that continues to inspirit popular posthumanism. They certainly look different from one another, with critical posthumanism frequently drawing on ideas also mined by much postmodern ecological thought: sciences of autopoietic emergence, complexity and chaos, and distributed cognition, as well as the new systems theories.[19] Here, the posthuman is defined not—or not merely—by machinic augmentation but by the putatively individual self's incorporation into dynamically interdependent environments. Such assimilation inevitably erodes the ontological priority of the human subject by troubling, conceptually and physically, the absoluteness of conventional human-nonhuman, subject-object, and self-other boundaries. As Neil Evernden asks, "Where do you draw the line between one creature and another? Where does one organism stop and another begin? Is there even a boundary between you and the non-living world, or will the atoms of this page be a part of your body tomorrow? How, in short, can you make any sense out of the concept of man as a discrete entity?"[20] The answer, of course, is that in both body and (embodied) mind, we are fundamentally open to our no longer external environments; indeed, we always have been, which means that "we"—

bounded, autonomous human subjects—have never been.[21] Thus can we speak of an ecological posthumanism.

The potential for this line of thinking is immense. Combining posthumanist and ecological notions of incorporation would challenge the false integrity not only of the humanist self but also of the idea of nature as essentially natural, other, elsewhere, or outside. Indeed, a posthumanist ecology informed by, among others, Donna Haraway, Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Manuel DeLanda, and Jane Bennett (none conventionally classified as either posthumanists or ecocritics) would dissipate the borders between self and world by abandoning such static, polarizing oppositions in favor of hybrid relations and dynamic human-nonhuman assemblages.[22] The result would be tense, uncertain imbrications rather than an easy, unified holism, with heterogeneities both within and across traditional identity terms—incorporations with neither homogeny nor hegemony. Consequently, *human*, *self*, *environment*, and *nature* would become heuristically useful insofar as they demarcated emergent properties of nonhierarchical differences and deleterious to the extent that they assigned ontological purity and stability to what is a much more contingent, coprosthetic process (in that agency and vitality inhere in nonhuman entities—both animate and inanimate, natural and artificial—normally denied this status). Such an approach would avoid, in Isabelle Stengers's words, the "temptation to conceive of nature as submissive, manipulable, assimilable to some 'raw material' on which we would be free to impose whatever organization we choose."[23] Far from existing either in imperious isolation or in rapacious proximity, then, we would see ourselves, like Poe's "Man That Was Used Up," as enmeshed in links of affiliation with the nonhuman things within and around us—things both constitutive *and* destructive of "us."[24]

The danger of such a model, however, lies in the ease with which it can lapse into the very colonizing, anthropocentric subjectivism it seeks to escape. As with romanticism and transcendentalism, there is the potential for a slippage from speaking of the self's assimilation *into* the environment to speaking of the self's assimilation *of* the environment, the dream of the dissolution of harmful self-world distinctions threatening to become the nightmare of an all-colonizing subjectivity. We might have reason to pause, therefore, when Robert Pepperell implicitly responds to Haraway's question "Why should our bodies

end at the skin?" (*SCW*, 178) by answering that, in fact, "human bodies have no boundaries. . . . No finite division can be drawn between the environment, the body and the brain. . . . There is nothing external to a human, because the extent of a human cannot be fixed"; or when Daniel White draws upon Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's work on the coevolution of the universe and human cognition to conclude that the cosmos "forms our own extended identity" and therefore is to be loved; or when Paul Shepard argues that seeing ourselves "as part of the landscape and the ecosystem" means that "the self [is] ennobled and extended rather than threatened"; or when Evernden claims that "the extension of the boundary of the self into the 'environment' . . . imbue[s] it with life" and then approvingly quotes Northrop Frye's contention that "the goal of art is to 'recapture, in full consciousness, that original lost sense of identity with our surroundings, where there is nothing outside the mind of man, or something identical with the mind of man."[25]

Based on this evidence, we apparently stand to gain more than a little from the loss of our bounded selves, as deconstructive play becomes a metaphysical principle of perpetual becoming that eventuates in intensities of contact, liberation, and desire (Haraway, for instance, promises "*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries," including the "pleasure of connection . . . [with] other living creatures" no longer regarded as our others) (*SCW*, 150, 152). But that we should expect to benefit from "the collapse of [the] ontological boundaries" that separate "us" from the "world" betrays an incredible degree of optimism, even anthropocentrism, regarding our posthuman condition, all the more so given that it is a condition supposedly based in postmodern ecology's emphasis on dynamism, contingency, and uncertainty rather than older ecological models of harmony, equilibrium, and balance.[26] More disturbing, however, is the assumption that enables this form of ecophilic gratification: in the absence of real boundaries, it would appear, the imperial self is infinitely extendable into the world, free "to become . . . with no origin or end."[27] Of course the end result of this expansion is that no outside is left, nothing but the self remains ("There is nothing external to a human"; "there is nothing outside the mind of man"). In these philosophies' push to univocity it is not the interiority of the self that disappears but the externality of the world, which becomes merely the shadow of our now universalized selves. Thus, for many posthumanisms the fact that "it becomes harder and harder to say where the world stops and the person begins" does not

mean that persons disappear.[28] On the contrary, persons now *become* the world.

We might then say, formulaically, that the Enlightenment self is formed through a constitutive exclusion of the "natural" world whereas the para-Enlightenment self is born of an ostensible inclusion of it, but the distinction is largely semantic: in both, the nonhuman world serves our all-too-human agendas, either by being our slave or by becoming our selves. Posthumanism can thus uncannily echo the means-end logic of the Cartesian and capitalist metaphysics it supposedly corrects, ending the dialectic with otherness in order to achieve a final synthesis of the self.[29] Read in this light, Haraway's question of "Why should our bodies end at the skin?" sounds not ethically inclusive but disturbingly imperialist, as the nonhuman world becomes only something to be colonized by our limitlessly possessive selves.

This is not to say that some posthumanist critics are unaware of such dangers. Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Deleuze and Guattari, in particular, are quite cognizant of the ways in which the discourses of potentiality, emergence, and interconnection can be co-opted by networks of "domination," and they all underscore the consequent need to "tak[e] responsibility" for the circuits in which one is a part (*SCW*, 181, 154).[30] Despite the commitment to the disarticulation of the liberal humanist subject via an insistence on difference, multiplicity, partiality, situatedness, impurity, fragmentation, instability, and irony, however, the combination of a negative critique with the positive articulation of a posthuman being is a precarious one. Indeed, to the extent that the logic behind these beings is even marginally defined by an impulse toward progress or normative universality rather than the stated investment in contingency—defined, that is, by prescription rather than mere description, by what Andy Miah labels a "visionary stance"—it threatens to arrogate for itself the ontological privilege and exclusivity of the humanist worldviews it putatively corrects.[31] We would do well, therefore, to attend to the potential inhumanity of our becomings, to fear the possibility of "the *ecologization* of the subject" becoming a "*rhizomatics of domination*," even when such domination looks for all the world like love.[32]

Fearful Prospects

Fearing love need not commit us to loving fear. In fact, from the perspective of ecological posthumanism, ecophobia is no more warranted

a response than ecophilia to the human self's assimilation into larger environmental networks. But it nevertheless can serve as a useful check on the ecophilic impulse toward self-universalization, and it can do so, contrary to Estok's assessment, without reestablishing the humanist boundaries that would separate us from the world. Like love, fear can be an experience of vulnerability, and we can imagine a fear that would remain suspended in the apprehension of this vulnerability, unable to vanquish its object because unable to regard it as either fully self or fully other; we can imagine, in other words, a fear that would recognize the self's integration into its environment without the ability to overcome it, that takes ecological systematicity and the attendant loss of individual subjectivity literally, thereby precluding reactionary, destructive attempts at mastery. Rather than reinscribing a defensive dualism between one's self and one's context, such a fear would be the inhabitation of a radically uncertain openness to the world. And if this echoes the sublime, then it refuses sublimity's conventional reconsolidation of the subject after its unsettling encounter with radical otherness, thus offering no "psychological satisfaction or happiness . . . [or] opportunity to be human in [the] most essential and sacred sense of the word."[33] Against such consolations, the "essential" human self here dissolves into the obscurity of its fearfully dark—because no longer transparently internal or external—ecology.[34]

To explore the nature of this kind of fear, I conclude with a brief examination of three of Poe's tales. After all, who better than Poe to guide us through the terrors of a world that we can only tentatively call our own? And yet the choice of Poe for an ecocritical inquiry might seem perverse. When one considers ecoconsciousness in the literature of the American Renaissance, it is rarely Poe's name that comes to mind: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, even Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville—but not Poe. Lawrence Buell pointedly excludes Poe from the canon of ecocentric US authors outlined in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), and this because, in his estimation, Poe rejects Usher's environmental pantheism as "a form of madness" in favor of Dupinian rationalism.

Interestingly, however, many of Poe's tales satisfy Buell's criteria for "environmental text[s]": (1) "*The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history*"; (2) *"The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest*"; (3) "*Human*

accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation"; (4) "*Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text*."[35] It would be impossible to survey here the ways in which Poe's fictions satisfy each of these standards, but suffice it to say that such narratives as "The Fall of the House of Usher," "A Descent into the Maelstrom," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and *The Journal of Julius Rodman*, as well as the cosmological prose poem *Eureka*, all link, indeed subordinate, human interests to nonhuman environmental processes (where "environment" is frequently broadened beyond Buell's primary focus on "natural" settings).[36] Note the following near-future apocalypse depicted in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" (1841): "Man, because he could not but acknowledge the majesty of Nature, fell into childish exultation at his acquired and still-increasing dominion over her elements. . . . He grew infected with system, and with abstraction. . . . Meanwhile, huge smoking cities arose, innumerable. Green leaves shrank before the hot breath of furnaces. The fair face of nature was deformed as with the ravages of some loathsome disease." And with the "ravag[ing]" and "deform[ation]" of "Nature," humankind itself is soon obliterated in a "fiery overthrow." Speaking from the grave, the tale's narrator thus ruefully "doubt[s] the propriety of the term 'improvement' as applied to the progress of our civilization" inasmuch as "we" ignored the "principles which should have taught our race to submit to the guidance of the natural laws, rather than attempt their control."[37]

These passages alone would seem to warrant further ecocritical study of Poe, illustrating as they do the complex nature-culture imbrications currently at issue in much ecocriticism and science studies discourse.[38] Why, then, with the notable exceptions of Louis Renza, Lee Rozelle, and Tom J. Hillard, the continued exclusion?[39] It is a complicated question, but I would hazard to say that although Poe's characters are accountable to their environments, as Buell would have them be, and though there are moments of Romantic disgust at the blights of nineteenth-century industrialization, as in "Monos and Una," on the whole Poe's tales are not concerned with the ethical ramifications of humanity's actions for the environment; they do not worry about our capacity to either destroy or save the "natural" world. But, and this is a crucial point, this lack of concern is not the result of a philosophy that deems humanity to be elevated above the nonhuman world or even essentially distinguishable from it. Rather, Poe's works—conceived in

the moment immediately prior to the modern professionalization and differentiation of science, philosophy, and fiction—picture a physically and spiritually interconnected universe inexorably returning to the singularity from which it began.[40] Unlike Emerson's superficially similar vision, however, which imagines phenomenal unity as a potentially edifying means of personal transcendence, Poe's universe offers no such satisfactions. Representing the fusion of subjects and objects as an inevitable, cataclysmic collapse, Poe repeatedly makes the nonhuman environment the field against which discrete selves disappear—both as material bodies and as metaphysical entities. Here, the blurring of the distinction between self and world is achieved by subsuming the former into the latter, not the other way around. "To what end is nature?" Emerson asks in his introduction to *Nature*; Poe responds that it is to our end, our deaths as individuals, and not, as Emerson would have it, to the realization of our ends.[41]

In thus rebutting the self-exalting metaphysics of transcendentalism, Poe also preemptively challenges the related line of posthumanism that aims to find in the interpenetration of persons and world a range of ecstatic, self-gratifying potentialities. As we shall see, Poe, too, undermines the ontological priority of the atomistic human subject. However, unlike in much posthumanist discourse, the merging of persons and environments in Poe's world is, by and large, *not* self-affirming, self-realizing, or self-exalting. It is, rather, self-destructive. The threat of individual bodily death writ large in Poe's fiction betokens a more universal destruction of the very category of the human self and its affirmative posthuman alternatives.[42]

In Estok's analysis, this association of environmental contact with death would qualify Poe's fiction as ecophobic, and perhaps it is, but with the important proviso that it does not authorize a reactionary domination of the natural world. Quite the contrary; it is not the environment but the human self—autonomous, masterful, ontologically prioritized—that is in danger of being destroyed—subject, as it were, to its own form of environmental catastrophe. Fear of the environment exists, but it does not eventuate in mastery because both the fear and its uncanny source cancel the Cartesian distance between (and assuredness of) self and world, such that one's self becomes strangely foreign and the world unsettlingly familiar. The object of our fear, that is, becomes indistinguishable from ourselves, which is not to say that we become the world but rather that we become afraid of the shadows

that we sense we are, scared as much by our inanimation as by the animation of the world.[43]

Such a two-pronged fear is evident in "The Black Cat" (1843). Ostensibly a perverse temperance narrative, the story charts a man's transformation from loving husband and pet owner into inhuman murderer of his animals and spouse: after the narrator, fueled by alcohol, tortures and then hangs one cat, a new cat (or a reincarnation of the old) arrives; and when shortly thereafter it is walled up with the narrator's murdered wife, its "inhuman" howl leads police to discover the crime, thereby consigning the narrator "to the hangman."[44] Justice is thus served, but there is more to the story than karmic retribution. Note, for instance, the narrator's description of the second cat as an "incarnate Night-Mare" and a "vast weight . . . incumbent eternally upon my *heart!*" ("B," 856). Similarly, the narrator feels "terror . . . horror" and "an absolute *dread* of the beast," which is "not exactly a dread of physical evil" yet one that he is "at a loss how otherwise to define" ("B," 855). That this indefinite dread, and the resulting attempted murder, results at least in part from ecophobia is evidenced by the narrator's subsequent lament: "[For] *a brute beast* to work out for *me*—for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God—so much of insufferable wo!" ("B," 855–56).[45] Refusing to suffer this assault upon his sovereignty, the narrator attempts to reestablish his divinely ordained dominance over the "beast" by brutalizing it.[46]

Of course, the attempt to reinscribe the line dividing self from animal fails, as, according to the story's logic, it must; they are inextricably bound, the image of the narrator awakening to "find the hot breath of *the thing* upon my face" a testament to their unity of spirit (the cat's exhalation is the man's inspiration) ("B," 856). Perhaps most telling in this regard is the narrator's professed motive for torturing his cats in the first place: "the spirit of PERVERSENESS," subsequently described as an "unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only" ("B," 852). What is significant about this description is its equation of harming other things with harming oneself: the soul does "violence to its own nature" by violating something else. However obliquely, the narrator apprehends that there is a "*Law*" that connects him to the animal he harms, which means that murder is inevitably an act of suicide ("B," 852). To indulge one's ecophobia is thus to ensure, paradoxically, a reunion with the very environment that

one tries to escape.[47] This is *Eureka* by another name, of course, its process of universal reconsolidation translated here into an irresistible drive to individual self-destruction; in both, seemingly singular entities rush to mortal encounters with what only appear to be their others. The "chimera" of the cat thus manifests *Eureka*'s claim that we are "haunt[ed]" by a subconscious knowledge of our impending and "infinitely awful" reconvergence with the world, its howls echoing "the low voices" of *Eureka* in foretelling—like the white patch resembling a "GALLOWS" on its chest ("B," 855)—the end of the narrator's particular life.[48] Here, however, the revelation is never fully grasped, the loss of one's individual identity as "Man" a tragedy to be fought rather than an inevitability to be endured.

For a story that pictures the endurance of this inevitability, let us return to "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," which, like Poe's mesmerism tales and his other cosmological dialogue fictions, is narrated by a deceased character. Monos, killed during the earthly apocalypse previously discussed, is describing to his companion, Una, his sensations after death. After a year interred, his individuality is disintegrated, his sense of self lost, as he gradually becomes part of the grave itself:

> The consciousness of *being* had grown hourly more indistinct, and that of mere *locality* had, in great measure, usurped its position. The idea of entity was becoming merged in that of *place*. The narrow space immediately surrounding what had been the body, was now growing to be the body itself. . . . The sense of being had at length utterly departed, and there reigned in its stead—instead of all things—dominant and perpetual—the autocrats *Place* and *Time*. For *that* which *was not*—for that which had no form—for that which had no thought—for that which had no sentience—for that which was soulless, yet of which matter formed no portion—for all this nothingness, yet for all this immortality, the grave was still a home, and the corrosive hours co-mates. ("C," 616–17)

Transitioning from the sentience of an individual to a sensation of deindividuation, Monos here records the process by which the self's physical resonance with the earth supersedes both human rationality and personal psychology.[49] Now a coordinate plotted on the axes of "*Place*" and "*Time*," a diffuse "narrow space" rather than an integrated person, a temporal duration of "*that* which *was not*" rather than a self-

present "being," Monos is at last one with his environment. Unlike the self-affirmative harmony of American transcendentalism, however, it is a "corrosive" unity won only by becoming one with "nothingness." "Soulless" and immaterial, even his name ("Monos," like "Una" in Latin, translates to "one" in Greek) bespeaks his lack of a specific individual existence.

The tale thus exhibits the effect of environmental integration on our selves, with discrete persons giving way to universal forces and individual beings absorbed into general being or, even more strangely, becoming. And what happens to Monos in death is only the culmination of a lifelong process (Monos dies due to a "fierce fever" explicitly attributed to the infection of "system" affecting humankind as a whole: dying "in the Earth's dotage," he was "wearied at heart with anxieties which had their origin in the general turmoil and decay" ["C," 612]; Monos, in other words, is integrated with the Earth to such an extent that he feels its sickness as his own). We can thus say that Monos does not survive his death so much as he outlives the illusion of his discrete self; rather than posthumanism's extension of subjectivity into the world, Poe here depicts a self caving in under the weight of its surroundings. Domination of the environment proves impossible, therefore, not because the world is invulnerable or infinitely removed but because it is infinitely, fearfully near, as close as our own estranged selves. Consequently, the story does not herald the victory of "Nature" over "us": inverting the man/nature binary would simply reify its terms, as would imagining a utopian conjunction of the two; to proclaim the rebirth of nature upon the death of man would be to assume the anthropocentric fallacy of their dialectical distinction or synthesis. "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" suggests instead a paradoxical simultaneity of sameness and difference—the "immortality" of our "nothingness."

"The Island of the Fay" (1841) also effects this shadowy blurring of human self and nonhuman environment, if in more muted tones. Centered on the narrator's picturesque journey to an island secluded deep in the mountains, the tale describes a "fantastic" vision of a fairy's cyclical migrations from light to shade, finally ending in her death and integration with the waters upon which she traveled. As the sprite is absorbed into the water, "darkness [falls] over all things" and the story ends.[50] This is a fitting image for Poe's conception of the assimilation of individual life into a larger field of being, the inevitable loss of one's

person for an obliterative identity with the universe: "Do [the Fays] yield up their sweet lives as mankind yield up their own? In dying, do they not rather waste away mournfully; rendering unto God little by little their existence, as these trees render up shadow after shadow, exhausting their substance unto dissolution? What the wasting tree is to the water that imbibes its shade, growing thus blacker by what it preys upon, may not the life of the Fay be to the death which engulfs it?" ("I," 604). Putatively individual entities bleeding their shadow lives into a stream—of God, of death—until they are both no more and something more: it is an idea of (dis)integration anticipated earlier in the story, when the narrator confesses,

> I love . . . to regard the dark valleys, and the gray rocks, and the waters that silently smile, and the forests that sigh in uneasy slumbers, and the proud watchful mountains that look down upon all . . . as themselves but the colossal members of one vast animate and sentient whole . . . whose cognizance of ourselves is akin with our own cognizance of the animalculae in crystal, or of those which infest the brain—a being which we, in consequence, regard as purely inanimate and material, much in the same manner as these animalculae must thus regard us. . . . In short, we are madly erring, through self-esteem, in believing man, in either his temporal or future destinies, to be of more moment in the universe than that vast "clod of the valley" which he tills and contemns, and to which he denies a soul for no more profound reason than that he does not behold its operation. ("I," 600–601)

Here is a pantheism that finds sentience not only in other living things but in rocks and water. And in granting consciousness across such an expansive scale, in extending the great chain of being beyond its normal culmination in "man," the narrator relativizes "us." As with "The Black Cat" and "Instinct vs. Reason," we are merely intermediate, dispensable points in "one vast and animate whole." "We" are invisible to both large and small. The immense magnitude of life belittles the self-constructed stature of man, deflates his "self-esteem," and reduces him to nothing greater than the dirt beneath him. Indeed, human life and animate life in general are regarded as "a stain upon the landscape . . . at war with the genius of the scene" ("I," 600).

Thus, although the story ostensibly frames a Romantic scene of aesthetic enjoyment and philosophical contemplation, the principle

behind both the aesthetic and the philosophy is inconsistent with the viewer's own existence. He, too, is "at war with the genius of the scene," and with the fall of the final "darkness . . . over all things," this human stain is at last erased. Most frightfully of all, the shadows necessarily touch the reader as well. Like the Fay, with "more of care and uncertainty, and less of ecstatic joy," our own "person[s]" must "gr[o]w feebler, and far fainter, and more indistinct . . . and . . . bec[o]me whelmed in a shadow more black," leaving only "the mere ghost" of our former selves ("I," 605).

Obscuring the boundaries between inside and out, person and environment, shadow and substance, these brief examples gesture toward a radical, often fearful decomposing of normative conceptions of discrete humanity and bounded individual identity. Eclipsed, diffused, spectral, the human self is changed into something other than itself—but not into something able to benefit from its unification with the world, not least because the "world," too, is murky, unreal. In this light, we see our former selves and world darkly, as penumbras of what we believed them to be. A "dark ecology," then, to borrow Timothy Morton's phrase, but less as an "existentialis[t]" "*critical* choice" than as a systematic imperative of what he elsewhere calls the "mesh": "a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment."[51] Exploring the limits of such "radical nonidentity," Poe's texts foreclose both the idea that human selves are inherently distinct from or superior to their nonhuman environments and the seemingly antithetical (but actually coextensive) notion that we can self-constructively lose ourselves to the world.[52] For Poe, the world can be made neither other nor mirror; if our ontological separation from the universe is a fantasy, so too is our enabling kinship with it. What, then, is the nature of the relation? It is as uncertain as ourselves.

If such a cosmology affords no ready answers as to how we are to live—indeed, if inhabiting Poe's universe seems unimaginable, frightful—then that is the point, the source of its otherworldliness: Poe's cosmos defies our attempts to remake it in our image. Rather than being a failure, however, this frustration of our designs offers—however fleetingly—a vision of a universe that is not our own. It is a vision not long to be endured, perhaps even to be feared, but we know that we have seen it if in it our selves are less than assured, if, follow-

ing Theodor Adorno, what we glimpse we can neither identify with nor reject, neither fully comprehend nor control.[53] Admittedly, this may seem a devil's bargain: rather than dominating the nonhuman world we are now lost within it. But in attenuating our attachment to the absoluteness of the human-nonhuman and self-other divides, Poe's cosmos dispenses with a concept of being that necessitates a violent defense of its boundaries. A negative ethics, then, what we might call, following Judith Butler, an "undone" ethics—a posthuman ethics of being undone.[54]

Even if "phobic fascination" never "turns into kindness" or "care" or "love," it at least exposes the inextricability of dependency, the inescapability of vulnerability, the impossibility of mastery.[55] Like Poe's narrators, we cannot fix the border between "us" and the "world," cannot be on one side and master on the other, cannot isolate the injury when our attempts to do so fail. "We" are instead left suspended in an irresolvable fear, a doubt that leaves us incapable of reestablishing either a dominating remove or a self-serving union. With no promise of reconciliation (what would be reconciled?), and less of harmony, Poe's cosmos does not reassure us as other ecocriticisms do. It only whispers, awfully, that something other than "us" might be.

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Notes

1 Simon C. Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia," *ISLE* 16 (spring 2009): 210.

2 For a critique of Estok's call for greater theoretical focus in ecocriticism, see S. K. Robisch's "The Woodshed: A Response to 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia,'" *ISLE* 16 (autumn 2009): 697–708. I find Robisch's argument to be problematic, both for its Manichaean depiction of the evils of theory and for the violence with which its author imagines visiting physical harm upon his theoretical adversaries, as when he fantasizes withholding "food and water" from a "poststructuralist" stranded in the forest "until the survivor acknowledges the representational value of words like 'giardia' . . . and 'grizzly bear'" (705). Timothy Morton voices a similar concern regarding Robisch's rhetoric in "Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125 (March 2010): 273–82.

3 See Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Landscape Vision: Constable and Wordsworth* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin

Press, 1975); and Kate Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2004).

4 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Eolian Harp," in *The Great Romantics* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1994), 579; and William Wordsworth, "Influence of Natural Objects," in *The Great Romantics*, 110.

5 See Carolyn Merchant's classic *The Death of Nature* (London: Wildwood House, 1982); Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); Annette Kolodny's "Unearthing Herstory: An Introduction," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Harold Fromm (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996), 170–81; and Louise Westling's *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996).

6 Coleridge, "Religious Musings," in *Romanticism*, 2nd ed., ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000), 455.

7 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul" (1847), in *Emerson: Essays and Poems* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1996), 385–86; "Song of Myself" (1891–92), in *Walt Whitman: Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: Norton, 2002), lines 403–4, 406; Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Hall Witherell (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2001), 233. Further references to "Walking" are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as "W."

8 Emerson, *Nature* (1849), in *Essays and Poems*, 42.

9 *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World* (ed. David Brower [San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club, 1962]) was the title of the third book in the Sierra Club's Exhibit Format series. It combined photographs by Eliot Porter with text by Thoreau.

10 In an otherwise fine argument, Richard J. Schneider, in "'Climate Does Thus React on Man': Wildness and Geographic Determinism in Thoreau's 'Walking,'" explicitly avoids discussing the "racial implications" of Thoreau's essay (in *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*, ed. Schneider [Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2000], 53).

11 Given its late preparation date, "Walking" would seem to contest Lawrence Buell's claim in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1995) that *Walden* marks a transition from Thoreau's early anthropocentric transcendentalism to a later biocentrism. Westling writes in reference to both Emerson and Thoreau that there lurks an "imperialist nostalgia . . . at the heart of American pastoral—a sentimental masculine gaze at a feminized landscape and its creatures that mask[s] the conquest and destruction of the 'wild' continent" (52). See also James C. McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and*

Ecology (New York: St. Martin's, 2000); and R. Bruce Hull, *Infinite Nature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006).

12 The trope of becoming wild through ingesting wilderness recurs throughout Thoreau's oeuvre (recall "the tonic of wildness" in *Walden*). Thus, although Jane Bennett is right to note that Thoreau's description of surprisingly lively things is not based on common ecocritical tropes of harmony or equilibrium, it is hard to see how the above passage supports her claims that, first, Thoreau's Wildness is "an irreducibly strange dimension of matter, an *out-side*," rather than material that exists to be ingested, and that, second, his disgust after attempting to absorb the wildness of a woodchuck by eating its flesh translates into a universal principle (*Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* [Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2010], 2–3, 46). Even if Thoreau embraces vegetarianism, he retains the belief that he can extract nature's wildness by consuming its products.

13 Thoreau, "Love," in *Collected Essays and Poems*, 326; and "Friendship," lines 1–2, 4, 8, in *Collected Essays and Poems*, 532–34. It is a sentiment echoed in "I will obey the strictest law of love": "My friend can wound me / For to him I bare my breast—" (lines 29–30, in *Collected Essays and Poems*, 624–25).

14 For a more thorough discussion of these poems as well as other "dark" moments in Thoreau's writings, see Walter E. Bridgman, *Dark Thoreau* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1982). Although I depart from Bridgman's psychological account, his insistence on acknowledging the violence of Thoreau's idealism lays the foundation for the subsequent critiques of Westling, McKusick, and others. For an alternative dark Thoreau, see Sharon Cameron's peerless *Writing Nature: Henry Thoreau's Journal* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989).

15 Marjorie Levinson, for instance, traces a common anthropocentric attitude toward nature from the canonical British Romantics to current deep ecology: "For deep ecology, protection is nothing more than long-range and displaced production. Human stewardship objectifies nature in the sense of converting it conceptually if not literally into 'resources' that are valorized by long-term availability for development of a material or spiritual kind" ("Pre- and Post-Dialectical Materialisms: Modeling Praxis without Subjects and Objects," in *Observing Complexity: Systems Theory and Postmodernity*, ed. William Rasch and Cary Wolfe [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000], 65). On ecophenomenology, see *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, ed. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2003); and David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1997). For a review of "nature spiritualit[ies] in America," see John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present*

(New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 5. For the points of convergence between New Age spirituality and "goddess" ecofeminism, see *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. Judith Plant (Philadelphia: New Society, 1989); and *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993).

16 For studies that situate the posthuman transhistorically, see Caroline Bynum Walker, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003); Myra J. Seaman, "Becoming More (than) Human: Affective Posthumanisms, Past and Future," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37 (summer 2007): 246–75; Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Allison Muri, *The Enlightenment Cyborg: A History of Communications and Control in the Human Machine, 1660–1830* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007).

17 This differentiation borrows from ones previously made by Andy Miah, "Posthumanism: A Critical History," ieet.org/archive/2007.04.12–Miah-Chapter2.pdf (accessed 12 February 2008); Bart Simon, "Introduction: Toward a Critique of Posthuman Futures," *Cultural Critique* 53 (winter 2003): 1–9; Laura Bartlett and Thomas B. Byers, "Back to the Future: The Humanist 'Matrix,'" *Cultural Critique* 53 (winter 2003): 28–46; and Seaman, "Becoming More (than) Human," 247–50.

18 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 287.

19 For specifically ecocritical receptions of these theories, see Neil Evernden, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Harold Fromm (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996), 92–104; Daniel R. White, *Postmodern Ecology: Communication, Evolution, and Play* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1998); Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992); Bruce Clarke, "Science, Theory, and Systems: A Response to Glen A. Love and Jonathan Levin," *ISLE* 8 (winter 2001): 149–65; Jim Tarter, "Collective Subjectivity and Postmodern Ecology," *ISLE* 2 (winter 1996): 65–84; and Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003). For explicitly posthumanist interrogations, see Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*; Cary Wolfe, *Critical Environments: Postmodern Theory and the Pragmatics of the "Outside"* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1998); and *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010).

20 Evernden, "Beyond Ecology," 95.

21 This language echoes the titles of Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993)

and Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman*. See also Wolfe's claim that "we have never been human" in the context of his discussion of Michel Serres ("Bring the Noise: *The Parasite* and the Multiple Genealogies of Posthumanism," in Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007], xi).

22 Although we differ on specifics, I draw heavily on the following articulations of what I am calling posthumanist ecology or ecological posthumanism: Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995); Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Porter (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), and *We Have Never Been Modern*; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987); Manuel DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; and Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Further references to Haraway are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *SCW*.

23 Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000), 34.

24 Note that Poe's title is "The Man That Was Used Up" rather than "The Man Who Was Used Up," an interesting formal reflection of the story's thematic dehumanization. See *Edgar Allan Poe: Tales and Sketches*, 2 vols., ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2000), 378–92.

25 Robert Pepperell, "The Posthuman Manifesto," *Kritikos* 2 (February 2005), intertheory.org/pepperell.htm; White, *Postmodern Ecology*, 8; Paul Shepard, "Ecology and Man—A Viewpoint," in *The Subversive Science*, ed. Shepard and Daniel McKinley (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 2; quoted in Evernden, "Beyond Ecology," 102; Evernden, "Beyond Ecology," 101; Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: CBC, 1961), 9; quoted in Evernden, "Beyond Ecology," 99. Evernden himself becomes skeptical of this earlier position in *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992).

26 Miah, "Posthumanism," 21.

27 Eleni Ikoniadou, "Rhythmic Topology: The Affective Stretching of Nature," in *An (Un)likely Alliance: Thinking Environment(s) with Deleuze/Guattari*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 173.

28 Timothy Lenoir, "Makeover: Writing the Body into the Posthuman Technoscape. Part One: Embracing the Posthuman," *Configurations* 10 (spring 2002): 218.

29 This idea picks up on Bartlett and Byers's consonant claim that the post-

humanist rhetoric of "fluidity, flexibility, boundary dissolution, and border crossings" is "uncann[ily] simila[r] to the structures of global capitalism" (29). For a cognate critique from the perspective of art history, see Jon Erickson's *The Fate of the Object: From Modern Object to Postmodern Sign in Performance, Art, and Poetry* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995): "Unfortunately, too often the desire to break down the distinction between subject and object, the understandable desire for wholeness, comes from the subject and results in the appropriation and consumption of the object by the subject. The latter's ideal of nondifferentiation masks a wish to be omnipotent" (197–98).

30 Latour's shift in emphasis from a Nietzschean focus on "strength" in *The Pasteurization of France* to a procedural parliamentarianism in *We Have Never Been Modern* and *The Politics of Nature* is also instructive in this context.

31 Miah, "Posthumanism," 21.

32 Bernd Herzogenrath, introduction to *An (Un)likely Alliance*, 4; Michael Mikulak, "The Rhizomatics of Domination: From Darwin to Biotechnology," in *An (Un)likely Alliance*, 68. For other ecocritical engagements with Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, see the rest of the essays in *An (Un)likely Alliance* as well as the companion anthology, *Deleuze/Guattari and Ecology*, ed. Herzogenrath (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

33 Lee Rozelle, *Ecosublime: Environmental Awe and Terror from New World to Oddworld* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2006), 22. Rozelle here draws on the work of Christine L. Oravec ("To Stand Outside Oneself: The Sublime in the Discourse of Natural Scenery," in *The Symbolic Earth: Discourse and Our Creation of the Environment*, ed. James G. Cantrill and Oravec [Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1996], 58–75); and Christopher Hitt ("Toward an Ecological Sublime," *New Literary History* 30 [summer 1999]: 603–23). Hitt's attempt to recuperate the sublime from an "ideology [that] is fundamentally or intrinsically maleficent" rests on slowing the all-too-quick move from "humbling fear" to "ennobling validation for the perceiving subject"; in this old, Kantian model, Hitt continues, "humility is . . . transformed into self-apotheosis, validating the individual's dominion over the nonhuman world" (605, 606, 608). Yet while Hitt wants to "resist the traditional reinscription of humankind's supremacy over nature" (609), he still insists that the sublime is about "an individual's process of self-discovery" via a "confront[ation] with the wild otherness of nature" (610, 620). This insistence seems inconsistent with Hitt's claim elsewhere in the essay that the sublime reveals that "there can be no subject or object, since this very dualism is a conceptual construction" (614). It is from this suspension of definite self-other distinctions—rather than their eventual affirmation—that my own analysis proceeds.

34 I here invoke Timothy Morton's "dark ecology," with which I will engage

more substantively in the conclusion. See Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 181–97, and his recent *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010).

35 Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 188, 7–8.

36 In *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), Buell expands his definitions of what might count as an "environment" or "nature" to include certain human constructions.

37 "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," in *Tales and Sketches*, 1:610, 612, 609. Further references are to this version and will be cited parenthetically in the text as "C."

38 See William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. Cronon (New York: Norton, 1995), 69–90; and Molly Wallace, "'A Bizarre Ecology': The Nature of Denatured Nature," *ISLE* 7 (summer 2000): 137–53.

39 See Louis A. Renza, "'Ut Pictura Poe': Poetic Politics in 'The Island of the Fay' and 'Morning on the Wissahicon,'" in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), 305–29; Rozelle, *Ecosublime*; and Tom J. Hillard, "'Deep into That Darkness Peering': An Essay on Gothic Nature," *ISLE* 16 (autumn 2009): 685–95. Renza reads Poe's "The Island of the Fay" and "Morning on the Wissahicon" as political allegories that inhabit and then subvert positions of American exceptionalism and European conventionalism. In an argument that directly opposes mine, Rozelle, echoing Buell's position, contends that Poe regards nature as a chaos to be dominated and brought to order by humanity. Finally, Hillard reads "The Raven" as embodying a US gothic tradition that confirms Estok's definition of *ecophobia*.

40 The chronology is important because it is in this period and following that the consolidation of the social science–physical science distinction contributes to the further reification of the human-nonhuman divide (see Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell [Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004]; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 83; and Niklas Luhmann's discussion of the functional differentiation of individual identities and careers in the nineteenth century in *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz Jr. [Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995]). Poe can be seen as a preemptive critic of both binaries.

41 Emerson, *Nature*, 7. For readings of Emerson's later explorations of the radical uncertainty of the self, see Sharon Cameron, *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007); Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003); and Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*

42 For an analysis of this dynamic in the context of *Eureka* and other tales

not discussed here, see my "Edgar Allan Poe's (Meta)physics: A Pre-History of the Post-Human," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 62 (September 2007): 193–221.

43 See Freud's discussion of the *unheimlich* as "a regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world," as "something which is familiar and old—established in the mind [but] which has become alienated from it only through . . . repression," and as an instance of "when primitive beliefs [such as animism] which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" ("The Uncanny," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch [New York: Norton, 2001], 941, 944, 950). The *unheimlich* is thus related, conceptually and chronologically, to Freud's formulation of the *Todestrieb*, a drive to return to the inorganic. See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920; reprint, New York: Norton, 1990). From this perspective the titular subject's reincarnation in "The Black Cat," to which we will turn shortly, doubles the return of the narrator's repressed fear, which is less of his entombed wife than of his once and future convergence with the supposedly external world.

44 "The Black Cat," in *Tales and Sketches*, 2:859. Further references are to this version and will be cited parenthetically in the text as "B."

45 In a similar vein, Poe's "Instinct vs. Reason—A Black Cat" (1840) emphasizes the denigrating effect of animal intelligence on human exclusivity: "While the self-love and arrogance of man will persist in denying the reflective power to beasts, because the granting it seems to derogate from his own vaunted supremacy, he yet perpetually finds himself involved in the paradox of decrying instinct as an inferior faculty, while he is forced to admit its infinite superiority, in a thousand cases, over the very reason which he claims exclusively as his own" (*Tales and Sketches*, 1:478). The narrator thus concludes "that the boundary between instinct and reason is of a very shadowy nature"—as, by implication, is the one between cat and human.

46 See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009).

47 In this story and others, such self-other destruction proves inescapable. As "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845) makes clear, the compulsion to self-obliterate is constitutive of existence, "an innate and primitive principle" that is "antagonistical" to "self-defence" (*Tales and Sketches*, 2:1220, 1221). It is a principle inherent to the narrative trajectory of "The Black Cat" (which also identifies this impulse, seventy-five years before Freud, as an "indivisible primary facult[y] . . . of Man" ["B," 852]): that which most defines the self is also that which ensures the self's extinction. In other tales, however, the compulsion is felt without being acted upon, which suggests that fear need not result in such mutual destruction—and actually might prevent it.

48 Poe, *Eureka*, in *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry, Tales, and Selected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 1357, 1356, 1357.

49 For discussions of the depersonalizing force of bodily sensation, see Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (New York: Continuum, 2008); and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2008).

50 "The Island of the Fay," in *Tales and Sketches*, 1:601, 605. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as "I."

51 Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 185, 183, and "Queer Ecology," 275–76. For other instances of Morton's advocacy of an affect, politics, and ethics of dark ecology, see *The Ecological Thought*; and ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/. Morton's expanded sense of ecology usefully links up with recent work in "dirty" ecocriticism, which, counter to first-generation ecocriticism, focuses on sites of pollution, impurity, and artificiality rather than on scenes of unspoiled or unproblematic nature. Moreover, Morton's critique of what he terms the "beautiful soul syndrome" parallels my questioning of the continued Romanticism of ecocritical thought. As this conclusion should make clear, however, I break from Morton's insistence on retaining existential choice—and the subject that subtends it—as the only viable alternative; there is, I believe, an element of Romantic heroism, even humanism, to this model that seems inconsistent with Morton's emphasis on self-estrangement elsewhere.

52 Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 186.

53 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2007), esp. 183–92. My thanks to Anne-Lise François for pointing out the relevance to my own study of Adorno's attempts to circumvent the violence of forcing the natural world into anthropocentric schemas of identity and "positive" dialectics. For recent engagements with Adorno in a posthumanist-ecological context, see Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2005); Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 14–17; Wolfe, "In Search of Posthumanist Theory: The Second-Order Cybernetics of Maturana and Varela," in *Observing Complexity*, 163–96; and Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), 18.

54 In exploring the possibility of a fear that need not eventuate in domination, I depart not only from Estok but also from Hitt in "Toward an Ecological Sublime": "We must be careful . . . before embracing a sense of humility, mortality, and dependence as . . . a panacea for our environmental predicament. . . . The difficulty is that the consistent response of Western civilization . . . to this recognition of vulnerability has *not* been eventual acceptance, but dogged resistance. The unfathomable otherness of nature unnerves us. . . . Hence we devise ways to circumvent, deny,

escape, or overcome it" (611). Although I take Hitt's point, I am more interested in Butler's articulation, via Adorno and Emmanuel Levinas, of an ethics of vulnerability and nonmastery: "To be undone by another is a primary necessity, and anguish to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient 'I' as a kind of possession." I am skeptical of its proffered payoff—that "becom[ing] undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human" (*Giving an Account*, 136)—but Butler's formulation nicely captures, perhaps despite itself, the way in which this encounter both invokes and problematizes the autonomous liberal subject: there is a "me" but it is "undone" by being "bound" to a "not me," and thus is sent away ("address[ed] . . . elsewhere . . . vacate[d]"); there is agency but it is located in the relation of being "moved" and "prompted to act" rather than exclusively within the "the self-sufficient 'I.'"

55 Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 196, 195, 201. See also the concluding paragraphs of *The Ecological Thought*, 135. As Morton does in this latter work (3), Jonathan Bordo critiques the idea that we can solve the environmental crisis through better technological management because it echoes the logic that produced the crisis in the first place ("Ecological Peril, Modern Technology, and the Postmodern Sublime," in *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, ed. Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick [London: Routledge, 1992], 165–78). Serres also opposes the managerial stance, emphasizing instead the mutuality of vulnerability (Serres with Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus [Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995], esp. 119–21, 169–71, 182, and 203–4).