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Sur le seuil : les maisons aristocratiques chez Cooper et Poe

15 July 2025.

Matthew Redmond

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1. Dust and Ghosts
2. Homemade Aristocracy
3. Gothic Infestation

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1. Dust and Ghosts

1 In the first volume of *Democracy in America* (1835), Alexis de Tocqueville devotes several eloquent passages to assessing how Americans' relationship with their land and property both reflects and perpetuates the principles of a democratic republic. In this process, he details the legal system of inheritance that pervades much of the Old World, according to which property is preserved, whole and intact, to be inherited by a single male heir. This is supposed by Tocqueville to have a profound effect on the way that families are constituted across time.

2 In societies where the law of inheritance is based on the right of primogeniture, territorial estates are most often handed down from

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generation to generation without being divided. As a result, the family spirit becomes, in a way, embodied in the estate. The family represents the estate, the estate the family; it perpetuates their name, their origin, their glory, their power, their virtues. It is an imperishable testament to the past and a precious guarantee of the future. (Tocqueville 1981: 110). [1]

3 In the United States, says Tocqueville, things work differently. After the Revolutionary War, primogeniture, and the generational continuity that it enables, has given way to the law of partible inheritance, so that every proprietor's death triggers "a revolution in property" (Tocqueville 1981: 110). [2] Large estates are divided among several inheritors time and again, "until nothing can be seen but a shifting, impalpable dust, upon which democracy is founded." (Tocqueville 1981: 109). [3] This repeated dividing prevents a small number of wealthy families from exerting outsized control over the republic across many successive generations—in short, from becoming an American aristocracy. Power in the United States, then, is not immortal; it is made to expire with those who wield it.

4 If Tocqueville's points are always decisively made, the imagery that he deploys can sometimes feel unstable, ambiguous, and even subversive of his argument. To say that shifting dust (« une poussière mouvante ») forms the basis of democracy in the United States rather uncomfortably evokes a parable from the Book of Matthew: "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand" (KJV 7:26). An aristocratic reader (like James Fenimore Cooper), less persuaded than Tocqueville of democracy's inalienable merits, might have pounced on this irony, convinced that letting large estates sink beneath such dust must represent a foolish overindulgence in democratic spirit. Meanwhile, readers of a Gothic bent of mind (like Edgar Allan Poe) could easily regard a wealthy family's becoming embodied (« se matérialise ») by their imperishable estate (« un témoin impérissable du passé »), each representing the other, not only as something less than a sign of eternal power and glory, but as a figurative instance of something truly horrific: degeneration, monstrous transformation, or incest.

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5 During the same decade that saw the publication of Tocqueville's sociological study, writers of narrative fiction, whether they read him or not, examined for themselves what it would mean, and what it would cost, for great houses to establish themselves on U.S. soil. They questioned, that is, whether a republican democracy could support (or survive) some version of aristocracy, or whether its only hope was for powerful families and their estates to be razed almost to the ground with every passing generation. In such fictive thought experiments, the image of the house becomes crucial. Houses built, inhabited, sold, abandoned, torn down, and rebuilt all express different nuances of the republic's fraught relationship with the idea of dynastic wealth and power. I will focus on two fictional narratives, published only months apart: Cooper's 1838 society romance *Home as Found*, and Poe's 1839 story "The Fall of the House of Usher." For all their obvious differences, these two texts, read alongside one another, are diptych-like in their complementarity, with one exposing the other's ideological underbelly. Cooper's sunny romance of society contends that it is not only possible, but necessary to synthesize some form of aristocracy that is compatible with the American experiment; Poe's pitch-black story suggests that all such syntheses produce only inbred horrors that, left unchecked by the laws described in Tocqueville, ultimately collapse on themselves.

2. Homemade Aristocracy

6 The story goes that James Fenimore Cooper was reading aloud from an English novel of manners to amuse his ailing wife, Susan, but threw it aside when it became unbearably dull and declared that he could do a better job himself. She dared him to try, and he wrote *Precaution* (1820), a novel set in Northamptonshire and emulating (so he imagined) the style of Austen. That America's first internationally successful novelist launched his career on a domestic dare has become a staple of his lore, as has early critics' lukewarm response and their suggestion that he favor more 'American' subjects instead. 'American subjects' has almost always been taken to mean the Revolutionary War, the taming of the frontier, and other varieties of masculine struggle, all of which Cooper started embracing from his second effort, *The Spy* (1821). With this wrenching shift in subject matter, Cooper seemed to do more than discard his own society novel as he

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had someone else's; he seemed to reject domesticity as a literary theme, charting a radically different course for his own career and, by extension, for American narrative fiction of his time.

7 Americanists throughout the twentieth century saw Cooper's corpus lending itself only too generously to theories of U.S. literature that privileged renunciation, exploration, and the bloodiest forms of regeneration. To paraphrase loosely Richard Slotkin's influential assessment, this version of Cooper was important chiefly for being the creator of the frontiersman, a kind of amalgam, at once promising and nightmarish, of European literary genres, indigenous myth, and settler culture (Slotkin 2000: 493). But in tracking some of Cooper characters' progress away from so-called civilization, scholars have either undersold or overlooked his fiction's deep investment in the struggle to achieve stability, society, and a permanent sense of belonging. Whatever powerful allure the image of Natty Bumppo disappearing into untrod wilderness may have possessed for Cooper, that image had eventually to subside and be replaced by one of society; and contemplating precisely how that replacement will or should come about is integral to his project as a chronicler of the United States. Particularly during the 1830s, after returning from his extended sojourn in Europe, Cooper set himself the grand task of using narrative fiction to create a stable image of the national character when it is at home. The result of that effort was *Home as Found*, a so-called "silk-stocking tale" (as opposed to the Leatherstocking tales of frontier adventure) in which the Effingham family, having lived abroad for many years and only recently returned to the United States, must orient themselves as strangers in a strange land (Schulenberger 1955:50).

8 The reader of *Home as Found* strains to imagine a novel lighter on incident. Even as characters move restlessly from one drawing room, natural wonder, or town to another, the plot generally stands still. This, it seems, is all according to plan. As Cooper explains in his foreword to the first edition, his primary purpose in writing this work, a direct sequel to *Homeward Bound*, was to "delineate ordinary American life," in which endeavor he claims that no American novel or play has yet enjoyed success (Cooper 1871: 2). Cooper's attempt explores the efforts of the Effingham family, newly landed in New York, to acquaint themselves with—or else reconcile themselves to—the society in which they now move and have their being. This requires under-

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standing how people in the United States differ from Europeans, which makes people-watching one of the Effinghams' most productive pursuits, especially when conducted in the places where those people live. Partly for this reason, large swaths of *Home as Found* read like a field guide to American character types, and so it has been read.[4] Meanwhile, at the level of plot, the novel seems as static as the many town houses, country estates, and other structures that Cooper's narrator insists on describing in some depth.

9 On closer inspection, however, houses in this novel are not so static after all, or else their fixity lasts only a short time. In Chapter One, Cooper introduces Aristabulus Bragg, a disarmingly forward land agent who visits the Effinghams to discuss their many sumptuous holdings. The narrator describes him as "an epitome of all that is good and all that is bad, in a very large class of his fellow citizens," and one feels unmistakably Cooper's effort to establish him as the novel's preeminent comic offering (Cooper 1871: 17). Bragg represents the love of progress that supersedes any consideration of such factors as tradition, sentiment, or nobility. His lack of any regard for the past is nowhere more pointedly articulated than in discussing his own home. "The house I was born in was pulled down, shortly after my birth," he explains, "as indeed has been its successor, so I can tell you nothing on that head; and as for altars, there are none in my persuasion" (Cooper 1871: 33). Bragg feels no attachment to any living space, nor can he understand anyone else feeling such, a point made abundantly clear when he asserts that John Effingham should have had his New York house torn down some time ago: "Had the materials been disposed of, they would have sold well, and by running a street through the property, a pretty sum might have been realized" (Cooper 1871: 33). When Effingham politely but frigidly observes that such a decision would have left him homeless, Bragg treats this consideration as barely more than a wrinkle on the face of American profit and progress: "It would have been no great matter to get another on cheaper land. The old residence would have made a good factory, or an inn" (Cooper 1871: 33). Houses, for Bragg, are raised up to be pulled down, and nothing must be allowed to outlast its usefulness, no matter what sentimental value it has accrued. To prove his point, Bragg shows his companions to an auction site where they learn about a hundred-year-old dairy that was sold two years ago for

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five thousand dollars: “The next spring Mr. Feeler sold it to John Search, as keen a one as we have, for twenty-five thousand. Search sold it, at private sale, to Nathan Rise for fifty thousand, the next week, and Rise had parted with it, to a company, before the purchase, for a hundred and twelve thousand cash” (Cooper 1871: 115). “Search,” “Rise”: even the buyers’ surnames denote where their priorities lie. This meteoric escalation in value, it turns out, is based on its proximity to a town that does not exist yet and possibly never will. An empty dream of the future, Cooper laments, is worth more in these United States than a concrete past.

10 If Bragg is to be believed, the United States lives in a constant state of architectural fermentation: houses rise and fall, wood turns liquid and dissolves, only to congeal again in different structures with the next swell of enterprise. And while Cooper encourages readers to laugh at Bragg and his all-forgetting lust after progress, his opinions still represent something that Cooper regarded as a real and pressing problem for the American republic. On returning to the United States in 1833, Cooper was dismayed by the fever of land speculation and aggressive ‘go-aheadism’ that had taken hold in Templeton and elsewhere. To him, the rising generation was hopelessly absorbed in schemes of purchase and sale, their English having degraded into a smattering of stock phrases and capitalist cant (Sundquist 1977: 263). Among fiction writers, he was not alone. Indeed, we can situate Cooper’s reflections in a chorus of similar assertions about the nature of property in the United States. When William Austin, in his 1820 fable “Peter Rugg, the Missing Man,” tries to express the mutability of American life with a single image, he chooses the auction of Rugg’s old home. The fast-talking auctioneer of that story—with whom Cooper’s Bragg would undoubtedly find much to discuss—cannot be bothered to check that his latest property’s former occupant is actually dead and gone; for him, the past is significant only as a rhetorical flourish to help sell real estate. But an auction is not necessary to drive home how erratically houses rise, fall, and change hands in the United States. Even the premise of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* subtly underscores this fact. Readers may glance at the novel and assume that John and Edward Effingham are direct descendants of Oliver Effingham, the young hero of *The Pioneers* who, with Natty Bumppo’s support, uncovers the mystery of his birth and marries

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Elizabeth Temple**.** But, as Joy Kasson was the first to observe in print, they cannot be: John and Edward were born in 1787, roughly seven years before Oliver marries Elizabeth Temple; and, as first cousins, John and Edward must be the sons of siblings, whereas Oliver Effingham is an only child. We must conclude John and Edward are distant relations from another branch of the Effingham family, and that Oliver must have died childless at around thirty-five years old, for the property in New York to have been handed down as it was (Kasson 1977: 55). Possibly without the reader's even noticing, Cooper has thwarted Oliver Effingham's happy ending, robbed him of his posterity, and relegated his bloodline to a half-remembered past. Even as it seems to establish continuity with a previous Cooper novel, *Home asFound* actually achieves a rather violent discontinuity that becomes perceptible through the novel's focus on inheritance.

11 Such discontinuities are a feature, not a bug, of the democratic republic that Cooper's novel depicts. According to Tocqueville, "the very germ of aristocracy" never flourished in those parts of the New World where it was even planted, including New York, because the suspension of entail made the diffusion of wealth and property the law of the land (Tocqueville 1981: 107). [5] Cooper satirically pushes Tocqueville's point still further by suggesting that the suspension of entail might be just the beginning. Midway through his novel, during a discussion about family legacies, the dubious Steadfast Dodge congratulates himself and his countrymen on "having got matters so now, that a man can no longer indulge in the aristocratic and selfish desire to make a will" (Cooper 1871: 454). Cooper's narrator, after clarifying that even Dodge himself does not know what he means by this remark, offers a lengthy and caustic rebuttal.

12 The institutions of America, like every thing human, have their bad as well as their good side; and while we firmly believe in the relative superiority of the latter, as compared with other systems, we should fail of accomplishing the end set before us in this work, did we not exhibit, in strong colours, one of the most prominent consequences that has attended the entire destruction of factitious personal distinctions in the country, which has certainly aided in bringing out in bolder relief than common, the prevalent disposition in man to covet that which is the possession of another, and to decry merits that are unattainable (Cooper 1871: 455).

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13 It is a moment of narratorial intervention that betrays the reactionary politics undergirding Cooper's study of U.S. character. The narrator's defense of "personal distinctions" and "merits" casts those who deplore them as motivated by only the most selfish considerations. According to the narrator, whoever does not inherit property will likely covet it, and it is that covetousness, not a spirit of idealism, that drives their critique of families more powerful than themselves. The reader is expected to reject Bragg's concept of aristocracy as absurd, and to recognize the making of a will as an exercise neither "aristocratic" nor "selfish," but one compatible with the values of a republican nation. With this rhetoric, Cooper deplores the ethos of free circulation, arguing instead that some property should descend in predictable and linear fashion through the successive generations of a single family. If this linear descent would result in a kind of American aristocracy, the central characters in *Home as Found* see that as no bad thing.

14 Those central characters, the novel's own germ of aristocracy that Cooper would plant on inhospitable ground, are the Effinghams; and it is certainly apparent from the novels' first several chapters that mingling with "the general mass" is not an experience for which they have any appetite. As for the destruction of "the last trace of hereditary ranks and distinctions" that Tocqueville describes, the aristocratic Cooper puts certain very cagey remarks in Eve's mouth during a chapter where she converses with English family friend Sir George Templemore, who expects (naively, in Eve's view) that American ways should be totally unlike European ones in every respect.

> There are two great causes of distinction every where, wealth and merit. Now, if a race of Americans continue conspicuous in their own society, through either or both of these causes, for a succession of generations, why have they not the same claims to be considered members of old families, as Europeans under the same circumstances? (Cooper 1871: 42)

15 Templemore, an Englishman, cannot find fault with this logic, as Cooper presumably expects that his reader will not. Eve's talk of "generational succession" contrasts sharply with the outlook of someone like Bragg, for whom the passing of every generation provides license for the next one to shape the republic however they

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see fit. With this and similar exchanges, *Home as Found*, though not uncongenial to democracy, nonetheless signals an investment in recovering some version of aristocracy for the United States—one uncoupled from associations with the alleged corruption and decadence of the Old World. Powerful old families living "cattishly" in the old houses they know best is an idea for which Cooper has ample sympathy, even as he recognizes the potential of such families to abuse their position and become overgrown.

16 This is perhaps the most rigorously pursued objective of *Home as Found*: testing what a U.S. aristocracy might look like and how its members might ethically comport themselves in this modern nation. In its early chapters, the novel sends the cosmopolitan Eve and her more thoroughly American friend Grace on a tour of fashionable New York homes. These houses, Grace warns, lack the "ante-chambers" and "vast suites of rooms" that Eve has come to expect from her experience in Europe—amenities that Eve rejects as belonging to a European past rather than an American future. The message is clear: a sensible American upper class will not expect their significance to be proclaimed by estates as grandiose as the ones in Europe. Just as "[i]t is not necessary" in Eve's phrasing, "to enter a house of four or five windows in front, to see it is not a house of twenty or thirty," so the American aristocrat will cut a figure perceptibly different, less ornate and imposing, than their counterparts across the Atlantic (Cooper 1871: 71). This discussion of houses only increases the intensity of our focus on the novel's most crucial question, one announced by its title: what kind of home will the Effinghams make for themselves in the New World? Cooper transports his family from their New York property to a recently (and somewhat clumsily) renovated country house. Eventually, the Effinghams find themselves embroiled in a dispute over Three-Mile Point, a region of the Ostego that legally belongs to them but has been taken over by the public during their long absence abroad. The family's awkward struggle to reclaim this land for their private use screams of Cooper's growing frustration with a democratic republic too apt to forget who its most important families are. It is the same deeply personal frustration that we heard in Eve's insistence that even in an ever-mutating republic some families will (and should) rise to the top and stay there. As a member of one such family, Cooper felt this very strongly. [6]

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17 But while the Effingham family—or at least this particular branch—seems to find their desired happiness in the end, *Home as Found* discretely gives us license to wonder whether the home chosen by these characters is the best possible one. The last recorded conversation between Paul and Eve, in the final pages of the novel, concerns a misunderstanding that arose between them during their journey to America aboard the *Montauk*. To allay his wife's confusion, Paul must explain to her that "[t]he etiquette of a vessel of war is rigid certainly, and wisely so … Among us sailors, it is the inferior who goes first into a boat, and who quits it last" (Cooper 1871: 583). In the end, these two youthful characters, despite having found their permanent home on U.S, soil, have not fully left the ship that brought them there. In Cooper's mind, perhaps, the ship is a difficult dwelling to improve upon, combining rigidity and fluidity, constancy and change, more successfully than any home on land. The Effinghams' mobile home, the ship that brought them to America, is perhaps also the home that best represents its values.

18 Despite its professed focus on everyday American life, Cooper's novel proves at least as preoccupied with longer timespans. Through the Effingham family's efforts to re-settle in their original country, made unfamiliar to them by years of European living, Cooper mounts an argument for the transformation, rather than the disposal, of aristocracy. The United States, according to his novel, needs great houses and great families to occupy them, even if both differ starkly from their European counterparts. He concludes that great houses and family lines are not only possible in a democratic republic, but necessary for its flourishing.

3. Gothic Infestation

19 Leslie Fiedler, in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, famously argued that American literature is "almost essentially" Gothic literature (1960:28). "Until the Gothic had been discovered," says Fiedler, "the serious American novel could not begin; and as long as that novel lasts, the Gothic cannot die" (1960: 143). Notwithstanding the narrowness of Fiedler's canon, it remains difficult not to be swayed by his insistence that "our greatest writers sought out Gothic themes" (1960: 142). As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock has pointed out, this assertion be-

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comes only more persuasive when our scope widens to include writers such as Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Louise Erdrich, Anne Rice, and Joyce Carol Oates (2017:1). As more, and more diverse, U.S. writers enter the critically accepted ambit of American Gothicism, the range of forms, genres, settings, themes, and characters associated with this mode continues to expand with no outer limit.

20 On its surface, *Home as Found* is not a work equipped to support Fiedler's thesis. If it takes very seriously its mission of defining and characterizing everyday American life, that does not make it likely to qualify as a "serious" novel in his assessment. It is also a remarkably un-Gothic piece of narrative fiction, even by silver fork standards. Nowhere in Cooper's book do we find the quintessentially "Gothic themes" identified by Fiedler and his successors: an obsession with power imbalances, prohibition and transgression, forbidden secrets, and the crushing burden of a long past fraught with crimes finally punished in the present (Weinstock 2017: 5). Cooper's novel of everyday American life seems not so much oblivious to Gothicism as willfully defiant of it: a novel determined to think only of the future, and only in terms of generation and prosperity, however elusive it may judge them to be. Indeed, Gothic elements are so completely absent from *Home as Found* that their absence risks becoming a conspicuous presence. The Gothic, after all, is not easily domesticated or guarded against; it haunts the future as well as the past. To reread Cooper's novel through "The Fall of the House of Usher" is to render visible a dark presence that hides under the floorboards of *Home as Found* and threatens to corrode its mostly promising picture of U.S. futurity. After all, if Cooper shows us a family struggling to put down roots in American soil, Poe's story revolves around a massive aristocratic tree grown rotten to its core. The Ushers' estate, sclerotic and ossified after centuries of aristocratic corruption, while ostensibly a remnant of the past, is also a specter of the Effinghams' possible future.

21 What exactly is wrong with the Usher family? Their symptoms have been variously diagnosed. Both Edward Hungerford and Edward Zimmerman register the tale's investment in phrenology, an investment that the former interprets in "diegetic and cultural" terms and the latter as a sendup of eighteenth-century fears of excessive sensibility (Hungerford 1930: 209-31; Zimmerman 2007: 53). David W. Butler finds Roderick suffering from the cluster of complaints that

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nineteenth-century medicine labelled 'hypochondria,' before suggesting that Poe satirizes the exercise of reducing "extraordinary experiences" with medical thinking (Butler 1976:1). David Roche, also detecting a satire on medical knowledge, offers a poststructuralist reading that looks past signs of contamination and exposes "the contaminating effects of the signifiers" (Roche 2009:26). Most recently of all, Zachary Tavlin has pushed the phrenology connection further by linking it with architecture, resulting in a concept of "architectural phrenology … that joins seemingly disparate scales of human thought and activity in order to diagnose our condition within a universe violently opposed to the continuation of our mental, corporeal, and communal identifications" (Tavlin 2017: 125).

22 Examining with Poe's narrator the relationship between the Usher clan and their crumbling house, we find that another explanation volunteers itself. Even before renewing his acquaintance with Roderick, the narrator remarks that the Usher family "had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain." If this was not unsettling enough, Poe's narrator also detects another kind of improper and excessive familiarity cultivated by the Ushers.

23 It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other—it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the 'House of Usher'—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion. (Poe 2007: 1554)

24 The Ushers' "deficiency," it would seem, can be traced to the stiflingly close relationship between the family and their imposing estate. This passage points to a different violation of nature: an incestuous link between the ancient house and its long, narrow line of occupants. The resemblance between them proves how excessively close this

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fraternization has been. Americans are not supposed to look so much like their houses as this. As his gaze wanders across the estate's imposing façade, the narrator notices "a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones" (Poe 2007: 1554). Evidently the preservation of the Usher line comes at a devastating price to the individuals who comprise that line. The collective leeches off the individual, making illness the family's true inheritance. Each individual inheritor is another brick straining under the unsupportable weight of dynastic succession. Having somehow escaped the transformative effects on inheritance described by Tocqueville, the Ushers are sickly survivals of a bygone era coded European. Recall the conflation that *Democracy in America* attributes to European aristocracy: "the family represents the estate, the estate the family." Poe's story presses on this construction until the boundary of mere representativeness collapses, leaving us with something far more bizarre: a family somehow inbred with their estate, the two parties utterly inseparable and sharing far too strong a resemblance with one another.

25 What does the Ushers' condition suggest about that of the Effinghams, and vice versa? Reading *Home as Found* alongside "Usher," we may recognize Poe's inbred, suffocated clan and Cooper's vigorous American aristocracy as two sides of the same coin. Cooper tries to thread the lifeline of his novel's central family, the Effinghams, through the eye of a needle: to depict them holding continuity and transformation in balance, looking to a prosperous future without sacrificing the past or present. Not everyone has found this labor convincing. Eric Sundquist sees the Effinghams as an object of satire in this book—far less ludicrous than Bragg in Cooper's eyes, certainly, but problematic nonetheless. According to Sundquist, "aristocratic incest and inbreeding is the last, and most extreme, bulwark against the mob rule which Cooper found threatening himself and his country" (1977: 263). If the Effinghams seem nothing like the Ushers, the only missing ingredient may be time. Eve, after all, marries Paul Powis, who turns out to be yet another Effingham. In their professions of love, one hears at least the possibility of family branches becoming ever more tightly interlaced with themselves in the fulness of time—a house falling inward generations from now, dying of the failure to grow. Given enough generations spent in self-imposed con-

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finement, could their family be buried alive by the walls of their estate? Cooper's omniscient narrator detects no crack in the foundation of the home to which Eve and Paul will retire as a married couple. Then again, the crack in the Ushers' house was once almost imperceptible. Meanwhile, in a kind of reverse-foreshadowing, *Home as Found* attunes the reader's eyesight to some past promise in the life of Poe's aristocratic family that inbreeding and alienation have since blotted out. We may wonder from what height, in the "long lapse of centuries" to which the narrator continually alludes, the Usher family has actually fallen. Perhaps one very near the moral and societal high ground on which the Effinghams stand at the close of *Home as Found*, having founded their new home on principles of Old-World power and hereditary privilege, and in the process removed themselves from a rising tide of city financiers, land speculators, and devil-may-care capitalists. If so, it is all downhill from there.

26 At the nexus of these two house-obsessed fictions, then, is a throbbing anxiety about how U.S. society, like a great house itself, is best maintained over the long term. For both Cooper and Poe, there is a kind of illness that arises from too much investment in the past and too little adaptation to the circumstances of an ever-changing nation. Like mold, this illness pollutes old homes and infects old families, leaving them brittle and susceptible to collapse. If Cooper reserves more hope than Poe for a legitimate American aristocracy than Poe, he nonetheless leaves unanswered the question of how a family like the Effinghams—proud, insular, not naturally disposed to form any rapport with people of lesser status—can avoid degenerating into the kind of family horror that Poe's Gothic horror story depicts. Read in one another's light, *Home as Found* becomes a Gothic novel-in-waiting—the healthy glow of the Effinghams' faces betraying signs of the Ushers' pale complexion—while "Usher" reads as the epilogue of a generational saga of decay.

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1 « Chez les peuples où la loi des successions est fondée sur le droit de primogéniture, les domaines territoriaux passent le plus souvent de générations en générations sans se diviser. Il résulte de là que l'esprit de famille se matérialise en quelque sorte dans la terre. La famille représente la terre, la terre la famille; elle perpétue son nom, son origine, sa gloire, sa puissance, ses vertus. C'est un témoin impérissable du passé, et un gage précieux de l'existence à venir » (Tocqueville 1981: 110).

2 « une révolution de la propriété » (Tocqueville 1981: 110).

3 « …jusqu'à ce qu'il ne présente plus à la vue qu'une poussière mouvante et impalpable, sur laquelle s'assoit la démocratie » (Tocqueville 1981: 109).

4 Donald Kay identifies the Representative American, the Ignorant American, the Dissatisfied American, and the Ideal American as the four categories that emerge from Cooper's novelistic study of U.S. culture. Aristabulus

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Bragg, who figures significantly in this essay, is his Representative American, while Eve Effingham stands for the Ideal American.

5 « le germe même de l'aristocratie » (Tocqueville 1981: 107).

6 Scholars and biographers have routinely noted that Cooper himself was involved in a nearly identical controversy with the public concerning the possession of Cooperstown. Sundquist explains that "Judge Cooper's will had left the land in his son's trust, designating that it remains the mutual property of the Cooper family until 1850, when it would pass solely to the youngest descendant bearing the name of Cooper." In fighting to regain definitive ownership of the property, Cooper clearly saw himself taking a principled stand against "the rapacious democratic fever sweeping the nation." (Sundquist 1977: 264-5)

English
This article reads two U.S. narrative fictions of the 1830s alongside one another, finding in them complementary commentaries on the nature of power, tradition, and freedom in a young republic. Both James Fenimore Cooper's novel Home as Found and Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher" use the image of the house to consider what kind of elite families should exist in a nation that prides itself on democratic freedoms. By closely observing how the fictional houses in these works are built, maintained, occupied, sold, torn down, and rebuilt, we discover a new cross-section of the discourse surrounding the United States' colonial heritage and its republican future.

Français
Cet article met en parallèle deux fictions narratives étatsuniennes des années 1830, et y trouve des remarques complémentaires sur la nature du pouvoir, de la tradition, et de la liberté dans une jeune république. Le roman Home as Found de James Fenimore Cooper et la nouvelle "The Fall of the House of Usher" d'Edgar Allan Poe utilisent tous les deux l'image de la maison pour réfléchir au type de familles des élites qui devraient exister dans une nation qui se vante de ses libertés démocratiques. En observant de près comment les maisons fictives dans ces œuvres sont construites, entretenues, occupées, vendues, démolies, et reconstruites, nous découvrons une nouvelle perspective sur le discours entourant l'héritage colonial des États-Unis et son avenir républicain.

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Mots-clés
politique, républicanisme, théorie du roman, Allan Poe (Edgar), Fenimore Cooper (James), domesticité

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