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EDGAR·ALLAN·POE

A·CRITICAL·STUDY·BY

ARTHUR·RANSOME

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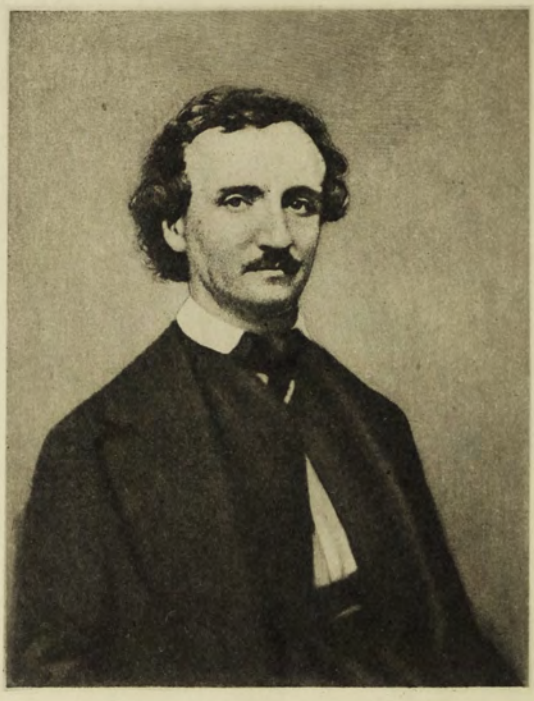


Edgar Allan Poe.
from a daguerreotype made about 1848.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

ARTHUR RANSOME

NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MCMX

TO
MY WIFE

PREFACE

POE is a writer whose work has come to mean something quite different from himself. He has been hidden by a small group of his writings. The bulk of his work is covered away under a mantle of the iridescent colouring of his tales. The popular conception of him is so narrow and powerful that it has made of him a legendary Faust, and it is hard for us to say "Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man," and, lifting that brilliant, shining mantle, to unveil the real astrologer. There is this traditional Poe to blind our eyes, and there is also the hero of a new morality play, where Art is Life, Beauty is Virtue, and Public Opinion is the Devil. Baudelaire, and cheap editions of his works, which take account only of his tales, and, among them, of a single group alone, combine to obscure him.

It would not be surprising if Poe had been labelled out of existence, or fallen into a general contempt. This is far from being the case. Many are ready to discuss him, and to betray in discussion the fact that they have not troubled

to examine the subject of their argument. He is praised and blamed for such details as the talkers happen to have noticed in passing. Different men see in him momentary reflections of themselves, and, becoming interested, are disappointed to find that he has other facets on which their image does not fall. He compels a respect to which, as an artist, he is not entitled, so that those of his admirers who are obstinately determined to base their admiration on his art are driven to make excuses for him, even to themselves. His best things are so good that his readers are impelled to deny the badness of his worst, instead of recognising that the grounds of their admiration are false, and seeking a firmer explanation. That such an explanation is to be found is proved by the fact that something in the character of his mind moves those who dislike what they know of him to express their dislike with extravagance, and others to praise no less extravagantly the tales and poems on which they persuade themselves that their respect for him is based.

There is no need, then, to apologise for a book that seeks to examine all Poe's activities in turn, and so to separate truth from tradition, and to discover what it is in Poe that stimulates such violence of praise and blame, alike insecurely founded. There is no need to apologise even for

failure in such an attempt. An admiration or contempt that we do not try to understand is more humiliating to the mind than none at all.

I had become dissatisfied with my own respect for Poe, because I could not point to tales or poems that accounted for its peculiar character of expectancy. I admired him, but, upon analysis, found that my admiration was always for something round the corner, or over the hill. In reading and re-reading his collected works I learnt that, perfect as his best things are, he has another title to immortality. It became clear that Poe's brain was more stimulating than his art, and that the tales and poems by which he is known were but the by-products of an unconcluded search. Throughout Poe's life he sought a philosophy of beauty that should also be a philosophy of life. He did not find it, and the unconcluded nature of his search is itself sufficient to explain his present vitality. Seekers rather than finders stimulate the imagination.

Poe's circumstances were not those most favourable to a philosopher of æsthetic. He was ill-educated and seldom free from anxiety. He lacked at once a firm foundation and an untroubled atmosphere in which to build. But he practised no art on which he did not write, and wrote on few that he did not find oppor-

tunity to practise. He had a craftsman's knowledge and much more, and, though again and again a bias in his character, or a prejudice that he had acquired, made his building impossible, his efforts towards a system, embedded as they are in all kinds of other work, foreshadow in an extraordinary manner the ideas that are most satisfying to-day.

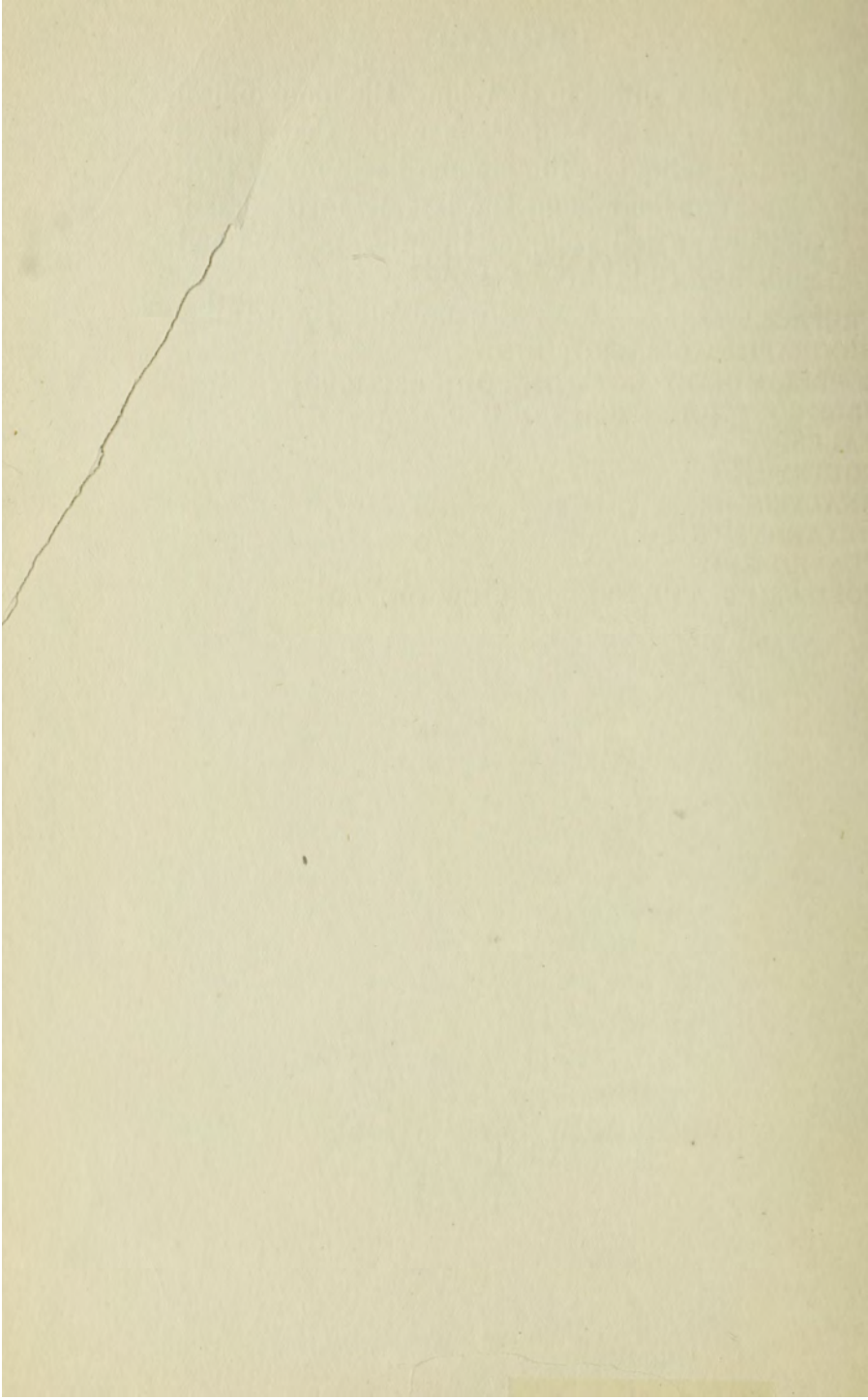
In this book I have tried to trace Poe's thought by discussing in the most convenient order his various activities or groups of ideas. I have tried also to draw a portrait of the man and to strike a balance between his practice and his theory. In a *Biographical Background* I have tried to give this life of work and thought a setting in the world, and, in a postscript, to follow the gradual naturalisation of Poe as a French writer.

There are a few sentences in the book taken from a previous short essay, published in my *History of Story-telling*, and in other forms. There seemed to be no sufficient reason for obscuring by a paraphrase what was as clear as I could make it.

Professor Woodberry very generously gave me permission to quote from several letters that are his copyright, and also to use his excellent book on Poe (issued in "The American Men of Letters Series" by Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin of Boston,

U.S.A.) as a guide in sketching the biographical chapter. The text of Poe's works that I have used throughout is the standard edition by Professor Woodberry and the late E. C. Stedman, published in ten volumes by Messrs. Stone and Kimball of Chicago.

ARTHUR RANSOME



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BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

I

IT is only in exceptional cases that he who would examine a man's work can refuse all knowledge of its author, as a hindrance rather than a help to his understanding. We do not need much, but we are glad of much from which to choose our knowledge. We recognise that his life, the physical facts of his existence, even though they may not affect his work directly, are yet symptoms of the conditions in which that work was produced. And on our knowledge of those conditions depends at least the accuracy of our re-creation of his work, our reproduction of his picture as he intended it, our reading of that unwritten book whose shadow is given us in print and paper.

The life of Poe has been a battleground for his biographers, and it is perhaps because of the din and smoke of that field that what he wrote has been so obtusely comprehended. In the excite-

ment of personal conflict with other writers, a conflict mainly concerned with the facts and legends of his life, and their judgment in terms of contemporary morality, all but one of those who have written "Lives" of Poe have taken his work for granted, his uneven poetry, his affinity with Baudelaire, his weirdness—there are a few other general headings under which, as it were by mutual consent, Poe's work is labelled and left out of the scrimmage, like the hospital in a siege.

For this book, concerned with the contents of that hospital, we need only enough biographical background to throw into the perspective of life such an examination as we propose. We have no wish to expose the peace of mind that is necessary for our work to the rude shocks and countershocks of that smoking field. The battle does not invite us, for it does not seem to us to be a battle about anything that matters. I wish to make it clear that in this chapter I am only preparing the ground for our discussion. I do not offer a biography of Poe, but set down, as briefly as I can, such facts as seem to be important, passing over much, and reserving the right to be disproportionately detailed in treating anything that seems likely to throw any light upon his work. There is already one "Life" of Poe that is impartial, and written by a man who is himself an artist. If I could be sure that all who read

this book had read Professor Woodberry's I would proceed at once to the more inviting subjects of examination.

II

The opening scene of Poe's life might have been taken from the story of a nineteenth-century *Capitaine Fracasse* and painted by Hogarth. The curtain lifts on the children, Poe and his brother and sister, with a father and mother, both poor players left in illness by the travelling company to which they were attached, living in a garret. The Hogarthian figure of the group is an old Welsh nurse, who, to quiet the children, took them in turn upon her lap and fed them with bread soaked in gin. The Welsh woman fantastically dressed, the gin, the squalid garret, the dying parents; the subject would have delighted the most literary of painters. It is like the first note in one of Poe's tales, foretelling the inevitable end.

The Captain Fracasse of the story, whose adventure turned out less pleasantly than that of the adventurous Marquis in Gautier's tale, was David Poe, the son of a Revolutionary Quartermaster-General. He married Elizabeth Arnold, a graceful but not a superlative actress. She had been married before, and when David Poe

met her, she was known as Mrs. Hopkins. Hopkins was a comedian, and his widow became Mrs. Poe within a month of his death. They had three children, William, Edgar, and Rosalie. Edgar Poe was born on January 19, 1809. In January, 1811, his mother was too ill to move on from Richmond where the company had been playing. The destitution of the family became known, and, when the children were left orphans, William, the eldest, was taken into the house of relatives, a Mrs. Mackenzie adopted the little girl, and the younger boy was adopted by John Allan, a tobacco-merchant. The girl became a listless creature, with vacuous eyes, a love of flowers and a dislike of ugly faces. The little boy became Edgar Allan Poe, the writer whose work this book is an attempt to discuss.

The Allans were rich, and the child, who was really an elaborate kind of pet for Mrs. Allan, was wild and lovely in appearance, precocious in speech and manner. He was indulged by the lady, and the business man sometimes, pleased with his antics, followed her example, and sometimes, displeased with his wilfulness, adopted a severity that was the more demoralising because capricious. There are tales of a little boy standing among the dessert, and, glass in hand, proposing toasts. There are tales, too, of ungovernable tempests of rage.

As a child, he knew the extremes of poverty and opulence. The garret lodgings and the comfortable household of the Allans struck contrasted chords that, in different keys, echoed throughout his life. He had the pride and the sensitiveness to insult of the poor boy who has become rich, and, when a starving man, his wretchedness was intensified by the fastidious delicacy of his tastes.

III

When he was six years old the Allans took him to England, and, while they travelled, left him in the Manor House School at Stoke Newington. His description of this period of his life (for it cannot be doubted that "William Wilson's" schooldays were his own) is comparable to Coleridge's memories of Christ's Hospital. The sediments of impression that their schooldays left the two men are characteristic of themselves. Coleridge remembers his old master as a teacher of what is true and false in literature. He gives no picture of the man, nor of the grey cloisters, nor of the sounding flagstones, while Poe, less concerned with what he learnt there, is unable to forget the pictorial, nervous impression left upon him by his school.

Here are the paragraphs from *William Wilson.*

Very little in them seems to have been peculiarly coloured for the purposes of the tale:

"My earliest recollections of a school-life, are connected with a large, rambling, Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient. In truth, it was a dream-like and spirit-soothing place, that venerable old town. At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply-shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight, at the deep hollow note of the church-bell, breaking, each hour, with sullen and sudden roar, upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep.

"It gives me, perhaps, as much of pleasure as I can now in any manner experience, to dwell upon minute recollections of the school and its concerns. Steeped in misery as I am—misery, alas! only too real—I shall be pardoned for seeking relief, however slight and temporary, in the weakness of a few rambling details. These, moreover, utterly trivial, and even ridiculous in themselves, assume, to my fancy, adventitious importance, as connected with a period and a locality when and where I recognise the first ambiguous monitions of the destiny which afterwards so fully overshadowed me. Let me then remember.

"The house, I have said, was old and irregular.

The grounds were extensive, and a high and solid brick wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prison-like rampart formed the limit of our domain; beyond it we saw but thrice a week—once every Saturday afternoon, when, attended by two ushers, we were permitted to take brief walks in a body through some of the neighbouring fields—and twice during Sunday, when we were paraded in the same formal manner to the morning and evening service in the one church of the village. Of this church the principal of our school was pastor. With how deep a spirit of wonder and perplexity was I wont to regard him from our remote pew in the gallery, as, with step solemn and slow, he ascended the pulpit! This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast,—could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy? Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!

"At an angle of the ponderous wall frowned a more ponderous gate. It was riveted and studded with iron bolts, and surmounted with jagged iron spikes. What impressions of deep awe did it inspire! It was never opened save for the three periodical egressions and ingressions already mentioned; then, in every creak of its mighty hinges, we found a plenitude of mystery—a world of matter for solemn remark, or for more solemn meditation.

"The extensive enclosure was irregular in form, having many capacious recesses. Of these, three or four of the largest constituted the play-ground. It was level, and covered with fine hard gravel. I well remember it had no trees, nor benches, nor anything similar within it. Of course it was in the rear of the house. In front lay a small parterre, planted with box and other shrubs; but through this sacred division we passed only upon rare occasions indeed—such as a first advent to school or final departure thence, or perhaps, when a parent or friend having called for us, we joyfully took our way home for the Christmas or Midsummer holidays.

"But the house!—how quaint an old building was this!—to me how veritably a palace of enchantment! There was really no end to its windings—to its incomprehensible subdivisions. It was difficult, at any given time, to say with certainty upon which of its two stories one happened to be. From each room to every other there were sure to be found three or four steps either in ascent or descent. Then the lateral branches were innumerable—inconceivable—and so returning in upon themselves, that our most exact ideas in regard to the whole mansion were not very far different from those with which we pondered upon infinity. During the five years of my residence here, I was never able to ascertain with precision, in what remote locality lay the little sleeping apartment assigned to myself and some eighteen or twenty other scholars.

"The school-room was the largest in the

house—I could not help thinking, in the world. It was very long, narrow, and dismally low, with pointed Gothic windows and a ceiling of oak. In a remote and terror-inspiring angle was a square enclosure of eight or ten feet, comprising the *sanctum*, 'during hours,' of our principal, the Reverend Dr. Bransby. It was a solid structure, with massy door, sooner than open which in the absence of the 'Dominie,' we would all have willingly perished by the *peine forte et dure*. In other angles were two other similar boxes, far less reverenced, indeed, but still greatly matters of awe. One of these was the pulpit of the 'classical' usher, one of the 'English and mathematical.' Interspersed about the room, crossing and recrossing in endless irregularity, were innumerable benches and desks, black, ancient, and time-worn, piled desperately with much-bethumbed books, and so beseamed with initial letters, names at full length, grotesque figures, and other multiplied efforts of the knife, as to have entirely lost what little of original form might have been their portion in days long departed. A huge bucket with water stood at one extremity of the room, and a clock of stupendous dimensions at the other.

"Encompassed by the massy walls of this venerable academy, I passed, yet not in tedium or disgust, the years of the third lustrum of my life. The teeming brain of childhood requires no external world of incident to occupy or amuse it; and the apparently dismal monotony of a school was replete with more intense excitement than my riper youth has derived from luxury, or

my full manhood from crime. Yet I must believe that my first mental development had in it much of the uncommon—even much of the *outré*. Upon mankind at large the events of very early existence rarely leave in mature age any definite impression. All is grey shadow—a weak and irregular remembrance—an indistinct regathering of feeble pleasures and phantasmagoric pains. With me this is not so. In childhood I must have felt with the energy of a man what I now find stamped upon memory in lines as vivid, as deep, and as durable as the *exergues* of the Carthaginian medals."

He was eleven years old when he left.

IV

On the return of the family to America, Poe was sent to a day-school at Richmond, where his adopted parents lived. He slept and passed his evenings at the tobacco-merchant's, and spent his days among the usual classical authors, and in adding to his knowledge of French, as well as in hardening his muscles with athletics. He was a good fencer and a powerful swimmer. One hot June day he swam over seven miles "against a tide running probably from two to three miles an hour."* Facts like these help to give bodily existence and credibility even to such a walker

* Griswold.

under the bat's wing and crescent moon as Poe, just as our understanding of Keats is fortified by the knowledge that upon occasion he was ready and able to chastise a butcher.

But, simultaneously with these quite fleshly schooldays, were passing days of another kind, and nearer to the shades that were to rule the man. He fell in love, and in such a manner as to suggest a darker lining to the silver cloud his schooldays seem. Only when a boy is very lonely do a few kind words from a woman make any deep impression on his mind. One such boy, outwardly happy enough, was surprised by his schoolmaster's wife laying her hand on his shoulder and calling him "old man." So novel and unexpected was the endearment, that, secretly, in a corner of the playground, he wept throughout a summer afternoon. I think a similar feeling must have been the origin of Poe's first love affair. One day, when Poe was at the house of a schoolfellow, he met the boy's mother.

"This lady, on entering the room, took his hand and spoke some gentle and gracious words of welcome, which so penetrated the sensitive heart of the orphan boy as to deprive him of the power of speech, and, for a time, almost of consciousness itself. He returned home in a dream, with but one thought, one hope in life—to hear again the sweet and gracious words that had

made the desolate world so beautiful to him, and filled his lonely heart with the oppression of a new joy. This lady afterwards became the confidant of all his boyish sorrows, and hers was the redeeming influence that saved and guided him in the earlier days of his turbulent and passionate youth. After the visitation of strange and peculiar sorrows she died, and for months after her decease it was his habit to visit nightly the cemetery where the object of his boyish idolatry lay entombed."

I tell this story in the words of a slim and ladylike little book, one of those that took part in the battle over Poe's character.* It was published eleven years after his death, and, though the writer cannot help trying to lift the facts into the atmosphere of romance, they have not been denied by his biographers. The same writer tells us that Poe spoke of this affection as "the one, idolatrous, and purely *ideal* love" of his boyhood. In the *Marginalia*, writing of Byron, he quotes from Madame Dudevant, "'Les anges ne sont plus pures que le cœur d'un jeune homme qui aime en vérité' ('The angels are not more pure than the heart of a young man who loves with fervour'). The hyperbole is scarcely less than true. It would be truth itself, were it averred of the love of him who is

* *Edgar Poe and his Critics.* By Sarah Helen Whitman.

at the same time young and a poet. The boyish poet-love is indisputably that one of the human sentiments which most nearly realises our dream of the chastened voluptuousness of heaven." Poe was a boy of fourteen and a poet. It is possible for such to love from the heart upwards, and, even while living an athletic youth, to look out from the frame of this love with the same aloof and almost pitying eyes as those of a child who is happy enough to exist in a painting by Sandro Botticelli.* This kindly woman, who died so soon after he met her, left her image to the boy as the rough sketch of that ideal Lenore who was to thread her ghostly way through his phantasmal poetry.

Without some such experience, much of his work would have been other than it was. I think, too, that it is perhaps important to notice that he suffered it at this time. He left school not long after her death, and the time between his schooldays and his entry of the Virginia University, a year free for idleness and self-examination, probably did much in inking-in the pencilled outlines of his character. He must

* When I noted this, I was thinking of a picture, not by Botticelli, but by one of Botticelli's school, that hangs, I think, close by the master's picture in the long Italian gallery of the Louvre. I have never met the eyes of the child who looks from that picture without feeling that here was one who leant from heaven and saw that men could never understand.

have been thinking of this time, spent in the rather magnificent house of the tobacco-merchant, when, wrapped in Byron's cloak, with Moore's translation in his pocket, he wrote in the 1831 edition of *Romance* these lines, that were to be erased later:

"For, being an idle boy lang syne,
Who read Anacreon and drank wine,
I early found Anacreon rhymes
Were almost passionate sometimes—
And by strange alchemy of brain
His pleasures always turn'd to pain—
His naïveté to wild desire—
His wit to love—his wine to fire—
And so, being young and dipt in folly
I fell in love with melancholy,
And used to throw my earthly rest
And quiet all away in jest—
I could not love except where Death
Was mingling his with Beauty's breath—
Or Hymen, Time, and Destiny
Were stalking between her and me."

Byron's cloak was already on his shoulders when, at the age of seventeen, he began his session at the University. He earnestly but discreetly lived up to it, with no very serious result, as he escaped censure by the authorities, and took honours in Latin and French. He had, however, gambled prodigiously, and expected Mr. Allan to satisfy a debt of honour that

amounted to two thousand five hundred dollars. Mr. Allan was a business man. The cloak of Byron meant nothing to him, nor did the gains in Latin and French compensate for these more obvious losses. He removed Poe from the University, and set him to add figures in his office.

V

Honours in Latin and French, a grand manner in gambling, a boy's tragical love affair, and the cloak of Byron, do not find in a tall stool in a tobacco-merchant's office the setting they require. Poe knew what the setting should have been, when he permitted, or even helped into existence the fictions of his expedition in aid of Grecian liberty, the journey that did not end in Missolonghi but in St. Petersburg.* That is what

* It is worth while to show that Poe was not alone in thus trying to lessen the discrepancy between his life and what he felt to be fitting to his character. I take an example from Hogg's *Life of Shelley*. Shelley wrote to Godwin:

"'At the period to which I allude, I was at Eton. No sooner had I formed the principles [Godwin's own] which I now profess, than I was anxious to disseminate their benefits. This was done without the slightest caution. I was twice expelled, but recalled by the interference of my father.'

"All this is purely imaginary: he never published anything controversial at Eton; he was never expelled; not twice, not once. His poetic temperament was overpowered by the grandeur and awfulness of the occasion, when he took up his

the setting should have been. But it was not. Professor Woodberry prints documents that leave little possible doubt as to what actually occurred. Poe left Mr. Allan, went to Boston, and persuaded another boy, who was setting up as a printer, to publish a book of verse. Then, since there seemed to be nothing else to do, and he had no money, he enlisted in the American army under the name of Edgar A. Perry.

pen to address the author of *Caleb Williams*, so that the auspicious Apollo, to relieve and support his favourite son, shed over his head a benign vision. He saw himself at his Dame's with *Political Justice*, which he had lately borrowed from Dr. Lind, open before him. He had read a few pages and had formed his principles in a moment; he was thrown into a rapture by the truisms, mares'-nests, and paradoxes, which he had met with.

"He sees himself in the printing-loft of 'J. Pote, bibliopola et typographus,' amongst Eton grammars and Eton school-books, republishing with the rapidity of a dream and 'without the slightest caution,' Godwin's heavy and unsaleable volumes. He sees himself before the Dons convened and expelled; and lastly, he beholds the Honourable Member for Shoreham weeping at his knees like Priam at the feet of Achilles, and imploring the less inexorable Dr. Keate.

"All this being poetically true, he firmly and loyally believes, and communicates, as being true in act, fact, and deed, to his venerable correspondent. One more instance, and that is still more extraordinary; he says:

"'My father wished to induce me, by poverty, to accept of some commission in a distant regiment, in the interim of my absence to prosecute the pamphlet, that a process of outlawry might make the estate on his death devolve to my younger brother.'

"No offer of a commission in the army was ever made to Bysshe; it is only in a dream, that the prosecution, outlawry, and devolution of the estate could find a place."

The poems received no more attention than is usually given to unadvertised verse, even of better quality. Lack of money is enough to account for many enlistments. But what is extraordinary is the fact that Byron's cloak, turned to a military great-coat, brought with it such an attention to duty and discipline as won Poe, in less than two years, the responsibilities of a Sergeant-Major. Perhaps Poe's aloofness from the interests of his comrades saved him from the carousals, however mild, that would have overturned his resolves and certainly cost him his promotion. Drinking alone is dull work, and there is no evidence that Poe enjoyed or practised it. There can be no doubt that he recognised his danger, in the mind of any one who reads the three letters of recommendation given him by his officers. The first, from his lieutenant, says, "His habits are good and intirely free from drinking"; the second, from his adjutant, says that he "has been exemplary in his deportment"; the third, from his commander, says, awkwardly, "he appears to be free from bad habits, in fact the testimony of Lt. Howard, and Adjt. Griswold is full to that point." It is not extravagant to suppose that he had asked for an explicit statement on a question that may have been raised by Mr. Allan at the close of his short University career.

He asked for these letters when he had made

peace with Mr. Allan, who secured for him a discharge by substitute, so that he might qualify for officer's rank by passing through the military school at West Point. Mr. Allan gave him a rather unpleasant letter, hostile and cold, to the Secretary for War, and Poe went with it to Washington.

Some time passed before he was admitted as a cadet, and he showed that his two years in the ranks had not altered his character. He had added other poems to those in his first volume, and presently published another book, a revised edition of the first, with the new work. This book was issued at Baltimore in 1829, and much of its matter stands in the final edition of his writings.

On July 1, 1830, he entered West Point. He was again in the society of students, but the difference between himself and them was wider even than that between the young poet-lover and his fellows at the Virginia University. There, at least, they were of his own age, although they had not mourned a Lenore among the tombstones. Here, with a man's experience behind him, he found himself among boys. He had known something of the sober battles of the world, whereas they were gaily learning to direct the gaudy conflicts of the tented field. They said "he had procured a cadet's appointment for his

son, and, the boy having died, the father had substituted himself in his place." * The loneliness that lasted through his life was already deepening about him, but did not prevent him from sharing in the brandy-drinking that was the habit of the cadets who shared his room. He met them on the lowest of common grounds. Elsewhere, he lived his own life, reading, and writing poetry that began to wear the iridescent colours of his genius, doing well in the French and mathematical classes, but occasionally contemptuously neglectful of the military routine. He found it easier to please the army mind as a penniless common soldier than as a cadet with a tobacco-merchant behind him. Six months were sufficient to show him that he was not destined to his grandfather's career, and, to make sure of escaping from West Point, he compelled his own dismissal by a consistent series of offences against the discipline of the place. He was dismissed by court-martial, and, on March 7, 1831, at the age of twenty-two, he found himself in the world again, with twelve cents of his own money, and possibly a few subscriptions for the new volume of poetry which he immediately published in New York. On leaving his guardian, on leaving the ranks, on leaving West Point, he had flung out his flag in publishing a book.

* Woodberry. Quoted from *Harper's Magazine*, 1867.

VI

The next six years hold the *motif* of the troubled composition of his life. In them were developed the qualities that should have brought him happiness, and those that turned his happiness to misery, those that should have made him worldlily successful, and those that invariably turned his success to failure. He was twenty-two when he left West Point, leaving with it a career and any hopes he may have had of pecuniary help from Mr. Allan. For a moment he seems to have found it hard to realise that money is a thing that must be earned. He published his book of poetry, and went to Baltimore because he had relations there. They did not put him in the way of getting any work. He tried for a post as a clerk, and for another as a schoolmaster. He must have had a full experience of the poverty of those who can only earn money by their pens, and have not yet proved their power of doing as much. In 1833 he was without a decent suit of clothes, and almost without food. His only property seems to have been his poems and his first stories, none of which he had been able to publish. A local paper offered a hundred dollars as the prize for a competition in story-writing, and fifty dollars for a similar competition in poetry.

Poe, empty-bellied and almost in rags, sent in *The Coliseum* and a careful manuscript copy of his tales in a small book. He won both prizes, was given the larger, and complimented by the critics who had decided the awards. The prize brought him more than the hundred dollars in the friendship of Mr. Kennedy, who saw to it that his tales were published in the paper that had held the competition, gave him a horse to ride for exercise, fed him and clothed him, and, in fact, lifted him from the risk of imminent disaster to a position where he could work with some tranquillity. Poe also became intimate with the editor of the paper, an editor who, unfortunately, was soon to taste poverty himself.

About this time he became the third in a small family, thenceforward made up of his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, her daughter Virginia, then eleven, and himself. Mrs. Clemm, harder in appearance than in heart, treated him as her own son, better, indeed, than mothers treat their sons, starving herself for his sake, and, to the end of her life, working unstintedly for his work and for himself. Poe repaid her by an absolute identification of her interests with his own, and by an affection that, next to his feeling for Virginia, was the least angular thing in his life.

Mr. Allan died next year, and Poe's name was not in his will. His feelings towards his adopted

son had already been made sufficiently clear. The news in no way interrupted Poe's life. He was working steadily at poetry and prose, and making money to boil the common pot by scantily paid journalism. Already his brain was full of schemes for a paper of his own, a dream like Balzac's printing house, that was to make him rich and help him in getting the ear of America for his work. It is difficult for us, with our knowledge of what he was to become, to construct a true picture of Poe as he seemed then. But a letter from his friend Mr. Kennedy to the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, to which Poe had just sent his first contribution, shows us a young man in whom it was easy to be interested, the sort of young man whom his elders regard with some fondness, even while trying to make him like themselves. The letter is printed in Griswold's essay.

"BALTIMORE, *April* 13, 1835.

"DEAR SIR,

"Poe did right in referring to me. He is very clever with his pen—classical and scholar-like. He wants experience and direction, but I have no doubt he can be made very useful to you. And, poor fellow! he is *very* poor. I told him to write something for every number of your magazine, and that you might find it to your advantage to give him some permanent employ.

He has a volume of very bizarre tales in the hands of ——, in Philadelphia, who for a year past has been promising to publish them. This young fellow is highly imaginative, and a little given to the *terrific*. He is at work upon a tragedy, but I have turned him to drudging upon whatever may make money, and I have no doubt you and he will find your account in each other."

Poe, though "classical and scholar-like," and "a little given to the terrific," very soon made it clear that if he had had a magazine of his own he would have known what to do with it. He first contributed to the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835. At midsummer he left Baltimore for Richmond, to become more closely connected with it. In January of the next year he was practically managing it, and filling its columns with his work. By January 1837 he had turned a little paper, that was rather tottery upon its legs, into a firmly established and important magazine. His critical articles, of a kind new in America, iconoclastic, vigorous, and speedily feared, had brought it to the level of the older papers of New York. He then left it to its success, and turned to face poverty himself.

The history of his connection with the *Messenger* runs parallel to events in his private life, equally important to us in their elucidation of

his character. The child Virginia had become necessary to him, and his cousin's proposal to take care of her until she should be old enough to decide if she and Poe were suited to each other, first threw him into extreme anguish, and then, rousing him to action, hurried on a wedding. He took out a licence in September 1835. It is suggested that there was a private marriage. Whether that is so or not, Virginia did not leave Mrs. Clemm, and mother and daughter followed Poe to Richmond. Here he tried to establish Mrs. Clemm as the landlady of a boarding house, in which he and her daughter were to live with other paying guests. In May 1836 Poe and Virginia were publicly married. She was not fourteen.

It is probable that early in these six years the little cloud, at first no bigger than a man's hand, that was at last to cover the sky and close like a pall over his grave, had shown on Poe's horizon. His biographers, hostile or apologetic, assuming, like Moslems, that drink is the unforgivable sin, spend themselves in vain battle, on the one hand, to show that he was a drunkard, on the other, to prove that he touched little but water. There is, certainly, no evidence to show that, before leaving West Point, Poe had been in the habit of drinking more than other young men. But, when we remember the circumstances of his

childhood, the Hogarth picture of the old woman feeding the child with gin, and his father's undoubted failing, we find it easy to explain much of his story by supposing that, in those early months of starvation, Poe, like most men insufficiently fed, took more readily to drink than to food, and found it less difficult to obtain. Drink is always offered before food to a starving man by his friends. Poe may have learnt in a tavern in Baltimore, like many a young journalist in a bar in Fleet Street, that a glass of whisky is almost the only thing that is given and taken without a hint of the patronage distasteful alike to giver and receiver. He certainly learnt to fear it. Griswold prints a letter from White, the owner of the *Messenger*, in which occur these sentences:

"That you are sincere in all your promises I firmly believe. But when you once again tread these streets, I have my fears that your resolution will fail and that you will again drink until your senses are lost. . . . If you would make yourself contented with quarters in my house, or with any other private family where liquor is not used, I should think there was some hope for you. But if you go to a tavern or to any other place where it is used at table, you are not safe."

Is it too much to suppose that something more than his knowledge of Virginia's age made

Neilson Poe anxious to remove her from his cousin's side? Is it too much to find in the separation from the *Messenger* a proof that renewed lapses contributed to Poe's irregularity at the office. Nothing else explains at once the dismissal of so successful an editor and the friendly attitude of White, who was still ready to publish his work.

In the six years since he left West Point Poe had fought his way up from poverty, and shown that, with Balzac's business powers and acumen, he had also, for different reasons, Balzac's ill luck in letting other people profit by them. He had found himself, and, with himself, the secret of his eventual disaster.

VII

Poe's life henceforth is a story of shiftings from the pillar to the post of journalism. In 1838 he published *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, that had begun as a serial contribution to the *Messenger*. In 1839 he put his name to a piece of hackwork, not much more predatory than the exercises of other free lances, that was published under the name of *The Conchologist's First Book; or, A System of Testaceous Malacology*. He contributed to many American papers, and became particularly connected with

Burton's Gentleman's Magazine and American Monthly Review, where he reprinted much that had already appeared, and published *The Journal of Julius Rodman* and a quantity of criticism. But, in June 1840, he had a vehement quarrel with Burton. Burton was an actor and the proprietor of the paper. Poe considered him a scoundrel on account of a premium scheme, and also, perhaps chiefly, because he wished to mollify the tone of Poe's attacks on some of the authors he criticised. Poe seems to have written a bitter letter, meeting Burton on his own ground, and suggesting that slashing reviews brought subscribers to the paper. The editor replied in a letter quoted by Griswold:

"I am sorry you have thought it necessary to send me such a letter. Your troubles have given a morbid tone to your feelings which it is your duty to discourage. I myself have been as severely handled by the world as you could possibly have been, but my sufferings have not tinged my mind with melancholy, nor jaundiced my views of society. You must rouse your energies, and if care assail you, conquer it. I will gladly overlook the past. I hope you will as easily fulfil your pledges for the future. We shall agree very well, though I cannot permit the magazine to be made a vehicle for that sort of severity which you think is 'so successful with the mob.' I am truly much less anxious

about making a monthly 'sensation' than I am upon the point of fairness. You must, my dear sir, get rid of your avowed ill feelings towards your brother authors. You see I speak plainly: I cannot do otherwise upon such a subject. You say the people love havoc. I think they love justice. I think you yourself would not have written the article on Dawes in a more healthy state of mind. I am not trammelled by any vulgar considerations of expediency; I would rather lose money than, by such undue severity, wound the feelings of a kind-hearted and honourable man; and I am satisfied that Dawes has something of the true fire in him. I regretted your word-catching spirit. But I wander from my design. I accept your proposition to recommence your interrupted avocations upon the *Maga*. Let us meet as if we had not exchanged letters. Use more exercise, write when feelings prompt, and be assured of my friendship. You will soon regain a healthy activity of mind and laugh at your past vagaries."

I am almost inclined to suspect that Mr. Burton wrote his letter with a view to publication, or, at least, to showing it round among his friends. Its sentiments are so uniformly respectable. Few things are more galling to proud and sensitive minds than to receive advice of this confident nature from their intellectual inferiors. "I am satisfied that Dawes has some-

thing of the true fire in him." Pronouncements like that stir the mildest heart when they come from the mouths of publishers and men of business with more pretension than right to literary judgment. Poe must indeed have been in straits to consent to work with such a man.

Burton also accused Poe of drunkenness, a charge that was indignantly denied. Presently Burton was trying to sell his magazine, and Poe was trying to start another that should be his own, and leave him free from interference. He failed in securing a capitalist, and became editor of *Graham's Magazine*, to which he contributed his articles on cryptography and handwriting, and, amongst other stories, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Meanwhile, he was living a peaceful idyll with Virginia and the gigantic, matronly Mrs. Clemm, who was body-servant and mother to them both. But Virginia broke a blood-vessel in singing, and spent the rest of her life in dying. This anxiety possibly increased Poe's irregularities, which had, however, other causes. He had lived beyond his means.

"There are few men of that peculiar sensibility which is at the root of genius, who, in early youth, have not expended much of their mental energy in *living too fast;* and, in later years, comes the unconquerable desire to goad the

imagination up to that point which it would have attained in an ordinary, normal, or well-regulated life. The earnest longing for artificial excitement, which, unhappily, has characterised too many eminent men, may thus be regarded as a psychal want, or necessity—an effort to regain the lost—a struggle of the soul to assume the position which, under other circumstances, would have been its due."

It is suggested that he took opium. In 1842, he left *Graham's Magazine* less peaceably than he had parted from the *Messenger*. He again projected a paper of his own, but, going to Washington to seek subscribers for it, he became intoxicated to such an extent that his friends sent for each other, and debated who was to take him home, lest harm should come to him on the way.

On June 11, 1843, he wrote to Griswold a letter that shows into what state of poverty the family had fallen:

"DEAR GRISWOLD,—Can you send me five dollars? I am sick and Virginia almost gone. Come and see me. Peterson says you suspect me of a curious anonymous letter. I did not write it, but bring it with you when you make the visit you promised to Mrs. Clemm. I will try to fix that matter soon. Could you do anything with my *note?* Yours truly,

"E. A. P."

Virginia did not die until 1847. But year by year she lingered as if in the moment of departure. Few things are more trying to the nerves than a protracted farewell; and, when the parting is for ever——! It is not surprising that Poe's tendency found slight resistance to its growth during these years.

Griswold describes his home in Philadelphia:

"When once he sent for me to visit him, during a period of illness caused by protracted and anxious watching at the side of his sick wife, I was impressed by the singular neatness and the air of refinement in his home. It was in a small house, in one of the pleasant and silent neighbourhoods far from the centre of the town, and though slightly and cheaply furnished, everything in it was so tasteful and fitly disposed that it seemed altogether suitable for a man of genius. For this and for most of the comforts he enjoyed, in his brightest as in his darkest years, he was chiefly indebted to his mother-in-law, who loved him with more than maternal devotion and constancy."

During the summer of 1843, he began lecturing with a fierce attack on Griswold's *Poets and Poetry of America*. He is not likely to have lectured without thinking of the art of oratory, and discovering laws to which he did his best to adhere. But we can guess at the character of his delivery from the various notes that have

been left describing his manner of conversation. Mrs. Osgood, for example, speaks of his "pure and almost celestial eloquence." Griswold described it as supra-mortal. "His voice was modulated with astonishing skill, and his large and variably expressive eyes looked repose or shot fiery tumult into those who listened, while his own face glowed, or was changeless in pallor, as his imagination quickened his blood or drew it back frozen to his heart." Mrs. Whitman noticed that "the strange fascination—the unmatched charm of his conversation—consisted in its genuineness." We are to imagine a less rotund Coleridge, who meant what he said, and seemed, as he said it, to mean it perhaps more vehemently than he did. We are to imagine this man leaving his extreme poverty and his slowly dying wife, and lecturing on poetry to well-fed and comfortable audiences.

VIII

Poe returned to *Graham's Magazine* as a contributor, and seems to have recovered a semi-official position on the paper. But he was soon again projecting a paper of his own, that was to be a kind of co-operative *Edinburgh Review*, with an editor to be chosen by election.

Throughout his life as a journalist runs this continuous thread of hope that he would one day control a paper, and build up such a powerful weapon of criticism as Christopher North had fashioned in *Blackwood's*.

In 1844, when *Graham's* deserted him, he went, almost penniless, to New York. He took Virginia with him, and Mrs. Clemm followed. For some time they lived on his earnings as a free lance, and starved, because the rates of pay were small, and he could not publish enough work to overcome this handicap in his struggle for bread and butter. Then, for a time, he was a minor assistant on another man's paper, where he bore his humiliating position with a good grace, and won the rather patronising praise of his editor. In January, 1845, he published *The Raven* in this paper, *The Evening Mirror*, and it was reprinted in *The American Whig Review*. This raised his value as a contributor, in giving him a wider celebrity than he had won from his tales and criticisms. He left *The Evening Mirror*, and opened another of his adventures as an editor. He joined *The Broadway Journal* which had just come into existence, and, as with the *Messenger*, speedily became its chief contributor, and finally its motive power. The tenth number of the *Journal* announces as editors C. F. Briggs, Edgar A. Poe, and H. C. Watson.

The first number of the second volume is "edited by Edgar A. Poe and Henry C. Watson." The sixteenth number of the second volume announces "Edgar A. Poe, Editor and Proprietor," and the twenty-sixth number, January 3, 1846, contains this note:

"VALEDICTORY.

"UNEXPECTED engagements demanding my whole attention, and the objects being fulfilled, so far as regards myself personally, for which *The Broadway Journal* was established, I now, as its editor, bid farewell—as cordially to foes as to friends.

"Mr. Thomas H. Lowe is authorized to collect all money due the Journal.

"EDGAR A. POE."

The Broadway Journal had come to an end. Poe had acquired it in exchange for a promissory note which Horace Greeley endorsed and had to meet. Poe borrowed from Griswold to pay his printers. He succeeded in raising the circulation, but a few borrowed dollars will not run a paper, and the paper died as proudly as it might.

In New York he came to know some literary ladies, who were to take a strange part in the latter years of his life. One of them, Mrs. Osgood, whose poetry he admired, wrote, when he was dead, a description of him which, though

it betrays her own character more clearly than his, is yet worth reading as a sidelight upon the colour of his existence :

" It was in his own simple yet poetical home that to me the character of Edgar Poe appeared in its most beautiful light. Playful, affectionate, witty, alternately docile and wayward as a petted child, for his young, gentle, and idolised wife, and for all who came, he had, even in the midst of his most harassing literary duties, a kind word, a pleasant smile, a graceful and courteous attention. At his desk beneath the romantic picture of his loved and lost Lenore, he would sit, hour after hour, patient, assiduous, and uncomplaining, tracing, in an exquisitely clear chirography, and with almost superhuman swiftness, the lightning thoughts—the 'rare and radiant fancies' —as they flashed through his wonderful and ever-wakeful brain. I recollect one morning, toward the close of his residence in this city, when he seemed unusually gay and light-hearted. Virginia, his sweet wife, had written me a pressing invitation to come to them; and I, who never could resist her affectionate summons, and who enjoyed his society far more in his own home than elsewhere, hastened to Amity Street. I found him just completing his series of papers entitled *The Literati of New York*. 'See,' said he, displaying in laughing triumph several little rolls of narrow paper (he always wrote thus for the press), 'I am going to show you by the difference of length in these the different degrees

of estimation in which I hold all you literary people. In each of these one of you is rolled up and fully discussed. Come, Virginia, help me!' And one by one they unfolded them. At last they came to one which seemed interminable. Virginia laughingly ran to one corner of the room with one end, and her husband to the opposite with the other. 'And whose lengthened sweetness long drawn out is that?' said I. 'Hear her!' he cried. 'Just as if her little vain heart didn't tell her it's herself!'"

Poe found in the friendship of women a stimulant that took in the end as powerful a hold on him as drink. His wife did not satisfy his needs of intellectual courtship, and she even asked Mrs. Osgood to allow and to suffer her husband's letters. Mrs. Osgood may not have loved Poe, but she describes "his proud and beautiful head erect, his dark eyes flashing with the electric light of feeling and of thought," and says that "to a sensitive and delicately nurtured woman, there was a peculiar and irresistible charm in the chivalric, graceful, and almost tender reverence with which he invariably approached all women who won his respect." She retained her feeling for him till she died, though, at the end of the first year of their acquaintanceship, busybodies had made their meetings impossible.

During that year he moved out of New York

to the little cottage at Fordham which has usurped the pretensions of all his other resting-places, and come to represent Poe's home life. He only lived there during the last two and a half years of his forty. Mrs. Whitman, who in the last act of his life became an important person of the drama, described it as "a little Dutch cottage . . . bordered by a flower garden, whose clumps of rare dahlias and brilliant beds of fall flowers showed, in the careful culture bestowed upon them, the fine floral taste of the inmates." The cottage was half buried in fruit trees. Mrs. Clemm, as always, did the work, and the three of them must there have had some happiness from their lives. They had pets, a bobolink and a parrot, and a cat that used to sit on Poe's shoulder as he wrote.

But they became so poor that a public appeal was made for them, which Poe was too proud to allow without protest. Friends cared for them, fed them, and nursed the now rapidly sinking Virginia. She died on January 30, 1847, at the age of twenty-four. Poe was worn out by privation and anxiety, and fell seriously ill.

IX

He slowly recovered, and spent the remainder of the year in thinking out and writing *Eureka.* He published *Ulalume* in December. His *Murders in the Rue Morgue* had been stolen by more than one French paper, and the first French criticism upon him had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* Baudelaire was about to devote the better part of his life to the exposition of his doctrines and the translation of his work. But Poe could not know this, and the loneliness that followed him to his death began to be oppressive. He was, however, again full of the hope of founding a magazine. On January 22, 1840, he wrote to Willis:

"My dear Mr. Willis,—I am about to make an effort at re-establishing myself in the literary world, and *feel* that I may depend upon your aid.

"My general aim is to start a Magazine, to be called *The Stylus,* but it would be useless to me, even when established, if not entirely out of the control of a publisher. I mean, therefore, to get up a Journal which shall be *my own,* at all points. With this end in view, I must get a list of, at least, five hundred subscribers to begin with:—nearly two hundred I have already. I propose, however, to go South and West, among my personal and literary friends—old college and

West Point acquaintances—and see what I can do. In order to get the means of taking the first step, I propose to lecture at the Society Library, on Thursday the 3d of February—and that there may be no cause of *squabbling*, my subject shall *not be literary* at all. I have chosen a broad text —'The Universe.'

"Having thus given you *the facts* of the case, I leave all the rest to the suggestion of your own tact and generosity. Gratefully—*most* gratefully—

"Your friend always,

"EDGAR A. POE."

The lecture was an abridged version of *Eureka*. It did not bring him the money for which he had hoped. He repeated elsewhere his lecture on *The Poetic Principle*. But *The Stylus* was never to appear.

I have already spoken of his friendships for women, encouraged, in the case of Mrs. Osgood, by his wife. After her death, his need of feminine companionship became a disease. He could not do without it. This was no physical need, nor even "falling in love." It had two motives. He could not be satisfied with the motherly and man-servant-like attention of Mrs. Clemm, but felt an imperious need of marriage, of being married, of being re-established in life on a firm basis, as he hoped with his paper to re-establish himself in literary America. A wife became a thing as full of beckoning promise to him as

The Stylus. He sought both with equal abandon. Beside this new motive was another. He had loved Virginia, but, even while she was alive, had sought to live other poems with other women. They were harmless little German poems, of holding hands, and walks in the dusk, and meetings of mystery-laden eyes. They were part of his life, and we are now given the disheartening spectacle of Poe making love to two or three middle-aged women at once, and oscillating in his mind between several prospects of married life under the care of different guardian angels of literary tastes. No more brain-wrecking condition can be imagined, and its harassments were not lessened by his other and more physical disease.

Within a year of his death he had written to Mrs. Whitman:

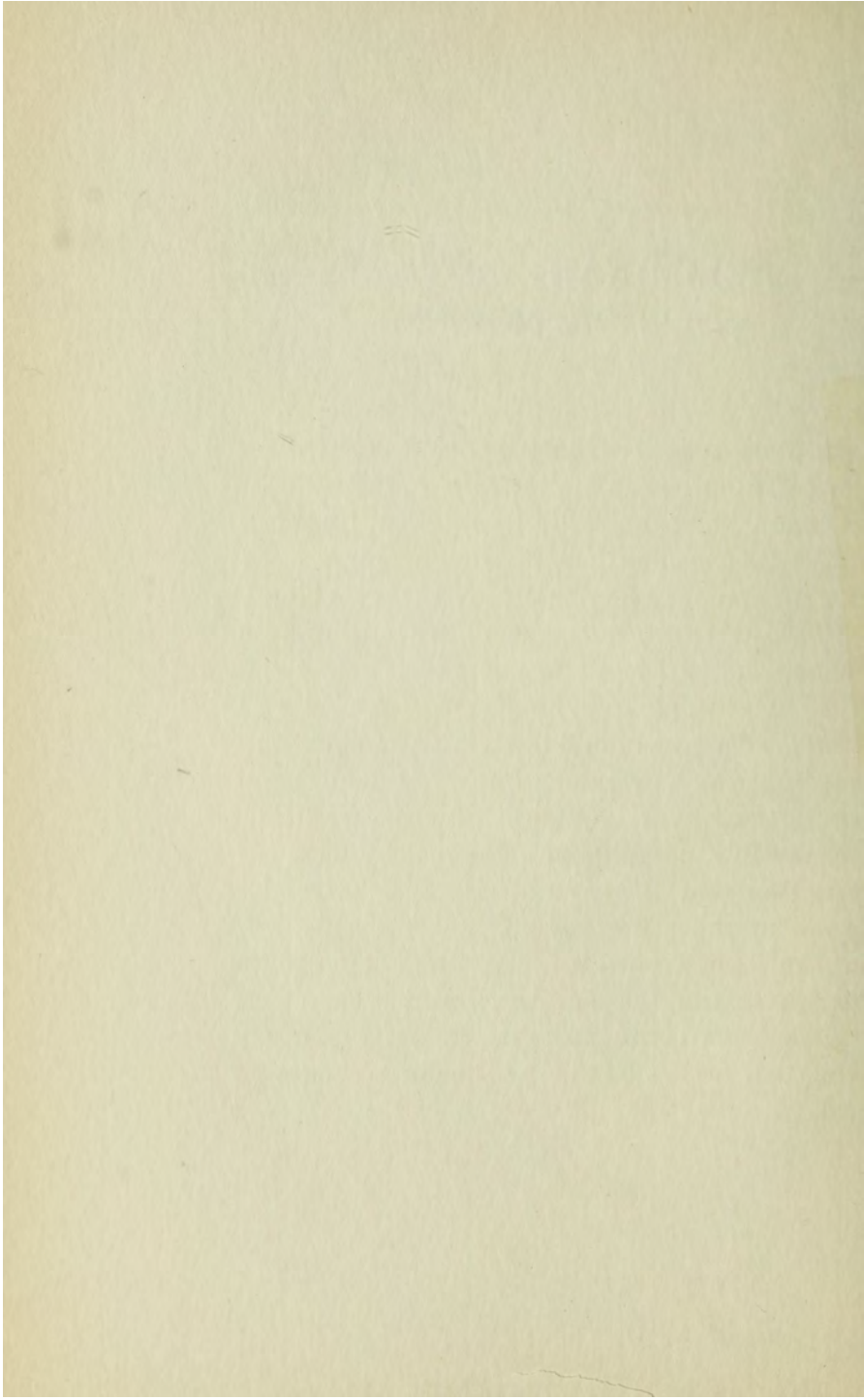
"The agonies which I have lately endured have passed my soul through fire. Henceforth I am strong. This those who love me shall know as well as those who have so relentlessly sought to ruin me. . . . I have absolutely *no* pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have perilled life and reputation and reason. It has been in the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories—memories of wrong and injustice and imputed dishonour—from a sense of insupportable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom."

But the two diseases reacted on each other, and soon frenzied wooings alternated with bouts of drinking. He was also taking laudanum. Now one marriage was arranged and now another. It is surprising that he still wrote. During 1849, he lectured again on *The Poetic Principle*, and made renewed efforts to secure money for *The Stylus*. He more than once had serious warnings of the rapid approach of his end. He had, however, at Richmond a St. Martin's summer of happiness with some friends. He prepared to settle at Richmond, but, on a journey to New York, stopped at Baltimore and drank enough to make further travelling impossible. The elections were being fought, and canvassers finding him already drunk, kept him so, and dragged him about from place to place to record his vote for their candidate. On October 3, he was recognised and taken to the hospital in delirium tremens. The manner of his death suggests that of Bampfylde, described in one of Southey's letters. After a bountiful youth of open air and poetry, he had come to town, and found his way into a madhouse, only recovering his reason and freedom to die of a consumption. The doctor urged him to go to Devonshire, saying his friends would be glad to see him. "He hid his face and answered, 'No, sir; they who saw me what I was, shall never see me what I am.'" Just so died Poe, on

October 7, 1849. The resident physician at the hospital told him he hoped "that in a few days he would be able to enjoy the society of his friends. . . . At this he broke out with much energy, and said the best thing his best friend could do would be to blow out his brains with a pistol."* He became delirious again, and then, at three o'clock of a Sunday morning grew quiet, and died, saying "Lord help my poor soul."

* Letter from Dr. Moran to Mrs. Clemm. Woodberry.

A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON POE'S CRITICISM



A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON POE'S CRITICISM

THERE is a stridency in Poe's critical writings that we do not find elsewhere. Even the rude essays of the old Blackwood and Quarterly reviewers sound a fuller note, a rounder tone. And, among men on Poe's level, Hazlitt argues, Leigh Hunt recites, and Lamb insinuates, all with a tenderer regard for listeners' ears. These are English critics, but Lowell, with whom, as an American, it is fairer to compare Poe, "roars you as gently as any sucking dove." I call Lowell an American, but the distinction between them, to which is due Poe's stridency and Lowell's mildness is this: Lowell, from his study window, compliments his readers with the assumption that they are of the Old World or as good in the same way; Poe lectures frankly from an American tub to an audience of Americans, and, his subject being what it is, far from their common interests, it is not surprising that he has to shout to make his speeches heard.

English criticism had influenced Poe's youth. Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, that heterogeneous, mazelike work, in whose blind alleys and unfinished roads there is more than in any other English book of searching knowledge of the processes and ends of composition, shaped Poe's conception of the object of writing, and started him on his quest of an æsthetic theory. In the *Letter to B——*, with which he prefaced an early edition of his poems, he adopts, knowingly or unknowingly it is irrelevant to discuss, Coleridge's words.

Coleridge writes: "A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth. . . ."

Poe: "A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth. . . ."

The phrase "in my opinion" being true, justifies him, I suppose, in using the words of the man by whom the opinion had been formed. Coleridge walks like a ghost through much of Poe's criticism, although their understandings of a critic's duties were directly opposite. England and America needed differently built reviewers.

"He who tells me," writes Coleridge, "that there are defects in a new work, tells me nothing

which I should not have taken for granted without his information. But he who points out and elucidates the beauties of an original work does indeed give me interesting information, such as experience would not have authorised me in anticipating."

Coleridge's reviewer was such a man as Leigh Hunt, whose scattered italics bring his voice to us across the garden where he reads, or, through a subtler development of the same spirit, such a man as Pater, in whose company our eyes are awakened to the tinted mist that rises from the flowers—the mist that perhaps we had not before been able to perceive. Such a critic was, sometimes, that old Greek pedagogue of whom Pope wrote :

"See Dionysius Homer's thoughts refine
And call new Beauties forth from ev'ry Line."

His choice of beauties is indeed valuable, balanced as it is by a wise selection of defects from other writers. Pater's disentanglements and drawings-out of loveliness are like Carrière's pictures in their leisurely revelation. Leigh Hunt's turned-down leaves and marked passages give his criticism the charm of reading aloud.

Poe's criticism is without charm, and he resembles Dionysius writing of Hegesias more often than Dionysius quoting Homer or playing

showman to Sappho. He had sterner work to do than Hunt's or Pater's. We have to remember the America in which he wrote. Its criticism, when he began to write, was a tumult of timid flattery and unreasoning praise. America had so lately ceased to be a colony that the Old World was still indiscriminately reverenced at the expense of the New. Its homegrown civilisation was so fresh that accomplishment, however poor, was more often admired than judged. American letters were on the one hand neglected for European, and on the other uncritically praised because they were American. Poe was clear in his denunciation of both these evils.

"You are aware of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. He is read, if at all, in preference to the combined and established wit of the world. I say established; for it is with literature as with law or empire—an established name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession. Besides, one might suppose that books, like their authors, improve by travel—their having crossed the sea is, with us, so great a distinction. Our antiquaries abandon time for distance; our very fops glance from the binding to the bottom of the title-page, where the mystic characters which spell London, Paris, or Genoa, are precisely so many letters of recommendation."

This complaint holds the grievance of all

young writers, who see the bony fingers of Shakespeare and Spenser reaching from the grave to pluck the cloaks of those who, undetained, might read the books just published by themselves. That is hard, but Americans of Poe's time suffered a competition more unfair. A writer who felt himself peer to some at least of the dead, saw his readers held from him not only by the classics but by a thousand mediocrities whose foreign birth alone gave them the word before him.

Poe complained of this handicap but did not spare the faults he saw at home. He would have no petting of his countrymen.

"It is folly to assert, as some at present are fond of asserting, that the literature of any nation or age was ever injured by plain speaking on the part of the critics. As for American letters, plain speaking about *them* is, simply, the one thing needed. They are in a condition of absolute quagmire—a quagmire, to use the words of Victor Hugo, '*d'où on ne peut se tirer par des périphrases—par des quemadmodums et des verumenimveros.*'"

American criticism had not the dignity that could raise the standard of American judgment, being fully occupied in unlimited praise of the foreigner and hurried praise of its friends, com-

paring them one by one to the models it unquestioningly imported.

"When we attend less to 'authority,'" wrote Poe, "and more to principles, when we look *less* at merit and *more* at demerit (instead of the converse, as some persons suggest), we shall then be better critics than we are. We must neglect our models and study our capabilities. The mad eulogies, on what occasionally has, in letters, been well done, spring from our imperfect comprehension of what it is possible for us to do better. 'A man who has never seen the sun,' says Calderon, 'cannot be blamed for thinking that no glory can exceed that of the moon; a man who has seen neither moon nor sun cannot be blamed for expatiating on the incomparable effulgence of the morning star.' Now it is the business of the critic so to soar that he shall *see the sun*, even although its orb be far below the ordinary horizon."

In America were many morning stars who had not their friends to thank if they did not mistake themselves for suns. According to the newspapers, whose short-sighted eyes are always easily dazzled, the sky was ablaze with light. It was impossible to look "full in the face of the blue firmament," so thickly clustered and so radiant were the false centres of the solar system. A Poe was indeed needed who could sight the true orb, and, having seen it, put out

the lesser lights. He stated accordingly a principle of criticism the exact opposite of Coleridge's, and, in putting it upon a philosophical basis, the practical reason for it not sufficing him, came upon an important link in the chain of his æsthetic theory.

"Boccalini, in his *Advertisements from Parnassus*, tells us that a critic once presented Apollo with a severe censure upon an excellent poem. The god asked him for the beauties of the work. He replied that he only troubled himself about the errors. Apollo presented him with a sack of unwinnowed wheat, and bade him pick out all the chaff for his pains. Now we have not fully made up our minds that the god was in the right. We are not sure that the limit of critical duty is not very generally misapprehended. Excellence may be considered an axiom, or a proposition which becomes self-evident just in proportion to the clearness or precision with which it is put. If it fairly exists, in this sense, it requires no further elucidation. It is not excellence if it need to be demonstrated as such. To point out too particularly the beauties of a work is to admit, tacitly, that these beauties are not wholly admirable. Regarding then excellence as that which is capable of self-manifestation, it but remains for the critic to show when, where, and how it fails in becoming manifest; and, in this showing, it will be the fault of the book itself if what of beauty it contains be not, at least, placed in the fairest

light. In a word, we may assume, notwithstanding a vast deal of pitiable cant upon this topic, that in pointing out frankly the errors of a work, we do nearly all that is critically necessary in displaying its merits. In teaching what perfection *is*, how, in fact, shall we more rationally proceed than in specifying what it *is not?*"

He approaches here the theory of Benedetto Croce, a comparison of whose ideas with Poe's always illumines the unseen object of his thought. Reading beauty for excellence, which, after examining our definition of beauty, Poe would have allowed, we can more clearly understand his view.* Beauty, or expression, is self-evident in so far as it is truly beauty, truly expression. To demonstrate it as such is only to repeat it in identical terms, or to say that a thing that is the same thing is equal to the same thing; and this is waste of time. It is more profitable to note those moments of self-contradiction, those small mutinies that, quarrelling with individual beauties, destroy the whole expression. A cultivated sensitiveness to discord is the same thing as an appreciation of harmony.

These were the reasons, this the principle that determined the character of Poe's criticism, and made his articles, even on the poets he admired —like Mrs. Browning—read like attacks. They

* In another passage he makes the substitution himself.

are indeed unfair unless we have given the excellences of the books reviewed an opportunity for self-manifestation. Many critics, rightly caring that their work should be itself creative and valuable on its own account, are indifferent as to whether we have read or seen the books or pictures that have engendered it. Pater's *Mona Lisa* can be enjoyed by those who have not been to the Louvre to see Leonardo's. A knowledge of Villon's poetry is not necessary to a just delight in Stevenson's essay on his favourite vagabond. But Poe, perhaps unwisely, paid his readers the compliment of supposing that they read the books first and his criticisms afterwards.

Three volumes of his collected works are filled with judgments upon English and American literature, and with essays upon his art, unconnected with particular books. There is much here that is worthless, but it is easy to winnow the grain of his intended criticism from the chaff of unformed opinion, praise written only for the day and blame that had not had time to grow philosophical. There is no need to judge a man's aim by those occasions on which Forced Haste, an unfriendly hand, pulls his arm aside at the moment of loosing the arrow, or sends the shaft upon its way before his eye is steady on the target. In thinking of Poe's critical work,

we think of his *Hawthorne*, and his *Philosophy of Composition*, and the other essays whose temper of mind lets them share with these a swift and dry-shod life.

These essays turn readily from a discussion of this or that volume to speculation on the principles of literature. The needs of American letters are often forgotten for a higher purpose, and few books of criticism are more valuable to writers who care worthily for the art they practise. Narrative, plot, inversion, the length of poems, all the secrets of literature's harmony and counterpoint, are one after another his subject. With such a view of criticism as was his it is not surprising that he does not often describe his own adventures among masterpieces, though here and there are vivid fragments of characterisation. Of Coleridge, for example:

"In reading his poetry, I tremble like one who stands upon a volcano, conscious from the very darkness bursting from the crater, of the fire and light that are weltering below."

Of Macaulay:

". . . we assent to what he says too often because we so very clearly understand what it is that he intends to say. Comprehending vividly the points and the sequence of his argument, we fancy that we are concurring in the argument itself."

Of Defoe:

"Not one person in ten—nay not one person in five hundred—has, during the perusal of *Robinson Crusoe*, the most remote conception that any particle of genius, or even of common talent, has been employed in its creation. Men do not look upon it in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts—Robinson all. The powers which have wrought the wonder have been thrust into obscurity by the very stupendousness of the wonder they have wrought. We read and become perfect abstractions in the intensity of our interest; we close the book, and are quite satisfied that we could have written as well ourselves."

These fragments, which are just and careful, are certainly balanced by opinions on other writers with which time has not brought the world to agree, or kept it in agreement. Poe praised Moore extravagantly, and also Hood; but, perhaps because of his dislike of seers and teachers, could not bring himself to write with courtesy of Emerson or Carlyle.

It is not by such passages or opinions that his criticism can be judged. Many theorists astonish us by the wrongness or rightness of their examples without in either case affecting the truth of the argument. And Poe's interest was less in individuals than in the principles and nature of their art. The *De Sublimitate* of Longinus might

be paralleled with a *Concerning Beauty* made up entirely of quotations from Poe's critical work. Indeed this book is, in a humble manner, such a collection. It is impossible to discuss Poe's practice without reference to what he has himself written on his theory. I have placed this chapter first because it overflows into all the others. I think it better to consider his views on the length of a poem while writing of his poetry, and his ideas on story-telling while writing of his tales, to take only two examples, than to crowd these and many other fertile opinions into an essay either too long for the book or too short for their illustration. His views on self-conscious art were in any case too important not to need a chapter to themselves.

It is sufficient here to point out that in these three volumes, strident in pitch, often exaggerated in tone, sometimes difficult to read with patience, lie the greater number of his efforts towards an æsthetic philosophy. As he worked, so he thought, and observed his work and that of other men. His skill and observation grew with each other's growth. Building on the foundation that held excellence to be itself manifest, Poe raised for himself a structure of knowledge about the means of avoiding ugliness or failure in expression. There is no rule for the creation of beauty, but there are many

for freeing loveliness from its fetters. Perseus cannot make an Andromeda, but he can loose her from the rock. The varying, hazardous nature of Poe's conception of beauty will become clear to us as we proceed. She appeared to him in changing veils, now pure and transparent, now dimmed and opaque with lesser heresies, but never beneath a veil so darkening as that through which she shows to men who have never troubled to cleanse their eyes or to ask themselves what indeed they see. No other goddess has suffered such violence at the hands of her worshippers, none has been so cheapened in the mouths of her talkative priests. Poe at least tried to set her on her throne, and proscribed as irreverent those side glances towards didacticism that bring ruin to so many of those who should have been her single-minded servants. He did this in the heat of battle; and, whenever the smoke cleared about him, he did more; setting her by herself, and demanding desperately, from men who did not care, that her religion should be uncontaminated by ethic, unblurred by passion, and that the goddess should be served with the high obedience she demands, and worshipped with the spiritual exaltation properly her own.

SELF-CONSCIOUS TECHNIQUE

SELF-CONSCIOUS TECHNIQUE

THERE is a note, one of a series of *Marginalia*, jetsam from old reviews, and new paragraphs too careful to be unpremeditated, whose light must not be hidden under the bushel of a general discussion of Poe's criticism. "It is the curse," he says, "of a certain order of mind, that it can never rest satisfied with the consciousness of its ability to do a thing. Not even is it content with doing it. It must both know and show how it was done." Now this is the curse that gave us Leonardo's notebooks, Reynolds' Discourses, and Stevenson's essay on *Some Technical Elements in Style:* the curse that is among the reasons of Leonardo's excellence, Reynolds' excellence, Stevenson's excellence and the excellence of Poe himself. It is the curse that is at the bottom of all public knowledge of technique. The man who is as interested in the way of doing a thing as in the thing when done, is the man who is likely to put a new tool into the hands of his fellow-craftsmen. Such men some-

times suffer for their curiosity. Poe called it a curse because he feared it while enjoying it. He learnt that it is possible for an artist to debauch in technique as for a lover to take the body for the soul, and that in one case as in the other it is the spirit that is lost.

Poe's own methods came gradually to be such a delight to him; his interest in them was so particularised by his essays in criticism and in the observation of the methods of other men, that some of his later works have an uncanny atmosphere about them, as if he had not written them himself, but had been present, passionately observant and critical, while they were being written by some one else. Imagination, from being a queen, sometimes becomes in them that slave of the intellect which is called fancy. They are richly-coloured marionettes that have never lived, but owe a wire-hung activity to their maker's cleverness. Poe was too good an observer of himself not to notice his danger. He must have known that he ran a risk of dying for Art, as a greater than he had died for Life. It was his destiny, and he pursued it. More than once he used his pen to make a new thing out of a discussion of an old one, and on these occasions he dissects his own motives in so impersonal a manner that it is difficult for the reader to remember that the author examining

is in any way connected with the author undergoing examination. *The Raven*, for example, a profound piece of technique, is scarcely as profound, and certainly not as surprising, as the *Philosophy of Composition*, in which its construction is minutely analysed, and Poe callously explains, as a matter of scientific rather than personal interest, that the whole poem was built on the refrain *Nevermore*, and that this particular refrain was chosen on account of the sonority and ease of *o* and *r* sounded together. Baudelaire, in calling attention to a poet "qui prétend que son poème a été composé d'après son poétique," remarks that "après tout un peu de charlatanerie est toujours permis au génie, et même ne lui messied pas. C'est comme le fard sur les pommettes d'une femme naturellement belle, un assaisonnement nouveau pour l'esprit." Mountebank or not, Poe was serious in his statement. It was not intended as a hoax, but carried real aspiration into actuality, and noted, in their extreme manifestation, the workings possible to such a mind as Poe felt was his own. In that article he tries to carry a point. Half-measures are no measures in oratory, and, the truth being on his side, he might well be permitted to say more than the truth in stating it to an audience. We are concerned here less with what he says than with the point of view

that lets him say it. How different is this way of talking about writing from the anecdote of Hoffmann, who held his wife's hand lest, in terror of the phantasmagoria he created, he should lose his reason and forget the existence of a homelier and less delirious world. How different from the letters of Balzac, noting joyously the amount of paper he had daily been able to cover. How different from the tale of Scott's tireless hand, or the account of George Sand, writing with babies on her knees, starting her characters on their careers, keeping beside them with fluent pen, and following their adventures as ignorant as themselves of the end towards which they were progressing.

Another man, who, like Poe, was at once a philosopher and deeply interested in technique, had lived and written, and from him Poe had that strengthening of his ideas that is given by outside confirmation. He refers often to William Godwin, the author of *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* and of several novels, among them one now most undeservedly half-forgotten, called *Caleb Williams*. There is a character of Godwin in *The Spirit of the Age*, where Hazlitt has noted that "his *forte* is not the spontaneous but the voluntary exercise of talent," a sentence which, if Poe read it, would have been enough to interest him in its subject. He "re-

minded those who knew him of the Metaphysician engrafted on the Dissenting Minister." Shelley, who repaid him in the end by running away with his daughter, wrote him boy's letters which he answered with chapter and verse on the conduct of life taken from the *Political Justice*. He was a sombre man, and his novel is a sombre, muscular book, worth reading still for other reasons besides the anatomy which at present concerns us. It is seldom possible to point to any one book as the sign-post of a literary cross-roads, but there can be no doubt that in *Caleb Williams* we can see the beginnings of self-conscious technique in story-telling. Hazlitt wrote of it: "No one ever began *Caleb Williams* that did not read it through; no one that ever read it could possibly forget it, or speak of it after any length of time, but with an impression as if the events and feelings had been personal to himself." And the author had not only done this, but had known how it was done. It is usual to say that Poe himself was the first to talk of choosing an effect and then planning a tale to produce it. But *Caleb Williams* was published in 1794, and, in a preface to one of the later editions, Godwin gave his methods away. On him also lay that fruitful curse. He wrote: "I formed a conception of a book of fictitious adventure that should in some way be

distinguished by a very powerful interest. Pursuing this idea, I invented first the third volume of my tale, then the second, and last of all the first."

Godwin, perhaps, did not realise how revolutionary was his attitude; and even Hazlitt, delighted as he was by their results, does not seem to have noticed the novelty of his methods. Dickens mentioned them to Poe in writing to him about his ingenious article on the mechanism of *Barnaby Rudge*, and Poe, finding Godwin's ideas of the very temper of his own, developed them logically as far as they would go, and, in two paragraphs that I shall quote, formulated clearly the principles of self-conscious technique.

But, before reading them, we have to examine a proposition assumed by the title of this chapter, and by all that has been written in it. It is easy to talk about things that have not been defined, but impossible to talk about them profitably. We have assumed that there is a well-understood difference between conception and craftsmanship. Let us justify the assumption. Until we have done so we are playing at battledore with a shuttlecock that does not exist.

We must find for our own satisfaction an intelligible process for the miracle of beauty's creation. There is no need to break our heads on the rash enterprise of proving that there is no

miracle at all. Let us leave that to those who can believe that a theory of our descent from protoplasm explains not only our growth but our original birth. In the making of all beautiful things, poems, stories, pictures, in the making of all things that bring us, beside their emotion of pain or joy or passion, a breath of that ecstasy that is not of earth and gives us kinship with the conscious Gods, there is a miracle. The processes of art of which we are about to speak are but the reverent preparation of the altar on which the miracle will be performed, the holy fire will fall, or the bread be turned to living flesh.

Shelley, in *The Defence of Poetry*, writes:

"A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day,

whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and delay recommended by critics, can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connexion of the spaces between their suggestions by the intertexture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself, for Milton conceived the *Paradise Lost* as a whole before he executed it in portions."

This passage, true in spirit as it is, is carried away from truth by reason of its *parti pris*. It contains the truth glossed into untruth in a few important sentences by the choice of words which imply rather than openly state an incorrect appreciation of the processes under discussion. The use of the word *conventional*, when Shelley talks of the "artificial connexion" of the spaces between the suggestions of the "inspired moments," is enough to throw the reader off the scent, or rather to let him mistake the true trail for a herring drag, and therefore to desist at the most promising moment of his pursuit.

I am not unconscious of the risk I take in describing what I believe to be the processes of literary creation. I cannot guard myself against another honest man who reads me with surprise, calls me a liar, and proves me such by references to the methods he notices are his own. Such a

man may read the following paragraph and smile; but I ask him, before he gives me the lie, to examine carefully the process I describe, and to be sure that he is not quarrelling with me for the statement of his own belief in a language other than his.

An artist is about to make a song. It does not often sing itself into his head, worded and tuned as he will write it down. Nor is it often present to his mind in words at all. It is more often but a nucleus—two lines of poetry, burdened with an invisible body that the artist has to find, a tune that asks for words or for its own completion, a presentiment of such and such an invisible burden that words and tune, if found, will bring into the light. The inferior artist is known by dead masks of verse that do not fit the unseen faces on which he has sought to mould, or by his good lines, which are the nuclei of poems he has not known how to write, and, set in songs that are not tuned to them, blossom sadly like real roses in gardens of artificial flowers.

The true artist is he who is able to make the part of his poem indistinguishable in texture from the whole, who is able to baffle the inquisitive reader asking which lines were first imagined, who is able, that is to say, to preserve an absolute unity between the nucleus and its elaboration. The nucleus may itself dictate the form it is to

fill, like the fragment of a statue implying the missing limbs, when the poet's business is faithfully to follow its suggestion. Or, if it be the presentiment of a whole, it will teach the poet, who is humble before it, with what delicacy or coarseness its veins are to be patterned, and what the texture of skin that its personality demands. Here, it is clear, is no question of an intertexture of conventional expressions, but rather the spreading of some creeping vitality, sparklike and separate, until, at last, the whole material break into a flame. Here, however, lies the truth as well as the untruth of Shelley's statement. He interprets "the toil and delay recommended by critics" as "a careful observation of the inspired moments." And, indeed, the making of a work of art asks no more than a tender watchfulness over the original intuition. From every word the artist's mind flies back to its starting-point as if to refer each note to an infallible tuning-fork. One artist will write down as near as he can the whole of the poem that is in the making, and then go over it, removing all that contradicts the rest. A jigging run of words will be ordered to a due solemnity. A stately sentence will be made to trip as light as Ariel. The snowball meaning of a word—the meaning it has gathered in its progress through the years—may covertly deny the impression it is meant to give: he will

erase it from his mind or paper and write another less refractory. Thus gradually is the poem perfected, as a boat's crew, once at sixes and sevens, is trained to work in powerful unison. Another artist, who can better trust his memory, instead of working on a whole, will perfect line by line, conscious of all in writing each, so that when all are written there will be nothing to correct. In either case the mental process, and its object, is the same. The poet's "labour and study" are devoted to a striving for unity and an avoidance of hindrance. His care is, that the delicate breath of the original nucleus or inspiration may inspire all, and move as freely in the house it has built, the poet helping, as in the scrap of wall, or the phantom mansion, that was at first its sole possession and itself.

Let Shelley appeal to Keats among "the greatest poets of the present day." Let Keats betray the genesis of a passage in *Hyperion*. I take my example from Mr. Buxton Forman's edition, where other readings than the final are printed below the page. Lines 72–79 of the poem were first written:

"As when upon a tranced summer-night
Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
The Oaks stand charmed by the earnest
Stars:
And thus all night without a stir they rest

Save for one sudden momentary gust
Which comes upon the silence and dies off
As if the Sea of Air had but one wave;
So came these words and went;"

Keats' corrections of this text sharpen our feeling for ugliness and contradictory rhythm, and admirably illustrate the process of composition I have just described. The fourth line would suggest to any one that it needed tuning. "They rest" see-saws the attention rather than soothes it. The "st" at the end puzzlingly doubles that of "gust" in the next verse, with half a suggestion of rhyme. He substituted "remain." But the third line also needed improvement. "The oaks stand charmed" was a little weak and became "Tall oaks branch-charmed" leaving the verb over for the next line, which, either before this alteration or after it, disregarding the first tentative change, was rewritten "Dream and so dream all night without a stir." In the fifth line, "sudden momentary" though easily presenting themselves with the word "gust," falsified the image he was conveying. He avoided the staccato suggestion of "momentary" by writing "solitary," and for "sudden" he substituted "gradual." "The Sea of Air" is a phrase, either ineffectual, or combating the main image with another too definitely stated. He wrote "as if the ebbing air," keeping the idea, but softening its impres-

sion. In the final version one inspiration is dominant throughout, and all contradiction has been cleared away. The passage, now unalterable poetry, reads:

"As when, upon a tranced summer-night,
Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
Save from one gradual solitary gust
Which comes upon the silence and dies off,
As if the ebbing air had but one wave;
So came these words and went;"

Labour and study have had their value here, and their efforts, it is well to notice, have all been in one direction, unity, the unity of the passage with itself, and, though that would be more difficult to show in a couple of pages, the unity of the passage with the whole poem.

There is then a real difference between conception and craftsmanship. Conception is that breath on the glowing coal of which Shelley speaks, and craftsmanship all that knowledge that helps the artist tenderly watching and remembering that moment of brilliance, to prevent the intertexture from being made of conventional expressions, and, indeed, to lead the glowing sparks throughout the mass until the whole is kindled.

When we write of "self-conscious technique" we mean this process carried out by men aware of the purpose of their work. Many absolute and unalterable things have been written by men without this knowledge, guided only by the memory of their moments of inspiration, intolerant, without knowing why, of words and phrases that contradicted them. It has been left for writers of the last hundred and fifty years to discover what they and their ancestors have been doing, and so to hang shining lamps over the desks of other artists. Godwin's inverse method of writing his book was undertaken for the sake of the intensity of the interest he was determined to evoke. He knew that the intensity of an impression depended on its unity. His technique was rough, but it showed at least a general understanding of the principles of creation that have so long been recognised unstated. Poe went further than Godwin and demanded that story or poem should be one throughout, not only in framework (the object of Godwin's procedure) but also in detail, in sentence and in word.

The first of the two paragraphs of which I spoke, is taken from an essay on Hawthorne published in 1842:

"A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having con-

ceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed. . . ."

Poe has been discussing the length of compositions, and goes on to say that this perfection is unattainable in the novel, because the novel is too long to be read with sustained attention at a sitting. That question need not trouble us here. We have only to notice that Poe's curse, leading him not only to do things but to find out how they are done, showed him that his care in writing and re-writing was precisely the avoidance of hindrance and contradiction, the tuning of the part with the whole, that I have already tried to describe. The initial inspiration is to rule, how absolutely this second paragraph from *The Philosophy of Composition*, published in 1846, informs us. There is a cheerful arrogance about

this paragraph that it is hard not to respect. Poe, conscious of his own consciousness, is a little drunk with free-will; and the result is the momentary vision of a calm-browed person sitting between earth and heaven weighing and choosing with mathematical precision invisible and imponderable things.

"I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view —for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place—'Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?' Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone—whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone—afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect."

This means that when the illusion of choice had left Poe with the nucleus for a tale or poem, he followed it with careful observation instead of dragging inspiration bound and captive behind a runaway pen. Whereas men not self-conscious work blindly, and are themselves surprised by

the confused effects they produce, Poe watched his inspiration for guidance, and was determined that the first shadowing of the effect to be "constructed" should rule every touch he laid upon his canvas. It is easy to quarrel with the violence of his statement, as with Shelley's on the other side. But, in reading these paragraphs, we should remember not only that Poe is trying to carry a point but also that it is hard to make new principles clear, even to their discoverer, without throwing a limelight upon them that makes their shades black, and their whites almost too luminous. When Baudelaire writes of himself as "un esprit qui regarde comme le plus grand honneur du poète d'accomplir *juste* ce qu'il a projeté de faire," we find the same thoughts similarly exaggerated, and not until nearly fifty years after Poe do we get them softened by the gentler light of day, in Pater's essay on *Style:*

"To give the phrase, the sentence, the structural member, the entire composition, song, or essay, a similar unity with its subject and with itself: style is in the right way when it tends towards that. All depends upon the original unity, the vital wholeness and identity of the initiatory apprehension or view."

It is easy in Poe's best work, for we must continually throw aside what was written hur-

riedly, for bread, too hurriedly to allow that watching of the remembered moment which he was one of the first to demand—it is easy to trace the result of this craftsmanship conscious of its aims. His theory brought him as near perfection as his nature would permit. His stories are the readiest examples. They, the best of them, are one with themselves, and (so thorough is their domination by the idea) their first sentences are ordered by knowledge of those which are to be the last. Never, except by that misfortune of his, that left him insensitive to the unpleasant qualities of some words and phrases which the long habit of the language has taught more delicate ears to find discordant, does he break for a moment the spell that these carefully prepared beginnings throw upon his readers. "Il accomplit juste ce qu'il a projeté de faire," to adapt Baudelaire's words, and his mastery seldom loosens its grasp. In the less successful works among those by which he was willing to be known, he slackens his grip by movements of awkward laughter, hangman's jokes, which are painful to those who admire him in his strength. But, in the perfect tales, like *The Masque of the Red Death; Silence: a Fable;* or *The Oval Portrait*, there is not a movement that does not contribute to the effect of the whole.

Let me set side by side some of these beginnings and endings. *The Masque of the Red Death* opens thus:

"The Red Death had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its avatar and its seal —the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution . . . "

It ends:

"And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed hall of their revel, and died, each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."

We are led on through gradually increasing disquietude and terror. How menacing is the sentence that immediately follows the prelude: "But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious." We feel at once that the shadow of death is at his elbow.

Shadow: a Parable strikes at once the knell that is to close it:

"Ye who read are still among the living; but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows."

This solemn note is reinforced by another as the tale begins:

"Over some flasks of the red Chian wine, within the walls of a noble hall in a dim city called Ptolemais, we sat at night, a company of seven."

And finally these two deep monotones bell forth together:

"And the shadow answered, 'I am SHADOW, and my dwelling is near to the Catacombs of Ptolemais, and hard by those dim plains of Helusion which border upon the foul Charonian canal.' And then did we, the seven, start from our seats in horror, and stand trembling, and shuddering, and aghast: for the tones in the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one being, but of a multitude of beings, and varying in their cadences from syllable to syllable, fell duskily upon our ears in the well-remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends."

Silence: a Fable has a similar double opening, though here the two notes sound together at the beginning and, with wonderful effect, are disentangled at the end.

"'Listen to *me*,' said the Demon, as he placed

his hand upon my head. 'The region of which I speak is a dreary region in Libya, by the borders of the river Zäire. And there is no quiet there, nor silence.

"'The waters of the river have a saffron and sickly hue; and they flow not onward to the sea, but palpitate forever and forever beneath the red eye of the sun with a tumultuous and convulsive motion. For many miles on either side of the river's oozy bed is a pale desert of gigantic water-lilies. They sigh one unto the other in that solitude, and stretch towards the heaven their long and ghastly necks, and nod to and fro their everlasting heads. And there is an indistinct murmur which cometh out from among them like the rushing of sub-terrene water. And they sigh one unto the other.

"'But there is a boundary to their realm—the boundary of the dark, horrible, lofty forest. There, like the waves about the Hebrides, the low underwood is agitated continually. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And the tall primeval trees rock eternally hither and thither with a crashing and a mighty sound. And from their high summits, one by one, drop everlasting dews. And at the roots strange poisonous flowers lie writhing in perturbed slumber. And overhead, with a rustling and loud noise, the grey clouds rush westwardly forever, until they roll, a cataract, over the fiery wall of the horizon. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And by the shores of the river Zäire there is neither quiet nor silence.'"

It is worth while to notice in this the careful, if rather elementary music, and the refrain "And there is no quiet there, nor silence" repeating itself with gathered emphasis at the end of the description, while in the second and third paragraphs are internal refrains: in the second—"They sigh one unto the other"; and in the third—"But there is no wind throughout the heaven."

Then, turning to the end, we hear the two notes separate. The Demon is finishing his tale:

"'And mine eyes fell upon the countenance of the man, and his countenance was wan with terror. And, hurriedly, he raised his head from his hand, and stood forth upon the rock and listened. But there was no voice throughout the vast illimitable desert, and the characters upon the rock were SILENCE. And the man shuddered and turned his face away, and fled afar off, in haste, so that I beheld him no more.'

* * * * *

"Now there are fine tales in the volumes of the Magi — in the iron-bound, melancholy volumes of the Magi. Therein, I say, are glorious histories of the Heaven, and of the Earth, and of the mighty Sea—and of the Genii that overruled the sea, and the earth, and the lofty heaven. There was much lore too in the

sayings which were said by the Sibyls; and holy, holy things were heard of old by the dim leaves that trembled around Dodona—but, as Allah liveth, that fable which the Demon told me, as he sat by my side in the shadow of the tomb, I hold to be the most wonderful of all! And as the Demon made an end of his story, he fell back within the cavity of the tomb and laughed. And I could not laugh with the Demon, and he cursed me because I could not laugh. And the lynx, which dwelleth for ever in the tomb, came out therefrom, and lay down at the feet of the Demon, and looked at him steadily in the face."

How admirably justified is the introduction of the lynx. So true is the note that I should not be surprised if nine readers out of ten never observe that the existence of the beast has not been mentioned before. The whole image is a fine example of daring trust in the one infallible test, of unity with the original inspiration.

TALES

TALES

IN talking of the material of a work of art, we must not forget that we are only speaking in an inaccurate way of the personality of the artist. It is vain to hope for an understanding of the art of pottery from an analysis of the clay the potter uses. It would, however, be instructive to note how this and that material influenced the shapes that could be turned from it upon his wheel. We should find that we were approaching a geographical knowledge; learning that such and such districts produce such and such forms of pottery, and, conversely, that from a specimen of ware we could more or less inexactly guess some of the characteristics of the country whence it came. A similar knowledge can be won from an examination of the material of works of art. They were built, we can say, from this or that species of impressions; they flowered from this or that intellectual subsoil.

But not all the tales and poems of a man belong truly to his nature. Here and there he has gathered a handful of earth from countries not

his own, and, in these shallow beds he has grown flowers that spring the quicker for their lack of root, and only betray the weakness of their soil by dying as they open to the sun. Here our criterion must be the works of art rather than their material, and we must rely upon our taste to distinguish dead flowers from living, native intuitions from arbitrary specimens of acclimatisation. This is markedly the case with Poe, whose will frequently chose an "effect" foreign to his genius, and then tried to whip up impressions to produce it. Again and again in the stories so inspired we can detect moments of strange vitality, the lingering looks of the spirit toward its own and peculiar province of impression.

That province was not the wide and various territory of a Balzac, but rather a small grove closed in by tall trees, filled always with dusk. The ground must be trodden warily for fear of open graves. Here and there are fallen tombstones, and, in the twilight, strange flowers rise from between them, like those fierce irises whose orange fiery tongues creep out on lips veined terribly with white and purple. The faces of the ghosts that walk here are twisted with pain or fear. No priest has exorcised them, and their mortal bodies have not had Christian burial.

From this narrow grove Poe brought the

strange tales by which he is most widely remembered, and here his spirit had its home when it was not wandering clear-eyed and critical about a more ordinary world. When, as Poe would have put it, he left his intellect for his soul, he found it here, aloof indeed from the arena of his purely intellectual activities. Many things, however, called him elsewhere, and, in the stories that resulted from his wanderings, it is interesting to trace those flashes of homesickness in which he remembers himself.

Poe, the critic, admired the skill of Defoe in giving verisimilitude to fiction. We have read in the chapter on his criticism the note in which he described the effect of *Robinson Crusoe*. He wished to produce such an effect with tales of his own writing. *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* and the *Journal of Julius Rodman* written two years later, represent unfinished attempts to create new Crusoes. The fact that they are without ends is itself suggestive. In reading them it is curious to watch Poe's genius escaping from the galley where he had bound his cleverness to an oar, and swiftly flying to the remembered place of strange dreams and sepulchral imaginations. The style of Defoe, a paved causeway, swells and heaves, glaucous coloured grass springs up through the interstices, and flowers like drops of blood, while the plain

stones are covered with a variegated fungus. Poe begins:

"My name is Arthur Gordon Pym. My father was a respectable trader in sea-stores at Nantucket, where I was born. My maternal grandfather was an attorney in good practice. . . ."

and, parodying not too accurately the style of Robinson, goes on with accounts of shipwreck and mutiny and voyages to undiscovered lands. But presently the style changes. A ship like *The Flying Dutchman* sails by and disappears. Saffron-coloured corpses lie upon her decks and lean upon her bulwarks, and, as she passes, a huge sea-gull, spattered with blood, draws its beak and talons from the body where it feasts, and, flying over the heads of Pym and his companion, drops at their feet "a piece of clotted and liver-like substance." After which Poe turns again to his longitudes and latitudes, succeeding very fairly well in making the verisimilitude he desired. But, by the time the book breaks off, Pym's adventures are tuned to a pitch beyond credibility. Pym and his companion in a small boat sail, under clouds of white ashes, over a milky ocean, too hot to be endured by the naked hand, towards a silent cataract that curtains the horizon.

"At intervals there were visible in it wide,

yawning, but momentary rents, and from out these rents, within which was a chaos of flitting and indistinct images, there came rushing and mighty but soundless winds, tearing up the enkindled ocean in their course. . . . And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow."

It was almost inevitable that Pym should die and his manuscript be lost, for a reconciliation between Defoe and his imitator was no longer possible.

The Journal of Julius Rodman is more consistent in tone. It purports to be the revised notes of the first man who crossed the Rocky Mountains. There are in it encounters with Indians, described like those of Robinson with his savages, and it breaks off after a battle with a couple of bears chronicled more seriously than the piece of sport shown by Man Friday with his grizzly. Poe loads his narrative with detailed catalogues of food and arms in the approved manner, but gave himself a narrow safety-valve by making Rodman sensitive to nature and an exuberant describer of landscape, which, in Defoe's time, had not yet begun to exist, except

as something difficult or easy to traverse. Poe's intention is shown in such sentences as this:

"My father had been very fond of Pierre, and I thought a great deal of him myself; he was a great favourite, too, with my younger sister, Jane, and I believe they would have been married had it been God's will to have spared her."

The fact that it was foreign to his nature is betrayed in such as this:

"The two rivers presented the most enchanting appearance as they wound away their long snake-like lengths in the distance, growing thinner and thinner until they looked like mere faint threads of silver as they vanished in the shadowy mists of the sky."

I find a very characteristic sign of the intellectual character of Poe's invention in his description of Rodman's appearance:

"He was about twenty-five years of age, when he started up the river. He was a remarkably vigorous and active man, but short in stature, not being more than five feet three or four inches high—strongly built, with legs somewhat bowed. His physiognomy was of a Jewish cast, his lips thin, and his complexion saturnine."

Rodman's task was to take his men over the Rocky Mountains, as Hannibal had led his Car-

thaginians over the Alps. He had to be a leader. Few but Poe would have thought of sketching him in the lines of the popular imagination of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Poe's attempts at verisimilitude contain occasional flashes of himself. He appears more rarely in those tales in which, instead of aping an eighteenth-century Defoe, he masquerades as a nineteenth-century humorist. His conception of humour was not elementary. There is no round Rabelaisian laughter in him at the contrast between man the animal and man the God. Nor does he, with Shakespeare, see big, boy-like men playing like children in a serious world, or taking a laughable one with gravity. There is no fat or juice in Poe's amusement. His sense of the ridiculous is lean and pinched, and moves pity rather than laughter in his readers. It is the humour of a hungry man who is a little angry. He laughs in a falsetto and the world will not join in the chorus. Some schoolmasters make jokes like his, jokes that to their pupils do but deepen the monotony they are intended to relieve. When, in a tragic story, Poe introduces a scrap of would-be ridicule, we have to pass it over with forgiveness instead of relishing it like the humour in Shakespeare's solemn plays. It does not fill out his conception to the broad proportions of humanity, but is a blemish upon it,

an excrescence that we would be glad to do without. And when, in his mad confidence that the discrepancies he saw were as amusing to others as to his own serious mind, he wrote whole tales of nothing else, he found that the laughter evaporated as he wrote, and that he had to overemphasise all his points to get any effect at all. Small things amuse big minds of a peculiar species. I believe Poe often laughed at the grotesque ideas and bad puns that he, or any one else, could easily invent. I believe he was really amused by the long-drawn-out witticisms that seem to us so dull. I cannot otherwise understand how he could print them not only in magazines that paid for them, but also in books that did not and were not likely to bring him any money. His case suggests that it might be possible to reason that humorists are men with a sluggish sense of humour. The incidents or ideas that make them laugh are laughable indeed, whereas the thinnest little ghost of a pale joke will shake the sides of those who, like Poe, are unable to compel others to share their enjoyment. Perhaps, instead of saying of some ridiculous occurrence that it would make a cat laugh, we should be more truly praising it in exclaiming that it would make Charles Dickens smile. It might be possible to argue so. Who but one with very active muscles of laughter

could smile, unless with sorrow, at the Court Guide in *King Pest?*

"The other exalted personages whom you behold are all of our family, and wear the insignia of the blood royal under the respective titles of 'His Grace the Arch-Duke Pest-Iferous,' 'His Grace the Duke Pest-Ilential,' 'His Grace the Duke Tem-Pest,' and 'Her Serene Highness the Arch-Duchess Ana-Pest.'"

We have been spoiled by the great masters of humour, and our pampered minds can find nothing funny in such simple jests as these. Yet Poe filled a volume with such stuff. Sir Pathrick O'Grandison Barranitt tells, in the style of Charles O'Malley, of an incident in his rivalry with a little Frenchman, and we remain hopelessly solemn. The Angel of the Odd talks like Hans Breitmann, and we do not smile. The printer's devil substitutes "x's" for "o's" in a paragraph, and when he tells us that it made somebody "x(cross) in the x-treme," we are more sad than merry.

Yet, even in these tales of dead laughter and demands for smiles that do not come, Poe sometimes touches his own note, and the withered second-rate jester suddenly rises in stature, and the empty wrinkles round his eyes disappear into cavernous and impressive hollows. Even in *King Pest*, with its annoying verbal witticisms,

is a paragraph in which Poe comes to his own:

"Had they not, indeed, been intoxicated beyond moral sense, their reeling footsteps must have been palsied by the horrors of their situation. The air was cold and misty. The paving-stones, loosened from their beds, lay in wild confusion amid the tall rank grass which sprang up around the feet and ankles. Fallen houses choked up the streets. The most fetid and poisonous smells everywhere prevailed; and by the aid of that ghastly light which, even at midnight, never fails to emanate from a vapoury and pestilential atmosphere, might be discerned lying in the by-paths and alleys, or rotting in the windowless habitations, the carcase of many a nocturnal plunderer arrested by the hand of the plague in the very perpetration of his robbery."

Poe seems to have been unable to leave his admirations to themselves. He was always tempted to turn them into emulations, and it was almost always through some delight of his critical mind that he was led to the attempting of tasks foreign to his genius. Just as his understanding of the excellence of Defoe made him eager to imitate the master whose secret he perceived, so his pleasure in the discoveries of science, the pleasure of the amateur, of the uninitiated, made him desirous of using it in his own way, and, as an artist, of carrying further the marvels

whose existence had been proved by the professors. Critic and metaphysician as he was, I think that at some moments of his career he would readily have flung away these titles, like those of poet and storyteller, if he could have been given instead of them the name of a scientific discoverer. There are many indications in his scientific tales that he plumes himself as much on his knowledge and conjecture as on the tales in which they are turned to account. He learnt what science he knew from popular works, but was certainly able, on these not very deep foundations, to raise quite ingenious edifices of speculation. In *Hans Pfaall*, for example, he anticipates Jules Verne, and describes a voyage to the moon, whose plausibility, however, is a little lessened by the tone of banter in which parts of the story are told. He lets us see too clearly that he is laughing in his sleeve, and at the same time is very careful in securing verisimilitude, and apparent submission to the laws of science. He does not allow Hans Pfaall to fly to the moon, in the free and easy manner of the hero of Cyrano de Bergerac's *Voyage aux États de la Lune*, for his interest is more in the flight than in what is to be found on alighting, which, in fact, never gets described. Poe busies himself in contriving an oxygen-making apparatus for turning a rarefied atmosphere into fit stuff for

breathing. He makes calculations of weights and distances, and finds pleasure in such logical invention as sees that the balloon turns round and descends bottom downwards to the moon, after passing the point at which the lunar attraction exceeds that of the earth. If such a voyage had been made, Poe would have been eager to point out that he had foreseen its possibility, and forecast its method. In another story he describes the crossing of the Atlantic by airship. This was printed as truth in the columns of a newspaper, and did indeed deceive many. Here, too, he is happy with calculations and deductions, and the same kind of logical invention as pleased him in *Hans Pfaall*. Of these tales the most consistent in tone is *The Descent into the Maelstrom*, which, although, like *The Pit and the Pendulum*, empty of spiritual significance, yet makes an effect tuned more closely with his mind. The measured description of the whirlpool fitly prepares the reader for the narrative of the man who has been sucked into its depths, and we are grateful to Poe for his ingenious piece of reasoning about the respective resistance offered by cylinders and other bodies swimming in a vortex, that, at the last moment, is sufficient to save the unfortunate, whose hope and despair we have already made our own.

Among these scientific dreams and imaginative

projections of scientific into pictorial and concrete fact are two stories in which Poe's peculiar powers are more easily detected. These are: *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar* and *Mesmeric Revelation.* Both are tales of men preserved beyond death by mesmerism, and talking, as it were, from the farther side of the gulf. Both were written in later years, and are examples of the work of the metaphysician whose work we shall discuss in a later chapter. The first is the more physical of the two studies. Valdemar is mesmerised when on the point of death, and, from a mesmeric trance, signifies to the operator the stages of his sinking and the moment of his actual dissolution. For seven months he is preserved under the mesmeric influence, while his body does not decay, and all physical processes are seemingly arrested. At the end of that time he is awakened by the customary passes. He cries out to be put once more to sleep or to be finally awakened. The operator tries to mesmerise him again, but, failing through lack of will power, works earnestly for the removal of the spell.

"As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations of 'dead! dead!' absolutely bursting from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute, or even less—shrunk,

crumbled—absolutely *rotted* away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putridity."

Mesmeric Revelation reports a conversation between the mesmerist and his patient, a philosopher who believes that from his self-cognisance in the mesmeric state may be learnt some truth that, in an ordinary condition, his powers of reasoning would not be so acute as to discover. A series of questions bring as answers some of the ideas that were already shaping Poe's *Eureka*, and the tale ends with the philosopher's death.

"As the sleep-walker pronounced these latter words, in a feeble tone, I observed in his countenance a singular expression, which somewhat alarmed me and induced me to wake him at once. No sooner had I done this than, with a bright smile irradiating all his features, he fell back upon his pillow and expired. I noticed that in less than a minute afterward his corpse had all the stern rigidity of stone. His brow was of the coldness of ice. Thus, ordinarily, should it have appeared only after long pressure from Azrael's hand. Had the sleep-walker, indeed, during the latter portion of his discourse, been addressing me from out the region of the shadows?"

* * * * *

It is clear in all these stories, less expressions than attempts at expression, how much of Poe's

work as an artist was merely illustrative of his adventures as a critic and thinker. In the last two are indications of what came to be the prevailing character of his thought, indications which are elsewhere again and again confirmed. When Poe was not thinking of beauty he was thinking of God, and so of death; and much of his thought on God and beauty came to be associated with death when he allowed it to appear in work whose aim was æsthetic rather than scientific. The confusion in his mind between beauty and melancholy, death being taken as its symbol, caused one of the flaws in his theory of æsthetic, one of the brambles that entangled his pursuit of truth. There are tears of beauty and tears of sorrow, and Poe did not distinguish between them. Artists have not yet got so far as thinkers in freeing their souls from fettering catalogues of the things they admire, which they confound with the beautiful. They will still give lists of beautiful things, betraying rather the colours of their temperaments than the acuteness of their understandings. Different men are moved to æsthetic expression by different things; it is hard for them to realise that beauty is not exclusively the possession of the things that make expression, and so beauty, possible to themselves. Poe passes very near the truth in saying:

"When indeed men speak of Beauty, they mean precisely not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect; they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul—not* of intellect or of heart—upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating 'the beautiful.'"

There is a taper of illumination in that sentence. It flickers when he writes:

"Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy then is the most legitimate of all the poetical tones."

It dies absolutely when he continues:

"Now, never losing sight of the object, *supremeness*, or perfection, at all points, I asked myself, 'Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?' 'Death,' was the obvious reply. 'And when,' I said, 'is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?' From what I have already explained at some length, the answer here also is obvious—'When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*.' The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of a bereaved lover."

There the light is dead, and Poe only tells us that he is a melancholy man who is easiest

prompted to æsthetic expression by the emotions belonging to death and bereavement.

Robert Burton, in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, writes of Phantasie or Imagination, "whose organ is the middle cell of the brain," that, "in melancholy men this faculty is most powerful and strong, and often hurts, producing many monstrous and prodigious things, especially if it be stirred up by some terrible object presented to it from common sense or memory." Monstrous and prodigious things did this man produce, whose brain sought a white light and a rarefied air in which to think, while his temperament dragged it back continually to graveyard mists and that grove of purple, poisonous flowers. Setting on one side the analytical tales, which are a subject for separate discussion, we may note that almost all the best of his remaining stories, in which his inspiration is not turned to invention by the arbitrary interference and intention of his will, are concerned directly or indirectly with the idea of death. They are variations on a Funeral March, played now almost silently with muffled notes, now with reverberating thunder, now in a capricious staccato, now with the jangling of madness, the notes tripping each other up as they rush along, and now so slowly that the breath of his listeners waits for suffocation in their throats in

expectation of the phrases that are continually postponed.

But death is the catastrophe of many stories beside Poe's. It is a bulky incident in life, and consequently one that readily offers itself for the purposes of art. Poe, however, was peculiar in his use of it. He does not watch a death-bed and make notes of the humanity of the patient. He does not make us feel the painful emotions of the men and women who see their friend irrevocably departing from them. There is no irony, no sadness, no setting of familiar things in the light that in death's presence seems to pierce the curtain that divides those who have gone from those who, busying themselves with irrelevant things, are waiting to go in their turn. Most writers seek in death an enhancement of the value of life, and find in mortality a means of elucidating humanity. Death with them is a significant moment of life. Death with Poe is Death. The metaphysician is obsessed by it as the point where simple calculations slip through into the fourth dimension. The artist is concerned with death as something separate from life, something whose circumstances are special and terrible.

It has been said that the horror of Poe's tales of death is purely physical. A quality more universally theirs is that of peculiarity of circum-

stance. The people who die, or have killed, or are about to die, are unusual, and the manners of the deaths, or the condition of mind in which they are prepared for them, are extraordinary. In some cases the death is no physical death, but the murder of half a soul by its fellow, as in the tale of *William Wilson*. In others the deaths are those of reincarnated spirits (*Morella*) of madmen (the murderers of *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*) or of souls whose bodies are snatched in the moment of dissolution by spirits who have already left the earth (*Ligeia*). Brooding over the idea of death, Poe found his way into other corners of speculation, and the mere fact of dying became clothed for him with the strangely coloured garments of the weird.

He plays none of the witch melody that Hawthorne knows. Poe is interested in the conscience, but does not make of it and the faith that it sometimes implies a background to throw up into relief the figures that dance to his music. No penalties to be enacted in another world heighten the importance of deeds done in this. He is not, except as a metaphysician, concerned with the soul after death, but only tunes its progress to the grave. His fingers will lift no trumpet on the day of a judgment in which he does not believe. His interest as a story-teller is with the terrors of the soul before yet it has

separated from the body. Let it wake in the coffin and beat with the fingers that are still its own upon the weighted lid. Poe will be with it in its agony. Hawthorne, thinking of Heaven and Hell, forgets the worms. Poe hears them eating through the rotten wood.

But though death is the motive that runs through them, Poe's best stories are not concerned only with mortality. He parades his corpses in the dim neutral country between ordinary life and the life that remains uncharted and scarcely explored. We have to remember in reading him that the geography of humanity changes from age to age, and that when, in his tales of mesmerism, for example, he seems to be moving in districts now open to the public, those districts when he wrote were no less shadowy than the world beyond the horizon to the dwellers in the caves. In *William Wilson* he is using, long before Stevenson, the idea of dual personality. In *The Oval Portrait*, where a painter transfers the very soul of his lady to the canvas, and, as the portrait seems to breathe alive, turns round to find her dead, he is using the subtle, half-thought things that an earlier writer would scarcely have felt, or, if he had, would have brushed like cobwebs secretly aside. Then there is the Germanesque story of the horse whose soul is a man and carries that man's enemy headlong

into a flaming castle. *The Assignation* is an objective piece of colour. *The Black Cat* and *The Tell-Tale Heart* are stories of murder and its discovery, threaded with hitherto unimagined varieties of madness. The note common to all is that of the weird, and Poe keeps warily along the narrow strip of country that is neither frankly supernatural, nor yet prosaic enough to be commonplace.

The effect of the weird is not very old in story-telling, though the terrible and the monstrous have long been motives of narrative. Its appearance is almost synchronous with the eighteenth-century birth of the Romantic movement. Its first thrill has been traced to a passage in one of Smollett's novels. It does not necessarily use the supernatural, although it perhaps implies an appeal to those half-forgotten states of mind that would once have so considered the details that stimulate it. It is possible that for the weird, as for many other romantic effects, like those of the clash of sword and of the hunting of beasts, our ancestors thrill within us, and communicate their shudders to ourselves. It is worth while, in thinking of Poe's use of it, to consider its short history in art. Our attitude towards the weird or the fantastic, with which it is closely allied, defined itself with some rapidity. Mrs. Radcliffe, when she secured a weird effect by the

lighting of blue flames on the points of the soldiers' lances before the Castle of Udolpho, was careful to write in a footnote: "See the Abbé Berthelon on Electricity." Miracles were already powerless before the Royal Society, and whereas, not half a century before, Horace Walpole had lifted his giant warrior to heaven in a clap of thunder, a writer in the later day would have been careful to show the wires and pulleys that hoisted the monster to the skies. Mrs. Radcliffe, eager to serve two gods, gave us our thrill and our electricity together. Her fictions, clever as they are, are a little laughable on that account, and when Poe executes a marvel and explains it, as in *Thou art the Man!* he drops his story into a class below that of his best work. But with the later Romantics came a clearer understanding. Théophile Gautier, in an essay on Hoffmann, says, in praising him:

"Besides, Hoffmann's marvellous is not the marvellous of the fairy tales: he has always one foot in the real world, and one does not see much in him of carbuncle palaces with diamond turrets. The talismans and wonders of *The Arabian Nights* are of no use to him. Occult sympathies and dislikes, peculiar manias, visions, magnetism, the mysterious and malevolent influence of an evil principle that he only vaguely suggests, these are the supernatural and extraordinary elements that Hoffmann is accustomed

to use. This is the positive and the plausible of the fantastic."

He might almost be writing of Poe. Even so, he does not dig at the root of the question, but only at the loose soil about its trunk. For there is no untruth in fairy tale so long as we can be made to believe in it and do not require to have it reduced to terms of the Abbé Berthelon. It was left to another Romantic to make a philosophical statement of the difficulty. We remember with Teufelsdröckh:

"The potency of Names; which indeed are but one kind of such Custom-woven, wonder-hiding Garments. Witchcraft, and all manner of Spectre-work and Demonology, we have now named Madness and Diseases of the Nerves. Seldom reflecting that still the new question comes upon us: What is Madness, what are Nerves? Ever, as before, does Madness remain a mysterious-terrific altogether *infernal* boiling up of the Nether Chaotic Deep, through this fair-painted Vision of Creation which swims thereon, which we name the Real. Was Luther's picture of the Devil less a Reality, whether it were framed within the bodily eye, or without it? In every the wisest Soul lies a whole world of internal Madness, an authentic Demon-Empire; out of which, indeed, his world of Wisdom has been creatively built together, and now rests there, as on its dark foundations does a habitable flowery Earth rind."

Truth is so variable except in its relation to the soul. The facts of physical science turn into butterflies and elude us as we grasp them. The Demon-Empire is all-powerful as soon as we believe in it, and to do that we must be moved by one who has been himself under its sway. The priests of the weird do not enjoy the even life of other men. A few, like Gautier, have visited the temple sometimes, and escaped before its curse has fallen on them. But Gerard de Nerval hanged himself with a bootlace, that may have been the Queen of Sheba's garter, to a lodging-house door in a back street of a Paris that may have been Baghdad. Hoffmann lay in bed petrifying from his feet up in expiation of those nights in the tavern where, in the fumes of beer and smoke, he saw Krespel dancing with the crape in his hat, and the floating shadows of Callot's grotesques, that seemed inextricably related to his own. Poe's death, as wretched as either of these, has already been described. They are men who have submitted to "les Bienfaits de la Lune." The weird is that strange child to whom Baudelaire overheard the Moon speaking:

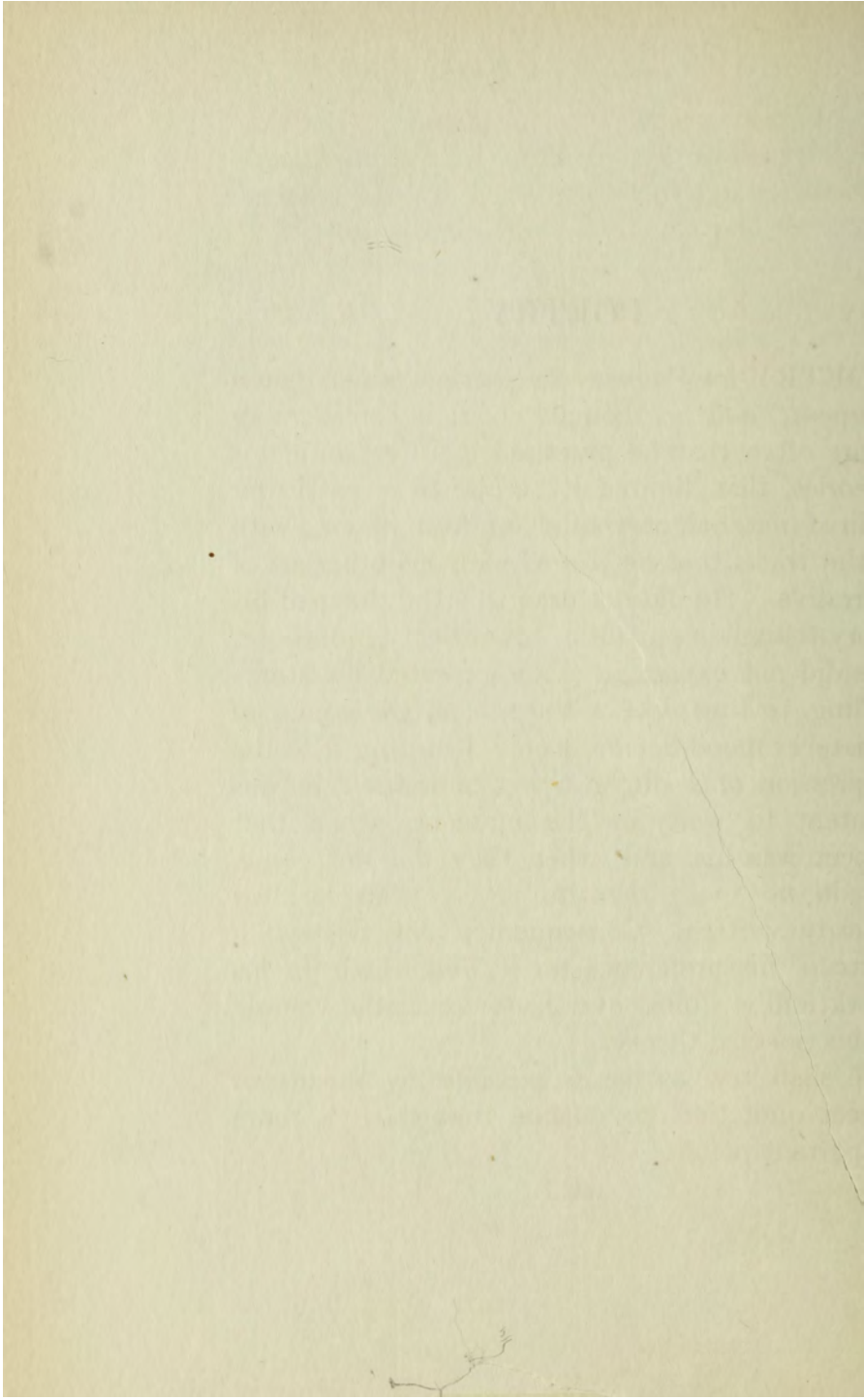
"Tu seras la reine des hommes aux yeux verts dont j'ai serré aussi la gorge dans mes caresses nocturnes; de ceux-la qui aiment la mer, la mer immense, tumultueuse et verte, l'eau informe et

multiforme, le lieu où ils ne sont pas, la femme qu'ils ne connaissent pas, les fleurs sinistres qui ressemblent aux encensoirs d'une religion inconnue, les parfums qui troublent la volonté, et les animaux sauvages et voluptueux qui sont les emblèmes de leur folie."

Poe was one of these, and that fact is the secret of his power. He would reverse Gautier's confession, and write it: "I love a phantom better than a statue, and twilight better than full noon." For him "the invisible world existed," and his excursions on the common earth were less personal to himself, and less real than his travels in that other country that is and is not, like a landscape in a dream, and is and is not again. His stories leave us richer not in facts but in emotions. We find our way with their help into novel corners of sensation. They are like rare coloured goblets or fantastic metal-work, and we find, often with surprise, that we have waited for them. That is their vindication, that the test between the valueless and the invaluable of the fantastic. There are tales of twisted extravagance that stir us with no more emotion than is given by an accidental or capricious decoration, never felt or formed in the depths of a man. There are others whose extravagance is arbitrary, ingenious and incredible because explained. But the best of Poe's tales,

like those patterns however grotesque that have once meant the world to a mind sensible to beauty, have a more than momentary import. Like old melody, like elaborate and beautiful dancing, like artificial light, like the sight of poison or any other concentrated power, they are among the significant experiences that are open to humanity.

POETRY



POETRY

POETRY for Poe was "a passion rather than a purpose," and he thought about it considerably more often than he practised it. Certain of his theories, that limited its scope to a particular vein of material, prevented him from playing with it the tricks that he played with his other art of narrative. He did not drag it, as he dragged his story-telling, in pursuit of his critical admirations. He did not expect it, as he expected his story-telling, to turn, like a chameleon, the colour of whatever mood he laid it on. Limiting it to the expression of a single aspect of himself, he was content to wait for the moments when that aspect was his, and, when they did not come, to do no more than to revise what he had already written. Consequently, his poetry, in spite of his preference for it, bulks little in his work, and is almost overshadowed by the volume of his poetical theory.

I shall try, as far as possible by means of direct quotation, to outline that theory's more important points.

We have already observed, in a brief note on his criticism, that Poe protested against the error of supposing didacticism to be a motive of poetry. He speaks in *The Poetic Principle* of "a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated, but one which, in the brief period it has already endured, may be said to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other elements combined."

"I allude to the heresy of *The Didactic*. It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans, especially, have patronised this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true Poetic Dignity and Force; but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified, more supremely noble, than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake."

The Poetic Principle was published in 1850, after Poe's death. Eight years earlier, in a review of Longfellow's ballads, he had very ingeniously suggested how didacticism, once an accidental undercurrent, had come to be considered essential to poetry.

"Mankind have seemed to define Poesy in a thousand, and in a thousand conflicting, definitions. But the war is only one of words. Induction is as well applicable to this subject as to the most palpable and utilitarian; and by its sober processes we find that, in respect to compositions which have been really received as poems, the imaginative, or, more popularly, the creative portions alone have insured them to be so received. Yet these works, on account of these portions, having once been so received and so named, it has happened, naturally and inevitably, that other portions totally unpoetic have not only come to be regarded by the popular voice as poetic, but have been made to serve as false standards of perfection, in the adjustment of other poetical claims. Whatever has been found in whatever has been received as a poem has been blindly regarded as *ex statu* poetic. And this is a species of gross error which scarcely could have made its way into any less intangible topic. In fact, that licence, which appertains to the Muse herself, it has been thought decorous, if not sagacious, to indulge, in all examinations of her character."

When he wrote that he had not yet written

the most valuable sentence in *Eureka*: "A perfect consistency is no other than an absolute truth." He perceived only that poetry had nothing to do with the truth of novelists and teachers. The "first element" of poetry was "the thirst for supernal beauty—a beauty which is not afforded the soul by any existing collocation of the earth's forms—a beauty which, perhaps, no possible combination of those forms would fully produce." Those two negations show that he was on the way to discovery, but he had not yet seen that this beauty was itself the quality of a kind of truth, the truth of art, "an absolute truth" when "a perfect consistency." He had not yet distinguished between the truth of morals and the truth of art. Supernal beauty had not yet been recognised by him as the invariable companion of the only truth that is above argument. Yet, working in the dark, his face was in the right direction, and his eyes were keen. He did not, as a lesser and more headlong thinker would have done, reject moral truth altogether, but generously allowed it its humble place in poetry, its importance as of a colour or a note of music with a higher end to serve. Benedetto Croce goes no further.

In *The Poetic Principle*, which, published in 1850, is a lecture, and so in its final form probably represents his ideas very shortly before his death,

he still does not follow the line of thought which *Eureka* had thrown open. He is more polite to the truth of logic (in issuing that book he had openly set up as a thinker) but he does not call poetry by any name that would show he had seen the trend of his own thinking, and recognised poetry as truth of a different kind.

"With as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would, nevertheless, limit in some measure its modes of inculcation. I would limit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe; she has no sympathy with the myrtles. All *that* which is so indispensable in Song, is precisely all *that* with which *she* has nothing to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox to wreathe her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood, which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind indeed who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth."

This would seem final. I shall run the risk of

being myself considered theory-mad, if I point out that he protests against the attempted reconciliation not of poetry and truth, but of lyrical and logical truth, of the concrete and the abstract, or, as Croce puts it, of intuition and conception.

He sums up the result of his thinking in these two paragraphs:

"To recapitulate, then: I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty.* Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

"A few words, however, in explanation. That pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognise as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the Heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least *most*

readily attainable in the poem. It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work; but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that *Beauty* which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem."

Bold utterance, this, in the America of Lowell, Longfellow, and Emerson.

Poe's theories, however, did not stop at a definition of poetry. Spending much of his time in reviewing bad poets, and learning continually from his own work in prose, he busied himself in many considerations of craftsmanship. Baudelaire calls him "un poète qui prétend que son poème a été composé d'après son poétique." His *poétique* was sufficiently detailed. It was no collection of vague theories, but had a practical influence on what he did. That one of his beliefs that has been most discussed is concerned with length. He held that a long poem does not exist, and that books of this appearance are really collections of independent lyrics. He supported this theorem in an ingenious and irrefutable manner. He writes in one of the *Marginalia*: " . . . to appreciate thoroughly the work of what we call genius is to possess all the

genius by which the work was produced." Now that is a separation of the work of art from the painted canvas or the printed book, similar to that accomplished by Benedetto Croce, in his *Theory of Æsthetic*. It perceives that the work of art has a mental rather than a physical existence, and that the canvas or the book are only the stimuli that make possible its continual renaissance. The picture or poem is a collaboration between artist and student, and exists only so long as this collaboration lasts. With this clearly understood, he writes in *The Poetic Principle:*

"I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such."

He continues:

"There are, no doubt, many who have found difficulty in reconciling the critical dictum that the *Paradise Lost* is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining

for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of true poetry there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical prejudgment can force us to admire; but if, upon completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book (that is to say, commencing with the second), we shall be surprised at now finding that admirable which we had before condemned—that damnable which we had previously so much admired. It follows from all this that the ultimate, aggregate, or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun is a nullity: and this is precisely the fact."

There is a commonly accepted distinction between lyrical and other poems, which appears on examination to be merely a rough quantitative division, that counts short poems lyrical. In the light of this distinction it has been suggested that Poe's arguments against long poems were prompted by the fact that he was a lyrical, and short-breathed poet himself. His opinion had a broader foundation. There is no passage in his critical work that goes to prove that he had not,

and many that show that he had recognised, like Croce in our own day, the lyrical nature of all art. He perceived that the essential quality of art, whether drama, poem, statue, melody or picture, is this same lyricism that was once attributed only to poems of a certain brevity. Again and again in his work are indications of a mind grappling with problems that his own understanding set far out of reach of his country and time. Poe fought many battles the very dust of which could not appear to his contemporaries.

But he could turn from questions as important as these, and, with equal eagerness and vivacity, discuss the details of his art. Nothing connected with poetry was too small for his notice.

In *The Rationale of Verse* he attacks the teachers of versification much as Hazlitt invaded the pedagogic realm of English Grammar. Hazlitt asks "Is Quackery a thing, *i.e.*, a substance?" in angry comment on the usual definition of a noun. "Versification," Poe quotes in scorn, "is the art of arranging words into lines of correspondent length, so as to produce harmony by the regular alternation of syllables differing in quantity." He proceeds to show that it is nothing of the sort, and, in doing so, makes several notes that let us see how carefully he has thought about his art. He discusses, for example, the question

of synæresis, and loudly objects to the practice of writing silv'ry, am'rous, flow'ring, in order to comply with the arbitrary demands of a fantastic scheme of feet. "Blending," he says, "is the plain English for *synæresis*, but there should be *no* blending; neither is an anapæst *ever* employed for an iambus, or a dactyl for a trochee." He pointed out that "there was no absolute necessity for adhering to the precise number of syllables, provided the time required for the whole foot was preserved inviolate." He takes the line,

"Or laugh and shake in Rabelais' easy chair,"

and asks if we suppose it should be scanned and pronounced

"Ŏr laŭgh | ănd shāke | ĭn Rāb | ĕlaĭs' ēa | sў chāir,"

instead of sounding Rabelais in three syllables, the last two being in quick time, so equalising and at the same time delightfully varying the foot. He was not advocating any looseness of metre. On the contrary, he held that "that rhythm is erroneous (at some point or other, more or less obvious) which *any* ordinary reader *can*, without design, read improperly. It is the business of the poet so to construct his line that the intention *must* be caught *at once*." But he states the general proposition that "in all rhythms the prevalent or distinctive feet may

be varied at will, and nearly at random, by the *occasional* introduction of equivalent feet—that is to say, feet the sum of whose syllabic times is equal to the sum of the syllabic times of the distinctive feet." This little charter is the base of the delicious liberties of such modern verse as Mr. Yeats', and holds the secret of all the gossamer swayings of those melodies that are too delicate for definition, and tune our ears to hear the music of the fairies.

Poe himself makes frequent appeal to it. For example, in:

"No rays from the holy heaven come down
On the long night-time of that town;
But light from out the lurid sea
Streams up the turrets silently,
Gleams up the pinnacles far and free:
Up domes, up spires, up kingly halls,
Up fanes, up Babylon-like walls,
Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers
Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers,
Up many and many a marvellous shrine
Whose wreathèd friezes intertwine
The viol, the violet, and the vine."

The last line of this wonderful little scrap of music was the favourite verse of Ernest Dowson.*

Throughout all Poe's writings on poetry blows

* See Mr. Arthur Symons' Essay, prefixed to Dowson's Poems.

a refreshing wind of sense. He defines the object of art, and, that done, refuses to let detail obstruct the distant vision. Details are all-important, but he insists on seeing them as details, as means, not ends, and will not allow the flying dust of argument to blind him to the purpose in relation to which alone they are worth discussion. He writes of refrains, of internal and triplicate rhyme, of the vivid effect that can be wrought by the use of rhyme at unexpected places, and, in all this, never for a moment allows himself to generalise without a view to practice. He upholds legitimate liberties, because they are a help to the making of beauty. He condemns illegitimate licence, because it is a help to the vanity of the incompetent. Like Dionysius of Halicarnassus, he has no praise for the inversion of the poetasters. If a man wishes to speak of a well, whose waters swell amid its chill and drear confines, he must not write

"Its confines chill and drear amid,"

and imagine that he is making poetry.

"Few things have a greater tendency than inversion to render verse feeble and ineffective. In most cases where a line is spoken of as 'forcible,' the force may be referred to directness of expression. A vast majority of the passages which have become household through frequent quota-

tion owe their popularity either to this directness, or, in general, to the scorn of 'poetic licence.' In short, as regards verbal construction, *the more prosaic* a poetical style is, the better."

In writing of the possibilities of verse, Poe traces a possible history of its development from the rudimentary spondee.

"The very germ of a thought, seeking satisfaction in equality of sound, would result in the construction of words of two syllables equally accented. . . . The perception of monotone having given rise to an attempt at its relief, the first thought in this new direction would be that of collating two or more words formed each of two syllables differently accented (that is to say, short and long) but having the same order in each word: in other terms, of collating two or more iambuses, or two or more trochees. . . . The success of the experiment with the trochees or iambuses (the one would have suggested the other) must have led to a trial of dactyls or anapæsts—natural dactyls or anapæsts—dactylic or anapæstic *words*. . . . We have now gone so far as to suppose men constructing indefinite sequences of spondaic, iambic, trochaic, dactylic or anapæstic words. In *extending* these sequences, they would be again arrested by the sense of monotone. A succession of spondees would *immediately* have displeased; one of iambuses or of trochees, on account of the variety included within the foot itself, would have taken longer to displease; one of dactyls or anapæsts, still

longer; but even the last, if extended very far, must have become wearisome. The idea, first of curtailing, and secondly, of defining the length of a sequence, would thus at once have arisen. Here then is the *line*, or verse proper. . . . Lines being once introduced, the necessity of distinctly defining these lines *to the ear* (as yet written verse does not exist) would lead to a scrutiny of their capabilities *at their terminations;* and now would spring up the idea of equality in sound between the final syllables—in other words, of *rhyme*. . . . That men have so obstinately and blindly insisted, in general, even up to the present day, in confining rhyme to the ends of lines, when its effect is even better applicable elsewhere, intimates, in my opinion, the sense of some *necessity* in the connection of the end with rhyme —hints that the origin of rhyme lay in a necessity which connected it with the end—shows that neither mere accident nor mere fancy gave rise to the connection—points, in a word, at the very necessity which I have suggested (that of some mode of defining lines *to the ear*) as the true origin of rhyme. . . . The narrowness of the limits within which verse composed of natural feet alone must necessarily have been confined, would have led, after a *very* brief interval, to the trial and immediate adoption of artificial feet—that is to say, of feet not constituted each of a single word, but two or even three words, or of parts of words. These feet would be intermingled with natural ones. . . . And now, in our suppositious progress, we have gone so far as to exhaust all the *essentialities* of verse."

He proceeds to discuss such valuable inessentials as alliteration and refrains. The frequent use of the refrain is characteristic of his own poetry. It is sometimes the burden at the closes of the stanzas that he believes was its origin, but he notices "that further cultivation would improve also the refrain in slightly varying the phrase at each repetition or (as I have attempted to do in *The Raven*) in retaining the phrase and varying its application—although the latter point is not strictly a rhythmical effect alone." In *The Raven* "Nevermore" does not become the refrain until the eighth out of the eighteen stanzas. "Nothing more," varied in application, ends six of them; "evermore" the seventh. Of the eleven stanzas that end in "nevermore," six of the last lines are differently worded. The monotony of the remaining five refrains, "Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore,'" is made surprising and changeful by the stanzas that they close. A similar method is followed in *The Bridal Ballad* and, much more delicately, in *Ulalume*, where three of the nine stanzas end with variations upon

"It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir:
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir,"

which is also a good example of Poe's economical use of alliteration. Another form of refrain, that

is no more than a reinforcing echo, is used in this poem and in others.

"The skies they were ashen and sober;
The leaves they were crisped and sere,
The leaves they were withering and sere."

In *Ulalume* it is part of the obvious design of the stanzas, which are meant to be whispering-galleries. Elsewhere it is made to seem a careless accident. In the musical and wave-like flow of speech it is as if one wave has chosen to break before its time.

"In the greenest of our valleys
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
Radiant palace—raised its head."

In the following example it is combined with another effect that is peculiarly Poe's:

"Over the lilies there that wave
And weep above a nameless grave!
They wave: from out their fragrant tops
Eternal dews come down in drops."

Here, beside the half-suggested echo of "wave," is a wholly unexpected rhyme. Poe's theory on this point was not early developed. He writes in *The Rationale of Verse*, continuing his history:

"Finally, poets when fairly wearied with following precedent—following it the more closely

the less they perceived it in company with reason —would adventure so far as to indulge in positive rhyme at other points than the ends of lines. First, they would put it in the middle of the line; then at some point where the multiple would be less obvious; then, alarmed at their own audacity, they would undo all their work by cutting these lines in two. And here is the fruitful source of the infinity of 'short metre,' by which modern poetry, if not distinguished, is at least disgraced. It would require a high degree, indeed, both of cultivation and of courage, on the part of any versifier, to enable him to place his rhymes—and let them remain—at unquestionably their best position, that of unusual and *unanticipated* intervals."

Poe had not always thought so, and his own verse had been so "disgraced." The lines of *Lenore*, as they were first printed, were cut in two and in three.

Oscar Wilde's *Sphinx* is the best example I can remember of thus printing the lines with reference to themselves rather than to the rhymes that they contain.

"The river horses in the slime trumpeted when
they saw him come
Odorous with Syrian galbanum and smeared
with spikenard and with thyme."

The delicacy of the lines would be cruelly bruised if they were printed

"The river horses in the slime
Trumpeted when they saw him come
Odorous with Syrian galbanum
And smeared with spikenard and with thyme."

Examples of Poe's unanticipated rhymes are:

"And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic horrors never felt before,"

and

"That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee."

* * * * *

But although it would be interesting to follow in detail the influence of Poe's attention to his instrument on the music he touched from its strings, it is perhaps more profitable to consider them separately. I wish to turn now to a discussion of the characteristics of Poe's small body of verse. One or two curious facts at once present themselves for explanation.

Scarcely any English critics but many French have held his poetry to be his most perfect expression. There is something in it that annoys the English reader, if ever so slightly, and that something disappears for the foreigner. This is itself sufficient to suggest that we must put it down to a quality of his language. In doing so

we are on very quaggy ground, since words and their haloes of suggested meaning are the very stuff of poetry, and in quarrelling with their use we are very sure to be scarcely upon speaking terms with the poems in which they are contained. It is impossible to quarrel with a poet's wording without quarrelling with his poetry. But there is in much new poetry a novelty of language that distresses us until we are accustomed to it. Dialect poetry suffers from a similar disadvantage. It is like seeing a new actress in an old part: a novelty not distressing to any one unfamiliar with the part, and not haunted by memories of the older actresses who played it so incomparably well. This novelty or strangeness of language is less keenly perceived by a foreigner. Baudelaire and Mallarmé are not shocked by it, because they do not see it, and, in their wonderful prose versions, it naturally disappears. We may even have to go to these French translations to learn the pleasure that waits for us in the originals.

I choose an example from *The Sleeper*, the poem of all Poe's that I consider least touched by this finger of strangeness.

"*O lady bright! can it be right,*
This window open to the night?
The wanton airs from the tree-top,
Laughingly through the lattice drop;

The bodiless airs, a wizard rout,
Flit through thy chamber in and out,
And wave the curtain canopy
So fitfully, so fearfully,
Above the closed and fringèd lid
'Neath which thy slumb'ring soul lies hid,
That o'er the floor and down the wall,
Like ghosts the shadows rise and fall.
O lady dear, hast thou no fear?
Why and what art thou dreaming here?
Sure thou art come o'er far-off seas,
A wonder to these garden trees!
Strange is thy pallor; strange thy dress,
And this all solemn silentness!"

I can read that now with a pleasure quite unspoilt by the memory that once the two lines here printed in italics pained me so that I could find no readiness of enjoyment for the others. Incredible as now it seems to me, I had to learn its excellence from Mallarmé's version where those two sharp repeats (not objectionable, perhaps admirable, in themselves) were smoothed away with the "dear" and the "bright" that had bothered me.

"Oh! dame brillante, vraiment est-ce bien, cette fenêtre ouverte a la nuit? Les airs folâtres se laissent choir du haut de l'arbre rieusement par la persienne; les airs incorporels, troupe magique, voltigent au dedans et au dehors de la chambre, et agitent les rideaux du baldaquin si brusquement — si terriblement — au-dessus des closes paupières frangées où ton âme en le somme

gît cachée, que, le long du plancher et en bas du mur, comme des fantômes s'élève et descend l'ombre. Oh! dame aimée, n'as-tu pas peur? Pourquoi ou à quoi rêves-tu maintenant ici? Sûr, tu es venue de par les mers du loin, merveille pour les arbres de ces jardins. Étrange est ta paleur! étrange est ta toilette! étrange par-dessus tout ta longueur de cheveux, et tout ce solennel silence!"

And was this the poem that my impatience hid from me? I turned from one to the other until at last Poe's language became my own, and his verses flapped their dusky, jewelled wings unsmudged before my eyes.

Poe is not alone among poets in thus not easily becoming manifest in his own person. Himself found the language of Wordsworth repugnant and vulgar. A poet like Lascelles Abercrombie is not so easily recognised as, for example, a poet like Ernest Dowson. When Abercrombie writes:

"And full of the very ardour out of God
Come words, lit with white fires, having past through
The fearful hearth in Heaven where, unmixt,
Unfed, the First Beauty terribly burns.
A great flame is the world, splendid and brave;
But words come carrying such a vehemence
Of Godhead, glowing so hot out of the holy kiln,

The place of fire whence the blaze of existence
rose,
That dulled in brightness looks the world
against them,
Even the radiant thought of man,"

he will find even worthy readers to ask themselves, "And is this poetry?" They may ask it more than once, before, at last, the thing is freed for them, or the passages of their ears for it, and their hearts greet it with joyful acclamation. And the reasons for this foreignness of much true poetry are not all the same. With Abercrombie it may be that his words are accustomed to a high world of metaphysical thought where we must climb to meet them. With Wordsworth it may be simply the result of an exaggerated theory, fertile like all exaggerations. With Poe, it may be the strange web between himself and the America he knew, so much further from England than that of Hawthorne or of Emerson.

It would be possible to collect many instances of an apparent deafness or bluntness that is painful to those brought up in another atmosphere, where certain discords or worn-out expressions are become forbidden things or laughable accidents.

From *Ulalume:*

"She revels in a region of sighs."

From *Lenore:*

"The sweet Lenore hath 'gone before,'* with Hope that flew beside."

From *The Raven:*

"Is there—is there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore."

There is this difficulty of language that repels readers from his poetry. There are also some considerations of technique. The most obvious characteristic of Poe's verse is its tunefulness.

"It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. It may be, indeed, that here the sublime end is, now and then, attained in fact. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which cannot have been unfamiliar to the angels."

Such notes are sometimes struck by Poe, as in the bodiless *Israfel.* But sometimes, also, his rather indelicate melody makes him suffer from the admiration of those who like tavern music, not because, like Sir Thomas Browne, they hear in it some echo of the music of the spheres, but

* It has been objected that the vulgarisation of the phrase printed in quotation marks has taken place since Poe used it. The reply is that it was actually so printed in a version of *Lenore* published in Poe's lifetime.

because they require of music, as of poetry, that it shall rest their heads and be a kind of tuneful soporific. On the other hand, it brings him the contempt of some more valuable readers, who remember the rather heartless melody of *The Bells*, and dismiss him as a jingle-monger. Sometimes, too, words and melody do not match, and in "marrying music to immortal verse" he makes a *mariage de convenance*, and, though the bride be lovely and the bridegroom strong, there is no wedding guest but is conscious of the ugliness of their union, even if he feels this ugliness only as an uncomfortable dissatisfaction in himself.

But, in his best poems, as in his best tales, he touches perfection. His finest stories are unalterable from start to finish. His rare poems are as flawless as a crystal drop, whose symmetry the touch of a finger, be it never so delicate, would utterly destroy. *To Helen*, for example:

"Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicæan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

"On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naïad airs, have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.

"Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land!"

Or *Israfel*, more than worthy of the improvement on the *Koran* with which he introduces it:

"And the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures."—*Koran.*

"In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
Whose heart-strings are a lute;
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars (so legends tell)
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
Of his voice, all mute.

"Tottering above
In her highest noon,
The enamoured moon
Blushes with love,
While, to listen, the red levin
(With the rapid Pleiads, even,
Which were seven)
Pauses in Heaven.

"And they say (the starry choir
And the other listening things)
That Israfeli's fire
Is owing to that lyre
By which he sits and sings,
The trembling living wire
Of those unusual strings.

"But the skies that angel trod,
Where deep thoughts are a duty,
Where Love's a grown-up God,
Where the Houri glances are
Imbued with all the beauty
Which we worship in a star.

"Therefore thou art not wrong,
Israfeli, who despisest
An unimpassioned song;
To thee the laurels belong,
Best bard, because the wisest:
Merrily live, and long!

"The ecstasies above
With thy burning measures suit:
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
With the fervor of thy lute:
Well may the stars be mute!

"Yes, Heaven is thine; but this
Is a world of sweets and sours;
Our flowers are merely—flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

"If I could dwell
Where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky."

Some of his most famous poems seem to me among his least successful. *The Raven*, for

example, a *tour de force*, a skilful piece of technique, is a well-shaped body that has never had a soul to lose. In *Ulalume* skill almost swamps inspiration. *Annabel Lee*, another work of his last years, may have been spoilt for me by painstaking young ladies at their mothers' pianos. I cannot read it with pleasure, though I find myself repeating some of its lines. I find his best poetry in the revisions of his youthful work, like *The Sleeper*, and *The City in the Sea*, and the poems printed above.

It seems, on first observing it, strange that the note of horror that sounds so often in the tales should be almost absent from the poems. There is, certainly, *The Conqueror Worm*, and, perhaps, *The Haunted Palace:* but the one belongs to *Ligeia*, and the other to *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The gloom of the poems is of a less various texture than that of the prose. I believe that the difference is due to a rather curious misconception as to beauty itself. In other parts of this book we see how far Poe walked on the right track in eliminating from the beautiful any kind of passion, in showing that beauty is a condition and not an emotion, in asking that poetry should aim only at securing this condition, and not allow itself to be deflected by any consideration of didacticism or other side issue. Here we must notice that he went too far, and narrowed

the scope of his verse by rejecting, as incapable of beauty, a great mass of material that his own prose showed need not be anything of the kind. He writes: "The author who aims at the purely beautiful in a prose tale is labouring at a great disadvantage. For Beauty can be better treated in the poem. Not so with terror, or passion, or horror, or a multitude of other such points." Elsewhere he still more clearly betrays himself:

"We shall reach, however, more immediately a distinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recognises the ambrosia, which nourishes his soul, in the bright orbs that shine in Heaven, in the volutes of the flower, in the clustering of low shrubberies, in the waving of the grain-fields, in the slanting of the tall, Eastern trees, in the blue distance of mountains, in the grouping of clouds, in the twinkling of half-hidden brooks, in the gleaming of silver rivers, in the repose of sequestered lakes, in the star-mirroring depths of lonely wells. He perceives it in the songs of birds, in the harp of Æolus, in the sighing of the night-wind, in the repining voice of the forest, in the surf that complains to the shore, in the fresh breath of the woods, in the scent of the violet, in the voluptuous perfume of the hyacinth, in the suggestive odour that comes to him at eventide from far-distant, undiscovered islands, over dim oceans, illimitable and unexplored. He owns it in all

noble thoughts, in all unworldly motives, in all holy impulses, in all chivalrous, generous, and self-sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman, in the grace of her step, in the lustre of her eye, in the melody of her voice, in her soft laughter, in her sigh, in the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deeply feels it in her winning endearments, in her burning enthusiasms, in her gentle charities, in her meek and devotional endurances ; but above all—ah ! far above all—he kneels to it, he worships it in the faith, in the purity, in the strength, in the altogether divine majesty of her love."

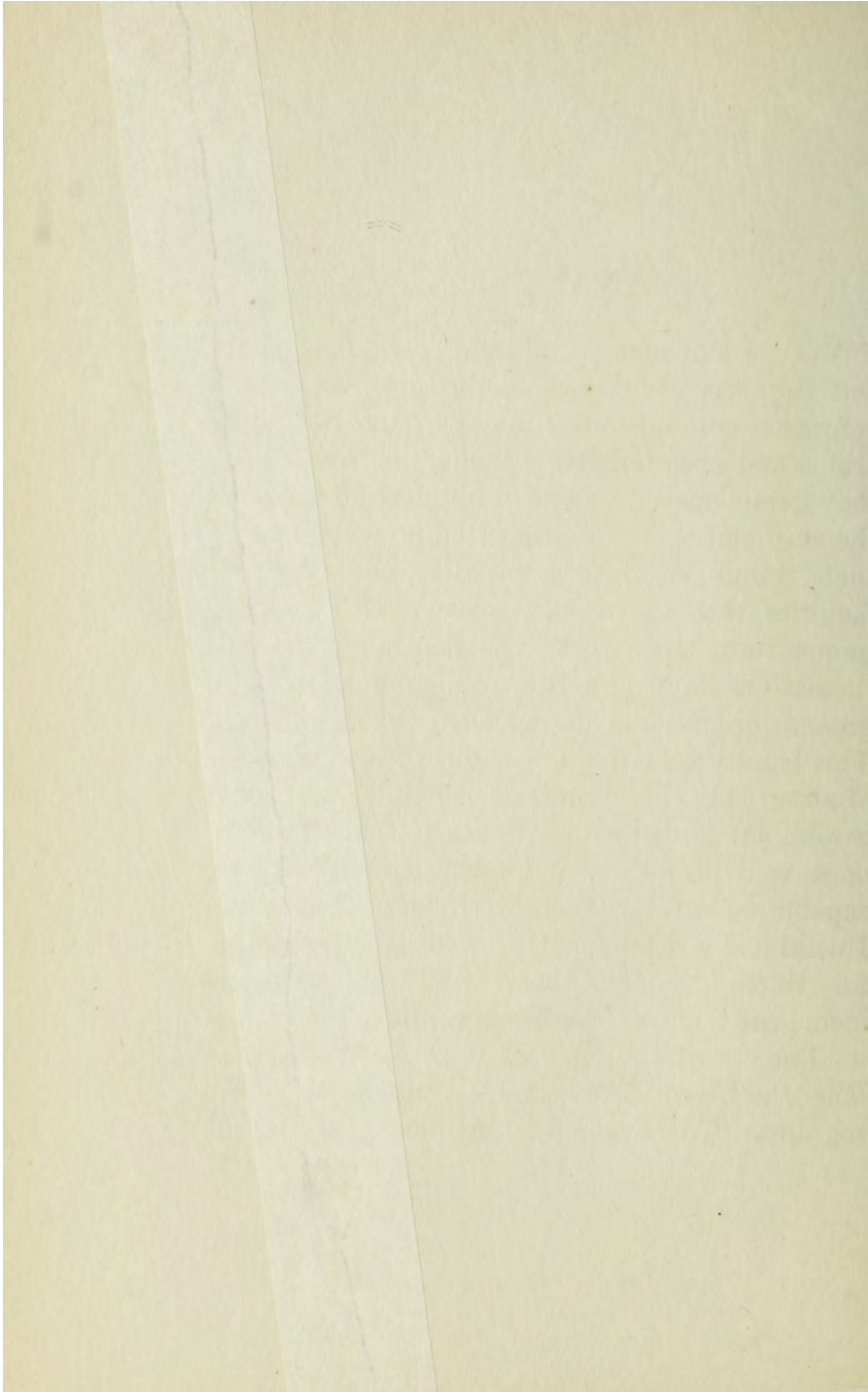
There is more than a hint here of declamation and an impressible audience, but, taken with the sentences quoted before it, it provides the key we seek. What is it but a catalogue of lovely accidents, from which all that we have not grown accustomed, in our loose way, to call beautiful, is excluded ? With such a conception of the inspirations of poetry, counting them distinct from those of prose, it is not surprising that Poe's excursions as a poet seemed visits to Arcady. He never returned to his youthful poems without the feelings of a man remembering the Golden Age. He brought to their revision the knowledge that prose work had given him, and made no changes that were not for the better. But he never let his poetry follow his development. It represented only one of his aspects. He would

keep it always a charming child, or a dreaming Eros that no Psyche could wake with burning oil.

> " Rafael made a century of sonnets,
> Made and wrote them in a certain volume
> Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
> Else he only used to draw Madonnas."

Poe's verse was to the prose-writer what Rafael's sonnets were to the painter, that other art, not his, and yet particularly his own, cherished for a supreme purpose. In it, to paraphrase Browning, he gained the artist's joy, missed the man's sorrow, finding the work more complex, and so, to such as he, a greater pleasure, and fixing in it, and refixing in revision, those moments that seemed so fair as to be foreign to his life.

ANALYSIS



ANALYSIS

TWO sorts of men spend time on riddles: fools and the very clever; fools because, in sitting before a conundrum, aimlessly puzzling their brains and occasionally chancing on a solution, they gain a specious sense of intellectual activity; the very clever because they find in acrostics and such things an outlet for that one of their faculties that moves most easily with its own momentum, that works ceaselessly in spite of themselves, and, like the grindstone of a mill, groans for material on which to exercise itself. This faculty is analysis, a tool in the equipment of all artists. So important is it to them that it would not be surprising to learn that the converse were also true, and that all analysts were capable of art. If it were discovered that Euclid had written poetry beside those wonderful thirteen books, there would be no more incongruity in the double accomplishment than in Poe's writing *Silence: a Fable* as well as *The Purloined Letter* and his article on cryptograms. There would be no incongruity at all.

The same faculty that produced the one made also possible the other. Analysis is the art of disentangling, and the muddled skein of our feelings and images must first be disentangled before we can knit together the firm plait of a lyrical expression. Analysis is more than observation; it clears the moss from the pebble and lets its colouring appear, and with careful fingers frees the honeysuckle from its surrounding brambles. It makes selection possible, though the poet, conscious of what he does, would say more truly that it helps him to reject, to throw aside the arbitrary, the inessential, leaving, perhaps, gaps that miraculously fill themselves like the holes we make when we scoop a floating piece of dirt from a still pool of water.

This faculty was extraordinarily developed in Poe, and overflowed its legitimate place in his creative work. It had its share in laying upon him the curse of self-consciousness for which we value him so highly. It was, at last, like fire who is better as a slave than as a master, to rise up and battle with his imagination instead of doing its loyal best to aid it. He found, like Brockden Brown, whose books very probably influenced him, that "curiosity, like virtue, is its own reward," or, at least, that the delight of the analysis that curiosity inspires is sufficient as a

motive for itself. His exercise of it became as necessary to him as absinthe to the absinthe-drinker; it was greedy of his energies, and grew in greed with his efforts to satisfy it. He might have cried with Faustus: "Sweet Analytics, 'tis thou hast ravished me!" The same faculty that made possible the lyrical excellence of his best works, and gave his critical articles their most valuable paragraphs, spoilt *Eureka*, and urged him to the solution of cryptograms and the study of handwriting; and, turning from the solution of puzzles to their manufacture, set him to the composition of acrostic sonnets and to the invention of tales of analysis in which it becomes the material as well as the tool of art, the excitement of reasoning being substituted for that of love or terror.

There is a kind of insolence in the making of acrostics when one might be making poetry. It is an impertinence in the face of the gods, as if a man running a race were to stop for a moment before the judges' stand, and fold a cocked hat from a piece of paper, before resuming the contest whose result they are to decide. The excellence of the cocked hat—and most of Poe's exercises in this kind exhibit an almost deplorable cleverness—does not in the least affect our half-admiring, half-resentful impatience of his having dared to fold it in such circumstances.

"'Seldom we find,' says Solomon Don Dunce,
'Half an idea in the profoundest sonnet.
Through all the flimsy things we see at once
As easily as through a Naples bonnet—
Trash of all trash! How can a lady don it?
Yet heavier far than your Petrarchan stuff,
Owl-downy nonsense that the faintest puff
Twirls into trunk-paper the while you con it.'
And veritably, Sol is right enough.
The general tuckermanities are arrant
Bubbles, ephemeral and *so* transparent;
But *this* is, now, you may depend upon it,
Stable, opaque, immortal—all by dint
Of the dear names that lie concealed within't."

That is one of Poe's cocked hats. To unfold it, take the first letter in the first line, the second in the second line, the third in the third, and so on, until the fourteen letters spread out into a name that, but for the insolent fun of it (though it reads dully to us), might have been better written so than in these fourteen empty verses.

There is something of the same flippant seriousness in the analysis of Maelzel's Chess-Player, an automaton very neatly and unnecessarily pulled to pieces with the help of Sir David Brewster. Time is wasted just as earnestly in the still cleverer essay on solving cryptograms. Only, when we turn from all these exercises (which may have served a purpose in turning play to bread and butter) and read the four tales in which

Poe's analysis snatched an independent æsthetic value, and turned into a kind of poetry, have we the satisfaction of feeling that there is no more a question of cocked hats, but of the business of the day.

These four tales are *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, *The Purloined Letter*, and *The Gold Bug*. Of these, *The Gold Bug*, though not the first written, is not free from elements of another kind. The law-court atmosphere of evidence and deduction is shaken by breaths of romance. The skull and cross-bones of Captain Kidd wave on a black flag before our eyes, and the process of analysis is carried out in a lonely hut and in a forest of tropical trees. When the analysis is over, the tale closes on a note of different character, a hollow knell, so carefully sounded as almost to make us forget the original interest of the tale in a moment of romantic speculation. "Perhaps a couple of blows with a mattock were sufficient, while his coadjutors were busy in the pit; perhaps it required a dozen—who shall tell?" For some reason or other Poe was afraid to trust himself to the mechanism he had already proved. He needed flesh and blood to steady his belief in the thin steel framework and infinitesimal wires of his machine.

But in the other tales, the trilogy of Dupin, he

gaily cast off his safe anchor in romance, and adventured on the untried wings of curiosity and analysis. In the beginning he was perhaps over-conscious of the novelty of his experiment. The first eleven pages of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* are taken up with an elaborate account of the new motive power, almost as if he were reassuring himself. He has to talk of analysis, and then of its personification in Dupin, of the motive power and then of the engine in which it is to be used, before, in the story itself, he gives, as it were, a trial and a specimen flight. *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* has scarcely a page of introduction. There is a short reference to the former flight, and the inventor is in the air again. *The Purloined Letter* is without preliminaries. Confident that the machine will bear him, he rises instantly from the ground.

It is possible to illustrate the method and design of this machine by showing the model, the small example of analysis that Poe used in his introduction to the first of his three experiments. The specimen will cover a few pages that can ill be spared, but will repay us by being at hand for reference. It is, indeed, a complete tale in itself, a working model designed for examination.

"We were strolling one night down a long dirty street, in the vicinity of the Palais Royal.

Being both, apparently, occupied with thought, neither of us had spoken a syllable for fifteen minutes at least. All at once Dupin broke forth with these words:

"'He is a very little fellow, that's true, and would do better for the *Théâtre des Variétés*.'

"'There can be no doubt of that,' I replied unwittingly, and not at first observing (so much had I been absorbed in reflection) the extraordinary manner in which the speaker had chimed in with my meditations. In an instant afterward I recollected myself, and my astonishment was profound.

"'Dupin,' said I, gravely, 'this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should know I was thinking of——?' Here I paused, to ascertain beyond a doubt whether he really knew of whom I thought.

"'Of Chantilly,' said he, 'why do you pause? You were remarking to yourself that his diminutive figure unfitted him for tragedy.'

"This was precisely what had formed the subject of my reflections. Chantilly was a *quondam* cobbler of the Rue St. Denis, who, becoming stage-mad, had attempted the *rôle* of Xerxes, in Crébillon's tragedy so called, and been notoriously pasquinaded for his pains.

"'Tell me, for Heaven's sake,' I exclaimed, 'the method—if method there is—by which you have been enabled to fathom my soul in this matter.' In fact I was even more startled than I would have been willing to express.

"'It was the fruiterer,' replied my friend, 'who brought you to the conclusion that the mender of soles was not of sufficient height for Xerxes *et id genus omne*.'

"'The fruiterer!—you astonish me—I know no fruiterer whomsoever.'

"'The man who ran up against you as we entered the street—it may have been fifteen minutes ago.'

"I now remembered that, in fact, a fruiterer, carrying upon his head a large basket of apples, had nearly thrown me down, by accident, as we passed from the Rue C—— into the thoroughfare where we stood; but what this had to do with Chantilly I could not possibly understand.

"There was not a particle of *charlatanerie* about Dupin. 'I will explain,' he said, 'and that you may comprehend all clearly, we will first retrace the course of your meditations, from the moment in which I spoke to you until that of the *rencontre* with the fruiterer in question. The larger links of the chain run thus—Chantilly, Orion, Dr. Nichols, Epicurus, Stereotomy, the street stones, the fruiterer.'

"There are few persons who have not, at some period of their lives, amused themselves in retracing the steps by which particular conclusions of their own minds have been attained. The occupation is often full of interest, and he who attempts it for the first time is astonished by the apparently illimitable distance and incoherence between the starting-point and the goal. What, then, must have been my amazement when I heard the Frenchman speak what he had just

spoken, and when I could not help acknowledging that he had spoken the truth. He continued:

"'We had been talking of horses, if I remember aright, just before leaving the Rue C——. This was the last subject we discussed. As we crossed into the street, a fruiterer, with a large basket upon his head, brushing quickly past us, thrust you upon a pile of paving-stones collected at a spot where the causeway is undergoing repair. You stepped upon one of the loose fragments, slipped, slightly strained your ankle, appeared vexed or sulky, muttered a few words, turned to look at the pile, and then proceeded in silence. I was not particularly attentive to what you did, but observation has become with me, of late, a species of necessity.

"'You kept your eyes upon the ground—glancing, with a petulant expression at the holes and ruts in the pavement (so that I saw you were still thinking of the stones), until we reached the little alley called Lamartine, which has been paved, by way of experiment, with the overlapping and riveted blocks. Here your countenance brightened up, and perceiving your lips move, I could not doubt that you murmured the word "stereotomy," a term very affectedly applied to this species of pavement. I knew that you could not say to yourself "stereotomy" without being brought to think of atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus; and since, when we discussed this subject not very long ago, I mentioned to you how singularly, yet with how little notice, the vague guesses of that noble

Greek had met with confirmation in the late nebular cosmogony, I felt that you could not avoid casting your eyes upwards to the great *nebula* in Orion, and I certainly expected that you would do so. You did look up, and I was now assured that I had correctly followed your steps. But in that bitter *tirade* upon Chantilly, which appeared in yesterday's *Musée*, the satirist, making some disgraceful allusions to the cobbler's change of name upon assuming the buskin, quoted a Latin line about which we have often conversed. I mean the line:

"'Perdidit antiquum litera prima sonum.

"'I had told you that this was in reference to Orion, formerly written Urion; and, from certain pungencies connected with this explanation I was aware that you could not have forgotten it. It was clear, therefore, that you would not fail to combine the two ideas of Orion and Chantilly. That you did combine them I saw by the character of the smile which passed over your lips. You thought of the poor cobbler's immolation. So far, you had been stooping in your gait; but now I saw you draw yourself up to your full height. I was then sure that you reflected upon the diminutive figure of Chantilly. At this point I interrupted your meditations to remark that as, in fact, he *was* a very little fellow that Chantilly, he would do better at the *Théâtre des Variétés*.'"

The interest of that anecdote is the same as the interest of the three tales to which it is a

prelude. It does not consist in dulled waiting upon a solution, but in "a pleasurable activity of mind." It is a kind of gymnastic with which Poe exercised his analytical powers, and it is also something more. Poe's work is difficult to treat of as a whole, because of his tendency to the segregation of particular moods of his mind. This separation of moods is common to all men of lyrical expression; but, whereas with most artists the moods separated are temperamental, the faculty of analysis assisting the disentangling of one mood from another, Poe goes further, and separates analysis itself. He, at bottom a critic and thinker, wore several masks in turn, and a study of him can only hope to reach the truth by the examination of all these masks as circumstantial evidence. But of them all, analysis is the one that, for good or evil, he least readily laid aside, the only one that completely obscures his possession of other dominoes. The puzzles, the acrostics, the cryptograms, show how much waste energy this mask allowed him to spend. The anecdote we have just read will show how he was able to turn this faculty of his brain into the material for lyrical expression.

In those tales Poe does not ask us to be surprised at the cleverness of Dupin. The little story I have quoted tells us nothing about Dupin but his name, yet our ignorance does not in the

least affect our enjoyment. We are amazed, not at Dupin's subtlety, but at the human mind. Dupin is not an analyst, but analysis. It is for that reason that some people have complained of his lack of individuality. They might as well complain of Nicolete in the old French tale. Dupin and Nicolete are not individual but universal. Not that I would suggest any coarse allegory in either case; although Poe has been very careful, in the few details he cares to give us, to start no false hare of personality, and to leave Dupin free to be what he is. Analysis, for example, loves the dark. So does Dupin. "His manner at these moments (the exercise of his analytic abilities) was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, ran into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation." Is not that a vivid observation of the physical expression of analysis itself? And then again: "Observing him in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin—the creative and the resolvent." And, finally, "There was not a particle of *charlatanerie* about Dupin." I can imagine Euclid saying the same in a hymn of praise to his geometry. "I will explain," he

said, and Poe's three stories are a lyrical personification of the explaining faculties of the mind.

The abstract can never be the material of art. It has already passed beyond particular expression into the regions of thought. It has left feeling behind. It can no longer lose in translation, since it is practically independent of the words that are used to note it down. But Poe is not moved here by an abstract idea. Dupin is no wooden dummy chosen to illustrate such and such abstract principles. Instead, the reasoning powers of a mind that keenly enjoyed them have flowered suddenly into something concrete and particular. The abstract Love has become the concrete Nicolete, who cast a shadow in the moonlit streets of Beaucaire. A new moment of the unconscious human life (unconscious of itself even in its moments of careful reason) has been isolated and made real. We have another scrap of conscious life in which our brains can shake their weights off and be lucidly alive. Many analysts, geometricians and draughts-players must have surprisedly awakened to themselves in reading those three tales.

Let us now examine the architecture of these stories, in which, perhaps more clearly than in his other work, Poe's skill in narrative is manifest. In the anecdote we have read, the solution and

the question are presented first and together, and the interest is free from any anxiety to know the end. It lies simply in retracing the steps by which the solution was attained. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* the question is first posed, with all the evidence, over which the reader's mind runs in hopeless emulation of the power that is then applied to it before his eyes. The solution follows, and finally the solution and the steps by which it has been found are one by one explained. In *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* the question is first stated, followed by the evidence, interspersed with examples of false reasoning which are disposed of by Dupin, who works through them to the clue, which, as he makes clear, is itself a solution. In *The Purloined Letter* the question is first posed, with all its difficulties. Then there is a proof of its solution (in the production of the missing letter), and finally an account of the methods whereby the problem has been solved. It is plain that the form of the problems is sufficiently various. The constant factor in the reader's intellectual enjoyment lies (apart from wonder, which certainly counts a little) in the swift and bracing gymnastic of following the mental processes that lead to the solutions. Our knowledge of the solutions does not in the least affect it. Our æsthetic pleasure, dependent first upon the lyrical

and concrete inspiration of the whole, is due to the perfection of the conditions under which our mental gymnastic takes place. These tales share the conditions of beauty that belong to Euclid's propositions. There is nothing in them that is unnecessary, nothing merely baulking, no dead matter. In each case question and answer are accurately balanced with each other. The details of question and answer come in the right order; that is to say, in the order most apt for the particular tale. Our æsthetic enjoyment, then, is partly dependent upon plot, an element whose importance in story-telling Poe was one of the first to perceive. Plot does not mean the posing of a question and the keeping of its answer until the end of the story, although in the cruder forms of detective fiction it does manifest its presence in this way. We find ourselves, as so often throughout the book, turning to Poe's own statements of æsthetic theory:

"Plot is very imperfectly understood, and has never been rightly defined. Many persons regard it as mere complexity of incident. In its most rigorous acceptation, it is *that from which no component atom can be removed, and in which none of the component atoms can be displaced, without ruin to the whole;* and although a sufficiently good plot may be constructed, without attention to the whole rigour of this definition, still it is the definition, which the artist should always keep

in view, and always endeavour to consummate in his works."

Many of Poe's best stories fulfil this definition's demands, though in few is their fulfilment so easily seen as in these. Plot, like composition in a picture, is the most recognisable mark of the analytic spirit's presence in creation. Reading again that part of Poe's definition which he has underlined, it is clear that there is no real difference between this manifestation of analysis and that which occurs in every work of art, even if it be without "plot" obvious as such. The same power that separates the contradictory, and rejects the irrelevant in the careful tending of a growing inspiration, helps the artist to this ruder proof of the unity of his work with itself. In this sense there is plot in all works of art. It is indeed a condition of their being. And it is wise to remember this while following Poe in his discussion of plot as the more plainly geometrical element of construction. He contrasts it with the less obvious manifestations of itself, as a man might well contrast the steel girders and ropes of a suspension bridge, beautiful in their direct explanation of themselves, written clear against the sky, with the solid curves of an older bridge whose lines of stress and strain are fleshed in stone, and overgrown with moss and fern.

We must think of this when he says:

"Plot, however, is at best an artificial effect, requiring, like music, not only a natural bias, but long cultivation of taste for its full appreciation; . . . the absence of plot can never be critically regarded as a defect; although its judicious use, in all cases aiding and in no case injuring other effects, must be regarded as of a very high order of merit."

Forgetting it, this paragraph would be rubbish. Remembering it, we see that he points out that a delight in Bach is less facile than a delight in Wagner, and that in all cases construction is vain without an end. The bridge, iron or stone, must cross a river. The work of art must begin with an inspiration.

METAPHYSICS

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"METAPHYSICS," I learn from a respectable dictionary, are "that science which seeks to trace the branches of human knowledge to their first principles in the constitution of our nature, or to find what is the nature of the human mind and its relation to the external world; the science that seeks to know the ultimate grounds of being or what it is that really exists, embracing both psychology and ontology." Now psychology is the science of the soul and ontology that of being, and these were Poe's preoccupations rather than the more easily legible sciences of manners and appearances. I can fairly give this title to a chapter on the character of his researches and in particular on his book *Eureka* and a few of the dialogues, *Monos and Una*, *Eiros and Charmion*, and *The Power of Words*, in which these researches bear æsthetic fruit.

We must beware lest in reading these things we forget, as he found it too easy to forget himself, the character of the man who wrote them. We must not mistake him, as he sometimes

mistook himself, for a logician or a natural philosopher. Poe was a man for whom abstract ideas very readily disintegrated into impressions. He was at times an able acrobat on the trapezes and ladders of reasoning, but he was not a man for whom abstract reasoning could itself take on an æsthetic quality, as with Schopenhauer or Benedetto Croce, whose *Theory of Æsthetic* is itself a beautiful work. This does not contradict what was said in the last chapter. In the analytical tales he is finding beauty not in reasoning but in the reasoning mood. I pointed out there that analysis was the faculty in Poe which most readily obscured his possession of others. He seems almost to leave the bulk of himself behind when he comes to argue, and, consequently, his arguments, forgiven for their contexts, are always disappointing. This may seem ungracious speech of a man whose work is so fruitful in the minds of other men, whose work owes much of its importance to the ideas that underlie it. But we must remember that the ideas that have altered the attitude of artists of their art were more properly close observations on the nature and end of that art, due less to abstract reasoning than to a vivid and concrete perception of particular things. They are the observations of a man, himself an artist, made in those moments when, after close business upon

his table, he lifts his head to look out at the stars in sudden enlightenment about what he has actually been doing. They are different in origin and kind from his reasonings on the cosmos engendered by reading Herschel on astronomy.

In Poe's mind, I repeat, an abstract idea very readily disintegrated into impressions. It would, perhaps, be more exact to say that an abstract idea very readily set a direction to loose impressions already floating there, and so gave them the vitality that made them expressive. Poe leaps boldly from a scientific to a spiritual truth, often, with sublime carelessness, kicking aside the ladders of reason as he flies by a swifter path. There is an excellent example in the conclusion of *The Power of Words:*

"AGATHOS. I have spoken to you, Oinos, as to a child of the fair Earth which lately perished, of impulses upon the atmosphere of the Earth.

"OINOS. You did.

"AGATHOS. And while I thus spoke, did there not cross your mind some thought of the *physical power of words?* Is not every word an impulse on the air?

"OINOS. But why, Agathos, do you weep—and why, oh, why do your wings droop as we hover above this fair star, which is the greenest and yet most terrible of all we have encountered in our flight? Its brilliant flowers look like a fairy dream, but its fierce volcanoes like the passions of a turbulent heart.

"AGATHOS. They *are!* They *are!* This wild star—it is now three centuries since, with clasped hands, and with streaming eyes, at the feet of my beloved, I spoke it, with a few passionate sentences, into birth. Its brilliant flowers *are* the dearest of all unfulfilled dreams, and its raging volcanoes *are* the passions of the most turbulent and unhallowed of hearts."

The abstract idea that a spoken sound communicates a deathless vibration to the atmosphere is here cast suddenly aside for the bolder assumption that these vibrations are creative of something correspondent to the meaning of the sound, an assumption that no reasoning could uphold. And yet, as we read that final paragraph we feel that it is true, as true as "Cinderella," or the story of the mermaid who danced on knife-blades and was turned into the foam of the sea. The truth of reason has been abandoned for the more luminous truth of poetry.

In plunging into the scientific speculation of *Eureka*, Poe provides us with the spectacle of a man, accustomed to autocracy in his own domain, flinging himself into another and confidently expecting from it an equal pliability and obedience. We laugh at professors who turn to writing sonnets. We cannot laugh at Poe because, on the hard rocks of the professors' world, he left so much of the gold he had brought with him from his own.

Sometimes, usually after these excursions, when it was already too late, he felt himself a foreigner, or at least had some misgiving about his right in that world. And then he would think of what he had done, perhaps remembering the scraps of gold, and become confident again. Such a mixture of doubt and belief dictated the preface to *Eureka :*

" To the few who love me and whom I love —to those who feel rather than to those who think—to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as the only realities—I offer this book of Truths, not in the character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth, constituting it true. To these I present the composition as an Art-Product alone,—let us say as a Romance ; or, if I be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem.

" *What I here propound is true :* therefore it cannot die ; or if by any means it be now trodden down so that it die, it will rise again to the Life Everlasting.

" Nevertheless, it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead."

That little piece of prose has always seemed to me a very moving embodiment of a great man's hesitation. It is hope almost throttled by fear and for that very reason raising its voice to an unnatural pitch. He would have liked to quote the words of Kepler from the letter in the

book: "*I can afford to wait a century for readers when God himself has waited six thousand years for an observer. I triumph. I have stolen the golden secret of the Egyptians. I will indulge my sacred fury.*" But he dared not burn his boats.

He asks us to consider *Eureka* as a poem or a romance, a work of art not science. It is indeed a *De Rerum Natura*, and a comparison with Lucretius is the readiest way to an understanding of Poe's failure. Lucretius, like Poe, is full of facts of science imperfectly understood. Long arguments about the void in things tempt a modern thinker to regard the work as vain that is based on such conceptions. But in Lucretius the spirit of the argument is the same as that which gloriously greets the creative spirit of the earth:

"Æneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,
alma Venus, cæli subter labentia signa
quæ mare navigerum, quæ terras frugiferentes
concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis
te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila cæli
adventumque tuum, tibi suavis dædala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident æquora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine cælum."

All is of a piece, and the outworn science retains its power over us in the veins of poetry

in which it flows, the white and scarlet corpuscles making blood between them. In Poe, this is not so. The reds and the whites are gathered in separate camps, and the whites have an unfortunate predominance. The two do not mingle. The book is at war with itself, and, consequently, fails as a work of art. It is not to the point to pick holes in Poe's knowledge of science, or even in the conduct of his argument, though several of his critics have thought that in so doing they were exposing the weakness of the book. Lucretius is all wrong, but his poem is all right. Even if Poe's science were invulnerable, it would still be the Achilles' heel of his work, because it is at war with himself, at war with the poem he is trying to write, and so no more than dead matter whose existence eats like a canker into the vitality of what is left.

But, in writing *Eureka* Poe went near the making of a great book. It was not mere fanaticism that led Baudelaire to translate it entire. It is not a poem, because it is a failure and every poem is a success. But it is a book whose patches of vitality are luminous with their special kind of truth, a lump of worthless rock with glittering gold caught in its crevices, a cluster of glow-worms on a piece of barren land. And these bright sparks must be gathered by any one who would understand the path Poe

trod between earth and the stars. Moments of reasoning, and, far more often, fragments of poetry that have flung off reason to live in their own right, help us to see, perhaps more clearly than himself, since we are at a greater distance, what this man sought, and what was the character of his search.

In the letter that Poe prefixes to his argument, the letter written in the year two thousand eight hundred and forty-eight, and cruelly smudged with some of the worst of his attempted jokes, there is the promise of a book that would indeed have been the poem that *Eureka* was not. In the prefatory note, Poe had dedicated his book "to those who feel rather than to those who think—to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as the only realities." Here he exclaims against the limitation of truth to what is arrived at by reasoning, or to collections of fact, "the impalpable, titillating Scotch snuff of *detail*." "No man," says the author of the letter, "dared to utter a truth for which he felt himself indebted to his soul alone." He points out, on the one hand, that reasoning is founded upon axioms and so upon nothing, and, on the other, that the "diggers and pedlars of minute *facts*" substitute natural science for metaphysics. He calls the philosophers to task for their "pompous and infatuate proscription of all *other* roads to

Truth than the two narrow and crooked paths—the one of creeping and the other of crawling—to which, in their ignorant perversity, they have dared to confine the Soul—the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognisant of 'path'!" Then, like a flash, follows this sentence: "Is it not wonderful that they should have failed to deduce from the works of God the vitally momentous consideration that *a perfect consistency can be nothing but an absolute truth?*" Is not that the secret of art, the explanation of its value to mankind, far above that of the things, colours and lines that it may happen to represent or use? Is not that the idea whose amplification is Benedetto Croce's theory of æsthetic? Would not Blake in reading it have heard that the sons of the morning were shouting in heaven?

That it was not an accident, whose worth and meaning Poe had not recognised, is proved by this other paragraph from near the end of the book:

". . . And, in fact, the sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended upon with an almost blindfold reliance. It is the poetical essence of the Universe—*of the Universe* which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems. Now, symmetry and consistency are convertible terms; thus Poetry

and Truth are one. A thing is consistent in the ratio of its truth, true in the ratio of its consistency. *A perfect consistency, I repeat, can be nothing but an absolute truth.* We may take it for granted, then, that Man cannot long or widely err, if he suffer himself to be guided by his poetical, which I have maintained to be his truthful, in being his symmetrical, instinct. He must have a care, however, lest, in pursuing too heedlessly the superficial symmetry of forms and motions, he leave out of sight the really essential symmetry of the principles which determine and control them."

How near in these few sentences, as in a hundred other places in his work, Poe comes to the enunciation of the truth that in the absolute unity of a work of art, a poem, or a picture, is an escape from the general flux of unconscious living into the conscious and absolute life that lies above it.

If, as he almost promised, he had kept to this path, or, rather, independence of path, towards the truth, *Eureka* might have been a smaller and better book, consistent with its author and with itself, and so really a poem that we could receive more graciously than, as I seem to be doing, by putting one hand behind us and only timidly advancing the other.

But the bulk of *Eureka* is of a different texture, and, if we are to win any of the riches

that are hung haphazard upon it, we must understand why we are not bound to consider it the most important, as it is the largest, part of the book. It has usually been so considered, and Poe has suffered in the resulting interpretation. More than one of his biographers, unable to distinguish dead from living flesh, has talked about Poe's "materialistic philosophy," and about *Eureka* as the book in which it has been imperfectly expressed. Nothing could be further from the truth. In every case where Poe's nature finds a lyrical expression, by which alone such a nature can be judged, his philosophy is of a consistent colour, quite different from the hard, sharp blacks and whites that a superficial reading of *Eureka*, that gave most prominence to the unsuccessful and inessential parts, would possibly suggest.

We have noticed in the last chapter the exuberance of Poe's analytical faculty. We saw that he had more of it than was sufficient to the artist's purposes. We have seen him spending it in solving cryptograms, and in writing acrostics. Particularly we have seen him turn it to beauty in such tales as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Purloined Letter*. What could be a more natural misfortune than that, pleased with his power of reasoning from data, sure since arbitrary and his own, he should be

over-confident in argument on data that he had at second hand, and that he should mistake its athletic exercise for something almost as trustworthy as his power of dreams. There comes to many men a period when reason seems in itself so strange and admirable as to usurp in themselves the thrones of those faculties that, unlike reason, have characters peculiar to their owners and therefore valuable. What happened to Shelley at eighteen happened to Poe at thirty-eight, unfortunately synchronising with and contradicting his furthest development, instead of only spoiling youthful work that he might have been glad to see forgotten. It would be possible, in making a new mythology of the brain, to picture Godwin (not the author of *Caleb Williams* but the author of *Political Justice*) as a personification of the hard and active god who makes the brain an enemy of the heart, and refuses those moments of armistice in which are born the children of the beautiful. In *Eureka* there is a nervous effort to show that brain, going by the creeping and crawling ways that Poe has already contemned, reaches the same end as heart trusting to the poetical instinct which alone, as he said, is indeed worthy of faith. This quarrel of purposes is the reason of *Eureka's* failure. I should like to wipe out three-quarters of the book for the sake of the remainder.

Poe believed, after reading various writers on astronomy and the constitution of the cosmos, that the Universe was made by the flinging forth from a common centre of innumerable atoms, that, collecting towards individual centres, are, in a more general movement, again converging. But statistical arguments in support of this thesis are unnecessary for the exposition of the complementary idea that the soul of each man is a fragment of the soul of God, and that the end of things will see the reabsorption of these million wandering Psyches into the one soul to which they all belong. Such arguments are worthless in comparison with such luminous points as this, for example, written as a postscript to the book:

"The pain of the consideration that we shall lose our individual identity ceases at once when we further reflect that the process, as above described, is neither more nor less than the absorption by each individual intelligence of all other intelligences (that is, of the Universe) into its own. That God may be all in all, each must become God."

Now that is a fine thought, and it is not alone in *Eureka*. But the real value of the book is in its unfulfilled promise of inspired guesswork, its elevation of intuition above reasoning as a means of truth, and its explanation of the principle of so doing as a trust in the poetical or

symmetrical instinct, which, as we have already suggested, is no other than the feeling for the beautiful.

It is not often that Poe pierces directly through his statistics. More often, in the metaphysical dialogues as well as in *Eureka*, he reaches expression by leaving on one side the fog of ill-founded reasoning from which

> " Helpless, naked, piping loud,
> Like a fiend hid in a cloud,"

wails his dream of God and Man. " Come! we will leave to the left the loud harmony of the Pleiades, and swoop outward from the throne into the starry meadows beyond Orion, where, for pansies and violets and heart's-ease, are the beds of the triplicate and triple-tinted suns." Whenever he forgets to substantiate his imaginations by reference to works of science, when he keeps the promise of that much post-dated letter, he writes again and again pages of emotional self-projection into those states of existence from which no traveller has yet returned to solve the problems of metaphysicians.

These passages belong to art, not reasoning. Their truth accordingly is to be judged by themselves, and can neither be confuted nor sustained. I choose as example a part of the dialogue between Monos and Una, describing death and

the conditions of thought and feeling that succeed it, simplifying sensation until it no longer needs the senses, but is become an abstract feeling of Time and Place that fills the void the worms have slowly eaten into existence. Monos is speaking:

"Words are vague things. My condition did not deprive me of sentience. It appeared to me not greatly dissimilar to the extreme quiescence of him, who, having slumbered long and profoundly, lying motionless and fully prostrate in a midsummer noon, begins to steal slowly back into consciousness, through the mere sufficiency of his sleep, and without being awakened by external disturbances.

"I breathed no longer. The pulses were still. The heart had ceased to beat. Volition had not departed, but was powerless. The senses were unusually active, although eccentrically so—assuming often each other's functions at random. The taste and the smell were inextricably confounded, and became one sentiment, abnormal and intense. The rose-water with which your tenderness had moistened my lips to the last, affected me with sweet fancies of flowers—fantastic flowers, far more lovely than any of the old Earth, but whose prototypes we have here blooming around us. The eyelids, transparent and bloodless, offered no complete impediment to vision. As volition was in abeyance, the balls could not roll in their sockets, but all objects within the range of the visual hemisphere were

seen with more or less distinctness: the rays which fell upon the external retina, or into the corner of the eye, producing a more vivid effect than those which struck the front or interior surface. Yet, in the former instance, this effect was so far anomalous that I appreciated it only as *sound*—sound sweet or discordant as the matters presenting themselves at my side were light or dark in shade, curved or angular in outline. The hearing, at the same time, although excited in degree, was not irregular in action, estimating real sounds with an extravagance of precision not less than of sensibility. Touch had undergone a modification more peculiar. Its impressions were tardily received, but pertinaciously retained, and resulted always in the highest physical pleasure. Thus the pressure of your sweet fingers upon my eyelids, at first only recognised through vision, at length, long after their removal, filled my whole being with a sensual delight immeasurable. I say with a sensual delight. *All* my perceptions were purely sensual. The materials furnished the passive brain by the senses were not in the least degree wrought into shape by the deceased understanding. Of pain there was some little; of pleasure there was much; but of moral pain or pleasure none at all. Thus your wild sobs floated into my ear with all their mournful cadences, and were appreciated in their every variation of sad tone; but they were soft musical sounds and no more; they conveyed to the extinct reason no intimation of the sorrows which gave them birth; while the large and constant tears which fell

upon my face, telling the bystanders of a heart which broke, thrilled every fibre of my frame with ecstasy alone. And this was in truth the *Death* of which these bystanders spoke reverently, in low whispers—you, sweet Una, gaspingly, with loud cries.

"They attired me for the coffin—three or four dark figures which flitted busily to and fro. As these crossed the direct line of my vision they affected me as *forms;* but upon passing to my side their images impressed me with the idea of shrieks, groans, and other dismal expressions of terror, of horror, or of woe. You alone, habited in a white robe, passed in all directions musically about me.

"The day waned; and, as its light faded away, I became possessed by a vague uneasiness, an anxiety such as the sleeper feels when sad real sounds fall continuously within his ear—low distant bell-tones, solemn, at long but equal intervals, and commingling with melancholy dreams. Night arrived; and with its shadows a heavy discomfort. It oppressed my limbs with the oppression of some dull weight, and was palpable. There was also a moaning sound, not unlike the distant reverberation of surf, but more continuous, which, beginning with the first twilight, had grown in strength with the darkness. Suddenly lights were brought into the room, and this reverberation became forthwith interrupted into frequent unequal bursts of the same sound, but less dreary and less distinct. The ponderous oppression was in a great measure relieved; and, issuing from the flame of each lamp, for there

were many, there flowed unbrokenly into my ears a strain of melodious monotone. And when now, dear Una, approaching the bed upon which I lay outstretched, you sat gently by my side, breathing odour from your sweet lips, and pressing them upon my brow, there arose tremulously within my bosom, and mingling with the merely physical sensations which circumstances had called forth, a something akin to sentiment itself—a feeling that, half appreciating, half responded to your earnest love and sorrow; but this feeling took no root in the pulseless heart, and seemed indeed rather a shadow than a reality, and faded quickly away, first into extreme quiescence, and then into a purely sensual pleasure as before.

"And now, from the wreck and chaos of the usual senses, there appeared to have arisen within me a sixth, all perfect. In its exercise I found a wild delight: yet a delight still physical, inasmuch as the understanding had in it no part. Motion in the animal frame had fully ceased. No muscle quivered; no nerve thrilled; no artery throbbed. But there seemed to have sprung up, in the brain, *that* of which no words could convey to the merely human intelligence even an indistinct conception. Let me term it a mental pendulous pulsation. It was the moral embodiment of man's abstract idea of *Time*. By the absolute equalisation of this movement, or of such as this, had the cycles of the firmamental orbs themselves been adjusted. By its aid I measured the irregularities of the clock upon the mantel, and of the watches of the attendants. Their tickings

came sonorously to my ears. The slightest deviations from the true proportion—and these deviations were omniprevalent—affected me just as violations of abstract truth were wont, on earth, to affect the moral sense. Although no two of the time-pieces in the chamber struck the individual seconds accurately together, yet I had no difficulty in holding steadily in mind the tones, and the respective momentary errors of each. And this—this keen, perfect, self-existing sentiment of *duration*—this sentiment existing (as man could not possibly have conceived it to exist) independently of any succession of events —this idea—this sixth sense, upspringing from the ashes of the rest, was the first obvious and certain step of the intemporal soul upon the threshold of the temporal Eternity.

"It was midnight; and you still sat by my side. All others had departed from the chamber of Death. They had deposited me in the coffin. The lamps burned flickeringly; for this I knew by the tremulousness of the monotonous strains. But, suddenly these strains diminished in distinctness and in volume. Finally they ceased. The perfume in my nostrils died away. Forms affected my vision no longer. The oppression of the Darkness uplifted itself from my bosom. A dull shock like that of electricity pervaded my frame, and was followed by total loss of the idea of contact. All of what man has termed sense was merged in the sole consciousness of entity, and in the one abiding sentiment of duration. The mortal body had been at length stricken with the hand of the deadly *Decay*.

"Yet had not all of sentience departed; for the consciousness and the sentiment remaining supplied some of its functions by a lethargic intuition. I appreciated the direful change now in operation upon the flesh, and, as the dreamer is sometimes aware of the bodily presence of one who leans over him, so, sweet Una, I still dully felt that you sat by my side. So, too, when the noon of the second day came, I was not unconscious of those movements which displaced you from my side, which confined me within the coffin, which deposited me within the hearse, which bore me to the grave, which lowered me within it, which heaped heavily the mould upon me, and which thus left me, in blackness and corruption, to my sad and solemn slumbers with the worm.

"And here, in the prison-house which has few secrets to disclose, there rolled away days and weeks and months; and the soul watched narrowly each second as it flew, and without effort took record of its flight—without effort and without object.

"A year passed. 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. At length, as often happens to the sleeper (by sleep and its world alone is *Death* imaged)—at length, as sometimes happened on Earth to the deep slumberer, when some flitting light half

startled him into awakening, yet left him half enveloped in dreams—so to me, in the strict embrace of the *Shadow*, came *that* light which alone might have had power to startle, the light of enduring *Love*. Men toiled at the grave in which I lay darkling. They upthrew the damp earth. Upon my mouldering bones there descended the coffin of Una.

"And now again all was void. That nebulous light had been extinguished. That feeble thrill had vibrated itself into quiescence. Many lustra had supervened. Dust had returned to dust. The worm had food no more. 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."

In this noble passage is no scientific truth, but the truth of intuition, whose opposite may be no less true than itself, whose opposite might, indeed, be no less truthfully written by the same man in a different mood. This is the metaphysic of the poets, and the only one that can be the body-stuff of art. For in such passages, and for those in which he recognises the difference between their truth and that other truth that is

sought by logic, between the innumerable facets of absolute truth, and the variable truth that is gleaned from facts whose absoluteness we can never know, is Poe to be valued. The activity of his mind was its own enemy. It made him prehensile of scientific knowledge, while without the power of judging the rottenness or the strength of its branches. It hampered him by making him weakly deny the principles he had himself discovered, and seek to buttress his work with science and so to twist it into such a position that it needed buttressing. But, in fortunate moments of inspiration he trusted his own wings. Popular scientific books are left to the multitude for whom they are designed. Intuition is free and bold, trusting in its own truths. "A perfect consistency is an absolute truth," and is not obscured by argument. The Nebular Hypothesis of Laplace, Kepler's Law,

"The Atoms of Democritus
And Newton's Particles of Light,
Are sands upon the Red Sea shore
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright."

FRAYED ENDS

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BEFORE proceeding to a summary that shall attempt a portraiture of Poe's mind, there are, as is natural in a book built on the plan I have followed, a few frayed ends to be considered.

For example, I have not mentioned a small group of his writings that are less stories than studies, less studies than dreams of ideal rather than actual landscapes. They do not make up any great bulk in his work, but are proof of a delight in nature for her own sake, a proof that Poe shares Julius Rodman's pleasure, not only in watching natural scenery but in describing it. *The Island of the Fay* holds an allegory and a suggestion of nineteenth-century fairy tale, so delicate, so pretty, as to contrast strangely with what we recognise as the predominant, and too readily conclude were the invariable, colours of Poe's imagination. *The Domain of Arnheim* exalts landscape gardening, which Poe more than once set among the fine arts. *Landor's Cottage* is a sketch of what a poet's house should be.

I had planned, earlier in the book, to quote two or three of Poe's descriptions of rooms, as I believe that few things are more expressive than rooms of the characters of their owners or designers. I refer the reader to the accounts of Poe's own homes in the biographical chapter, and then, with the licence given by the title of this, do now what I had meant to do before, letting the first of these imaginary rooms be the parlour of *Landor's Cottage.*

"Nothing could be more rigorously simple than the furniture of the parlour. On the floor was an ingrain carpet, of excellent texture—a white ground, spotted with small circular green figures. At the windows were curtains of snowy white jaconet muslin: they were tolerably full, and hung *decisively*, perhaps rather formally, in sharp parallel plaits to the floor. The walls were papered with a French paper of great delicacy—a silver ground, with a faint green cord running zigzag throughout. Its expanse was relieved merely by three of Julien's exquisite lithographs *à trois crayons*, fastened to the wall without frames. One of these drawings was a scene of Oriental luxury, or rather voluptuousness; another was a 'carnival piece,' spirited beyond compare; the third was a Greek female head: a face so divinely beautiful, and yet of an expression so provokingly indeterminate, never before arrested my attention.

"The more substantial furniture consisted

of a round table, a few chairs (including a large rocking-chair) and a sofa, or rather 'settee'; its material was plain maple painted a creamy white, slightly interstriped with green—the seat of cane. The chairs and table were 'to match'; but the forms of all had evidently been designed by the same brain which planned 'the grounds'; it is impossible to imagine anything more graceful.

"On the table were a few books; a large, square crystal bottle of some novel perfume; a plain, ground-glass astral (not solar) lamp, with an Italian shade; and a large vase of resplendently-blooming flowers. Flowers indeed, of gorgeous colours and delicate odour, formed the sole mere *decoration* of the apartment. The fireplace was nearly filled with a vase of brilliant geranium. On a triangular shelf in each angle of the room stood also a similar vase, varied only as to its lovely contents. One or two smaller bouquets adorned the mantel; and late violets clustered about the opened windows."

Beside that wholesome symphony in lucid colour, let me set the room of Roderick Usher:

"The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of

the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all."

It is as if, in different moods, we had looked twice into the chamber of Poe's soul.

Then, too, I should perhaps have spoken earlier of Poe's plagiarisms, of which much has been made, perhaps because he made so much of other people's. He disfigured his criticisms by continual accusations of this kind, and too often based his impeachments on supposed thefts from himself. Even the authors he admired, like Hawthorne, were not free from the supposition that they were indebted to Poe for some of their effects. It is an old proverb that sets a thief to catch a thief, and Poe was as sturdy a robber as Shakespeare. Rebukes of thievery come from him with a bad grace, since, if he coveted a flower in another man's garden, he did not hesitate in taking it, dyeing it, and planting it in his own. But, in spite of his furious accusations, his views on plagiary were, at bottom, sound. They are best summed up in the last paragraph of his reply to

"Outis," who had defended Longfellow against him, and carried the war into his own country.

"It appears to me that what seems to be the gross inconsistency of plagiarism as perpetrated by a poet, is very easily thus resolved: the poetic sentiment (even without reference to the poetic power) implies a peculiarly, perhaps, an abnormally, keen appreciation of the beautiful, with a longing for its assimilation, or absorption, into the poetic identity. What the poet intensely admires becomes thus, in very fact, although only partially, a portion of his own intellect. It has a secondary origination within his own soul—an origination altogether apart, although springing from its primary origination from without. The poet is thus possessed by another's thought, and cannot be said to take of it possession. But, in either view, he thoroughly feels it as *his own*, and this feeling is counteracted only by the sensible presence of its true, palpable origin in the volume from which he has derived it—an origin which, in the long lapse of years, it is almost impossible *not* to forget—for in the meantime the thought itself is forgotten. But the frailest association will regenerate it—it springs up with all the vigour of a new birth—its absolute originality is not even a matter of suspicion—and when the poet has written it and printed it, and on its account is charged with plagiarism, there will be no one in the world more entirely astounded than himself. Now from what I have said it will be evident that the liability to accidents of this character is in the direct ratio of

the poetic sentiment—of the susceptibility to the poetic impression ; and in fact all literary history demonstrates that, for the most frequent and palpable plagiarisms, we must search the works of the most eminent poets."

Poe's politics, too, have so far had no place in this book. They were not elaborate, or more important to him than plain likes and dislikes. It was an ironic accident that connected his death with the polling-booth. He liked freedom and could not recognise it under a democracy. He disliked mobs because they imply at once brute force, and a kind of imprisonment of the brains of which they are composed. He disliked the word "progress," and indeed, most of the terms that are useful to political speakers. Poe's political views are very pleasantly expressed in *Some Words with a Mummy*, where, in a conversation with a stripped and galvanised Egyptian Count, the civilisations of Egypt and America are compared.

"We then spoke of the great beauty and importance of Democracy, and were at much trouble in impressing the Count with a due sense of the advantages we enjoyed in living where there was suffrage *ad libitum*, and no king.

"He listened with marked interest, and in fact, seemed not a little amused. When we had done, he said that a great while ago there had occurred something of very similar sort. Thirteen

Egyptian provinces determined all at once to be free, and so set a magnificent example to the rest of mankind. They assembled their wise men, and concocted the most ingenious constitution it is possible to conceive. For a while they managed remarkably well; only their habit of bragging was prodigious. The thing ended, however, in the consolidation of the thirteen states, with some fifteen or twenty others, in the most odious and insupportable despotism that ever was heard of upon the face of the Earth.

"I asked what was the name of the usurping tyrant.

"As well as the Count could recollect, it was *Mob.*

"Not knowing what to say to this, I raised my voice, and deplored the Egyptian ignorance of steam."

* * * * *

And now, I think, we may proceed to our conclusion. In examining severally the facets of Poe's mind, and the various activities that represent them, an observation must early have suggested itself, that the ideas sown by these activities carry us further than Poe carried them. We must also have noticed that the temperamental character of Poe's writings is less important than their "fundamental brain-work." The Poe who thrills us is less exciting than the Poe who thinks, and even the tales and poems are of more than their face-value on that account. It seems

almost an accident that the spirit which sought for its exercise so clear and rarefied an atmosphere, should have found a home in that nocturnal grove. There is a quality in his work more universal than that of strangeness, a quality not of temperament but of brain. His temperament often found expression, his brain was seldom able to reach its far more difficult goal. He left us weird and shapely works of art, but, in the realm of thought, how much more often a blaze on a tree trunk showing that he had passed than a cleared path showing that he had passed with ease and been able to make a road. Yet it seems to me that these blazed tree trunks are the achievements that should keep his memory alive. He made a few beautiful things. So have others. But how few in the history of thought have tried to teach, even in broken speech, the secret of beautiful things, and the way not to their making only but to their understanding. It was to that end that Poe blazed his trees, and, when we see how often he mistook the road, we should remember in what a dense forest he was travelling, and how lonely was the pioneer. There is a most applicable saying in Coleridge's *Table-talk*:

"To estimate a man like Vico, or any great man who has made discoveries and committed errors, you ought to say to yourself, 'He did so

and so in the year 1720, a Papist, at Naples.' Now, what would he not have done if he had lived now, and could have availed himself of all our vast acquisitions in physical science?"

In estimating Poe, that is, in learning the bias and the personal background that we must know in order truly to read his thoughts, we must substitute for the year 1720 the year 1840, for Papist what we may imagine to have been his religion, and for Naples the peculiar America he knew. It would be humiliating to ourselves to try to rewrite the final sentence, substituting æsthetic for physical science. We could only say that if he lived to-day he would have the advantage of his own thought, matured and clarified by seventy years, passed from America to France, and France to England. Baudelaire and Pater in different ways, knowingly and unknowingly, as a disciple and in perfect independence, do little more than blaze again the trees he had already marked. He would find in the æsthetic that underlies this account of him only his own ideas, his own path, made clearer perhaps by the felling of the forest trees, and the passage of others by the gaps through which he had to fight his way.

His thinking and writing life covers the years between 1828 and 1849. In England the writers of that time were Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle,

Lytton, Disraeli, Tennyson and Elizabeth Barrett. Before the end the star of Robert Browning was rising in cloud. At the beginning the power of Byron had not yet fallen into its period of contempt, the period that follows dynasties and writers alike with a momentary oblivion. Leigh Hunt was teaching the admiration of Keats and Shelley. Wordsworth and Coleridge were living. Christopher North was rioting in *Blackwood's*. Hazlitt was writing his *Life of Napoleon*.

In France these twenty years cover the second period of the Romantics. Lamartine, Hugo, Gautier, Dumas, Mérimée, were writing the books in whose atmosphere Baudelaire was growing up to recognise in Poe something more than a chance literary affinity, and to do him the inestimable service of making him a French author.

In America also there was a group of considerable writers. And here we come suddenly on a fact that helps us to an understanding of the relations between Poe and his country. Poe did not know them. Hawthorne was writing his tales, Emerson his essays, Longfellow was pouring out his prose poetry. Lowell was beginning. Of these men Poe attacked Longfellow for plagiarism, was on terms of acquaintanceship with Lowell, admired Hawthorne, and was very rude to Emerson. I have read a polite

letter addressed to him by Hawthorne, and Lowell corresponded with him on such terms that Poe called him "My dear Mr. Lowell," and "My dear Friend," and signed himself "Most cordially Yours," and "Truly your friend." But the letters are concerned with business, with a new magazine and contributions to it. Poe flattered Lowell, and Lowell wrote a short life of Poe full of inaccuracies that, if Poe did not supply, he did not correct. But there seems to have been no interchange of ideas between them, or indeed between Poe and any other of the writers of his time. He had "avowed ill-feeling towards his brother authors," and for him Emerson walked not "with that pure intellectual gleam diffused about his person like the garment of a shining one," but in the sulphurous fumes and the black cloak of the devil himself. Poe had no friend in an artist of his own strength. It is doubtful if he could have found one except in Hawthorne. He had no friend in a thinker of his own power. He was extraordinarily alone.

The reason for this was manifold. Poe was without money, and so had but little time for friendship unconnected with his newspaper work, and none for those intellectual companionships that are rich in proportion to what is spent on them. His principles were opposed to those of

his contemporaries. The theory of art that was his staff of life held didacticism to be the unforgivable sin, and these writers were concerned with morality for its own sake. With them, except perhaps with Hawthorne, who used morality as an artistic background for his work, the making of beauty was secondary to the more obvious doing of good. Instead of making possibilities of life, they were intent on teaching how to live well. They held art to be the servant of the people, and Poe saw as little of "the people" as he could, and disliked what he saw. Their minds had all been lit by flying sparks from the French Revolution, which had never flamed for Poe. They were democrats or socialists, in the spirit if not in the letter. Poe held that "the People have nothing to do with the laws but to obey them." He could have no sympathy with the communists of Brook Farm or with their friends.

He was left, then, to the America that was not writing books of any importance. He found there some friendly journalists, who were sorry for him because, as one of them said, "he wrote with fastidious difficulty and in a style too much above the popular level to be well paid," and women poets, some of whom were very good to him, some quarrelled over their letters and his, and all suffered his protestations of love and

poetry. He found also the firm affection of his own household, his mother-in-law and his wife, with their pets, a household that, whether at Fordham or elsewhere, was always a peaceful small citadel, held by these three against the world.

But his loneliness was deeper than that of lacking friends for his head. There was a real, if undefined hostility between himself and the nation to which he belonged. And this is harder to explain. If, as M. Remy de Gourmont thinks, he was "instruit jusqu'à l'érudition," it would be possible to suppose that his loneliness was that of a scholar mistrusted by the uneducated. It is of moment to show that it was not so. His learning was a heap of dross and gold, the gold perhaps acquired in his school years, the dross accumulated haphazard, glittering like gold, and then suddenly betraying itself because he had been too hurried to follow the good advice of Quarles:

"Use common-place books, or collections, as indexes to light thee to the authours, lest thou be abused: he that takes learning upon trust, makes him a faire cup-board with another's plate. He is an ill-advised purchaser, whose title depends more on witnesses than evidences."

Collections of literary gossip, and scrap-books of fact and quotation were treated by him with

as much confidence as original works, and used to throw on his own writings the light of a midnight oil that he had never burnt. He took this learning upon trust and it frequently exposed him. He leaned too heavily on the titles of books, and so, because *Ver-Vert* sounded incomprehensible, Gresset's immoral parrot, that died of an indigestion, shrieks its bad language among the books on Usher's table, Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* and Robert Flud's *Chiromancy*, in company almost as incongruous with it as that of the scandalised nuns in the convent where it lived.

Learning was not the quality that kept him separate from his fellows. It is a thin veil at worst, that any scholar with a heart learns how to tear aside. Poe's conflict with his nation was due to nothing that he had acquired, but to something in the character of his mind. I think it was due to a rather scornful pride. He felt that his intellect had been born free, while those about him always had been, and always would be, slaves. He knew that free intellects are rare, and he had the pride of the king's son brought up among the shepherds in the fairy tale. Only, while the shepherds were proud to admit their foundling's superiority, Americans, seeing that it carried no dower, were not. Their patronage increased his scorn. "That there were once

'seven wise men,'" he wrote disdainfully, "is by no means an historical *fact;* and I am rather inclined to rank the idea among the Kabbala." He could speculate without fear, his fellows never without a thought of the praise or the blame that would be given them by the black-robed ministers of public morality. Poe owned a higher censorship. He knew that he was nearer than they, alike to the earth and to the stars, and in all his work there is a breath of impatience with those who are never to understand it. He felt himself surrounded by fools and deaf men, to whom he had to shout to be heard, and exaggerate to be even partially understood. He was like a wolf chained by the leg among a lot of domesticated dogs.* While they were busy with their bones, giving honour to him who had the biggest, Poe wandered in fancy on mountain peaks and in wooded valleys, seeking food of a more intangible character, and honour that is better worth the winning.

Both parties were conscious of the distinction he drew. It was perhaps through resentment of his intellectual pride that his enemies seized so eagerly upon his drunkenness. It was a weapon

* There is surely no need for me to tell Americans that I am not attacking their country for being like others. Perhaps there is a land where the chained wolves outnumber the domesticated dogs. But I do not know it.

for them, and they were glad of it. For, as Baudelaire suggests, it is inconceivable that all American writers, except Poe, were angels of sobriety. Other men who drank excused themselves by their stupidity, and were forgiven. But Poe was so certain of his height above America, that, when ill-fortune set him below it, America was glad of the chance to trample on him. It is a common spectacle. We cannot forget a writer of our own times whose obvious intellectual superiority brought upon his sins a popular execration that would never have been poured on the crimes of a man of popular stupidity. "Come down you who sit upon Olympus talking with the Gods! You forget us, but we remember. You are lower than us. Let us teach you. Come down from Olympus! Let us tread you in the mud as a punishment for your baseness, you who dared to look above it and commune with the Gods we cannot see."

There is no need here to recapitulate the stages of Poe's conquest by drink. We have followed them in the account of his life. Our only concern now is to notice that his drunkenness, such as it was, combined with his intellect, to separate him from the nation in whose country he happened to be born. He lived and worked like a man who knows that he is hated. His mind must indeed have been strong to work even as

calmly as it did. As he cut his way through the forest, to wake the Sleeping Beauty with a kiss, he was alone and worse than alone. Brambles coiled about him, holding him back, and black malicious snakes hung from the boughs before him, hissed in his face, and fastened on his wrists.

Yet, throughout his short life (he was forty when he died), the development of his brain went on unhindered by the struggle in which he was engaged. There is a unity in his mind, whose principle is its loneliness and pugnacity; but there is also a unity in its growth. Not one of Poe's faculties seems to have been acquired before or after any other. He was born with the same number of facets with which he died. A broad glance at his work almost suggests that his exertions in all kinds were contemporaneous and parallel. A closer examination makes it clear that, though all facets were there, yet the light fell on them in an order that is not without interest. All might sparkle at any time, but one by one they became steadily luminous.

The order in which the facets of Poe's mind shone out with particular luminosity, bears a close analogy to the stages, or planes of thought, through which passes the intellect of mankind. He began by writing poetry. Those moments of his life that seemed important to him were moments of intuition, when mood and picture

fused into something with the power of creating in other minds a similar experience. Swiftly, during the few years that he spent chiefly on his verse, the power of analysis increased in him, modifying the work he was to do, and clarifying what he had already done, in invariably suc cessful revision. The prose tales that followed the poetry show both these faculties reacting together with growing power. Analysis and intuition gave him a creative power, critical of itself, and so of others. In examining books and poetry not his own his practice began to systematise itself in theory. Simultaneously with the beginning of this theorising about æsthetic, the analytical faculty, too energetic for the work he gave it, became unruly and assumed an independent importance, wasting itself in the solving of puzzles, and, making use of the powers with which it had grown, delighting him with trains of reasoning, and with tales in which analysis was itself given an æsthetic value. Reason, spasmodically at first, began to usurp the throne of art. Now it raised his art to its highest point, and, at the next moment, turned it to nothingness in forgetting its existence. Finally, he began to let argument satisfy him, and let intuition atrophy for lack of use. Theory became too powerful to allow itself the suppleness that would have kept it true. He

was obliged to turn for inspiration to old intuitions, and stifled them beneath a skill too self-opinionated to be careful of them. So far Poe had gone when he died. He had traversed all the stages of man's mind. Perhaps he chose the right time for his death. He had completed the circle, like a civilisation. Perhaps nothing was left for him but the decay of Babylon or Greece. It may have been time for the sand to rise over the ruins. On the other hand, he died with a knowledge of the mind's biography that could have given his speculations a weight they seldom possessed. He stood upon the mountain top, tired out by his climb; but he could see below him the pathway he had trod, and the author of *Monos and Una* and *The Power of Words* might have gone on to write a series of such dialogues, freed of the old contradictions between their parts, dialogues in which reasoning was indeed emotional and dream one in texture with the emotional reasoning. He might have reviewed the work of his life, and revealed, seventy years ago, the theory of the beautiful to which his ideas so constantly approach, and, by seeming accident or the blindness of hurry, so constantly deny. If he had had but the time to do this, his work would not have been so frequently mispraised. But he struck his blows as he went, driven or fight-

ing; he was never able to return and widen the breaches he had made. Man after man has felt in reading single groups of his work that a powerful force was passing, and, noting its momentary direction, remained ignorant of its general trend. Few men have been so irrelevantly praised and blamed. Few men have been so single-minded in their aim. Poe, who could have been a great man of business,* a great mathematician, a great thinker, a great artist, was none of these things, failing in life, but seeking, down every turning that presented itself, for that scrap of knowledge concerning beauty and the æsthetic life of man, which might there be possibly concealed. His work, as it is left to us, is made up of observations and finds, by the way, each one modified by the blind alley, high road, or field path that he happened to be pursuing at the time. It is embedded in rubbish and beautiful things, verse with the jewelled wings of tropic moths, hoarse-throated critical articles calming again and again into passages of invaluable wisdom, dialogues as unforgettable as Leopardi's, a prose book in which argument and mysticism battle together to a common end, tales that are like Defoe's, tales that are like Lytton's, tales whose flavour

* No one can doubt this who observes his management of the various magazines that passed under his control.

is that of the most delightful of Euclid's propositions, and others by whose colouring, because it is easily recognised, I suppose he will always be chiefly remembered. Beside the whole mass, I believe he would have written, like the painter beneath his picture, "Hoc faciebat." He was doing this, while, all the time, his eyes were seeking in the gloom the lamp that, though he found it again and again, he was never able to take from its altar and carry home with him for the enlightenment of humanity.

POSTSCRIPT: THE FRENCH VIEW OF POE

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IT has been said that the best of Poe's works was Charles Baudelaire. As in most bold splashes of exaggeration, there is a drop of truth in this. Three volumes out of the eight that hold Baudelaire's collected works are filled with translations from Poe. It is not an infrequent surprise to find, on turning Baudelaire's own opinions into English, that, with little more than accidental alteration, they are written in Poe's words. Through those translations, and the writings and emulations they inspired, Poe has become a French writer. Byron and Shakespeare are read through glasses that look across the Channel. Poe is read as if he were a native. His influence, as M. Remy de Gourmont points out, is far greater than that of Shelley, or even of Rossetti, whose Latin genius might have expected a readier welcome. Every year new monographs and new translations are published. He is a "popular" writer as well as one whose critical influence has run through the veins of

French literature. This month * the *Mercure de France*, that feeds the most intellectual French public, has issued a new version of the poems. Last month Poe was the subject of the twenty-seventh number of the *Portraits d'hier*, a little bi-monthly, twopence-halfpenny, bookstall sheet. I have a list of the first twenty-four numbers of the *Portraits d'hier ;* no Englishman or American, and Wagner, Ibsen, Goethe and Beethoven alone, among foreigners, appear in it. Here is a list of some of Poe's translators, beside Baudelaire and Mallarmé: E. D. Forgues, W. Hughes, E. Goubert, H. Pagés, L. Lavergnolle, E. Hennequin, E. Guillemin, F. Rabbe, C. Simond, G. Mourey, J. H. Rosny, C. Demblon, V. Orban. There are others, and a still larger list could be made of the essays and books on Poe that I have seen in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and elsewhere, some few of which shall presently help us in drawing a portrait of Poe, the French writer.

I set down these facts as the readiest means of making clear how firm is Poe's position in France, how different from that of any other English author. I wished to do this before examining in detail what this position is, and how it came to be so securely held.

To discover the original colours of that vision of Poe that caught French eyes, filled them, and

* June 1910.

remained undisturbed there until quite recent years, we must consider Baudelaire as the shop-window through which Frenchmen saw Poe and his works. We must examine the character of the glass and allow for its texture and formation, as we should allow for reflection and refraction in looking ourselves through a window at any bright-coloured object within. Baudelaire himself has suffered from such a glass. Prejudice and hearsay have made it difficult for those who read him, and impossible for those who do not, to see in him other than a sinister, opium or haschisch-drunken creature, the lover of a black woman, a kind of elaborate Villon. Lee-Hamilton's excellent sonnet represents the traditional portrait. I quote it here for its own sake:

"A Paris gutter of the good old times,
Black and putrescent in its stagnant bed,
Save where the shamble oozings fringe it red,
Or scaffold trickles, or nocturnal crimes.

"It holds dropped gold; dead flowers from tropic climes;
Gems true and false, by midnight maskers shed;
Old pots of rouge; old broken phials that spread
Vague fumes of musk, with fumes of slums and slimes.

"And everywhere, as glows the set of day,
There floats upon the winding fetid mire
The gorgeous iridescence of decay:

"A wavy film of colour gold and fire
Trembles all through it as you pick your way,
And streaks of purple that are straight from
Tyre."

It is a true enough picture of the superficial appearance of a selection from Baudelaire's poetry, made by tradition, which will never forget that *Les Fleurs du Mal* cost their author a prosecution and a fine. It is also a delightful piece of colour, but, if Baudelaire had been that and no more, he would not have translated Poe. Is there anything in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* that could move in such a man "une commotion singulière"? I think not. We must correct that portrait by setting beside it a prose poem writted by Baudelaire himself:

"—Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta sœur ou ton frère?

"—Je n'ai ni père, ni mère, ni sœur, ni frère.

"—Tes amis?

"—Vous vous servez là d'une parole dont le sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu.

"—Ta patrie?

"—J'ignore sous quelle latitude elle est située.

"—La beauté?

" —Je l'aimerais volontiers, déesse et immortelle.

" —L'or ?

" —Je le hais comme vous haïssez Dieu.

" —Eh ! qu'aimes tu donc, extraordinaire étranger ?

" —J'aime les nuages . . . les nuages qui passent . . . là bas . . . les merveilleux nuages."

Baudelaire was more than a dead thing whose decay was lit with iridescent colours. Like the stranger of his poem, he loved " the clouds . . . the clouds that pass . . . yonder . . . the marvellous clouds," and all else that freed the intellect, that dissolved (impossible but in a delightful hallucination) the ties between the spirit and the earth. Poe's detective story begins with a few paragraphs of analysis that set the key for the rest, somewhere in the immaterial regions of geometry. Baudelaire's admiration for Poe opens on this note, repeated again and again. He found in Poe, first a liberator of the spirit, and then himself as he thought he was or might be.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue was adapted and translated independently by two French writers in 1846. The papers in which these versions appeared fought over their rights, and Baudelaire learnt in this manner the name of the author whose tale had so moved him. I give his

own account of what followed, from a letter to Armand Fraisse:

"Je puis vous marquer quelque chose de plus singulier et de presque incroyable. En 1846 ou 1847, j'eus connaissance de quelques fragments d'Edgar Poe: j'éprouvai une commotion singulière. Ses œuvres complètes n'ayant été rassemblées qu'après sa mort, en une édition unique, j'eus la patience de me lier avec des Américains vivant à Paris, pour leur emprunter des collections de journeaux qui avaient été dirigés par Edgar Poe. Et alors, je trouvai, croyez moi si vous voulez, des poèmes, et des nouvelles, dont j'avais eu la pensée, mais vague et confuse, mal ordonnée, et que Poe avait su combiner et mener à la perfection."

M. Remy de Gourmont thinks there is an exaggeration in this statement, that Baudelaire had to seek Poe's work in copies of American papers. He points out that *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* had appeared in 1839. But that fact, even if Baudelaire knew it, does not affect the real interest of the paragraph. Baudelaire recognised in Poe something of his own soul, and came swiftly to believe that this American writer held the key to his own development. As time went on and he added tale by tale to his bulk of translated work, Poe seems to have assumed a still greater significance for him. In *Mon cœur mis à nu* he writes, "De Maistre

et Edgar Poe m'ont appris à raisonner," and registers this resolve: "Faire tous les matins ma prière à Dieu, *réservoir de toute force et de toute justice, à mon père, à Mariette, et à Poe,* comme intercesseurs." I am reminded of that fine theatrical creed of Bernard Shaw's artist in *The Doctor's Dilemma.*

The translation of Poe meant more for Baudelaire than the rendering of a good foreign writer into his own language. His feelings were not far different from those of an impassioned believer translating the New Testament. Swinburne's enthusiasm for Victor Hugo was not so violent.

Stéphane Mallarmé, who did for the poems what Baudelaire did for the prose, suggests that Baudelaire found the inspiration of *Le Flambeau Vivant* in the last lines of *To Helen.* I give the French poem and the lines from Poe, as an example of the kind of echoes that so often startle Baudelaire's readers.

". . . Only thine eyes remained:
They would not go—they never yet have gone;
Lighting my lonely pathway home that night,
They have not left me (as my hopes have) since;
They follow me—they lead me through the years;
They are my ministers—yet I their slave;
Their office is to illumine and enkindle—

My duty to be saved by their bright light,
And purified in their electric fire,
And sanctified in their elysian fire;
They fill my soul with beauty (which is hope),
And are, far up in heaven, the stars I kneel to
In the sad, silent watches of my night;
While even in the meridian glare of day
I see them still—two sweetly scintillant
Venuses, unextinguished by the sun."

Le Flambeau Vivant (No. xliv. of the *Fleurs du Mal*).

"Ils marchent devant moi, ces Yeux pleins de lumière,
Qu'un Ange très-savant a sans doute aimantés;
Ils marchent, ces divins frères qui sont mes frères,
Secouant dans mes yeux leurs feux diamantés.

"Me sauvant de tout piège et de tout péché grave,
Ils conduisent mes pas dans la route du Beau;
Ils sont mes serviteurs et je suis leur esclave;
Tout mon être obéit a ce vivant flambeau.

"Charmants Yeux, vous brillez de la clarté mystique
Qu'ont les cierges brûlant en plein jour; le soleil
Rougit, mais n'éteint pas leur flamme fantastique;

"Ils célébrent la Mort, vous chantez le Réveil,
Vous marchez en chantant le réveil de mon âme,
Astres dont nul soleil ne peut flétrir la flamme!"

Although that poem justly takes its place in Baudelaire's original works, it may let us into the secret of his understanding of Poe, of the personal vision of him that he scarcely tried to impress upon the French nation. It is the intention of Poe, freed from preoccupations. For Baudelaire, Poe was the man who refused all but the beautiful in art, who recognised no other goal than beauty. Beside this idea all others fade away, or are pushed out of sight under any of the purple or rusty gold curtains that may be hung about the room or over the couches of æsthetic contemplation. But in the criticisms that moulded the French view of Poe, the curtains were allowed more influence than was their due. Poe was a lover of the beautiful for its own sake, such a worshipper as Baudelaire felt himself, but in writing about him, in propagating an interest in him in a country where he was not known, it was tempting to make a picturesque view of his life, and tempting, too, to overlay that reason for his admiration with others more likely to be generally recognised. It is impossible not to feel the eagerness to persuade in such a description of Poe's excellence as this:

"Ce n'est pas par ses miracles matériels, qui pourtant ont fait sa renommée, qu'il lui sera donné de conquérir l'admiration des gens qui pensent, c'est par son amour du Beau, par sa connaissance des conditions harmoniques de la beauté, par sa poésie profonde et plaintive, ouvragée néanmoins, transparente et correcte comme un bijou de cristal—par son admirable style, pur et bizarre,—serré comme les mailles d'une armure,—complaisant et minutieux,—et dont la plus légère intention sert à pousser doucement le lecteur vers un but voulu,—et enfin surtout par ce genie tout spécial, par ce tempérament unique qui lui a permis de peindre et d'expliquer, d'une manière impeccable, saisissante, terrible, *l'exception dans l'ordre moral.* Diderot, pour prendre un exemple entre cent, est un auteur sanguin; Poe est l'écrivain des nerfs, et même de quelque chose de plus—et le meilleur que je connaisse."

But Baudelaire had an almost equal admiration for another man, a painter, and his picture of Poe was tinted by his love of Delacroix. Eugène Delacroix was the great painter of the Romantic group, who found in Dante, Byron and Shakespeare, a palette of smoking colours, the sulphurous yellows, stagnant greens, and Tyrian purples, that Baudelaire preferred for the painting of his soul. His passion for these two men fused in his mind, and when he wrote

"Comme notre Eugène Delacroix, qui a élevé

son art à la hauteur de la grande poésie, Edgar Poe aime à agiter ses figures sur des fonds violâtres et verdâtres, où se révèlent la phosphorescence de la pourriture et la senteur de l'orage"

he made it hard for Frenchmen to see as much in Poe as he saw himself. He must have been thinking of "Dante et Vergile conduits par Phlègias," with its agonised figures in the gloomy sea and the burning city in the clouds behind. Delacroix's painting makes the setting of the picture terrible to those who do not know the poem, while to those who do, something, perhaps Dante, seems to have passed away. Poe suffered in a similar way. The colouring of his tales, lit up by this comparison, blinded his readers, and for some time he was read for his colouring alone.

I suppose the popular French idea of Poe, the description of him that would be given by a Frenchman who had not read him to another who inquired about him, may be best learnt from *Larousse*, that delightful illustrated dictionary that has a word for everybody, and tells us that Shakespeare was "the author of a great number of tragedies and comedies regarded for the most part as masterpieces." Larousse labels Poe as "écrivain Americain d'une imagination deréglée, auteur des *Histoires Extraordinaires*." That description too often suffices in

England. It did not long suffice the critical mind in France.

Baudelaire died in 1867. In 1875 Stéphane Mallarmé published a translation of *The Raven*, and later an almost complete version of the poetical works of Poe. Though Baudelaire prefaced *The Philosophy of Composition* with a version of *The Raven* he held that a fitting translation of the poems was impossible. He felt, like Shelley, "the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower—and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel." Perhaps, like Croce, he saw that "every translation either diminishes and spoils; or it creates a new expression, by putting the former back into the crucible and mixing it with other impressions belonging to the pretended translator."* "Dans le moulage de la prose appliqué à la poésie, il y a nécessairement une affreuse imperfection; mais le mal serait encore plus grand dans une singerie rimée." Mallarmé, conscious of his daring, produced a version of the poems in a rhythmic prose of whose beauty an inadequate example has been given in a stanza

* *Theory of Æsthetic.* Translated by Douglas Ainslie.

from *La Dormeuse*, printed earlier in the book. Mallarmé's translation contains the following poems: *Le Corbeau*, *Stances à Hélène* ("Helen, thy beauty is to me"), *Le Palais Hanté*, *Eulalie*, *Le Ver Vainqueur*, *Ulalume*, *Un Rêve dans un Rêve*, *A Quelqu'un au Paradis*, *Ballade de Noces*, *Lénore*, *Annabel Lee*, *La Dormeuse*, *Les Cloches*, *Israfel*, *Terre de Songe*, *A Hélène*, *Pour Annie*, *Silence*, *La Vallée d'Inquiétude*, *La Cité en la Mer*; and, under the heading of "Romances et Vers d'Album," *La Romance*, *Eldorado*, *Un Rêve*, *Stances*, *Féerie*, *Le Lac*, *A la Rivière*, *Chanson*, *à M.L.S.*, *A ma mère*, *à F.S.O.*, *à F.*, *Sonnet à la Science*, *Le Colisée*, *A Zante*. From the date of this volume's publication French readers have been able to obtain all the best of Poe's prose and verse, in their own language, and written by consummate artists.

With this mass of work before them French critics began to see Poe with independent eyes. It is possible to read a man for a long time with a preconceived and erroneous idea of the quality that causes your admiration. If you have read him so, there grows up slowly a vague dissatisfaction with yourself and him. It is the business and happiness of a critic to trace this dissatisfaction to its source, and so to free other minds for a truer understanding of their enjoyment. Several critics have become dissatisfied with the lack of

proportion between the pleasure or intellectual excitement they have had from Poe, and the skilful technique and phosphorescent colouring, to which they had been accustomed to attribute it. New Poes, other masks, have been made, which, taken with the old, suggest a closer approximation to the truth.

M. Camille Mauclair, in one of the essays in a most interesting book, *l'Art en Silence*,* after noting that no one has been more methodically unhappy than Poe (a very suggestive remark), discovers that Poe the thinker is more important than Poe the story-teller. I give his ideas as they are, not without rejoicing in the exaggeration that is necessary to balance the older conception. He writes:

"Quand nous avons lu un conte de Poe, nous n'avons pas oublié l'univers visible pour errer un instant au pays des songes; nous avons tiré un nouveau motif de songe et de la contemplation plus attentive de ce qu'il y a autour de nous. Nous avons en quelque sorte augmenté notre idéalisme par les procédés du matérialisme lui-même."

He notices that Poe, unlike other fantastic writers, does not ask us to admire ingenious combinations of bizarre episodes. "L'imagination de Poe procède du simple au profond et de

* Paris, 1901.

l'ordinaire à l'inquiétant." I remember, in parenthesis, Flaubert's remark that "fine subjects make mediocre works," and give it a new application.

Finally, M. Mauclair thinks of Poe "qu'il fut un esprit mystique et non critique ; que sa raison pure était inversement proportionelle à sa raison pratique ; que la solidarité du génie et du malheur le constitua tout entier ; que l'art lui fut non point un but, mais un moyen temporaire de son idéalisme ; qu'on doit avant tout le considérer comme un philosophe." He suggests that Poe was working towards the production of a great book, for which his tales were only prolegomena. It is indeed possible that, if Poe had lived and written such a book, he would have thought that such had been his intention, and wished others to think so too. But we must remember that Poe was not such a man except at moments of his career ; and, that, whatever he was, that he had always been. In one mood he would certainly have agreed with M. Mauclair ; in another, with Baudelaire. He would have been grateful for M. Mauclair's opinion when he was writing *Eureka.* He would have buttressed himself on Baudelaire's when, having written it, he nervously added the little preface that asks for its consideration as a poem.

In a book published three years after M.

Mauclair's are a series of *Marginalia* on Poe and Baudelaire that suggest yet another mask, and another incarnation.* M. Remy de Gourmont is one of the subtlest and most liberating of the school of writers grouped about the *Mercure de France*. He is a critic whose pleasure it is to toss doubts into the air, catch them and throw them up again as dogmas. His books breathe an exalted freedom that is only to be won by climbing, and he compels his readers to rise as high as himself by continually cutting the ground from beneath their feet. I am thinking of the wonderful *Une Nuit au Luxembourg*, when Christ walked in the gardens behind the Odéon, and the winter night was a summer morning on which the young journalist, who had dared to say "My friend" to the luminous unknown in the Church of Saint-Sulpice, heard him proclaim the forgotten truth, that men have once called him Apollo, and that, in one age, his mother had been Mary, and, in another, Latona. It is a noble book, an apotheosis of the critical spirit, piercing false skies one by one, and carrying its reader higher and higher on the wings of a curiously disinterested speculation. I write this as a description of the glass through which, in M. Remy de Gourmont's *Marginalia*, we look at Poe.

Is it surprising that such a man should find,

* Remy de Gourmont: *Promenades Littéraires*. Paris, 1904.

on the one hand, that "les contes ne sont que la moitié d'Edgar Poe, les poèmes le contiennent tout entier," and, on the other, "que sa meilleure définition serait celle-ci : un grand esprit critique." He mentions the definition in my beloved *Larousse*, pointing out that it would serve as well for Baudelaire, Chateaubriand, Goethe, Dante, or Flaubert, and continues, "Rien de plus absurde que d'opposer l'esprit créateur à l'esprit critique." M. Remy de Gourmont has shown the absurdity of the supposed opposition in his own books, that most obviously combine the two. Poe had shown it before him, and, almost as Poe would have said it, he adds, "Sans la faculté critique, il n'y a point de création possible ; on n'a que des poètes chanteurs, comme il y a des oiseaux chanteurs."

There seems to be enough of Poe to go round. Three men as various as Baudelaire, Mauclair and Gourmont can find in him reflections of themselves. And beneath them a host of other writers impotently repeat the old lessons, or busy themselves with his life and explanations of his life. M. Arvède Barine considers Poe among his *Poètes et Névrosés* in company with Gerard de Nerval and Hoffmann. Barbey d'Aurevilly had long before made a similar comparison. M. Alphonse Séché writes an account of his life, including the exploded bubble

of his journey to St. Petersburg. M. Paul Delaunay, Interne des Hôpitaux de Paris, discusses him in a pamphlet that he shares with Hoffmann, called *Alcooliques et Névrosés.* M. Teodor de Wyzewa, after talking of "ces vers, les plus magnifiques, a mon gré, de tous ceux qui existent dans la langue anglaise," defends his character; a vain and empty task. M. Emile Lauvrière, as a "Thèse presentée pour le Doctorat à la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Paris," writes two volumes on *Un Génie Morbide,* one on the life of Poe, founded on Woodberry, and the other a rather dull and sightless criticism on his works. Finally, M. Emile Hennequin, as long ago as 1889, included Poe with Dickens, Heine, Turgenev, Dostoievski and Tolstoy, among his *Écrivains francisés.*

Poe is indeed, far more than Dickens, an "écrivain francisé," and perhaps this tumult of criticism, awakened by the French writer, may teach us to understand the American. It should at least widen our conception of him, and show that he too is among the great men with a meaning for more than one age, and for men of more than one temperament. It clears away those difficulties of language that stood between himself and us, obscuring him in our narrow eyes, like the provincial manners that, before now, have often blinded Londoners to a great

man's worth. It destroys prejudices and cleans our spectacles. And the cleaning of spectacles is one of the highest services that the intellect of a man or of a nation can give to the intellect of another.

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