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POE

THE RATIONALE OF THE UNCANNY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Approved by

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"Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!"

—"William Wilson"
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INTRODUCTION
A WINDOW TO THE MIND

Poe's dubious fortune--to have been both passionately rejected by his American contemporaries and ecstatically embraced by poets far away--charms us into equivocation. Griswold desired to demolish him in his hateful obituary. But the French symbolist poets, naming Griswold a villain, all but canonized Poe. What greater fortune could befall an artist than to be publicly repudiated by his own people, so inferior to him, only to be resurrected and adored by strangers, poets far greater than he? That chapter in the history of American literature which records his mortification and reaffirmation is bound to bewilder, if not embarrass, both American and French literary critics. It has made all of us notably self-conscious. For we know that whenever we speak of Poe, we must confront his various conflicting reputations and explain how intelligent and discriminating critics, not to mention great artists, could ever have become so deeply concerned with the work of a second-rate artist. American critics often feel they must with quiet dignity atone for Griswold's shameless renunciation of Poe a hundred years ago. Like the French symbolist poets, they might even make him a saint, as Leslie Fiedler seems to have done, by electing him the sacrificial victim of his times. The French temper, on the other hand, always embarrassed when it loses its sense of irony, may have an even greater task ahead, as it tries to apologize for the lack of taste, as well as the lack of perspective, of the finest symbolist poets.
History, then, has made Poe conspicuous. And, like people who hope to see the Emperor's new clothes, we must read him again and again in order to determine whether we might not discover something great in his art and describe and evaluate it with some certitude and agreement.

Poe's most sensitive readers have tried to assess his work, patiently modulating evaluation with inquiry and interpretation. They have been the ones to write about the Poe legend with a sense of perspective. Critics like Yvor Winters—who insist that great art and amorality is a contradiction in terms and that, therefore, both the French and Poe had limited visions—only terminate all discussion with exasperation. Their categorical value judgments, though true in a very large sense, are dangerous to the spirit of scholarship; the sudden truth is confining and not liberating as it should be. For once we conclude that Poe's vision is unsatisfactory, we must explain why it is so significant. The numerous historical and biographical studies which place Poe into this or that tradition rarely hazard such large-scale evaluation. One motif is often singled out, or else inquiry is confined to one or two works. These kinds of studies may reveal little more than that the influence of specific writers is reflected in Poe's work.

The most valuable critical studies of Poe are those which attempt to discuss such representative works as indicate his interests in science, aesthetics, the short story, and poetry. These critical studies have generally focussed upon what appears to be the problem of consistency in Poe's commitments. Margaret
Alterton and Harden Craig, almost alone, claim that Poe's great achievement was "unity." However, most critical opinion in America seems to start from the opposite extreme, namely that Poe was at war with himself. American critics have described Poe's work by sets of contrary terms (order--chaos; reason--emotion). But not one critic has attempted to define precisely what he means by "order" and "chaos"; and, as a result, Poe's critics are unable to conceive that such definition might enable them ultimately to perceive the unity between these opposites. Instead, they ignore for the most part the "rational" component in Poe's art and casually associate the "dark" elements with the themes of destruction in his tales of the grotesque. In his article, "Pym's Imaginary Voyage," Patrick Quinn states that "What must be emphasized rather is the other component of his mind--at the opposite pole of the analytic." Critic like Edward Davidson and Harry Levin have attempted to discuss the themes in the tales of the grotesque; but their studies do little more than demonstrate the impact of literary traditions upon Poe's imaginative works. Since Levin's main purpose is to emphasize what he calls the "latent elements" in order to arrive at archetypal characters and experiences, he seems to suggest that the tales of the grotesque have a compelling meaning for us and that the experiences Poe

writes about are real. In "A Reinterpretation of 'The Fall of the House of Usher'" Leo Spitzer, however, insists that the experiences Poe writes of are not genuinely human at all, but that they are instead reducible to the "irreal" paraphrenalia of the Gothic tale. Yvor Winters, among all the critics of Poe's work, goes the farthest in refusing to take Poe seriously, when he declares that Poe writes of no compellingly real human experiences. Indeed Winters seems to suggest that there is nothing evil and mysterious about the tales of the grotesque by claiming that Poe created mystery only for the sake of mystery.

There are two chief shortcomings, then, in all of these studies: a failure of response and a failure of definition. Whoever desires to take Poe's work seriously must be moved by it in some inexplicable way. Once he attempts to account for its mysterious impact upon him, he must reject from the beginning any analysis based upon a rationale which is preconceived. I suggest that critics have seized hold of such preconceived rationales because they are at a loss to perceive the abstruse rationales devised by Poe which subsumes all of his work. Indeed, it is ironic that the most helpful appraisal of Poe's work comes from those critics who seem to admit that they cannot easily formulate the meaning of what they take to be Poe's latent content. They assume from the beginning that whatever order they see in Poe's world is imposed by Poe himself, and not borrowed by Poe from any literary tradition. Their failure, however, is in defining that "orderly" aspect of Poe's work with precision, even when they seem to feel that it is
an integral part of the "latent" content of his work. The French symbolist poets in their rather unsystematic observations insist vigorously that Poe's work is coherent and that on some scarcely perceivable level the various pieces, which American critics generally believe hang helplessly unrelated, are really forged together into a mysterious unified whole. Even when they cannot describe his concept of unity, Valéry and Mallarmé assume that Poe's work is unified—Valéry, when he calls Poe "L'ingénieur littéraire" who created "une sorte de mathématique et une sorte de mystique [qui] s'unissaient"; Mallarmé, when he tries to find substance and order in the most insubstantial places and in the most ineffable states. But again, this view is partial: the tales of the grotesque, rich in the sense of evil and blackness, are purified of their integral component of anguish and self-destruction. For Mallarmé and Valéry the destructive and analytic motifs in Poe's art are characterized by a furiously ascetic and disciplined artistry. Baudelaire in his sacred-profane poems also senses that integrated dualism; but, as he conceives of it, it is of a more substantial, a less intellectual order than Mallarmé's. And even in the integrated dualism that Baudelaire himself achieves, as he is "influenced" by Poe, he must underplay that frigid, relentless logic pervading most of the tales of Poe's weird genius and thereby, ironically enough, becomes easily the greater poet.

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2 Quoted by Joseph Chiari, *Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé* (London, 1956), p. 64, as being an extract from *Variété II*, p. 165.
Although Allen Tate writes that Poe's greatest discovery is
the theme of the "disintegration of the personality," he seems
nevertheless to admit that Poe's work is unified when he observes
that Poe's technique (like that of Flaubert, Joyce, and James) is
"naturalistic symbolic,"--and when he asks in "Our Cousin, Mr.
Poe" "... why a writer of the lucid, if not distinguished pas-
sage from 'William Wilson' repeatedly fell into the bathos of
'Ligeia'?" Edward Davidson points out the dichotomy in Poe's
art when he observes in Poe: A Critical Study, that Poe begins
with palpable reality and goes beyond the concrete world to write
at the very boundaries of the unreal, a poetry of the meaningless.
Studying the works of French and American critics of this persua-
sion is valuable; for all of them would attempt to conceive of
Poe's art as one in which diametrically opposite components are
poised in fearfully perfect symmetry. They would attempt to con-
sider at the same time the meaning that seems to be conveyed im-
mediately and the "deeper" meaning concealed beneath that seems on-
ly barely amenable to analysis. However, at some point in their
study they all become exasperated with the sense of mystery. When
what they describe as the latent content seems trivial to them,
they say that it is bathetic. When it is obscure, they often dis-
parage it as being meaningless. Those critics who are puzzled by
the mystery and yet hesitate to say it is meaningless describe it as

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Allen Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," PR, XVI (Dec., 1949),
pp. 1216-1217.
symbolic. The proliferation of critical terms whose meanings are contradictory suggests that none of these studies have sufficient clarity of definition. Any intensive and systematic study of Poe, then, must be guided by the conspicuous need to offer a definition of those terms critics have most frequently used to describe his work.

Toward a Working Vocabulary:
unity, disunity, rational, uncanny, ideal

A review of the major critical opinion of Poe's work seems to lead to the fact observed earlier that the critics generally disagree on whether or not Poe's work is unified. It is indeed curious that in not one of these studies has the writer asked what Poe himself might conceive the word "unity" to mean. Nor has it ever occurred to the critics that Poe's notion of unity might, in fact, be altogether different from theirs. Allen Tate's conception of unity as somehow the fusion of the moral sense, the intellect and the emotion (which, for him constitutes an ideal, whole personality) enables him to perceive at once and profoundly some of the major flaws in Poe's art. But Tate's conception of unity has very little in common with Poe's, for Poe from the beginning of his career consciously silences the moral voice and thereby would never admit that it figures at all in the unity he conceives of as ideal.

With neither much spirit nor conviction in what they do,
other critics in briefer critical essays attempt to demonstrate the correspondence between Poe's theory of composition and his art, and to conclude that such correspondence effects unity in Poe's work. They fail, however, to define Poe's theories with much precision at all; most of them conclude that no matter what Poe might have claimed to the contrary, his "Philosophy of Composition" is a hoax, and that he could never have composed his poetry according to those rules. The work of such critics is incomplete in an even more important respect; for neglecting to read the "scientific" pieces seriously they do not observe how Poe's "scientific" method, defined in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and "A Few Notes on Secret Writing," constitutes the very core of his philosophy, subsuming a theory of composition from which his tales and poetry follow with inexorable logic.

This study begins, then, with a description of that "scientific" method. Once the method is understood, we will begin to see that a remarkable correspondence between theory and practice actually does exist in Poe's work. Such "correspondence" we would be tempted to see as the goal, the ideal he finally achieves, were it not that Poe keeps insisting his work is unified. Had he been genuinely convinced of his achievement, he certainly would not have felt the need to announce it repeatedly, to advertise the fact so obsessively. Indeed, such insistence that he has achieved "unity," rather than convincing one, leads one to suspect that Poe was agonized because he realized he could never arrive at his goals, and that his work, therefore, would always be disunified.
For him a mere correspondence between theory and practice cannot possibly be the means of achieving unity.

If, therefore, the disunity noted so frequently in Poe's art does not issue from any failure on his part to demonstrate the correspondence between theory and fact, it must then describe the numerous dualisms seen everywhere in his art: between analysis and intuition; truth and mystery; formulae and poetry; abstractions and the concrete world. Poe admits openly that such disunity exists in his work. Indeed, he claims that these faculties—means and ends both—constitute rigidly distinct principles. Furthermore, he insists so vigorously upon their distinctness that for him they become mutually exclusive. Deliberately exaggerating the often slight distinctions between these modes of understanding, he would sever them radically and construct sequences of gaping fissures from what may constitute for other poets a thin line of difference. Indeed such attempts to distinguish and separate would in themselves not be so unusual and unsettling, were it not that Poe keeps insisting with increasing desperation that he intends to achieve unity and that he has, in fact, achieved it.

We are confronted, thus, with a bedeviling paradox. Why would a man deliberately choose to make rigid distinctions, to sever and separate, in a word to disunify, if he desires most of all to achieve unity? The easy way out of this question—an answer which would terminate the discussion of his work at once—is to conclude that Poe was simply a masochist and that he designed complicated means of torturing and destroying himself. But if one
declines to accept that hypothesis, there is a single alternative hypothesis he can resort to: namely, that Poe attempted to dis-unify, to break down, to rupture ad infinitum, so that he might arrive at the ultimate, indivisible element, which, in subsuming every divisible thing, would indeed unify all things. This is, I believe, the only legitimate hypothesis that can guide us in a study of Poe's work. It is the central hypothesis of my study. We must conceive of the basic dialectic throughout Poe's work as expressing Poe's ceaseless search for the ultimate, indivisible, infinitesimally small substance. We can hope to arrive at the central principles in his work only if we insist from the beginning that Poe's commitment to those principles has generated the massive disintegration and, at the very same time, paradoxically created whatever unity we see manifest therein.

I maintain, then, that Poe is searching for an ultimate substance. His process of inquiry is disintegrative in the sense that he defines an object or concept in terms of its parts, so to "prove" that the parts can never be reconstituted into the whole.

I turn to evidence in Poe's work to support my hypotheses and observations. Poe's critics are at a loss to explain that evidence, because they cannot conceive how a man might possibly have entertained such beliefs and ideals. The major misunderstanding of Poe's work arises from the fact that his critics attempt to understand it in terms of traditional notions of ideal human behavior. They expect to see Poe expressing ideals that they themselves hold dear. And when they read the tales which describe the
lack of communication among people, the disunity between man and
his society, insanity and apocalypse, they are at a loss to under-
stand such art because it fails to express any moral ideal, any
sense of justice, and, for all the destruction seen in the tales
of the grotesque, any sense of tragedy which we have come to iden-
tify with "meaning." One expects a writer to express the "ideal,"
those ideals that one cherishes himself. Whether they are aware
of it or not Poe's critics have been searching all along for the
"ideal" Poe might have cherished. But because Poe's ideal does
not happen even remotely to resemble their own, in the end, they
fail to understand his art.

To read Poe with understanding, to understand his "ideal,"
we must believe him when he states emphatically in his magnum opus
"Eureka" that the highest "unity" he strives for is nothing short
of total annihilation. Such annihilation, he writes, will not be
achieved by the event of death. For absolute unity, total dis-
integration, is a potential property of a universe, imperfect be-
cause it is disunified. It will be realized only in the far dis-
tant astronomical future, when all particles of matter lose their
form and are dissolved into an undifferentiated whole of comple-
tion and repose. The more easily recognizable (because human)
disparity between the real and the ideal, between realistic expec-
tation and impossibly ambitious wish--this becomes in Poe's
prose-poem observations and speculations upon natural law. Thus,
because the universe is disunified (i.e., its components diffuse
in space, varied, apart), it is, according to him, abnormal. For
Poe, the universe will be normal only when a condition of perfect unity is achieved.

Since Poe maintained that nothing human would obtain "out of TIME-out of SPACE," his ideal is objective, impersonal, anti-human in its most radical sense. For him the rational means of achieving any objective, any ideal, on earth are also objective and impersonal. Maintaining that only science can communicate truths, Poe ranks physics above metaphysics as a "rational" order of study. He adopts the "scientific" method of reasoning from effects to causes whenever he attempts to solve any problem or mystery which confronts him. In this way he would try to de-personalize, de-humanize both the "ideal"--which for him comes to represent truth--and the rational means of achieving it. The first interest of his centers around a concept of causation and being; the second, around the problem of knowledge. Our problem is to define Poe's ontology and epistemology as we see them expressed in his works, and then to determine the relationship between these two facets of his thought. To achieve clarity, I shall begin my inquiry into Poe's theory of causation and his theory of knowledge by discussing those works where he explicitly defines his epistemology and ontology in most simple, easily understandable terms. I shall observe that with each additional artistic experiment Poe's epistemology and ontology undergo progressive modification (become progressively complex and obscure) as he carries on that continuing search for (the disintegrative analytic inquiry into) the ultimate substance, the indivisible element in the universe.
In my first two chapters, I deal with Poe's non-imaginative works, where I may the more easily delineate the means uniformly employed by him in analyzing things that happened to interest him: from toy automata, to art that can be produced with mathematical certainty, to the plot-like structure of the universe. The main line of inquiry throughout establishes the fact that Poe is working toward a clear statement of an epistemology and of an ontology. In each essay by Poe, the principle of causation he arrives at is progressively illusive, non-sensuous, unpredictable, anti-human—in a word, uncanny. But the method he uses in describing the toy automata, secret writing and his theory of composition remains arid, frigid, optimistic, and affirmative. Understanding the method of inquiry, we will devise a rationale for the rational. Understanding the principle of causation, we will devise a rationale for the uncanny. Poe's commitment to his method and his faith in its applicability becomes even more remarkable when, as we shall see in the fourth chapter, he employs it to conjure the portraits of his evil geniuses of crime. The essential uniformity of the method, then, gives a stability, a unity, a structure to Poe's work, even while the range of his interests creates a sense of variety and disjointedness which is precariously close to chaos, if, of course, one fails to see the method that subsumes the whole work.

In Poe's early tales, his masterpieces, and finally in "Eureka" the method itself, the epistemology, modified by degrees, becomes increasingly uncanny and unpredictable, and the rationale
of the rational becomes obsolete. The change becomes manifest as the step-by-step progression from effects to causes is broken. In the tales, then, the conclusion is immanent from the very beginning; and the sense of certainty and clear-cut definition, triumphantly stated at the conclusion of the essays, "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and "The Philosophy of Composition" is qualified sadly in Poe's finest tales by a paralyzing sense of mystery. In his most ambitious work, after the stubborn onslaught of insupportable mystery, Poe admits that he cannot analyze the unanalyzable. Yet in delineating the mystery in terms of its manifestations in his finest tales, he does indeed come close to solving it.

In "Eureka" Poe most self-consciously reveals that to know is, in fact, to achieve unity. In his final grand poem, he would attempt to devise an esoteric epistemology by which he might depersonalize the mind and thereby enable it to identify perfectly with the objective truth it would know. This truth which Poe postulates even when he knows he cannot conceive of it is, indeed, the perfected condition of unity, where the mind and the object, epistemology and ontology, become one and the same thing. In "Eureka," then, the early scientific method of Poe obtains only in its vestigial form. And in the poetry, it tends to disappear altogether, as Poe would obliterate time, place, and process, to "achieve" the eternal state of the ineffable, absolute unity. In his poems, then, the rationale which is no longer self-consciously and demonically asserted, epitomizes the ineffable.

In the final chapter I discuss some of the deeper implications
of the kind of unity Poe cherishes as an ideal when, in attempting to arrive at an understanding of his conception of causation and law, I re-examine his art as the image of a mind. My general conclusion is that Poe tried to reduce the universe to a grain of sand by insisting that all things were identical. His belief in the lethal "Secondary Cause of All Things," in the universal tendency to unity imposed enormous deprivations upon him as an artist. He knew the price of his own beliefs. And he was rigidly committed to paying it. That fact, then, is a clue to the dubious achievement of his art. For, as Eric Kahler has written, "Any principle . . . that is pushed to its extreme and loses its resilience, its adaptability to changing conditions, reverses and defeats itself."4 The evidence of that failure is expressed by all of the negative terms that the finest of Poe's critics, those who have developed moral standards to clarify the relationship between language and philosophy, have heaped upon him. Viewed sympathetically, with neither approval nor disapproval, Poe is a genuinely pathetic figure, torn to pieces by his passionate commitments to pairs of diametrically opposed goals, which no matter how hard he tried, he could never reconcile convincingly enough to achieve indisputable greatness in his art; nor in his lifetime to gain more than faint and indeterminate glimpses of peace and resolution.

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CHAPTER I

THE INFINITESIMAL CALCULUS OF THE INEFFABLE

There is in "Pinakidia" a passage which gets to the heart of the special kind of anti-intellectualism everywhere manifest in Poe's work:

The usual derivation of the word Metaphysics is not to be sustained. Meta physician\(^1\) is tortured into meaning super physician, and the science is supposed to take its name from its superiority to physics. The truth is, that Aristotle's treatise on Morals is next in succession to his Book of Physics, and this order he considers the rational order of study (XIV, 14).\(^2\)

Here—opposing those, who, as he believes, conceive of metaphysics as the more profound and exacting study—Poe claims that they place upon the affix "meta" a moral value that it simply does not have. For "meta" means nothing other than "beyond," in the sense of being invisible, and not, in the moral sense, superior to the physical, the observable world. Yet Poe goes even farther than Aristotle; for Morals have no place in his "rational order of study." His study was art. And he would force us to grant that

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\(^1\) Italics are Poe's. I ask the reader to keep in mind any words italicized either by Poe or by myself. In attempting to delineate the system that demonstrates the unity of Poe's thought, I have proceeded under the assumption that frequently repeated words indicate a writer's attempt to classify. Whether or not these terms lead to true systematization is a point I do not care to debate at this moment. In any event, they are a symptom of the urge to systematize, an urge that is fulfilled, as we shall see, in the fourth chapter. Note that unless I signify otherwise in the citation, italics are Poe's.

\(^2\) Citations from Poe in my text are to The Complete Works, ed. James A. Harrison, 17 vols. (New York, 1902).
morality is in no way a criterion in art. Not merely does he object to grossly didactic art. He incessantly denies the correctness of those causal laws, which, even in their most subtle connotations, interpret human activity in moral terms. At times in order to avoid the faintest suggestion of ethics, he writes of experiences not even recognizably human, where no moral issues would seem at all relevant. In so doing, he inevitably oversteps his goal, giving his critics the chance to reject him on the most crucial grounds: that his vision of life is amoral. But this quite common description of Poe's art, though accurate, can tell only what it is not: that it is not didactic, or put more weakly, that it is not moral. "Amorality" cannot serve to describe Poe's art as it is. And description, after all, is one of the major problems of criticism, a necessary condition of interpretation.

The passage from the "Pinakidia," written late in his career, leads us to search for "scientific" principles, the "philosophy" of his art. The problem of definition, then, begins with those principles. To achieve clarity I begin my discussion with two of Poe's most easily analyzable pieces, "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and "A Few Notes on Secret Writing." In these works Poe attempts to solve through an exclusively scientific method a riddle intriguing to him. Although the riddles in both essays seem to be of paramount interest to him, it is his own theory of knowledge, his "method," that for him comes to be the most intriguing of all mysteries. Thus, in this chapter, I do not confine myself to elucidating Poe's epistemology as a stable structure. Indeed, my
greatest concern is to observe the way in which Poe's epistemology becomes increasingly complex from "Maelzel's Chess-Player" to "A Few Notes on Secret Writing" and to attempt to understand its enormous complexity in "Eureka." In the first chapter, therefore, in delineating Poe's early theory of knowledge and in describing its radical change in "Eureka," I propose to map out the problems that this study will analyze and develop on a larger scale. I shall present both that aspect of Poe's work whose simplicity suggests that it represents a terminus a quo in the growing complexity of his thought as well as that aspect of his work, his terminus ad quem in "Eureka," where Poe achieves a complexity so great that his prose poem seems to have no structure at all.

In each work that follows "Maelzel's Chess-Player" I shall point out the way in which the "method" alters in proportion to the degree of the insolubility of the riddle Poe poses for himself. Although he boasts constantly that he arrives at the principle of causation intuitively, he is not content merely to formulate the conclusion. Indeed, he cannot be satisfied until he has demonstrated it. In the process of proving the validity of his intuition, he would proceed step-by-step from what is manifested phenomenologically to the invisible principle of its causation.

Where the manifestations of the causal laws are profuse and varied, as in "Maelzel's Chess-Player," the procedure can be plotted out with both clarity and certainty. However, as the manifestations of the causal laws become less evident in each subsequent inquiry, the definition of those laws tends to become increasingly abstract.
The history of the method can be traced, as it were, as Poe postulates the existence of a cause ever more ambitiously conceived. When at times he attempts to analyze what really cannot be known, he gives evidence of bluffing, because, so one guesses, he cannot admit to failure. At other times, he admits outright that no answer is possible. In the course of his analysis, he introduces those terms that enable him to define explicitly the first and final stages of solution: analysis-intuition; visible-invisible; demonstrable-undemonstrable; material-metaphysical. And when in "Eureka" his study finally proves to have no cumulative results that can be formulated into a body of coherent truths, then the style of analysis, reflecting calm and composure, gives way to a style that expresses the frustration of ignorance and the futility of effort.

"Maelzel's Chess-Player": The Early Scientific Method

In "Maelzel's Chess-Player" Poe enjoys displaying his ingenuity in solving the riddle of a most extraordinary toy which fascinated and puzzled a world-wide audience. The chess player, a toy Turk created by Maelzel, is in certain respects a work of art, at least in as much as it is, in a very special sense, mimetic. Not only does it resemble the physical appearance of a human being; more important it can act (move) in a manner ascribable only to
living things. The duck of Vaucason, Poe believed, was a most remarkable toy because,

It executed, says Brewster, all the natural movements and gestures, it ate and drank with avidity, performed all the quick motions of the head and throat which are peculiar to the duck, and like it muddled the water which it drank with its bill (XIV, 9).

Even more unusual was Mr. Babbage's calculating machine, which could "compute astronomical and navigational tables to any given extent," and "print off its elaborate results, when obtained, without the slightest intervention of the intellect of man" (XIV, 9).

But Maelzel's Turk was the most fantastic of the toy machines, for it satisfied none of the specific criteria which Poe claims immediately characterize the "pure" automaton. First, the number of motions the pure automaton is capable of making has to be limited; for example, the toy magician can answer only 20 questions, the magic coach can turn about only in a specified number of directions, and finally even with the complex calculating machine, "Certain data being given, certain results necessarily and inevitably follow" (XIV, 9). Second, the order of the movements (i.e., which would be first, which second, etc.) is always fixed and unvariable. And finally the termination of all the movements is absolutely identical.

The toy chess player satisfied none of these requirements. From its very first move there is no determinate progression: i.e., the second move does not necessarily and inevitably follow the first, nor does the third follow the second, since, of course, the moves of the toy Turk's human opponent cannot be predicted in
advance. No two games last the same amount of time; nor are the results of any two games exactly identical. These criteria—de-limitation, arrangement, and termination—which keep reappearing in Poe's works in fascinating variations, enable him to distinguish one kind of machine, operated directly through immediate human agency, from the other, the so-called pure machine, the automaton, where the human agent is remote. In the second kind, the inventor sets the machine in operation and then like Newton's clockmaker, permits it to run according to its own predetermined laws.

No one who saw the toy Turk could quite believe that it was a "pure machine." Poe knows that it cannot be; but he writes that everyone else, against his will, was deceived into believing what his commonsense should have told him was impossible. Like a Dupin in the tales of ratiocination, he describes how other people have tried unsuccessfully to solve the mystery of the toy Turk. The hundred-year-old riddle of the toy chess-player was still a source of confusion in Poe's time. It is clear why the conclusions of others were so vague and inconclusive: demonstration itself is difficult; for it requires that one search beneath the surface in order to find what is concealed (i.e., invisible) from the audience and then to establish its correspondence with outwardly manifested details. It requires the series of painstakingly detailed observations that Poe records. A few of them are listed below. (1) The "moves of the Turk are not made at regular intervals of time, but accommodate themselves to the moves of the antagonist" (XIV, 25).
(2) Since there is no connection between Maelzel's movements and those of the Turk, it would appear that the toy Turk was really self-activated, a self-contradiction made sensible only if someone were really concealed inside the machine. (3) He never shakes his head or rolls his eyes at those moments when the game is difficult; his facial expression, therefore, does not correspond to the emotions he might be expected to feel. (4) Maelzel has deliberately placed mirrors inside the compartments of the machine so that the reflections of various parts can be mirrored many times and create the impression of a greater complexity than really does exist. Had the machine been "pure," how much greater would Maelzel have been to achieve that complexity with the simplest means. (5) One can tell by the sounds that can be heard in winding up a system of machine that "The winding up is inessential to the operations of the automaton" (XIV, 30); and, therefore, by conveying a false idea of mechanism, Maelzel would try to imply that he had initially set the machine in motion. Instead, as Poe demonstrates later, the motions were immediately directed by another agent concealed within the chess player. (6) The small dimensions of the compartments would easily convince the audience that no one could possibly be concealed within them. (But Poe resists the natural inclination to believe at precisely that moment when he feels that he is being pressured into believing something; persuasion then for him is deeply suspect, and the persuader is a deceiver.) (7) The cloth that lines the interior of the main compartment
serves to stifle the sounds made by the person concealed within; also it constitutes one of the partitions which can easily be pushed aside to permit the free movement of the individual concealed within. (8) In exhibiting the machine, Maelzel follows a strict procedure, from which he deviates in only a predetermined number of ways.

Poe's ingenious observations disclose the peculiar cast of his mind and enable one to predict the kinds of speculations that might have fascinated him most of all. His description of the toy Turk indicates that he might well have reasoned in the following way. Because he concluded quickly that the machine could not be pure, he knew that Maelzel must deliberately have intended to deceive his audience into believing that it was a genuine automaton. Maelzel's attempt to beguile is especially conspicuous when he displays the machine before an audience in an elaborate ritual. For Poe, therefore, complexity, camouflage, deception, illusion and craftsmanship are insidiously inter-related. Going from Maelzel as craftsman to artists in general, we will later observe that in his "Philosophy of Composition" Poe devises techniques for presenting the truth obliquely, through suggestion. The meaning of his tales and poems, the rationale of the uncanny, can be perceived, therefore, only if one knows how to "see" the basic materials of his art, to supply the invisible progression from effects, manifestations, to their causes. That progression, that rationale, for Poe, is increasingly impossible to articulate in the manner of the lucid exposition of "Maelzel's Chess-Player."
piece, the very wealth of details at his disposal enables Poe to conceive imaginatively of the substantiability of what appears to be hidden from view. The certitude in his belief that his initial hypothesis is correct derives unerringly from the substantiability of his material evidence. He never once doubts that he is right. One can sense his stubbornness of belief, as he applauds his own tenacity and certitude. The tempo and direction of this essay—and of the tales of ratiocination as well—reflects his pride and pompous self-confidence, for the intervals between the observations he makes, set off by numbers and italicized phrases which guide the reader from one point to the other, are regular; and once a statement is made, he neither retracts it nor qualifies it to indicate that he ever doubts the validity of his initial claims. The procedure from claim to proof is slow, but triumphanty achieved, with the grandiloquent flourish of an impresario.

When Poe sets out to support his own hypothesis with a painstakingly detailed demonstration, it becomes clear that the mystery of the toy Turk is less important to him than another absorbing riddle which he repeatedly attempts to understand in his other essays, his short stories, and most emphatically in his final work, "Eureka": the problem of distinguishing between intuition and analysis. In "Maelzel's Chess-Player" Poe claims he knows from the beginning that the toy cannot be a pure machine; he implies, furthermore, that he has arrived at this conclusion intuitively without relying upon any labored analytic procedure and that analysis was required only in the demonstration of the
solution. The fact is, however, that Poe is bluffing and that not
one riddle about the toy chess-player was solved by the powers of
intuition alone. Had intuition alone figured in the solution,
then validating his insight would have depended solely upon the
demonstration itself. But as the essay stands for us to read, the
proof of the solution clearly does not rest upon details which may
reveal how "human agency is brought to bear." Poe's so-called
"guess" is formed, as we have seen, on the basis of the criteria
he uses each time he sets out to distinguish the pure machine from
one that is not pure.

The essential characteristic of intuition, on the other hand,
is that one can point to absolutely no criteria whatever which
might lead step-by-step to the final conclusion. Instead, one may
often feel deeply frustrated because he cannot, in fact, supply
those criteria and thereby define a "hunch" in a way that would
easily convince his audience. Instead of calm, satisfying certi-
tude the bold leap of intuition more typically gives rise to agi-
tated and extreme emotions. Now a nagging self-doubt; now a eu-
phoric self-confidence; now an attempt to convince oneself; now,
in the midst of turmoil, a presumptuous assertion that one's own
intuitions are so simple, clear and self-evident; now wretched
failure to articulate; now joy and wonder at imagining that one
might have arrived at last at the very threshold of the final mys-
tery--such ambivalence is absent in "Maelzel's Chess-Player." But
it comes to be the very substance of "Eureka." Here Poe has no
need to tell the reader that his central principle admits of no
demonstration. This limitation is registered directly through the style. The moment his magnum opus begins with a statement of what for him constitutes the final truth, the progression from effects to causes breaks down instantaneously. When the progression collapses, the kind of structure that we are used to seeing everywhere in Poe's work disintegrates and we are left in "Eureka" with what clearly appears to be no structure at all.

I suggest that the collapse of structure takes place at the very moment Poe feels that he has confronted a riddle whose solution he cannot demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt. When in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" he would describe his solution to the riddle of the toy Turk as an intuition, we feel that he is over-assessing his own achievement. Such self-praise may be reprehensible. But, moral issues aside, Poe's tendency to praise himself for an accomplishment that actually is only desired, but not achieved, reveals the desire to achieve some impossibly ambitious goal. We must know what that impossible ideal might have been in order to determine to what degree Poe might have succeeded in achieving his goal and why it was inevitable that he fail in the end.

Already in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" two of Poe's most ambitious concerns begin to emerge from the welter of details in his essay: first, the abstruse processes of reasoning; second, the attempt to arrive at the cause (and, therefore, the solution) of certain phenomena that strike him as mysterious. What lies buried deep inside is, indeed, the cause, the truth. But for some weird
reason that "cause," which is indeed the deceitful craftsman, Maelzel, has deliberately desired to remain concealed altogether. What lies upon the surface, therefore, is mere illusion; to arrive at truth, one must probe beneath the surface. That probing from effects to causes constitutes a completed progression, when what was initially invisible (mysterious), the cause itself, is made visible and palpable. But when at some point Poe finds that he is no longer able to continue translating the invisible into the visible, then the cause remains invisible and inscrutable forever. At such time, Poe can only maintain his belief in it, even while he is unable to demonstrate it.

The collapse in the progression of reasoning from effects to causes is analogous to the disintegration in the processes of reasoning from the beginning to the end, whenever through intuition one achieves the end, the conclusion, in the beginning, without being able to delineate the processes by which that end was achieved in the first place. The absence of a progression suggests that indeed there is no determinate progression to calculate in the first place. However, Poe postulates its existence, even while he cannot conceive of what such progression must be like, and maintains that it is determinate. In this way does he reconcile the illusion of freedom suggested in our inability to calculate what appears to be incalculable but is not, with the existence of a pre-determined progression, which he believes in, even when he cannot conceive of it. In "Eureka" and "The Philosophy of Composition" we see Poe attempting to formulate a theory of
knowledge, art, and the processes of the universe into a paradoxical law which in its very structure might encompass freedom. Such an impossible law would for Poe be the most sublime achievement. It would be "beyond all comparison the most wonderful of the inventions of mankind" (XIV, 9); it would be like the kind of "pure" automaton he speculated about in "Nelzel's Chess-Player," an automaton whose varied and incalculable motions would, nevertheless, paradoxically be the effects of a rigid principle.

It is the lack of progression, of visible structure, then, that confounds Poe, as we shall continue to observe. In "A Few Notes on Secret Writing" and "Eureka," Poe ventures into areas of knowledge where the manifestations of causal laws become ever more impalpable and invisible, and, therefore, not amenable to any structuring whatsoever. At such moments there is a crisis in his ability to reason, to know what he is doing, to be able to state his intention clearly, and to pursue a coherent line of inquiry that would arrive at the solution to the problems he formulates for himself. In "A Few Notes on Secret Writing" we see him evading the issue conspicuously and bluffing his way through a solution. Finally in "Eureka," where he attempts an impossibly ambitious solution, we observe how he fails miserably to achieve any progression, structure, coherence and meaning.
"A Few Notes on Secret Writing": A Crisis in Epistemology

The cryptogram, which is the subject of Poe's essay "A Few Notes on Secret Writing," was not merely a casual interest for Poe. Critics have speculated on whether or not Poe was able to decode cryptograms without keys. A modern authority, W. F. Friedman, has even attempted to prove that Poe's understanding of cryptograms was exceedingly superficial. Our tendency, of course, is to believe the specialists, cryptographers in this case, who know more about such matters than we do ourselves. Although it would indeed be satisfying to be absolutely certain about the extent of Poe's ability to decode cryptograms, the matter is actually not very important. For those who might claim its importance often fail to observe a far more important fact: the cryptogram had an enormous impact upon Poe's philosophy of composition and art. The key to the cryptogram was for Poe a kind of emblem through which he saw the universe fractured in two: mystery and truth. They are related by the key as solidly as two sides of a coin. But, in spite of the guaranty of such integral relationship as the key provides, just as two sides of a coin, they cannot be perceived simultaneously.

One of the purposes of my study is to determine the various levels on which the fissuring occurs in Poe's work. I suggest

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that for Poe the cryptogram might have served to formulate the first part of his philosophy of "disunity and return to unity" in such categorical terms that he widened the expanse between mystery and truth, and, as a result, imposed upon himself an even greater burden of synthesis. To understand the impact of the cryptogram on Poe's art, then, let us examine the cryptogram as Poe himself might have conceived of it.

The mere surface appearance of the cryptogram gives rise to feelings that are mildly unsettling, because the sense of mystery conveyed by it is quite different from what one is generally accustomed to experiencing in art and life. Since, first of all, the cryptogram is consistently enigmatic, it cannot seem—unlike the toy Turk—to be mysterious at one moment and utterly free from mystery at the next; there is, in other words, no ambiguity between reality and illusion. The cryptographer's admission of clear-cut deception is both strange and disarming. In contrast to him, Maelzel desired to appear to be honest and open in his actions so that he could the more easily deceive. But the attempt to appear honest—which, indeed, is the essential requisite for lying effectively—has no relevance whatsoever to the purpose and function of the cryptograph. For the need to deceive occasions the craft from the start. The nonsensical arrangement of letters in the cryptogram announces with stark simplicity that the surface yields no meanings that can even be understood. The kind of mystery that is complex and enriching, where one suffers a prolonged involvement, arises imperceptibly from a background that is recognizable and
familiar. The source of the mystery cannot be precisely defined for this reason. And, therefore, it floats like an unattached substance in the psyche.

Such unalleviated mystery, where all nature seems to be suddenly as weird as the cryptogram, assails Poe's characters in his tales of the grotesque. Achieving no understanding of their predicament, they experience only paralyzing fear. No one, not even Poe himself, can make any sense of the manifestations of destruction seen everywhere about him and thereby arrive at a rationale for the uncanny. On the other hand, the cryptographer who knows the laws of his craft can decipher the surface and solve the mystery. In unraveling the mystery, he experiences no terror and bewilderment; instead, his only response is one of frigid curiosity and detached pleasure which he derives "from any exertion of human ingenuity" (XVI, 10). Just as he solves the cryptogram, so can he construct one. And, once having created the mystery, the cryptogram, he can also artificially increase it by substituting symbols for the "natural" alphabet.

So much for effects—because in this essay, as in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" Poe is more concerned with arriving at causes. The cause, however, is both transparent and obscure. It is, of course, the cryptographer himself. But in another sense, the "cause" has nothing whatsoever to do with the cryptographer; it is composed only of "method." (Throughout Poe's work, the causes are almost altogether de-humanized, as inquiry leads inexorably to an objective rationale; as the rationale itself begins to disintegrate,
whatever semblance of "personal" interest might have been achieved earlier disappears altogether). It is this "method," then, that Poe would attempt to understand. The method, as we shall observe, is coherently delineated only when Poe describes how the cryptographer devises the cryptogram. But when he attempts to explain how the cryptographer can decode the cipher without the key, then there occurs a crisis in his epistemology—his understanding of his own method—a crisis which is manifest by the collapse of the step-by-step progression, the hallmark of analytic inquiry.

The laws of deception belong not to any one cryptographer, Poe maintains. They reside in the craft itself.

The reader should bear in mind that the basis of the whole art of solution, as far as regards these matters, is found in the general principles of the formation of the particular laws which govern any cipher, or the construction of its key (XIV, 118).

The truths, then, are described as being timeless, constant, independent of the vicissitudes of persons and places. They can be formulated as a body of scientific knowledge. The laws of the cryptographer can be expressed by the key which, in establishing the pure and stark correspondence between mystery and explanation, is analogous to the equation: let "a" stand for (equal) "z"; "b" for "y," etc. The connotations of many of the words which Poe uses to describe the structure of his materials are mathematical: "stand for," "correspondence," "arrangement," "intervals," "natural sequence," "combinations," "order," "the location of each cipheral letter," "succession," "comparison." These terms enable him to conceive of items in three important ways: first, as distinct,
apart from each other; second, as related together as distinct properties, but not fused together so that they would lose any of their properties in absorbing any attributes of the contrary item; third, as invariably occupying a specific place in a pre-determined, rigidly defined progression from one particular to another. In "Eureka" we see Poe attempting self-consciously to transcend the restrictions imposed by such terminology.

By referring to the laws of the craft expressed in formulae, Poe does indeed gain some assurance that he is coherently explaining his method of devising a cryptogram. His discussion at this point is lucid, direct, perhaps a bit boring with all the detail and repetition. His description of the method involved in solving the cryptogram, however, is brief and vague. The problem of deciphering the cryptogram without a key is easily the more intriguing. If no key is available, how, one wonders, can the riddle be deciphered? Whoever devises the cryptogram obviously knows which combinations of correspondences he has used to construct the key. But how can one without such a key determine which one of the apparently indefinite number of combinations has been used? In asking the question again and again, Poe leads the reader to suppose that it will be answered, for one cannot imagine why Poe would have asked the question in the first place, had he no intention of answering it.
In the different methods of cryptography specified above, it will be observed that there is a gradually increasing complexity. But this complexity is only in shadow. It has no substance whatever. It appertains merely to the formation, and has no bearing upon the solution, of the cipher (XIV, 119).

Instead of continuing to explain the factors involved in solving a cryptogram—an explanation which one is led to anticipate, given the fact that Poe has conspicuously raised the question in the first place—Poe obfuscates the issue by attempting to understand a phenomenon that clearly fascinates him more than the cryptogram, namely the rare "gift" of "ratiocination," "a peculiar mental action." Poe writes that the cryptogram can be solved only by someone who possesses this rare gift. At this moment in the essay, he would attempt to demonstrate how a cryptogram is decoded and at the same time to analyze the peculiar mental processes involved in arriving at the solution. He knows that there must be some sort of correspondence between the processes of the mind and the procedure involved in decoding the cryptogram. But he himself cannot establish it. He is unable to do this for two reasons. First, while the procedure involves taking one step at a time, as each cipheral letter is translated into its real letter, at the same time those steps, minute as they are, are not half as subtle and indistinguishable as the imperceptible mental processes by which one makes "The discovery, accidental or otherwise, of any one letter..." (128) by which the process of solution is suddenly accelerated. For such discovery marks the termination of the intuitive process. In order to
present a coherent and complete analysis of the processes of intuition, Poe would have had to reconstruct the entire progression from the elusive beginnings of such processes throughout to the end. In "A Few Notes on Secret Writing" he fails to furnish an explanation of the progression, even though he emphatically asks questions that would demand such an explanation. He records verbatim a letter written by W. B. Tyler, who explained the procedure he used in deciphering a cryptogram without a key. Poe writes that Tyler's analysis, though quite accurate up to a certain point, is simply not complete. But Poe himself conspicuously dismisses the problem of solution by saying that he simply has not got enough time to continue the analysis.

The ratiocination actually passing through the mind in the solution of even a single cryptogram, if detailed step by step, would fill a large volume. Our time is much occupied, and notwithstanding the limits originally placed to our cartel, we have found ourselves overwhelmed with communications on this subject, and must close it, perforce--deeply interesting as we find it (XIV, 149).

This passage would seem to imply that, given his braggadocio, Poe would not have turned down such an opportunity to display his ingenuity, had he been able to meet the challenge of providing a solution. Indeed I suggest that in "Eureka" Poe attempts to overcome the crisis of ignorance he experiences in "A Few Notes on Secret Writing," where he is unable to supply the progression from the beginning of his intuitive insight, which he postulates even when he is not conscious of ever having experienced it, to its end. In his essay on cryptography the dialectic between the mental processes (as he conceives of them ever more elusively and
indistinctly) and the manifestations of causal laws (as he con­ceives of their being increasingly nonsensical, meaningless and weird) is interrupted. In "Eureka" it comes to a dead end. In the course of the discussion of "Eureka," I shall attempt to de­scribe those manifestations as Poe defines them and to see how he finally faces up to the challenge of attempting to supply that invisible, ineffable--and, yet on some mysterious level--detailed progression from the beginnning, through the middle, to the end.

Returning briefly to "A Few Notes on Secret Writing," I sug­gest that this essay might be thought of as standing midway be­tween "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and "Eureka," in the central dia­lectic of Poe's thought concerning causal laws, a dialectic which, in the introduction of my study, is described as paradoxically the tendency to sever in order to arrive at unity. Poe's essay on the toy Turk expresses a view of nature speciously unified; in his essay on secret writing, the key to the cryptogram is the emblem of the gaping fissure of a universe on the verge of collapse; fin­ally, in "Eureka" Poe attempts to conceive of how reconstitution into unity from the present "abnormal" condition of the universe can hypothetically be achieved.

"Eureka": Disintegration and Reconstitution

The "Uncanny" as Manifestations of Unstructuring. Even Poe's most sympathetic readers who do not reject "Eureka" as psychotic art have admitted that they don't quite know what to make of it.
While certain scientific principles borrowed by Poe from Newton and LaPlace are expressed in this work, no amount of digging into the most recondite scientific textbooks for background material can possibly account for what must surely strike both the scientist and the literary critic as being a grotesque and maudlin abortion of the scientific method. We are taken aback by the vast subject Poe chooses to speculate about, namely the "universe of stars." But perhaps our greatest perplexity arises from the apparent incoherence, inconsistency, and lack of structure in this work. The opening paragraph, which expresses the poet's humility before his subject, seems inconsistent with an objective, dispassionate scientific treatment. The truth that Poe arrives at, furthermore, does not issue as the result of a systematic search for causal laws. For only in several points in "Eureka" does Poe conceptualize the step-by-step progression of such analytic inquiry or test or demonstrate any conclusions reached through it. Furthermore, in "Eureka" Poe does not observe the manifestations of causal laws independent of their causes (mystery conceived of as being distinct from the explanation) as he did in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and "A Few Notes on Secret Writing." And finally the cool certitude he felt when he finished formulating the causal laws in his earlier "scientific" pieces is not the pervasive tone of "Eureka." For despite the dispassionate certitude conveyed by the scientific principle, there is expressed almost concurrently in "Eureka" a wide range of emotions from despair to euphoria. By their very variety, such emotions suggest that Poe's thought takes
no decisive turn in a definite direction toward a specific end—a process that might lend itself to any systematic paraphrase and analysis. Finally, to add to the confusion, Poe attempts to speak of the universe as understood through five perspectives: "the Physical, Metaphysical and Mathematical—of the Material and Spiritual..." (XVI, 185).

I can think of no better way of describing one's initial response to "Eureka" than by citing Thomas Mann's eloquent appraisal of a work whose glaring defects are comparable to the major flaws of "Eureka." Like Poe, Nietzsche praised his own achievement in "Zarathustra," whose scope he maintained was more ambitious than any other ever attempted before. Like "Eureka," "Zarathustra" was to protract the emotion of ecstasy until it could no longer be endured.

This genius of his became rather the object of his wonder-struck admiration, of exuberant self-assertiveness, crass hubris. With complete naivete Nietzsche glorified the blissful obverse of his disease, those euphoric compensations and over-compensations which are part of the clinical picture... What he is "in truth" describing—but what is truth, the experience or its medical interpretation?—is a dangerous condition of over-stimulation which ironically precedes tertiary-lytic collapse.

Everyone will grant that Nietzsche's paean to his own work are delirious excesses of egotism. It is certainly evidence of vanishing rationality when he calls his Zarathustra an act compared to which all the rest of human achievements appear poor and petty.  

The emotion in excess of the achievement manifests a fissure in the mind, a failure to integrate emotion and reason. Such

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disintegration is manifest structurally in "Eureka" when suddenly, unexpectedly and inexplicably Poe expresses ebullient enthusiasm. The very title of the work, "Eureka," expresses the instantaneous declaration of a discovery—a declaration unmediated by reason or irony—which he believes is grandiose. His own genius becomes for him the implicit object of praise, as well as analysis. For he would attempt to "have the mind of God" in order to comprehend a subject that is utterly beyond man's rational capacities. Assessing his own work, he writes in the preface:

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 Life Everlasting" (XVI, 183).

And, in the preamble of his work, he carries out that prophecy when he introduces a letter, a curiosity, written in the year 2842, which, to his great surprise, informs him that the dark ages in the history of thought was beginning to come to an end in the year 2000. The fanciful letter writer is indeed Poe himself, who with a transcendent view "out of TIME-out of SPACE" can assess the achievements of the past and predict those of the future. In the preamble, he discloses that he will not be understood in the year 1848, but that his work will one day "rise to Life Everlasting," when the human mind is wise enough to understand him.

It is the lack of coherence, then, compounded with an excessive expression of egotism that might impel the reader to condemn "Eureka" as the product of a mind that is falling to pieces. We tend to see Poe's self-praise as a symptom of megalomania. Such loss of both perspective and irony manifests an indifference to
the empirically given which, carried beyond a certain point, indicates the breakdown of the reality principle. Poe's megalomania and his obsession with the theme of the apocalypse do, in fact, indicate that some psychogenic disorder might be the "cause" of the unstructuring of "Eureka" which seems so uncanny. If we accept this explanation of "cause," I suggest that we condemn "Eureka," even before we have bothered to understand it. Whoever is interested in Poe's art cannot afford to ignore "Eureka," and even less, to condemn it. For Poe's magnum opus stands at both the beginning and the end of his career; whatever ideas are expressed in it, Poe maintains are implied in the very first piece he ever wrote. Therefore, anyone who would take "Eureka" seriously must decide in advance that he will assume the "cause" for the unstructuring in "Eureka" is not unconscious, but that instead the principle of its unstructuring is the result of conscious premeditation on Poe's part.

Indeed, even on the basis of what appears to be its senseless unstructuring "Eureka" cannot possibly be described as psychotic art. For some of the substance of this work is familiar, namely the scientific principles and the language which, even to the most recalcitrant Poe critics, communicates some meaning. To gain a sense of perspective which would enable us to perceive that Poe's "Eureka" is quite rational, one would have merely to compare his preoccupation with "the universe of stars" with that of the psychotic patient, Kirk, in The Fifty Minute Hour. In comparison to
a valid example of psychotic vision, Poe's vision in "Eureka" is clearly grounded in common sense.

Although the first impression we have of "Eureka" is one of chaos, it has been demonstrated any number of times that there are portions of that work which can be easily understood. Edward Davidson suggests, in fact, that he is able to observe a structure to the work, when he speaks of the three major themes handled consecutively by Poe: "first, the concept of creation ...; second, the nature of matter; third, the prospect for the natural world."\(^5\) Davidson has succeeded in succinctly paraphrasing the essential "scientific" content in the work, indicating thereby that at least parts of this work can be understood.

Varying Newton's law which described merely the present observed condition of things, Poe attempts to return to an origin and to describe both the known condition of matter and its problematical beginning. He posits two contending forces in the universe. One is attraction or gravitation, a physical principle operating as the data or patterns of what the sense perceptions tell us are occurring. The other is repulsion or electricity, a spiritual principle. Matter exists as expressions of these two forces; spirit is extended throughout, is individualized in matter and assumes special forms which may be far removed from the laws or forms known to man, and reaches its highest development in the conscious and intuitive intelligence of man.

In the beginning God, or the first cause, existed only as spirit; in that condition of thought there was made known the principle of "Diffusion," which, when it occurred, caused matter to be created at some focal point and then dispersed throughout the universe. During that process of dispersion, God exists in diffused matter and as spirit in His universe; when the dispersion is completed and the universe has reached the forms which accomplish God's design, then God's thought is to be withdrawn, and

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there will commence a reverse process, a necessary conflict of the powers of attraction and repulsion. Eventually, by its tendency to return to a single center, matter and spirit will be perfectly unified again.  

While Davidson's clear, succinct paraphrase is useful—indeed mandatory—in helping us to understand the essential content of the work, it is, nevertheless, incomplete for the reason that descriptions like it are bound to be incomplete. For he treats only the "rational," the clearly ordered, the explicitly formulated principles; but he neglects altogether any detailed inquiry into possible meanings that might be expressed in the very act of unstructuring, in the chaos itself. Davidson fails, in other words, to deal with the uncanny, and to attempt to determine in what way Poe hoped in "Eureka" to make it an integral part of the "rational."

My purpose, then, in discussing "Eureka" will be to deal with the central problem that is manifest in all of Poe's work, namely the problem of unity, structure, and coherence. My assumption throughout this discussion is that in spite of the disintegration seen everywhere, "Eureka" is "unified" if only for the reason that unity is expressed as the ideal in this work, even as it is expressed as the ideal in all of Poe's other work. Indeed, "Eureka" presents Poe's most self-conscious and demonic attempt to achieve that ideal. Those critics who refer to the expression of unity in Poe's "Eureka" by means of hierarchical structures of the universe that—as they claim—Poe attempts to discover and express analogically fail altogether to understand his notion of unity. Poe

6 Davidson, pp. 225-226.
believed that a series of structures related by correspondences could never constitute unity. For unity depends upon the existence of a single, indivisible state and, therefore, it cannot be adequately expressed by the analogue, which acknowledges the existence of two or more particulars to be related, and, even while establishing their correspondence, recognizes their differences. To be sure, at specific moments in "Eureka" Poe does attempt to establish analogies. But he is not content to stop at that point. For the analogue expresses a relationship which Poe maintained can only constitute an artificial, an imperfect means of representing unity. Poe's desire, therefore, was to transcend such artificiality, such specious unity by conceiving of how he could "imitate" stylistically the apocalypse to come at the end of time, the final convulsion before the perfect unity, perfect disintegration would be achieved. He chooses to "imitate" this destruction of the imperfect condition of relatedness by destroying the very means man uses to relate one concept another. And that is why in "Eureka" the route of the journey to this final state, the leitmotif of his works, bypasses the analogue to lead one far beyond the specious unity implied in order, structure, and relationship toward a dead center of identification that he has postulated, even without being able to conceive of it, much less to represent it. For by conceiving of how even language as a structure would be destroying, he thought he might foretell the apocalypse to come, the annihilation of all hierarchies, and the final perfection of the universal impulse toward unity.
Since the problem in understanding "Eureka" arises from the difficulty in perceiving an order in what appears to be so chaotic, I am concerned here not with paraphrasing any purely "scientific" theme, as it might be articulated at times distinctly from those passages that are non-scientific; nor am I concerned with attempting to read "Eureka" as a poem, divorced of its "scientific" content. While I recognize that there are passages that are restricted to one subject for more than a page, and which, therefore, in pursuing a single line of direction, achieve a certain coherence, I am concerned especially with those sections of "Eureka" where there is a greater degree of complexity and obscurity, in a word, of "unstructuring."

The process of "unstructuring" is manifest in two large ways: first, as the result of Poe's attempt to speak concurrently of a number of distinct categories, so that a sum, a "unity" can be achieved by superimposing the distinct parts, one upon the other; second, as the result of Poe's deliberate attempt to represent as having disintegrated the step-by-step progression of logically consecutive thought from his first hypothesis to the final conclusion. Once such progression (the only manner of relating in which he displays faith in the earlier scientific pieces) is dissolved, the beginning and the end exist concurrently; they are, in fact, identified. I do not suggest that Poe achieved unity; nor, in fact, would he himself admit that he had fused opposites and altogether dissolved the progression. But I am convinced that "Eureka" can
be understood—even if we still maintain at the end that it is a hopeless failure—only as the expression of Poe's desire to unify.

In determining the modes of disintegration and reconstitution, we will observe the kind of God Poe postulates as the first cause, and, by what kind of mathematical formula he finally expresses the mechanism of the central principle of "unity-diffusion-radiation-return to unity." I suggest that in attempting to "imitate" the disintegration into unity, the need to break down orders and structures imposed an enormous deprivation upon Poe as an artist: for he was obliged to try to achieve definition and meaning in spite of the dissolution he initiates. We will observe that it is by means of the scientific formula that Poe finally defines with precision the kind of truth he believes presently exists in the universe. And if perchance anyone might question how such truth as Poe finally arrives at could possibly sustain one through life, one might come to understand at last that dependent upon such truths, Poe's erratic, exuberant and desperate emotions are, indeed, not in excess of the situation, but that, for a man who believed in science as he would in God Himself, these responses are quite logical and necessary and therefore, as mad as they initially seem to be quite inevitable and normal.

A Rationale for the Chaos. The initial perplexing and paradoxical problem which focuses upon the question of unity in "Eureka" arises from our attempt to determine in what sense "Eureka" is a poem, in what sense it serves to communicate scientific truths,
and finally in what sense Poe conceives of relating science and poetry so that he might achieve unity in this poem. In "The Poetic Principle" Poe states quite explicitly that the functions and ends of poetry and science are mutually exclusive. For science can define with precision causal laws and give rise to a sense of certitude; but poetry can only express effects, responses of bewilderment and enchantment. If Poe really intended to write a prose poem, he faced the problem of having to conceive of the kind of mind that could concurrently experience absolute mystery and have absolute knowledge, that could be both in and "out of TIME," that could be both man and God. Even if he could conceive of such a "state," even if an artist could conceive of having an intimation of eternity in time, he would be beset with the problem of expressing such conceptions. If eternity--truth, absolute knowledge, certitude--could be represented only by the mathematical symbol, which formulates meanings precisely but suggests nothing beyond these meanings, how could he hope to express such truth and at the same time express in an impassioned style of poetry the sense of mystery?

Of course, one might conclude that Poe was not concerned with achieving the maximum degree of unity. Because for him poetry could do what science could not, and science could do what poetry could not, Poe might well have intended them merely to function concurrently while yet maintaining their distinctive properties. The causal laws, the substance might then, for Poe, have been merely the mathematical formula; and he might have responded to
that truth in the style of poetry. The evidence of such unity which is little more than an adaptation of parts which can be easily separated and distinguished—a unity that disintegrates into two sharply demarcated and distinguishable disciplines of science and poetry—is easily observable in large parts of "Eureka," where Poe alternately formulates causal laws in scientific principles and thereupon responds to them ecstatically. Those passages would seem to demonstrate that he achieved at best a specious unity by merely adapting in a rigid manner what even in "Eureka" could be seen to constitute for him two mutually exclusive disciplines.

If, for a moment, even at the expense of temporarily dismissing the evidence in the latter part of the poem, we insist that Poe attempted to achieve a greater fusion than such mere adaptation implies, we require that evidences of a unity more intense than such adaptation be demonstrated to exist on at the very least the following two levels: causes and effects. Put another way, fusion can be achieved only when the core of one discipline (poetry) is fused with the core of the other (science). Scientific principles would have to be made "suggestive" and poetry would somehow have to be conceived of as delineating—no matter how faintly—a cause. We will take up now the matter of that fusion Poe might well at least have considered by speaking briefly, first about causes, and then, more extensively, about effects.

In analyzing "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and "A Few Notes on Secret Writing," we have observed that in each of these cases the cause
becomes progressively elusive. In "Eureka" the cause almost altogether vanishes; it is merely named, "God," but given no predicate. Because in his poetry Poe expresses only effects, he suggests that the cause of a given condition can only be implied in a poem. But there are times when he seems to go beyond such implications to express the faintest illusion of an object that has evoked magical responses in him. At times Poe would try to analyze that object. But it is, like the ultimate cause, remote and inscrutable. Therefore, the single property that science and poetry might possibly have shared in common for Poe is the remoteness of the object that each seek; for the scientist would attempt to make visible what is invisible and so to arrive at the ultimate, the most elusive cause; and the poet would respond ecstatically to the ineffable.

Therefore, while some kind of a dubious identity may be achieved between poetry and science by claiming that the ineffable and the ultimate cause constitute one and the same thing, yet unity is difficult to achieve and sustain on the level of verbal expression and of commitment. In scientific terminology one can define with precision, and thereupon respond with cool certitude. But for Poe no causes are defined in poetry with precision. The sense of mystery gives rise to a range of emotions from mild uneasiness to agitation. Thus, while he knew that he could not present a mind in total ignorance and complete knowledge at the same time, Poe might well have attempted to conceive of some means of mediating
between these extremes. And he found those means in the epistemology he devised for himself.

Science, Poetry, Epistemology: Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis. Poe's way of mediating between knowledge and ignorance is achieved as he presents in "Eureka" an image of the mind attempting to understand the most difficult subject that can be described: the universe. (For Poe the subject is at times the universe; at times it is the scientific laws of Newton and LaPlace.) Poe believed that the method by which one arrives at causes and knowledge can be neither orderly nor lucid. We see him attempting to understand the universe by means of a method—a theory of knowledge—that is so rigorously demanding upon man's intellect, that paradoxically its major assumption seems to proclaim the virtual impossibility of conceiving of anything in the first place. The failure to arrive at knowledge seems to be, in fact, the implied result of his epistemology. Such failure, (the limitations of the human mind), implied throughout his categorically defined theory of knowledge enables Poe to be indefinite (poetic) and vague, even while he is uncompromisingly specific in spelling out the limitations of the human mind. Indeed, in devising a theory of knowledge that in the end would fail to define a method of arriving at understanding, Poe is in a position to speak of causes indefinitely. And this is precisely what he does when he quite deliberately expresses the sense of futility that the attempt to define gives rise to. The epistemology, Poe's journey to truth, expresses his partial
achievement in fusing the styles of poetry and science; for that
epistemology explicitly defines man's sense of his own imperfec-
tion which imitates the imperfection of the universe in a state of
diversity, conflict and irresolution. Because man is finite, he
must plod along step-by-step from manifestations to causes, until
he comes to a point where the concrete world disappears altogether
and there is nothing more to plot. (The step-by-step procedure,
which in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" is a sign of certitude comes in
"Eureka" to express the attempt and the failure to define). At
such time the sense of resolution and vacuity becomes unbearable
and bewildering to Poe. And then, he would circumvent such basic
shortcomings implicit in his epistemology by introducing the magic
faculty "intuition," through which man attains the impossible, "the
mind of God." By means of intuition, man presumably perceives
causal laws. But when such perceptions are articulated, we see
that in the end they only constitute scientific laws. The inef-
fable subject far off in poetry becomes in the end only the scien-
tific principle. (One supposes that such reductionism is possi-
ble, because the ineffable had no real substance for Poe in the
first place.) But to sustain the effects of poetry, Poe perhaps
feels the need to respond with ecstasy, exclaiming over the beauty
of each law.

The later parts of "Eureka," where Poe goes beyond his im-
plied epistemology to speak of ontology, to formulate causal laws
in scientific formulae, therefore, do not attempt to present the
integration of poetry and science; now they exist apart, distinct
from each other. They are expressed in almost regular pairs of
alternates. In the first half of "Eureka," wherein Poe attempts
to describe how impossibly difficult it is for man to attain know-
ledge, he is able to be at once both specific and vague. It is,
then, only by means of the epistemology which subsumes at least
half of "Eureka" that Poe does in a qualified sense achieve a
unity, an identity between science and poetry.

In "Eureka" Poe postulates the existence of a final cause,
i.e., God. He refuses to describe God as benevolent, implying
that such descriptions arise from beliefs which are religious ra-
ther than intellectual. He describes the difference between the
two.

We believe in a God. We may or may not believe in
finite or in infinite space; but our belief, in such
cases, is more properly designated as faith, and is a
matter quite distinct from that belief proper—from
that intellectual belief—which presupposes the mental
conception (XVI, 203).

Once we have postulated the existence of God, we must proceed to
describe him. For such description, indeed, constitutes knowledge.
But to name God as a cause, as "infinity" itself is not to know
anything more about him. (Indeed, naming, for Poe is merely a way
of being specific and vague at the same time.)

A First Cause. And what is a First Cause? An ultimate
termination of causes. And what is an ultimate termina-
tion of causes? Finitly—the Finite (XVI, 202).

Guided by the belief that "the finest quality of Thought is its
self-cognizance" (p. 204), Poe would attempt to devise an episte-
mology (a method) of achieving description (explanation) that
would constitute absolute truth. Such description must be objec-
tive in order to be valid; it must be true to the object being
described, and not express any fancy or desire of man to define
his object in a way that will please him but fail to correspond to
the truth. Poe's general assumption is that the knowledge of the
final cause has nothing whatsoever to do with describing man and
recording historical events. It is not anthropocentric in any
sense of the term. His assumption is based upon a belief that the
only valid truth there is, is one that will endure eternally. At
the end of time, man will become one from among many things to be
destroyed. All that will endure is a "unity" which is total anni-
hilation. Man can postulate such disintegration. But he can know
the universe only in its present state of diversity tending toward
fulfillment into unity. It is a kind of truth that requires not
only objectivity; it also demands a de-humanization of the most
radical order. To be perceived, it requires a quality of mind that
can penetrate beyond experience and history (which only obfuscate
the truth), beyond the phenomenological world to truths mysteri-
ously presented to man as a kind of proof of the substantiality of
his spirit.

Through intuition man hypothetically achieves (and perceives)
the laws of the universe.

"Do you know, my dear friend," says the writer, address-
sing, no doubt, a contemporary--"Do you know that it is
scarcely more than eight or nine hundred years ago since
the metaphysicians first consented to relieve the people
of the singular fancy that there exist but two practicable
roads to truth? Believe it if you can!" (XVI, 188).
Poe repudiates the validity of the inductive and deductive modes of arriving at truth. The inductive philosophers for Poe can never arrive at truth because they rely upon facts alone and refuse to accept the risks of theorizing; they were unable to arrive at any significant notion of causation. The deductive philosophers, on the other hand, pursue "in blind confidence, the a priori path of axioms (XVI, 192). They arrive at a notion of causation facilely and rigorously maintain that certain truths are self-evident. Whenever Aristotle set out to formulate a specific axiom, Poe believes that all he really did was fancifully to invent a cause. Thereupon, writes Poe ironically, "From axioms he proceeded, logically, to results (XVI, 188).

Repudiating the importance of facts alone and the validity of preconceived causes, Poe repudiates demonstration as a valid test of truth. For he insists that anyone whose quest for knowledge is governed by the need to arrive at a principle of causation that can be easily demonstrated has never made any major scientific discoveries. Causal laws are altogether imperceptible; they are not even insinuated by anything in the phenomenological world that can suggest that it is a manifestation of the cause:

... ninety-nine hundredths of what is undeniable in Heaven would be demonstrable falsity upon Earth (XVI, 193).

Poe believes, therefore, that anyone who would desire to discover absolute truths would have to have that rare quality of imagination which is not fettered by the need to rely upon empirical evidence as a test of truth. Indeed, he claims that such men of
genius as Kepler and LaPlace were able to arrive at laws inconceivable to the pedestrian imagination because they dared in one gigantic leap of "guessing" to travel "from the known because proximate, gradually onward to the point where all certitude becomes lost in the remote" (p. 199), the invisible omega point of the universe.

Paradox, Irresolution, Dialectic. To repudiate axioms and demonstrations; to require from men of genius the kind of imagination that can resist the temptation to visualize a fact; to insist that the pursuit of knowledge be an intellectual study and not a religious act of faith; to maintain categorically that quantity and not quality constitutes the ideal criterion of truth; and, in spite of this, to demand of oneself that he try to understand infinity even though it cannot be fixed and limited without being reduced immediately to the finite: all of this establishes the character of Poe's epistemology. Indeed, Poe has so categorically defined the indescribably impossible criteria of his epistemology that he seems to have wanted to insure himself against ever achieving truth. It seems that he has deliberately calculated how one might somewhere along the line become shipwrecked in the journey to truth, in spite of a consuming desire to arrive at it.

These antithetical goals—to arrive at a kind of truth and deliberately to calculate how one might yet never achieve it—would seem to arise from Poe's equally intense commitments to science and poetry. And yet one finds it hard to understand how
a man's commitments to science would not have modified his commitment to poetry, and vice versa. For it is difficult to believe that a man would deliberately and consciously have chosen to maintain these dual commitments, if he were well aware that they could only give rise to so much destructive ambivalence. It seems more conceivable that he would prefer to restrict himself to one discipline, instead of tearing himself to pieces by attempting to maintain concurrently two mutually exclusive disciplines.

Thus, one comes to the bedeviling paradox at the center of Poe's commitment. We seem to find that he has formulated his ambitious epistemology to make knowledge ultimately impossible to achieve in order to sustain the sense of mystery which poetry alone can express. But if we accept the fact that Poe was committed with equal intensity to science and poetry, such an explanation leads us to the ludicrous conclusion that he might have preferred to remain ignorant in spite of his ability to analyze causes, in order to maintain his commitments to poetry. Though it is patently absurd, we tend to affirm such a hypothesis, only because we assume that Poe's commitment to poetry was as great, if not greater than, his commitment to science. If we maintain that hypothesis, then we conceive of Poe primarily as an artist. But if we reject it—as I think we must on the grounds that it does not make sense—we have no choice but to accept the fact that Poe's commitment to science, his desire to know, was greater than his desire to worship the ultimate mysteries expressed in /
Because I find it difficult to believe that a man would deliberately have calculated to destroy himself, I can come to only one conclusion: that at least in "Eureka" his poetry arises in response to his ignorance; an outburst of desperate passion comes precisely at the moment when science fails. I am convinced that Poe's greatest ambition was to analyze the unanalyzable; that desire, greater than his passion to be a poet, occasions the presence of poetry in "Eureka," where his poetry is the expression of a man who can respond only chaotically to mystery that is overpowering because he cannot analyze it. To demonstrate my hypothesis, I shall discuss Poe's attempt to cope with the mystery which, in "Eureka" he makes desperate pretensions of knowing, in terms of (1) his furious attempts to define words, and (2) to conceive of number in such a way that it will define not the static, monolithic surfaces of things which appear fixed, but rather that it will—even as a fixed term—define the internal processes of the universe that he conceived to be in a state of ceaseless motion. And finally, as his attempts to achieve definition progressively deteriorate, I shall describe the desperate means Poe must resort to in order to gain the illusion that "Eureka" does, in fact, communicate truths. In the end, such grotesque understanding as Poe achieves is tragically the only resolution, the only stasis he can achieve, the only intimation of that final resolution he postulates to come at the end of time.
Disintegration of Words and Numbers. Poe believed that the basic substance of the universe, "the Secondary Cause" would be realized in its perfected state in the far distant astronomical future. To describe that condition of perfection (unity), Poe uses the word "one" again and again. For, to him, no other numbers will be real when the universe finally dissolves. Describing the present condition of the universe in a state of diversity and change, however, is much more difficult for him. Motion and change are conceived of, even when they cannot be perceived, as being ceaseless and swift. The central problem in science, of course, is to devise the instruments by which one can observe changes as taking place. While Poe does not speak of such tools, he does speak of the problem of definition which is directly contingent upon devising those tools. He seems constantly to be asking himself how, in a universe which is presently in a state of flux, changes can be predicated and formulated in specific terms whose meanings will not be blasted away at every infinitesimally small fraction of time and change. The description that Poe is especially interested in predicking of the present condition of the universe has no qualitative meaning. It concerns only quantity and distance, and therefore it can be expressed only numerically:

We perceive, therefore, upon the whole, that it would be supererogatory, and consequently unphilosophical, to predicate of the atoms, in view of their purposes, any thing more than difference of form at their dispersion, with particular inequidistance after it—all other differences arising at once out of these, in the very first
processes of mass-constitution:--We thus establish the
Universe on a purely geometrical basis (XVI, 208).

But toward the middle of "Eureka" he writes as though number had
figured only incidentally in his description of the universe.

Of specification there has been little; and whatever
ideas of quantity have been conveyed—that is to say,
of number, magnitude, and distance—have been conveyed
incidentally and by way of preparation for more definitiv
conceptions (XVI, 277).

His reliance upon numbers, indicated in the earlier passage, seems
by the time he concludes to have been deeply qualified. Such an
implicit change of opinion suggests that Poe arrived at an impasse
in his search for causal laws.

We shall discuss the crisis Poe experiences in dealing with
number, his attempt to overcome it, and finally the solution he
arrives at, a solution by which he finally formulates changing condi-
tions by means of numbers. We will see that Poe's crisis occurs
when he expresses a dissatisfaction with the fact that numbers,
it seems, can be predicted only when an item is immutable. Since
Poe believes that immutability, strictly speaking, exists only in
the remote astronomical future, he wonders how he might numeri-
cally describe the universe in its present state of flux. We
find, in the end, that he achieves definition with the help of
Newton and LaPlace, who provide him with the means of achieving
truth, the illusion of eternity, resolution and stasis. For in
the end, he finally discovers how he might use numbers paradoxi-
cally to describe states that are constantly changing.
In "Marginalia" Poe writes of the problem of defining terms in what he calls the "science of metaphysics":

... the whole science of metaphysics is at present a chaos, through the impossibility of fixing the meanings of the words which its very nature compels it to employ (XVI, 111).

We recall earlier in this chapter how in a passage from his "Pinakidia," he relegated metaphysics to second place as a rational order of study. In "Eureka" Poe would strive to bring it finally to the level of physics in order to evolve some sort of grand synthesis. To transform metaphysics into a science, to make its procedures absolutely identical therefore with those of physics, is merely to extend the sphere of physics. But so long as the ineffable materials which constitute the realm of metaphysics have not been analyzed, so long as no proper terminology exists by which one can even name them, metaphysics cannot strictly speaking--according to Poe--be considered a rational order of science. In "Eureka," then, we see Poe attempting to transform metaphysics into a rational order of study. In the passage quoted above, Poe anticipates the chief problem that inquiries into metaphysics inevitably raise: Do the definitions of imperceivable entities name and describe objects that actually exist? Or does one indeed define a word which relates to no corresponding object whose existence, "outside" the mind, is unimpeachable?

In the beginning of "Eureka" Poe declares that he will speak of the universe. He defines it emphatically: "... by the term 'Universe,' wherever employed without qualification in this essay,
I mean to designate the utmost conceivable expanse of space" (XVI, 186. That "utmost conceivable expanse of space" is, as he repeats again and again, infinity itself. And infinity, he writes later on, he cannot "conceive of and am convinced no one can." We are confronted with a central blatant contradiction that runs throughout "Eureka": how can Poe pretend that he has defined an object (in this case, the universe) by a term (in this case, one that is equivalent to infinity) that he admits from the very beginning he cannot define? Here we see a perfectly obvious example of the defect of circularity which is frequently leveled at modes of defining that are, in technical terms, nominal rather than real.

This apparent self-contradiction epitomizes both Poe's desire to arrive at and formulate the truth and his inability to do so. At times, by the way he uses a specific term, he suggests that he has a clear conception of the object and in fact has defined it; at other times, however, that same term is used in a way to suggest that the object is far away and indistinct and that it cannot be defined simply because it cannot even be visualized. Though the same word, therefore, may keep reappearing in different contexts, its meaning in each case is not fixed. In fact, the very same term can convey both an air of certitude and an air of ignorance and mystery—depending upon which context it may happen to appear in. For, curiously enough, the meaning of a term may really seem to have little to do with the object it names. Instead, words may be defined constantly in terms of their various contexts which for Poe turn out to be the various stages
in the process of inquiry: the beginning, the middle, and the end. Attempting to define the term "infinity" Poe fuses ontology and epistemology—the objective world and the intellectual context—and dissolves the distinction between mind and world through language which enables man to achieve a precise identity between cognition and what is ontologically real. In "Marginalia" Poe describes this relationship between mind and world:

The mind can form some conception of the distance (however vast) between the sun and Uranus... These objects serve as stepping stones to the mind; which nevertheless, is utterly lost in the attempt at establishing a notion of the interval between Uranus and Sirius... (XVI, 23).

In "Eureka" he represents the mind in its various stages of groping toward a definition of infinity.

Let us begin, then, at once, with that merest of words, "Infinity." This, like "God," "spirit," and some other expressions of which the equivalents exist in all languages, is by no means the expression of an idea—but of an effort at one. It stands for the possible attempt at an impossible conception. Man needed a term by which to point out the direction of this effort—the cloud behind which lay, forever invisible, the object of this attempt. A word, in fine, was demanded, by means of which one human being might put himself in relation at once with another human being and with a certain tendency of the human intellect. Out of this demand arose the word, "Infinity"; which is thus the representative but of the thought of a thought (XVI, 200).

Gradually he implies that our idea of infinity becomes increasingly clear, even while he keeps insisting that we cannot even conceive of it, not to mention ever define it. Yet the illusion of growing certitude is expressed by the enormous reserves of energy suddenly released by the mind in the effort to define.
In the effort to entertain it, we proceed step beyond step—we fancy point still beyond point; and so long as we continue the effort, it may be said, in fact, that we are tending to the formation of the idea designed; while the strength of the impression that we actually form or have formed it, is in ratio of the period during which we keep up the mental endeavor (XVI, 203).

Only an illusion of definition, therefore, can be achieved by all our striving. We dare not relax our efforts lest we wreck whatever definition we have achieved.

But it is in the act of discontinuing the endeavor—of fulfilling (as we think) the idea—of putting the finishing stroke (as we suppose) to the conception—that we overthrow at once the whole fabric of our fancy by resting upon some one ultimate and therefore definite point. This fact, however, we fail to perceive, on account of the absolute coincidence, in time, between the settling down upon the ultimate point and the act of cessation in thinking.—In attempting, on the other hand, to frame the idea of limited space, we merely converse the processes which involve the impossibility (XVI, 203).

While a cessation of mental activity will dispel the illusion of defining, at the same time, ironically, no amount of effort will achieve the precise definition itself:

...he who has a right to say that he thinks at all, feels himself called upon, not to entertain a conception, but simply to direct his mental vision toward some given point, in the intellectual firmament, where lies a nebula never to be resolved (XVI, 203).

As if finally to confirm the fact that definition is altogether impossible, "he comprehends, not only the impossibility, but, as regards all human purposes, the inessentiality, of its solution (XVI, 204).

However, to one's surprise, later on the page, Poe continues his inquiries as though he had clearly defined infinity and may now use that term to define the word "universe." And, in fact,
Poe really has in a sense achieved a definition of "infinity."
For now the term conveys the vision not of a fixed and limited universe; nor does it suggest that Poe's conception is definite and completed. Instead, infinity defines boundaries which are ever expanding and implies, therefore, that our conception of the universe must be partial in its endless striving, if it is to claim with justification any validity at all. For man is not capable of that omniscience which would permit him to see the entire expanse of the universe, and, therefore, achieve absolute definition.

... were it possible for us to attain any given point in space, we should still find, on all sides of us, an interminable succession of stars (XVI, 204).

Pascal's vision of the universe succinctly suggests for Poe why the absolute distance from one point, which we postulate as the ontologically real center of the universe, to another, the outermost circumference of an imaginary circle, is impossible to measure. For the universe "is a sphere of which the centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere (XVI, 205). The center, thus, in being everywhere at one time may constitute any one of an infinite number of still points on any one of an infinite number of circumferences. In attempting to define infinity, Poe realizes that precision of definition, ironically, points only to an immense vacuum of indefiniteness.

Unable to conceive of an end—spatial or temporal—to the universe, Poe, nevertheless, postulates both. He believes that he is not required to conceive of a fact in order to postulate it.
Although he knows that no one can conceive of the end of the universe, he postulates it. Once postulated, it becomes hypothetically real. The freedom to postulate gives one a sense of certainty; the failure to achieve precise definition gives one a sense of ignorance. These divergent, mutually exclusive predicaments of hypothetically achieving knowledge, of arriving at the end, and at the same time, of failing to achieve definition, being far away, Poe presents through the two methods he employs concurrently in his quest for absolute truth. By the first mode, he would begin at the beginning, with the material world which he can perceive and measure; by the second, he would begin at the end, where everything seems to disappear. And in the processes away from both beginning and end, he would proceed inch by inch toward that remote center, where the end intuited from the beginning would supposedly be made finally understandable and demonstrable under incisive analytic scrutiny:

This thesis admits a choice between two modes of discussion:—We may ascend or descend. Beginning at our own point of view— at the Earth on which we stand— we may pass to the other planets of our system— thence to the Sun— thence to our system considered collectively— and thence, through other systems, indefinitely outwards; or, commencing on high at some point as definite as we can make it or conceive it, we may come down to the habitation of Man (XVI, 198).

Such a procedure he would gladly follow— but cannot, because numbers, and not will power or desire, fail him.
For my present purpose, however,—that of enabling the mind to take in, as if from afar and at one glance, a distant conception of the individual Universe—it is clear that a descent to small from great—to the outskirts from the centre (if we could establish a centre)—to the end from the beginning (if we could fancy a beginning) would be the preferable course, but for the difficulty, if not impossibility, of presenting, in this course, to the unastronomical, a picture at all comprehensible in regard to such considerations as are involved in quantity—that is to say, in number, magnitude, and distance (XVI, 199).

The evidence of that failure is, of course, the frustration that Poe feels over the limited capacities of language as a mode of defining. It becomes even more evident through the disintegration of meaning and structure. Poe himself clearly points out such disintegration. As he expresses that journey from the beginning to the end, all considerations of number become increasingly irrelevant. Initially proceeding step-by-step, he gives the illusion of being located in a specific place and time; suddenly he seems to lose one step after another in that postulated progression and seems to be flying imaginatively in space. The journey from the end to the beginning reflects a kind of psychic weightlessness, where the mind does not even seem to realize that it exists as such. Later, able to distinguish itself as an entity in space, mind begins to become aware of itself and of some remote indeterminable point upon which it can descend. Sensing how high it has soared, it feels a giddy omniscience, which turns suddenly to dizziness and fear, and then begins to feel itself pulled into a vortex of endlessly revolving objects that blur into an undifferentiated unity.
He can rescue himself from the panic of ignorance only by taking refuge in two beliefs he holds dear: first, the process of intuition, by which he circumvents the need to justify the validity of his conclusion and to explain the procedure by which he claims to have arrived at truth; second, the scientific laws of Newton and LaPlace, which give to "Eureka" the only semblance of depth it has.

**Intuition, the Unanalyzable, and Metaphor.** Unable to resist the temptation of praising and understanding his own mind as he sublimely conceives of it, Poe would try to subject the abstruse processes of intuition to analysis. In "A Few Words on Secret Writing" Poe had boasted that he was able to analyze the unanalyzable, to describe the mental processes involved in arriving at an intuition. In "Eureka," however, Poe concedes that intuitions are simple "guesses," sheer "phantoms of thoughts," whose processes, far from being amenable to any rational analysis "... lie out of the human analysis--at all events are beyond the utterance of the human tongue" (XVI, 206). Here, he seems to concede that it is impossible for him to analyze the unanalyzable. But though analysis is itself not feasible for him, at the same time, his intense preoccupation with abstruse mental processes indicates that he can conceive of the possibility of some sort of analysis, even though he himself is unable to describe what kind it would have to be. And we can well understand why he cannot make this sort of crucial discovery. For such analysis requires
a rigidly determined progression that occurs in time. More im-
portant, it requires a clear-cut notion of causation. But how,
can one find material in the phenomenological world, upon which
analysis depends almost exclusively, to plot the timeless, space-
less, the most invisible steps which are themselves the ration-
ales both of the universe and of the mental processes of intui-
tion? The very mode of analysis would have to bridge the chasm
between a step-by-step chronology and a supra-logical time scheme
—difficult to conceive of—where the past, present, and future,
and the beginning and the end would, from a strictly a-temporal
perspective, be seen as occurring simultaneously. By establishing
some sort of correspondence between these two time schemes, the
lightning speed of the intuition could theoretically be protracted
in slow motion and the unified and complex whole, whose parts seem
utterly indistinguishable, be reduced into its manifold and dis-
tinct elements. But first, as Douglas Angus suggests briefly in
"Quantum Physics and the Creative Mind," instruments would have to
be devised to measure and classify phenomena on the sub-micro-
scopic level.

The cortex of the human brain contains about ten billion
cells and is capable according to C. Jodson Herrick of
102,783,000 synapses. It is difficult to find terminology
to express even hypothetically what happens when these im-
мене numbers are involved within such limited space, and
there are controversies between structural connection the-
ories and dynamic field pattern theories, between connec-
tionist and configurationist theories, all vaguely sugges-
tive of the conflicting particle and wave theories of quan-
tum physics. It would seem necessary, in short, to think
of both structural patterns and wave motions as involved in
the workings of the brain; that is, the brain must be
thought of as being amazingly fluid and at the same time
amazingly precise. One wonders, therefore, if the suddenness and wholeness of insight may not occur because the small-scale phases are affected by "quantum jump," the sudden and complete jarring of one submicroscopic configuration into another.7

Poe has the "urge" to conduct scientific inquiries into the structure of the brain. But he lacks the instruments which would enable him to define. He also lacks the terminology which would permit him hypothetically to manipulate, control and predict the movements of the phenomena he would pretend to investigate. Ultimately, the complexity of the problem demanded a new way of conceiving of number. For, after "The discovery of incommensurable lengths, . . . there was no real harmony between arithmetic and geometry, between the realm of discrete numbers and the realm of continuous quantities."8

It took the efforts of many centuries of mathematical and philosophical thought to restore this harmony. A logical theory of the mathematical continuum is one of the latest achievements of mathematical thought. And without such a theory all the creation of new numbers--of the fractions, the irrational numbers, and so on--always seemed to be a very questionable and precarious enterprise. If the human mind by its own power could arbitrarily create a new sphere of things we should have to change all our concepts of objective truth. But here too the dilemma loses its force as soon as we take into account the symbolic character of number. . . In order to fill the gap between the integers, which are discrete quantities, and the world of physical events contained in the continuum of space and time mathematical thought was bound to find a new instrument. If number had been a "thing," a substantia quae in se est et per se concipitur, the problem would

have been insoluble. But since it was a symbolic language, it was only necessary to develop the vocabulary, the morphology, and the syntax of this language in a consistent way. What was required here was not a change in the nature and essence of number but only a change of meaning. A philosophy of mathematics had to prove that such a change does not lead to an ambiguity or a contradiction—that quantities not capable of being exactly expressed by integral numbers or the ratios between integral numbers became entirely understandable and expressible by the introduction of new symbols.9

Poe, bedeviled with the problem of number, is unable in "Eureka" to "develop the vocabulary . . . in a consistent way" the morphology which might well have enabled him to conduct into the structure of the brain systematic inquiries which might well have revealed the shadowy processes of intuition. And, therefore, when rational analysis fails to explain the shadowy processes of intuition he must resort to poetry itself, to the faculty of establishing analogical relationships. By describing the principle of generation and the basic forces at work in the universe, attraction and repulsion, by stating emphatically that no one can specify all the infinitesimally intricate stages by which agglomerations of atoms form into yet higher forms of matter, and finally by suggesting that "unity" is the end toward which everything moves, he has metaphorically described intuition which can reveal in the most cloudy forms the beginning, the middle and the end of a process.

The metaphor devised from a number of scientific theories is

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9 Cassirer, pp. 268-269.
the machine. However, Poe conceives of it neither as a perfect, unchanging structure, nor as a dead, spiritless, inhuman structure without soul or God. For him it is a constantly moving and changing form whose dimensions are infinitely incalculable. His conception of the changing universe is not organic, however. For the changes which occur for the most part on the level of atomic particles cannot be observed. On the outside, then, the machine appears to be a stable structure. But penetrating the deceptive surface as he does when he solves the riddle of the chess player and the cryptogram, Poe can "see" the invisible internal structure revealed in the very action of motion, the "modus operandi," of each vibrating object. In "Eureka" the central principle of the universe, is formulated in the following statement: "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (XVI, 185-6). Stasis is implied in "unity." The principle of that unity in time is the "Secondary Cause" of all things. The "Secondary Cause" is the most remote and at the same time the most basic of all causes. It exists only potentially in the universe, in the operation of the machine: the constantly throbbing atoms of matter, imperceptibly shifting among and converging upon others, ceaselessly attempting to satisfy their tendency to return to a condition of undifferentiation and repose.

Stasis "Achieved": Proportion as Golden Mean. The universe, then, is somehow fixed and yet constantly moving. Since Poe
believes that motion is, in fact, the tendency toward stasis, he is beset with the problem of distinguishing between them. He concedes that absolute stasis as an ultimate condition in the remote future cannot at this moment really exist. And yet "stasis" must be described in Poe's concept of the universe, for it represents the stabilizing factor in nature which defines in the beginning the inevitable condition of unity toward which all things tend to resolve. Poe's image of the universe in its present state requires that he sustain the ideas of motion and relatedness concurrently. Such conceptions are not so difficult when two or more objects are conceived of as being respectively motionless and changeless. Poe conceives of such "vision," however, as being neither distinctly mobile, nor distinctly fixed; the particles of matter are constantly moving and changing. And all the time they are to be defined only in terms of their present situation which is to be at an incalculable and, therefore, ineffable distance (that is neither temporal nor spatial) from their ultimate condition of unity. One generally thinks of stasis and motion as descriptions of surfaces only. Poe's self-appointed task in "Eureka" is to translate these abstractions into terms that could suggest the internal processes of the universe. Stasis, then, becomes for him the tendency toward unity; motion, the frustration of that tendency. To reiterate this complex dialectic between stasis and motion, he uses the following terms: "perpetual tendency," "approach," "junction," "design of the repulsion," "heat," "magnetism," "electricity," "vitality," "proximate contact." The transition
from motion to stasis, therefore, constitutes the dialectic of the universe, of "Eureka," of every work of art. Poe's great desire, then, is to represent and structure that dialectic by resolving in some way two divergent functions of language (both as formulating precisely the absolute and suggesting the ineffable) with corresponding notions of objective truth (the temporal, perpetual balancing on the sub-atomic level of matter, of the divergent tendencies toward motion and stasis, and of the eternal ascendance of repose, undifferentiation, and stasis).

All of Poe's speculations in "Eureka" seem to underscore his attempt to resolve two major problems of knowledge implicit in such dialectic: first, if the universe is presently in a state of flux, how can any definitions which fix meaning in time ever be formulated accurately? second, upon what grounds can a postulated law and a hypothetical universe conjured from it be taken as absolute truth and ontologically real? Poe keeps reminding the reader again and again that the present condition of the elements of the universe--reflected on the most minute scale through the relationship between one atom and another--is inequality. The basic tendency however, is toward equality and balance. To formulate the present condition mathematically, a simple unifying equation cannot work. For unity, of course, cannot describe incessant change and motion. The kind of law Poe required would have to define precisely the degree of imbalance and inequality and at the same time imply a stasis and balance to be achieved in the remote future. For Poe this law is expressed by the proportion.
For this kind of law expresses two contrary states: the present state of imbalance and motion and the perpetual tendency to equalize, to achieve perfect balance, to move toward the future condition of equality and repose. These laws, which formulate the real condition of the universe, can be sustained and affirmed eternally.

But, in any series of concentric spheres, the surfaces are directly proportional with the squares of the distances from the centre (XVI, 231).

I am fully warranted in announcing that the Law which we have been in the habit of calling Gravity exists on account of Matter's having been irradiated, at its origin, atomically, into a limited sphere of Space, from one individual, unconditional, irrelative, and absolute Particle Proper, by the sole process in which it was possible to satisfy, at the same time, the two conditions, irradiation, and generally-equable distribution throughout the sphere—that is to say, by a force varying in direct proportion with the squares of the distances between the irradiated atoms, respectively, and the Particular centre of Irradiation (XVI, 242).

The present condition, which is every incalculably small point in time, may be understood therefore only in terms of its antecedent condition, which is its primary cause, even while the subsequent condition is caused inevitably from the present state. And the entire progression from the beginning of time to the end is irrevocably determined by the secondary cause. The law of causation is, therefore, in its strictest sense, post hoc, ergo propter hoc.

From this vision of the universe comes the chief criterion which for Poe becomes a sign (a demonstration) of the validity of his theories and those which comport with his own. The key term of evaluation throughout "Eureka"—and also, as we shall see in
his imaginative works—is "unity" and all the synonyms that are generated from it: consistency, adaptation of parts, reciprocity of adaptation, analogy, plot, symmetry. For him all of the parts of a theory must be mutually consistent. The faintest suggestion of inconsistency is a symptom of error. Eventually theories evolve into laws by withstanding the test of time in demonstrating their consistency with other great laws. Therefore, the visions of Newton, LaPlace, and Kepler complement, rather than refute, each other.

He who, divesting himself of prejudice, shall have the rare courage to think absolutely for himself, cannot fail to arrive, in the end, at the condensation of laws into Law—cannot fail of reaching the conclusion that each law of Nature is dependent at all points upon all other laws, and that all are but consequences of one primary exercise of the Divine Volition. Such is the principle of the Cosmogony which, with all necessary deference, I here venture to suggest and to maintain (XVI, 255).

For Poe the "plot" of the universe is beautiful. He has declared that law itself, the human rationale of the universe, becomes itself a source of beauty through its perfect consistency. In this way poetry, which expresses man's deepest awareness of beauty, and science, which satisfies man's most anguished search for truth, are joined in "Eureka" in ecstatic resolution.

A perfect consistency, I repeat, can be nothing but an absolute truth (XVI, 302).

Science as Religion. Poe's description of his ontology as the "plot" of the universe suggests organic growth, suppleness, and freedom. But in Poe's vision there is a strong sense of pessi-
mistic determinism; we feel it as we are reminded constantly of the necessity and the quality of the final synthesis. Whenever we hear the word "unity," we sense an overwhelming dissolution and doom which qualifies seriously whatever vitality, life and beauty we think the temporal reality may have for Poe. Vitality degenerates into electricity. And every impulse away from the center is doomed to be directed back to the original unity once again.

Although Poe acknowledges the manifold forms from which the original unity is radiated, he concentrates bleakly upon the simplest forms, forms that are so elemental that they cannot even be named, and upon the constant check (frustration) that keeps them from evolving into higher forms. For Poe the possibility of evolution exists, of course. But such evolution is absurd, since it cannot be sustained forever at any level, nor advance indefinitely, but rather must inevitably return to the aboriginal condition of absolute unity. His vision, then, if beautiful at all, has a beauty marred by relentless necessity, as the intimations of beauty in both his poems and finer tales are always of beauty somehow necessarily flawed. Indeed, it is often the flaw which, for Poe, transforms compelling beauty into its most rarefied implications.

As unsettling to us as are the aesthetic implications of Poe's vision of the universe, and its final condition, even more unsettling is the final moral evaluation Poe hazards when he attempts to define unity metaphysically. He maintains categorically that unity, the ultimate ontological state of rest (death) is normal
and right and that diffusion (life), therefore, is abnormal and wrong.

The absolute, irrelative particle primarily created by the Volition of God, must have been in a condition of positive normality, or rightfulness—for wrongfulness implies relation. Right is positive; wrong is negative—is merely the negation of light. That a thing may be wrong, it is necessary that there be some other thing in relation to which it is wrong—some condition which it fails to satisfy; some law which it violates; some being whom it aggrieves. If there be no such being, law, or condition, in respect to which the thing is wrong—and, still more especially, if no beings, laws, or conditions exist at all—then the thing cannot be wrong and consequently must be right. Any deviation from normality involves a tendency to return to it. A difference from the normal—from the right—from the just—can be understood as effected only by the overcoming a difficulty; and if the force which overcomes the difficulty be not infinitely continued, the ineradicable tendency to return will at length be permitted to act for its own satisfaction. Upon withdrawal of the force, the tendency acts. This is the principle of reaction as the inevitable consequence of finite action. Employing a phraseology of which the seeming affectation will be pardoned for its expressiveness, we may say that Reaction is the return from the condition of as it is and ought not to be into the condition of as it was, originally, and therefore ought to be (XVI, 2347).

This statement sums up the impact of Poe's studies in science upon his vision of life. In "Eureka" man, history, and time dissolve into an immense plethora of atomic particles. Only what is basic, timeless, and ultimate is ontologically real. What will exist in the condition of unity is, from his finite, human perspective, normal and right. In attempting categorically to evaluate the universe, Poe has not merely described how he thinks the universe operates—its genesis, present condition, and destiny. For he has gone beyond description to conceive of it as he wishes it to be described. And that is why the passage quoted strikes one—if
one responds immediately, in a human and uncomplicated way—as absurd and inconceivable. For every such judgment issues neither from analysis of empirical evidence nor from intuitions. One cannot conceive of something in the first place unless that conception would spring from observable facts or beliefs. Especially when such a conception of the universe hinges upon metaphysical questions, it must perform arise from some kind of belief, that, if not religious, certainly cannot be intellectual, as Poe would claim. Belief must have been occasioned by the "desire to believe" which, in turn, is aroused by that something desirable one wishes to affirm.

Poe categorically refused to postulate in the manner of the deductive philosophers any qualities that God might have. And this is the crucial point. For he is ecstatic in announcing repeatedly the subject of his poem, the description of the universe. He has told us to hold in abeyance our preconceived notions of the meanings of words. He has ripped definition from the word and we are sickened with disbelief at seeing how it, like a vessel, can so abruptly be emptied of its meaning. As a substitute for what we have lost, he would give us meaning with a capital M, the gigantic straining of a lonely and fiercely proud intellect, wrenching from words new meanings as he attempts to understand a subject that he admits from the beginning he cannot know, i.e., the universe. But, for all of his efforts to arrive at a coherent vision, definition, meaning, and order crumble into a terrifying chaos, a diffuse and intense disorganization that issues from a
willful act of destruction. For the gross irony of "Eureka" is that for all of Poe's effort to achieve a precise definition, his quest for knowledge has led him only to a dead end. To his boundless terror, the straining to conceive of God does not issue in any kind of substantial description. Though he seems to keep screaming "Eureka!," yet he can point to absolutely nothing. The effects generated by his enormous claims that he has arrived at the final mystery are constantly frustrated by the effects generated by his outright admission that no one can solve the riddle; and, therefore, at practically every other turn of the phrase the organic unity of "Eureka" is wrecked. Ecstasy, the profuse expression of ardour and joy at having at last solved the riddles, helplessly detached from any substantial human knowledge, leads inexorably to anxiety.

At the very end of "Eureka" Poe claims that he has given us a vision of life:

. . . bear in mind that all is Life--Life--Life within Life--the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine (XVI, 315).

But, no matter what he may say at the end, we know that the state of beatitude Poe conceives of and affirms with what appears to be deep belief is nothingness itself. In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" Poe describes the experience of nothingness.

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 . . . the grave was still a home, and the corrosive hours, co-mates (IV, 212).
It is difficult to understand how any man could affirm such a belief. But if we believe that Poe does—and we must if we are going to understand his art—then "Eureka" becomes in fact the rationale of that belief: an abstract image of Poe's agonized and thrilling surrender to death.

Early in his career, then, Poe imagined the world severed in two parts—matter and mind, body and soul, concrete surfaces and inner motion, the cipher without meaning and the message that it bears. Whenever he thought of them independently, the surface became merely illusion. Sometimes it was seen as the product of man's desire to deceive. In any case, by itself it could not reveal the "modus operandi," the inner forces at work in any object. Therefore, to describe mere surfaces was not enough. To arrive at causal laws, one had to penetrate beyond them, not as the metaphysician, who is able to arrive at invisible quiddities immediately but as the scientist who must grope step by step from what is manifested before him to what remains unseen. But in the end, the scientist proves that what was unseen was not really invisible, and, therefore, not as remote a cause as Poe at times initially leads one to believe that it is. However, when the unseen is actually not even an invisible particle of matter, when man can devise no tools for measuring it, for apprehending it quantitatively, then the net of mystery becomes too complex for methodical unravelling by scientific analysis. At that time Poe must resort to the faculty of intuition which supersedes any mental processes
describable as either poetic or scientific. Intuitively arriving at the central principle of "Eureka," Poe can neither demonstrate nor prove it as the scientist would. His only recourse is to suggest as the poet would what can never be made visible and what he himself can never systematize.

In the following chapters, we will observe how science and poetry, their styles of containing the ineffable, the "Secondary Cause of All Things" which presages complete repose, are forged into a unity. One is tempted to conclude that in initiating such a synthesis, Poe wished to destroy all structures. For the final category of learning, science-poetry, would reflect, on the most abstract level, that ultimate destruction which would bring about the perfect unity of all things.
Toward the end of his career, Poe put to test what was perhaps his most lofty ambition. In "Eureka" he tried to fuse the language of poetry and science and so achieve a transcendent style whereby he could formulate causal laws and at the very same time express man's response to them. Shortly after he finished "Eureka," he proudly announced that it was indeed his finest achievement. His critics, however, generally disagree with him. And, therefore, they fail to do the very thing that Poe implicitly asked of them: to place "Eureka" at the very center of his creative speculations. I have chosen to take "Eureka" most seriously, so that I might see all of his work as a series of experiments culminating in the style of this grand poem. In my study of "Eureka" in the first chapter, I have described some of the goals Poe set for himself. Now I shall proceed deductively, as it were, from the principles expressed in "Eureka" and shall view all of this work as a series of experiments involving essentially the same synthesis of poetry and science.

Turning to his theory of art, we find in "The Poetic Principle" a passage which articulates the central epistemological problem of "Eureka," the attempt at once to communicate expressively and to explain causal laws.
The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness—this struggle, on the part of souls fittingly constituted—has given to the world all that which it (the world) has ever been able at once to understand and to feel as poetic (XIV, 274).

Arriving at this principle makes possible an intensive inquiry into a theory of language that Poe consciously evolved and tested in practically everything he wrote. In respecting Poe's conscious efforts, my study is unlike the traditional biographical and psychoanalytic approaches which explain his art in terms of a rationale of abnormal behavior. Nor is my approach "historical," for I am not concerned at this moment to evaluate his achievement by standards which tangentially describe and so "place" his art, but fail to define what Poe may have wanted most of all to accomplish. My study of Poe's literary criticism will begin perhaps too simply by reiterating his chief concerns, the central ideas expressed in the first chapter. Though here I define them only in terms of Poe's theory of composition, I shall attempt to develop the ideas sketched in the first chapter and affirm that they constitute the most legitimate structure in Poe's literary achievement. The basis upon which this can be done is almost embarrassingly transparent: I should like to propose that Poe himself explicitly defined the principles he intended to embody in his art and that in all fairness to Poe, we can at least take the time to hear what he believed he had intended to do, even if, later on, we decide that this, in fact, has nothing whatsoever to do with what Poe really--i.e., unconsciously--might have intended. The conspicuous shortcoming in Poe scholarship, as I have observed it, is that critics have not really desired to believe Poe when he
stated precisely what he intended to do and for some reason they have had ideas of their own as to what Poe might have intended. They fail from the outset to question what Poe might have meant by the word "intention."

Contemporary literary critics often have conflicting notions as to what the intention of the poet in any one poem really is. They often state that no critic should ever presume to know the real intention of the poet and, therefore, to offer a conclusive interpretation of his work. Furthermore, poets themselves have confounded the problem of interpretation by flatly refusing to state what they really intended to do in any one poem. Exasperated by our futile attempts at analysis, we often conclude that understanding the poet's intention is really not important at all in appreciating art. However, such a belief seems to be more a rationalization for our failure to define the poet's intention than a genuine conviction that asserts itself in the experience of reading with understanding. For behind every attempt at analysis is the vain and fierce desire to understand precisely what the poet intended. How one comes to terms with this complex word "intention," therefore, is crucial in every critical essay. Those critics who never do confront it vigorously may hesitate to define the intention of the poet categorically for fear of stating it incorrectly. And, therefore, although they may, because of their caution, never blunder with an improbable thesis, at the same time they are unable to experience the temporary satisfaction we derive
from certitude and belief in a single interpretation or from several tightly related interpretations.

One of the conspicuous goals that determined Poe's critical procedure is that he, too, was obsessed with the desire to understand "intention." As a critic he would be utterly incapacitated were he not to permit himself the liberty of guessing the intention of the poem, line by line, word by word, letter by letter. He does not stop here, however. He announces that he will conceive of what the poet himself might have had in mind when he wrote a particular poem. And, thereupon, he will evaluate the poem by measuring the poet's intention in terms of the poem's "ideal" intention. This procedure is not as novel as it may initially appear; many critics, indeed, have labored from the same perspective. However, strangely enough, whereas they generally take their set of ideal standards for granted and express them implicitly in their criticism, Poe spelled out his procedure in irritatingly painstaking detail. Since so many critics are unable to understand why so standard a procedure should have occasioned the bold and plodding emphasis that Poe gives it, they have said that he boasted about everything he did. However, such facile remarks are not justified, it seems, because they do not follow an explanation "of those meanings, and only those meanings, which the text explicitly or implicitly represents." ¹ On the basis of a close

examination of the text I suggest that Poe's procedure in analyzing literary pieces and his aesthetics might well have issued automatically from his deep commitment to the following two central beliefs which he intensively analyzed and conflated in "The Philosophy of Composition": first, that the poem could exist somehow independently from the poet; second, that he himself could precisely define the intention of the poet and in doing so, could pursue an activity that he had enjoyed in his role of scientist. For in order to understand how the chess player was operated, he had to "conceive of" what Maelzel had in mind; in order to analyze the cipher, he had to conceive of the abstruse intentions of the cryptographer; and finally, in "Eureka," in order to understand the creation of the universe, Poe had, as he himself said to "have the mind of God."

Poe's desire to possess the mind of any being outside of himself, this ambition which critics have described as the demonic sin of pride, has made him morally repugnant to critics like Allen Tate and Joseph Chiari. Poe's name has become synonymous with black magic, Lucifer and the "poète maudit" all at once. We have certain accounts of Poe's behavior by his contemporaries who claim that he was tormented by nightmarish visions, legends which have been perpetuated to this day. Yet if Poe was a magician, or even if he desired to become one, why did he not desire to project that image in his literary criticism? Few romantic poets would have treated the artist as impersonally as Poe did. His attempt to clarify the most elusive aspects of composition as he conceived it
has, to my knowledge, not been equalled in the literary criticism of any other poet or critic. There is absolutely no attempt on Poe's part to create any subterfuge which could inveigle the reader into believing that the poet was divine. On the contrary, the tone of his criticism reveals an excruciatingly earnest attempt of a critic who deeply desires to communicate clearly and directly to an audience. That desire, one might say indeed, constituted one of his few commendable moral characteristics.

Poe's occupation as a literary critic might well have been motivated by more than an obligation he felt toward his "uneducated" reading audience. For it satisfied a deep desire on his part. In formulating his theory of composition, he discovered that he could pursue a special intellectual activity that he adored: to arrive at a rationale for those very shadowy processes involved in creating a poem, for intuitions much like those which must have stirred mysteriously when scientists intuited what for others were inscrutable laws of the universe. Poe speaks lovingly of his life-long fancy in "Marginalia":

There is, however, a class of fancies, of exquisite delicacy, which are not thoughts, and to which, as yet, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language. I use the word fancies at random, and merely because I must use some word; but the idea commonly attached to the term is not even remotely applicable to the shadows of shadows in question. They seem to me rather psychical than intellectual. They arise in the soul (alas, how rarely!) only at its epochs of most intense tranquility. . . (XVI, 88).

These images or fancies, he says, occur at the very edge of consciousness. Like the romantic poets, he prized dream-images. But unlike them Poe would analyze his fancies. He does not, however,
maintain as they often did that those images are the very content of poetry. Instead, he believed that for the most part "fancies" elude any style of poetry whatsoever. But even if he could ever hope to express them in poetry, he would still not be satisfied until he had submitted them to analysis.

I have proceeded so far, secondly, as to prevent the lapse from the point of which I speak—the point of blending between wakefulness and sleep—as to prevent at will, I say, the lapse from this border-ground into the dominion of sleep. Not that I can continue the condition—not that I can render the point more than a point—but that I can startle myself from the point into wakefulness—and thus transfer the point itself into the realm of Memory—convey its impressions, or more properly their recollections, to a situation where (although still for a very brief period) I can survey them with the eye of analysis (XVI, 90).

Clearly he wished to meditate consciously on images which he felt were the product of unconscious mental activity. But given the nature of his efforts, he was confronted with what seemed to be an insurmountable problem: how could he possibly be conscious and unconscious at the same time? He knew he would somehow have to achieve a state of semi-consciousness, that "point of blending" between wakefulness and sleep, that rare, infinitesimally small instant of time and try through an immense act of will to sustain it for more than just one instant. The synthesis required this time would have to be of contrary states of mind. Yet even if he were able somehow to retain just one image, could he ever hope to objectify it, to project it in any way without distorting it? He knew that even though the style of poetry and the plodding step by step method of analysis might differ from each other in every
respect, in one they would certainly correspond: each in its own way would violate the meaning of the dream-image.

The dream image, therefore, is remote. Poe maintained that it is never amenable to verbal analysis or representation. In "Eureka," however, where unity is hypothetically achieved, Poe would have us believe that the central principle of the universe is, in fact, the abstract dream image which he experienced, projected, and analyzed. In this imaginary, unreal sense, the impossible fusion of states of consciousness is achieved in Poe's prose poem. Except in "Eureka," therefore—which is, after all a "romance"—Poe felt analysis and poetry were mutually exclusive categories. Yet in as much as both styles seize hold of states of consciousness, the meanings contained in dream images, partly deducible through analysis and partly expressible in poetry, had to be identical on some remote level, difficult ever to conceive of, not to mention achieve. He felt in other words that the only difference between analysis—that is "scientific" discourse—and poetry was their respective styles and not their meanings. It was as though Poe believed that meaning existed somehow independently of man's capacity to express it. There are other times, however, when he felt that meaning was contingent upon language; then he would insist that analysis yielded crystal clear meanings which gave him great self-confidence and certitude. And yet whenever he was dissatisfied with the frigid quality of analysis, he would maintain that there were meanings that only poetry could suggest.
Finally, in parts of "Eureka" he asserted that mathematical symbols, formulae, and diagrams themselves had a mysterious power of expressing elusive dream images:

What does the Newtonian law declare?—That all bodies attract each other with forces proportional to their quantities of matter and inversely proportional to the squares of their distances. Purposely, I have here given, in the first place, the vulgar version of the law; and I confess that in this, as in most other vulgar versions of great truths, we find little of a suggestive character. Let us now adopt a more philosophical phraseology: --Every atom, of every body, attracts every other atom, both of its own and of every other body, with a force which varies inversely as the squares of the distances between the attracting and attracted atom. -- Here, indeed, a flood of suggestion bursts upon the mind (XVI, 215).

As if inverting his most deeply felt commitments, in "Eureka" Poe implies that poetry itself is less suggestive than scientific laws.

It is hardly important that Poe's equivocal assessment of the language of analysis and poetry--his tendency to conceive of them now as separate and distinct, now as hypothetically constituting one category--suggests he may have contradicted himself. There is something far more important: Poe seriously undertook a study--and his willingness to tolerate inconsistencies is proof of the ardent of his commitments--to describe those mental processes involved both in analyzing and in creating an artifact, so that he could establish finally the precise correspondence between them. He genuinely believed that if he were able to analyze the mental processes involved in creating a work of art, he would automatically be able to devise rules according to which art would
henceforth be created. Only in this way could he justify analysis itself.

Literary criticism as it is generally understood attempts to make the work of art comprehensible to the reader. But literary critics should never insist that the standards of criticism they employ to evaluate art constitute scientific laws. Their observations may elucidate many details in one poem, but no critic should assume that he can define the intention of the poet. Poe believed that a thorough analysis would have to account for every item down to the smallest possible poetic component (sound), in a way that would correspond with the meanings expressed by every other item. We observed in "Eureka" that Poe postulated the meaning of every atom in terms of its activity (attraction-repulsion) and the principle regulating that activity, electricity. But he could not describe even a few of the possible shapes of the multivariate agglomerations of atoms, because he had no knowledge of the principle by which an infinite variety of forms could have been created from a uniform undifferentiated particle. Yet, whenever Poe works with concrete items that can be described, he is able to isolate and define the minute elements that compose the structure, and at the same time to describe at any number of consecutive points in their development the various forms they grow into as well as the principle which generates the processes of fusion.

In analyzing a poem, one dare not assume that the analysis corresponds precisely to the principle that generates the poem in
the first place. This fact would be too obvious to state, were it not that Poe seems to dispute it. For he believed that his rationale, devised after the fact, was identical to the principles according to which the poem was composed. But even more important, in "The Philosophy of Composition" he seems to have subsumed the rationales for any number of poems under just one law. He implies, therefore, that his method of analysis formulates the only legitimate procedure for composing poetry. While the rationale is not meant to be the poem itself, it is even superior to a poem in the sense that it can create any poem. In its universal applicability, it supersedes poetry itself. And, therefore, the judge propagating Poe's law for composing poetry is like Newton's God, detached from the "plot of the universe."

Poe conceived of his rationale for composition in much the same way as Babbage might have conceived of his famous calculating machine which Poe admired in "Maelzel's Chess-Player." He describes how the machine operates:

Arithmetical or algebraical calculations are, from their very nature, fixed and determinate. Certain data being given, certain results necessarily and inevitably follow. These results have dependence upon nothing, and are influenced by nothing but the data originally given. And the question to be solved proceeds, or should proceed, to its final determination, by a succession of unerring steps liable to no change, and subject to no modification. This being the case, we can without difficulty conceive the possibility of so arranging a piece of mechanism, that upon starting it in accordance with the data of the question to be solved, it should continue its movements regularly, progressively, and undeviatingly towards the required solution, since these movements, however complex, are never imagined to be otherwise than finite and determinate (XIV, 10).
Poe might well have reasoned in the following manner: if a poem may be created apart from the will of anyone other than its creator, eventually apart from even his will, according to certain fixed and immutable laws, then is it not conceivable that those conditions can be embodied in a machine which would be empowered to create art itself? To postulate these conditions and formulate them into some kind of scientific principle, one would have to believe that they are determinate. In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe seems to be defining those conditions irrevocably, when he speaks of prescribing a very specific limit "as regards length, to all works of literary art--" (XIV, 196):

. . . the limit of a single sitting. . . Within this limit, the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit—in other words, to the excitement or elevation—again in other words, to the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect:—this, with one proviso—that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all (XIV, 196-7).

His diction suggests that he would try to formulate in a series of mathematical symbols the conditions under which the poem is composed, thereby automatically liberating the laws of poetry from the arbitrary taste of individual poets.

Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem, per se, the circumstance—or say the necessity—which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste (XIV, 195-6).
He does not sympathize with—

Most writers—poets in especial—[who] prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought—at the true purposes seized only at the last moment—at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view—at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable—at the cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions—the tackle for scene-shifting, feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio (XIV, 194-5).

Poe's evaluation of the creative process is to the poem itself what the mock epic is to the epic. Poets, he claims, often conceal the fact that they must plod in agony until they scribble even the most unsatisfactory line. They would often imply that their poems are composed in scarcely more than an instant through some mysteriously divine powers of intuition. His claims for his own procedure are more humble than theirs, he says, because he quite clearly describes himself as a craftsman and not as the angel Israfel. In "The Philosophy of Composition" he spells out step by step the method he uses to compose "The Raven."

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with the repugnance alluded to, nor at any time the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions; and, since the interest of an analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considered a desideratum, is quite independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analyzed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the modus operandi by which some one of my own works was put together. I select "The Raven," as most generally known. It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referrible either to accident or intuition—that the work
proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem (XIV, 195).

Whatever progress there was from one point to another was not fortuitous, the product of swift and unanalyzable associations. "The Raven" came into existence in an orderly way; for Poe would have us believe that the entire poem was created on the basis of a few premises established prior to its writing. The "modus operandi"—a term used frequently in Poe's analytic pieces—has nothing whatsoever to do with the intention of individual poets. For Poe believed that the only real intention there is belongs not to the poet, but to the poem, to poetry. And now he has tried to formulate that intention into a series of determinate conditions so that it may constitute as the rationale articulated in "The Philosophy of Composition"—a machine.

In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe explains the modus operandi of his machine by demonstrating the very process involved in manufacturing a poem. The machine has provided for the articulation of each poetic element down to the last detail at the precise moment when it should figure in the construction of the poem. The emergence of every element is regulated by its relationship to other elements. For Poe, because the whole process, of course, is determinate, all of the elements in the poem are immanent in the machine, even before the poem emerges. But once the machine is put into operation, the abstract principles themselves begin to take on substance; they become, in fact, the cause of the poem.
The dialectic of principle and form continues until the poem has been produced.

Before we examine that dialectic, however, we might inquire how Poe might have constructed his machine in the first place. Poe devised his rationale of composition by establishing the relationship between his response to poetry and what he conceived to be the basic properties of language. Poe's diagram-like delineation of the mind bears upon his struggle to resolve the styles of poetry and analysis. In "The Poetic Principle" he writes:

Dividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position which, in the mind, it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme; but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the offices of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience teaches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste contents herself with displaying the charms: —waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her disproportion—her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious— in a word, to Beauty (XIV, 272-73).

Poe would never have said "beauty is truth," except, of course, at the end of his career in "Eureka." Nor would he ever have dreamt of affirming the beauty of moral feelings. For to Poe,
beauty and truth are, for the most part, diametrically opposed.  

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 en-
force 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 whatever
to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox, to
wreath 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 poeti-
cal. 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 (XIV, 272).

2 Aristotle, Poe observes, wrote that Taste and the Moral Sense
function concurrently at times. Poe, however, is characteristically
more interested in making distinctions which separate one category
from another than he is in noticing similarities, blurring dis-
tinctions, and unifying opposites. His unwillingness to concede
the near impossibility of distinguishing the beautiful from the
good suggests more than any other fact that he misread the Greeks,
that he was unable to learn from them perhaps the most crucial
thing they can teach us.

3 When Poe speaks of "Taste . . . displaying her charms,"
wreathing herself "in gems and flowers," expressing herself in an
"efflorescence of language," he is not accurately describing his
own poetry. Nevertheless, one has every reason to suspect that
this is the way he would care to describe it, given the fact that
for him this is what all poetry should be like. Such descriptions
always call to mind an older woman trying to simulate the charms
of an adolescent panzy. Furthermore, the description implies the
preponderance of adjectives which are richly sensuous. However,
Poe's poetry—for whatever defects it may have—is not coy. At
times, like the mathematical formula, it is cool and calm. At oth-
er times, impassioned, it far exceeds a prettified and repressed
response. And the adjectives which abound generally take on the
abstract and frigid glare of a mathematical symbol.
Throughout most of his career, Poe insisted that the poem "exists for its own sake." Not realizing that art most aesthetically pleasing also has a capacity to edify, he repudiated the heresy of the didactic. By claiming that art and morality have mutually exclusive purposes, he was led to discover what it meant to labor in each one independent of the other. Later in this study we shall try to determine the price he paid for not having attempted a synthesis from the very beginning.

If Pure Intellect seeks after Truth and the moral sense fulfills obligation, then Taste, Poe believed, could be satisfied only in contemplating Beauty. The beauty that he speaks of has no connection with moral responsibility; for him it cannot arise from any human relationship. Furthermore, beauty has no need to justify its existence. And man cannot alter it in any way. The poem exists, therefore, not for any practical reason of communicating moral lessons and truths. Once created, it cannot be destroyed. The poem exists for no reason other than to be beautiful, to be worshipped from afar—like a beautiful sunset or a landscape garden, or a woman who can never know how it was that she was destined to be so lovely.

Beauty does not excite passion which is aroused and satisfied by an immediate object at one moment of time. Instead a sense of the beautiful, the "excitement of the soul," is awakened by something "indeterminate," something "in the distance which he is unable to attain" (p. 273). Before it he feels a "disinterested interest," a disquieting and profound dispassion. It is a feeling
which "through a psychal necessity" (p. 196) is transient. One cannot--and dare not--feel so intensely for any long period of time. When one is required to do so in reading a long poem, "a revulsion ensues--and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such" (p. 266). For poetry and beauty, Poe said, exist only so long as one can respond to the sense of the beautiful. When that feeling is spent, however, the poem no longer exists. Instead it becomes prose. Therefore, even though language still maintains the formal properties of verse, rhyme and meter, Poe believed that it no longer constitutes poetry when it exceeds a specific length and evokes responses inimical to the sense of the beautiful. For the style of poetry, by definition, expresses the soul moved by an object sublime and remote. But language which expressed at best the cool satisfaction of reason was for Poe by definition prose. The chief distinction between poetry and prose was to be made, therefore, on the basis of the response that each could evoke. This is perhaps one of the most crucial observations one can make about Poe's aesthetics. For it gives us a clue as to how we may justifiably describe Poe's various interests and accomplishments.

The terse, dispassionate language of the tales of ratiocination is the most conspicuous example of prose style. A sense of beauty, however limited, is aroused by the tales of the grotesque and arabesque; by their effects alone, these prose tales by definition become poems. And taken as poetry, they can be read in part in a way Poe himself might have approved of, in terms of the
principles articulated in his rationale for composing poetry.
Poe's trans-generic distinction between poetry and prose allows us to assume that "The Philosophy of Composition" is relevant not merely to his poetry, but, more important, to his short stories as well. In the following chapters, we shall try to read his tales of ratiocination according to principles that he affirmed in "Maelzel's Chess Player" and "A Few Words on Secret Writing" and his early tales of the grotesque according to the principles he established in "The Philosophy of Composition" and his finest tales according to those principles implicit in "Eureka." But here, in this chapter, delineating the central principles in "The Philosophy of Composition," I shall try to show how they follow inevitably from the "scientific" principles formulated in the preceding chapter.

Poe believed that each word is partly responsible for the total impact of the poem upon the reader. Since single words for Poe are the smallest element of a poem, their unique arrangement, which is a style of poetry, constitutes the poem's basic structure. But words themselves are reducible to an ultimate structure: patterns of sound. Poe conceived of poetry, then, as it relates to music, and the harp became for him as well as for many romantic poets the metaphor to express this relationship. The standard terms "music," "melody," "melodious," and "harp" belong to the dictionary commonly used by the romantic poets. Yet one may question whether for most of them the terms were really more
than descriptive phrases. For Poe, however, these terms brought with them an entirely new frame of reference.

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 this 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. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. . . .

To recapitulate, then:—I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty (XIV, 275).

Not merely did he adopt this musical terminology; he actually took it seriously by trying to determine how musical ideas adapted to language could make out of poetry a kind of music. It is quite apparent why he might well have desired to catalyze verbal meanings into musical ones. For music, the least mimetic and denotative of the arts, lends itself most unsatisfactorily to paraphrase, description, and analysis. Poe, who militated against paraphrase which issued in didactic truths, might well have desired to transform language into music and thereby avoid altogether the necessity of being forced to communicate truths. Analyzing Poe's poems and some of his stories is a frustrating experience for those critics who look for moral truths in art, because the meanings expressed in his art are a-moral inasmuch as they are purified of a morality, even implicitly expressed.

4 This is the highest tribute Poe could possibly pay to art. Note, the claim is made for music, not for poetry.
The meanings conveyed in his poetry are in a sense musical and this explains why they are difficult to understand. For music criticism deteriorates either into the pure mechanics of harmony and counterpoint or into a most superficial guesswork concerning the experience which might have prompted the composer to write a specific piece of music. Music critics are either highly technical or absurdly sentimental. The meaning that music conveys is amenable to no satisfying verbal analysis, and for this reason Poe prized it so highly. He introduced into his theory of composition the two most basic properties of music: harmony and tempo. He did not prize melody as the traditional romantic poet had done. Instead he realized that melodies could be generated and sustained only by appealing to the laws of harmony. For no theme in poetry could long be sustained unless the poet could submit a uniform idea to a highly complex and stable structure and thereby rework it so that it could assume various forms. In this sense, Poe wrote like a composer. Musical composition before the 16th century was believed to depend upon melody alone. But no great musical compositions were composed until everyone agreed that complex laws of harmony existed independently of any musical composition and that without knowing them, no one could pretend to compose a piece of any length and importance. The laws of harmony, however, have not remained stable. As each composer redefines them, so that they become increasingly complex, the melody—as well as the ostensible discursive meaning of the poem—has almost altogether disappeared.
When Poe mentioned the word "nevermore" in "The Raven," what impressed him first was not its meanings; he conceived of it instead as a broken chord which he reduced in analyzing it to its components. Conceived of harmonically they are the sounds of its vowels and consonants. He implies that these sounds are musical and that, therefore, they are to be understood by appealing to the laws of harmony which are imbedded in the structure of language. He speaks of the "character of the word" (p. 199) which he chose in terms of its capacity to suggest meanings in terms of its sound:

[It] must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt: and these considerations inevitably led me to the long o as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with r as the most producible consonant (XIV, 200).

Poe began to reduce the key word, which would constitute the refrain, to what for him are its harmonic components (which specify the degree of sonority and duration) and then to fuse those elements so that one could be used to intensify the other. But he would imply that fusion occurs after he has specified the two distinct elements and determined what musical effects he desires to produce by relating them. The intention, therefore, is first conceived of in musical terms; then it finds substance in language.

In musical terms Poe describes the way in which the "unity of effect" is achieved in "The Raven."
Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its dénouement before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention (XIV, 193).

Once the theme is decided upon (melancholy) and the proper length has been determined, then Poe began to search for "some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn" (p. 199). He conceived of this pivot musically as a "refrain or burden, [which] not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone--both in sound and thought" (p. 199). The refrain serves as the basic, the tonic key. At the place it occurs in the poem, it suggests the possibilities for variation. Yet because of its unvaried repetition, appearing as the unchanging cadence at the end of each stanza, it disturbs and calms at the same time with its perpetual resolution-irresolution that pervades the poem "The Raven." Poe speaks of the "pleasure deduced solely from the sense of identity--of repetition" (p. 199) by the refrain, which provides moments of stasis and rest and uniformity even while the application of the refrain is constantly varied. Once the word "nevermore" has been harmonically conceived by fusing vowel and consonant sounds, then as a musical chord its various positions in the poem are regulated by increasingly complex harmonic laws of poetry which supersede those basic combinations of vowel and consonantal sounds and establish the comprehensive harmonic scheme for larger "musical" units. Having determined,
therefore, that "Nevermore" is to be the refrain, the pivot, then
he decides that he must devise a "pretext" for the continuous use
of one word. This procedure is typical. Poe defines the effects
he wishes to express; he conceives of those effects brought about
largely by harmonic laws. He tries to find in language a ration-
ale for the harmonic structure of music. And then he sets out to
write poetry as he imagines great music is composed.

The meanings of words like "consequence," "causation," "tone,"
and "development" which are key terms in "The Philosophy of Com-
position" are enriched by the affinity of poetry to music. Poe
spoke of effects. By failing to speak of results (which can often
be mistaken as a synonym for effects), he avoids suggesting the
substantial. For Poe, effects were psychic responses initiated
from the very beginning of a poem and maintained uninterruptedly
throughout. To achieve a unity of effect, Poe required that the
structure be shaped so that every element can set the condition
under which subsequent poetic elements may be generated. The best
analogy again is musical. The specific key in which a composition
is written gives it at once the stability of a single harmonic
structure. From this structure, harmonic variations and patterns
of dissonance may be generated, eventually harmonic progressions--
a seemingly determinate number--which bring about a transition
from major to minor, or vice versa, or even from one key to an-
other that is logically suggested by incipient harmonies. The end
of the piece occurs on three levels: first, it is the final term-
ination, the final cadence, the final resolution, inasmuch as a
piece may or may not happen to end with a sense of resolution. Second, "end" occurs at a number of minor terminal points defined by the cadence and the half resolution of one variation which at the same time paradoxically generates another variation. Three, finally the end, even during moments of discord and perpetual motion, is faintly articulated in the very expectation of the listener whose demand for a cadence must be satisfied. Poe felt that in reading a poem, the reader experiences an emotion that is quite similar to the kind felt by the protagonist. He says at one moment in his analysis of "The Raven" that the lover "experiences a phrenzied pleasure in so modeling his questions as to receive from the expected 'Nevermore' the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow" (p. 202). The lover, then, like the reader, anticipates the response which will always be the same and finally precipitates it by actually asking the raven further questions. The raven's answers, which are so painful to him, finally become the source of pleasure, which is curiously evoked from the mere repetition of the refrain. The satisfaction one experiences in being able to predict the raven's responses gives way finally to a burdensome sense of monotony. As the refrain becomes irrevocable and seemingly interminable, the lover begins to accept its inevitability and experiences at last a perverse delight in being unable to forestall it. Finally he invites the pain upon himself by asking questions that solicit the same fatal answer.

The unity of effect, therefore, is reinforced as the outcome implied throughout is finally articulated outright. The
consistency achieved throughout the beginning would be wrecked in an instant were the ending to be altogether unexpected. An artist, Poe believed, should never end a story of continued sorrow and suffering, with a bright gleam of unalloyed happiness, and sunshine—thus destroying, at a single blow, that indispensable unity which has been rightly called the unity of effect, and throwing down, as it were, in a paragraph what, perhaps, an entire volume has been laboring to establish (VIII, 74-5).

To avoid these gross inconsistencies, the poet must initially determine the precise response he chooses to evoke and then combine such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringer of this effect, then 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 (XI, 108).

Poetry is like painting, then, where the "end" and the beginning can be seen at one moment of time. Or, better still, it is like a musical composition, where the end, the tonic key, is established with the first few bars. In a passage from "Marginalia" Poe speaks of how the end is immanent from the beginning.

Thus, as individuals, we think in cycles, and may, from the frequency or infrequency of our revolutions about the various thought-centres, form an accurate estimate of the advance of our thought toward maturity. It is really wonderful to observe how closely, in all the essentials of
truth, the child-opinion coincides with that of the man proper—of the man at his best? (XVI, 92).

From what Poe says here, we are invited to look for uniform "thought-centers" from which, and eventually toward which, variations of central ideas "radiate," as atoms of the universe are irradiated from the original unity and are destined finally to return to that condition. The "thought-centers" are uniform and change is measured only by the degree and kinds of variations generated from those "thought-centers." Since the original commitments are stable, the one source of variety is the various forms that these commitments are made to assume. In this sense, then, the form literally speaking creates the content.

A determinate, intricately detailed progression initiated from the first step and carried out through to the end of the poem adds further complexity to the traditional meanings of cause and effect. Poe never uses the words "motive" and "environment," the two most easily recognizable "causes" of human behavior. The word "cause" is rarely mentioned by Poe. Yet he must have had some

5 This quotation, more than any other I know of, succinctly and explicitly expresses the premium Poe placed on the circle, as a figure of speech that could epitomize a whole philosophy of life and a way of thinking. For he suggests that, although our maturity is measured by the frequency of "our revolutions about various thought-centres," at the same time, the continuity between past and future is nevertheless maintained so that "the child-opinion coincides with that of the man." With these words Poe implies not merely that there is not great maturation in "opinions" (in, let us say, a philosophy of life); he suggests, in fact, that as far as he is concerned, maturation involving a radical alienation from the past is not desirable.
notion of it the moment he used the word effect. The reader, at any rate, feels impelled to postulate the word "cause" which automatically occurs to him whenever he hears "effect." We are aware of the "effects" of his poems and his tales of the grotesque. Yet we search in vain for their causes, because it rarely occurs to one initially that Poe is speaking of "cause" as a strictly formal principle.

According to Poe's analysis of "The Raven," the lover himself experiences some of the curious "effects" and, in fact, the poem itself structures them. Therefore, far from bringing about the "effects" of the poem, the lover in "The Raven" is himself the victim of causes. The causes lie beyond his fragile will; the poem is merely an expression of their terrifying, their maddening results. And even more important, the poem is designed merely to suggest what those almost translucent causes are, without ever defining them. Poe surrounds "cause" with an air of mystery by making it seem imperceptible, even while the "effects" are what appear to be the only substance of the poem. The poem seems deliberately to be concealing the "causes," even as they are muted in the chess player and in the cryptogram. If known at all, only human intuition can discover them, as Poe was later to say in "Eureka," and, even then, the only cause one can postulate with certainty is the prime mover. Any more immediate causes, Poe says, can be defined only in a strictly formal sense, as the fusion of poetic elements. Poe observes the forces of causation at work, the "modus operandi" of human behavior. In his "Philosophy
of Composition" he conceives of causation in terms of "the effect of the variation of application" (p. 201) of the word "Nevermore." He notes he can conceive of the word "nevermore" as a pretext, as a cause, of the responses of the protagonist which issue from the encounter between the raven and the lover. The raven employs "the word in answer to the queries of the lover" (p. 201).

Poe decided to make

this first query a commonplace one--the second less so--the third still less, and so on--until at length the lover, startled from his original nonchalance by the melancholy character of the word itself--by its frequent repetition--and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it--is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character--queries whose solution he has passionately at heart--propounds them half in superstition and self-torture--propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which, reason assures him, is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote) but because he experiences a phrenzied pleasure in so modeling his questions as to receive from the expected 'Nevermore' the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow (XIV, 202).

With "Nevermore" as the pivotal point, the poem is made to turn by degrees, as the pivot itself becomes the "cause" for the effects that are presented in their psycho-logical order, as they are "varied and graduated" until they run the gamut of emotional responses from nonchalance to excruciating misery. Poe began with the last stanza and worked back to the beginning, so that he would "the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover" (p. 202). To focus upon the cause and effect--the constant repetition of the term, "Nevermore," and the response of the lover--he decided to
"circumscribe," "insulate" the action by setting the scene in a room in which there were only a few conspicuous reminders of his lost love and nothing besides that to distract the lover, as well as the reader. Through "insulation" Poe binds the cause irrevocably to the effect. It frames the action setting it apart like a painting.

The close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:--it has the force of a frame of a picture. It has an indissoluble moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place (XIV, 204).

Upon the concrete world of the enclosed space the lover projects his fancies, which are, at the same time, "determined" by this world. In the beginning when he finds the bird fantastic, he is nonchalant. But later one senses the "tone of the most profound seriousness" (p. 206); at that time the lover no longer sees anything unbelievable and "fantastic in the Raven's demeanor" (p. 206). He speaks of him as a "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore," and feels the "fiery eyes" burning into his "bosom's core." This revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader--to bring the mind into a proper frame for the dénouement--which is now brought about as rapidly and as directly as possible (XIV, 206).

The "revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part," Poe believes, is immanent from the very first stanza of the poem.

The dénouement, as it is described in "The Philosophy of Composition," is a most horrifying resolution. Poe says that it
is the most indispensable part in the craft of writing the poem.

Until the dénouement the

... narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and so far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real (XIV, 207).

The boundary between the real and whatever term one may care to suggest (the ideal, the fantastic, the mad--terms which are not, however, equivalent) must be crossed in order for a poem to be "complex" and "suggestive," qualities which endow a work of art with "so much of that richness (to borrow from the colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with the ideal (p. 207). He says, furthermore, that poets often make the mistake of bringing suggested meanings to the surface of the poem.

It is the excess of the suggested meaning--it is the rendering this the upper instead of the under current of the theme--which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind) the so called poetry of the so called transcendentalists (XIV, 207-8).

The degree of suggestivity, then, must constantly be regulated.

The "first metaphorical expression in the poem" (p. 208) disposes the reader "to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated" (p. 208). The reader begins to imagine that the raven is more than a mere bird, simply because of the "effect" it is able by its very presence to have on the lover. The bird grows in stature until at the end the Raven becomes "emblematical of Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance" (p. 208). The cause for the lover's distress at the end, which is the impenetrably mysterious and morbid refrain, epitomizes at the same time his deep-
est sadness. The cause and the effect, then, have become one and the same thing. For the dialectic of the poem identifies them at the end. The effect itself was immanent in the cause, which was the intellect meditating on its own state of mind, the mind assessing its own responses which automatically generate new emotions. All of these states of mind follow each other in a manner that Poe plotted poetically step by step. The lover thought that the bird was fantastic. Later he "believed" in it. And in this belief, he overstepped the "limits of the real," so that no longer was the bird a mere representation of "mourning and remembrance"; at the end the lover actually names it his own deep misery. The raven becomes both the cause and the emblem of a mysterious and tormenting melancholy. And the lover becomes his own victim and his own torturer.

Poe's analysis of "The Raven" is important not so much for what it may happen to say about the creative process itself. It provides a key by which one may understand his conception of poetry. For in analyzing "The Raven," he indicates the most obvious characteristics one can look for in reading his poetry as well as his tales of the grotesque. Central in his conception of poetry are the baffling terms which keep recurring throughout his criticism: "suggestion," "beauty," "beyond the real." Poe states outright that at one point in "The Raven," he attempted to embody what lies beyond "the limits of the real." But he expressly states that this has nothing to do with the ideal with which it
has often been mistaken. Furthermore, this something beyond reality he describes as an effect, the effect of "novelty" and of "vividness." Describing that undercurrent of the deepest meaning as peculiar, Poe brings into relief the salient characteristics of his art. For "peculiar" suggests not merely "out of the ordinary." More important, it implies a deviation from norms that are desirable and certainly a departure from ideality, the fulfillment of beauty, health, and goodness. In Poe's poems the most constant theme is "the death... of a beautiful woman" (p. 201). Death has swept the girl far off into the distance. The lover never remembers her when she was joyfully anticipating life. He never thinks of her with a substantial loss of grief, with anything like a liberating outburst of tragedy and a sense of loss. Somehow his response is the more terrifying precisely because it seems to be all bottled up. It is expressed either with a weird bittersweet lament (the sorrow oozing out so gradually) or with a violent, mad outburst in "The Raven" after which grief is never spent, but "still is sitting, still is sitting" like a leaden weight on the soul. For Poe all beauty has a certain strangeness in its proportions that makes it impossible for us to understand it. But we do not even desire to understand it; in fact, we fear lest we know what it is all about, terrified of what might happen to us, should we ever know precisely why it is so awful and peculiar.
The sense of painful peculiarity is evoked, Poe claims, by the most subtle means. If the strange were to be expressed outright, it would be flat, no longer capable of exciting any responses whatsoever, except perhaps feelings of boredom. Beautiful strangeness, therefore, must be expressed only by a faint "undercurrent," the "ineffable," that somehow runs counter to the ostensible dialectic, and, thereby produces the effects of "indefiniteness" and "irresolution," which are the essential characteristics of poetry. Poe speaks of both undercurrent and irresolution in Hawthorne's "Twice Told Tales."

A painter would at once note their leading or predominant feature, and style it repose. There is no attempt at effect. All is quiet, thoughtful, subdued. Yet this repose may exist simultaneously with high originality of thought; and Mr. Hawthorne has demonstrated the fact. At every turn we meet with novel combinations; yet these combinations never surpass the limits of the quiet. We are soothed as we read; and withal is a calm astonishment that ideas so apparently obvious have never occurred or been presented to us before. Herein our author differs materially from Lamb or Hunt or Hazlitt--who, with vivid originality of manner and expression, have less of the true novelty of thought than is generally supposed, and whose originality, at best, has an uneasy and meretricious quaintness, replete with startling effects unfounded in nature, and inducing trains of reflection which lead to no satisfactory result (XI, 105).

Irving's art, Poe notes, has "repose" but in his case

... this repose is attained rather by the absence of novel combination, or of originality, than otherwise, and consists chiefly in the calm, quiet, unostentatious expression of commonplace thoughts, in an unambitious, unadulterated Saxon. In them, by strong effort, we are made to conceive the absence of all. In the essays before us the absence of effort is too obvious to be mistaken, and a strong under-current of suggestion runs continuously beneath the upper stream of the tranquil thesis (XI, 106).
Two paradoxical emotional states, then, are made to coexist. The "repose" in Hawthorne's tales is communicated with the suggestion of an undercurrent of motion, which issues in the feeling of resolution-irresolution. For Poe, novelty alone cannot issue in poetry. The transcendentalists who failed, according to Poe, to embody the ineffable, have written prose instead. Great art, with the most indirect, the most subtle means, stirs one to contemplate its remote mystery forever, instead of reducing it to banal truths. For Poe the chief importance of the language of poetry is the effects it embodies and not the objects it points to and the definitions it expresses. For the concrete and the definite can only dispel the ineffable. To sustain the undercurrent of suggestivity is no easy task. Even in musical compositions the least mimetic of all the arts, it is often violated.

Give to music any undue decision—imbue it with any very determinate tone—and you deprive it, at once, of its ethereal, its ideal, and, I sincerely believe, of its intrinsic and essential character. You dispel its dream-like luxury:—you dissolve the atmosphere of the mystic in which its whole nature is bound up:—you exhaust it of its breath of faery. It then becomes a tangible and easily appreciable thing—a conception of the earth, earthy. It will not, to be sure, lose all its power to please, but all that I consider the distinctiveness of that power (XVI, 137).

Poe describes the effects of poetry as novel and vivid. We may never know precisely what he might have had in mind when he used the word "vivid," but it seems to indicate that he might have prized the kind of art that could evoke the maximum degree of excitement in the responses of his readers. If Poe describes Hawthorne's tales by the word "repose," no such word can describe
"The Raven." For in this poem Poe quite consciously tries to achieve intensity and excitement. First he decides upon a distinct limit as to the number of lines the poem should have, noting that a poem too brief cannot excite an intense response, since intensity requires some degree of duration. Yet the poem which lasts too long can create a revulsion which will soon dissipate whatever effects have been established. When Poe settles on the proper length of his poem, he seeks the tone of the highest manifestation of beauty and conceives of sadness. Thereupon, he tries "attaining the maximum amount of pleasure through repetition," and settles, as it were, automatically upon the necessity of a refrain. Trying to conceive of the most melancholy tone, he asks himself: "Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the universal understanding of mankind is the most melancholy?" Thereupon he desires to arrive at the most sublime expression of beauty by determining ways of embodying it. At the end he describes his poem as the "utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair" (p. 201).

There is one curious, paradoxical fact that these observations seem to point to. While Poe insisted that "indirection" was the only mode for embodying the ineffable, at the same time he prized those effects that were the most directly intense and excited, responses that reveal a state of mind at its highest pitch of anxiety and intensity. In his criticism of Hawthorne's tales, Poe noticed that while the surface was tranquil, there was an undercurrent of suggestion. If, in Poe's works, therefore, we see no such constant tranquillity; if, in fact, what is beneath the
surface comes to the surface at one point, expressing exceedingly intense excitement, pain and irresolution, what, then, is the suggestivity that Poe says exists beneath the surface? Can it ever be observed when the surface itself is so apparently inscrutable? Can one, in other words, understand that undercurrent of suggested meaning beneath a surface that with its weirdness and storminess would seem to conceal it from us altogether? In the following chapters, we shall see how Poe's analysis of "The Raven" provides the harmonic laws by which to arrive at discursive meaning and make visible the opaque background of suggestivity which he has deliberately muted in his tales and poems.

In "The Philosophy of Composition," then, we see Poe speculating about much the same things that concerned him in his scientific pieces. Far from trying to resolve poetry and science, however, he wishes here specifically to distinguish between them. In so doing, he defines poetry, as we have seen, in terms of its effects and in so doing, enables the reader to see his tales of the grotesque as poems of sorts. While his poetry is deliberately intended to overwhelm the reader with a sense of mystery and excitement, his poetic method itself he would attempt to make as lucid as possible. For he insists that in no way is writing poetry an immediate act of divine inspiration. It is a disciplined, drawn out procedure, where the ineffable effects of the poem are produced step by step with the utmost degree of calculation. While on the first glance, Poe might appear to be humble in saying with
surprising candor that the poet's abilities are amenable to analysis, his arrogance becomes apparent when we realize that he would claim his rationale of composition defines the conditions under which all poetry may henceforth be written. Poe implicitly compares his "Philosophy of Composition" to the calculating machine which can, on the basis of a few data and without human intervention, work highly complicated problems in higher mathematics. The immutable laws of poetry, which are built into the machine, arise from analogues Poe establishes between psychological laws of effects or responses and the laws of harmony and tempo inherent in the structure of the language. Formulating these laws Poe postulates the existence of an ultimate category, which would transcend the principles of language and psychology as such. The "ultimate thought-centers" give to art its stability and unity. Whenever articulated, they take on two intimately related forms: the theoretical formulation of the laws of composition, the rationale; and their practical application, the poems themselves. In his poetry we see the modus operandi of the cause, which is, in fact, the effects' of a causal, formal principle. On a higher level cause and effect become one and the same thing. But that synthesis, "cause-effect," when broken down into its two component parts, Poe's rationale and his poetry, reflects the dichotomy of his world view, fractured into explanation and mystery, truth and beauty.

Reading Poe's fiction, we shall try to translate it in terms of the theory he spelled out for us in "The Philosophy of
Composition." Gradually we shall try to arrive at those "thought centers" which supersede, or subsume both poetry and its rationale. But first, in the subsequent chapters we shall begin, as the scientist and as Poe himself would have us begin, by observing mere surfaces. I shall attempt to proceed step by step from effects to causes in Poe's work. Gradually the "causes" become increasingly elusive and remote, as the effects they give rise to become progressively uncanny. The dialectic between the mind of Poe and the strange phenomena it would analyze does not issue in a sense of resolution and knowledge. For Poe cannot bring the dialectic to an end and know what cannot be known. The enormous expanse between Poe's inquiring mind and a sense of truth achieved is expressed by his concept of infinity: the most difficult thing to conceive of and finally understand, plus yet another idea even more difficult to conceive of which will never be understood. The most profound thing Poe can ever sense is his own abysmal ignorance. This in the end is the moral truth we can learn from Poe. But that discovery does not lead him to the religious act of reverence. Instead, it culminates in hysteria.
CHAPTER III
REASON AND PASSION: THE FISSURE IN THE WALL

In writing of the genesis of "The Raven" in "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe underscores the sudden violent appearance and the electrifying quality of "the first metaphorical expression in the poem." Before it occurs, "everything is within the limits of the accountable--of the real" (XIV, 206). Poe warns us not to confuse this "going beyond the real" with the ideal, as it is traditionally conceived in terms of an ethic. For his goals are ideal, only in the sense that they are remote. They represent less an unqualified achievement than a perpetual striving. But Poe's ideal is weird. His idea of unity does not correspond to any conventional neo-Platonic idea. For he would evoke those states of being which are, by definition, not part of human experience: dissolution of the soul after death, corruption of the body after death, metapsychosis and transmigration of souls. Unlike his great contemporaries who resolved the uncanny--the a-human aspects of life--into a single grand vision of life, Poe often deliberately chose to describe in his art those experiences where nothing whatsoever relates to the facts in the day-to-day world. The overriding idea of order of his great contemporaries can be described with some assurance, simply because it states in effect that human experience, no matter how private, chaotic, and unique, may be understood, assessed and communicated in terms of
potentially explicit moral, practical, and social standards of behavior. But those themes in Poe's art strike us as being uncanny because he is not concerned with experiences describable as moral, pragmatic, or societal. However, we find it almost impossible to describe what precisely Poe happens to be concerned with.

The sudden breakthrough into a condition beyond the real suggests to us the weirdness of Poe's ideal. That condition "beyond the real" exists potentially in the earlier parts of the poem as an "under-current, however indefinite, of meaning." Far away, its power to affect us is minimal. But looming suddenly before us, as it follows immediately what is at times an almost imperceptible transition from the real, it abruptly startles the reader, awakening him to a "response greater than the reality presented." Poe discusses carefully how the ordered, conscious, progression of images, actions, and responses gradually intensifies the suggested meaning. However, far from conceiving of the metaphorical expression of "beyond reality" only as it is grounded in the concrete and the real, Poe would at times speak of the peculiar "ideality" existing independently; therefore, he would perforce imply that he can conceive of this condition without mediating images of reality. Before Poe begins to write "The Raven," he says he will strive for a novel and vivid effect. He proceeds to break down the effect into its component parts and to decide which part will embody the peculiar. Thereupon he begins to measure out the right
combination of incident and tone so that it will, so he calculates, issue in this 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 (XIV, 194).

These combinations of characteristics peculiar and ordinary enable us to describe Poe's tales succinctly. The tales of ratiocination, for example, appear to derive their novelty from the unusual quality of events, and their ordinary tone from the application of reason, which reduces them to their natural causes. Certain homely details in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell Tale Heart" might call to mind various domestic details in everyday life, whereas the tone is peculiarly undomestic. The tone in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is weird and so are the events in that story.

But such schematization may also prove to be superficial, if the primary goal of the critic is merely to pinpoint in the tales the aspects of the peculiar and those of the ordinary, those that are uncanny and those that are rational. This procedure may issue in a study of the various genres with which Poe experimented: the grotesque, the ratiocinative, the arabesque. This sort of study might well underscore distinctions instead of pointing toward central principles subsuming all of Poe's work. And, after all, it is indeed those principles which I am attempting to establish. At the same time, pinpointing the ordinary and the peculiar can lead
to a catalogue of isolated images, which, as units of measurement and understanding, are much too minute to have any cumulative results. This kind of study is especially fruitless with Poe because his images are receptacles of meanings which are merely suggested and, therefore, much too elusive to be satisfactorily analyzed and defined.

To probe beneath mere suggestions, one must not merely specify plastic images which for Poe convey suggested meanings; one should also translate those images into discursive meaning. There is scarcely a better way this can be done than by doing the very thing Poe himself might have done were he in our position: to enter the minds of Poe's protagonists. For we will identify our modes of perception with theirs and thereby learn through them how to assess Poe's world. We shall notice the increasing demands imposed upon their understanding, as they journey into various lands that become increasingly unrecognizable and fantastic.

All of Poe's characters have one remarkable similarity: they confront for the first time, with such a terrifyingly intense response, a world that seems to be (even when at times it is not) monstrous and fantastic. These characters can be understood by the very way they respond to this world. They may gain a mastery over the fantastic, which does not appear to be understandable, merely by comprehending it, as Dupin, for one, did. They may become deeply involved in it, as does Arthur Gordon Pym. They may become involved in it and yet triumph over it inevitably, as does the protagonist in "The Pit and the Pendulum." They may be
destroyed by it, as is Roderick Usher. They may try to destroy it by destroying themselves, as does William Wilson. They may through their own perceptions even create the fantastic—without ever understanding it, as do the people in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." However they react to it, they implicitly define themselves mentally and physically. Sometimes, as with Dupin and the protagonist in "The Pit and the Pendulum," those who achieve an understanding of what is to everyone else incomprehensible are able to discuss the means by which they were enabled to unravel the mystery. They manage, in other words, to achieve a prodigious amount of self-awareness: of their own predicaments, of their own reactions as "natural responses" to their predicaments, of the means by which they can exercise a control over those responses. Thereupon, they will generally begin to devise with great deliberation a plan of action.

When they achieve a mastery over their own plight, the pattern their thoughts assume and the structure of the story become at times one and the same thing. We see the character breaking down the scene before him and his own human perception according to its component modes (visual, sensation, intellection, intuition, etc.) and constructing analogues among them. This breakdown into component forms and the subsequent synthesis and adaptation of the forms to each other recalls the marvelous activity of the Romantic primary and secondary imagination. However, Poe's procedure is a corruption of the creative process inasmuch as he would attempt to analyze and specify exhaustively the step by step
processes of breakdown and gradual reconstruction. The genuine romantic poet would describe these processes as "divine" or "unconscious" and not attempt to analyze them. This desire to analyze the unanalyzable which Dupin and the protagonist in "The Pit and the Pendulum" display is similarly manifested as we have seen, by Poe himself in his "Philosophy of Composition," "The Rationale of Verse," "A Few Words on Secret Writing," and "Maelzel's Chess-Player."

Indeed, Poe's short stories are notes toward a theory of knowledge. His epistemology is, however, quite different from the traditional ones whose obvious limitations arise from the facts that the perceptions discussed are generally the most basic and universal and the conditions in which they arise are relatively ordinary and normal. Poe, in contrast to them, would attempt to deal with those perceptions which arise when people find themselves suddenly placed in a world that is so monstrous and unfamiliar that they are unable to recognize one detail. We can appreciate—even though we may not be able to conceive of it—how intense their responses can be, if we recall the various degrees of pleasure and pain evoked with the startling appearance of something new in our humdrum lives. Compounding this imagined response a thousand-fold, perhaps we can begin to understand how Poe's characters might have felt when the familiar world disappeared suddenly and they looked upon a landscape inexplicably bewildering.

Within the ambitious framework of what seems to have been in varying degrees a new world, a new reality—new, because nothing
was familiar—Poe began to work toward a theory of knowledge. It is clear why his speculations cannot be described as philosophical, and why, in fact, they required representation in art. For art enabled Poe to enter into a world "out of TIME-out of SPACE," --a world which philosophy could never describe in detail without seeming nonsensical--and respond to it and assess it as though it were real. The responses of Poe's characters are so intense that they are forced to insist that another plane of reality which is quite different from the one they have experienced does exist. How could they repudiate the existence of a world that has changed them so radically? They affirm that new plane of reality for reasons which are diametrically opposed: either because they are overwhelmed by the strangeness about them, even when they don't understand it; or because they have managed somehow to achieve a modicum of understanding after their initial bewilderment. In the colloquies the characters who are immortal comprehend a mystery which those on earth could never understand. But the ailing characters in the tales of the grotesque are overcome by the mysterious forces which have made them suffer. The description of these people will have to wait for the following chapter. In this chapter we shall be concerned primarily with the characters who survive. By analyzing the perceptions of each character, we shall try to understand both the kinds of mystery he confronts and his quality and degree of understanding.
In the tales of ratiocination, Poe continues his speculations on abstruse mental processes. With intense admiration he visualizes Dupin who possesses this gift in abundance.

At such times I could not help remarking and admiring (although from his rich ideality I had been prepared to expect it) a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin. He seemed, too, to take an eager delight in its exercise—if not exactly in its display—and did not hesitate to confess the pleasure thus derived. He boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own. His manner at these moments was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. 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 (IV, 152).

It is Dupin's mind, then, which gives to the tale, "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," its "ideality," its strange out-of-the-ordinary quality. The world seems to be immediately clear to Dupin. He looks through it, as though it were only a window, an image by which Poe implies that those mere surfaces which blind others are transparent for Dupin who is quick to solve the mystery. When he becomes absorbed in analyzing the mystery, his personality is frigid and abstracted. His eyes become vacant, for what he sees is not the world in front of him. The tone of his voice is strangely treble, as though it were not quite human. His enunciation is so distinct that he sounds like an oracle pronouncing categorical truths. The dual parts of his soul operate separately: the creative by night, the analytic by day. In conceiving
of intuition and analysis, one process completely purified from the other, Poe created a mind that is not recognizably human. With narrowed vision—now creative, now analytic—Dupin beholds the world perforce radically altered from the way it would appear to the more normal or ordinary perspective. Yet the narrowed, intensified and concentrated vision of one of Dupin's souls is far superior to that of the total man; it is, in fact, omniscient.

Only Dupin, then, can order this world. After he solves the crime in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," he must also correct the misconceptions of everyone around him. Dupin arrives on the scene of the crime only after he has learned of some of the important details through the newspapers. He knows from the beginning that he must be quick to distinguish fact from fancy. Thereupon, he attempts to solve the crime by accounting for the conflicting testimonies of the witnesses. All of the witnesses responded with horror at the outré aspect of the crime, admitting outright that they would never have believed that a man could be responsible for such a heinous crime.

It appears to me that this mystery is considered insoluble, for the very reason which should cause it to be regarded easy of solution— I mean for the outré character of its features. The police are confounded by the seeming absence of motive—not for the murder itself—but for the atrocity of the murder. . . . In investigations such as we are now pursuing, it should not be so much asked "what has occurred," as "what has occurred that has never occurred before." In fact, the facility with which I shall arrive, or have arrived, at the solution of this mystery, is in the direct ratio of its apparent insolubility in the eyes of the police (IV, 168-9).
Dupin displays extraordinary restraint in examining the details of the crime. For unlike everyone else, he alone does not postulate any cause for the murder. Instead, he is struck first of all by the character of the murder itself. He notices the "outré character of its features." The others observe the "atrocity of the murder." The difference between the implications of both observations is obvious, Dupin says. In the first case, no solution or interpretation has been hazarded. In the second, however, a cause is postulated. The witnesses assume that the criminal must be a human being. And, therefore, they fail in the initial and crucial respect.

In the passage quoted above, Dupin tells those around him the procedure he will follow in order to solve the mystery. Curiously enough it resembles closely Poe's method of solving the mystery of Maelzel's chess player. He announces emphatically that the mystery is easily soluble; as if to underscore the uniqueness of his own perspective, he notes that the most fantastic aspect of the crime is paradoxically the clue to the solution. Put another way, the more difficult the solution would seem to be, the more easily he thinks he can solve it. With the mathematical terms "in the direct ratio," mystery and explanation, both areas of experience, are reduced to an arithmetical symbol and related concisely and immediately.

Dupin realizes that at least one term in the relationship was immediately available for his examination: the mysterious material evidence, the mere appearance of the murder scene. What he
had to arrive at was the rationale that could account for it. Everyone besides Dupin had immediately attempted a solution—and they were wrong, as we have seen. Dupin rejects what appears to him to be the fallacious cause postulated by everyone around him. His cause is the more remote, because it is not preconceived. For given the outré aspect of the crime, no one could imagine that a human being, even someone insane, could be the criminal. Nevertheless, it is hastily assumed that the crime was committed by a man; and thereupon a search is vainly begun for the specific criminal. But Dupin knows that the crime could have been committed only by a non-reasoning being. Dupin arrives at that conclusion, not by searching for motivations, but by reading the mind of the criminal, which involved taking account of the "outré" disarray of the objects in the room which no human being—rational or irrational—could possibly have caused. There is nothing in the murder scene which suggests rationality, regularity, precision, and arrangement: characteristics which describe human activity, no matter how seemingly disorganized. With Dupin "rational" does not describe human behavior. It is simply a descriptive term which suggests a certain pattern created by some intelligence that may be human, superhuman (as the Creator of the cosmic design), normal or abnormal. The lack of any rationale in the crime investigated in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" points to the absence of human causation, and immediately defines the criminal as beast. We must remember this in dealing with the tales, "The Tell-Tale Heart" and
"The Black Cat," tales of abnormal psychology which are distinguished by the intricate rationale of the crime.

Dupin's genius, for Poe, is that he can perceive a pattern in certain details which by their very nature would seem to have no pattern whatsoever. The way he does this resembles the manner in which Poe analyzed the chess player and cryptograms: by observing the appearance alone without predicing of the murder scene more than is suggested by it. He observed that the "character" of the details (brutal ferocity, prodigious power) effected a degree of disorder which no human being could possibly have been responsible for, a scene that Dupin can describe only as a "grotesquerie in horror absolutely alien from humanity." Dupin is able, then, to deduce from the arrangement of the objects in the room that the agility and activity of the criminal was extraordinary. With certain human categories in mind (strength, agility, tone of voice), he determines their "degree of applicability" in view of the character of the scene. These principles, curiously, enable him to make some sense out of the obvious formlessness in the scene.

In a later tale of ratification, in contrast to "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" Dupin notices the highly artificial arrangement of the articles. . . The pieces, as described, do indeed "look like strips torn off"; but purposely and by hand (V, 51-2).

To solve the various crimes in the tales required an identification "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent." Dupin
believed that such identification is most difficult to achieve for two reasons:

first, by default of this identification, and secondly, by ill ad-measurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged (VI, 41).

Identification requires the ability to "adapt" oneself to something apart from oneself.

When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is anyone, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts of sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression (V, 41).

Facial expressions and mute gestures alone can only suggest what a person is thinking about. Because meaning is not articulated verbally, these indirect modes seem initially to express meanings too elusive to conceptualize in language. Dupin describes how he would try to arrive at those meanings which do not seem to be amenable to communication and analysis. First, he would imitate the facial expression. The corresponding thoughts are bound, thereupon, to arise in his own mind. Most of us conceive of the facial expression as a result of the thoughts and attempt, therefore, to guess the thoughts of a person without realizing the importance of identification. But Dupin conceives of imitating the facial expression as a cause which will bring about the thoughts logically related to it. Hidden beneath the surface of the facial expression, these thoughts can be read, therefore, only at the cost of temporarily forgoing one's own identity.
Dupin observes the "character of the murder" as he would the expression on a person's face. He focuses his attention fiercely on these isolated objects, forcing his mind not to be prejudiced by the faulty notions of those about him. His vision must be so purified that he is not tempted to add anything extraneous to the murder scene—which means, in effect, that he must not "react" to it by calling it an atrocity. The press itself, Dupin said, "reacted" when it said that the evidence was "suggestive." But Dupin dispassionately analyzes the testimony and reports of the witnesses, the public, the press, the police together with the "character" of the scene. The bizarre scene is perceived by Dupin dispassionately, "abstractedly"—as though it were a mechanical design of an abstract painting.

The detective-seer Dupin solved the mystery because he alone remained detached. The protagonist in "The Pit and the Pendulum" cannot afford to be uninvolved; and yet he manages to rescue himself from horrible death. The action of this story is startlingly bare. A man imprisoned by the inquisition is expecting to be put to death at any moment; he finally manages through his own ingenuity to save himself. When he is faced with the possibility of dying in another more horrible manner, he is liberated suddenly by an army which storms the prison walls. This theme might have been treated in any number of ways. A sense of tragedy might have been evoked in the reader. Or the ghastly description of death and torture might have served to create a sensational effect. To be sure, the pit is described in a manner which excites revulsion in
the reader. And one does sense the physical discomfort and mental anguish of the character. But most important, one is made aware in detail of the levels of consciousness and semi-consciousness, as the mind confronts its own pain and traces its source to the external world. The mind of the protagonist is beautifully lucid, perhaps like that of Dupin's. And the most amazing fact is that it can work (we see its "modus operandi," to use Poe's favorite phrase) even while it suffers excruciating pain. The "movements" of the mind here are intensely active and affirmative. The "effects" of it—observable in thoughts, perceptions, and action—establish the dialectic throughout.

That dialectic is the very structure of the tale. It can be pinpointed as we plot step by step the levels of consciousness. When the character of the tale first hears "the dread sentence of death" (V, 67), he does not feel anguish at the thought of dying. The only pain he feels initially is generated by purely physical torture and the anticipation of the greater torture he will surely experience. We never really know who he is, and what crime he has been accused of, although we infer that he has been unjustly condemned to die. However, questions of justice, human and divine, are simply irrelevant here. Whatever thoughts concern him are purely reflections on his own degree of consciousness and the quality of pain that his body is able to sense. In his gradual slumbering to semi-consciousness, he was unable to perceive the stark agony of his predicament. Instead it is dulled by the physical pain he feels; and furthermore, it cannot be understood and
responded to with misery. Since the brain itself is numb, the agony is merely projected in the very images of his dreaming. The external world is telescoped into one image.

After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum. It conveyed to my soul the idea of revolution—perhaps from its association in fancy with the burr of a mill-wheel (V, 67).

This passage suggests the image of a funnel through which sounds pass as they filter from the gradually narrowing horizon of the external world into the mind. As they rush inward, the various materials achieve a uniformity, an "indeterminate" quality. Losing their individuation, they become one uniform essence: voices become sounds which, with the sensation of movement, fuse into "revolutions" of indistinct humming and revolving expressed in the word "burr." Though he ceases to hear, he begins for a moment to "see." But what he is conscious of now is his own dream-like images and not external reality. He sees the world now "with how terrible an exaggeration!" The entire scene is not presented to him so that he could perceive one detail in relation to others. He is aware only of the white-lipped, "thin even to grotesqueness" black robed judges. His attention is fastened to those lips (as though they were right in front of him) which "writhe with a deadly locution"; he "sees" them fashion "the syllables of my name." And yet, because he is barely conscious at all, he "shuddered because no sound succeeded." His attention is focused now on the candles which calm him by suggesting for only a moment thoughts of mercy and charity. But the candles them-
selves become the source of pain, the "angel forms as meaningless spectres with heads of flame." And thereupon the misery of utter hopelessness leads inevitably to the voluptuous feelings of relief at the thought of being released finally of all pain. The generation of thoughts and the subsequent sensations that they themselves generate—how lovingly these are described by Poe:

And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave. The thought came gently and stealthily, and it seemed long before it attained full appreciation; but just as my spirit came at length properly to feel and entertain it, the figures of the judges vanished, as if magically, from before me (V, 68).

The judges, the flames, the visual world, the sweet naming of death: everything disappears within the "idea of revolution and the hum of inquisitorial voices," as all "sensations appeared swallowed up in [funneled into] a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades." The temporary suspension of mental activity follows: "Then silence, and stillness, and night were the universe." The sense of time, place, and motion has altogether disappeared and the soul has an intimation of spacelessness and eternity.

In the second paragraph he describes the degrees by which he becomes conscious once again. As he had recorded the gradual disintegration of the scene and his own perceptions in the first paragraph, here he would try to describe the reconstruction and reintegration of the fragments of his perception. Now the blurred details become gradually more distinct and substantial; they are related to other fragments that gradually come into view. He
attempts to represent the conscious mind meditating on its uncon­
conscious states, to analyze the unanalyzable:

Arousing from the most profound of slumbers, we break
the gossamer web of some dream. Yet in a second after­
ward, (so frail may that web have been) we remember not
that we have dreamed (V, 69).

He would attempt to arrest that brief fraction of an instant in
time and analyze it in terms of its parts:

In the return to life from the swoon there are two stages;
first, that of the sense of mental or spiritual; secondly,
that of the sense of physical, existence. It seems prob­
able that if, upon reaching the second stage, we could re­
call the impressions of the first, we should find these
impressions eloquent in memories of the gulf beyond. And
that gulf is--what? (V, 69).

He is struck by the fact that he cannot understand how the first
visual image could have emerged--the first dim awareness of con­
sciousness--from out of a black insensate vacuum. He admits in
the end that unconscious mental activity is not amenable to scru­
tiny. This paragraph reiterates the epistemological specula­
tions so often found in Poe's literary criticism and in "Eureka":
the wistful and petulant longing to understand the ineffable.
Whenever he would strive to conjure up remembrances, he achieves
not "memories" but mere "shadows of memory." For clarity that
requires fixity and stability is frustrated by the sense of per­
petual movement and the gravitation "down-down-still down--til a
hideous dizziness oppressed me at the mere idea of the intermin­
ableness of the descent." Boundless descent followed by the
feeling of infinity, which by man cannot be endured too long,
issues in a cessation of motion; the third paragraph then comes to an end.

The subsequent paragraph represents the activity of the two basic senses: motion and sound. But he is aware now not of the external world as such, but only of his body which becomes both the primary source and the locus of sensation. The walls disappear; they become either the universe or the body relaxing and, as it were, extending itself throughout space. He is aware of nothing else. He knows only that he is alive, and then is aware of "thought," "the endeavor to comprehend my true state." He would attempt to adapt every sensation to the external world. From paragraph to paragraph through the rest of the story, the movement is regulated by the struggle to establish correspondences between sensations and their possible sources (cause) in the external world. He would attempt to understand his own sensations, his feelings, even the "shadows" of memory: all of this activity just for the sake of comprehending his predicament, even when he believes he has no hope of ever escaping it. "I had little object—certainly no hope—in these researches; but a vague curiosity prompted me to continue them" (V, 73). With great ingenuity he saves himself from the pendulum. But he would have died just the same, had he not been freed at a most critical moment.

The resolution of the tale, then, is not brought about by the protagonist. Yet we are satisfied to know that he exercised his ingenuity at one moment and triumphed, even if he would have
been powerless to free himself a second time. The ending of the story is as unexpected, then, to the reader as it is to the character himself. Nevertheless, one is tempted to believe that a person who so energetically confronts life cannot be permitted by a writer to die. Poetic justice—which, unfortunately has nothing whatsoever to do with divine or human justice—maintains that those who struggle to survive will eventually save themselves. Those of Poe's characters who yearn in a sickly fashion for death must die. But the ones who have the strength to endure under the most extreme conditions are often simply too precious not to be saved in the nick of time.

We would require a sense of perspective in order to determine the shortcomings as well as the virtues of "The Narrative...." As a sea story with a philosophical content of some sort, it invites comparison with a much greater work, Moby-Dick. Those critics (Edward Davidson and Patrick Quinn) who enthusiastically claim that the theme of deception renders the events morally complex have generally not observed that Poe has quite mechanically manipulated the images of reality and illusion. Two images of the world are generally conjured up independently: first, reality, and then, immediately afterward, illusion. In contrast to Moby-Dick the world of Arthur Gordon Pym is not defined in terms of a metaphor. In Melville's novel the whale itself is the cipher that must be read. No matter what activity Melville wrote of, it was always related somehow to the whale. The whale, a symbol of the
world, was for **Moby-Dick** a cogent unifying principle. For the whale really did exist. And, therefore, the feverish pursuit after it occasioned by the belief of the crew in the physical reality of the whale was justified, was purposeful. But in "Arthur Gordon Pym" the meaninglessness of the sea voyage is underscored by the very lack of an even nameable goal toward which Pym would journey. In place of the substantiability of Melville's whale, Poe would characteristically give us the mind of Arthur Pym as the center of the tale. The novel should, then, be assessed on the basis of the quality of understanding the central character achieves.

But Arthur Pym is hardly a rich and complex person; his range of perception is frighteningly narrow. Since he is constantly in great danger, his mental energy is consumed in struggling to survive on the barest physical level. Though Ahab's crew constantly confronts the unknown, they are not perpetually threatened with starvation, disease, mutiny, shipwreck, storms, and as a result, even those among them who are the most dubiously heroic enjoy some reprieve from horror and imminent destruction to speculate on what it means to survive spiritually. How can subtle moral and aesthetic issues be appreciated when Pym is confronted with an almost unalleviated assault of terror and horror? His discoveries are always the same: that someone or something who had appeared to be friendly and good is really evil and destructive. Only once or twice do the forces of good and evil exist simultaneously in one soul, at one time and place, tormenting the character with the
desperate need to affirm and reject at the same time. In one poignant moment, Arthur, seeing his dog go mad, is agonized by the need to kill him in order to save himself. The forces of good and evil are poised precariously for a moment. Unfortunately the effect of this rather moving spiritual struggle is dissipated. Later Pym says that it was a good thing that he hadn't killed the dog, because it saved him from being killed when he tried along with two or three men to seize the ship from the mutineers. By itself the scene where Pym is concealed with his dog is compelling. Once it is integrated with the following episodes, however, the pathos is dissipated by "adapting" this scene to a later one when the dog repays his debt to Pym. At other moments however, when Pym would demonstrate his charity and compassion, the pathos is not dissipated. When the lone survivors decide to draw straws in order to decide who among them would consent to be sacrificed for the others, Pym alone cries out against this plan and initially shrinks in horror when he is called upon to participate in it. Later Pym is anguished at witnessing the death of Augustus, and the slaughter of so many men.

The main defects in this novel, then, can be pointed out rather simply. Chief among them is the complete lack of characterization in depth. Arthur is the most unequivocally good character, in spite of his childish pranks in the beginning. He is, nevertheless, cunning and practical; and he must be if he is to have the will power and the physical and mental fortitude to survive. When his companions, at the point of starvation, become
unconscious, though terribly weakened himself Pym can manage to secure a few scraps of food concealed in an almost inaccessible area. Augustus, we infer, is basically a good man, if simply because he is on Pym's side. The narration of the mutiny is flat, however; it is little more than parenthetical exclamations of horror in an otherwise calm narration of events. That Augustus can narrate the events so coherently after the treacherous mutiny when his father is killed seems inconceivable. His narration expresses none of the stunned bewilderment one would expect to see. Peters is also "good," because he too is on Pym's side. But one knows even less about him than about Augustus. The mutineers who are never perceived individually are barbaric.

Toward the end of the novel, the crew lands on the islands where they are greeted warmly by the natives. This hospitality also proves only to be a horrid deception. Arthur manages to escape, cursing the natives. One need only contrast Poe's natives with Melville's sunny, sympathetic and amusing treatment of the natives to see the awkward melodrama reflected in "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." Even more conspicuous is the lack of warmth in Pym's description of nature. There is nothing humanly beautiful about it. Poe would never have been able, as Melville, to describe lovingly the anatomy of the whale, so that the facts themselves seem miraculous and divine. The scholarly research in Moby-Dick projects the image of the mind gathering minutiae and ordering them compassionately into a beautiful affirmative vision; the mind of the scholar (for Ishmael is that) is heroic. In Poe's
"The Narrative..." the scholar (for Pym is that) is a mere pedant who cannot be moved by the details he has collected. For him the facts are mere statistics. Poe represents the scholarly mind at the moment of his researches that is quite different from the comparable moment in Moby-Dick. In Melville's work the scholar responds ecstatically to his latest discoveries and is thrilled by the vision of beauty that has unfolded in front of him in the patterning of details. Melville communicates a vision; Poe, a series of orderly facts that follow step by step in a logical order. For Poe the scholar has long since recovered from the effects of beauty he might have experienced at one time. Having thoroughly assimilated his knowledge, he sets out to communicate it in lucid, flat prose as though he were giving an arid report in front of a sober and respectable scholarly organization.

The aridity of prose in chapter 15, for example, is expressed to a degree throughout the entire tale by Poe's deliberate attempt to present the fantastic events objectively. He has Pym announce in the introduction that he would offer the narration as "a statement so minute and connected as to have the appearance of that truth it would really posses" (III, 1). Like the mathematical laws in "Eureka" the truth itself must be purified of personal responses. In the Introduction to "The Narrative..." we note that Arthur is to serve primarily as a receptacle of truth. His narration is to be a mere "documentary." The truth, then, in no way is generated by him. He cannot enhance reality in any way without distorting it. What he would require is discipline and restraint,
not imagination, to describe the reality that exists apart from him. If, therefore, his chief importance is not to measure reality by its effects on him as he matures and gains a certain ennobling stature through his experiences, but instead to discover the reality which exists apart from him—apart from his own and anyone else's humanity—then the philosophical importance of this tale must derive not from the characterization, but from whatever discoveries Pym makes concerning the nature of what is ontologically real.

The very structure of the book supports the judgment that he never really arrived at the final questions and answers. The novel ends only when Pym is about to ask the ultimate question. The action is abruptly broken off, as Pym is sailing to the South Pole. There is no sense of human purpose and achievement, therefore. The agony established almost from the very beginning is protracted senselessly and intensified. Appearances of things dissolve and the reality confronted is unendurable. The cause of cosmic deception—the main theme which is so mechanically manipulated here—cannot be revealed and, therefore, resolution in the sense of explanation cannot be achieved. For Poe, deception is not an integral part of beauty, reality and truth. He cannot realize that deception is the very soul of romance. For Poe, it is unequivocally evil. In the beginning of the tale, Pym himself is a deceiver. Becoming the victim of deception, he learns to detest it. And when he is forced to deceive the crew by pretending
to be a corpse, he is filled with shame and loathing for himself.

Reality and illusion, then, are like two sides of the same coin. So near to each other, they are, nevertheless, remote, for they cannot be perceived at the same time. Pym's world view is fractured in two. What he believes initially is good and safe he finally realizes is evil. Earlier he has no intimation whatsoever that destruction is imminent. Mutiny, death, all Hell seems to descend upon him with a violent suddenness. He is stunned because it is so unexpected. He is terrified, because he knows that he is at the mercy of inscrutable powers which can destroy him for no apparent reason at any time without the slightest warning. The reality-illusion theme, therefore, is extended from Pym's initial seemingly innocent lie through the more horrific deception by the natives and finally to the cosmic deception of nature and God Himself. Only in the spirit of romance where man himself creates reality and illusion can this theme be treated with delicacy and richness of meaning. When nature itself becomes a deceiver, when, by extension, God Himself creates men so that they can be beguiled, then the individual cannot even have trust in the accuracy of his own perceptions. All he can ever do is to resign himself to the fact that whatever knowledge he finally achieves is the effects of reality, which are, indeed, the most excruciating pain. What he knows, therefore, can only be what he is made to feel.

Because nothing human has been accomplished by the characters in "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," because they seem to journey endlessly without a sense of direction (other than geo-
graphical), almost as though they let themselves be hypnotized into sailing forever without ever asking themselves where they intended to go and for what reasons, one does not expect to find a pattern for their journeying. However, as if to insist that the journey is meaningful, Poe has artificially created a dialectic for his novel, a dialectic which is rigid, compulsive, and repetitive. The substance of Melville's vision of the world are hierarchies of paradoxes; they do not contradict each other and, thereby, confound and stun the characters. Instead, they fuse into a single vision of life which overwhelms man like a miracle. For Poe, however, paradoxes are not sustained in his narrative. Reality and illusion are mutually exclusive; the illusion collapses instantly at the sudden intrusion of reality. This progression, this alternation of illusion and reality, continues until the narrative is artificially brought to an end. What then constitutes the dialectic which binds one group of reality-illusion incidents to another? It is, indeed, the straining of the will to pierce through the ultimate illusion to the ultimate reality and the frustration Pym experiences in knowing that he cannot really know when he has been beguiled by yet another illusion until it is too late. For he has no knowledge whatsoever of the "mechanism" of deception, and, therefore, has no control over it.

Pym journeys to the bottom of the earth in search of this law. Were man to discover the means of control, he would have to try to reduce the variables (the infinite radiation of certain "thought centers") to certain ultimate categories. And this is
precisely what Arthur would do. The major difference between Melville and Poe, then, is that whereas the former could generate any number of variables from a given fact or symbol, Poe would reduce the variables he found about him to the initial and ultimate cosmic facts: to "de-symbolize" the symbol, as it were. Deception as such epitomizes the human predicament, the curse, the recognition of man's finite condition. Illusion so completely obstructs the reality concealed beneath that it must be made to crumble like a wall if one is to penetrate the reality beyond. Understanding reality is not a subtle process, therefore, that occurs gradually. Rather, it is a violent sundering apart.

The journey to the absolute, the sundering away of the final illusion which is the gigantic walls of the universe: this is what Poe would do, but cannot. In reducing human perceptions to ultimate categories (black and white, evil and good, reality and illusion) Poe would make impossible demands upon words. He would—as he himself said in "Marginalia"—be implying that he had fixed the meanings of words. Words would refer not to things, but to metaphysical states that dissolve into meaninglessness itself. These symbolic journeys into the ineffable are plotted step by step in the tales discussed in the following chapter. In "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," however, the rigid unchanging pattern of reality and illusion that for Pym has no purpose and cumulative meaning is the radical shortcoming. It also epitomizes Poe's central thesis which we first observed in "Maelzel's Chess-Player." Therefore, although "The Narrative..." is not a
great literary achievement, it sustains an exploration to its logical conclusions, of certain central principles which pervade Poe's work. As the only long work of fiction Poe ever wrote, it alone can serve as Poe's attempt at a vision of life. Poe carried Pym as far as he could have gone; and, therefore, in that sense if in no other the narrative comes to an end.

Where, one might ask, could Pym have gone from Anarctica? Where could he have gone? from the vision of a universe that is so white that one might perceive it by simply being blind. But even more important, Poe did not learn anything which could possibly have related to his life in a human community. Instead, he is caught up in the hysterical pursuit of higher levels of reality. For everything that antedates the final vision, which, ironically, can never be achieved, is absolutely irrelevant. There is no sense, therefore—and no possibility, furthermore—of ever returning home. The compulsive need, then, is simply to complete the journey "out of TIME-out of SPACE."

In spite of its structural weaknesses, "The Narrative..." has any number of memorable fragments. Pym's concealment aboard the Grampus reveals the energetic mind that one admires in "The Pit and the Pendulum." The description of the phantom ship and the hideous figures on board is startlingly vivid. The nightmarish details are described in great detail, not as the product of a mind in a state of semi-consciousness which is aware of only a fragment here and there. For this scene now is not dreamed. It is real. Every detail is part of a background richly, sensuously
perceived. (The background in dreaming is so elusive that it seems to recede altogether.) Few poets can describe now the dim perceptions of a sleeper who has swooned away in agony, now the world as it exists apart from the mind.

As art, therefore, "The Narrative..." can be appreciated only piecemeal. The fantastic imagery of various passages is made partly ineffectual by the major structural weaknesses of the entire tale. The main defect in "The Narrative..." as I see it, derives from Poe's compulsive tendency to create more than one peripety. Indeed—as though Poe himself were aware of this defect—he restricts himself to writing shorter pieces, and, in his finest tales there is only one peripety, so that his protagonists manage to arrive at meanings in ten or fifteen pages that in "The Narrative..." Pym achieved in the course of around 200. And yet, because it is ironic that the meanings Poe arrives at constantly seem for the most part to be as mysteriously concealed and, in the end, as inscrutable as those in "The Narrative..." one might well ask the following question: if the principle of order Poe would seek is one he would appear to admit that he cannot perceive at all, then how can he manipulate language to express the mysterious truth, that absolute reality itself, which is non-sensuous and a-human? How can, in other words, what is not perceived become the principle of unity in a tale? I shall analyze Poe's poetic method in the fifth chapter. But in the following discussions of the tales, I would point out, merely how the word, how language itself, gradually loses its denotative
characteristics, its direct relation to a concrete external world, as Poe would write about experiences that are "unreal," simply because they appear to be out of the ordinary and fantastic.

Whoever takes Poe seriously has almost invariably attempted to analyze "The Fall of the House of Usher." I should like to offer a reading of this story which does not take issue with any specific analysis, but yet attempts to see this tale in terms of those themes that pervade Poe's work. The two central characters in this story are Usher himself and, more important, the observer through whose eyes we see the action. The observer enters a world which seems to be weird and thoroughly unfamiliar; he would attempt, therefore, to understand this world. In a sense, then, this story records the way in which he comes to terms with what he sees. Usher, every bit as much an emblem of this world as the house he lives in, is the object of that understanding. The narrator of this tale is involved in no observable danger. Only at the end of the tale is he running away from the crumbling house. In the beginning, however, he voluntarily enters it. There is no practical reason for the direction his perceptions take; he has no reason to solve any mystery, for he is not called upon to act in any specific way. Yet just the same he begins to speculate for he is impelled to analyze the vividness and painfulness of his own impressions.
He is not speculating about an idea (as for instance the theme of reality and deception in "The Narrative..."). Furthermore, his observations are not regulated by a need to know his predicament so that he might save himself, as was the case with the character in "The Pit and the Pendulum." His speculations are generated by his need to "liberate" himself from the effects of Usher's world by finding a rationale, an explanation which can account for them. In a manner which resembles Poe's in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and Dupin's in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," he would proceed to analyze his impressions by trying to explain what he means by "insufferable gloom."

I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible (III, 273).

In this passage Poe implicitly describes the peculiar quality of depression his characters feel. In the subsequent chapter of this study, I shall observe how "insufferable gloom" constitutes a manifestation which will lead us to the nearly inscrutable cause (i.e., meaning) of these tales. Looking upon the scene, the character feels insupportably gloomy—so gloomy, in fact, that no pleasure whatsoever can possibly issue from his observations. He has experienced the catharsis, the pity and fear released by a sense of the tragic, which is both pleasant and painful. But viewing Usher's mansion, he is struck by the fact that for practically the first time in his life he feels no pleasure whatsoever. Instead, the initial gloom is
progressively intensified. He experiences only "an utter depression of soul," "the hideous dropping off of the veil" (III, 273). The mystery insoluble becomes both the scene itself and his own inexplicably weird sense of gloom. His pain is absolute, in as much as it is not relieved by feelings of pleasure.

Trying to account for his own response, he implies that the objects alone cannot evoke such feelings; instead he says the cause must be implicit in the arrangement of those objects. But unlike the analytic Dupin, he is unable to analyze the mystery:

What was it--I paused to think--what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth (III, 273-4).

Nevertheless, he would continue to try to account for his impressions. But unlike Dupin who can almost instantaneously intuit the rationale, the observer in "The Fall..." would examine detail by detail to confirm his initial impression, hoping in the end that through the evidence alone, he could proceed step by step to the conclusion. He speaks of a letter he received earlier from Usher; he was impelled by "the manner," the "heart" of the letter--its implied, or suggested meaning--to make this visit. He would try to analyze the impression he received as he
attempted to view the image of the mansion in the tarn, in much the same way that Dupin or Poe himself might have:

I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment—that of looking down within the tarn—had been to deepen the first singular impression. There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition—for why should I not so term it?—served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis (III, 276).

In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe explains that the awareness of fear in itself is generally the cause for yet a greater panic and, in fact, that a series of emotions can be generated as a hysterical response to the initially felt fear. And one might add that the tempo according to which the initial psychic response becomes more intense is often accelerated progressively, if one is unable to locate the source, the cause, of that fear—the rationale itself through which the tragic expenditure of psychic energy may be controlled and eventually brought to an end.

The image in the tarn, a mirror of the house that is weird, the heart of the letter: all together seem more fantastic because they evoke a painful response never before felt. The "insulation," the "circumscription of space,"—for the boundaries of the tarn enclose the reflected image of the house like a picture—leads him to believe, when he looks at the house again, that it is also insulated by an atmosphere. We are not told that the atmosphere exists as such. Instead, the awareness of
the atmosphere seems to be the effect of the infinite suggestivity of the tarn itself.

Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy—a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity—an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued (III, 276).

The suggestivity, then, is evoked by the objects in the external world. But his own response to those objects generates his awareness of (the reality of) the atmosphere itself. Since the immediate cause of the atmosphere appears to be his own impressions, the dialectic of "The Fall..." is suddenly, briefly defined. For, instead of debating whether or not the atmosphere actually exists Poe assumes—and so do his critics (which testifies to his power as an artist)—that the atmosphere does exist as a physical reality, once it is suggested to and postulated by the mind. Therefore, the continuity of the psychic reality of the house, the tarn, the observer and Usher himself is given substance in the atmosphere which binds everything and everyone in a condition of unity. Identity, then, is achieved through modes of insulation: the tarn which visually mirrors the concrete reality of the scene; the sensations that oppress or weigh
heavily upon the observer; the atmosphere that hangs over everyone and everything.

Examining the real aspect of the building, he would hope to dispel his earlier impressions of weirdness. But again he is only dismayed at the "specious totality" of the old woodwork. Because of its antiquity, the house, it seems, should not be standing at all. In fact, it really seems to have expired long ago, but, like the body of M. Valdemar, it remains intact because the soul has not yet been released, because indeed the Ushers are still alive. Suddenly he observes a fissure in the wall, which, though scarcely perceptible, manifests the extensiveness of decay. For it extends from the very top to the bottom of one side of the wall. In the following paragraphs the tone of mystery deepens, with the description of the atmosphere: the "Gothic archway"; the "stealthy step" of the valet who leads him "in silence" through "many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio" (as if these objectified the labyrinthine processes of analysis itself); the physician who "wore an expression of low cunning and perplexity" and accosted him "with trepidation." It is curious, he thinks, that all of these objects which ordinarily have appeared so familiar should now strike him as being so terribly unfamiliar. But the source of their strangeness, the cause of the impression, he cannot pinpoint, perhaps because the intensity and the strangeness of his own responses makes further analysis difficult.
Usher, who invited him, greets him with a "vivacious warmth" at one moment, but later, when they sit down, he is silent. His actions are "alternately vivacious and sullen," we are told. The two states of mind are expressed independently. Never synthesized and modified by each other, they cannot express a genuine wholeness and wholesomeness. Usher's facial expression, which the narrator would scrutinize, is the cipher which conceals a meaning that cannot be penetrated, particularly the eyes which seem to "arrest attention" and the silken hair which "floated rather than fell about the face," and seems, therefore, to insulate the mystery from exposure. The appearance of Usher is so weird that he is unable to "connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity." He notices an inconsistency and "incoherence," even as he noticed the same inconsistency in the specious totality of the house. This inconsistency is one of vivacious and sullen mood and of voice which is alternately tremulous (as Dupin's voice was described) and gutteral. Usher would try to find a cause for his own illness. He describes it as a "constitutional and family evil." Its symptom is fear of the sensuous world because of the "unnatural sensations" it generates within him: the fear of "events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results": the fear of fear itself. The sense of "totality [within Usher and in his world] that was specious" seemed to have obtained some influence over his soul--the "physique of the gray walls," all the sensuous details which had wrought a radical change in
the "morale of his existence." The mansion itself, with which he is fatally identified, has imprisoned him. It is both the cause and the effect of his deterioration. His flight from the sensuous world, thus, is a way of blinding him to the effects of that mansion on him, of insulating himself from it. Only by escaping from the world in which he lives can he possibly obtain some relief from the painful memories and from the insufferable oppressiveness of his own identity. The only way he can obtain permanent relief is by obliterating the sense world; and, therefore, he must die, if he is to be free altogether from pain. The fissure in the personality of Usher testifies to the extent of decay of his spirit. His sullenness and abstractness are manifestations of his attempted flight from the world, from reality itself, to the terrifying silence and blindingly white landscape of his own soul.

Usher would try to account for the peculiar depression which afflicts him in terms of a "more natural and far more palpable origin" (my italics). The physical deterioration of his sister objectifies his fear of and retreat from the world of sense perceptions. As he suffers from a nervous disease, marked by acute sensitivity of sensations, so she is suffering from another type of nervous disorder, catalepsy. Leo Spitzer and all the critics who have wisely followed the line of inquiry he proposed in analyzing "The Fall..." have tried to account for many of the mysterious references to Madeline: the incest theme, the mysterious appearance of the doctors; Usher's hasty
interment of his sister. However, there is something even more important that has not been accounted for. Why does Poe deliberately understate Usher's motives? Usher's personality, which constitutes the chief mystery, is described most circumspectly, only as it is outwardly manifested to an observer, and not as the inner forces of his behavior, the "modus operandi," are described by the omniscient story teller. No analysis of motivation can be complete unless we can explain how and why Poe concealed them so painstakingly from the reader in the first place. Only such an explanation will demonstrate how Poe's strategy of secrecy, silence, and mystery constitutes the seemingly inscrutable cipher which is, indeed, the structure of this story.

The sense of mystery is increasingly oppressive. It becomes even more confounding at the final catastrophe. In the tale no explanation is explicitly offered. At the end, we see the narrator rushing out of the house: "my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder." When the air of mystery is so intensely developed in a tale, one would demand that the mystery be explained. Mystery and explanation are mechanically manipulated in the tales of ratiocination; but the meaning in these tales is so shallow because it issues from a flat and arid arrangement of external details and no probing in depth of concealed inner forces.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is not a tale of this order. For mystery and explanation are fused throughout. However, because the mystery seems so oppressive in "The Fall. . .," one
cannot understand it facilely in terms of a preconceived rationale without violating the integrity of the tale whose impact is the overwhelming effects of a mystery that is inscrutable—or nearly so. Spitzer's attempt to arrive at cause is excellent as far as it goes. He has underscored the most suggestive quotation on "Fear" which states that a person can, by anticipating events, actually precipitate them. I should hesitate, however, to explain Usher's fear in terms of his sister's ailment, as do both Usher and his critics. Fear is Usher's permanent predicament; it is a "radiation" of his mental affliction. Whatever rationale (or source) for this fear one may postulate, therefore, can not be so easily formulated. It dare not be so palpable and natural. In itself, the rationale must seem so weird that it will account for the mystery and yet, by the very fantastic and out of the ordinary nature of the cause, sustain it.

The questions raised in this discussion of "The Fall..." will be taken up in the following chapter. I mention them now to define the questions Poe seems to have asked himself--questions we must know if we are going to attempt the answers later on. From the beginning of his career, he was obsessed with a desire to analyze the unanalyzable. And, therefore, he obviously had to decide what was amenable to analysis in the first place and in what styles he could represent adequately the degree of mystery he wished to evoke, as well as the kind of explanation. It was almost as though he conceived of the
relationship between explanation and mystery in their mathematically relative senses and then created a style to express this precisely. Experimentation with style issued in a series of genres which Poe cultivated simultaneously. Among them, two, the tales of ratiocination and the melodramatic tales of the arabesque (especially tales of the order of "Metzengerstein" and "The Assignation") proceed in diametrically opposed directions. The first would reduce the weird to immediately perceivable natural causes. The second would intensify the mystery throughout by transforming the ordinary and the commonplace into the weird. In the detective stories, once the crime is solved, the quality of mystery is instantaneously dissipated. The only facts left unaccountable are the intuitive powers of Dupin which sustain the sense of mystery feebly and artificially.

In "Metzengerstein" the passion and mystery are unleashed from the very beginning and intensified until the catastrophe at the end. Here the structure of the tales seems to have been designed with the intention of narrating events which appear to be progressively fantastic. The story abruptly comes to an end with what is supposedly intended to be the fantastic horror of the final calamity. But here we are not gripped helplessly with the sense of horror and suspense, as we are in "The Fall. . ." In trying to explain why "Metzengerstein" fails to be a tale of the order of "The Fall. . .," one is tempted to say that metempsychosis is impossible to conceive of, whereas for some reason one is able to conceive of a mansion suddenly collapsing like a
human being. In saying "for some reason" we would imply that there are degrees of impossibility, some of which are more credible than others. The degree of impossibility determines the quality of belief we register in reading, which in turn bears upon the effect. This kind of reasoning would try to explain the basic difference between the two tales on the basis of content rather than form; and it is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. First, having found an immediate reason that would account for the difference between the tales, we may not feel compelled to find the legitimate cause of our "belief" in the very structure of both stories. But, even more important, according to what he said in "Eureka," Poe would hardly have found this explanation consonant with his own intentions. For he emphatically stated that there are no degrees of impossibility and "thus no one impossible conception can be more peculiarly impossible than another impossible conception" (XVI, 195).

Given the fact, then, that all impossible conceptions are equally impossible to conceive of, the problem might well have been focused in this way for Poe: having throughout his career been fascinated with the possibility of conceiving of, defining, and eventually representing (making a reality out of) events that were utterly inconceivable and impossible, he might have tried to determine how he could make those conceptions seem believable. It is as though he admitted from the beginning that certain conceptions were utterly impossible, and in spite of this strenuously attempted to believe in them so that he could--
by the sheer quality of his belief—make them real. But then, given their intense reality for him, he was forced to make them real to others by making his readers believe in what they surely had not taken seriously before. For by making his readers believe what they can hardly even conceive of, he could, in a very tangible sense, create the impossible. In "Metzengerstein" he did not achieve a quality of belief which could have given the tale an air of reality. In "The Fall...," however, one is stunned into believing. The growth of Poe's technique from "Metzengerstein" to "The Fall..." can be measured by the fact that the principle of causation in the first tale is referred to by Poe as merely a superstition and a curse. In the second, however, curse and superstition achieve the stature of a law.

In "Metzengerstein" the superstition is grossly, awkwardly framed:

The soul... ne demeure qu'une seule fois dans un corps sensible: au reste—un cheval, un chien, un homme même, n'est que la ressemblance peu tangible de ces animaux (II, 185-6).

In "The Fall..." the theme of metempsychosis—used with grotesque emphasis in "Metzengerstein"—is never openly formulated; it is indirectly represented as the mansion which seems to have a soul of its own and can suffer, like a human being, a sudden collapse. Usher speaks of the house as though it were a living being which will destroy him, whose effects he can predict in advance. The horse in "Metzengerstein" is especially uncanny because it emerges violently and unpredictably from the tapestry.
The baron is horrified to see something he cannot explain, something which seems to him so unreasonable. Usher, on the other hand, at times calmly anticipates the catastrophe he feels certain will take place: "I shall perish"; "I must perish in this deplorable folly." He anticipates the catastrophe, and he is afraid. As he reacts to the anticipation of the horrific event in the future, the reader is made to feel effects analogous to Usher's. And like him, we are intended to postulate the inevitable calamity, which paradoxically we cannot conceive of until it happens, so fantastic it is. We are therefore made to insist that cause and law exist, even without feeling the need to define them.

The specific laws and causes which structure human behavior are implicitly expressed in the finest tales by Poe. Regardless of whether or not we may feel impelled to define those principles, they can nevertheless be defined, as we shall see in the following chapter. At this moment, however, I wish merely to make one simple observation: the impossible conception, the cause formulated as a curse or superstition in "Metzengerstein" from which fantastic events issue, is not analyzed by Poe. He cannot even represent the mind of the individual who can analyze the manifestations of the principle. They can merely react to them. In "Metzengerstein" and "The Asignment," therefore, the characterization is melodramatic: the effects of the cause as they are superficially observed (not as they are internally observed) in the behavior of the character. But later, by
presenting in "William Wilson" and "The Black Cat" the "modus operandi" of human behavior, Poe implies that he knew why the characters were weird. Poe knew that he would somehow have to achieve a sense of resolution, however limited, in order to create a dénouement. As the sense of mystery became less amenable to a formulaic reductionism to cause (as in the tales of ratiocination), he was driven by the need to find some plausible explanation. And where human behavior itself constitutes the mystery, the rationale, he knew, would have to be psychological; furthermore, it would have to be one which because of its out of the ordinary manifestations would be almost inscrutable. In the finest tales, he finally devised this rationale for the uncanny.

But there are times when in his less memorable tales, he clearly admits that he cannot analyze human behavior; then the structure of the story invariably breaks down. In "The Imp of the Perverse" Poe speaks of the "prime mobile," the paradoxical law of perversity:

... it is, in fact, a mobile without motive, a motive not motivirt. Through its promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction in terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should not. In theory, no reason can be more unreasonable; but, in fact, there is none more strong. With certain minds, under certain conditions, it becomes absolutely irresistible. I am not more certain that I breathe, than that the assurance of the wrong or error of any action is often the one unconquerable force which impels us, and alone impels us to its prosecution. Nor will this overwhelming tendency to
do wrong for the wrong's sake, admit of analysis, or resolution into ulterior elements. It is a radical, a primitive impulse--elementary (VI, 147).

The first half of the tale resembles a treatise rather than fiction; Poe describes in general terms how the principle operates and clearly emphasizes that he finds its cause inescrutable. In the second half of the tale Poe cites an instance (an example, a demonstration) of this law of perversity in a tale of murder and confession.

Critics who often praise Poe for the "unity" of his stories generally fail to realize that he achieves only the most specious totality most of the time. So many of his stories fall into two sections—a collapse symptomatic of a permanent fissure in his modes of perception. The first part extends from a mere paragraph to half of the tale (as, for instance, in "The Imp of the Perverse"); the second, which offers the tale itself, would supposedly demonstrate the principle formulated in the style of analysis. This relationship between principle and demonstration, separately articulated, bears only a superficial resemblance to the rationale which structures an entire tale and the tale itself. The rationale which would explain the action in a tale differs altogether from the principle in tales like "The Imp of the Perverse." For while we may see the effects of the rationale, we may not be able to define it easily; the principle, on

1 In this passage Poe characteristically reveals his desire to arrive at the ultimate cause of human behavior by reducing all of its manifestations to uniform "thought-centers."
the other hand, is invariably explicitly stated from the very beginning. The principle is to the rest of the tale (the demonstration), as the major premise is to the minor premise in a categorical syllogism. The lack of resolution in the tale corresponds to the missing third term of the syllogism. The principle formulated in the beginning of the tale like the major premise makes an unqualified assertion about all members of a specific class. The demonstration, like a minor premise, cites a specific instance of a member of that class. The applicability of the principle to that specific member is automatically taken for granted by Poe in these tales. (The principle is not conceived of as a cause, which is brought to bear upon someone or something in order to achieve a certain effect; it serves only as a definition or description of a category of which any number of instances are parts). In his finest tales, however, the applicability of that principle to the specific instance (the specific characters involved) cited, is tested, as it were. But never clearly articulated by Poe, it remains just the same an almost inscrutable rationale.

The demonstration which follows the principle constitutes a structure that is anticlimactic. What follows the principle merely supports it and is not meant to test it in any way. This kind of structure does not project the image of a mind engaged in analyzing a subject; instead, the analyst who beforehand scrutinizes the issues now presents what he knows with an air of definition. The general unqualified conclusions are stated in
the beginning; thereupon, he begins merely to relate an anec-
dote which elaborates, but does not qualify those conclusions. Anticlimax results because one may stop at any point in the anecdote after reading the general principles. The principle that often introduces the story is like a scientific law which explicitly formulates the meaning. Such a principle might well do for the tales of ratiocination; but it could never suffice to express the meaning in the tales of the grotesque which are prose-poems of sorts. For the meanings in them—as in all poems—must be suggested, and not stated openly. He sharply criticizes the transcendentalists for bringing to the surface meaning that should be expressed only as an "undercurrent of suggestivity." Since he seems to have objected violently to baldly formulated statements, why did Poe himself articulate any number of categorically defined principles at the beginning of his stories? It would be tempting to say that he merely contradicted himself. However, I find it impossible to believe that Poe unwittingly violated his own principles. For him this apparent contradiction might well have been explained by the fact that the particular principles he tried to formulate were some of the most elusive, suggestive and inscrutable and, therefore, not amenable to analysis and elaboration in any conventional sense. Indeed, he might have expected the very weirdness of the principle to excuse him for stating it so baldly. We may not be inclined to believe that those principles are unusually strange. But there is no doubt that Poe thought they were. In
fact, he seems to apologize constantly for the peculiarity of
his own ideas. He seems to assume in advance that the reader
would not be inclined to believe him, and, therefore, he apolo-
gizes every time he sets out to relate what he thinks would
seem unbelievable to everyone. Poe begins "Eureka" with an
apology, where he would beg the reader to believe him. Yet it
is curious that in criticizing the inaugural address of Rev.
D. L. Carroll, he should have said that,

Apologies are seldom worth the time spent in making or
reading them. Generally, an author who prints his pro-
duction may be supposed to consider it of some value.
To make an apology, then, similar to that of Mr. Carroll,
is but a modest way of hinting that, with a fair trial,
the writer could have done much better (VIII, 116).

Although he seems to feel, according to this passage, that
apologies are quite superfluous, I believe that the apology is
structurally justified in Poe's work. In fact, it is the most
logical, the inevitable, final self-assessment Poe can make,
given his intellectual position. For he begs the reader to be-
lieve principles without giving him a shred of evidence and with-
out specifying causes. And, even more important, he expresses
the impossible longing for that evidence, even while he insists
that the mystery cannot ultimately be penetrated. Of course,
those who read Poe may never choose to believe him. Whoever
does not believe, however, can be forced to respond intensely to
the fantastic principles and events, no matter how strenuously
he would attempt to resist believing. For the readers' capaci-
ties to control their own responses (responses that indeed
express a quality of belief) can be eroded by the technique of verisimilitude indispensable in all great art, which dignifies fiction by calling it fact and making the materials of the hoax compellingly real. When Poe mastered the art of verisimilitude, he had no need to rely upon grossly stated apologies, although they are faintly articulated in even the best of his tales. He achieved the effects of reality by conjuring up a world that—with the degree of its intensity, destruction, and disorganization, its absurdity, perversity, and seeming improbability—compells us to understand, even while we are dared to find a rationale which can account for it.

There are times, then, when Poe would begin a tale by asking the reader to believe him. There are other times, however, when he shares the reader's disbelief, and ever so gradually begins to lead him to believe, as he himself would pretend gradually to register belief. The dialectic from disbelief to belief can be plotted at times almost graphically; the first stage reflects the improbability of a specific fantastic event occurring here and now; the second stage, the possibility of very dimly conceiving that this event could take place—first, to other people on other planets, then to us, in the far distant future; the third stage, the sudden horrifying realization that the improbable and fantastic event is about to take place here and now. Belief is literally forced upon us with the immediate realization of that improbability, the instantaneous looming into the present of the future catastrophe. This dialectic
structures the second half of "The Imp of the Perverse" and "The Angel of the Odd," both rather light in tone; it is presented more compellingly in "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" where the future event—the collision of the earth with another planet—anticipated half seriously as an event that could possibly take place in the remote future—seizes credibility until believing transforms nightmare into reality.

For a few short days they would not believe an assertion which their intellect, so long employed among worldly considerations, could not in any manner grasp. But the truth of a vitally important fact soon makes its way into the understanding of even the most stolid (II, 4).

This sudden "going beyond the real," the swift revolution of thought that makes the fantastic very real, transforms the vague intimation of a future calamity into a prophecy.

As has been mentioned earlier the central principle of the "dark" tales is often expressed as a curse. The cause for the events, then, is a militant and virulent prophecy. Formulated mysteriously in the poetry of incantation, it claims that certain future events are absolutely determinate, even while it suggests that those events are to take place only at some indefinite point in the future. The curse in "Metzengerstein" phrased elliptically strains to be highly suggestive and mysterious.

"A lofty name shall have a fearful fall, when, as the rider over his horse, the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlitzing" (II, 186).

Poe claimed that this prophecy had a most curious way of precipitating the event itself.
To be sure, the words themselves had little or no meaning. But more trivial causes have given rise—and that no long while ago—to consequences equally eventful (II, 186).

In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the principle of fear, prophetically uttered, had a damning effect upon Usher's mind. Indeed, the whole story may be read as a demonstration of that principle. In "Metzengerstein," Poe presents superficially the effects as the actualization of certain events. The curse has not been realized in the psychological effects of the characters. Poe does attempt to understand the peculiar behavior of the baron. But he cannot arrive at the cause of his disease; for, though the cause is suggestive, it does not constitute a law. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," however, Poe fuses superstition and law, as he formulates the superstition in scientific diction where metaphor entirely disappears.

There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition—for why should I not so term it?—served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis (III, 276).

Although superstition and law, adapted to each other in "The Fall..." create a complete and unified vision, both are reducible, Poe would say, to an ultimate category of words.

It is indeed demonstrable that every such impulse given the air, must, in the end, impress every individual thing that exists within the universe;—and the being of infinite understanding—the being whom we have imagined—might trace the remote undulations of the impulse—trace them upward and onward in their influences upon all particles of all matter (VI, 142).
If words themselves can effect results, then scientific principles become suggestive also, as Poe would maintain in "Eureka." Yet one may inquire what effects words may have in Poe's satires when they would seem to be so ludicrously meaningless at times. Half seriously, half frivolously, Poe writes in "The Imp of the Perverse:"

There lives no man who at some period, has not been tormented, for example, by an earnest desire to tantalize a listener by circumlocution. The speaker is aware that he displeases; he has every intention to please; he is usually curt, precise, and clear; the most laconic and luminous language is struggling for utterance upon his tongue; it is only with difficulty that he restrains himself from giving it flow; he dreads and deprecates the anger of him whom he addresses; yet, the thought strikes him, that by certain involutions and parentheses, this anger may be engendered. That single thought is enough. The impulse increases to a wish, the wish to a desire, the desire to an uncontrollable longing, and the longing, (to the deep regret and mortification of the speaker, and in defiance of all consequences,) is indulged (VI, 148).

In the "Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" the fabulous princess indulges herself just once too many times in story telling. She is finally interrupted by her irate husband who refuses any longer to tolerate her circumlocution and ends her prodigious career. When he tells her that her story is impossible to believe, she insists that it is true and continues merrily, apparently oblivious to the king's sceptical interjections. Had Scheherazade known the art of verisimilitude, perhaps she would not have been put to death.

In the tale "Mellonta Tauta" the narrator says:

Now, my dear friend--now, for your sins, you are to suffer the infliction of a long gossipping letter. I tell you distinctly that I am going to punish you for
all your impertinences by being as tedious, as discursive, as incoherent and as unsatisfactory as possible (VII, 197).

Circumlocution by its very nature prizes form, rather than content, mannerisms rather than meaning; its purpose is to frustrate us by trying our patience, to irritate us by failing to satisfy our desire to arrive at understanding without excruciating effort. Were we sure there really is no meaning conveyed through circumlocution, we most likely would not be exasperated. But we cannot conceive how anyone would desire to waste his good time and ours by writing meaningless prose. And, regardless even of his intention, words cannot fail to communicate some meaning, no matter how elusive or absurd. As our inability to formulate meanings conveyed by words increases, we feel increasingly exasperated, until we decide like the king in "The Thousand-and-second Tale..." to stop listening altogether. Therefore, to enjoy a reading audience at all, a writer, Poe might have thought, would have to control the degree of meaninglessness (the degree of exasperation); in fact, a test of the reader's capacity to believe would be his desire to read to the end of the tale.

To read Poe's satires from beginning to end is a frustrating experience. In fact, Poe himself probably designed them partly to exasperate the reader. In "How to Write an Article for Blackwood" he defines hyperbolically and satirically certain stylistic excesses, saying that they are indeed merely pretensions to refinement and culture: erudition, bizarrie, sadism, mystery, obscurity, and intensity. He mentions the
standard themes of premature burial and life-in-death. These
very same standards figure in "The Philosophy of Composition,"
where Poe seriously defines what he considers are the legitimate
requisites of fine art. The sado-masochistic theme, cited hum-
ourously in the "Blackwood" piece, Poe reiterates when he speaks
of "the human thirst for self-torture." The lover in "The
Raven" is a student. Usher, William Wilson, the men in "Ligeia,"
"Berenice," and "Morella" are scholars of sorts; furthermore,
many of Poe's finest tales are prefaced by a learned epigraph.
The "intensities" mentioned satirically are reflected in the
serious tales by the shrill tone which pervades them. And the
bizarre quite accurately describes tales like "The Premature
Burial," and "The Oblong Box" as well as "The Black Cat" and
"The Tell-Tale Heart." "Innuendo" which Poe says is indispensa-
ble in the satire resembles the "undercurrent of suggestiveness"
in poetry. Poe writes satirically about the "tone didactic,
the tone enthusiastic, the tone natural--all commonplace enough.
But then there is the tone laconic, or curt, which has lately
come much into use." These various kinds of "tones" correspond
closely to the combinations of the peculiar and ordinary that
Poe speaks of in "The Philosophy of Composition." In the "Black-
wood" piece Poe wrote:

In a Blackwood article nothing makes so fine a show as
your Greek. The very letters have an air of profundity
about them (II, 281).
(In "A Few Words on Secret Writing" he makes a similar distinction between the natural and artificial alphabets in the cipher.) We may also recall the hieroglyphics in "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," which may have been intended to bewilder.

There is one phrase missing in Poe's guide on writing the kind of article that "Blackwood Magazine" would accept. It is "unity of effect, and it succinctly explains the chief difference between the satires and Poe's short stories. Every element of the satire is described independently as valuable for its own sake. In the satires details so dissimilar, emotions so inappropriately adapted to the actions, have been forged together in one story; Poe must have realized that understanding under circumstances where any notion whatsoever of adaptation, harmony and appropriateness of details is violated is impossible. For how can meaning possibly be achieved, when the structure of the story itself violates all of one's remotely conventional, recognizably familiar notions of "unity?" Where unity is impossible to perceive, one is tempted to conclude that the satires are deliberately designed to be meaningless.

Nevertheless, there are degrees of meaninglessness in Poe's satires. "The Duc de L'Omelet" seems absurd, even while the "Angel of the Odd" does not. The angel appears on the scene only after he has been introduced in a substantial prefactory remark by Poe. Furthermore, the word "extravaganza" announces the perspective and, thereby, explicitly describes the events as fantastic. From the very beginning, the tale does not pose
as reality. In "The Duc de L'Omelet," however, the reader enters a fantastic world without having been prepared in the slightest degree in advance. His entrance into this world is directed by no principles which could instruct him how he should believe what he reads—which could translate fantasy into reality. The violation of the unities of time, place, action, as well as effect, suggest that the meanings of these tales are their very meaninglessness, their cultivation of the obscure for the sake of obscurity. They resemble, then, the cryptogram Poe spoke of in "A Few Words on Secret Writing," which could not be deciphered because the message concealed was, in fact, absolutely nonsensical.

There are times, however, when the satire achieves a curious unity of effect, as, for instance, in the tales "Loss of Breath" and "Lionizing," if we take seriously the implied meanings and the "innuendos." "Loss of Breath," described by Poe as an article neither in nor out of "Blackwood," implicitly expresses certain characteristics that belong specifically to the satire and to the serious tales as well. If we take the meaning of the title literally, the emotions and consequences suffered by the central character are simply in excess. However, given the implied meaning of the title, the central character seems quite rational in being so wretched because of his loss of breath. Three satires ("The Devil in the Belfry," "Diddling as an exact Science," and "The Business Man") appear initially to be absurd, because the behavior of the characters appears to be
hyperbolically rigid and dehumanized. However, dehumanization itself is—as we shall see later—both the substance and the form of Poe's finest work.

To restate, then, the major ideas in this chapter and suggest the direction of this study in the subsequent chapters. Initially I tried to determine to what degree the events in the tales might be explained by the characters themselves. Those gifted with an extraordinary degree of self-awareness record their sensations and analyze their predicaments. Such analysis constitutes for the most part the structure of the tales of ratiocination and the colloquies on death, as well as the life-in-death tales of premature burial. In "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" the central character is ever coming face to face with the unknown which is inscrutable. He would try, as much as he can, to account for it. He is ever seeking to confront the final mystery; but he seems never ultimately to have arrived at it. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the observer confronts the mystery but never can analyze it; Roderick Usher himself is the mystery, the symbol of it, just as much as the house itself is. He is destroyed by it never having attempted to analyze it. And yet perhaps the mystery has a rationale—abstruse though it is.

At this point in the discussion of the serious tales I stopped; for in the fourth chapter I intend to analyze the tales that epitomize the superb and complicated achievement of Poe.
These tales contain a rationale so complex and mysterious that it creates and sustains the mystery throughout. With the exception of these tales, however, the dichotomy of "mystery-explanation" is conspicuous; the two parts independently operating are never integrated. The structure of the story—the unity of effect—inevitably breaks down, for the rationale which should constitute that "undercurrent of suggestion" in the short story cannot be formulated so explicitly without reducing the poetry to the flattest kind of prose. I proceeded to demonstrate this weakness in two varieties of tales: the melodrama and the principle-anecdotal demonstration. And finally, I spoke briefly about the satires which I suggest relate to the essay, "How to Write an Article for Blackwood" as a demonstration does to a principle. The central thesis of the "Blackwood" piece is that parts of a story should deliberately fail to relate to each other and, thereby, should dispel the unity of effect which is the soul of the short story. "A Predicament," an instance of this kind of satire, lacks unity of plot, place, time, and action—of everything, in a word; it is characterized by a long train of non-sequiturs and the absence of a perceivable center of understanding—for characters and readers alike.

But "The Devil in the Belfry" and "The Business Man" and "Diddling as an Exact Science" do achieve a sense of unity. The rationale is much more delicately manipulated here than in any of the other satires. For now the method—the mechanical
regularity that is initially so amusing because it is so
unhuman--epitomizes human behavior. The mystery of human be-
havior is its very "modus operandi": the pedantry and robot-
like lack of imagination, flexibility and spontaneity. All of
these forms of human activity constitute, in fact, the very
substance of his finest satires. The epigraph at the beginning
of "The Business Man" epitomizes at once the rationale and the
mystery of human behavior: "Method is the soul of business"
(IV, 122).

In the following chapter I shall discuss the finest of
Poe's tales of the grotesque. The unity of rationale and mys-
tery finally achieved in the humorous satires, "The Devil in
the Belfry" and "The Business Man," enables Poe to delineate
manifestations of derangement and thereby to conjure one of the
most personal and devastating images of disorder projected in
literature.
For all of their illuminating insights into the art of the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, critics have not really taken it upon themselves to study in much detail the conception of character and motivation which makes for his finest stories. This is most curious; since we speak of Roderick Usher, William Wilson and the evil geniuses of crime in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," as though we found them so mysteriously fascinating, we should try to understand them as persons. All of these characters exhibit in one way or another by their behavior that principle of perversity so central to Poe's conception of human behavior. Poe himself said that he could not analyze it; and perhaps we cannot either. But we may describe its various manifestations and conclude that Poe's great genius as a writer derives from his power to imagine some of the most elusive aspects of human behavior. He does so not merely by describing his characters from the outside, but by entering their minds. He discovers again and again that their conflicts are not those of the individual and the world in which he lives, but those of the individual and the world that in their being—which is their mode of living—they create. The first, and most obvious fact one must realize is that Poe's characters are
not "normal" human beings. Their actions cannot be understood in terms of the moral, social and psychological norms embodied in what Freud has taught us to call the reality principle.

These people have no future; they are utterly beyond redemption. Their past is irrelevant. History is irrelevant. Willy-nilly, they have fatally insulated themselves from the real world. And the only human drama they know—and that makes them comprehensible to us as human beings—is the one between the opposing forces in their own dark souls. Their suffering is so intense that it strains the possibilities of tragedy. Even at the beginning of the tales, one feels that they have suffered far too much and should have been liberated from life long ago.

To understand them according to any conventional literary and moral criteria is useless. For their experiences seem scarcely human at all. The female characters, for instance,—Berenice, Ligeia, and Morella—exert their wills in a superhuman degree. On the other hand, the men seem to suffer from a variety of mental ailments: monomania, compulsion neurosis, anxiety, paranoia, dipsomania, claustrophobia, and agoraphobia. The symptoms of their mental distress are generally similar: the fear of exposing their senses to external stimuli; the excessive degree of energy they expend; a depleting and enervating restlessness; an acute sensitivity to sounds; the sense of vertigo; their constant attempts to make a restitution with the world which are doomed to fail; their alternating moods of silence and loquaciousness; their constant fear of what will
happen to them, a fear that does not seem justified by any visible cause for fearing; their terrifying realization that they are all alone in the world. A quotation that keeps reappearing in Poe's tales, "vient de ne pouvoir être seul," epitomizes their predicaments. Even when they know that they will never be able to come out into the world again--so far have they wandered into the unlit chambers of their souls--yet they would desperately struggle to make contact. "The Man in the Crowd" cannot bear to be by himself; he attempts furiously to burrow into the midst of a crowd, as if to prove that he were not really imprisoned in his own soul. Roderick Usher, a dying failure, cannot at his most desperate moment bear to be alone; therefore, he invites a friend from his childhood days who might comfort him. No one, however, can save him; for soon after his friend comes, upon greeting him with a specious cordiality, Usher suffers a prolonged lapse into irremediable gloom. William Wilson, despite his feverishly active life, becomes involved in a close relationship with only one person, his double. The husbands in "Berenice," "Morella," and "Ligeia" become involved with only one other person, their very strange spouses. Being under the mysterious influence of their wives who are prodigious and weird has so radically altered their vision of the outside world that it seems to us no longer recognizable.

In "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" the narrator
relates to no human being, only to the world that is a mad image of his own sick mind.

The modes of communication between the characters indicate clearly in what specific ways they are losing contact with the world. They generally reflect a lack of concern for their roles in society, with their more normal obligation and responsibility toward their wives, as in "Ligeia" and "Morella." But continuing long after the death of the wife, their dependence upon their wives proves to be inhumanly binding and, therefore, oppressive and destructive. William Wilson obviously experiences no sense of responsibility toward his peers, whom he cheats willfully whenever he can, or ironically, even toward himself, objectified in his double. Usher's obligation—whatever we see of it—arises out of his sense of being an Usher.

The madman in "The Tell-Tale Heart" knows that the old man loves him and he genuinely attempts to repay that love with love. But he finds one day that he simply cannot stand one of the old man's eyes. And so the old man must be killed.

Though the criminal in "The Cask of Amontillado" seems astonishingly normal in comparison to the psychopaths in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat," yet his crime, like theirs, planned with precision and executed step by step, is curiously passionless. The motive (cause) for the crime is characteristically concealed by the narrator who refers to "the thousand injuries" inflicted upon him by Fortunato, and, the final most grievous hurt, insult itself. The structure, then,
of "The Cask. . ." is the very manner in which "the avenger. . . makes [himself] felt as such to him who has done the wrong" (VI, 167). The insidious ingenuity of the criminal, beguiling and tormenting the unfortunate Fortunato, becomes the more distasteful and horrifying as his victim, inebriated by degrees, would allow himself to be reduced to an idiotic drunk who would willingly crawl to the grave just to get a bottle of amontillado. Initially the criminal would seem to have no mercy whatsoever for his victim. But at the end of the story, when in placing the last brick on the wall, he hears the final feeble jingle of the bells on the poor wretch's cap, he says: "My heart grew sick" (VI, 175). Then he hastens to add "on account of the dampness of the catacombs," as if to stifle his faint awareness of remorse. The last phrase in the tale, nevertheless, seems to express more emphatically his feelings of regret, now that the crime has been committed. On the other hand, he might just as easily have thought: The job is done; I wipe the dirt off my hands, and now, to Hell with him! "In pace requiescat!"

Those characters who maintain even a superficially normal and real contact with the world enjoy the most peculiar types of companionship. The narrator of the weird women tales says that his and Berenice's love was "of the mind." Roderick and Madeline Usher, twins, unmarried, the lone survivors of an illustrious family, have an affection for each other that is, according to several critics, incestuous. William Wilson is
utterly incapable of loving anyone, since he is unable to act in a morally conscious way. The madman in "The Black Cat" loathes his wife, has a weird passion for his cat whom he grows to hate by degrees and finally in a fit of fury he kills his wife with a hatchet and buries her along with the cat in the wall of the basement. Describing such relationships is difficult because the two people rarely engage in any conversation with each other. Whatever glimpse of the second party the reader has is usually through the perceptions of the narrator, who is himself most weird. Curiously, however, except in "Morella," where a child is born from the marriage, all of these relationships are sterile. In every case, the marriage gradually depletes the wife. While she is dying by degrees, she manages somehow to torment her husband, even from the hereafter, until he too begins to weaken and to believe that he is not strong enough to survive for much longer. The fate of all the marriages is remarkably similar. The man somehow causes the death of the wife; however, once she has died, he feels that he can no longer go on living. The specific cause for her death is most indefinitely stated. In "Berenice" the narrator says:

Oh! Naiad among its fountains!—and then—then all is mystery and terror, and a tale which should not be told. Disease—a fatal disease—fell like the simoon upon her frame, and, even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! (II, 18).
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In "Morella" the narrator is specified as the cause of his wife's death:

But, indeed, the time had now arrived when the mystery of my wife's manner oppressed me as a spell. I could no longer bear the touch of her wan fingers, nor the low tone of her musical language, nor the lustre of her melancholy eyes. And she knew all this, but did not upbraid; she seemed conscious of my weakness or folly, and, smiling, called it Fate. She seemed, also, conscious of a cause, to me unknown, for the gradual alienation of my regard; but she gave no hint or token of its nature. Yet was she woman, and pined away daily (II, 29).

The implication is that the "alienation of his regard" made her unhappy; and though she never spoke of this to him, yet she felt the effects of it and gradually "pined away daily." Husband and wife cease to communicate directly to each other at the very moment that some sort of mysterious alienation takes place. Though they speak very little to each other, they somehow manage to communicate:

... but, in the next, I met the glance of her meaning eyes, and then my soul sickened and became giddy with the giddiness of one who gazes downward into some dreary and unfathomable abyss (II, 29-30).

The narrator of "Ligeia" adores his wife; but shortly after her death, in spite of the fact that the outside still bore about it the air of melancholy and age, he redecorates the interior of his estate "with a child-like perversity, and perchance with a faint hope of alleviating my sorrows..." (II, 258). At one moment, then, he fails to mourn Ligeia's death and later "ever accursed... in a moment of mental alienation, I led from the alter as my bride--as the successor of the
unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine" (II, 259). He makes life very unbearable for his new bride; for it gives him great pleasure to torment her. Finally from his perpetual nagging she too grows ill and gradually pines away and dies. In "Eleonora" no line even faintly suggests that the husband might be the cause of his wife's death. Yet when she dies, like all of the others, he vows never to alienate himself from her; and yet in a moment's folly, he marries once again. However, instead of being upbraided for his faithlessness, Eleonora "speaks to him in a dream."

"Sleep in peace!—for the Spirit of Love reigneth and ruleth, and, in taking to thy passionate heart her who is Ermengarde, thou art absolved, for reasons which shall be made known to thee in Heaven, of thy vows unto Eleonora" (II, 244).

The fantastic quality of all of these tales is heightened in "Eleonora" by the diction which strains to be exotic: "the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass," "The River of Silence," "the regions of Hesper," "the win-harp of Aeolus." This diction, suggesting tenderness and remoteness, promises a peaceful resolution of the mysteries.

In all of these stories the man is somehow responsible for his wife's death; for she appeared never to have been ill before she got married. The intensely ambivalent, "attraction-repulsion" quality of this relationship between husband and wife cannot be analyzed by the husband; and for some inexplicable reason, the wife, who knows much more than her husband does, is
silent. Since the wife's death is deliberately not explained in terms of natural causes, the mystery seems to be the more profound. The disease of the lady Madeline Usher also is not attributed to any one cause; nor are the doctors themselves able to diagnose it.

The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptic character, were the unusual diagnosis. (III, 281-2).

Roderick's response to his sister's death is not an expression of grief. Normal grief finds relief in tears and a constant recollection of the past. For someone who is grief stricken, Usher speaks very little about his dying, beloved sister.

For several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself: and during this period I was busied in earnest endeavours to alleviate the melancholy of my friend (III, 282).

Though he briefly speaks of her with his visitor, yet one feels that Usher is constantly thinking of his sister. Even when he cannot mention her name, he paints the picture of the vault where he will bury her later. Finally he informs the visitor "abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more," and "stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight." Usher, thereupon, ceases altogether to speak of his loss; he sheds no tears and displays no uncontrollable burst of emotion when he sees his dead sister. He explains quite simply why he intends to inter her body in the vaults and finally without breaking
down, he says that "the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them" (III, 289).

Though there is only one outburst of grief from Usher, when, in the beginning he greets his friend, he ceaselessly radiates the gloom he feels. Though Poe has remarked any number of times that the highest form of beauty, the effects of beauty, result from contemplating the death of a young woman, there is nothing beautiful in Usher's response. Furthermore, the women themselves are hardly beautiful; they gradually waste away until they resemble vampires. Their influence over their husbands is weird and terrifying. The husband of Berenice, whose attention is riveted to her teeth, feels a deep compulsion to exhume her body and extract them. The hatred that he had felt for her when she was alive is now finally demonstrated openly. Both the reader and the husband learn of the sadistic act after it has taken place. The events in the tale are recorded uninterruptedly, until the preparations "for the burial were completed." A rude transition follows:

I found myself sitting in the library, and again sitting there alone. It seemed that I had newly awakened from a confused and exciting dream. I knew that it was now midnight, and I was well aware that since the setting of the sun Berenice had been interred. But of that dreary period which intervened I had no positive—at least no definite comprehension. Yet its memory was replete with horror—horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity. It was a fearful page in the record of my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strived to decipher them, but in vain (II, 25).
Later he learns that in that interval he has brutally violated his dead wife. But the curious fact is that he had—and there is no other word that can be used—repressed that fact. One wonders, then, whether Roderick Usher was really unaware that he was burying his sister alive in her tomb; whether Rowena's husband himself killed her; whether, in fact, grief can describe their emotions at all.

In "Ligeia," "Morella," "Elsonora" and "Berenice," the husband obviously plays a secondary role to the wife's. She is a prodigious woman, intellectually, spiritually, physically. Since the husband is only her protégé, clearly, there is an enormous sense of inequality between them, one that the husband is painfully aware of. He would strive to identify himself with her, to receive some of her characteristics; and at the same time, we are tempted to infer that he loathes her for being so superior and for his having to be dependent upon her. These tales present a hyperbolic image of a relationship between an inferior man and a woman whom he recognizes as being superior to him. The wife is unearthly, an ideal; he would "know" her in a "mystical" sense, but he cannot. Gradually he is oppressed by the mysteriousness of her being. He would try in vain to identify with her, to analyze her, to emulate her. Hence the ambivalence of his emotions. She, on the other hand, so superior to him, has no reason to hate him; instead, she constantly smiles benevolently at him, without ever upbraiding him for the alienation of his affection, the cause of which she—not he—is
well aware of. The vampire-like and exotic appearance of the wife in part expresses the husband's ambivalence. In two other stories that Poe wrote ("Loss of Breath" and "The Black Cat") the husband utterly loathes his wife and yet for some reason cannot express his hatred. He "loses his breath" (the meaning of this passage reveals the strong overtones of sex, sadism and self-assertion) and cannot tell his wife how much he despises her. In "The Black Cat" instead of loving his wife, the husband adores his prodigious cat which he gradually begins to loathe. Not one story suggests that the love between the man and the woman is free from intense ambivalence.

These observations point to questions that must be answered: Why is the relationship between the husband and his wife, the madman and the cat, Usher and his sister, and by extension, William Wilson and his double destined to destroy both parties? What connection, furthermore, does the fatal companionship have with the morbidity and ambivalence which almost invariably characterizes the man's response? The answers to these questions will, in part, explain in what way the two following stylistic devices in these tales are functional: first, the weird combination of ideality and grim horror and brutality; second, the deliberate attempt on Poe's part to conceal specific causes and to speak only of effects. In the essays "Repression," "Mourning and Melancholia" and "The Uncanny"¹

Freud enables us to pierce through the shrouded mysteries to the rationale that pervades Poe's weird tales. I shall attempt briefly to paraphrase relevant passages from these essays and bring into relief ideas which bear directly upon a study of Poe's art.

Freud distinguishes the state of mourning from that of melancholia with which he says it has often been confused. While the manifestations of both states are often similar (lack of interest, total absorption in the person who has died) yet the main difference can be observed by the fact that the person who suffers from melancholia degrades himself usually on moral grounds in a way that seems unnatural (abnormal) to an audience or public because of the fact that neither he nor they can find any cause for his self-abnegation. As if to add to the peculiarity, although he publicly derides himself, yet the melancholic reveals no remorse or shame for the crime he would imply by his behavior he has committed. We are faced with a paradox: how can an individual who upbraids himself fail at the same time to experience any shame or guilt? Our inability to answer this question would seem to confirm our initial impression that the individual upbraids himself for no good reason at all (for no reason observable to us, that is). The apparent contradiction of self-debasement and complete lack of remorse is resolved by Freud in the following manner. He says that melancholia is caused not by the death of an individual, for the appropriate response to the loss of a loved one is grief. However, the
loved object died symbolically (was killed) at the very moment when it inflicted some injury upon the melancholic. The physical death may occur many months or years later, but for all practical purposes the melancholic responds to the first death of the beloved, when he "killed" her, rejected her, for injuring him. And his response to the first death--the remote cause--brings about the disease. The subsiding of normal grief is manifested as the normal person gradually transfers his affections from his deceased beloved to someone else; grief is gradually spent; and the individual establishes his relationship with the world again through those who are alive. But the melancholic, at the first "alienation of affections," begins to carry on his relationship with his beloved withdrawn from the world into the ego itself. What preceded the death of the loved one is an irrevocable identification between the ego and the abandoned object, an identification that Freud says most likely would never have occurred had the beloved not been chosen in the first place on a narcissistic basis. Once the beloved, which no longer exists as an object in the world, is internalized, the ego splits in two: one part identifies with the beloved and the other criticizes both that part of the ego altered in the process of identification and the loved object toward whom it feels intense ambivalence. And, therefore, the ambivalence in the love relationships takes place right in the ego of the individual, casting
a pathological shade on the grief, forcing it to express itself in the form of self-reproaches to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved one, i.e., desired it.\(^2\)

The melancholic's erotic cathexis of his object thus undergoes a twofold fate: part of it regresses to identification, but the other part, under the influence of the conflict of ambivalence, is reduced to the stage of sadism, which is nearer to this conflict.\(^3\)

Melancholia tends to turn into mania, the symptoms (manifestations) of which completely differ from those of its opposite state. When the individual occasionally solves a problem so that he is in high spirits, he triumphs temporarily "over [what] remains hidden from" him (p. 165). But, in contrast to the state of mourning, in melancholia triumph is short-lived. The stages by which, in mourning, the affections are detached from the dead, because conscious, are amenable to observation and analysis by the criticizing ego which condones them because detachment does not give rise to feelings of guilt. In melancholia, however, the gradual detachment or alienation of affections, symptomatic of a deep-seated ambivalence, is never a wholly conscious process. Therefore, to restate, "...the three conditioning factors in melancholia—[are] loss of the object, ambivalence, and regression of libido into the ego—the first two are found also in the obsessional reproaches arising

\(^2\) Freud, IV, p. 161.

\(^3\) Freud, IV, p. 168.
after the death of loved persons. In these it is indubitably the ambivalence that motivates the conflict, and observation shows that after it has run its course nothing in the nature of a triumph or a manic state of mind is left" (p. 169). In the essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction" Freud defines in greater detail the relationship between the ego as it identifies with the object and the ambivalence expressed by that aspect of the ego that is detached, the criticizing faculty.

In his essay "The 'Uncanny'" Freud lists any number of details that by themselves are likely, when observed, to give rise to a sense of the uncanny: a doll which comes to life; the mechanical dehumanized appearance of the individual; the double—two exactly identical individuals; mental telepathy; meta-psychosis; the involuntary repetition of an action on the part of an individual; coincidences—the simultaneous occurrence of identically related events; the curse and the event which realizes it; the dread of the evil eye; certain prodigious powers of individuals; burial alive; existence of forces hitherto
unknown to and unseen by us which suddenly become manifest. All of these themes characterize Poe's tales. Yet Freud believed that there is an even more basic and comprehensive source of the uncanny. The uncanny, he had believed at one time, was evoked by one's perception of the unfamiliar. Schelling, on the other hand, maintained that the uncanny results from a fact that should have been hidden but was not. On the basis of Schelling's concept, Freud came to believe that the uncanny arises when we involuntarily confront something which was very familiar in the past, something that should have forever remained concealed for us, that should never again have recurred.

This resurfing into the present—in spite of all our unconscious attempts at repression—of a detail that was once so familiar to us in the remote psychic past, Freud calls the principle of "... a repetition-compulsion in the unconscious mind,

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4 In "Nature and Contemporary Physics," Daedalus, LXXXVII, (Summer, 1958), p. 10, Werner Heisenberg writes: "A decisive transformation in the character of technology probably began with the technical utilization of electricity. . . Natural forces were now exploited that were almost unknown to people in direct experience of nature. For many people, even today, electricity has something uncanny about it. . . Viewing the interior of a complicated electrical apparatus is sometimes unpleasant in the same way as watching a surgical operation." Note the relevance of this passage to the interaction between the atoms in Poe's vision of a mechanistic universe in "Eureka" and to the way in which Poe's characters are made to "correspond" to each other as though each one constituted an agglomeration of atoms whose change would be "proportional to" the change in any other quantity."
based upon instinctual activity and probably inherent
in the very nature of the instincts—a principle power­
ful enough to overrule the pleasure-principle, lending
to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character,
and still very clearly expressed in the tendencies of
small children; a principle, too, which is responsible
for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neuro­
tic patients. Taken in all, the foregoing prepares us
for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner
repetition-compulsion is perceived as uncanny (IV, p. 391)
(my italics).

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" this principle is referred
to by Freud as the death instinct. Like the pleasure principle,
it is a basic instinct. But the death instinct is even more
basic than the pleasure principle, and, in a way that seems to
us confounding, the pleasure principle Freud conceives of as
merely a manifestation of the principle of repetition-compulsion.
The death instinct is amenable only to analytic description (a
description of its manifestations); but it cannot be accounted
for in terms of (be reduced to) an ultimate cause. And, there­
fore, death itself is the "original unity" and the instinct for
death is the "secondary cause" of all things, as well as the
ger of their inevitable annihilation.

When we confront death directly in losing a loved one, we
experience feelings of grief and sadness. The feeling of the
uncanny does not, however, resemble these feelings; confronting
an elusive something that "reminds" us of death, we experience
mild symptoms of anxiety—which "can be shown to come from some­
thing repressed which recure" (p. 394)—which, indeed, are the
effects of the uncanny. The feelings of the uncanny no more
resemble those of the sense of the tragic than does the death
instinct resemble a voluntarily, calmly and sanely arrived at decision to commit suicide. Both the death instinct and the uncanny operate on levels almost completely beyond the reach of analysis and specification; their meanings have nothing whatsoever to do with a voluntary desiring of human goals. When the death instinct is stubbornly outspoken, it asserts itself as if in summons to a furious unconscious (and, therefore, by the individual, unanalyzable) desiring which is inherently opposed to the contrary desires of the conscious will. And, herein consists the conflict.

The image of a diseased mind manifests in an exaggerated form the principle of repetition-compulsion that exists in some measure in normal human beings. In the essays on "Melancholia" and "On Narcissism" Freud explains that the conflict raging between voluntary and involuntary desires (the ability to fuse them constitutes harmony that is by definition health) may well result in the ascendence of the death instinct and the splintering of the ego, into the ego critic and the ego which identifies with the loved object. (Although the conflict is entirely internalized, paradoxically the ego has strictly speaking no identity of its own). These two aspects of the ego have no independent physical existence. Indeed, they are in a purely destructive sense deeply dependent upon each other. Nevertheless,
In the pathological case of delusions of being watched this mental institution becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego, and discernible to a physician's eye. The fact that a faculty of this kind exists, which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object—the fact, that is, that man is capable of self-observation—renders it possible to invest the old idea of a "double" with a new meaning and to ascribe many things to it, above all, those things which seem to the new faculty of self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of the earliest period of all.5

In the normal individual, however, the boundaries between ego and super ego are not observable, for no absolute rupture in the ego has occurred. The fissure in the ego, then, is a clear-cut manifestation of psychopathology. The conscience, severed irrevocably from the humanizing, ironic influence of the ego is now emasculated and made arid and rigid. The melancholic senses the desperate need for iron control, a control that seems in excess of the situation, without at the same time knowing precisely why he should need that control in the first place. Aside from its physiological manifestations (stony rigidity, palor) the unnatural degree of control is manifested by the relentless criticism (destruction) of the ego by the diseased super ego, because the melancholic derives pleasure in indirectly destroying the original cause of the injury, the loved object, absorbed now into the ego. Therefore, the confounding problem in dealing with the melancholic is that the pleasure principle has become hopelessly identified with the death

5 Freud, IV, p. 388.
instinct. The senseless recurrence of the principle of repetition-compulsion expresses the individual's more basic and powerful desire (pleasure) to destroy. And that is why, in the end, death is destined to triumph over life.

But death emerges only by degrees, as the reality principle gains ascendence over the pleasure principle. Impersonated by the benevolent double, the pleasure principle had "sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man..." (p. 387) to become "an assurance of immortality." The double, then, embodies...

... all those unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all those strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will (p. 388).

But by degrees the double becomes the "ghastly harbinger of death." For under the impact of the reality principle, pleasure, no longer capable of being altogether contained—when re-asserted stubbornly in spite of all attempts at repression—is transformed into pain. And, therefore, that something familiar and friendly, which is part of the remote psychic past, has become estranged from conscious remembering. Its painful and unexpected recurrence now as destructive "double" constitutes the uncanny.
The deep-seated ambivalence that the husband displays before his wife, Usher for his sister, the madman toward his cat, William Wilson toward his double, Poe likewise displays on a more abstract level ironically toward poetry itself, the emblem of absolute beauty and mystery, the paradisal Eden he speaks of in "Al Aaraaf." Before I observe in the following chapter how this ambivalence pervades Poe's poetry, it might be well at this point to see how the conflict is reflected in the tales which describe the prodigious women. In describing these tales as allegories Richard Wilbur has suggested that we dare not assume that Ligeia, Morella, Eleonora, and Berenice are real women. The only reality they seem to have, he would insist, is what they are made by Poe to represent. As women, they are not conceivably human, he would say. And, therefore, their only function is to symbolize absolute beauty or the Psyche. Richard Wilbur's interpretation is quite valid as far as it goes. Its main shortcoming is that in interpreting these tales allegorically, he would imply that to make any sense out of them, one must translate fact into some kind of secret symbolic code. As a result, he is unable to observe the credibility (and, therefore, the reality) of one obvious aspect in these tales: though the women seem unreal, their husbands respond to them as though they were real. By their credible, their human

responses, the husbands would suggest that the women did exist. We are forced, then, to concede that the women are real and unreal at the same time. This arresting self-contradiction immediately defines the central problem in understanding these tales. It is once again the problem of synthesizing the symbolic meanings of the tales with their real meanings, their natural meanings, and to insist that on some level these meanings might indeed be absolutely identical. In his essays on "Melancholia" and "The Uncanny" Freud has given us the means whereby to plot the point where symbol and fact converge.

In the poem "To Science" Poe speaks philosophically about the effects that science has upon the world. As Richard Wilbur has ingeniously observed, science did not destroy beauty. It simply evicted it from the world to "some happier star." Poe's cosmic myth, Wilbur continues to say, involves man's fall from grace, from Eden, from "unity" into a state of diversity. The attempt to return to paradise is Poe's ambitious task. Only in the colloquies is the goal ever achieved. Expressed in these tales is the fulfillment of beauty, understanding and a serene love without passion. Sublime in their total freedom from ambivalence, Monos and Una, and Eiros and Charmion, among all of Poe's characters—with the exception of Eleonora—are the sole instances of lasting love between man and woman, a love that is

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7 Ibid, p. 9.
ironically radically ideal, in as much as it cannot exist on earth. Because the man and woman are reunited in Eden, neither exerts his will demonically, like Morella, Berenice, and especially Ligeia. These women, torn between this life and the hereafter, struggle intensely to survive, once their earthly existence has been threatened. Eleonora dies because, as pure beauty, she is unable, as Richard Wilbur writes, to endure the effects of "passion which degrades the soul." For her death, the husband feels only pure grief; no hostility was ever expressed between them. Therefore, his sadness gradually spent, he can redirect his affections to someone else and remarry. When Eleonora appears to him in a dream, after he has remarried, she does not come, therefore, as a "ghastly harbinger of death." Instead, a benevolent vision, she willingly absolves him of his bond to her, so that he can recover supernal beauty in his new bride, Ermengarde. Aside then from the colloquies and the anguished and demonic "Eureka" "Eleonora" is the sole instance of the "fulfillment of those possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy."

As the absolute fulfillment of the pleasure principle, where love, beauty, the impossible ideal are achieved and enjoyed on earth, "Eleonora" is more a fairy tale and not therefore "mature" art, which by definition is regulated by even while it redefines the inexorable demands of reality. Nevertheless, that fantasy is the real condition of primitive psychic life which Poe would present in this tale by attempting to
reconstruct from the most shadowy forms of memory those events "forming the first epoch of my life." In primitive psychic life, beauty and pleasure can survive. When it is destroyed, it may—in the fairy tale only—reappear benevolently, as it did in "Eleonora," blessing man with its own reincarnation.

In "Ligeia," "Morella," and "Berenice" the sweet angel of life, Eleonora-Ermengarde, is transformed by degrees into the "ghastly harbinger of death." Between Ligeia and her husband exists love that is intensely passionate; in "Morella" the love the husband has for his wife gradually wanes until he fiercely desires her death; the love between Berenice and her husband is even more short-lived. The ambivalence is manifested on a more instinctual level when the narrator exhumes his wife's dead body and extracts her teeth. These tales differ most strikingly from "Eleonora" by identifying beauty with strangeness and peculiarity which, when heightened in these tales, become grotesque and terrifying. He describes Eleonora:

The loveliness of Eleonora was that of the Seraphim; but she was a maiden artless and innocent as the brief life she had led among the flowers (IV, 239-240).

The lovers' universe is an idyllic garden. In comparison, Ligeia, Morella, and Berenice are constantly indoors; and, furthermore, innocence certainly is not consonant with their vast erudition. Their learning demonstrates in a sense their fall from power, from the heavenly, uncorruptible Eden. Their wisdom, which by itself manifests a will to power, might well have arisen from their desire to recover and to embody in learning
what they might have lost in this remote, innocent paradise.

In any case, though they cannot regain the irretrievable Eden (note, Ligeia is outwardly "placid" as though she were serene, but inwardly she rages with a superhuman passion) their powers are indeed extraordinary, as their spouses can see. The husband of Ligeia, overwhelmed by a sense of mystery his wife embodies, would attempt—in the manner of the ratiocinative Poe—to describe the effects of that mystery and finally to analyze those effects by tracing them (accounting for them) to their source:

... yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of "the strange" (II, 250).

He would analyze the "expression" of her eyes:

Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it—that something more profound that the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What was it? I was possessed with a passion to discover (II, 251-2).

He is reminded by her eyes of "something long forgotten"; but he cannot say precisely what that something is, for he is only "upon the very verge of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember." Though he would labor to understand the mystery, "Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it."

The husband of Ligeia responds ecstatically to the passionate mystery she expresses. But Morella's beauty gradually
begins to terrify her husband until "... the time had now arrived when the mystery of my wife's manner oppressed me as a spell" (my italics). He reacts to her at times with pity, at times with sheer disgust. The husband of Berenice states outright that he never "loved" Berenice, that with him "feelings with me had never been of the heart, and my passions always were of the mind." He loved Berenice, then, not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream—not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being—not as a thing to admire, but to analyze—not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation (II, 22).

It was the "Berenice of a dream" that enthralled him. And, therefore, she exists only as a dream, because only in this sense is she important to the narrator.

Berenice, then, seems to be the projection of a dream. Whatever she represents, therefore, must irrevocably be connected with the husband himself. Or, put another way, Berenice is the image of the exotic ideal, and, "As we have learnt, the formation of the ideal increases the demands of the ego..." demands which each one of the husbands would attempt to fulfill by identifying with the ideal. For all of them are visionaries—but, only in a fatally restrictive sense: each has a vision of the ideal, but none of them can analyze it. They

8 Freud, IV, p. 52.
are initially enthralled by the sense of mystery that the
ideal evokes, but gradually they become depressed and oppressed
by that same mystery. Only the husband of Eleonora makes no at­
tempt to analyze the mystery; and he alone is the least op­
pressed by the sense of the mysterious. However, he might well
have never desired to analyze the mystery since it was so sweet
and pleasant. In any case, the primitive wish fulfillment
which first occurred at some time in the remote past recurs once
again under an angelic aspect in the vision of Eleonora and en­
dures as Ermengarde.

Ligeia, who has a magnificently weird beauty, is the cor­
ruption of that perfect child-like innocence of Eleonora. The
strangeness of her features grows until she becomes in the end
a grotesque. The husband would analyze that element of dis­
tortion and peculiarity that, given his perversity, seems to
heighten her beauty. The husband of Berenice, who has been op­
pressed by "a sense of insufferable anxiety" by the grotesque
wasting away of his wife, has a "consuming curiosity" to ob­
serve her closely. Her mysterious transformation from the em­
bodyment of all wishes into the "harbinger of death" brought
about through the "reality principle," arouses within him a
sense of intense pain. He would attempt to analyze the source
of pain—which is Morella herself—in order to destroy it.
And that is why he waits so impatiently for her to die.
Morella, the pleasure principle, metamorphosed through the
demands of reality, into the death instinct, cannot be destroyed
without—as we have observed in the essay on "Melancholia"—destroying the husband at the same time. One destroys oneself by destroying the ideal sacred in all human beings. Although he would attempt to forget her once she is dead and he has re-married, yet she is destined to reappear (the death instinct, the principle of repetition compulsion), asserting her greater claims over the soul of her husband who, in a moment of "mental alienation" would attempt to recapture youth, beauty and the ideal, never realizing that this can be enjoyed only once in one's life, if at all. The narrator of "Berenice" explains that "evil is a consequence of good..." and "out of joy is sorrow born."

Either the memory of past bliss is the anguish of to-day, or the agonies which are have their origin in the ecstasies which might have been (II, 16).

Melancholia, is, then, the pervasive emotion felt by man. It results from the initial, inevitable detachment from the world, as it was once conceived as an ideal. The striving to regain that lost loved object is revealed here by the desire to analyze the mystery evoked by the women, idealized to the point of the grotesque, and, thereby, in a sense, to "know" them. Success "in solving a problem" leads to momentary exhilaration; failure, after the enormous expenditure of energy, to depression. In its more violent forms, melancholia reveals the basic conflict: the desire to destroy the destroyer. Beauty, far off, is transformed into an emblem of reality and death. The cause—perhaps that elusive "reality principle" Freud speaks
of again and again—the wives alone know; their husbands cannot know it. Nevertheless, they would subject their wives, emblems of beauty, to analysis in order to find a "real," a "natural" explanation for their wasting away. And, in this way, the more they seek to arrive at understanding (by applying real criteria to their ideal spouses), the more certain are they to hasten the inevitable transformation into death of the idyllic wife.

When beauty is destroyed, man himself proves that he cannot survive for long without in the end becoming twisted, hateful, and mad. In "Berenice" Poe describes what happens to a man who cannot bear to live without beauty, but, at the same time, cannot tolerate the effects of its mystery. To free himself from the oppressiveness of his wife's mystery, the husband would attempt to analyze her. But his mode of analysis is restrictive, as he realizes himself too well. He recognizes that the peculiar way he reasons is one of the obvious symptoms of the mental ailment that afflicts him. He distinguishes his inquiring mind from the more normal and imaginative analysis.

In the one instance, the dreamer, or enthusiast, being interested by an object usually not frivolous, imperceptibly loses sight of this object in a wilderness of deductions and suggestions issuing therefrom, until, at the conclusion of a day-dream often replete with luxury, he finds the incitamentum or first cause of his musings entirely vanished and forgotten (II.20).

He was able to perceive with critical detachment that his own mode of analysis was altogether different.
In my case the primary object was invariably frivolous, although assuming, through the medium of my distempered vision, a refracted and unreal importance. Few deductions, if any, were made; and those few pertinaciously returning in upon the original object as a centre⁹ (II, 20) (my italics).

This pattern of thinking, as he himself says, is monomania. Later, we see the results of it, when his eyes become riveted to the teeth of Berenice. The symbolic value those teeth have for him epitomizes his restrictive, mad, perceptions: "que toutes ses dents étaient des idées! Des idées." His vision of the world is unreal, as he himself says. It is not ideal, however; nor is it illusory and transitory. His perceptions of the world are unreal but in a sense that is very real with the mentally ill. For the grotesque emphasis he places upon sheer trivia is immediately symptomatic of a break from the reality principle.

But the break from the reality principle, the total eclipse of reason, is only an extreme symptom of disease. Usher's rejection of reality is not as radical as that of the narrators in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "Berenice." For he responds intensely to stimuli. He may still retain a relatively normal capacity to reason. In any case, we are at least one step removed from being able to perceive how his mind works; for the story is not narrated by him, and, therefore, the narration itself cannot project an image of

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⁹ This passage calls to mind a quotation cited in the second chapter in which Poe speaks of "uniform thought-centres."
his mind. Like the narrator himself, we remain therefore on
the outside. But though our understanding as a result is lim-
ited we can nevertheless determine without too much difficulty
that grief cannot adequately express Usher's emotional state.
Instead, he seems to be suffering from melancholia, observable
by its symptoms of alternating manic-depressive states. Though
he attributes his condition to a more immediate loss, Madeline's
death, we tend to suspect that the cause of the illness is more
remote. The cause of Usher's melancholia is never disclosed;
we, as readers, merely see the manifestations of the disease in
its symptoms, its states of depression and mad hilarity. In
the place of grief, we feel the need to postulate melancholia,
which, if our guess is accurate, enables us to assume that
Usher's emotions are characterized by an intense ambivalence.
The ambivalent feelings Usher has toward his sister, then, is
the very cause of her death, even while Usher's panic and fear
of his sister's dying is generated by the revulsion he experi-
ences in desiring to destroy her. The ambivalence present in
Usher's emotions is hidden from the view of the third person,
the narrator who is the critical observer; yet it is indirectly
manifested in Usher's thorough self-depletion and gloomy de-
pression. Furthermore, the identical twin, Madeline Usher, as
double, projects against an observable background the ghastly
effects of Usher's internal conflict. Madeline, the love ob-
ject chosen on a narcissistic basis is, therefore, that part of
Roderick Usher's ego which has become irrevocably identified
with his twin sister. In becoming a reflection of his soul, she is an image of the dissolution of Usher's ego just as the tarn is the image of the house itself. Usher brings about her death prematurely; he destroys her and she, the emblem of death, in turn, destroys him. The disparagement of the object-ego has become so intense that in destroying her, he himself commits suicide. The narrator who is the spectator to all of these events, can only guess what has happened. For to him the cause of the events remains completely mysterious.

A sense of mystery prevails throughout "William Wilson," for we cannot locate specifically the cause of the mental ailment of the central character. But, in "William Wilson" as compared to "The Fall..." the reader himself is brought face to face with as much of the conflict as the character William Wilson himself seems to be aware of. For William Wilson, and not a detached spectator, is the narrator of the tale; instead of describing the ailment as an observer would, he projects the image of an ailing mind. His is a mind that is by no means mad. He is rational enough to be able to observe himself and realize that some kind of mysterious change is going on inside his mind and that he is for some reason losing control of himself. But he is altogether incapable of knowing precisely what is happening to him. For his double, who is a constant reminder of the weird changes in Wilson's soul, sustains the aura of mystery by refusing to explain what importance he has, as double in Wilson's life.
Few critics have attempted to describe and account for the double in "William Wilson." It has been classified along with the famous doubles in literature created by Stevenson, Dostoevsky, Wilde, and Baudelaire. Stevenson's double, as it has been observed, presents not a case of schizophrenia, but more technically, the very rarely observed phenomenon of two distinct and fully formed personalities in one individual. The relationship between Ivan and Smerdyakov is that between ego and alter ego; Smerdyakov abstracts from Ivan's character all of his virulent philosophies and torments Ivan with an image of what he, given his intellectual position, is capable of becoming. Ivan is not afraid of Smerdyakov; but he does despise him. By desiring to reject Smerdyakov, Ivan would try to repudiate that part of himself that is like Smerdyakov. He knows that he hates his loathsome step-brother; he knows who Smerdyakov is; but he does not know why Smerdyakov is so deeply attached to him and what claims he has to Ivan's time and patience.

Just as Ivan finds Smerdyakov's fawning affection most repulsive, so Wilson is disturbed by the fact that his double scrutinizes him mercilessly. Wilson would try to understand his double, but his perceptions are distorted to such a degree that the double for him becomes a "harbinger of death" who would inflict pain upon him just out of a perverse desire to humiliate him. He constantly fears that his double will be the more intelligent and, thereby, embarrass him in front of everyone. And Wilson will not tolerate being humiliated by anyone.
He scrupulously avoids getting into predicaments where he could possibly be shamed before his schoolmates. Though he feels threatened by his double, yet his effort to maintain his superiority is never manifest to his schoolmates who still think that he is the superior one, even when he realizes that he is not. His double, on the other hand, would not fight to occupy Wilson's ambitious position at the center of all activity. Wilson's curiosity about his double's inexplicable humility in spite of all of his achievements is, therefore, confounded a hundredfold when he realizes that his (the double's) only function is to interfere in his (Wilson's) affairs. Although Wilson in public could pretend to win all the arguments with his double, although, in fact, the double often gratuitously concedes the argument, yet Wilson is made to feel privately that the double really deserved to win. The split, then, is more clearly defined: the a-moral ego opposed to the private and invisible—to everyone except Wilson—moral conscience whose nature to Wilson himself is baffling.

The reader knows who the double is, even when Wilson himself does not. And knowing in advance, we experience a certain uncanniness in wondering why the identity of the double, so obvious to us, should not be just as obvious to Wilson himself. As if to heighten the weirdness of his ignorance, Wilson attempts frantically to understand the nature of his double. When he cannot solve the mystery and becomes increasingly pained by it, his only recourse is to escape, panic stricken. But he
cannot get rid of the double so easily—no more than Wilson would consciously desire to destroy himself. For, of course, the double is the faintest glimmer of a moral sense that is still alive in Wilson's soul. Said Wilson, "Men usually grow base by degrees. [But] From me, in an instant, all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle" (III, 299). From that "remote epoch in time" the moral sense returns, not as a life-giving being, but bearing with it pain and destruction. While it does not appear to either the reader or to Wilson's friends as ghastly and terrifying, Wilson himself is petrified by it.

To uncover the source of pain, Wilson would strive to scrutinize his double. He knows that this individual is a most prodigious person; he knows, furthermore, that he must be related to him in some crucially important way; he knows that his double follows him around for some reason. He is amazed at the degree of identity between the double and himself. In fact, he cannot believe his eyes when they tell him that the double and he are identical in every respect. However, in one crucial respect they differ, of course. Wilson is an immoralist and his double is the vestige of Wilson's moral sensibility that has somehow mysteriously survived. But Wilson cannot recognize the difference. His only suspicion that they may be unlike is awakened by the difference in their voices; the double's voice, unlike Wilson's is reduced to a mere whisper. Therefore, though the two Wilsons look alike, and although they seem to be equally talented, yet the amoral Wilson cannot recognize the identity
of his double, because he does not possess one grain of morality in himself by which to recognize--by identification--any moral sensibility that exists apart from him. Wilson never calls his double his conscience, for he does not know the meaning of that word. But the sense of morality is ever so faintly articulated:

... a sense of pride on my part, and a veritable dignity on his own (III, 307).10

Wilson's reaction to his double is characterized by a growing ambivalence.

It is difficult, indeed, to define, or even to describe, my real feelings towards him. They formed a motley and heterogeneous admixture;--some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity (III, 307).

His animosity, controlled in the beginning, is disguised under the "banter or practical joke (giving pain while assuming the aspect of mere fun) rather than into a more serious and determined hostility" (III, 307). Although his double fails initially to degrade him in front of his peers, Wilson, nevertheless, feels a strong urge to debase (to discredit and thereby destroy) his double. His double, however, with "unassuming and quiet austerity" is somehow insulated from ridicule. And, therefore, though the double does not choose to humiliate Wilson in public in the beginning of the story, Wilson is, nevertheless, irritated because he feels his double is trying to imitate him. In

10 Note that the public and the private manifestations of morality express themselves simultaneously; but the public, William Wilson himself, is always inferior to the private, his double.
fact, the imitation is almost perfect. Yet curiously enough, no one except Wilson is alarmed by the identity in the appearance of the two boys. And no one except Wilson himself seems to be aware that his double is harassing him.

That the school, indeed, did not feel his design, perceive its accomplishment, and participate in his sneer, was, for many anxious months, a riddle I could not resolve (III, 309).

Meanwhile, the double constantly interferes, but "This interference often took the ungracious character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated" (III, 310). What that advice is Wilson cannot know because it is only "hinted" at. But he resents the fact that the double is offering any advice, perhaps because Wilson cannot understand what he is saying and because he resents being treated as an inferior. Therefore, instead of helping Wilson, the double only depresses him. And yet, try as he might, the double cannot speak to Wilson more clearly, because Wilson himself would not be able to understand him, so muted is his own sense of morality. Trying to solve the mystery of his double, Wilson feels that he is on the verge of penetrating the secret.

It was about the same period, if I remember aright, that, in an altercation of violence with him, in which he was more than usually thrown off his guard, and spoke and acted with an openness of demeanor rather foreign to his nature, I discovered, or fancied I discovered, in his accent, his air, and general appearance, a something which first startled, and then deeply interested me, by bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy--wild, confused and throbbing memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn. I cannot better describe the sensation which oppressed me than by saying that I could with difficulty shake off the belief of my having been acquainted with
the being who stood before me, at some epoch very long ago—some point of the past even infinitely remote (III, 311).

The two Wilsons come fearfully close to knowing each other only when they quarrel (the open rather than the concealed expression of hostility). Wilson cannot know precisely who his double is because he has repressed him; he has destroyed him, reduced his voice to a whisper, expelled him from his consciousness. And yet every time they quarrel or when he hears the double's whisper, he experiences the sudden illusion of a recognition of something that once very familiar, presents itself only as a most oppressive sensation.

Critics have recorded in the climactic order in which they occur the series of crimes that Wilson commits: from tricking his classmates, to drinking and gambling, to cheating at cards, to, finally, his attempt at seduction. The clash between the two Wilsons evolves in corresponding stages: its first expression as a concealed hostility, where the double refuses to make Wilson look ludicrous in front of his peers; their first quarrel, when Wilson first has an intimation that his double is mysteriously connected with him in the remote past; the evening when he attempts to erase the delusion that there is an affinity between them and discovers aghast as he gazes upon his sleeping double that the two appear to be absolutely identical; the first moment when his double mysteriously accosts him after their departure from school, whispering his ignominious name; his more humiliating intrusion during the card game when he
exposes Wilson publicly in front of everyone. Unable to tolerate the double any longer, Wilson, panic-stricken, would try to escape. But wherever he goes, the double follows. And all the while Wilson still does not know who the double is and what the objective of this feverish pursuit could possibly be. But he decides one day that if he asserts himself more vigorously, the double might well be intimidated:

And was it only fancy which induced me to believe that, with the increase of my own firmness, that of my tormentor underwent a proportional diminution? (III, 323).

At last he decides: "... I would submit no longer to be enslaved" (III, 323). Wilson and the double meet for the last time at a masked ball—masked now, as though they had not always been strangers. Finding himself alone with the double, Wilson decides to kill him. With passionate determination he stabs him many times in the heart, as if to make sure that he would die.

The tale ends in two ways: first, metaphorically, and then, with a final epigraphical explanation which translates the metaphor into a discursive statement. After Wilson stabs his double, he perceives a change in the room; he notices, for the first time, a mirror. Stepping up to it, he sees himself pale and covered with blood. The fury of the combat is suddenly magnified as Wilson becomes his own victim and his own torturer. The almost perfect identity between Wilson and his double
becomes absolute for a fraction of an instant. Then the metaphor is explained:

Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist—it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution (III, 325).

The sudden "going beyond the real" of the mirror image is dispelled, but the reality, the meaning of that illusion is articulated, as the double speaks to him in a way he can finally understand.

In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself (III, 325).

The final triumph of William Wilson is moral suicide. Death has not resolved the conflict, however. There can be no resolution to such a conflict until Wilson himself is dead.

The achievement of this story is that Poe would make language function in the way one would least expect: through the medium of words, he would conjure instinctual conflicts that can hardly be expressed on a purely verbal level. Unconscious conflicts are scarcely articulated verbally because in their intensity they resist being confined in any ordered scheme, language being the most conspicuous. We shall see in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" that the degree of insanity is manifest in the degree of disorganization between language, meaning, and logic; under such circumstances as these stories present, understanding the characters is nearly impossible. Such radical deterioration has not occurred in Wilson's being; he has not, in other words, departed altogether from the reality principle.
For he can communicate with others. Indeed, the only person with whom he cannot communicate is the being closest to him, his double. The sudden appearance of his double (the recurrence of morality) and his constant harassment of Wilson becomes for him increasingly alarming. A third person narrator who might witness the relationship between Wilson and his double would never be able to observe the conflict in the first place. Though Wilson and the double are the only persons capable of describing their relationship, Wilson expresses only his growing irritation and horror at the mystery, and the double, the mysterious object himself, refuses until the very end to explain a thing. In the double, the effects of mystery become deadly and destructive. In fact, it is ironic that Wilson would have felt more comfortable had his benevolent double never tried to save him. Wilson's discomfort is ever so gradually and faintly shared by the reader himself, who is likewise oppressed by the sense of a lethal mystery and by the deliberate, sadistic reticence of the double, even though he knows who the double is.

Wilson's inability to point to the cause of the mystery is further intensified by the special incompleteness of the vision reflected in the narration itself, an incompleteness that suggests that Wilson's world is a moral vacuum. Although Wilson openly denigrates himself as though to commemorate some ancient crime, he expresses no sense of guilt. His conflict may be described as a variety of melancholia, where the lost loved object is his own soul. He is dedicated to destroying it: to
destroying by degrees whatever conscience he might once have had; and in so doing he destroys himself. His reaction toward his double is marked by feelings of hostility. Failing to recognize who his double is, Wilson reacts to him on a more instinctual level as a deeply hostile, threatening and alien force which is his enemy because it is wretchedly depleting him.

William Wilson resembles certain of Poe's healthy and vigorous characters in his feverish activity; he would desire at least to confront the mystery. Wilson's critical faculty makes furious pretentions to activity, even while it cannot function properly because of the absence of a moral vision. Superimposed upon the narrator's perspective is that of the double, who enters the story here and there, impressing both the reader and Wilson as a superior, though inscrutable, observer and critic. The double could, if he desired to, tell Wilson who both of them are and what all of this disagreement between them is about. But he deliberately chooses (or is made by Wilson) to be silent. He constantly repeats their names, but naming is not explanation. The double merely voices his disapproval in the most mysterious manner. Because Wilson never knows why his double follows him everywhere like his shadow, the double's presence, bearing with it insupportable mystery, is painful. He becomes the persecutor; and thus he constitutes the paranoid hallucination of the conscience as merely an observing and critical hallucinated person. The effect of this perspective,
therefore, is brilliantly startling: Wilson as narrator must observe and assess the events; yet the very person he would strive to analyze, his double, is the very person who assesses his own actions in turn. To express this metaphorically, let one imagine that upon looking at himself in the mirror, he might, under the most strange circumstances, not be able to recognize his own image. This experience is conceivable. But let one try to imagine that the image in the mirror can recognize the person who stands in front of it! It is just such an extraordinary effect that Poe achieves by integrating two perspectives, two struggles at understanding so totally divergent in one story, in the soul of one man, William Wilson.

In "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" the commonplace and domestic world is seen through the eyes of a madman. Again like Poe's traditionally energetic characters, the narrators in these tales are actively attempting to understand the world about themselves. In fact, with them, "method is the soul of business." The narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" appears mad from the very beginning in asserting his brilliance to the reader. The depth of his madness is revealed by his failure to realize exactly how troubled he is. With him, the range of deterioration is extensive; reason and passion, fused to some degree in the normal person, in him function independently. He prizes form for its own sake, as constituting an adequate demonstration of his sanity. He cannot act with any depth of feeling. For he is unable to realize the consequences
of what he is doing. He can "reason"; but his thoughts reveal no moral sensibility alive within him. In fact, its total absence indicates immediately a break from "meaning" and the reality principle.

You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution— with what foresight— with what dissimulation I went to work! (V, 88).

He attempts incessantly to convince his readers that he is not mad. He states how practical he is; for "The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them... Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story." The madness is manifested most clearly in his claims of what he is able to do: namely, to relate his bizarre story calmly, in painstaking detail. In contrast to Roderick Usher, whose response to the events seems frightfully intense, in excess of the given observable events, the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" curiously fails to respond and his failure in this respect demonstrates the extent of his disease. Unable to respond to a world that seems real to the normal and healthy, he reacts intensely and excessively to those details that have no extraordinary significance to the normal individual and yet which have some overpowering meaning for him—a meaning, however, that neither he nor the reader can ever comprehend. Therefore, even when he decides to kill the old man because of his eye, and even though he is able to plot the murder in detail
and later dismember and bury the body, yet he cannot say precisely why the eye is so important to him:

Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever (V, 88).

He has the capacity to understand what his motives were not. He quickly isolates his real motive: "His eye!" However, incapable of comprehending the enormity of his crime, he assumes that everyone would find his motive as plausible and justifiable as he does himself.

What finally impels him to confess his crime to the police is not his conscience. It is what Poe describes in his essay "The Imp of the Perverse" as mere perversity: acting for the sole purpose of destroying oneself. In this evil genius of crime there is hardly the faintest glimmer of a normal moral sensibility. Yet the most primitive assertions of a moral sense are audible in the senseless pounding of the dead man's heart under the planks of wood. Again, as the character William Wilson, the madman in "The Tell-Tale Heart" deliberately asserts his audacity in the face of his crime, a presumptuousness and superciliousness as if in defiance of the law.

... in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, [I] placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim (V, 93).
Yet his wild enthusiasm is only symptomatic of an inner turmoil that he would attempt to conceal with a specious hilarity. The conflict which he can only feel but cannot account for comes to the surface in degrees, somatically, and later through his agitated response to hallucinated sounds:

But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct:--it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness--until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears (V, 93-4).

In "going beyond reality" the madman insists that a correspondence (a cause) in the external world exists for sensations which arise within him. In speaking of what is going on around him, he metaphorically describes the rationale of his own behavior, as he is able to understand it. Through the vision of the madman, who identifies the world with himself, metaphor and rationale become one and the same thing.

But in "The Black Cat," unlike "The Tell-Tale Heart," the sense of unity through identifying rationale and metaphor is not achieved. In "The Tell-Tale Heart" Poe scrupulously selected details that he felt could be integrated into one poetic scheme. The sense of unity is dissipated instantly in "The Black Cat" by an introduction which seems to be contrived. As in so many of Poe's tales there the narrator directly solicits the belief of the reader and briefly speculates about the principle of perversity. And, thereupon, he proceeds to relate a tale of
horror and crime so hideous that he fears that it will appear to be incredible. However, to make belief the more easily achieved, he would be willing, he claims, gladly to supply only the facts without interpreting them, so that his audience will be able by itself to assess, and, therefore, believe what it sees. As a critic who is required to offer a statement of his intention in the beginning of an article, the narrator calmly, soberly discloses his purpose for writing and states his procedure.

My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household (V, 143).

Four elements characterizing Poe's work are implicitly expressed here: first, the materials of the tale itself, the household events which appear to be ordinary but later become weird; second, the premium placed on mere facts, the narrator's desire to report only objective details; third, the structure of the tale which is supposedly the ordering of those details step by step according to their chronological patterning; fourth, the stated intention of being clear, direct, and down to the point.

He continues:

In their consequences, these events have terrified--have tortured--have destroyed me (V, 143).

Like so many of Poe's characters he speaks of the effects of the events and not of their causes, as if he were totally unaware that those events were brought about by him. Yet again and
again he emphasizes that he will try to restrain himself from explaining and interpreting their true meanings. This task he would gladly leave to

\[...\] some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects (V, 143).

That intellect, perhaps a Dupin, could possibly transform the tale of the grotesque into a tale of ratiocination by reducing the phantasm to a series of logically related facts.

Though the reader is disarmed from the beginning by the narrator's avowed ignorance, as he insists again and again that he will not distort the facts by interpreting them, yet the madman does smuggle in his own theory of causation. Sometimes the cause is stated nebulous in the following terms: "through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance"; sometimes the cause cannot be analyzed because it is described as constitutional: "a peculiarity of character." When he decides to hang the cat, he is motivated, he claims, by the "spirit of Perverseness," which is the direct cause of his crime: "This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow" (V, 146).

It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute (V, 146).
But he speaks of perversity as though it has a separate and independent existence in his soul, and, therefore, as though it and not he were responsible for the crime. Because he is, therefore, in a sense absolved from the crime, he has no reason to feel guilty. His failure to feel guilt, then, explains why his story cannot be a confessional. It is at best a feeble attempt at self-diagnosis, an "objective" narration, offered to the reader ultimately for his scrutiny, judgment and belief. Although he acknowledges the brutality of his crime, yet strangely he hardly expresses the guilt of which one would normally expect to hear.

When reason returned with the morning—when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch—I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched (V, 145-6).

Clearly he is stunned by his own crime, but his responses are not recognizably normal.

One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;—hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence;—hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God (V, 146-7).

11 Note that the narrator's repeated emphasis on the word "because" underscores with the most bitter irony the unreasonableness of his motivation. Such anguished and insistent irrationality is one of the manifestations of the principle of perverseness.
To sin only for the sake of defying God is moral suicide. Yet he claims that this instinct of Perversity impels one to act in a self-destructive manner. The narration of the motiveless crime in *Crime and Punishment*—in comparison to that in "The Black Cat"—is transformed into a confessional. "The Black Cat," however, lacks the moral vision to make it great art. If perversity is just as strongly expressed by Raskolnikov as it is by Poe's evil geniuses of crime, yet Dostoevsky's characters are nourished by a primitive instinct that Poe's characters lack altogether or that is thoroughly twisted out of any recognizable shape: the opposite desire to love and the need to worship God that is even deeper and more powerful than the passion to destroy. God Himself is the object of ambivalence in the Russian novel, the most hated and the most adored. Therefore, love, which makes alienation and insanity almost entirely impossible in the Russian novel, is the very thing that permits the individual to find his way back to society and man, whom he has at one moment impetuously rejected. Alienation, insulation from society, madness, deliberate motiveless crime against God that evoke no feelings of remorse: all of this torments Poe's characters with the result that unrelieved hostility and suicide are inevitable. Love asserts itself feebly, indefinitely defined as a "peculiar affection." Failure to love, therefore, constitutes disease and a crime against God. But the narrator of "The Black Cat" does not realize how dangerously ill he is and how deeply he has offended God.
The narrator proceeds to describe what happened the very night he strangled his cat. The house burned down and "my entire worldly wealth was swallowed up." He emphasizes that one event does not follow another necessarily as effect follows cause: the murder of the cat which is followed by the event of the house burning down.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity (V, 147).

Yet the cat which has been walled in, "as if graven in bas relief," seems symbolically to establish such a relationship. But the narrator would try to explain this eerie image of the cat in terms of natural causes and effects and thereby do the very thing he said he would specifically avoid doing, namely interpreting the events.

When I first beheld this apparition—for I could scarcely regard it as less—my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd—by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse (V, 148).
Although he is apparently shaken by the coincidence of events, nevertheless, he would attempt to reduce the spectral image to a logical and understandable series of causes and effects. He is capable of reasoning, then. But his reasoning is arid and unreal, paradoxically in spite of its appeal to objective criteria. He would reduce a series of ghastly events to a cipher. In the meantime, the conclusions he makes from his logical inquiry do not account for the ineffable results from the crime, the half sentiment of remorse. For his reason has interpreted the events as though he were a mere spectator. The objectivity and calm that he achieves at times resembles Dupin's. However, Dupin was not involved in the action, and, furthermore, the crimes he solves in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" seem less ghastly than those in "The Black Cat," since they are not committed by a human being. The horror we feel in "The Black Cat," then, arises primarily from our inability to comprehend that a human being could possibly have committed the crimes enumerated in this tale. Therefore, the objectivity of the narrator, the madman, the very thing he prides himself for is, indeed, the strongest manifestation of his insanity. Curiously enough, his reasoning in specific instances is not even logical, even when he does achieve a specious objectivity by referring constantly to concrete details and sequences of events and by hesitating to appropriate supernatural causes to events.

By such logic the narrator is trying to prove that there is absolutely no connection between his crime and the horrible
loss he suffers and, thereby, to stifle the guilt that he feels. One can notice the subtle means by which he makes pretenses at logic. When he narrates the events, he uses the verb "had been." When he would attempt to postulate causation, he says "must have been" and "had probably been done." The logic becomes slightly absurd when he explains how the cat which he had hanged outdoors managed to get plastered up in the walls:

... the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep (V, 148).

One can hardly understand why anyone would have wanted to wake up the sleeper by throwing a dead cat into his window. However, the narrator, who speaks of the matter most casually, apparently cannot see anything perverse in the explanation he has given.

Shortly after this catastrophe, he sees another cat under what appears to be rather remarkable circumstances. Except for an "indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast," this cat resembles his first cat completely. When he tries to discover to whom the cat belonged, no one would claim it. One is reminded of the horse in "Netzengerstein," which could not be accounted for by anyone. The horse and the cat exist apart from any context of any known circumstances; they are not recognized by anyone; no one can account for them and, therefore, reduce their mysteriously sudden appearance to any known facts. He brings the cat home, but suddenly begins to feel a certain alienation from it. His wife, on the other
hand, can respond to it with affection because of "that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures" (V, 150). His aversion to the cat grows in degrees until he dreads the beast. He attempts to account for his fear:

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil—and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own—yes, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own—that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimaeras it would be possible to conceive (V, 150).

This chimera is, in fact, the indefinite mark of white hair, which, "in assuming a rigorous distinctness of outline" has a "character,"12 That character is indeed the form, the image that the changing spot gradually assumes. Finally he is able to read its meaning as it takes the shape of the gallows. The white mark on the cat, as the torn in "The Fall. . .," defines the irrevocable end toward which the character is destined to be drawn.

The events which follow indicate the same split between reason and emotion that the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" suffered. Having accidentally killed his wife, the murderer decides to wall up her body. Along with his wife, he buries the second cat unwittingly. Though he is unable to account for the disappearance of the cat, later on he nevertheless feels an

12 Notice the "character" of the crimes that Dupin observes in "The Murders. . ."
immense relief just to have it out of the way. The madman dreads the reappearance of the cat. At the same time, his response to having murdered his wife is most vacuous. Finally when the police search the house, he impudently and audaciously brings the criminals to the very place where he has walled up the cat. In a frenzy of hilarity, he raps "upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom" (V, 155). The cat, still alive, walled in, shrieks. The shriek of the cat is real, in the sense that the pounding of the old man's heart in "The Tell-Tale Heart" is not.

Given the twisted ratiocinative manner in which "The Black Cat" is narrated, it is clear why the shriek had to be real. For the criminal in "The Black Cat"—in contrast to the criminal in "The Tell-Tale Heart"—desired to account for the weird events, and thereby reduce them to the commonplace. He would offer as objective his interpretation; he deliberately fails to respond with a sense of remorse which would suggest that divine justice had invisibly intervened to make him pay for his crime. In the meantime, he would try to account for certain events that by their out of the ordinary nature are simply not amenable to understanding in terms of natural causation. Instead of admitting outright that he is baffled by what we must all admit that we cannot understand, he proceeds calmly to offer an explanation that, as we have seen, is simply not logical. At times he seems to be dimly aware that he is indeed not being logical at all;
for all of his reasoning has not relieved the oppressive sense of fear, which is a primitive expression of guilt. As his attempt to be logical asserts itself more vigorously, the events become increasingly bizarre, as though some divine power were forcing the criminal to admit that he cannot explain everything he sees. From the beginning he says that his tale is scarcely believable, since "my very senses reject their own evidence" (V, 143). Yet throughout the narration, he adapts (i.e., distorts) the event to meet the demands of his rigid, arid and unreal reason. As the event is less easily accounted for, he feels increasingly afraid. And, in the end, he is forced to admit the reality of what he cannot understand. What is inconceivable is, nevertheless, true. The criminal who is overwhelmed by a sense of guilt would have known this all along. He would have known that his crime was the cause of the weird events which follow it. The ratiocinative speculation of the criminal in "The Black Cat" is ironically the supreme expression of his ignorance. For by trying to be logical, he projects an image of a mind that is so "reasonable" that it is mad.

In the tales discussed here, then, Poe has made us believe somehow in the existence of something that is inconceivable, something which we cannot name, analyze and describe. His characters know of it only through its effects, which are beauty, beauty marred with a certain peculiarity, an increasing grotesqueness, a ghastly spectre. Although it is not
recognizably human, yet this changing something is most basic. Its initial effects are beauty and pure pleasure. Somehow, alienated from conscious remembering, it is transformed from a vision of beauty into a ghastly harbinger of death. Although it may appear temporarily to have disappeared, it is destined to return, to recur with deadly and enervating monotony. Freud has taught us that this recurring basic instinct is the principle of "repetition-compulsion," the death instinct itself. He implies that the death instinct asserts itself with the first awareness of the individual's alienation from the world, an alienation that is forced upon him by the "reality principle." Before that time, the individual believes in the glory of his youth that he can do everything and be everything he desires; as he grows older, he realizes that he can do nothing. But somehow there exists within him a vague intimation of a time in his youth when he felt that everything and anything were possible. And that is why man's deep primitive commitment to the impossible enables him from time to time to believe what his common sense would tell him is ridiculous.

Wish-fulfillments, secret powers, omnipotence of thoughts, animation of lifeless objects, all the elements so common in fairy-stories, can exert no uncanny influence. . . (unless) there is a conflict of judgement whether things which have been "surmounted" and are regarded as incredible are not, after all, possible13 (my italics).

13 Freud, IV, p. 404.
One might say that for Poe who used the words "possible," "credible," "outré," "incredible," and "inconceivable" obsessively, the longing to reach states and conditions that eluded definition and description was, in effect, an attempt to conceive of what is impossible and inconceivable. The ineffable of his stories is the fact that cannot be demonstrated and understood in terms of any specific cause. It can be known only through its effects: intense pain that arises from no traceable cause and an overwhelming sense of disorder. And so by the most subtle stylistic devices, Poe makes us feel and believe something we can neither see, define verbally, or even conceive of, as he takes us farther and farther away from those things that are friendly and familiar. Mystery insupportable: this is the obsessive theme into which all of his explorations in the short story and literary criticism and scientific prose may be finally resolved. He returns to it, sometimes willfully, consciously, and passionately. At times, poor soul, he is a slave to the riddle and cannot leave it until he destroys it or until it destroys him. Sometimes he is horrified when he finds that unwittingly his primitive instincts have led him, in spite of himself, to the inscrutable. His journeys are ever the compulsive return—the unconscious gravitation toward the absolute mystery. Poe expresses this theme poetically in "Ulalume":

And I cried; "It was surely October
On this very night of last year
That I journeyed—that I journeyed down here!—
That I brought a dread burden down here—
On this night of all nights in the year,
Ah, what demon hath tempted me here?"

And yet the absolute mystery is somehow terribly familiar: the death of his beloved. The entire structure of Poe's universe and the character of his speculations is emblematic of the "Uncanny"—the returning, the journey back to the original unity, to the weird "familiar-unfamiliar" Freud speaks of. For somehow Poe returns to what he always knew, even from the beginning of his career. But knowing it so terrifies him that he cannot tolerate it. And so the knowable becomes the enormous enigma of the unity of life and death in the universe.
In the previous chapters, we have observed how Poe's characters attempt to arrive at the heart of the ultimate mystery--by "ratiocination," by journeying to the ends of the earth. Those for whom the sense of mystery is lethal would want to run away from it. But the more furiously they try to escape, the more oppressive the mystery becomes. Their response to what they finally realize they cannot escape is panic and hysteria. The presence of mystery is immediately implied through even the slightest sense of irresolution and movement; for mystery, motion and life are identical. Only in the colloquies does the sense of absolute calm, absolute stasis, obtain. The only human being who experiences the sense of certitude and knowledge issuing in calm is Dupin himself; for he achieves understanding intuitively. He has no need to plod step-by-step, tracking down the truth through the method of analysis. Indeed, it is the analytic method which ironically does not solve the mystery; it serves only to protract man's senseless efforts to "analyze the unanalyzable."

In his poetry, Poe's passion for analysis is muted. Concrete details, specific facts, disappear altogether. And, except in the early "Tamerlane," so does the furious assertion of
will. What is left except in several glaring instances is an image of a mind that is inhumanly calm, and an image of a universe that is timeless and static. The range of "experience," furthermore, is limited. The persons, whenever there are any, are usually dying ladies or poets who breathlessly supplicate the mysterious something that exists far off. The poet and that ineffable something (which is at times a woman, at times nothing more than his own thoughts) constitute the only "persons" in the poem. Whatever substance the poems have issues from the relationship between the poet and that ineffable object. The ineffable is often "signified" by a girl who, now dead, is very far away. Instead of attempting to analyze the effects of beauty in his poetry as the characters in his tales would do Poe would merely experience those effects as the ultimate way of knowing them. The poem is at once the experience and the "knowledge" of that which is experienced.

The ineffable object far away—as we have seen in chapter four—is indeed analogous to the childhood experience long ago, the memory of which intrudes inexplicably upon the present. Such recurrence of the past which absorbs the present and the future is, as Freud has written, the rationale of the uncanny. Now, in the poetry we see merely the insinuation of that rationale. Instead of the words which are synonyms of "forgotten past experiences," words which appear almost uniformly in the tales, and the half awareness of those experiences, there exists the inscrutable object in the distance which is at times the source
of pleasure, and at times the source of pain. Whenever it is pleasurable, the return home and the past memory are affirmative and life-giving. But a sense of the poet's pain and uneasiness leads us to assume that a destructive memory is reasserting itself, in spite of all his attempts to forget.

By the order in which I discuss Poe's poetry, I shall suggest that the narrative method and the illusion of step-by-step analysis expressed in the early "Tamerlane" and "Al Aaraaf" disappear altogether in his other poems. Since Poe believed that poetry would embody the effects of beauty and not express man's attempt to analyze them, it might well be that he decided to restrict analysis to his prose works. Given, therefore, only "effects" as the substance of his poetry, I have decided upon the following procedure in discussing the poems. I shall underscore the extreme and manifold emotions that are generated from the narrow range of experience between the poet and the ineffable. Beginning with those poems where the effects of beauty are, for the most part, pleasurable, I shall analyze those poems which express an ambivalence toward the ineffable, and finally those poems where the grotesquely ineffable gives rise to feelings of terror and the most intense pain.

At this point, I shall return once again to Poe's tales, so that I might determine what connection several images repeatedly found in his tales have with his poetry. In so doing, I shall attempt to underscore the fact that the poetry expresses only effects, whereas the tales express the mind attempting to
understand them. Understanding Poe's mind in the process of attempting to analyze the unanalyzable, we may perceive more clearly the "meaning" of his poetry.

Written at the beginning of his career as poet, "Tamerlane" articulates some of those themes which Poe repeatedly expressed in his tales. The hero is confessing his sins to his priest. But, like the tales of the grotesque, the poem is not a confessional, for the hero expresses neither guilt, nor a passionate desire to be forgiven. Indeed, it is difficult to understand why he should feel guilty for what he has done. The hero, who has a consuming passion to rule the world, is soothed temporarily by his love for one woman. He enjoys her love briefly, but he is eventually carried away by his greater craving to satisfy his ambition. Finally at the end of his famous career, upon returning home, he discovers that his beloved is dead. He is disconsolate over his loss. But later in the poem, with much curiosity, as though he were not deeply involved, he would simply try to understand how ambition came to destroy his capacity to love. He meditates upon the effects of his ambition, because they strike him as most odd. Although he does say

O, I defy thee, Hell, to show
On beds of fire that burn below
An humbler heart—a deeper wo (VII, 8).

yet the poem ends with a question that indicates he is really more interested in analyzing himself than anyone or anything else.
How was it that Ambition crept,
Unseen, amid the revels there,
Till growing bold, he laughed and leapt
In the tangles of Love's very hair? (VII, 9).

The poet describes himself as being intensely proud and ambitious. He is a "diadem'd outlaw," one who rebels against authority and brings disorder into the world. The hero of this poem vanishes altogether from Poe's poetry. The vigor and will to power projected in this poem, however, pervades many of the tales. The a-moral self-sufficiency reflected here is powerfully alive in "William Wilson." Tamerlane, like so many of Poe's characters, harbors dark secrets. He does not speak clearly and directly to his love, mainly because he would not desire to startle and frighten her. In fact, he deliberately strives not to be taken seriously by feigning a casual air.

I spoke to her of power and pride,
But mystically—in such guise
That she might deem it nought beside
The moment's converse (VII, 6).

Edward H. Davidson in Poe: A Critical Study has perceptively observed that whenever Tamerlane conceives of his sweetheart, he thinks of her not as an individual, but as she projects and embodies some of his deepest yearnings. Especially at the end of the poem, the withering of his capacity to love is identified with the death of his beloved. This mode of identification, whereby the objective world and the subjective being are fused

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is characteristic of Poe's art, as we have seen. For it enables Poe to postulate that point— that point which he can never really arrive at except in "William Wilson" and "The Tell-Tale Heart"—where mind and universe, the invisible and the visible, symbol and fact, unreality and reality converge. In our further discussion of Poe's poetry, we will see how these two divergent planes of being are made hypothetically identical through allegory and metaphor.

In the beginning of "Tamerlane" the fantasies of the hero swell to enormous imaginings. His wishes are almost instantaneously fulfilled by his hallucination-like daydreams, which thereby transform wish into reality.

So late from Heaven— that dew— it fell
(Mad dreams of an unholy night)
Upon me with the touch of Hell,
While the red flashing of the light
From clouds that hung, like banners, o'er,
Appeared to my half-closing eye
The pageantry of monarchy,
And the deep trumpet-thunder's roar
Came hurriedly upon me, telling
Of human battle, where my voice,
My own voice, silly child!— was swelling
(C! how my spirit would rejoice,
And leap within me at the cry)
The battle-cry of Victory! (VII, 2-3).

The wish is projected, objectified, into the world so that it appears to exist autonomously, detached from the dreamer. And now, beside the virtually man-made reality (hallucination), nature shrinks until it almost altogether disappears. For Wordsworth nature is the sublime, chastening, unmetamorphosed element which man must accept humbly as a guide and teacher;
for Poe, however, man's imagination vies with nature and reality
to create an image that outdoes them in its sublimity and
strangeness. Wordsworth would respond with awe to nature's
grandeur. Poe would outdo nature to create a vision of reality
that is "unnatural," that "goes beyond the real." For other
poets the natural elements of thunder, rain, and lightning are
vigorous and clean. However, as they are transformed through
Tamerlane's perception, the expression of excitement becomes in­
creasingly shrill so that it seems somehow unnatural or un­
healthy. The lines below suggest a giddiness and euphoria that
in itself is slightly maddening and painful.

The torrent of the chilly air
Gurgled within my ear the crush
Of empires--with the captive's prayer--
The hum of suitors--and the tone
Of flattery 'round a sovereign's throne (VII, 2-3).

This passage is among the finest in "Tamerlane." Other
stanzas convey little more than a flat narration of the action,
a few trite epigraphs on love, and a brief discourse about
dreams that become real. Poe decided at one point, as he proved
in "The Philosophy of Composition," that he would arrange the
stanzas and lines in a poem in a climatic order, where the grea­
est moment of intensity would appear at the end, so that emo­
tions could be graded and expressed step by step according to
their degree of intensity. Beyond the two stanzas cited above,
which appear in the middle of the poem, none of the others
reach the same pitch of intensity. Aside from this, however,
the sense of unity is immediately destroyed, as was suggested
above, because the direction of the poem is unclearly deline-
ated; for while it begins as a confession, the confessional tone
is missing altogether. At the climax of the poem, one might
ordinarily anticipate an expression of grief; instead the poem
ends by a delicately phrased question.

The two stanzas cited above express the poem’s greatest
pitch of intensity. Here the mind is at the very verge of "go-
ing beyond the real." For the dream world has altogether de-
voured the real world. Through metaphor Poe predicates a vital-
ity, a reality, a substantiality to fantasy. The metaphor does
not, however, automatically lose its quality of suggestiveness.
For the dream in becoming substantial for Tamerlane does not
automatically become real for the reader; and this is the impor-
tant thing. Poe criticized the transcendentalists for trans-
lating flatly the ideal into the real and thereby instantly des-
traying that element of suggestiveness that inevitably arises
from confusing reality with illusion. The infinite suggestiv-
ness of many of Keats’s odes arises from the ambiguity between
dreaming and waking which is sustained throughout an entire
poem. At the end of one poem Keats asks: "Do I wake or dream?"
Unlike Poe’s "Tamerlane," so many of Keats’s dream images sug-
gest the gradual sapping of energy of the dreamer who grows
progressively fatigued, until the consciousness at the fore-
ground gradually becoming part of the background loses its sense
of individuality. In Poe’s work, the dialectic is just the
opposite. Wide awake, Tamerlane imperiously scans the world about him. Instantly, furiously, he telescopes everything about him into one small area where it can be perceived, controlled, and ultimately manipulated. The method of telescoping, which is diametrically opposed to that of diffusing, a relaxation of thought and will, reveals an enormous expenditure of energy, a gigantic assertion of will that fuses the whole world into one mental image. The possible confusion of reality and dreaming is no longer the crucial point; for this ambiguity is resolved into a more complex undercurrent of suggestivity. Poe creates a "state" that is neither waking nor dreaming, a state of mind and a condition of the universe which confounds through its sheer novelty. On the one hand, this state is not consciousness, for persons who are awake see objects in relation to each other in specific places. The dreamer, on the other hand, is drowsy; he is aware that things are being related but that some inscrutable forces, and not himself, are directing everything. The dreamer then has lost control over the action, even while he is conspicuously at the center of the dream. Tamerlane, therefore, is not dreaming; for fusing the elements into a unified whole requires a will to power.

For Poe, mere wishing creates reality. Poe's achievement in art derives from the enormous value he placed upon expressing not the real or the ideal, but the precise moment of a furious breakthrough into the ideal, at the very moment when the poet "goes beyond reality." Poe's conception of the ideal, as we
have seen, is directly contingent upon his radical departure from reality in his art—reality which for him is the ordinary, concrete, domestic, the humdrum. He does not conceive of the "real" in the same way as the traditional Platonist who sees it as an imperfect radiation of the ideal, which is the fulfillment of the good and the beautiful. This notion might have led him to prize the ideal as a kind of moral perfection; and this Poe clearly does not do. "Going beyond the real" in its most literal sense marks an irrevocable departure from the concrete, the observable and conceivable. Poe expresses again and again in his poetry and his tales that precise moment when what was familiar begins to become unfamiliar and weird. Even in his theory of composition he explains how he gives substance in "The Raven" to the rationale of the "uncanny" discussed in the previous chapter. The transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar, through an assertion of will that in itself is "beyond the real," catalyzes the real world into a monstrous apparition.

Before the transition occurs, however, whatever exists beyond reality has a sweet appeal, expressed tenderly by the word "ineffable." Initially, the inconceivable, which evokes the most subtle feelings of pleasure is whimsical and tantalizing.

Whose lineaments, upon my mind,
Are—shadows on th' unstable wind:
Thus I remember having dwelt
Some page of early lore upon,
With loitering eye, till I have felt
The letters—-with their meaning—melt
To fantasies—-with none (VII, 3-4).
But when he speaks of his ambition which manifests itself in his striving to conceive of the ineffable, his response gradually changes.

the ideal,

Dim, vanities of dreams by night--
And dimmer nothings which were real--
(Shadows--and a more shadowy light!)
Parted upon their misty wings,
And, so, confusedly, became
Thine image and--a name--a name!
Two separate--yet most intimate things (VII, 5).

Here he is able to distinguish an apparition from the name it is given. But naming itself brings him no closer to understanding the nature of the mystery. Finally the ineffable itself evokes within him a disquieting appeal.

But, just like any other dream,
Upon the vapor of the dew
My own had past, did not the beam
Of beauty which did while it thro'
The minute--the hour--the day--oppress
My mind with double loveliness (VII, 5).

He expresses more directly the disappointment he suffers from his encounter with the "ineffable," now that he has severed his bonds from the real world.

When Hope, the eagle that tower'd, could see
No cliff beyond him in the sky,
His pinions were bent droopingly--
And homeward turn'd his soften'd eye (VII, 7).

What results is oppression.

'T was sunset: when the sun will part
There comes a sullenness of heart
To him who still would look upon
The glory of the summer sun,
That soul will hate the ev'ning mist
So often lovely, and will list
To the sound of the coming darkness (known
To those whose spirits harken) as one
Who, in the dream of night, would fly
But cannot from a danger nigh (VII, 7).

The oppression weighs heavily upon him like a bad dream, from
which he cannot escape though he would desire to. He senses
danger, fear, and death. Thereupon his vision is tinged with
the neutral, frigid glare of eternity.

What tho' the moon— the white moon
Shed all the splendor of her noon,
Her smile is chilly— and her beam,
In that time of dreariness, will seem
(So like you gather in your breath)
A portrait taken after death (VII, 7).

Poe records, then, the constantly changing effects of the
ineffable; initially the source of a tremulous pleasure, it be-
comes in degrees a ghostly vision. Having once affirmed it with
such wild enthusiasm, Tamerlane suffers an apathy, a depression,
a cessation of activity, followed by a withdrawing and helpless
recoiling into himself. It is not liberation, then, but hideous
paralysis and confinement he suffers in an atmosphere of an al-
most oppressively dense texture.

In Poe's stories and poems the sense of confinement can be
measured by a number of carefully selected synonyms for oppres-
sion. In "Dreams," concerned for the most part with a pleasant
expression of the ineffable, he speaks of being temporarily
seized by an unhappy dream:

'T was once—and only once—and the wild hour
From my remembrance shall not pass—some power
Or spell had bound me—'t was the chilly wind
Came o'er me in the night, and left behind
Its image on my spirit— or the moon
Shone on my slumbers in her lofty noon
Too coldly— (VII, 11).
In the poem "The Spirits of the Dead," the soul is increasingly oppressed: "'Mid dark thoughts" that cannot be penetrated by any one, of all the crowd, to pry/ Into thine hour of secrecy" (VII, 11). Solitude leads to depression: "In death around thee—and their will/ Shall overshadow thee:" (VII, 13). There can be no liberation from such a burden: "Now are thoughts thou shalt not banish—/ Now are visions ne'er to vanish" (VII, 14).

Those thoughts have a curious substantiality.

From thy spirit shall they pass
No more--like dew-drops from the grass.

The breeze--the breath of God--is still--
And the mist upon the hill
Shadowy--shadowy--yet unbroken,
Is a symbol and a token--
How it hangs upon the trees,
A mystery of mysteries!— (VII, 14).

The oppression that the soul experiences is expressed by the mist that hovers over a hill; the thoughts, the mysteries that are unbroken (unsolved); the shadows can suggest only the inscrutable reality beyond.

In "Romance" the lassitude is a healthy drowsiness:

Romance, who loves to nod and sing,
With drowsy head and folded wing,
Among the green leaves as they shake
Far down within some shadowy laek
To me a painted paroquet
Hath been—a most familiar bird— (VII, 40).

However, the illusion of activity is implied by the syntax itself: the emphatically used subordinate clauses, which express the mind consciously forming relationships and a series of active verbs. In "Fairy-Land" the disquieting calm is sensed through
the infinitesimally gradual movement of tiny particles of matter, expressed in parallel phrases and the gradual descending that is neither impeded nor ordered by conscious thought:

While its wide circumference
In easy drapery falls
Over hamlets, over halls,
Wherever they may be—
O'er the strange woods—o'er the sea—
Over spirits on the wing—
Over every drowsy thing—
And buries them up quite
In a labyrinth of light—
And then, how deep!—O, deep!
Is the passion of their sleep (VII, 44).

Poe speaks of the miniscule size of the particles of that substance in the following lines.

Its atomies, however,
Into a shower, dissever,
Of which those butterflies,
Of Earth, who seek the skies,
And so come down again
(Never-contented things!)
Have brought a specimen
Upon their quivering wings (VII, 45).

The movement of matter and mind is downward; it is also homeward, the return home, the fatal unhappy familiar resting place.

In "A Dream within a Dream" the direction of the movement, which the poet would attempt to stay, is seaward, the eternal flux, and he is frustrated at the thought that he cannot retain one experience out of time, to salvage just one moment.

O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream? (VII, 45).
In "The Sleeper" the gradual movement, scarcely perceptible, is, once again, downward, associated now with intense fatigue and falling asleep. Verbs are selected carefully to suggest a modicum of life and activity: "moulders into rest" (VII, 51). The soul finally dozes off into death: "dripping, drop by drop,/ . . . Steals drowsily and musically/ Into the universal valley" (VII, 51). The "universal valley" "where lies/ Irene, with her Destinies!" is the valley of the shadow. The unusual tone of this poem derives from the absence of sorrow, passion and tragedy. In fact, with diabolic tenderness the poet addresses her as though she were still alive.

Oh, lady bright! can it be right--
This window open to the night? (VII, 51).

The unsettling ambiguity in the poem arises from the fact that we do not know whether the lady is dreaming or whether she really is dead. Suddenly there is the stir of music.

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 fringed lid. . . (VII, 51).

The reader anticipates that Irene will soon awaken, an expectation, one suspects, aroused by Poe just to remain unsatisfied. The contrast between life, which is a mere flickering and death is sustained with gentle irony to the end of the poem, when we learn that Irene will probably be buried in one of the tombs against which she had often thrown stones as a child.

There are, however, a series of poems where the contrasting
life-death, pleasant-unpleasant break down into what almost appears to constitute two poems in one. In "Dreams" the poet describes for the most part dreams that are pleasant; however, he notes briefly one instant when he had an unpleasant dream. "T'was once--only once--." Another peripety occurs after the break in the stanza: "I have been happy..." (the need to emphasize the "have" qualifies the entire statement.) In "Evening Star" the poet turns his glance from the cold moon to the star, announcing emphatically: "And I turn'd away to thee,/ Proud Evening Star" (VII, 15). In "The Valley of Unrest" the first part of the poem is introduced by "Once" and the second part by "Now" (VII, 55). "The Haunted Palace" records two images of the mind, one that is healthy and beautiful, the other (in the last two stanzas) that is diseased. The first part projects an image that is recognizably normal, pleasant, and familiar, and the second, one that is disquieting and alarming. In "Dream-Land" Poe leads us into a more disturbing world, into the "ultimate dim Thule--/ From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,/ Out of SPACE--out of TIME" (VII, 89). In this poem Poe journeys about as far away from reality as he can go. Thule is terribly remote; it can be compared with no other geographical place. Because it is so immense, it becomes terrifying. The main tension here evolves from the contrast between movement and stasis:

Mountains toppling evermore
Into seas without a shore;
Seas that restlessly aspire,
Surging, unto skies of fire;
Lakes that endlessly outspread
Their lone waters—lone and dead,—
Their still waters—still and chilly
With the snows of the lolling lily (VII, 89).

Like Poe's other supernal world, this place is haunted by ghouls.
"The City in the Sea," Poe's most powerfully weird poem, unlike
"Dream-Land," has a clearly perceivable peripety. The first
part of this poem expresses the totally unfamiliar and weird
even more intensely than a poem like "Dream-Land" which has no
sudden peripety. In the first half of "The City in the Sea"
there is no motion whatsoever. Poe states that this place "Re-
sembles nothing that is ours." Instead of the rays descending
from above, a weird light streams up from the "lurid sea,"

Up domes--up spires--up kingly halls--
Up fanes--up Babylon-like walls--
Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers
Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers-- (VII, 49).

And, in the meantime, "Death looks gigantically down" (VII, 50).
In spite of the "open fanes and gaping graves/ [which] yawn
level with the luminous waves. . .," there is no movement down-
ward. The stillness is unnatural; it is "hideously serene." At
any moment, we anticipate a catastrophe. The peripety occurs
toward the end of the poem in the last stanza, after the bizarre
stillness is intensified. "But lo, a stir is in the air!" A
final violent sundering of the walls follows and then the sink-
ing. "Down, down that town shall settle hence." The specious
stasis is destroyed as the city falls apart suddenly and des-
cends into its final resting place.

A faint stir devastates the grotesque submarine kingdom in
"The City in the Sea." When human beings themselves are causes, the "going beyond the real" involves the strenuous mental activity of the poet who selects and gradually abstracts from the concrete world about him those details which he will use metaphorically to establish some correspondence between this world and the hereafter. In the poem "To Helen" we see the process of selection and abstraction in slow motion, as it were. First, he makes everything about Helen seem enchanted (a sweet oppression) by her presence. Everything languishes and dies; and, finally, it disappears: "the hated world all slept,/ Save only thee and me" (VII, 107-8). The only two things that are permitted to remain are the lover and Helen. Together, they alone, their standing in relation to each other, are the only things that matter. The correspondence, which binds them irrevocably, is created by the poet-lover through the power of abstraction as he blots out everything else about them.

I paused—I looked—
And in an instant all things disappeared. . .
All—all expired save thee—save less than thou (VII, 108).

The following elements, then, keep recurring in Poe's poems: mystery, sometimes known as the ineffable; that which lies beyond what can be seen is the subject of the poem. The responses to the mystery are at times a quiet pleasure, but more often a disquieting appeal, a sense of oppression, at times sheer terror. In poems like "The Sleeper," pain and pleasure are simultaneously articulated. In other poems, however, they are independently
expressed. In "The Haunted Castle," for example, Poe projects an image of the before and the after; what caused the change itself, or the specific moment when the change occurred, is never recorded in this poem. His poems generally express "states" of mind and the universe that obtain only "out of TIME--out of SPACE." In "Dream-Land," "The City in the Sea" and "The Conqueror Worm" Poe writes areas of experience that are not recognizably human. Yet that ultimate region of Thule is not the substance of these poems. For there are degrees of timelessness which Poe embodies by his painstaking use of devices to express stasis, which suggests absolute timelessness and motion, which suggests organic and inorganic activity. The feeble stir in the midst of what appears to be, but is not, the ultimate condition is suspect. For it brings about as in "The City in the Sea," a final apocalyptic convulsion which precedes the inevitable condition of absolute stasis. The slightest tremulation, which is almost imperceptible, becomes the cause of the gigantic pro-lapse of the city; the infinitesimally minute cause in a fraction of a second extends its influence throughout the entire universe. When effects are wrought with such lightning speed, the peripety, the precise moment of the changing, is almost completely imperceptible. However, when the change itself is protracted, clear-cut images of the before and the after are blurred. For in "going beyond the real," through the use of "the first metaphorical statement in the poem," Poe leads us
from one world into another, without making us aware precisely when we have lost sight of human experience and entered eternity.

Ever so gradually, the woman herself in the poem "To Helen" begins to dissolve, as the poet fastens his attention only upon her eyes. His powers of concentration are so intense that he can recall her eyes even when she is no longer with him.

All—all expired save thee—save less than thou: 
And thou, a ghost, amid the entombing trees
Didst glide away. Only thine eyes remained.
They would not go—they never yet have gone (VII, 108).

The eyes abstracted from the woman achieve a symbolic meaning for him; but they are no longer a part of the concrete world; they lose their denotative meaning. Only their quality and function are important. They alone possess "form" and "light"; everything else dissolves, is disembodied, and becomes invisible. Even the "form" of the eyes is not real and human. They are cherished not for what they are in themselves, but for what they mean to the poet.

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 (VII, 108).

Once the supernal meaning of the eyes is achieved, their meaning is fixed; it cannot evolve into yet something more complex; for now the eyes have become the emblem of eternity.

And sanctified in their elysian fire.
They fill my soul with Beauty (which is Hope),
And are far up in Heaven— (VII, 108).
A special concrete detail which the poet abstracts from the real world casts a spell over him and mysteriously binds him to worship in helpless adoration the beauty and eternity it suggests. In the poem "To Helen" the timeless condition is tender and peaceful, although one feels, a bit too disembodied and chaste. With a weird and frightening charm, it is precariously close to the "cold clime" of Thule. Yet it seems more pleasant than the timeless state that the raven suggests: "Mournful and never ending Remembrance." In these two poems Poe relates the concrete image (the eyes, the raven) with the corresponding state of mind that is expressed.

In "The Coliseum," instead of abstracting," the poet "excavates" the correspondences that lie buried; he deciphers them by infusing into the broken images of the past, a vision of power, beauty and grandeur.

Here, where a hero fell, a column falls!  
Here, where the mimic eagle glaring in gold,  
A midnight vigil holds the swarthy bat!  
Here, where the dames of Rome their gilded hair  
Waved to the wind, now wave the reed and thistle!  
Here, where on golden throne the monarch lolled,  
Glides, spectre-like, unto his marble home,  
Lit by the wan light of the hornéd moon,  
The swift and silent lizard of the stones! (VII, 56).

Having transformed these objects into spiritual entities, he asks a rhetorical question which by his sheer passionate vigor he has already answered.
But stay! these walls--these ivy-clad arcades--
These mouldering plinths--these sad and blackened shafts--
These vague entablatures--this crumbling frieze--
These shattered cornices--this wreck--this ruin--
These stones--alas! these gray stones--are they all--
All of the famed, and the colossal left
By the corrosive Hours to Fate and me? (VII, 56).

All the details become emblematic of power, wonder, mystery, the
memories "that . . . cling around about us as a garment." They
are emblems because they have the power to evoke wonder and awe
in the poet.

In the poem "To the River" a particular woman has the power
to evoke within him an intimation of supernal beauty.

Thou art an emblem of the glow
Of beauty--the unhidden heart--
The playful maziness of art
In old Alberto's daughter (VII, 42).

Her image is reflected in the water; also it "deeply lies" in
the poet's heart; residing there, it testifies to the deep bond
between them.

His heart which trembles at the beam
Of her soul-searching eyes (VII, 42).

She is conceived of as the cause of some deep feeling aroused
within him, some profound awareness of mystery that is divine.

In the poem "To Helen" the woman comes to have any number
of rich meanings for the poet. She represents, of course, the
timelessness of beauty. Unlike the poem also named "To Helen,"
not one detail of the woman is abstracted. Instead her whole
person, substantial and warm, is affirmed. Idealizing the real
woman, the poet feels immensely relieved as though he had
arrived home, at last to a sweet, beautiful, loving resting
place, the return "to his own native shore" of the "weary, way-worn wanderer. . . On desperate seas long wont to roam" (VII, 46). The free and unbounded image in the lines "Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,/ Thy Naiad airs have brought me home" (VII, 46) is emblematic of the gentle journey home "To the glory that was Greece,/ And the grandeur that was Rome." To arrive home is to go back into the past, or because that is impossible, to go "out of time." Eternity is suggested by the silent motionless statue of Helen framed in "yon brilliant window-niche." The timelessness is underscored by framing the statue—as if the image projected in the poem was a still life picture of a statue of a woman. Helen, therefore, is twice removed from time and life. And even so, she seems so warm and soulful. In the image of the statue within the picture, the symbol itself (the statue) becomes the subject of art (the picture) which is itself the subject of the poem. Helen, therefore, is made to symbolize both the tired soul yearning for home and home itself. She expresses, then, a state of mind evoked by her beauty, the soul ever journeying toward her. Also she projects an image of beauty, eternity, and the ideal, purified of any ugliness and horror; for Poe has removed her altogether from any human activity in placing her in a state of repose in a frame. No one can inflict any change upon her. For, as art, she belongs to eternity.

Creating a symbol then consists in roughly two procedures
for Poe: first, abstracting from the concrete world certain
details that will be made emblematic of ineffable states of
mind; second, describing those objects as though they were time-
less, even if they exist among temporal objects. In "Eldorado"
a knight searches for the symbol, for the glimpse of eternity.
The old knight, who has spent all of his life looking for the
fountain of youth, meets a "pilgrim shadow," the emblem of etern-
ity, whom he asks where he might find the "land of Eldorado."
The "Shade" tells him to "Ride, boldly ride" (VII, 123), until
he comes to the "Valley of the Shadow" of Death, which is indeed
Eldorado. The gentle irony of this poem arises from the identi-
fication between Death and Eldorado, which suggests the fountain
of youth. The shade hastens the "gallant knight" "Gaily bedight"
on to this dream kingdom. The knight, never knowing the con-
cealed meaning of the shade's instructions, rides on.

At times Poe wished to express the effects of (his response
to) supernal beauty (without at the same time naming the object
that aroused those responses) and thereby imply that the poet
could achieve the state toward which he yearns. The loved ob-
ject so unattainable epitomizes supernal beauty. Yet, though
scarcely seen, she is profoundly sensed as the poet surrenders
to the joy of quivering anticipation. In the poem "To -- --"
the poet says that two Italian words have stirred up the most
"unthought-like thoughts that are the souls of thought,/ Richer,
far wilder, far diviner visions/ Than even the seraph harper,
I saw, . . ./ Could hope to utter" (VII, 106). Attempting to express them, he fails miserably:

And I! my spells are broken.
The pen falls powerless from my shivering hand.
(VII, 106).

He cannot define that thought (cannot, therefore, bring it close to him) although he yearns to reach that far off blessed being, so thrillingly distant:

I cannot write—I cannot speak or think—
Alas, I cannot feel; for 't is not feeling,
This standing motionless upon the golden Threshold of the wide-open gate of dreams,
Gazing, entranced, adown the gorgeous vista,
And thrilling as I see, upon the right,
Upon the left, and all the way along,
Amid empurpled vapors, far away
To where the prospect terminates—-thee only. (VII, 106).

Even while he is unable to articulate this timeless thought in a word or phrase that would evoke the illusion of eternity, yet entranced, standing motionless, he himself, in worshipful contemplation, partakes of timelessness and beauty. The poet becomes a statue. The symbol and the state of mind become one and the same thing.

The symbol, therefore, emerges as the poet confronts something apart from himself which awakens him to the ineffable, beauty and eternity. In "Stanzas" the poet writes that "that object" need not be "hid from us in life." Instead it

 doth lie
Each hour before us—but then only, bid
With a strange sound, as of a harp-string broken,
To awaken us—'T is a symbol and a token.
Of what in other worlds shall be... (VII, 18).

If the poems considered up to this point epitomize Poe's search for a symbol and finally a tentative definition of one, his allegorical poems would indicate that the poet had already arrived at definitions. For the allegories begin with statuesque figures which already have some kind of symbolic meaning that antedates the poem itself. This rigidly appropriated meaning which is masked by the fantastic and the grotesque is expressed in four poems which may be described as allegories: "Israfel," "Al Araaf," "The Haunted Palace," and "The Conqueror Worm." Israfel as the subject of the poem is the symbol of beauty and poetry. He is directly described from the beginning of the poem. Only at the end of the poem does the reader ever realize that the poet languidly observes Israfel from afar and that he envies him and would gladly change places with him, if he could. Until the last stanza the reader is under the illusion that the poet has achieved an unusual proximity to supernal beauty. The poet writes that Israfel produces the most unusual sounds "of those unusual strings" because, according to the epigraph, the lute was his heart. Everyone and everything ceases to move when he plays, just to "attend the spell/ Of his voice." His instrument is his heart (heart and lute are not merely related symbolically; they are made identical) since, of course, angels, if not men, can make lutes out of their own
hearts. The art that Israfel creates is far superior to anything that man could ever hope to achieve. For, as the poet says, "Our flowers are merely—flowers," our hearts are merely hearts and not lutes. Yet in spite of all his human limitations, the poet says that he would sing a "bolder note" than Israfel, were he able to change places with him. But, alas, no act of will can transform his heart into a lute.

"Al Aaraaf" is structured by a theme of a faintly religious nature: the fall from Eden motif. The two lovers at the end of the poem, true to their own heart beats, instead of to the heavenly music of Al Aaraaf, fall to a "dark," unhappy earth. The poem, which begins with the scene of paradise, ends with the descent. If this poem expounds Poe's cosmic myth—as both Davidson and Wilbur suggest—then Poe's later poetry expresses his longing to return to this lost Eden, to listen not to his own heart beats, but to timeless melodies and ever to gaze with adoration toward the ineffable and redeem it somehow through metaphor. The faintly religious overtones expressed weakly here—as disobedience and guilt are muted—almost altogether disappear in Poe's later poems and the tales. Except for the "Colloquy of Monos and Una," in "Al Aaraaf," Poe gives us our only glimpse of beings who might conceivably live "out of time."

Though their lyres are their hearts, we are inclined to feel perhaps because of the harmony and serenity in their world that they are human. However, the grotesque and horrible beings in "The Haunted Palace" and "The Conqueror Worm" alienate us,
repel us, rather than lead us to suppose that we could ever
desire to identify with them. The pomp and ritual suggested
in these poems implies an audience who are the ones who read
this poem. In the first poem it is the king who is the center
of civic life; his illness has demoralized everyone. In the
second poem the drama of the conqueror worm is a morality play.

In those poems of Poe where the effects of the ineffable
are grotesque, the kingdom "out of SPACE" is described, as has
been observed already, by the hideous serenity of the scene, by
the ghouls who haunt it, and by its generally oppressive effects.
The quietness implies total inactivity; the colors, movements,
gestures, etc. are suppressed; the entire scene is disquietingly
insubstantial. In the allegories there is a frightful activity,
which is related to two experiences: in the first case ("The
Haunted Palace") to a house; in the second, ("The Conqueror
Worm") to a drama. The weirdness of "The Haunted Palace" ob­
tains not merely from the second half of the poem, when the
poet writes that the house is desolate. For even from the very
beginning, weirdness characterizes the distortion which arises
when the human head is compared directly to the house, the win­
dows being the eyes, the door being the mouth. Readers perhaps
a little less literal minded than I may argue that the head is
just the symbol of the entire man. But I cannot help feeling
that the startling quality of this poem is not merely the theme
itself--the images of health and madness--but our response to
the structure of the poem: our continuing effort to identify
the house with the head and our frustration in not being able
to do so. It would be facile to say that the house is a meta-
phor for the entire man, and that, therefore, we are not meant
to identify them. But if the door really is the mouth (the lips
and the teeth become "with pearl and ruby glowing") there re-
mains no other part of the house by which the rest of the body
may be described. Our tendency, therefore, to identify the
house with the entire man is thwarted as soon as the poet indi-
cates that the windows are the eyes and the door is the mouth.
In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the house is described as
being desolate, and the windows are "vacant eye-like." Although
Poe closely relates the windows with the eyes in this tale, he
does not, nevertheless, identify them; and he does identify
them in this poem. When he speaks of wanderers looking into
the eyes, one would expect him to describe the eyes, but in-
stead our expectations are not satisfied; for we peer through
the eyes to see the brilliant luminosity of the room. What we
see inside the eyes is a scene around the king's throne. Since
the house is identified with the head from the very beginning,
"The Haunted Palace" is one instance where the entire poem in-
volves a "going beyond reality" in the sense in which Poe des-
cribed this device in "The Philosophy of Composition."

To conceive of how this principle might relate to "The
Haunted Palace," one might imagine the kind of poem "The Raven"
might have been, were the "first metaphorical expression in the
poem," "Take thy beak from out of my heart," to come not at the
end of the poem, but at the very beginning, and, furthermore, were the lover to struggle through some 100 lines to remove that beak thrust into his heart. In "The Raven" Poe wished to use metaphor sparingly, so that he could through the vividness of the startlingly unreal image, at one moment bring to the surface the "undercurrent of suggested meaning." In "The Haunted Palace" there is no such undercurrent; for the whole poem consists of a series of integrated metaphors. The "going beyond reality" occurs, therefore, not in one or two lines of the poem; it is its only substance. Therefore, though we imagine the house, we keep reverting to the image of the head. Though we cannot conceive of a head and a house simultaneously, yet we are compelled by references to both head and house to try to do so. Imposing the image of one upon the image of the other, we struggle somehow to coordinate the two, with the result that both head and house become monstrous through the inevitable distortion that this activity leads to. That monstrosity arises, then, through the very structure of the poem which prompts the reader to unite, to identify, the disparate images.

In "The Conqueror Worm" the horror is achieved through yet another effort at unity and identification. The poem takes place in what resembles a theatre; the audience, "An angel throng" (VII, 87), "Sit in a theatre, to see/ a Play." At the pit of the stage is the orchestra. In the second paragraph we learn that the play begins; the drama itself is an allegory, where the meaning is obscurely revealed in pantomime, gesture,
weird motion, and incomprehensible muttering. In the second and third stanzas the horrific is expressed in "an undercurrent of suggestion," since the meaning of the allegory until that point in the poem is deliberately masked. In the fourth stanza, the meaning of the drama is revealed in the metaphorical "going beyond reality" when the worm begins to devour the mimes; the image is ghastly, for either the mimes are pigmies, or the worm is a monster. In the last stanza, the angel throng bring the drama to an end, by unveiling themselves as well as the meaning of the play. They

affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
And its hero the Conqueror Worm (VII, 88).

Davidson is correct in calling this poem an allegory. However, his interpretation does not explain the richer complexity of the poem. For this poem is, indeed, an allegory within an allegory. The theatre, as Davidson points out, is the universe; but the play performed for the audience is itself an allegory which must be interpreted for the angels seated in that theatre. Through the allegorical setting in the first stanza, one's attention is focused upon the stage. And the performance is, in fact, the second allegory. The first allegory may be easily interpreted by identifying the theatre immediately and automatically with the universe. But the meaning of the second allegory, the one performed on the stage, cannot be achieved merely through identification. For though the Godless mimes are
identified with man, such identification in itself is not the "meaning" of the allegory. The power of the second allegory, then, in contrast to the first, results from something more than a mere identification between concrete object and the spiritual being it represents. Rather meaning issues from the relationship between the mimes and the conqueror worm which appears in the next to the last stanza. "The Haunted Palace" with its weird superimposition of one image upon another, one object upon another is not an instance of allegory. For the struggle to identify both images continues indefinitely, even while such identification is never achieved. In "flat" allegory, however, the object and the concept are one and the same thing. But the meaning of "The Conqueror Worm" is achieved only in time. The drama enacted for the angel audience has a beginning, a middle, and an end which is the catastrophe. The worm enters the stage and the audience horror-stricken unriddles the meaning.

The one theme that Poe writes of passionately is the trampling down of God and

That high tone of the spirit which hath striven,
Tho' not with Faith—with godliness—whose throne
With desperate energy 't hath beaten down;
Wearing its own deep feeling as a crown (VII, 18).

But poète-maudit though he may be, Poe is, nevertheless, neither the Germanic Faust nor the sybaritic Russian sinner. He relates not with man, woman, or God. Rather, the almost constant subject
of his art is the ineffable itself. This is the subject that fascinated and tormented him throughout his career to the end in "Eureka." The ineffable for him is beauty, inscrutable mystery, a mere riddle, a "state" of mind which achieves an intimation of immortality and the ultimate condition of the universe described variously in his poems, "Al Aaraaf," "Thule," and "Israfel," and also the weird city of the sea. Poe said that the ineffable could not evoke a commonplace emotion that is easily amenable to definition. Once sensed, it is never capable of being exactly reproduced. In speaking of the ineffable in "The Poetic Principle" he offers a definition of the pleasure principle.

An immortal instinct deep within the spirit of man is thus plainly a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors, and sentiments amid which he exists... There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the beauty before us, but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements perhaps appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry, or when by Music, the most entrancing of the poetic moods, we find ourselves melted into tears, we weep then, not as the Abbate Gravina supposed, through excess of pleasure, but through a certain petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys of which through the poem, or through the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses (XIV, 273).
The effects of every poem which is emblematic of supernal beauty are feelings of beauty. But in many of his poems Poe would attempt to make the very effects of the ineffable the subject of his poetry, to make art the subject of his art. The substance of his poetry, therefore, is that "something in the distance that is unattainable," that "thirst unquenchable." The poet himself is the "moth that yearns for the star." The materials of his art are the "things and thoughts of Time" which he tries to fashion in such a manner that he will achieve an intimation of immortality and eternity. The illusion of eternity is embodied by the static, motionless, plastic image, emblem, symbol, statue, painting. He perceives the faintest glimpse of it, either because the symbol is so remote ("To -- --") and ineffable, or because it is so inscrutable. With Helen of Troy and the glory of Greece, the emblems are real in the sense that they relate to the past. But the statue itself, which initiates such reveries and the return Home, its power to effect feelings of wistful yearning and contentment is inscrutable. The statue of Helen, then, is the source of the feelings of beauty which themselves are the substance of the poem. Poets today often express the desire to write at least one poem which could celebrate the effects of beauty. That subject--beauty, poetry, the ineffable--was Poe's perpetual theme.

Beauty, which is remote and not amenable to understanding and alteration, is ineffable. The feelings it gives rise to correspond to no emotions in the practical sphere of life.
Beauty gives rise to an intense, psychological pleasure. One might well question how it happened that Poe who adored and celebrated the beautiful could have been capable of transforming beauty into grotesque apocalyptic visions. But we have already observed in the previous chapter that Poe's stories reveal how, through the impact of some mysterious cause (which Freud calls the reality principle), beauty is metamorphosed into pain and ugliness. We may never know the precise psychological cause of these extremes of the ideal and the spectral in Poe's art, even when all the biographies and all the psychoanalytic studies have been written. But I should like to hazard a hypothesis which might well suggest one frail cause: through his passionate concern with the problem of language as he conceived it, Poe might well have precipitated the ruination of his own genius, of his own art. In attempting to embody the ineffable, he became increasingly aware of the futility (the imperfectability) of his own achievements. Obsessed with the desire to possess and define the ineffable, he enlists art itself in the service of his inquiries in epistemology and ontology. And the effects of those "scientific" commitments are, as we shall observe presently, directly registered through the finest qualities as well as the most grievous defects of his style.

We have observed in this chapter that in poems like "The Raven" and "To Helen" (both Helen poems), the poet relates
directly to another object, only in so far as it is merely a
projection of his own feelings. The dialectic of each of the
poems reveals the poet's desire to express and define the emo-
tion he felt. In "The Raven" the concrete details one recalls
most vividly are the lover and the raven "identified" by the
beak thrust in the poet's heart. In "Helen" the woman almost
altogether disappears, but her eyes remain to guide the poet.
In the other poem also entitled "Helen" the woman does not dis-
appear; rather she becomes altogether silent and motionless, a
living statue. In each of the poems, the abstracted detail
achieves a greater quality of definition at the expense of
everything else in the background which gradually fades or is,
as it were, absorbed into the detail. This technique—as I
described before—is one of abstracting and, thereupon, teles-
scoping the universe into one detail. At times the process of
abstracting and telescoping goes on in the poem itself, as we
have seen in "To Helen." In "Berenice" and "The Tell-Tale
Heart" the process of abstracting is not recorded; for it has
already been completed. The world is instantaneously telescoped
into the teeth of Berenice and in "The Tell-Tale Heart" into
the evil eye of the old man. Through the monomaniac vision of
the protagonist, therefore, one can see how the world appears
through the "lens of a single idea." The controlling idea un-
fortunately is less a purely intellectual concept than at times
a frightfully rigid, instinctual form of behavior over which
the protagonist has no control. This technique of abstracting
the detail and telescoping the world into it—which is indeed a way of achieving meaning—is directly related to the conscious activity of defining. For Poe the need to define arose from the need to achieve meaning and truth. But as we have seen in the first chapter, definitions were for him at best only approximations of truth. His technique of conceptualization is described clearly in a passage from "Marginalia" cited earlier. In that passage, Poe speaks of a rare state of mind between dreaming and consciousness where he has "thought unthought-like thoughts" and striven to retain them, to take hold of (to fix, make stop, take out of time) that which slips away so easily, and thereupon to create a new style which would express that "idea of an idea." In the poem "To -- --" the poet struggles to conceptualize ineffable feelings and a mere glimmer of a thought. All he can know, however, are the enormous limitations of language and of human capacities. All he is capable of expressing is his glorious and futile striving. He traces the source of the feeling:

Two words--two foreign soft dissyllables--
Italian tones, made only to be murmured
By angels... (VII, p. 106).

But those words are never named. Those "unthought-like thoughts" are never expressed; they are known partially through their effects: "The pen falls powerless from my shivering hand." Poe's attempt to create a transcendent style that would accurately conceptualize the effects of those "unthought-like thoughts," those weird and magical states of mind that for him could be
expressed in no ordinary way: this was his arduous, life-time goal. That style he knew would have to permit him to investigate, explain, and epitomize those states at one and the same time. As we observed in discussing "Eureka" he attempted to create a style that would explain a mystery, intense and inscrutable, without consequently destroying the air of mystery that encircles it. Put another way, Poe was faced with the problem of arresting in time, without at the same time destroying, a state of mind that is elusive and fleeting.

In chapter 2, we have observed how Poe scrupulously conceived of the combination of circumstances that would permit the poem to suggest concurrently motion and stasis; or, put in the idiom of the literary critic, variety and uniformity; or put in Poe's idiom, repetition (of a stable pattern) and change. At times the almost imperceptible change and motion are made to issue from the frailest fiber of human volition; or else an anti-human principle triumphs hideously, violently over a man who is able to cry out in horror only when it is too late for him to be saved. This changeless stable mold is expressed in many ways in Poe's works. As the formal principle of regulation, control and containment, it is the structural counterpart of the principle insulation analyzed in "The Philosophy of Composition." By circumscribing the action within a clearly defined space, Poe literally shuts out the outside world to concentrate with more intense focus upon the raven and the lover. By circumscribing the action, Poe attempts to limit the number
of objects that move and change, that act in any way, thereby
to focus our attention upon (to abstract from the scene) only
one or two moving objects. Any motion at all, therefore, be­
comes the more terrifying because of the silence and stillness
of the scene. Poe creates within that limited space an almost
unearthly atmosphere where the air seems to hang heavily (as in
"The Fall. . .") oppressively like a thick curtain. Furth­
more, this scene is sealed off, insulated, from the real world,
so that those who have entered it (the characters, and by ex­
tension, the reader himself) are trapped inside and cannot get
out. At times the scene is merely a room, as in "The Raven."
At times the scene is the entire ambiance that enshrouds the
house of Usher. At times it is the stillness that has petrified
a whole region, as in "The City in the Sea." Finally, it is the
universe itself, as in "Eureka" which petrifies one with its
very limitlessness. In any case, such confinement suggests an
encrustation of the soul and so extensive a deterioration of
human will power that man seems to be only a shell; succumbing
at the end, he cracks suddenly so that one would never imagine
that it could be the human soul which expired at the end.

The permanent confinement of the human soul in an anti­
human ambiance is the uniform predicament of the characters.
The plight of the protagonist in "The Pit and the Pendulum" is
not of this order, even though his actions are circumscribed by
the narrow prism of the pit. For like Poe's analytic, vigorous,
life-asserting characters, he has a strong will and a keen
intelligence which prevails over his environment. Furthermore, his environment cannot properly be described as inhuman "ambiance" in the sense that Usher's can, for the instruments of torture in "The Pit...." are the product of some kind of human rationale, one which can be analyzed and escaped, but again, only by superior human intelligence. Usher's ambiance thickened by innumerable shrouds of dust is an emblem of his soul. To penetrate the mystery of the house, the tarn and the thick walls of leaden air, he would have to know himself. But even if Usher were capable of knowing himself, he would discover that his illness was caused by forces alien to our preconceived notions of humanity, forces that do not seem to be recognizably human. The substance which confines, whether it is the walls of the house, or in "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" the white walls of the universe, seem inhuman because it is ultimate in its changelessness and immobility. Its presence is always oppressively sensed, even when like the scarcely visible "air" in Usher it can barely be seen. Try as much as one will, he cannot escape from it, even when he is sure that he is about to be destroyed.

The fear of confinement, of being buried alive, which is perpetually expressed in Poe's stories, arises from not merely an imprisonment in a narrow space, even though claustrophobia is one of the forms it takes. Terror arises from the sense of being helplessly alone in illimitable space; a kind of agoraphobia is faintly expressed in "Eureka" as terror of the infinite
and adoration of beauty are fused in synonyms for grandeur and awe. Fear, therefore, seems for the most part to arise from insufferable confinement or its opposite extreme, where any limits of space, time, and worlds dissolve and one becomes an orphan alone in the universe. On the other hand in tales like "The Fall...", "The Island of the Fay," and "The Mask of the Red Death," fear is diffuse; everything apart from the individual is so constant a threat to him that he would strive to avoid any kind of contact and ultimately to recoil within himself. As Usher, for one, realizes only too well anxiety arises within himself; and yet he is powerless to control it; fear breeds more intense anxiety, which in turn arouses panic and the frantic desire to escape. But, as Usher surely asked himself, from what specifically? and how? how does one escape from oneself? This is the very desperate predicament of "The Man of the Crowd."

Like so many of the others, he cannot tolerate being alone. The key to his personality is the epigraph at the beginning of the tale: "Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul."

The most utterly confining prison, then, is one's own soul. Sick and dying, it is "the type and the genius of deep crime"; even in the bustling world its permanent condition is desolate isolation. Ever attempting to make a restitution with the world, to establish some sort of contact, he is destined to fail pitifully. His involvement in the crowd is minimal: he is one among many. He is unable to establish contact with anyone, even with the curious observer who follows him everywhere. At the
end of the tale, he "stopped fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk..." (IV, 145). Though he cannot really involve himself with anyone, not even with the narrator who would want to speak to him, yet his accumulated tension is manifest through the frenzied expenditure of energy in a rather basic activity: sheer physical movement. That motor activity is terrifyingly incomplete and abnormal in its uninterrupted duration of at least 24 hours. However, it is ultimately more satisfying than the almost complete suspension of any activity at all that the ailing characters in "The Island of the Fay" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" experience. The anxiety Roderick Usher feels is so diffuse that it totally incapacitates him. He is fatally enclosed in a small area; in a sense he has already expired on the physical plane of existence. Usher engages in some kind of highly abstract intellectual inquiry, but toward the end of the story he lapses into a stony silence which is finally broken involuntarily by that last surge of contained motion (emotion), when he begins to tremble in the anxiety attack, as the lid of the tomb of his sister rattles when she breaks demonically out of it.

Confinement imposes a limit upon even the slimmest assertions of human activity, inasmuch as it represents that concrete or invisible force which binds and restricts. It serves also to fix in time that which is by nature fluid and mobile and has no fixed boundaries, so that this constantly changing something
may be made amenable to some sort of description and definition. In the poem "To -- --," the poet achieves a glimpse of his beloved who is so terribly remote. He is able to perceive her partly because she can remain motionless for a certain duration of time.

Insulation and confinement, then, in their most comprehensive sense in Poe's tales and poems have two related and yet quite independent meanings: first, as the rigid and immobile condition of the human body and the soul; second, as stasis, the technique by which meaning is conveyed through definitions, plastic images and numerous stylistic devices which suggest the absence of motion and change. These two aspects of confinement, one a matter of ontology, the other, a matter of epistemology, may be expressed in another way that is more vivid, if less comprehensive: first, as the description of the ailing nervous system—petrification though panic; second, as the attempt to solve mysteries by neat formulae, analytical exercises, rationales, and metaphors which function as rationales. Though ontology and epistemology constitute two independent areas of study, they are made by Poe to relate to each other by the concept of confinement or insulation. When Poe wrote that "the slightest appearance of mystery—of any point I cannot exactly comprehend—puts me at once into a pitiable state of agitation," he was not justifying his preoccupation with puzzles by referring to them as a trivial intellectual game. He was insisting in fact that
his very life depended upon this sort of intellectual gymnastics. However, definition implies the kind of intellectual confinement and lack of mobility (even while it may at the same time imply certitude) that was precariously associated with mental ailments characterized by a stony rigidity. Poe himself might well have been aware then of the paradoxical values communicated by language as he chose to use it: on the one hand the very emblem of knowledge and achievement, but on the other a symptom of confinement and disease and death, whose very fixity is inhuman. Though at times he militated against "fixity" in language (in didactic art), at other times in "The Philosophy of Composition" he prized the fixed, clearly defined rationale of a poem. Yet he would never have admitted that the effects of his rationale could ever be rigid. For he wrote that mediocrity in style is manifest by a specious vitality and motion; the style of poetry he strove to achieve would have to express vitality and motion as that "undercurrent of suggestion" which would make the boundaries of structure fluid and life-like.

What he clearly desired was a style that could suggest both uniformity and change, meaning and suggestion, knowledge and mystery, truth and beauty, the absolute and the finite, the objective and the subjective—all at one time. In the satires and that satirical counterpart of "The Philosophy of Composition," "How to Write an Article for Blackwood," Poe exhibits only the most rigid—and also the most arbitrary—modes of
calculation, as he explains how one may compose a tale by assembling a series of disconnected and unrelatable items and creating out of them some sort of hodge-podge that is coherent only because it is all contained within several pages. The meaning of any one of the elements in the satires is not conditioned by the poetic whole in which it occurs; instead its meaning which exists independently of the tale itself is taken from the dictionary used by the 15th rate writer of sensational tales and romances. In his exhaustive study, The Romantic Agony, Mario Praz has catalogued many of the devices and themes. Poe's satires make a mockery of exploiting literary conventions and passing them off as art.

For the measure of art, Poe says again and again, is the unity of effect. His rationale of composition, which is indeed a stable structure, is designed to create a unity of effect. Paradoxically it is also designed to catalyze the meanings of words and conventional literary devices that would, without such structuring, remain fixed and desiccated. In Poe's finest tales, a word, a conventional device, perforce loses its characteristic of having a precise meaning; instead, it strikes us as being increasingly meaningful, even while we are more and more at a loss to define the precise meaning. At no point in the poem is the meaning fixed. Instead it seems ever to accrue to words. At the end of the story or poem, Poe might occasionally attempt to translate the metaphor (when Poe explains only in "The Philosophy of Composition" that the raven is made
emblematical of "mournful and never ending remembrance," or in "William Wilson" when the double finally identifies himself as the conscience) and thereby bring to the surface the undercurrent of suggestivity which pervades the entire tale. But even such paraphrase, as we have seen in chapter 4, is incomplete, for it does not disclose the mechanism, the rationale of deliberate obscurity seen everywhere in Poe's tales. Poe's characters suffer in response to crimes they committed long ago. They have forgotten those crimes, even while their"effects" obtain. All of them are oppressed by a sense of doom. But they cannot conceive of how they might know what the catastrophe is and how, by knowing it, they might forestall it.

The final truth, then, is the sense of the future immanent in the present. It is, indeed, the raison d'être of every superstition, prophecy, curse, and law. Behind every attempt at theorizing and analysis lies the demonic intention to arrive at the cause for tomorrow's event. Every law we place our faith in gives us the rationale of predictability. The capacity to "guess," to intuit without resorting to analysis of any sort, is clairvoyance. And the superstition which oppresses us with a sense of doom makes us wish that we were divine so that we could read the future events in the present. The ideal man, for Poe, is by nature both a saint and a fortune teller. (He only seems to be a magician or miracle worker.) For only such a being is able to see the end in the beginning.
The tarn in "The Fall. . ." is like a primeval, rank continent; being the primary condition of all things, it is "out of time." It is destined to swallow the house of Usher. The catastrophic collapse of the house is quite believable, only because we were able to anticipate it (and perhaps, precipitate it ourselves). The cat (in "The Black Cat"), the beating heart (in "The Tell-Tale Heart"), the prodigious horse (in "Metzengerstein"), William Wilson's double, the Red Death, the hieroglyphics in "Arthur Gordon Pym," the prodigious imagination and intellect of Dupin who could "guess" the end in the beginning, the representation of that twilight universe (between life and death) in the fairyland poems and in the parables ("Shadow--A Parable"; "Silence," "Oval Portrait" and "The Landscape Garden"), the representation of death-in-life through the weird women of Poe's "Berenice," "Morella," "Ligeia," and "Eleonora," the image of death and eternity in the colloquies—all these themes and devices in Poe's stories and poems express the fact that ultimates and absolutes are immanent and observable to the poet who can perceive them in time. His tales express again and again that transition from the final stages of penultimate experiences to those that are ultimate: as in "The Premature Burial" and "Mesmeric Revelation," where the dissolution of life is paradoxically a state of being that approaches by degrees death itself. Poe's tales overwhelmingly end with death, more specifically the final convulsion before the last breath, and the apocalyptic dissolution into nothingness. From
the very beginning we are prepared for this catastrophe, as Poe said we would be in "The Philosophy of Composition." For the end, as he tells us again and again is immanent in the very beginning.

In "Eureka" the principle of "Unity-Radiation-Diffusion-Return to Unity" formulates the central principle of the universe as well as a technique that Poe mastered in his finest tales. The condition of unity, the absolute for Poe, was the experience beyond death. As we have earlier observed it has no moral or religious substance. At times it appears to be unreal in the sense that it is called a fairy land as in the poems "Annabel Lee" and "Eleonora." At other times, it is terrifying; it is an atomistic resolution into the primeval unity, the dissolution of individuation, where human beings no longer have an independent existence from each other. Since the end is immanent from the very beginning, the possibility for variation and change is limited. Since death is the ultimate condition, what is immanent from the beginning, must be made to take place eventually. That transition from what is implied to what at the end must be stated outright is the precise moment when everything achieves a grotesqueness that is "beyond the real." Ever so gradually one or two objects begin to change in a most unusual way. The alteration of the objects are most incredible and improbable. They defy comparison to anything that is within the realm of human experience: the weird sudden vitality of the tapestry in "Metzengerstein," the increasingly prodigious powers
of the cat in "The Black Cat," the beating of the dead man's heart, the sudden collapse of the house of Usher, the violent transformations of Ligeia, Morella, Eleonora, and Berenice. All are examples of Poe's "going beyond reality," which are really instances where the materials of art transcend the reality of the sensuous world.

The end which is the beginning, the original unity, defines a circle, any one of whose still points is both the beginning and the end. The change in the stories is often little more than an uninterrupted, increasing intensity of the initial response, the initial effects. To achieve the uninterrupted unity of effect and continuity of response, Poe forges together one detail with another so tightly that all details seem to merge into each other and lose their sense of individuation, especially in the graphic image of the maelstrom. The boat follows a circular path which gets narrower and narrower at the base like a funnel; its occupants sail at a speed that is almost unendurable to its occupants. In psychological terms, Usher is suffering from "circular insanity," the manic and depressive modes alternately expressed. Sometimes the circular funnel-like walls begin to revolve at enormous speeds, or the swinging pendulum which appears stationary at an enormous distance above the ground, begins to move and descend slowly; even when the hero in the pit closes his eyes so that he will not see the pendulum descending upon him, the hissing blade grows louder and louder as it slices the air by degrees. As long as
the poet has any one of his five senses about him, he can be aware of what is going on and register an emotion which sustains and adds a further dimension to the unity of effect. The reader senses the protagonist's agonized writhing and twisting until he asks himself when the degree of intensity will become unendurable and be brought to an end by sheer excess of effect. The simoon, recurring throughout Poe's tales, is emblematic of the sudden, violent and destructive change that can take place, both in the sea tales and in describing the sudden inexplicable illnesses of Berenice, Eleonora, Ligeia, and Morella. The abrupt realization of a prophecy, a superstition or a curse, is a violent recoiling to the beginning of the tale, which one realizes with horror is only the end. Davidson remarked about the poem "Annabel Lee" that the long line at the end of each stanza with its musical repetition suggests a recoiling back to the meanings expressed throughout the stanza; it is like a wave which aspires to the shore, only to recoil back to the sea, leaving the sand smooth and glossy. The epigraph at the beginning of each tale cryptically (cryptic, because, like the cipher it is both concise and mysterious) expresses the rationale which is, of course, no plain moral. Instead the theme enunciated in the epigraph defines the conditions under which one can understand the events as well as the special stylistic mode by which they are unfolded step by step; stated in literary terms, the epigraph succinctly expresses the content and the form.
Continuity and therefore intensity may be achieved by an unvaried repetition of one word or phrase. One recalls in "The Raven" the bird's nonsensical "Nevermore"; in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the madman's bizarre reiteration of his belief that he is perfectly sane. No matter what the narrator will say, however, we know very well that he is mad. We have observed, then, the changeless base: the refrain, the epigraph, the curse, the prodigious images, the emblems and the mirrors. All succinctly define the philosophical premises which subsume the perspective of timelessness in Poe's art. That stable base is the absolute against which everything else is measured. Alone it cannot exist; to endure in time, it depends, Poe insists, paradoxically upon change itself. The absolute juxtaposed against the finite is delicately and tenderly expressed in a specific passage in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una." Monos describes for Una exactly what he sensed when he perceived eternity and time simultaneously. He speaks of the sixth sense, a "mental pendulous sensation," "The moral embodiment of man's abstract idea of Time." According to this sense of absolute time the movements of the spheres are regulated. Monos could have analyzed this sensation and proceeded to speak philosophically on the nature of time. Instead, he expresses precisely how one feels when he experiences both eternity and time; in this way he reveals both his yearning and love for life and his ripening immortality.
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 deviation from the true proportion—and these deviations were omni-prevalent—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 individual seconds accurately together, yet I had no difficulty in holding steadily in mind the tones, and the respective momentary errors of each... (IV, 208-9).

In "The Rationale of Verse," the stable base of poetry is defined in terms of principles whose connotations are both musical and mathematical. In his characteristically analytical manner, Poe describes the one principle that generates verse, a basic primitive structure that, he claims, is obvious, because it is so very simple. "The Rudiment of verse may possibly be found in the spondee." (XIV, 220). The spondee is the rhythmic receptual of the absolute, the "beginning-end" from which all variations are generated.

The very germ of a thought seeking satisfaction in equality of sound would result in the construction of words of two syllables, equally accented (XIV, 220). The spondee, therefore, embodies the abstract idea of equality in rhythm. And equality, Poe said "embraces those of similarity, proportion, identity, repetition, and adaptation or fitness" (XIV, 218) (my italics). The spondee repeated twice suggests the idea of monotone. To perpetuate this idea, rhythmic variety is introduced as "the principle's natural safeguard from self-destruction by excess of self" (XIV, 220). This principle—the necessity to introduce change and variety in order to perpetuate the original idea expressed in the sublime monotone—
is central in "The Philosophy of Composition," where Poe rejects the possibility of sustaining enthusiasm and interest beyond a specific moment of time and beyond a predetermined length of a poem. After a certain period of time, the intensity of response "flags--fails--[and] a revulsion ensues." On a smaller scale this principle is reiterated in the need to vary the spondee with other rhythmic patterns. Limiting himself specifically to rhythm, then, Poe demonstrates in "The Rationale of Verse" that from the initial base, the spondee, ensues all further change and variation paradoxically perpetuating in sudden unexpected lapses here and there the illusion of monotone, the aboriginal element of verse. Change begins as the repetition of the spondee is curtailed.

The idea first of curtailing, and secondly, of defining the length of a sequence would thus at once have arisen (XIV, 223).

But the value placed on equality, on returning in part to the rhythmic base, on the desperate need to return, to arrive at the end, and the beginning as well, is clearly revealed as Poe scrutinizes "terminations" of lines and stanzas, and again on the smallest level, the sequences of meters. The specific terms he uses in summarizing the implications of his conception of the contours of a stanza reveal the extent of Poe's preoccupation with definition, limitation, and confinement.

The consideration of this last equality would give birth immediately to the idea of stanza, that is to say, the insulation of lines into equal or obviously proportional masses (XIV, 226) (my italics).
He writes that the purpose of written scansion is "the distinct marking of the rhythmical, musical, or reading flow" (XIV, 253). To place poetry in a mold by scanning lines is to risk assuming that every spondee has the same duration. Poe might well have realized this. However, one is inclined to believe that he really failed to realize that there is an infinite range of qualitative differences in the spondee itself, variations that are perceivable even though they can hardly be defined at all. For his frequent propensity to scan lines and demand of himself that he define in advance the specific rhythmic patterns which might be expected to give relief to that monotony of the spondee may well have resulted in the hyper-rigid rhythmic variations in "The Raven," and also in that gross failure, "Bells." For both poems reveal that at times Poe had a poor musical ear. But they reveal an even more crucial characteristic of Poe's thought, one which destroyed his art: having once created a complex rationale for perpetuating the absolute, he should not have clung so closely to it. For such a rigid commitment to his own philosophy made it ultimately impossible for Poe to sacrifice his principles for his art. Through transcending his own rationale, he would have remained flexible, bold and alive. In the last analysis, if we believe—as I think we must—that art exists to remind man of what he can ideally become, measured against what he really is, then the man imaged in everything he creates will eventually transcend art itself. How wonderful would Poe have been, had he with a flourish of humor boldly
said that his rationales were all a joke—even if he didn’t be-
lieve they really were and even if he did not want us to believe
it either. But to reject oneself by refusing to take oneself
too seriously requires too great, perhaps too destructive, a
sense of irony. And above all things, the one rare gift Poe
lacked altogether was a sense of irony.

Poe was ever trying to define and confine in specific
rhythmic patterns the "step by step" progression away from and
toward the monotonous spondee. This progression from the begin-
ning to the end resembles the analytic mode not of Dupin but of
Poe, the slightly pedantic and puerile author of "Maelzel's
Chess-Player" and "A Few Words on Secret Writing." In "The
Rationale of Verse" Poe attempted to analyze the unanalyzable;
for he tried to place limits upon, to insulate, to define, to
mark, that which flows and will not be confined. That he has
failed convincingly to do this in "The Rationale of Verse" does
not mean that there are no limits and that there is no base.
For in the finest passages of his tales and poetry, Poe has ex-
pressed those limits, demonstrating that life, motion, beauty,
and varieties of rhythms generate from it. Unity and departures
from it: this is the central principle in "The Rationale of
Verse" and "The Philosophy of Composition." It expresses also
the central principle of "Eureka." And so with a brief recol-
lection of "Eureka," we return to the beginning, in which, as
Poe would want us to, we shall find his end.
CHAPTER VI
FROM SUBSTANCE TO MEANING

The problem of unity and coherence which I raised in my introduction seems to be -- as stated there -- rather an academic question. And indeed it is, if we fail in our conclusions to go beyond the rather objective and hence neutral meanings that such words as "unity", "structure," and "coherence" suggest. As I have tried to maintain throughout, the problem of understanding Poe cannot be resolved simply by determining whether or not his work is unified. Indeed the question of unity in any literary work must mean much more to us than a comprehensive principle of organization that theoretically accounts for every element in a work. My purpose, therefore, throughout this study has not been only to demonstrate that Poe has managed in a few works to achieve coherence. My concern with structure, in other words, is not merely objective and neutral. Indeed, I believe that even his brilliant tales, "William Wilson" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" cannot be great. For we know in a way that supercedes our logic that his finest work is a failure and that we cannot place him in a class along with the genuinely finest writers we instinctively think of in any discussion of literary masterpieces -- Sophocles, Shakespeare, Melville, Tolstoy, Dostoevski, and so the list would go.

The failure of Poe's work arises from the quality of unity and resolution he achieves. The greatest art embodies a sense of resolution and peace. It expresses a state of human perfection and suggests that once achieved such perfection may endure without becoming stale and
atrophy. In its degraded form, resolution is expressed by the happy ending of a tale, constructed upon a series of rationalizations. In its most exalted form it is conveyed -- as George Steiner has written in his study *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* -- as an "armistice with disaster."

So that even if we are overwhelmed by King Lear's "No, no, no, no, no," at the end of the play, yet we recall perhaps more vividly the scene overflowing with tenderness and pathos where Lear is united once again with his "poor fool," Cordelia. Even though we wish that Roskolnikov did not have to make his pilgrimage to Siberia to expiate his crime, yet we recall of all the scenes in *Crime and Punishment* the catharsis, when he confesses his crimes to Sonya. Though we are saddened by Prince Bolkonski's untimely death, we sense an enormous relief in knowing that he perhaps among all the characters in *War and Peace* achieved in his brief life the greatest sense of peace and resolution that is for him a kind of beatitude. Even though the rest of the crew drowns, Ishmael has survived to offer us a vision of life that is more than the mere documentary of "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." Even though Faust must go to Hell in the end, yet we remember the joy he experienced in meeting the legendary Helen of Troy -- and it is ironic indeed that Mephistopheles himself conjured all that beauty for Faust. With Poe's tales curiously enough we never remember moments of resolution. For indeed there are none. Instead we recall only the catastrophe. It never occurs to us that the protagonist in "The Pit and the Pendulum" was ever to be liberated. As far as our lasting impression is concerned, we recall only the pendulum descending by degrees and the filthy rodents clustered like bees around his chest and face.
The contrary states of disaster and fury together with resolution and beatitude are the hallmark of the greatest tragic art. We are made through it to believe deeply -- even when we cannot explain precisely why -- in the transcendence of the beautiful and the good. We are comforted in being made mysteriously to expect that after suffering and negation a state of love, harmony and perfection, however brief, will ensue. Whenever we read Dostoevski and Shakespeare we know that affirmation and a return to the community, that -- in a word -- love is indeed more powerful than alienation and hate and that in the end it is love that must triumph. Though such reaffirmation following disaster is perhaps the only genuine intimation of heaven we shall ever have on earth, no reconstitution can occur before there has been some sort of alienation. To say, therefore, that one of the most comprehensive themes in Poe's art is the fact of man's alienation is to repeat what must be true for nearly all great art. Renunciation is, indeed, a theme that supercedes art; it is the myth of victims selected from among the members of their community to be slaughtered. The ambivalence their community feels toward them is analogous to the sentiments we experience before some of the most problematic heroes in literature. Once alienated, they are reviled for wrecking the status quo of society and also celebrated for giving us a ghastly, fascinating and spectacular glimpse into another plane of reality which we are free to explore ourselves.

Both history and art reveal then that there are two contrary tendencies expressed again and again for all time: the urge to move forward, to progress, to make daring and frightening discoveries; and the contrary impulse to remain where we are so that we can absorb what we have
discovered and determine its relevance for us. They are the impulse toward discovery and disorder (a softening and falling to pieces of the machinery of government, an alienation from commitment, a disintegration of the personality) and the impulse toward order and reintegration (civilization, status quo, unity). Put another way, these are essentially characteristics of romanticism (epitomized by rebellion in art, society, politics, etc.) and classicism (represented by the celebration of the status quo). Classicism manifests the attempt to create on earth a timeless Nirvana, a city of God. It is both the image of pure beauty and pleasure, and also -- as Freud has said -- the harbinger of death. For when the striving to achieve Heaven is subdued and partly realized through institutions of government, architecture, art, etc., people begin to live under the false illusion that the ideal has been achieved. Novelists who write to please such a public manufacture happy endings. They are oblivious to the fact that the supple unity of the realized ideal that exists perhaps only for a fraction of an instant, hardens and congeals so that institutions become fixed, frozen and mechanical. Then great artists sense painfully that the sky is no longer a sky, but a grave -- or a ceiling however vaulted; and that we are imprisoned within and must somehow find our way out. At such time there exists -- to use a phrase so often reiterated -- a crisis in culture; there is a crisis in art as well. Whoever accepts the responsibility of attempting a new solution and a new resolution, a new Nirvana, must have sensed the oppressive disparity between the real and the ideal. We risk believing in the end that we loved only what was the ideal. It is only the greatest artist who somehow keeps himself from rejecting out of
disgust the naked, the real substance of his existence. Even in the act of renunciation, he strives to find something he can love and affirm, something real which he can maintain as ideal. He manages, thus, willingly and joyfully to forgo repudiation before it is too late, before, that is, he has destroyed himself and his art, along with everything else.

Poe's enormous failing as an artist is that he really did not know when he should have called an end to renunciation. He was unable, therefore, to achieve any kind of peace and resolution. The real and the ideal then are not only antithetical terms in the dialectic in Poe's art. By their very antithesis, they are unrelated. For Poe there can be no synthesis which implies the resolution of the conflict between the real and the ideal, the temporary emergence in society and in art of a new status quo, and inevitably the incorporation into Heaven of the earthly Nirvana through the resurrection of the body and the soul. Poe's art which expresses only the struggle to achieve peace without in the end achieving it cannot be life-giving. In the absence of peace and love, the emotions most prevalent are hate and aggression. And the overriding principle of order in his work is a rationale of death. He is detached and objective toward -- in a word, uninvolved with -- his characters. And the result of such impersonality is a kind of knowledge that is anti-human, one that from our human and ideal perspective perforce seems immensely vacuous.

It will be my purpose in this chapter to discuss Poe's failure as an artist in greater detail. In the end we must condemn Poe's art, and yet not prevent ourselves from reading it. Because he went all the way in attempting to make impossible, suicidal discoveries, we should, if we are
practical, be warned against similar spiritual quests. Indeed, Poe has seemed to terrify Allen Tate in his ominous essay, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe." Poe has in some mysterious way unsettled many American critics who have ostracised (repressed) him from the recognized group of great American writers. But the fact is that a few of the greatest symbolist poets in France have elected to worship him. They are the ones who have been guided by the principle of perversity that structures the tragic romance of life and art: we do something for the very reason that we should not. Motivated in this way, we too will learn one day to cherish Poe, the victim whom we also revile. And even when we are not aware of it, his art might ironically become for us the prelude to our own suicidal achievements.

The Rationale of Death

D. H. Lawrence and Allen Tate have casually observed that it was Poe who discovered the great theme of our day, the disintegration of the personality. Important theories concerning the human mind are rarely discovered without any forewarning. For example, Freud's theory of repression has frequently been accounted for at least in part by Victorian prudery and authoritarianism. Since repression had been observed again and again as a psychological and cultural phenomenon, scientists were bound to discover its "mechanism," its modus operandi. Such observations and discoveries are made when the power groups, the social and political legislators, make impossible demands upon the health, reason and imagination of the individual. Unreasonable laws and conventions are bound to
be critically observed, analyzed and evaluated, and, thereupon, revised or liquidated. When we say, therefore, that Poe discovered the great theme of our times, the disintegration of the personality, we must respond to the magnitude and the destructive potentialities of such a discovery. The measures Poe takes are so extreme that if we grant that he has any sense of responsibility whatever, we must take his beliefs as constituting reactions to insupportable deprivations imposed upon him by others. When his thesis is harshly formulated and maintained stubbornly throughout his career, when he refuses to modulate the categorical tone of his assertions, then his discovery, we feel, is as much a product of hate as it might have been an expression of love. Through his hypothetical dissociation from reality in art, he rebelled against his times in a most extreme sense. He failed to write about his own people, his society, his history and chose instead to cultivate the Gothic romance. But by destroying the moral sensibility and by cutting off beauty from the substantial world of real objects, and finally by celebrating the mathematical symbol in "Eureka" as the very substance of life, he revolted in the most radical sense against his age. For his was a renunciation of humanity, his own humanity, his art, a mad and pitiful celebration of suicide, and, therefore, a triumphant and irrevocable leavetaking of his world.

In the extremity and violence of the measures he took, we see therefore a symptom not merely of his own illness but of the psychopathology of his times. Pressured by the highly restricted propagandistic function of art, the poet would have been forced to conform (and, thereby, destroy himself as artist), to make some sort of pitiful compromise, or
to write to those who would embrace him, the imaginary audience. In the event he chose not to compromise, but to insist stubbornly, sublimely, and at times childishly upon his own independence and superiority, he might become more interested in fighting a war with his society, than in devoting himself to his art. He might then be tempted to mobilize his art with a rigid and mechanical efficiency, capable of surviving and triumphing against the onslaught of the greater machine of society. Poe, the antagonist of his times, categorically formulated a strategy and nothing ultimately was too precious to be sacrificed in the name of rebellion.

Passages in "The Poetic Principle," "The Philosophy of Composition," and "The Rationale of Verse" read like a manifesto composed by a man who is preparing for war. Whatever happens in Poe's art does not take place gradually; it happens all at once, and once initiated, it is over. From the first time that beauty fled to Al Aaraaf in the poem "To Science," she did not languish and die as a frail damsel too weak to engage in battle, she retired only to fortify herself in order to reclaim the ground that science and sterile didactic art has usurped. But the tragic irony is that in order to grow strong, beauty had to learn from science how to fight the war. In Poe's art, then, we see a classic example of the inevitable corruption of passion that degenerates into power achieved through calculation and strategy. Beauty itself, a product of a machine for composition, was at best scarcely more than the emblem of perfect consistency, harmony, stasis -- the state of Nirvana itself. Poe's art is the product of an idiot savant mind which engineered an incorporeal reality by means of a hierarchy of complex rationales.
We would not condemn Poe so vigorously had he been totally oblivious to the destructive potentialities of his passion for abstraction. But he knew precisely what he was doing; he knew that he was in a sense destroying himself. And such knowledge only lured him on to more destructive and impossible speculations. In "Berenice" he describes certain philosophical works which, he claims, precipitate the mental breakdown of the narrator.

My books, at this epoch, if they did not actually serve to irritate the disorder, partook, it will be perceived, largely, in their imaginative and inconsequential nature, of the characteristic qualities of the disorder itself (II, 20).

But he persists in valuing abstraction, as we have already observed, in so many of his tales. In "The Black Cat," he writes of the perversity of objective reasoning. And at the same time his own reasoning in "Maelzel's Chess-Player" and the tales of ratiocination is passionless and objective. In "The Black Cat" and in "William Wilson" the chief character is doomed to die because he has lost his capacity to love; yet, in not one tale, do any of Poe's characters express love that is recognizably human. In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" he bitterly criticizes men who in his "infantile imbecility" would attempt to achieve universal knowledge. Yet in "Eureka" Poe desires above all to "have the mind of God." Poe claims that such desires are fatal and mad.

Pure Diabolism is but Absolute Insanity. Lucifer was merely unfortunate in having been created without brains (XVI, 160).

All-absolutely all the argumentation which I have seen on the nature of the soul, or of the Deity, seems to me nothing but worship of his unnameable idol. _Pour savoir ce qu'est Dieu_, says Biefield, although nobody listens to the solemn truth, _il faut etre Dieu meme_—and to reason about the reason is of all things the most unreasonable. At least, he alone is fit to discuss the topic who perceives at a glance the insanity of its discussion (XVI, 130).
By writing "Eureka," then, Poe implicitly admits -- in light of this passage -- that such striving is a manifestation of insanity. A writer who could permit himself to entertain thoughts he condemns, to create characters patently insane, and to attempt impossible goals: that he knows only those persons oblivious to the limitations of reality would ever think of achieving confounds us. Poe's interests furthermore are grotesque and perverse. We find it hard to conceive why he should have chosen from all possible areas of human experience to cultivate a taste for passionless abstraction and frigid puzzles and why he should have chosen to project in the evil geniuses of crime the mind of the insane. Seeing his art as a reaction to his times, we might conclude that perhaps he derived a perverse pleasure in reflecting upon the inevitability of his own mind going to pieces; perhaps through his own partial derangement, he could project for the edification and revelatory of a greatly innocent public one of the most personal and devastating images of disorder.

If such interpretation is tenable, we may confirm the statement made again and again by the most sympathetic of Poe's critics, commencing with Baudelaire: that Poe was the sacrificial victim of his times. Had his contemporaries taken his art seriously, they would have realized that after reading Poe, those values in society which gave the Babbitts of the 1800's a false sense of security and optimism, a faith in the status quo, and a self-righteous pride that was inflated into the euphoria of the commonplace: all these beliefs would have seemed to them like the value of the dollar during a period of high inflation. Poe attacked the spirit
of rationalism and predictability that his contemporaries prized with a rationale of the unpredictable, the inconceivable, the perverse, the incredible. He demolished the categories of truth and falsehood and in their places emerged belief and disbelief. Through the technique of verisimilitude he made us believe in and affirm those things we had said were impossible and frightful. A soul more gentle than Poe's would have resorted to comedy and farce. However, bent upon destruction, for him, only the most virulent satire could do. Through caricature he implied that the Duc de L'Omelet and the vacuous Scheherazade were not merely stupid; they were neurotically stupid for being so complacent and unaffected in a world that is hateful and malignant. They lacked supremely the "imagination of disaster" -- Henry James's superb phrase -- because they could not suffer, even when they were subjected to torture and death on earth and in Hell. For Poe the caricatures are, indeed, an accurate image of that reality where nothing whatsoever relates. For the only laws in the universe are rationales of death. The only pattern that experiences are made to assume in Poe's art is that of the constant recurrence (repetition, reflected in modes of consistency and identity) of the death instinct. In the apocalyptic "going beyond the real," the instinct for death is expressed with impassioned intensity and aggression. And finally in the original unity, reflected in the static Heaven imaged in the poems, death, purified of all anguished striving against life, exists as the ideal state of repose and quiet, Poe's vision of Nirvana.

When the disease, the dialectic of life and death, has run its course, and the conflict is no longer endurable, there follows a crumbling of order and pattern, which makes any reconstitution and return to
health and society impossible. Poe's art begins at the end of the
disease with the breakdown. At the collapse of modes of repression,
the tabooed material of the society which prides itself on its respect­ability becomes embarrassingly audible. As Geoffrey Gorer in "The
Pornography of Death" has perceptively suggested, death repressed for
so long, now, following the nervous breakdown of society is unimpeded.
For Poe, the anti-rationalist, death, no longer repressed, comes to the
surface as the subject of irreverent satire against science("A Few
Words with a Mummy") and a grotesque treatment of mesmerism ("The Facts
in the Case of M. Valdemar"). The morbid and obsessive fascination with
death is a constant preoccupation with Poe, the melancholic, who has
lost the love and respect of everyone, including himself.

In having death as its pervasive theme, Poe's art is unreal in a
very special sense. Surely, in the degree of monstrosity and abnormal­ity and the weirdly proliferating rationales, his art cannot be any
more monstrous than the very real world of Nazi Germany whose manifold
insanity of inhumane order and unparalleled spiritual vacuity has been
so magnificently studied by Eric Kahler and Bruno Bettelheim. Poe's
world -- and by extension the world of Nazi Germany -- are unreal only
in the sense that in neither case are human beings conceived of being
even possibly charitable, compassionate, and loving, the very standards
of human behavior which must be held sacrosanct if we are to survive.

As Poe himself expressly stated, the central perspective from which man's
alienation is to be comprehended is not informed by an ideal which is
recognizably human. Once he says that life itself is abnormal and that
death, the disintegration of all forms and substances into an indif­
ferentiated state of unity, is the ideal toward which all life strives,
he deliberately destroys the possibilities for expressing any vaguely
traditional idealism. Poe's vision of the universe is other-worldly in
its most radical sense. In the ultimate region of Thule, nothing that
was beautiful and good in this world is reaffirmed. Death has ruptured
the continuity of existence; the chasm between this life and the here­
after is so enormous that we should not take for granted the continuity
that we might have believed once existed between our experiences on earth
and our states in heaven. Poetic justice for Poe has at best a suicidally
ironic meaning; except for its grotesque manifestations in "The Black Cat,"
it is generally muted in his works. Dupin, who embodies a weirdly frigid
ideality, perceives not the "atrocity" of the crime, but only its mere
"character." Even when the characters in Poe's tales know from the be­
ginning that they are doomed to die, they do not desire to come to terms
with themselves, to achieve peace, for one brief moment on earth. Except
for a few instances, death or insanity overwhelms and unnerves them
before they are able to speculate for even an instant. Poe's sense of
beauty, then, is neither an intoxication with the senses nor a ripened
sense of poetic justice. At best it is expressed sensuously only as the
ineffable and indeterminate object far away, and abstractly as the harmony
of the rationales themselves. Put another way, it is epitomized by the
idyllic universe and the static Nirvana and by motionless structures. How­
ever, whenever man seeks to experience Nirvana in time, beauty is metamor­
phosed into a ghastly harbinger of death. And when the rationale begins
to work its "modus operandi," images the grinding inexorability of the
machine.
As Allen Tate has observed, there can never be a synthesis in Poe's art. The dialectic between life and death is destined to continue incessantly until any semblance of activity and motion altogether disappears. There can be no compromise; nor can there be growth, much less continuing transformation. In the colloquies alone, life, a spiritual kind of individuation, purified of striving, power and megalomania, is reaffirmed; only in these tales does the life instinct triumph over death. But the triumph is, as Poe himself knows, tragically qualified, for it is purified of evil -- not to mention of life as we know it on earth -- that is the source of so much beauty. In "The Man of the Crowd" beauty and evil are expressed simultaneously.

. . . the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense -- of extreme despair (IV, 140).

In place of the passionate and mad intensity that characterizes human beings who in the face of danger struggle to survive, we see in the colloquies only an image of sublime monotony and eternal repose.

The real and the ideal, motion and stasis, are crucial antithetical terms in the dialectic of Poe's art. They correspond partly to the halves of the universe, severed in two: the objective world and the mind attempting to comprehend it. The objective reality which exists apart from the mind is static. The mind which makes furious attempts at understanding is the chief source of momentum. Only the dream-like intuition which springs suddenly and imperceptibly into consciousness
can grasp Nirvana in time and enable Poe to experience the faintest
timation of resolution. By being able to intuit, man has, in a
limited respect, "the mind of God." Poe does not accept the gift of
intuition with gratitude and humility. Instead, he parades God in man
by solving the riddle of the toy chess-player with sham intuitions;
the intuition comes to provide in "Eureka" knowledge that is both sub-
lime and grotesque. Finally, unsatisfied with such indefinite knowledge,
Poe attempts again and again to analyze the unanalyzable intuition. The
price he must pay is frustration and fear of having to surrender to
ignorance. His despair deepens shortly after he experiences a sense of
elation when he has solved another riddle. Finally as with the specious
joy of the melancholic everything resembling euphoria disappears, when
he confronts a mystery he cannot penetrate. For once the conflict, the
dialectic, has run its course, nothing of the manic state remains.

But before Poe arrives at that static dead end, human activity
deteriorates into a feverish flight and search, as we see in the case
of the man of the crowd. He cannot attain his goal, for neither he, the
narrator, nor we, know exactly what it is. Nevertheless, he must persist,
since the habit of searching and journeying can no sooner be broken than
can an addiction to drugs. Though, judging from the surface, a calm
seems at times to have descended, the stony rigidity and abstracted
glance indicate that the calm is at best specious, that order has been
rigorously imposed in order to contain and conceal the senseless raging.
The more severe the control, the more certain is the agitation within.
For Poe, in life as in art, growth and development is only a progression
from one activity that is intense and excitable to another that is even
more intense and excitable. Progression does not for him constitute "growth" in any "normal" sense. Events in life are artificially presented to lead to a climax; experiences are valued in terms of their emotional effects, which are invariably crass fear and horror.

Obviously, given these restrictions on art, the possibilities of variation are necessarily minimal. That Poe realized this himself may explain why he decided not to write any longer pieces after having tried his hand at "The Narrative..." The obsessively repetitious pattern of deception-revolt is bound to initiate a revulsion in the reader. Poe would not have been able to continue shocking the reader without either boring him or else making a nervous wreck of him. He might, as a result, from nagging desperation have brought his novel to an end, but not to a conclusion. Even on the last pages, the activity does not cease. It is merely interrupted, concluded, not finished or perfected. In "The Fall..." the catastrophe occurs when the walls of the mansion collapse. But in "The Narrative..." the icy walls of the universe remain intact. He does not present that timeless state conceived only after an apocalyptic denouement. In "The Fall...", however, he gives us a glimpse of the before, motion and life, and the after, stasis and death. Because stasis and motion are not presented simultaneously, life is fraught with growing tension, increasing rigidity, and a maddening rush of activity. Threatened increasingly with furious onslaughts of destruction, the desire to live asserts itself more and more frantically. The mammoth instinct for life at the very threshold of death transforms man into a monster.
"O God!" half shrieked Ligeia, leaping to her feet and extending her arms aloft with a spasmodic movement, as I made an end of these lines -- "O God! O Divine Father! -- shall these things be undeviatingly so? -- shall this Conqueror be not once conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who -- who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigour? Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will (II, 257).

But immediately after the final convulsion there reigns an insufferable and inhuman tranquility. Calm silence in eternity, is sublime. In time, it becomes destructive and terrifying. In the two parables, "Silence" and "Shadow," the "curse of silence" is the mystery that will not permit itself to be revealed. The "shadow" is the stationary reminder of "the well remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends," whose inexplicable recurrence in memory and metaphor gives rise to feelings of the uncanny, feelings which Poe would attempt to relieve by analysis. Poe's passion for analysis and explanation rises steadily in "Mesmeric Revelation" as he probes demonically into the mysteries at the very precipice of death. But in the colloquies the demonic tone of analysis is altogether muted.

In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" and "The Colloquy of Eiros and Charmion," the two divine beings speak to each other, not to a human reader. In the fables "Silence" and "Shadow," a being out of time addresses his readers on this earth.

Ye who read are still among the living; but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows (II, 147).

What the shadow says cannot be understood, no more than can a superstition be comprehended and analyzed, except by a fortune teller or a clairvoyant. The meaning of the message from the hereafter can be only
suggested; those still alive suffer in confronting the mysteries of merely suggested meanings. But the beings in Nirvana can speak directly and clearly to each other. Indeed, among all of Poe’s characters, they are the only ones who can understand each other.

The state of being expressed in the colloquies implies the absolute standards against which every human activity is evaluated. Eiros and Charmion, Monos and Una have achieved absolute knowledge. They claim that human beings on earth have no such perfect knowledge, that, indeed, man desires only to reiterate what is false since the lie can protect him from suffering the destructive consequences of truth. Whoever can bear to achieve even a glimmer of reality and truth must, therefore, transcend his humanity. There is something in man's nature which makes it impossible for him to believe in the ontologically real substance of the universe. Man believes so deeply in what protects him, that he tries in "The Colloquy of Eiros and Charmion" to demonstrate the harmlessness of the comet. As the manifestations of the comet become increasingly apparent, "Even the grossly ignorant aroused their sluggish capacities to such considerations" (VI, 5). Gradually as the "lingering hope that the astronomers were wrong" was dismissed, everyone everywhere experienced "all the certainty of evil." Where knowing entails experiencing evil and implies certain annihilation, we wonder whether indeed to lie is not more moral than to tell the truth. For Poe, however, no price is too great to pay for belief in the impossible.

Belief in the impossible is the major theme in Poe's work. For Poe the impossible possibility is the only legitimate study of man; a study
designed for any other purposes constitutes a rationalization by which man may justify his own value. For Poe, however, man has no meaning and value, and, therefore, to speak of human beings at all is irrelevant and absurd. Rather one should forgo one's identity and humanity in order to arrive at truth. This is the only way one can get to know the universe. What one learns about it is true, only if paradoxically such truth is impossible to conceive of: "'certum est quia impossibile est!'" (II, 21). And, ironically, the only thing that we can with certainty say about the universe is that it has no identity.

Analysis, Disintegration, and Vacuity

Definition by default is the only categorical meaning Poe appropriates to the undefinable. The very absence of identity and specificity, the invisible, uncontained, and undefined, is given therefore a legitimate predicate: the absence of identity. Ontology conceived in this way can be pursued only at the enormous price of self-alienation. For existence, which embraces manifold categories, precludes ontology, and conversely, ontology -- which is committed to only one category defined as the very lack of any categories -- excludes existence. In the beginning of "Eureka" Poe selects one hypothesis which John S. Mill regarded as "the quintessence of axiomatic undeniability." "Contradictions cannot both be truth -- that is, cannot coexist in nature." Because Poe earlier states that there is no such thing as an axiom, we are inclined to assume that he would try to disprove Mill's axiom. But he does not; he merely rejects the reason that Mill established such an
axiom: "Because we find it impossible to conceive that a tree can be anything else than a tree or not a tree." The impossibility to conceive, as Poe insists again and again, is no criterion of the truth. His belief that the validity of a theory is not contingent upon man's capacity to conceive of it does not, however, lead Poe to insist that a tree can both be a tree and not be a tree, that a tree can both exist and not exist, that being can, in fact, be non-being -- the inevitable dead end which results upon the unqualified rejection of the law of contradiction. In fact, Poe says quite directly that a tree cannot be anything other than a tree without failing altogether to be a tree.

For That a tree can be both a tree and not a tree, is an idea which the angels, or the devils, may entertain, and which no doubt many an earthly Bedlamite, or Transcendentalist, does.

The principle of contradiction must be affirmed if we insist that the logical form of the principle is that it is impossible both to affirm and to deny "the same thing of the same thing in the same respect."
The phrase "in the same respect" implies that if the law of contradiction is rejected with qualification, given multivarious "respects" (or perspectives), contrary and manifold claims can be made about the same object. For Poe, who repudiates the validity of maintaining more than one perspective, there is only one "respect" that is valid, and that is God's, and man's also, if only he can become God. What man is capable of conceiving of is false. What he cannot conceive of -- what only God can conceive of -- is ontologically real. What is ontologically real can be understood only at the price of radically excluding what may on other levels, in other respects, also be real.
The transcendentalist, who has the capacity to conceive of manifold planes of reality, can, as it were, go from one plane to another, and return again without any apparent difficulty, and without feeling that he has contradicted himself in any way. He can, in other words, think symbolically. The symbolic imagination, as Erich Auerbach has stated in Mimesis, is epitomized in the Hebraic literary tradition which represents reality "vertically" by fusing the earthbound with the divine, thereby permitting man to establish correspondences between visible and invisible planes of reality. Poe's art, which is not capable of such fusion is both the converse of the Homeric world, which presents a horizontal view of reality, and the destructive apotheosis of the romantic (mystical, religious) striving to achieve the ineffable; for the journey to outer space is completed. But the irony is that he cannot return. His only alternative is to present that new plane of reality "out of time" as a self-contained whole. And that is why he, above all artists, was bound to destroy whatever symbol-making talents he might have possessed. His art is not symbolic in the sense that it cannot "affirm and deny the same thing about the same thing" in different respects. He fails to be flexible -- to affirm, but with qualification; to deny, but with other qualifications. In the poem "To Helen," once the eyes are conceived of independently of the woman, they gradually lose their identity as both eyes and spiritual signs. In "going beyond the real," they forfeit forever whatever vague semblance of the real they might have had. In their gradual alienation from reality, they are symbols. But once the alienation is a fait accompli,
they cease to be symbols and compose instead a closed and contained universe, another self-contained plane of reality. This plane, Poe felt, could be rich enough to sustain itself without appealing to the sensuous world of concrete and individuated substances. For Poe, then, there is only one real perspective. That is why the eyes of Helen must dissolve into spiritual lights, why the house of Usher must disintegrate into the thick miasma of the tarn, why the woman must sacrifice her soul for the oval portrait, why Morella and Ligeia must return once again to reclaim their husbands who in a moment of alienation would have declared their independence, and why, in the last analysis, from his finite perspective man must be content to adore supernal beauty, the remote ideal and never ultimately possess it. Those men who attempt to identify beauty and truth -- who attempt to make the ideal real -- are bound to destroy themselves.

The choice we are speaking of involves two extreme philosophical positions: either one affirms the existence of a number of planes of reality, or one singles out one plane and renounces all others. The first position may lead to excessive fragmentation; the second position, which avoids fragmentation altogether, achieves at best a vision that is pristine, aboriginal and anti-human. The art of Poe has this sort of weird, pristine unity. Had Poe desired to conceive of art and ethics independently, he might have ventured some grand synthesis of aesthetics, where unity is liberating, is inspired, we feel, by a belief in the eternal transcendence of beauty and divinity. Poe was unable to entertain such religious beliefs; that is precisely why the unity he achieves
is both rigid and specious. Indeed, the petrification of the system is symptomatic of the fact that it is destined to split and crack into a thousand pieces.

Poe himself -- as we have observed in the first two chapters -- consciously initiates the process of fissuring by conceiving of the world fractured in two. This piecemeal conception of the universe, where the functions of beauty and truth are severely restricted, he thinks enables him to forge them together into the unity he "achieves" in "Eureka." His attempt at a grand synthesis proves -- perhaps better than any work I know -- that to add up to any memorable achievement, the sum must be greater than all of its parts. Poe was too self consciously determined to defend the validity of his system which depended upon the distinction between poetry and science to achieve a unified whole where distinctions are incidental. His commitment to his philosophy was so rigid that without knowing it in advance, we cannot make any sense out of "Eureka." Its chief source of power is, ironically enough, its tendency to confound. For the super-imposed rationales of epistemology and ontology are almost impossible to describe and differentiate. Yet at other moments, almost apart from any understandable context, they are much too rigidly and exclusively defined. We shuttle back and forth from excessive specificity and definition to utter vacuousness; and all the time, the "golden mean," the ideal which great art embodies for Poe seems to be increasingly impossible to achieve.
The "golden mean," of course, was devised by Plato to describe ideal human behavior, the balance and harmony of antithetical aspects of the body and the soul. The attempt to conceive of human behavior in ideal terms indicates that Plato speculated deeply upon the dim feasibility of abolishing the disparity between the real and the ideal and bringing Nirvana down to earth. Poe is a Platonist in his deep distrust in appearances. His philosophy represents the very dead end of Platonism; the world of appearances is so deceptive that instead of even suggesting one glimmer of the truth concealed within as Plato argues, the sensuous world of Poe can only pervert and distort the absolute ideal. Therefore, appearances must be demolished altogether if one is to be able to perceive the truth beneath or beyond. Unlike Plato, Poe failed to prize the "golden mean" in terms of the human mind. His lack of synthesis is most profoundly sensed in his failure to integrate man's sense of his own ignorance -- which gives him a sense of humility before a superior being -- and man's ability to achieve the knowledge he needs in order to live his life with some degree of self-determination and self respect. Poe conjures what he conceives to be a primary state of undifferentiation by employing those stylistic patterns which critics have associated generally with primitive rituals. At the same time in Poe's tales we observe manifestations of a certain pretense toward abstraction and higher learning in physics, mathematics and logic.
Science is the last step in man's mental development and it may be regarded as the highest and most characteristic attainment of human culture.¹

Rationales abound in Poe's art. They are for the most part only trivial (as in "A Few Notes on Secret Writing" and "Maelzel's Chess-Player"), pompous and sterile (as in the tales of ratiocination), and anti-human (as in "The Rationale of Verse". and "The Philosophy of Composition"). In their shallowness, they are like an obsessional ritual, which begins as a protection against repressed wishes of destruction (reduction to identity), and later "...develops increasingly into substitute-gratification."² They are "a sort of 'Alibi' which had to be evolved under the heightened pressure of the Super-Ego and this 'Alibi' is the ritual with its strict and endless obsessional demands."³ When the desire to destroy is repressed, there invariably follow symptoms of anxiety which can be alleviated only by the compulsive, ritual rationale. The urge to destroy and the castigating conscience (both of which are expressed by the rationales), cause and effect, become one and the same thing.

Such identity which expresses some sort of a correspondence between the super-ego and id involves, of course, the disintegration of both of these aspects of the mind. Such disunity, I suggest, explains why Poe's art cannot have resulted from the genuine sublimation that artists of

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³ Sachs, p. 351.
the finest caliber achieve. To be sure, the ritual-rationale, psycho-
analysts might argue, may constitute, as a "substitute-gratification,"
some form of sublimation. But the rigid and contrived quality of Poe's
rationales suggest that logic, reason and science, might for him have
served mainly as a means of control over the senseless raging of a psychic
conflict. For the clue to the non-artistic function of the rationale,
its function as merely a sterile and rigid mechanism of control, is its
unchanging, obsessively repetitive expression in Poe's thought and art.
It does not lead to transformation -- "vivification" (Whitman), "Making
it New" (Ezra Pound).

One may, of course, argue -- as I have suggested earlier -- that
the very manner in which Poe devised his epistemology (to which even his
art was subordinated) led him to a point of no return, to a conclusion
formulated into a principle that admitted no further development was
possible. His only recourse might well have been to repeat those few un-
changing principles again and again. Such a hypothesis respects the con-
scious demands Poe made from art and science. On the basis of such an
hypothesis we may see "Eureka" as Poe's effort to spell out in agonized
detail the substance of the impasse he reached early in his career when
he restricted the functions of art and science. Of all the tales, perhaps
only in "William Wilson" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" did he break through
the impasse to offer some resolution to the diametrically opposed aims of
science and poetry. But for all of the writing that Poe did, these two
instances hardly compensate for the large number of failures where no
unity, no integration of mystery and explanation, is achieved.
At one end of the spectrum of his works, therefore, we see the rationale, sterile and a-human; at the other end, there is chaos, a sense of bewilderment, panic, and paralyzing mystery experienced by readers and characters alike. And, in the meantime, in the middle -- the substance of what must issue when the mysterious activity of sublimation is completed -- is the enormous vacuum that we cannot even speculate about, since Poe has given us no evidence to work with. For -- and this is the crucial point -- he has deliberately refused to deal in a straightforward manner with causation in terms of human motivation. Whatever causes we perceive, as we have seen in chapter 4, -- are disguised. We have attempted to arrive at those causes, not by restating what Poe himself has said (for he has said very, very little), but by arriving at them through their manifestations. Here again, the manifestations are so weird that we were entirely dependent upon Freud to describe them. No one can deny that Poe's art reflects his appalling intimacy with the abnormal mind. In not one tale, however, does Poe directly speak of motivation. This seems most curious; for if he devised the cipher of madness himself, might he not have had the key to his own riddle? I suggest that Poe's failure to clarify causes may indeed reflect less his commitment to principles -- to keeping causes and truth out of poetry -- than his desire to represent symbolically (obliquely) a personal conflict that has psychogenic, and not ideological origins.

We grope then toward some comprehensive rationale which might account for the odd characteristics reflected in Poe's mind through his art; the
inability to fuse compassion and objectivity, affirmation and rejection, except in the most rigidly self conscious and suicidal manner in "Eureka;" the narrow range of human emotions, lacking compassion, humor, irony, sensuality, love, and expressing for the most part only panic and bewilderment; the absence of characters that are real because they embody in some respect ideal moral qualities; and finally the failure to project a public image that is critical, compassionate and detached from petty accusations. Are we to say that many of Poe's characters are not normal only because they were intended by him to express a condition "beyond the real?" Are we to say that his art, therefore, follows deductively, logically from the premises he consciously defined for himself?

This approach indeed has been taken to enable us to see his work as a self-contained whole, as an expression of his conscious efforts. The product of those efforts, his art, we have been assessing throughout this chapter. But now, returning once again to the central premises which subsume his art, we might well inquire what kind of a man could have conceived them in the first place. We have earlier offered the hypothesis that has been and will be articulated again and again: that Poe's art was a reaction formation to the spirit of his times. The difference between Poe's psychopathology and the psychopathology of his times is that the latter was sanctioned and shared by large numbers of the community. The only guilt society assumes is what might be self-generated by individuals. But those who do not assume the risks involved in liberal criticism can never in their own eyes be guilty of anything. For them there is no disparity between the real and the ideal; there is, therefore, nothing objectionable in the status quo. Approved by society,
the circus performers in the arena of public life who fail to observe
the discrepancy between what we claim to be and what we really are
acquire a bloated sense of self-righteousness that is bound to drive
the diminishing numbers of dissenters stark mad.

Romance as Grotesque

Poe's failure as an artist, in the last analysis, derives from his
almost total abdication from the responsibilities of the artist to cor­
rode a fatuous status quo of his society. Indeed, among the great
American artists of fiction of the 19th century, no one — except Mark
Twain and finally Henry James — attempted this task as severely direct
critic of his times. 4 Whitman evades the issue altogether by celebrat­
ing the ideal state he felt American life was capable of evolving into.
Melville also evades the issue by sending his crew of sailors on the
most magnificent journey of all times. In "Bartleby the Scrivner" (See
also "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" and "Piazza
Tales.") he confronts the issue both cryptically and brutally; but his
treatment reflects such desperate seriousness that he inevitably fails
to touch upon the manifold insanities and delights of society. Hawthorne's
art, dominated by the spectral memories of the past, lacks a direct sense
of the mixture of humor, warmth, stupidity, love, fatuousness of his
world. All these writers are characterized by an almost categorical

4 For those who claim that William Dean Howells must be considered
a serious critic of his times, let them remember that at the end of his
career, after reading Tolstoy, Howells himself confessed that he had
been much too rigid and stuffy a moralist.
refusal to deal with contemporary issues in a flexibly humorous, tragic, deadly earnest, jocular manner. Those who know the American scene in the 19th century agree with De Tocqueville who said that Americans simply had no manners and no institutions. Scholars of comparative literature remind us that the romance as a genre unconditionally removed man from the "dull realities" of social life and enabled him to wander freely, innocently in strange and pleasant regions. But if, therefore, the spirit of romance might have prompted wish fulfillment, why, one might well ask, was the romance tinged with Gothic horror, why, in other words, did it become the "harbinger of death?"

The almost total lack of flexibility in the perspective of the American artist -- the inability to look upon another human being with humor, compassion, love, ridicule, hate simultaneously -- his self-conscious, paralyzing scrutiny of his own emotions and reactions which destroy spontaneous and creative action: all this indicates the presence of a weird authoritarianism of spirit, whose control is so rigid and unqualified that it must be responded to either by hopeless pleading (as we see in Emerson’s sublime, bathetic, and yet often ineffectual prose) or some form or another of a departure from reality. The journey into the unknown for the serious American artist, the attempt to fulfill the impossible wish, is not a leisurely adventure into fantasy worlds. For the later Mark Twain in parts of "The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," of course, fantasy can be pleasant, since Twain alone of all writers deals with contemporary issues. But even for Twain those issues are observed from the limited perspective of an adolescent. Extraordinary a child as Huck Finn may be in his moral sense,
he still does not have an adult mind. He lacks adult perceptions and the capacity to experience the complex emotions of an adult in society; and furthermore, there is even something grim about Twain's fantasies. As for the others, the romantic departure from reality might well have been the result of symbolic deportation. The artist disguised his criticism of the times so thoroughly (no wonder Poe was convinced that surfaces were deceptive) that no one would recognize it. Hence, fantasy and nonsense, the flight from reality -- which for all human beings seems to be the source of only play and amusement -- for the American artist is paradoxically his most serious mode. In this way was the childish game of nonsense, mobilized for the utilitarian purpose of fighting that impossible war against society sublimely corrupted through unhappiness and despair. The rigid and unalleviated hate of caricature becomes the emblem of the surreal; -- it is that perspective from which social criticism might best be safely conveyed, simply because it would not risk being understood.

If the impulse to love and identify with someone else is basic to man, it stands to reason that man's love for his community must implicitly be expressed in art. Although we have the capacity to hate, our aboriginal and more basic impulse is to love. Those we love are incorporated into our being. Harming us, they destroy us. Hatefully representing them in their art, artists come to hate themselves also. The complex and ennobling relationship between the artist and his community, that relationship where criticism and love are concurrently expressed, has been discussed by Hanns Sachs in _The Creative Unconscious_. Speaking
of the greatest of masters, he explains that to be a great artist
"The Poet has to give up a great portion of his narcissism," for
"The personality of the greatest masters -- Homer, Shakespeare -- has
disappeared behind their work." Sachs implies that in identifying
with his community the artist relinquishes part of his enormous res­
serves of narcissistic love. But when no such identification is
achieved, the artist can only project some image of himself which, in
underscoring his personality and his interests, does not enable him to
lose his identity behind his work. The 'disappearance of the artist's
personality' may well be the result of an ideal culture which made it
possible for him to identify with his times and thereby express his
narcissistic love through such identification.

One would not have to examine the American scene in the 19th century
to be able to determine that the conditions for art were not ideal, that
criticism of the sacrosanct inanities of American life could not be
tolerated. The art of the times testifies to the cultivation of the
illusion and dread of reality, for the tabooed subject in the great
American novel and tale is ironically contemporary American life. It is
indeed inevitable that what is repressed (tabooed) is bound to recur.
But once it becomes vocal, the vision of contemporary life is so grim
that, of course, no one among the reading audience would care to identify
with the characters. For the artist, however, there is no choice. He
must identify with his work. No matter how great the malice reflected in
his art may be, by desiring to communicate with others, he perforce implies

7 Sachs, p. 121.
8 Sachs, p. 114.
that his need to love is stronger. Under such tragic circumstances narcissism cannot take on a life-giving form. Instead, inverted, it can be only a kind of instrument of destruction.

Seeing art and culture, then, as manifesting degrees of health and disease, we lead up to a diagnosis of the psychopathology manifest in Poe's art: playful nonsense twisted into the virulent grotesquerie of the satire; poems reduced to a rationale. In his essay "The Delay of the Machine Age" Hanno Sachs asks the curious question that has always confounded philosophers and historians:

What was the enigmatic power which restrained ancient man from either the discovery or the consistent utilization of machines which supplant the worker, notwithstanding that he was driven in this direction by his mathematical-technical knowledge on the one hand, and on the other by economic necessity?

He proceeds to describe the kind of machine he has in mind.

We do not have in mind tools that render it possible for man to do his work more easily and better, but those complicated machines which, once set in motion, do the work alone, so that man, in a certain sense, need only play the role of the master-mind in control -- contraptions like the mechanical loom, the steam hammer, the locomotive. Sachs describes in some detail the complexity and the function of the machines invented and used in the ancient world.

7 Sachs, p. 121.
8 Sachs, p. 114.
Most of the ancients' knowledge of machines is recorded in the writings of Heron of Alexandria. When Heron lived is not known. The opinions of scholars leave a range of no less than two hundred years. His works on mechanics contain descriptions of machines which may have been in part invented, in part improved by him or merely copied from other inventors. It is amazing to see how close antiquity came to the invention of machines.

Hydraulic pressure, as well as air pressure and even steam pressure, are known and utilized for moving weights. The apparatus known to this day as Heron's fountain makes use of compressed air (which Ctesibios, 150 B.C., had used in the fire engine). Heron's aeolipile is the prototype of the steam turbine. The use of hydraulic pressure for lifting great weights was, as Suetonius testifies, known to the Romans of the Empire, but they used it only for shifting scenes in the Circus. The point in question here is that these are not chance findings, but discoveries based on mathematical and physical facts that nevertheless did not reach practical application. Or rather, this application was limited to one field only, namely that of play.9

The desire to identify was so basic to the ancients that they could not tolerate utilizing the machine to supplant the worker. So fearful and repellent was the image of the machine doing serious practical labor, that they could tolerate it only as a form of amusement and entertainment.

What would for the Greeks have been taken as nonsense, fantasy, and play, to Poe becomes twisted into caricature which serves as the most militant satire in disguise. This grotesque transformation of the human soul, we have seen, might well have been inevitable, for since the artist was denied the freedom to identify with his community, his love was bound to be twisted into malice and hate. The boundless reserves of narcissism which are too powerful to be repressed are, nevertheless, projected into a sort of delusional image that in its grotesquerie of destruction and despair fails to resemble hardly anything that is human and ideal.

9 Sachs, pp. 114-115.
We follow the method of psychoanalysis if, in such a case, we turn to psychopathology for advice and guidance. We have learned to see in the pathological and abnormal the expression, crude, distorted and one-sided to the point of caricature, of that which in the normal quite escapes our notice. The machine as an "influencing machine" plays, as every psychiatrist is aware, a typical role in the persecution fantasies of schizophrenics. Cases of this kind are described in every psychiatric text-book; are demonstrated in every course of lectures; and one encounters them in every institution for the insane. An understanding of the psychic mechanism involved can naturally be attained only by means of psychoanalysis; this was first successfully accomplished by Tausk, who succeeded in obtaining a complete understanding of this baffling symptom. In a particularly clear case the patient first imagined the "influencing-machine" as a complete reproduction of her own body, something like the outstretched figure on a sarcophagus. Manipulation on a certain part of this figure produced sensations in the corresponding part of the patient's body. In the course of time this figure became flat and indistinct until nothing remained but the usual nebulous "influencing-machine." 10

Sachs indicates what connection the "influencing-machine" of the psycho-path has with the kind of machine that the ancients might have found repellent.

The projection to which the ancients adhered represents exactly the same mechanism as that which leads the schizophrenic to the creation of the "influencing-machine" -- a casting out of his own ego into the external world in order to settle an inner conflict. But the result is antithetical, for the schizophrenic hallucination and the inhibition of the ancients stand in opposition to one another as positive and negative poles. Animistic man vitalized the inanimate world with such narcissism as he could find no other use for, the schizophrenic transforms his own body into something alien and inanimate (first, through 'feelings of alienation', in a further stage of regression into the "influencing machine"). 11

Going from the abhored machine of ancient Greece to Poe's art, I suggest that the machine in operation is, of course, the "modus operandi"

10 Sachs, p. 119.
11 Sachs, p. 127.
of the rationales of Poe's art. The possibilities for identification of the artist with the world were destroyed by the dictatorship of American literary tastes in the 19th century. But since the urge to identify can never be destroyed, it reasserts itself as the "harbinger of death" which is repellent to every person who is still, in some vague form, a human being and not a machine. Poe's rationale was the only narcissistic image he was capable of projecting. The processes of thinking embodied in the machine he himself imitated whenever he confronted a riddle that had to be solved. One dare not try to identify with such an image, however, lest one begin to take the machine seriously, as did Dupin who tried to identify with the criminal. For man might well begin to share the "thoughts" of the machine and become ill; or what is even worse, he may remain healthy at the enormous expense of alienating himself altogether from his humanity.

Stasis and Momentum

The problem of defining and understanding Poe's art rests heavily upon understanding his culture. But no final evaluation is possible without a definition of some sort of spiritual and physical ideal. We require some sort of definition that will subsume all notions of the ideal entertained briefly in this chapter. In *Life Against Death* Norman Brown suggests that Greek art is perhaps the one instance where the pleasure principle as Nirvana (homeostasis, "the activity of all organisms and also of the human mind... directed at getting rid of
tensions and attaining inactivity") is presented on earth. (We may add to his example of Greek art, the practices of the mystics in the East, whose unearthly calm remains mysterious to those who do not know the art of yoga). Aristotle defines the relationship between motion and atasis, whereby an intimation of the static ideal can be achieved in time. Brown paraphrases Aristotle in the following passage:

Aristotle's fundamental notion is activity (energeia). Motion (kinesis) is a special kind of activity, namely imperfect activity; it is the movement of the imperfect toward perfection. Perfect activity is activity without motion or change or passivity, and therefore, since time is correlative with motion, an activity not in time. And Aristotle recognizes pleasurable activity of the bodily senses, provided there is no 'impediment' (in Freudian terms, frustration), as an activity without motion or change, and therefore not in time. . . Pleasure is the measure of perfection in activity . . . We can add that activity not generated by want or defect is purposeless, and therefore play; hence Boehme conceived of God's life as it is in itself as play. Eternity is the mode of play.

Activity and rest achieved concurrently is the ideal. And yet that ideal is almost impossible to achieve. Brown formulates the problem in this way:

And yet would perfection and happiness be in eternity? Does not such a notion face emotional objections over and above the theoretical objections? Faustian characters as we are, we cannot imagine 'rest,' 'Nirvana,' 'eternity' except as a cessation of all activity -- in other words, as death. What our argument is reaching for is not death rather than life but a reconciliation of life and death. We have therefore to sustain the possibility of activity (life) which is also at rest.

It should by now be quite obvious that Poe set himself against the realization of such a possibility. For he has expressed, as we have
observed again and again in this study, motion and stasis almost independently in their absolute forms: stasis as stony rigidity, unearthly calm, the cessation of all striving and emotion; motion as the highest pitch of intensity, as a raging storm of passion concealed behind forms that are frozen, statuesque and abstracted. For those who believe that "Eternity is a mode of play," the condition of absolute stasis, Nirvana, must be made flexible and accommodated to man's finite experience of moving and changing things. That state of being that is "beyond the real" for Poe was the only ideal toward which he felt compelled to strive. He renounced any synthesis, any compromise, between stasis and motion, time and eternity. The goal was to live fiercely in order to earn the right to drop dead from exhaustion. And if stasis was ever to be experienced by men, it would have to come in the reality beyond.

Stasis is not achieved in its absolute form until some indeterminable point in the far distant future, long after one has died. The balance between motion and stasis -- which for Aristotle is achieved on earth -- for Poe is possible at some point during the corruption of the body and disintegration of the soul. It is recorded on the level of atomic particles, balanced and perpetually moving; the "golden mean," as we have already observed is the proportion. Before that point of non-being (which approaches the ontologically real) no resolution can be achieved.

The degree of alienation in his thought can be measured, therefore, by the indescribably complex levels of negation. Negation, whatever
fruitful discoveries it may eventually culminate in, arises from
man's desire to destroy, repudiate, repress that aspect of reality,
those people closest to him until he may arrive at that one remote,
ultimate (ultimate, because only at that point is one willing to
forgo repudiation) point which suddenly can be affirmed. As Norman
Brown explains in his final chapter "The Resurrection of the Body,"
it is perhaps the greatest irony that what one affirms in the end is
only the symbolic representation of what one has repudiated long ago.

The key to the nature of dialectical thinking may lie in
psychoanalysis, more specifically in Freud's psychoanalysis
of negation. There is first the theorem that 'there is noth­
ing in the id which can be compared to negation,' and that the
law of contradiction does not hold in the id. Similarly, the
dream does not seem to recognize the word 'no.' Instead of
the law of contradiction we find a unity of opposites.15

The recurrence of the repressed brings one in the end to the very
beginning.

We may therefore entertain the hypothesis that formal logic
and the law of contradiction are the rules whereby the mind
submits to operate under general conditions of repression. As
with the concept of time, Kant's categories of rationality would
then turn out to be categories of repression. And conversely,
dialectical' would be the struggle of the mind to circumvent
repression and make the unconscious conscious. But by the same
token, it would be the struggle of the mind to overcome the
split and conflict within itself. It could then be identified
with that 'synthesizing' tendency in the ego of which Freud
spoke, and with that attempt to cure, inside the neurosis
itself, on which Freud came finally to place his hope for
therapy. As an attempt to unify and to cure, the 'dialectical'
consciousness would be a step toward that Dionysian ego which
does not negate any more.15

In Irrational Man William Barrett advises his readers that we
must come to task with what is chaotic, painful and destructive within
ourselves by bringing it ever so often to the surface.

The solution proposed by Greek tragic wisdom through the drama of Aeschylus may not, then, be as frightening as we imagine; in giving the Furies their place, we may come to recognize that they are not such alien presences as we think in our moments of evading them. In fact, far from being alien, they are part of ourselves, like all gods and demons. The conspiracy to forget them, or to deny that they exist, thus turns out to be only one more contrivance in that vast and organized effort by modern society to flee from the self. 16

But Barrett, who, like so many other critics, appears in this passage to revere the Greeks, fails to observe that every society has its taboos, which theoretically protect it against some sort of dissolution and disaster. Cassirer cites an instance in the history of science when the discovery of a new dimension of knowledge so threatened the Greek sense of order and rationality that the science of mathematics was suddenly stunted by a fear of trespassing upon a truth that was just too terrifying to endure.

The whole Pythagorean theory of number was suddenly called in question by a new fact. When the Pythagoreans detected that in a right-angled triangle the line that subtends the right angle has no common measure with the two other sides they had to face an entirely new problem. In the whole history of Greek thought, especially in the dialogues of Plato, we feel the deep repercussion of this dilemma. It designates a genuine crisis in Greek mathematics. No ancient thinker could solve the problem in our modern way, by the introduction of the so-called 'irrational numbers.' From the point of view of Greek logic and mathematics irrational numbers were a contradiction in terms. They were an arrheton, a thing not to be thought of and not to be spoken of. 17

17 Cassirer, p. 268.
The Inexorable 'Yes'

The "thing not to be thought of and not to be spoken of" by the Greeks could well have been epitomized by Poe's vision of the universe in "Eureka." What for them might have been one of the most fearful subjects, irrational numbers, was for Poe perhaps the substance in miniature of his world view. Just the same, his vision of life ironically is the product of multiple instances of repudiation and repression. Indeed, the major assumption underlying all of Poe's endeavors is that if he could go far enough from his own society, "out of TIME-out of SPACE," he might perhaps at last be free. The major truth of his work is that the only possibility for absolute freedom is death. As an inversion of the Greek concept of making the ideal real by humanizing Nirvana, Poe has attempted to precipitate death, disintegration and the apocalypse in order to envision the original unity. He was only too willing to forgo the reality of the sensuous world in order to celebrate the reality that transcends and contradicts (and not subsumes) it. What would have terrified the earth-bound, therefore, fascinated and enthralled him. What others would insist is impossible, he would continue to demand was certain. The more abstract and improbable the fancy, the more likely he would insist that it could be fulfilled; not merely because he thought it could be fulfilled, but because -- though tormented with acute mental pain -- the only fulfillment he was able to achieve is paradoxically on the very plane of imaginative existence which is too rarefied, thrilling, and dangerous for the common lot.
For those who say that Poe's great discovery is Nothingness, Non-Being is widely affirmed as the very highest being. Non-Being triumphs in that dialectic between two contrary levels of reality. To be sure, the repudiation of the concrete world in one sense implies only a desperate form of rejection (destruction, repression); at the same time, failure to repudiate is itself an act of cowardice. Poe may have made no original scientific discoveries about that ultimate Nirvana envisioned in "Eureka." But he spoke for his times like a prophet, and desired to be taken for one. This fact may well explain why he could not hope to be an artist. To the saint, the clairvoyant, the prophet, and the mystic, the world does not appear in any recognizably familiar forms, and hence they cannot easily be understood. In Parapsychology Rene Sudre writes that their perceptions would be radically different from the normal. He tries to conceive of how beings that are four dimensional and not three might view this world.

This four-dimensional space has been familiar to mathematicians since the work of Riemann. It is not an invalid hypothesis, and can be fairly easily imagined. Poincare described imaginary two dimensional beings, conscious but without thickness, living in a plane. Space to them, is this plane and they cannot imagine leaving it. To make them understand our three-dimensional space we would have to present it to them successively, cutting it into slices like the leaves of a book and making it pass through their plane so that each of the slices was in it in turn. If these curious beings included clairvoyants, these would have the ability to penetrate into the third dimension and mentally turn the pages of the book, thus seeing the past or predicting the future. There is nothing in this opposed to our sense of logic, except for the idea of possessing insight into an additional dimension, but this is a fact we may be forced to accept. 

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Sudre suggests that psychopathological symptoms may well characterize paranormal perception.

The study of prosopopesis will confirm an important idea that we have already mentioned: the relationship of somnambulistic, hypnotic, hysterical and psychic states. These states are all more or less typified by the same tendency to modification of self. It can be said that they show a 'disintegration' of the personality, but this word should not be understood in two pathological a sense, since divided consciousness occurs with some sane subjects. Finally we should consider disintegration less a crumbling, a breakdown of mental synthesis, than as a preparation for new synthesis (my italics). 19

Through the principle of contradiction, we may refute step by step everything that the earthbound find more plausible and logical, in favor of the more absurd and illogical.

Who can say for sure that scientists will not be able one day to demonstrate that certain psychopathological states are paranormal.

Those who would not speak of impossible possibilities may believe such thoughts are offensive. Anyone who has a scientific mind -- and there is something wildly irresponsible and sublimely unconcerned about the scientific mind -- will believe strongly that as time goes on, the law of contradiction will triumph over the rejection of the same law, that the search for the cause behind the cause will establish more ineffable states of reality, sensibility, being, and that the dialectic will continue until the ultimate reality is discovered. At that time the symbolic imagination and the celebration of hierarchies of realities are destined to be a thing of the past. However, the loss of the peace and tranquility we enjoyed with simple beliefs may one day be compensated

19 Sudre, p. 95.
if we are able to know on earth with certainty precisely how it feels to be in heaven and in hell.

The paradoxical desire to be both in and out of time, the desire to maintain the status quo, epitomized by the ideal of classicism and the plastic arts in ancient Greece, and the contradictory desire for rebellion, epitomized by the spirit of romance: the balance between stasis and motion somehow must be achieved. It seems that man's basic desires dictate that these contradictory aspects of life must be preserved and expressed. For otherwise, without disorder, primitive societies would have endured forever; and without stasis, there would have been no possibility for duration and we would -- as Poe would have us do -- either have arrived at the moon centuries before the birth of Christ or have been destroyed trying to reach it. Stasis and motion on earth for Poe are utterly impossible to conceive of. For stasis, which is Poe's only ideal implies an absolute end to everything. And in this sense, his view of the universe and of man as somehow having to be dis-integrated into nothingness, is deeply morbid. Above all, I find this thought inconceivable -- only because like the "irrational numbers" in ancient Greece, it is my version of "an arrheton, a thing not to be thought of and not to be spoken of."

To utter the unspeakable, to solve the gigantic paradox of multiple contradictions between reality and appearance, triumphant non-being and finite being, the invisible (which is for us repressed and repudiated) and the visible (which for Poe was deliberately repudiated, from which he irreversibly alienated himself): all this means to solve the mystery, to give substance to "Shadow", to speak in spite of the categorical
imperative in "Silence," to translate the hieroglyphics in "The Narra-
tive . . .," to explain clearly and lucidly why Usher's mansion suddenly
collapsed, to crash down the icy walls of the universe, to lay bare the
heart. The passion for mystery that Poe cultivated suggests that he
too might have had an "arrheton" that would not permit itself to be told.
I do not think that it would be doing him and his art justice were we to
presume that we could unravel this final mystery. I for one, have no
desire to do so, lest I make his art trivial and banal and reduce to a
paltry definition the sense of mystery that Poe can evoke. The psycho-
analysts who repeat again and again that Poe was impotent and that he
loved his mother can continue to claim they have solved the mystery. But
they will never be able to explain how he was able to translate a domes-
tic situation into a horrifying grotesque of pleasure and fantasy. The
religious are free to condemn or praise Poe as they see fit. Shying away
from a certain self-righteousness and priggishness which tends to camou-
flage yet another "arrheton," I would say that I affirm Poe chiefly for
the superb beauty of his courage. And even so, I affirm him sadly --
for he destroys the beauty of the sensuous world, humor, gaiety, and
the full relief of sweet sobbing. In renouncing himself in this way,
he is stark and magnificent, as the stranger of Camus, who desired only
that he be reviled and desecrated at his execution, and Kirilof in the
Possessed who, before committing suicide, signed a confession of a crime
he never committed so that he could experience the thrilling agony of
what it means to be despised.
It is perhaps the arrheton against self-destruction, the greater pleasure of this world, that leads me away from Poe and also the Nirvana of "The Four Quartets" of Eliot, and that neutral state of being of Wallace Stevens -- from abstracted and rarefied experience, from the narrowest range of feeling -- to the manifold. Out of them, ecstasy is a mystical state; but in time, ecstasy can be expressed in any number of ways concurrently, as Ezra Pound has demonstrated in "The Cantos." So far as I can see, the alternatives are basically two: the earthbound and the mystical, the apollonian and the dionysian. But in the last analysis, a choice between them is impossible. For it is our destiny hysterically, petulantly, aimlessly, demonically to cling now to one, now to the other -- either until like Poe we destroy ourselves through the frustration of not being able to achieve a satisfactory resolution of stasis and motion on earth, or until through the dialectic of life and death, we achieve resurrection, eternal life, the only goal we ever desired in the first place.
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