

MAN AS ARTIST IN POE'S COSMOLOGY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences

The University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Carolyn O. Zintgraff

August, 1970

545412

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Dr. John Q. Anderson for his constant encouragement, kind assistance, and excellent advice.

I also appreciate the help of Dr. Don W. Harrell and Dr. Stanley E. Siegel, who responded on short notice to be on my thesis committee.

And I am extremely thankful for "Mom" Turner's help at home which gave me the necessary time to complete this thesis.

MAN AS ARTIST IN POE'S COSMOLOGY

An Abstract of a Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences
The University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Carolyn O. Zintgraff
August, 1970

MAN AS ARTIST IN POE'S COSMOLOGY

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine Poe's concept of man as artist functioning within the cosmological framework presented in Eureka. This examination focuses on Poe's mature concept of the artist (post-1839) as developed in his criticism, major tales of terror, tales of ratiocination, and Eureka.

In Eureka Poe presents the universe as a work of art created through an act of self-diffusion by the Supreme Artist, God. The grand design of the cosmos is perfect Unity, but its present state is chaos. The existing multiplicity of forms disguises the simplicity and unity of the overall design from man. Man, as part of the diffused God, is instinctively an artist because he possesses an innate Poetic Sentiment which impels him to seek the grand design of unity behind the present disorder of the cosmos.

Poe is concerned mainly with two types of artists: in his criticism he discusses the "genius" whom he regards as the "True Artist," and in his major prose fiction he portrays the "factitious genius" or disordered artist. The protagonists of Poe's major tales of terror prove to be disordered artists. Suffering from unbalanced faculties and unable to find satisfaction for their Poetic Sentiment through art, they are driven

to seek release from their state of tension through horror and madness in death. Dupin, the detective of the tales of ratiocination, is more successful on a mundane level in imposing order on the chaos of the world because he can merge reason and imagination; however, because his intellect operates apart from morality and feeling and because he lacks true Poetic Sentiment, he proves to be merely a "resolvent" artist--not a True Artist.

The True Artist, who serves as the high priest of Poe's aesthetic religion, possesses inordinate mental powers in a state of absolute proportion, a heightened sensitivity to beauty, extraordinary intuitive and imaginative powers, and a perfectly developed taste. His function is to produce works of art that will approximate Divine Unity-Beauty-Truth to mankind. In order to transmit his perceptions, he must rationally order his intuitive impressions into a preconceived unity of effect. Only through perfection of his craftsmanship can the creative artist approach his Divine model. Yet even the True Artist is constrained by mortal limitations and can never fully grasp the Ideal in this life. Only when the cosmos sinks into final unity will man realize his existence as God the Supreme Artist and achieve complete satisfaction for his Poetic Sentiment.

Poe's concept of cosmology and the place of man the artist in that scheme disclose his own struggle to understand the role of the creative artist in the world. And his works, viewed from the standpoint of this struggle, reveal Poe to be a significant commentator on the problems of man as artist in a chaotic world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. POE'S AESTHETIC COSMOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST	1
II. THE DISORDERED ARTIST IN THE TALES OF TERROR . .	31
III. DUPIN, THE RESOLVENT ARTIST IN THE TALES OF RATIOCINATION	61
IV. THE ARTIST'S ROLE IN THE REAL WORLD	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	104

CHAPTER I

POE'S AESTHETIC COSMOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

An understanding of Poe's aesthetic cosmology as presented in Eureka is basic to a comprehension of his conception of the role of the artist. In this extraordinary piece of literary criticism, Poe examines the material and spiritual universe and discovers a consistent world system based upon the same principle of unity that had guided his creative efforts.¹ He expounds and amplifies his mature theories of unity, beauty, imagination, and artistic creation in a work he clearly regarded as the culmination of his creative career.² Furthermore, Poe examines the general nature of man as part of God the Supreme Artist and explores the destiny of man in the aesthetic cosmos. Poe's treatment of man in his later tales of terror and ratiocination and his critical pronouncements on the function of the

¹Hardin Craig and Margaret Alterton regard Poe's Eureka as "the summary and apotheosis of his beliefs" on unity as the ultimate principle of all creative work. Edgar Allen Poe, Representative Selections (New York: American Book Company, 1935), p. xxxv.

²In a letter to Mrs. Maria Clemm dated July 7, 1849, Poe wrote, "I have no desire to live since I have done 'Eureka.' I could accomplish nothing more." In The Portable Poe, ed. by Philip Stern (New York: The Viking Press, 1945), p. 48.

artist can be completely understood only when considered against the cosmological background of Eureka.³

Because Poe conceived of the universe as "God's present expansive existence," each soul became "in part, its own God--its own Creator."⁴ And since God is the Supreme Artist, man as a part of God possesses an innate Poetic Sentiment, a desire for Supernal Beauty, that impells him to seek Divine Unity and to create approximations of the Ideal. However, not all men equally perceive Divine Unity, nor are all men equally equipped to record their perceptions. Poe is concerned mainly with two types of artists: in his criticism he discusses the "genius" whom he regards as the True Artist; and in his major prose fiction he portrays the "factitious genius" or disordered artist. Only the genius or True Artist in harmony with the design of the cosmos can adequately perceive Divine Unity-Truth-Beauty and reveal it to others.⁵ In his creative efforts the True Artist

³I have limited the scope of my examination to Poe's prose tales and criticism written after 1839 because as Alterton and Craig have pointed out, by this time Poe had reached the last stage of his critical development and had formulated his mature theories of unity as they applied to man and nature as well as poetry and the short story.

⁴Edgar Allen Poe, Eureka, in The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, ed. by James A. Harrison, XVI (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1902), p. 313. References to Poe's works are from this edition and are noted parenthetically in the text as (H, XVI, 313), for example.

⁵In Eureka Poe repeatedly defines Truth and Beauty in terms of Unity and equates the three terms. Unity as a perfect harmony and proportion defines Beauty; as a perfect consistency, Truth. Unity is "the Beauty that abounds in

attempts to achieve the complete mutuality of adaption, the complete reciprocity of cause and effect, the simplicity, economy, beauty, and unity which characterize the "perfect plot of God."

Because he is constrained by mortal limitations, even the True Artist can never duplicate the Divine Unity of God's perfect creation. However, the partial satisfaction of his poetic instinct through the creation of art enables him to cope with the chaos of the present state of the cosmos until that day when the cosmos sinks into final unity and man realizes his existence as Jehovah the Supreme Artist.

Poe advances as his general proposition in Eureka:

"In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (H, XVI, 185-86). To illustrate this idea he takes a survey of the entire material and spiritual universe, "the utmost conceivable expanse of space," considering its essence, origin, creation, its present condition, and its destiny (H, XVI, 186). His method of investigation is intuitive rather than scientific. In a digression concerning a letter, supposedly written in the year 2848 and found floating in the Mare Tenebrarum, he satirizes both deductive and inductive reasoning, "the two narrow and crooked paths--the one of creeping and the other of crawling--" which "dared to confine

its Truth; constituting it true" (H, XVI, 184). And "a perfect consistency...can be nothing but an absolute truth" (H, XVI, 302).

the Soul--the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of 'path'" (H, XVI, 195). The only straight road to truth is "the majestic highway of the Consistent" which the truly great scientists Kepler and Laplace followed. The Keplers and Laplaces speculated and theorized, proceeded by intuition and "guesses" to reach their great truths about the universe. Then their theories were gradually sifted of their chaff of inconsistency until absolute and unquestionable truth remained. Poe insists that "a perfect consistency...can be nothing but an absolute truth" (H, XVI, 302).

His method established, Poe proceeds to base his argument on the intuitive assumption that Divine Volition (God) created the primordial particle in its state of ultimate simplicity. He justifies this assumption by insisting that "no human conclusion was ever, in fact, more regularly--more rigorously deduced:--but, alas! the processes lie out of the human analysis--at all events are beyond the utterance of the human tongue" (H, XVI, 206).

With the primordial particle as center, Divine Volition diffused atoms spherically in all directions in a generally equable dispersion into a limited sphere of space. Divine Volition was then discontinued, and created matter sought to return to its normal state of unity; however, the development of repulsion commenced with the very earliest particular efforts at unity in order that the cosmos might have duration.

By intuition, Poe arrives at the conclusion that the nature of this repulsion is spiritual and beyond man's understanding. In creating repulsion, "God has interposed, and here only, because here and here only the knot demanded the interposition of God" (H, XVI, 212). This repulsion allows the atoms to cluster together but prevents final unity until the Divine purpose is fulfilled. Matter now exists only as attraction, which Poe identifies with Newtonian gravity, and repulsion, which he designates as electricity, heat, and magnetism. Attraction is the "body" or material principle of the universe, while repulsion is the "soul" or spiritual principle. Body and soul "walk hand in hand" in the great design, balancing one another in perfect equilibrium. Poe further identifies the force of repulsion with vitality, consciousness, and thought in man.⁶ Since the force of repulsion grows as the design of cosmic unity progresses, it would seem to follow that cosmic evolution produces greater minds, increased vitality, and more extensive thought processes. In fact, Poe speculates that perhaps the discharge of a new planet by the sun might modify the terrestrial surface and produce "a race both materially and spiritually superior to Man" (H, XVI, 259). Unfortunately, he does not develop this interesting theory (which impresses him "with

⁶Alterton and Craig, Poe, p. 550, note that confusion may result because "Poe conceives of his principles, not as forces of energy only, but as metaphysical entities and agents."

all the force of truth") but throws it out merely as a "suggestion" (H, XVI, 259-60).

From a consideration of Newtonian gravity Poe buttresses his assumption that unity is the beginning and ultimate end of the universe. It is the law of gravity that "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 of the attracting and attracted atom" (H, XVI, 217). Because the original atoms were radiated spherically, they tend rectilinearly toward a general center because more atoms exist in the direction of the center and thus create more attracting force. However, the atoms are not seeking a location but merely their "lost parent," Unity. In a letter dated February 29, 1849, Poe points out: "An inspection of the universality of Gravitation--i.e., of the fact that each particle tends, not to any one common point, but to every other particle--suggests perfect totality, or absolute unity, as the source of the phenomenon." Gravity is "but the reaction of the first Divine Act" (H, XVII, 339).

The law of gravitation implicitly contains the idea of irradiation from a center because an original irradiation was necessary for matter to exist in its observed condition of dispersion. Poe proves that this irradiation could not have been analogous to the continuous radiation of light because it had to be finite and produce generally equable distribution

of matter. Since reaction in the form of gravity is now in operation, the original Divine Volition must have been finite for as Poe points out, "while an act is continued, no reaction, of course, can take place" (H, XVI, 229-30). Furthermore, the radiation of light produces unequal dispersion with more light near the center than at the circumference of the illuminated sphere. An inspection of the generally equable distribution of the stars in the heavens proves that matter could not have been irradiated in the manner of light. The problem of reconciling the irradiation of matter with equability of diffusion provides Poe with the key to the secret of the modus operandi of the Newtonian law. Poe seizes the difficulty much as his detective Dupin might, because it is by "such peculiarities--such protuberances above the plane of the ordinary--that Reason feels her way, if at all, in her search for the True" (H, XVI, 228).⁷ He deduces that matter must have been diffused in pulsations of strata into a limited sphere of space. The force of the irradiation is directly proportional to the squares of the distances, since "every exercise of the Divine Will will be proportional to that which demands the exertion" (H, XVI, 236). The fact that the stratum of atoms discontinued its irradiation when it reached its proper sphere seems to contradict Newton's first law of

⁷Alterton and Craig, Poe, p. 551, note that this principle points out the "unity and consistency of the mind of man, whether operating as poet, critic, story writer, or scientist."

motion that matter continues in a state of rest or motion unless compelled by an outside force to change its state. Poe counters this objection very weakly and unconvincingly by insisting that the principles of dynamics did not exist at the time of the primary act of irradiation. Poe concludes:

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. (H, XVI, 242).

With the withdrawal of the diffusive force or Divine Volition, the desire for unity of atoms in the universal sphere resulted in "innumerable agglomerations, characterized by innumerable specific differences of form, size, essential nature, and distance each from each" (H, XVI, 244). Thus the formation of nebulae, stars, planets, and all material things was accomplished. Poe attempts to trace scientifically the formation of the solar system using his conceptions and Laplace's Nebular Theory which he regards as "beautifully true" because it is consistent. The small inconsistency of the anomalous revolution of the moons of Uranus cannot invalidate, Poe thinks, this beautifully true theory and in true Dupin-fashion, Poe insists that the anomaly will eventually be found to be the strongest possible

corroboration of the hypothesis.

Poe regards the universe as "a spherical space, interspersed, unequally, with clusters" (H, XVI, 269). The Milky Way is a cluster in the larger cluster of galaxies which may themselves be clusters in "a limitless succession of Universes," each existing "in the bosom of its proper and particular God" (H, XVI, 276). The poetical instinct of humanity, "its instinct of the symmetrical," impels man to the fancy of an endless extension of this system of cycles which must ultimately yield to that strongest of forces, gravity, and coalesce into a final "globe of globes." This final "globe of globes" will instantaneously disappear, and "God will remain all in all" (H, XVI, 311). Then a new action and reaction of the Divine Will will produce a new cosmos; "the processes we have here ventured to contemplate will be renewed forever, and forever, and forever; a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine" (H, XVI, 311).

Then Poe makes a startling revelation. "And now--this Heart Divine--what is it? It is our own" (H, XVI, 311). Each soul is "in part, its own God--its own Creator...that God--the material and spiritual God--now exists solely in the diffused Matter and Spirit of the Universe; and that the re-gathering of this diffused Matter and Spirit will be but the re-constitution of the purely Spiritual and Individual God" (H, XVI, 313). Matter is sentient; all material things have

the God-spirit in them, and in time their tendency to unity will grow stronger and man and all matter will be reunited in God. As Poe insists, "all is Life--Life--Life within Life--the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine" (H, XVI, 315).

Although the overall design of Poe's cosmos is Divine Unity, the present state of the world is disorder, chaos, dispersion, multiplicity, and "wrongness." This universe is in a "state of progressive collapse," becoming more disordered as different atoms cluster into multiple forms in their desire for unity. Although this multiplicity of forms is part of the Divine Plan, it creates confusion for man because it obscures the essential design of unity. The present state of affairs is described by Poe as "wrong" and "abnormal" because it differs from the perfection and rightness of Unity. God willed into being the primordial particle and then forced "the originally and therefore normally One into the abnormal condition of Many" (H, XVI, 207). Repulsion maintains this abnormal condition, and gravity which seeks unity is described as a reaction 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" (H, XVI, 234). Unfortunately, man must live in the present chaotic stage of the Divine Plan, which Poe calls "the great Now--the awful Present" (H, XVI, 307). This stage, at least, is preferable to the final cosmic destruction Poe envisions. The condition

of the universe is "a vortical indrawing of the orbs" and clusters (H, XVI, 307). Although the attainment of final unity is supposed to be the achievement of normality and rightness, Poe seems to take a perverse delight in painting horrible pictures of cosmic destruction of "the still more awful Future" (H, XVI, 307). In this future time there will be a "chaotic precipitation, of the moons upon the planets, of the planets upon the suns, and of the suns upon the nuclei" (H, XVI, 307-8). "Then, indeed," Poe continues, "amid unfathomable abysses, will be glaring unimaginable suns" (H, XVI, 308). The clusters of glaring suns will rush together with "a thousand-fold electric velocity, commensurate only with their material grandeur and with the spiritual passion of their appetite for oneness, as the majestic remnants of the tribe of Stars flash, at length, into a common embrace" (H, XVI, 308).⁸ Since matter exists only as attraction and repulsion, the condition of oneness implies a negation of these forces, so matter will instantaneously cease to exist. "In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all Finite Perception, Unity must be--into that Material Nihilicity from which alone we can conceive it to have been evoked--to have

⁸In the light of Joseph Krutch's view of Poe's abnormal sexuality, one wonders if the sexual imagery implicit in this description of the final union of stars is meant to be estatic or terrifying. In Edgar Allen Poe, A Study in Genius (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), pp. 82-85.

been created by the Volition of God" (H, XVI, 311).

Poe's notion of the cosmos' sinking into a vortex of material nihility has been seized by at least two recent critics as evidence that he believed only in the ultimate horror of Nothingness.⁹ As G. R. Thompson states, "it is only in the vision of Void that Poe comes close to 'belief.'"¹⁰ Certainly, the image of the void and its connection with death and destruction occurs frequently in Poe's fiction. However, in Eureka the void is not completely empty. Poe contends that when the final "globe of globes" disappears, "God will remain all in all" (H, XVI, 311). The total destruction of matter is a prerequisite for the reconstruction of the total spiritual God and the realization of man as God. Poe describes it as the achievement of final "satisfaction" and the end of "happiness" which man seeks unsuccessfully in life. The limitations that the material world imposes upon man will be removed, and he will possess complete knowledge and the Supernal Loveliness he desires. Thus, material nihility does not predicate spiritual nihility but rather spiritual rebirth. For as Poe states, "the pain of the consideration that we shall lose our individual identity,

⁹Robert M. Adams, Nil (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 41-51, deals with Poe's vision of Void as the informing principle of his creative work.

¹⁰G. R. Thompson, "Unity, Death, and Nothingness--Poe's Romantic Skepticism," PMLA, LXXXVI (March, 1970), p. 298.

ceases at once when we further reflect that the process, as above described, is, neither more nor less than that of the absorption, by each individual intelligence, of all other intelligences (that is, of the Universe) into its own. That God may be all in all, each must become God" (H, XVI, 336).

Poe contends that Eureka is addressed to "those who feel rather than to those who think--to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities" (H, XVI, 184). In the final estimation he wishes his composition to be judged "as an Art-Product alone:--let us say as a Romance; or if I be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem" (H, XVI, 184). Perhaps it is only when the essay is considered as a work of art, a prose poem perhaps, that the reader can grasp the complete meaning of Poe's design. As a scientific treatise, the essay leaves much to be desired, but as a work of art it has a consistency and beauty that renders it poetically true. Poe sincerely believed that the subject matter of Eureka was the highest of intuitional truth. He offers this book of truths, "not in its character of Truth-Teller," he says, "but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth; constituting it true" (H, XVI, 184). Supernal beauty is usually considered by Poe to be the province of the poem, but the highest scientific truth can also possess a consistency and harmony that renders it beautiful.¹¹

¹¹In "The Poetic Principle" Poe makes "Beauty the province of the poem," and defines poetry as "the rhythmical creation of Beauty" (H, XIV, 275).

In presenting his truths, Poe uses the intuitional method of the poet. He renounces deductive and inductive reasoning, preferring to rely instead on intuition and pure theory. The important bases for his arguments are arrived at by the intuitive method. He says that "with an irresistible intuition, I felt Simplicity to have been the characteristic of the original action of God" and unity to be the source of Newtonian gravity (H, XVI, 221). In a similar manner he fails to examine the ultimate nature of the force of repulsion because it strikes him as a spiritual intervention of God, beyond the reach of human understanding.

In his arguments Poe strives for a perfect consistency, harmony, and symmetry because "a perfect consistency is an absolute truth."¹² Truth is also equated with beauty when Poe discusses Laplace's "beautifully true" Nebular theory. He accepts it because of its beauty rather than for its logic or scientific justification. And when Poe supposedly uses ratiocination to convince the reader of the mode of the diffusion of matter, he is actually arguing for the consistency and beauty of his theory. Poe felt that Newton and Laplace succeeded in discovering important scientific laws but failed to find the principle behind the laws of gravity because they "were mathematicians solely." Leibnitz

¹²Alterton and Craig, Poe, p. 551, note that Poe's only goal "as an utterer of poetic truth" in Eureka is to achieve consistency.

possessed more insight but failed because "his fairy guide, Imagination, was not sufficiently well-grown, or well-educated, to direct him aright" (H, XVI, 224). The scientist can make important discoveries using logic and scientific reasoning, but he must employ his poetic instinct or imagination as well as his analytic ability to perceive Divine Truth. Only the scientist who has developed the artistic side of his nature can discover the unifying principle behind the laws of nature.

Poe objects on artistic grounds to the idea of a material ether which would slow down rotation to cause a final vortical indrawing of planets. The intrusion of such an extraneous means for achieving final unity would disturb the symmetry, consistency, and beauty of the universal plan, and "we should have been forced to regard the Universe with some such sense of dissatisfaction as we experience in contemplating an unnecessarily complex work of human art." Creation would become "an imperfect plot in a romance" in which the denouement is awkwardly brought about by external incidents rather than "arising as a result of the primary proposition--as inseparable and inevitable part and parcel of the fundamental conception of the book" (H, XVI, 306).

Poe describes the subject of his critical essay, the universe, as "the most sublime of poems" and as "the perfect plot of God" created by the Supreme Artist as a model of artistic perfection. This universe is characterized by

"absolute reciprocity of adaption" and complete mutuality of cause and effect (H, XVI, 292). Man as artist must emulate the Divine model and "the pleasure which we derive from any display of human ingenuity is in the ratio of the approach to this species of reciprocity" (H, XVI, 292). In constructing a plot, the fiction writer, like God, must strive to arrange the incidents so that "we shall not be able to determine, of any one of them, whether it depends from any one other or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is really, or practically, unattainable--but only because it is a finite intelligence that constructs. The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a plot of God" (H, XVI, 292).

In presenting the universe as a work of art and God as the Supreme Artist, Poe has created a cosmology in which conventional religious and ethical terminology has little meaning. Art rather than religion becomes the way to know God. Poetry is the inspired guide to highest truth. And even plot acquires a certain religious significance since it gratifies man's need for unity and order. Customary moral values are superseded by artistic values of beauty, harmony, consistency, and unity. Man as a part of the Supreme Artist has a Divine instinct "which the Soul, not only of Man but of all created beings, took up, in the beginning, from the geometrical basis of the Universal radiation" (H, XVI, 293). This Divine spark is a poetical instinct for

symmetry and unity rather than for moral "goodness." By following his poetical instinct for unity, man may, through his aesthetic faculty of Taste, apprehend the perfect work of art that is the universe. And in the creation of works of art that emulate the Divine Ideal, the True Artist may achieve at least partial satisfaction for his immortal thirst for Supernal Beauty. For Poe, man as artist is man in his noblest, most God-like role.

In Poe's great chain of being, man retains his traditional ascendancy over other created things because he possesses more of the poetic instinct that is God. However, Poe believes in the sentience of all things and recognizes gradations in all created matter according to its complexity and the amount of Divine spirit it contains. All created things, animate and inanimate, are "more or less conscious Intelligences" (H, XVI, 314). This discrimination between the various levels of being prevents Poe's cosmos from being entirely pantheistic since not every created thing in it is equally admirable or equally divine. Vice exists as well as virtue; disharmony and disproportion, as well as beauty.

Poe also recognizes gradations of being in mankind, distinctions he bases on artistic criteria. In order to fully appreciate a work of genius, Poe believes that the observer must possess similar genius himself. From this viewpoint, man can never expect to comprehend completely the Divine work of art until he becomes, once more, a part of God. In this

world his mortal limitations restrict his efforts to satisfy his Divine instinct for full understanding. Disregarding these mortal limitations, a man's ability to perceive the Ideal and his success in approximating it in artistic works of his own depends upon the individual's amount of poetic sentiment, the strength and proportion of his faculties, and the application of his talents. Some men perceive dimly; others, clearly. Of those who more clearly perceive the Divine Unity, some possess the ability to transmit their perceptions to others through the creation of works of art and others do not. It is these perceptive creators who occupy the topmost level in Poe's hierarchy of created beings. An individual of this elevated status Poe designates as a "genius" or True Artist, and it is his function to reveal Divine Unity-Truth-Beauty to the rest of mankind.¹³

The Diety implanted in all men the "Faculty of Ideality," a sentiment of the beautiful, sublime, and mystical (H, VIII, 282). This poetical instinct causes man to admire the physical beauties of nature and to search beyond them for a higher form of beauty. It gives him "the unconquerable desire--to know" (H, VII, 282-3). It is man's "sense of the symmetrical," which alone can lead him to truth and beauty; it is, Poe argues, "an instinct which may be depended upon with an

¹³Although Poe believes all men possess an innate poetic sentiment, he makes distinctions similar to those of Emerson between the various levels of genius and the men of mere "talent."

almost blindfold reliance. It is the poetical essence of the Universe...which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems" (H, XVI, 302).¹⁴

Because of his Divine poetical instinct, every man feels "omniprevalent strivings at perfection" just as every man possesses an inherent belief that nothing can exist greater than his own soul. Through a Jungian-type racial memory, man is aware of his former state as God. During youth these memories are clear and true. According to Poe, "we walk about, amid the destinies of our world-existence, encompassed by dim but ever present Memories of a Destiny more vast--very distant in the bygone time, and infinitely awful" (H, XVI, 312). Self-existence from all time to all eternity seems to be the most natural of all states until "conventional World-Reason awakens us from the truth of our dream" (H, XVI, 312). Worldly chaos intrudes upon man's belief in simplicity and greatly weakens his sense of primordial unity. Man's consciousness of individuality grows and fights against the desire for unity. Like the atoms of the cosmos vibrating between the tension of attraction and repulsion, man is torn between the innate tendency of his soul for unity, and the coexisting tendency to confusion and chaos which Poe terms "perversity." If man is to succeed as an artist,

¹⁴Alterton and Craig, Poe, p. 538, note that this poetic sentiment is associated in Poe's thinking with imagination, originality, and creative mentality. It is placed in the supreme position "since it satisfies the taste."

he must follow his poetic sentiment for unity and resist the perverse tendency to chaos. Yielding to chaos disorders the strongest intellect, thwarts the satisfaction of the poetic instinct, and drives man to horror, madness, and death. The satisfaction of man's poetic instinct is found through artistic pleasure which will enable him to find the happiness which Poe regards as the purpose of man's existence. The function of the True Artist is to recall in man the sense of unity, harmony, and satisfaction he felt as a child before world chaos had its destructive effect on his natural artistic sensibilities.

In his consideration of man as artist, Poe divides the mind into "its three most immediately obvious distinctions: the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense" (H, XIV, 272). Taste, being the aesthetic faculty, is naturally the most exalted. It occupies the middle position between intellect and moral sense, operating in conjunction with the other two faculties and mediating between them. Taste is especially close to the moral sense; in fact, it "is separated," Poe argues, "by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves" (H, XIV, 272-3). However, the function of each of the faculties is distinctly separate. "Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth," Poe explains, "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" (H, XIV, 273). Since man's immortal instinct is a sense of the beautiful, Taste guides the other faculties in the perception of Divine Beauty, which is also Divine Truth and Goodness. Taste thus becomes the highest moral guide through which man perceives evil as well as good.

Although Poe acknowledges the existence of evil in his cosmos, he never fully justifies its creation. In one of his early critical essays, Poe identified evil as "a mere consequence of good" and good as "a mere consequence of evil" (H, VIII, 299). Since good and evil exist only as comparative values, then the existence of evil aids man in recognizing good. Through an apprehension of disharmony and disproportion, man gains a clearer conception of symmetry and unity. Just how evil came to be part of the Divine plan is not so clearly explained. In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" Poe suggests that man corrupted himself by glorifying reason and neglecting his Divine intuition. Scientific reasoning subverted man's Taste so that he could no longer perceive the beauty and harmony of nature. Yet in Eureka, Poe argues that man must accept his burden of pain and evil--even if it is unjustified from man's point of view--because he helped create it and impose it upon himself. Only from the cosmic

or God view, Poe insists, can man comprehend the riddles of "Divine injustice" and "inexorable fate." The existence of evil supposedly becomes intelligible and endurable from this view because man can recognize it as a sorrow "we have imposed upon ourselves, in furtherance of our own purposes--with a view--if even with a futile view, to the extension of our own Joy" (H, XVI, 313). At this point the uncomfortable conception of an impotent God who created evil in a "futile attempt" to increase His own joy is paradoxically opposed to the previous portrayal of the omnipotent Supreme Artist who superbly planned every detail of creation. Man can almost pity a Divine Being who must pass His eternity "in perpetual variation of Concentrated Self and almost Infinite Self-Diffusion" seeking more joy but lacking the power to extend the amount of happiness which appertains to Him "by right" (H, XVI, 314). Divine Frustration alone would seem to be sufficient to account for the creation of evil. At any rate, man in Poe's aesthetic cosmology need not concern himself directly with the problem of evil. He can circumvent the problem artistically--as Poe does. By following his poetic instinct for Divine Unity, he need not concern himself with the corollary attributes of Truth and Virtue because they are inherent in his goal. An artist combats vice by struggling toward the supreme virtue of Unity.

Because of their Divine artistic instinct, all men long for Supernal Beauty. In certain individuals, the

response to this irrepressible demand is the creation of works of art which attempt to partially satisfy the artistic longing by approximating the Divine Ideal of harmony, beauty, and unity. "This struggle," Poe says, "to apprehend the supernatural Loveliness...on the part of souls fittingly constituted--has given to the world all which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and to feel as poetic" (H, XIV, 274). In order to reveal Divine Unity-Beauty-Truth to others, a man must possess the impressive artistic credentials of the True Artist.

Poe's man of genius or the True Artist possesses inordinate mental powers "existing in a state of absolute proportion--so that no one faculty has undue predominance." He continues, "the genius is greater or less, first, as the general mental power is more or less inordinately great; and, secondly, as the proportion of the faculties is more or less absolute" (H, XIV, 178). The proportion of mental faculties without accompanying inordinate mental power results in mere talent, while the lack of proportion of great mental powers results in insanity.

The result in the True Artist of an absolute proportion of great mental powers also produces "the appreciation of Beauty and a horror of Deformity which we call sensibility, together with that intense vitality, which is implied when we speak of 'Energy' or 'Passion'" (H, XIV, 178). The true genius alone is capable of complete universality. His poetic sentiment may be expressed in painting, sculpture, architecture,

dance, music, landscape gardening, or any other creative field. He has the ability to be equally successful at any endeavor. His greater success at a particular one can be accounted for by his greater taste or zeal for that activity.

As a result of his perfectly developed faculty of Taste, the poet or True Artist has greater receptive powers and imaginative abilities than the ordinary man. His heightened susceptibility to the impressions of beauty enables him to perceive it more clearly in the natural forms of the physical world and to glimpse the higher manifestations of Supernal Beauty beyond. His imagination which Poe calls "a lesser degree of the creative power of God," enables him to combine the forms of earthly beauty he perceives into novel approximations of the Supernal Beauty he glimpses. And every imaginative and mystic approximation he presents in his creative work provides "a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone" (H, XIV, 274).

The True Artist's exquisite sense of beauty is "a sense affording him rapturous enjoyment, but at the same time implying, or involving, an equally exquisite sense of Deformity or disproportion" (H, XIV, 175). Poe identifies this "Deformity" with evil. His "more than usual clear-sightedness in respect to Wrong" accounts for the "irritability" of the true genius (H, XIV, 175). He can see injustice where others cannot and it disturbs him to a greater

extent. Thus, the True Artist is also "the loftiest moral nobility." He can, by presenting his "vivid perception of Right" in his creative works, give his audience a standard by which to recognize more clearly the converse of Right which is the disproportion of Evil (H, XIV, 175).

Poe's positing of unity as the primary "virtue" has led some modern critics to conclude that Poe believed anything conducive to unity was a "good" and anything perpetuating diversity was an "evil." In this view, disease, decay, insanity, and even murder emerge as virtues because they are thresholds to unity. Man in destroying abets the destructive phase of the design of the cosmos, a cosmos which itself must be annihilated before unity can be achieved. Since all destruction represents a tendency to unity, then "all horror eventuates as pleasure; all crime issues in a 'supernal virtue.'"¹⁵ The drawback to this approach is that it virtually ignores Poe's repeated pronouncements on the nature of genius and the True Artist. And since Poe considers "happiness" to be the end of man's existence, it is difficult to see how disease, decay, and self-destruction could produce even momentary achievement of this goal. Although Poe makes unity the supreme virtue, he also makes it quite clear that Divine Unity embraces the highest truth

¹⁵Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections Between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision," PMLA, LXXXIII (May, 1968), p. 296.

and that the True Artist represents the highest morality. Although it may be combatted primarily for its deformity or disproportion, vice in Poe's cosmology is nevertheless abhorred by the artist who must have unity, beauty, and harmony to achieve satisfaction for his Divine poetic sentiment.

The True Artist perceives Divine Unity primarily by two means: he may contemplate the beauties of nature and through them glimpse Supernal Beauty; or he may receive intuitive impressions while he is in a state of reverie. The impressions which come to him through dreams and reveries are especially fleeting and evanescent. These impressions, Poe explains, "arise in the soul (alas, how rarely!) only at its epochs of most intense tranquility...and at those mere points of time when the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams" (H, XVI, 88).¹⁶ The artist can put himself in a receptive mood for these psychal impressions, but he cannot cause their appearance nor can he sustain their existence. This condition exists "but for an inappreciable point of time"--not even long enough to be seized as thought (H, XVI, 88). His inability to sustain these Divine glimpses causes the artist a great deal of pain and frustration. For this reason Poe insists that "a certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all

¹⁶Alterton and Craig, Poe, p. 541, see Poe as "a mystic and idealist in his psychology" because as an artist he sought to explore the region of the indefinite through psychic impressions.

the higher manifestations of true Beauty" (H, XIV, 279).

Because the True Artist has a heightened degree of poetic sentiment, "that intense longing of the soul for Supernal Beauty," he is impelled to creative effort. His "soul thus athirst strives to allay its fever in futile efforts at creation" (H, XI, 72). (By "futile" Poe means mortally restricted.) If the artist is to succeed in his creative effort, he must combine his intuitive perceptive ability with constructive ability and industry. Poe believed that there are many men of genius, but few works of genius because man must couple his ability with hard work. In addition, the artist, more than the average man, needs the moral qualities of patience, concentration, self-dependence, and a contempt for public opinion.

Thus, for Poe, the True Artist represents moral and intellectual as well as artistic superiority. He is the high priest in Poe's religion of art, mediating between God the Supreme Artist and the lesser mortals who lack sufficient poetic sentiment to grasp the Divine design on their own. Through his creative efforts he reveals something of the Divine Unity-Truth-Beauty to the rest of mankind and enables them to achieve some degree of spiritual happiness and "exaltation of soul." At the same time he receives partial satisfaction for the longing of his own poetic sentiment. According to Poe, "poetry is thus seen to be a response--unsatisfactory it is true--but still in some measure a response, to a natural and irrepressible demand. Man being

what he is, the time could never have been in which Poesy was not" (H, XI, 73). In the succession of ages which must elapse before the cosmic design of unity will be fulfilled, man's "sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness" and "he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah" (H, XVI, 314-15). Until that day when he transcends his mortal limitations, man must struggle to perceive the Divine plan of "life within life" if he is to achieve any satisfaction for his longing for unity.

In Poe's cosmology, the role of the True Artist is not a particularly happy one. Ugliness, disproportion, vice, and chaos constantly offend his exquisite sense of beauty. His mortal limitations prevent him from attaining more than a "partial satisfaction" of his intense longing for Divine Unity. His inability to duplicate Supernal Beauty in his own creative efforts leaves him dissatisfied; his "inordinate mental powers" only make him more aware of his mortal limitations and failures. However, the proportion of his faculties and the unified state of his body, mind, and soul put him in harmony with the design of the universe. His heart throbs to the rhythm of the "Heart Divine." The final satisfaction of his thirst for unity, while distant in time, is inevitable. Until his destiny is fulfilled, the artist satisfies his Divine nature as Creator by fashioning designs in miniature of the Divine Design.

This creative outlet enables him to withstand the pressures and pains that the chaotic world inflicts upon his delicate sensibilities.

Generally, the amount of poetic sentiment an individual possesses is proportional to his artistic ability to satisfy it. The man of "mere talent" needs less Divine Truth and Beauty than the true genius. Trouble arises only when an individual has an intense poetic longing for unity and lacks the corresponding means to satisfy it. This is the unfortunate case of the "factitious genius." Like the True Artist, he possesses inordinate mental powers and exquisite sensibilities; but because his faculties are not in proportion, he exists as a microcosm of the present world chaos. The "abnormal predominance of some one faculty...at the expense and to the detriment, of all the others" results in "mental disease or rather, of organic malformation of mind," Poe contends (H, XIV, 177). Even when pursuing the path indicated by his predominate faculty, such a "pseudo-genius" will produce "unsound" works of art. His unsuccessful creative efforts "betray the general mental insanity" (H, XIV, 177). And his efforts afford him little or no satisfaction for his Divine instinct for unity. By yielding to the chaos of the world, the pseudo-genius has perverted his poetic instinct and betrayed his Divine nature. Denied a creative outlet in art, the disordered artist is driven to find release from his frustrations.

This release often takes the form of self-destruction in an attempt to escape the chaos of the world. Such is the case with the narrator-protagonists of Poe's tales of terror-- who will be examined in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II

THE DISORDERED ARTIST IN THE TALES OF TERROR

The protagonists or narrator-protagonists of Poe's tales of terror are fictional representations of his conception of the "factitious genius" or disordered artist. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Oval Portrait," and "Hopfrog," Poe presents his imbalanced protagonists as literal artists. In "William Wilson," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado," the narrator-protagonists are not literally artists, but they possess the same innate poetic sentiment and demonstrate the same frustrated longing for unity as their artisan-counterparts. Like the true genius, these artists possess inordinate mental powers and exquisite sensibilities, but because their faculties are not in proportion, they find no satisfaction for their intense longing for Supernal Unity-Truth-Beauty. The world of chaos operates upon them, disordering their faculties, and they passively accept its influence. Some of them, like William Wilson and the narrators of "Ligeia" and "The Black Cat," actively pursue lives that dull their powers of self-analysis and destroy their artistic sensibilities. Then these weak individuals rationalize their behavior and

blame their crimes on unidentified external forces, not realizing that the origin of their damnation lies within themselves.¹ For each man in Poe's cosmos can choose to follow his innate poetic sentiment for unity or he can yield to "perversity," the force of worldly chaos. However, once the corruption of his faculties begins, man is powerless to reverse the process. When the Poe hero finally recognizes his deteriorating condition and seeks outside help (as does Roderick Usher), it is already too late. He has become a microcosm of worldly chaos. Significantly, the demise of the Poe protagonist is often accompanied by a symbolic swoon or descent into a pit, grave, or vortex, similar to the vortical destruction of the physical universe Poe depicts in Eureka.

The disordered, fragmented protagonist in the tales of terror suffers from intense feelings of disunity and separateness from others. Like William Wilson and the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," he is convinced that his crime will somehow bring him peace and satisfaction for his craving for unity. Murder, as Joseph Moldenhauer points out, is merely the attempt by the murdering protagonist to achieve

¹Edward H. Davidson, Poe, A Critical Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 194. Davidson notes that the ultimate reason why Poe's men choose or will good or evil is "far beyond anyone's knowing; the sinner is compulsively driven by some motive to be malignant, by some maggot in the brain which he cannot anticipate or understand but the penalty of which he is more than willing to suffer."

spiritual unity with his victim.² Yet the crime paradoxically intensifies the criminal's agony and frustration until he is driven to self-destruction in a futile attempt to regain the sense of unity and the harmony of faculties he once possessed. Since the Poe protagonist operates in a kind of moral vacuum, he is not accountable to society for his crime. The Poe criminal is never "brought to justice" by outside forces; rather, he is impelled to confess and is punished by the same force of chaos (perversity) that drove him to commit the crime.

Even the protagonists Poe presents as literal artists are frustrated failures because their imbalanced faculties prevent them from finding poetic satisfaction through artistic creation. Their works of art always betray their mental disorders. Usher's music, painting, and verse reflect his "distempered ideality." The painter of "The Oval Portrait" produces an "appalling" picture that mirrors his passionate and immoral obsession. Prospero's fantastic scenarios and interior decorations reveal his disordered imagination. The narrator of "Ligeia," who is an amateur interior decorator, creates a bridal chamber of horror and death for his second wife, Rowena. He is also a frustrated art critic who regards his first wife, Ligeia, as the ideal work of art but is unable to put her ideality into words. James Gargano notes

²Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections Between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision," PMLA, LXXXIII (May, 1968), p. 292.

that the hypertrophic language characteristic of Poe's protagonists in the tales of terror reveals "men reaching futilely toward the ineffable."³ Since words are "impotent to convey" the "inexpressible" beauty of Ligeia, the narrator is frustrated in his attempts to describe her spell over him.

Roderick Usher is Poe's prototype of the disordered artist who is driven to madness and death because he passively allows the chaos of the world to overwhelm his faculties; therefore, an examination of "The Fall of the House of Usher" reveals Poe's general attitude toward the destructive effect of the external world upon the artistic sensibilities of man.

Like Poe, Usher believes in the sentience of physical things and the capacity of matter to affect spirit. In Eureka Poe proclaims that every atom in the cosmos influences every other atom and that merely displacing a dust particle from his finger is an act which "shakes the Moon in her path, which causes the Sun to be no longer the Sun, and which alters forever the destiny of the...stars...(H, XVI, 218). Since the present condition of the cosmos is that of diffusion and chaos, the influence of matter upon mind is potentially destructive. Roderick feels the destructive force of his surroundings but lacks the "moral energy" to escape them.

³James W. Gargano, "The Question of Poe's Narrators," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Robert Regan (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 166.

He recognizes that "the mere form and substance of his family mansion" has exerted a horrible influence over his spirit, "an effect which the physique of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the morale of his existence" (H, III, 281). Usher maintains that the evidence of the sentence can be seen "in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls" (H, III, 286). This atmosphere "for centuries had molded the destinies of his family, and...made him...what he was" (H, III, 286-7). Although he recognizes the morbidity of his life and even calls his persistence in remaining in the house a deplorable "folly," Roderick makes no effort to escape. Instead, he secludes himself in the house and passively allows the "kingdom of inorganization" to destroy him (H, III, 286). He is like the lute in the lines Poe quotes from De Beranger:

Son coeur est un luth suspendu;
 Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne (H, III, 273).

Like the strings of the lute, Roderick passively vibrates to the influence of his environment. His nerves pulsate to the discordant jangle of chaos until he is driven mad by the cacaphony.⁴ Roderick's poem, "The Haunted Palace," repeats the musical analogy of the lute. "Spirits moving musically/

⁴D. H. Lawrence, "Edgar Allen Poe," in Twentieth Century Century Interpretations of "The Fall of the House of Usher," ed. by Thomas Woodson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 39. Lawrence believes the lines from De Berenger indicate that Roderick "has lost his self, his living soul, and become a sensitized instrument of the external influences."

To a lute's well-tuned law" are transformed by the disorder-influence of chaos into "Vast forms that move fantastically/ To a discordant melody" (H, III, 285). The motif of the lute intensifies the empathy between Usher and his environment and depicts by musical analogy the destructive force of chaos on mind.

In the description of the House of Usher, Poe identifies the house with its inhabitant and its decay with Roderick's mental and moral decay. At first view the house projects a "sense of insufferable gloom" (H, III, 273). Its "bleak walls," vacant, "eye-like windows," and the decaying vegetation surrounding it are ominously reflected by a "black and lurid tarn" (H, III, 273-4). The webwork of fungi hanging from the eaves resembles the "wild gossamer texture" of Roderick's hair (H, III, 274). The narrator notes that in spite of the appearance of dry rot and the crumbling condition of the individual stones in the house, the structure remains intact. The "inconsistency" in the apparent stability of a thoroughly decayed structure reflects Roderick's own attempt to maintain a composure of sanity when his faculties are disordered. A "barely perceptible fissure" which extends in a zigzag crack down the front of the house symbolizes Roderick's schizophrenic instability; the mansion, like its inhabitant is likely to collapse under the least external pressure (H, III, 277). But the still, unruffled waters of the tarn indicate that no breath of wind invades the isolation of the grounds to topple the structure. Roderick, however, recognizes

the precariousness of his unstable condition as symbolized by the house, and "shudders at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul" (H, III, 280).

Roderick's identification with the house and their mutual destiny is portrayed allegorically in "The Haunted Palace." As many critics have noted, the poem makes a point by point comparison between a building and a man's head. According to Wilbur, "the exterior of the palace represents the man's physical features; the interior represents the man's mind engaged in harmonious imaginative thought."⁵ Before the destruction begins:

Wanderers in that happy valley
Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tuned law (H, III, 285).

But "evil things" assailed the monarch's high estate and reason gave way to madness:

And travellers now within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows, see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody...(H, III, 285).

The "evil things" which provoke the civil war within the palace of the mind represent the corrupting influences of the physical world of chaos. As Wilbur sees it, "the palace in its original condition expresses the imaginative harmony which the poet's soul enjoys in early childhood, when all things are

⁵Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Robert Regan (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967), p. 104.

viewed with a tyrannical and unchallenged subjectivity."

The corrupting influences of the external world intrude as the child matures, and "the imagination must now struggle against the intellect and the moral sense; finding itself no longer able to possess the world through a serene solipsism, it strives to annihilate the outer world by turning in upon itself; it flees into irrationality and dream; and all its dreams are efforts both to recall and to simulate its primal, unfallen state."⁶ However, once the faculties are disordered by the chaos of the world, their harmony cannot be restored.⁷ "The Haunted Palace" closes with the wild laughter of insanity, foreshadowing Roderick's eventual insanity and death.

Both Roderick and his house radiate "a sense of insufferable gloom" (H, III, 273). About the mansion and grounds hung "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" (H, III, 276). Inside, the somber furnishings--black oaken floors, dark draperies that admit little light, and the tall

⁶Ibid., p. 107. Poe's earlier poem, "Romance," deals with a similar dichotomy.

⁷Darrel Abel, "A Key to the House of Usher," Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Fall of the House of Usher," ed. by Thomas Woodson (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1969), p. 53. Abel notes that "the tragedy of Roderick Usher was not merely his fatal introversion, but his too-late realization of his own doom and the ineffectuality of his effort to re-establish connection with life by summoning to him the person most his friend."

narrow windows--intensify the atmosphere of sorrow. Even the skeptical narrator who tries to find a rational explanation for the horrors he encounters is oppressed by the gloomy atmosphere radiated by the house. Likewise, he bitterly perceives "the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom" (H, III, 282).

Roderick is beyond help; his entire physical, mental, and spiritual being is progressively deteriorating. Physically, he is so "terribly altered" that his friend, the narrator, can scarcely recognize him. His skin is ghastly pale like a cadaver and his eyes reflect a "miraculous lustre" (H, III, 279). He already looks half-dead. His manner reveals a nervous agitation and an alternately manic-depressive temperament. His physical senses become so morbidly acute that "the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odours of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror" (H, III, 280). Even Roderick himself can recognize "the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne," a fact he acknowledges in his verse, "The Haunted Palace" (H, III, 284). His other works of art further reflect his incipient insanity. Usher's "wild improvisations" on guitar, his "perversion and amplification of the wild air" of a waltz, his "phantasmagoric" paintings, and his

"wild fantasias" of verse are all manifestations of "an excited and highly distempered ideality" (H, III, 282-4).

Roderick's moral collapse occurs with the burial alive of his sister, Madelaine. Up to that point, he maintains a semblance of sanity, but with her entombment he seals his fate. Madelaine symbolizes a necessary part of Roderick's being which he cannot live without. They are strikingly similar twins, between whom "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed" (H, III, 289). Both suffer from strange nervous disorders.⁸ Madelaine has been variously identified by critics as Roderick's physical aspect, as his unconscious, as a vampire, and as an illusion--to name only a few.⁹ Since she appears only briefly in the tale, it is difficult to determine her exact role. Her most notable characteristic is an intense will to live, a quality totally lacking in the passive Roderick. She "had steadily borne up" against her prostrating illness and refused to take to bed until the last day (H, III, 282). Even after being buried

⁸Allen Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 45. Tate convincingly argues that Madelaine's illness is vampirism brought about by the incestuous love of her brother. Roderick has possessed her inner being and she retaliated by destroying him. Only by mutual destruction can they achieve the spiritual unity they desire.

⁹Edward H. Davidson, Poe, A Critical Study, p. 28, sees Madelaine as the physical or sensual side of Roderick's being. Patrick F. Quinn, "That Spectre in my Path," in Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 89, argues that Madelaine represents Roderick's dark unconscious mind.

alive in a subterranean vault she manages to rip through the screwed-down lid of her coffin, open an immensely heavy iron door, struggle through a long copper archway, make her way to the apartment of her brother, and still retain enough vitality to fall upon him and bear "him to the floor a corpse" (H, III, 296).

Roderick seems to recognize that he cannot live if Madelaine dies.¹⁰ Instead of burying her, he places her in the vault in the house so that she is still near him. After Madelaine's entombment, "an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder" of Roderick (H, III, 289). "His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue--but the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out" (H, III, 289). Roderick's terrible secret obsesses him and as his terror increases, so does the hyperacuity of his senses. He can hear Madelaine stir in her coffin, and yet he "dared not speak" of it to his friend (H, III, 296). As the narrator reads the Mad Trist, Roderick listens to Madelaine's approaching footsteps but is unable to flee her vengeance. Her final death agonies "bore him to the floor a corpse"

¹⁰Darrel Abel, "A Key to the House of Usher," p. 46, notes that Roderick and Madelaine "are not two persons, but one consciousness in two bodies, each mirroring the other" and "all the life of the Ushers is flickering to extinction in these feeble representatives."

also (H, III, 296). And the house together with the inhabitants it symbolized divided and sank into final unity in the tarn.

Throughout the tale, Poe presents many carefully balanced correspondences which serve to point out the growing effect of worldly corruption upon Roderick's disordered faculties. The decayed house with its zigzag fissure represents Roderick's impending insanity, and the two halves of the house suggest both Roderick's schizophrenic, manic-depressive state and the two surviving Ushers, Roderick and Madelaine. The twinship of Roderick and Madelaine, their striking physical similarities, and their similar nervous illnesses identify Madelaine as a necessary aspect of Roderick's being. Roderick's ghastly painting of Madelaine's vault foreshadows her burial, and the sounds she makes as she escapes from the vault are echoed in the narrator's reading of the Mad Trist. The storm inside Roderick's mind on the night of his death is echoed by a wild, chaotic physical storm outside which brings about the destruction of the house. All of these corresponding elements are blended physically and artistically at the climax when the universe of Usher sinks into final unity in the tarn which, at the beginning of the tale, had reflected the image of the house.

The vortical sinking into unity of the House of Usher bears a striking resemblance to Poe's description of the destruction of the physical universe in Eureka. The narrator's description in the last scene of the tale is dominated by a

ferocious storm, "wild light," and the "full, setting, and blood-red moon" (H, III, 297). Suddenly, "there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind--the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight--my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder--there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters" (H, III, 297). The narrator's emotional and hyperbolic language in this passage could more fittingly be used to describe the cosmic destruction of the universe than the collapse of a house. It is almost as if the narrator were standing on the earth, watching "the chaotic...precipitation of the moons upon the planets" which Poe describes in Eureka (H, XVI, 307). In both cases, the "spiritual passion" of their "appetite for oneness" is satisfied by the annihilation of matter, mind, and spirit in "a common embrace"--imagery which recalls the possibly incestuous relationship of Roderick and Madelaine Usher (H, XVI, 308). By employing hyperbolic language and cataclysmic images of destruction, Poe suggests cosmic parallels to the fall of the House of Usher.

Unlike Roderick Usher, who passively allows world chaos to disorder his faculties, the narrator of "Ligeia" aids and abets the forces of disorder which disintegrate his rational consciousness. He actively plunges into "the trammels of opium" and attempts to substitute physical excesses for his spiritual needs. The narrator's intense longing for the Divine Ideal represented by Ligeia reveals his inordinate amount of poetic sentiment, which being mortal, he cannot

completely satisfy in this world.¹¹ Frustrated by his mortal limitations, the obsessed narrator finally reverts to hallucinations and madness in a futile attempt to recreate his lost ecstasy.

Ligeia is presented as the personification of Ideal Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. Her husband describes her person as if she were a perfect work of art, a beautiful statue. She is tall, slender, and majestic with a "lofty pale forehead" like "purest ivory" and a lovely "marble hand" (H, II, 249-50). Her face possesses the "luxurious smoothness of surface" and "harmonious curves" of the image on a Hebraic medallion (H, II, 250). Her chin has the "spirituality" of the Greek contour which "the god Apollo revealed but in a dream, to Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian" (H, II, 251). Even her teeth reflect "holy light" (H, II, 250). Her eyes are "far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race," and her beauty is "the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth--the beauty of the fabulous Hourì of the Turk" (H, II, 251). The narrator describes her radiance as that "of an opium-dream--an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the phantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos" (H, II, 249-50).

¹¹Roy P. Basler, "The Interpretation of Ligeia," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Robert Regan (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967), p. 53. Basler points out that the narrator's "imaginative desire has outrun his capabilities" which leads inevitably to his destruction.

Yet her features are not classically regular, but possess a certain "strangeness" (H, II, 250). For the narrator (as does Poe) believes that "there is no exquisite beauty...without some strangeness in the proportion" (H, II, 250). This strangeness is reflected in the expression of Ligeia's eyes, and the narrator becomes obsessed with a passion to understand its meaning. "What was it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! they became to me twin stars of Leda and I to them devoutest of astrologers" (H, II, 251-2). Often the narrator feels himself "approaching the full knowledge of their expression" but always remains on the very verge of discovering their secret without being able to grasp it (H, II, 252). Ligeia's beauty, he states, "passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine" (H, II, 252). Significantly, certain physical objects also inspire the narrator with the same exalted sentiment he feels in contemplating Ligeia. The list he enumerates is strikingly similar to Poe's list in "The Poetic Principle" of physical beauties that may inspire the poet to Supernal Beauty. Even Ligeia's name reflects her ideality. Poe gives her the same name as the ideally beautiful woman in his early long poem, "Al Aaraaf," in which Ligeia is the personification of the harmony and beauty of nature.

Like her beauty, Ligeia's wisdom is "gigantic" and "astounding." She is deeply proficient in all classical and

modern languages, in all the diverse areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science, and in all manner of "abstruse knowledge." While alive, she serves as her husband's spiritual and intellectual guide, directing him toward "the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden" (H, II, 254). However, even with Ligeia's help, the narrator cannot reach this goal of ultimate knowledge.

In addition to personifying Ideal Beauty and Wisdom, Ligeia represents ultimate Goodness and Love. The narrator "revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love" (H, II, 261). He rationalizes his hostility toward Rowena because of the idolatrous love he still bears for Ligeia; however, he clearly lacks the moral fortitude to emulate Ligeia's purity. His devotion to opium and his psychological torture and murder of Rowena demonstrate his deficient moral faculty.

The narrator observes that Ligeia possesses an enormous will and a "wild desire for life" which he has "no utterance capable of expressing" (H, II, 256). However, it is the narrator who exhibits the hypertrophied will and who believes the quotation from Glanville that "man doth not yield him to the angels; nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will" (H, II, 257). Ligeia holds quite an opposite view which she expresses in her grimly pessimistic poem, "The Conqueror Worm," a poem she composes only a few

days before her death and forces her husband to read to her on the day she dies. In Ligeia's poem, man is a weak-willed puppet, manipulated by the forces of nature, and ultimately destined to become food for the Conqueror Worm. Although she shrieks Glanville's formula on her deathbed, Ligeia does not really believe it. As Basler points out, she is merely echoing her husband's wish that death can be overcome by an exertion of will.¹²

The narrator's attempts to escape his mortal limitations through a superhuman act of will all end in failure. He is unable to completely possess the Ideal Beauty, Truth, and Goodness represented by Ligeia, nor can he prevent her death or "will" her back to life. Because he cannot accept the partial satisfaction afforded the mortal artist in this world, the narrator is driven by frustration and despair to insanity.

After Ligeia's death, the narrator purchases an isolated abbey and decorates it to resemble a grotesque funeral chamber. His growing insanity (like Roderick Usher's) is reflected in his art work. Much "incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold" (H, II, 258). He designs a heavy tapestry covered with arabesque figures to produce an effect of "an endless succession of

¹²Ibid., p. 55

ghastly forms" which an artificial wind heightens, "giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole" (H, II, 260-1).¹³ To this chamber "in a moment of mental alienation" the narrator brings his new bride, Rowena, who represents the physical world (H, II, 259). However, the divine poetic longing cannot be assuaged by physical means and the narrator soon begins to loathe Rowena "with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man" (H, II, 261). In profaning the Ideal by accepting Rowena as a replacement for Ligeia, the narrator intensifies his frustration and agony and hastens his incipient insanity. He begins to hallucinate, imagining the presence of an invisible object in Rowena's room that projects "a shadow--a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect" upon the floor (H, II, 263). Next he imagines "a gentle foot-fall" upon the carpet and sees "three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid" fall into Rowena's goblet of wine (H, II, 263). The narrator, in a state of hallucination, imagines that the poison is distilled from the air; actually it is administered by him. Because he wishes to believe that Ligeia is struggling to possess Rowena's body, he must rationalize the physical fact of poison in a supposedly spiritual struggle.

After Rowena dies, the narrator sits with her body and gives himself up to "passionate waking visions of Ligeia" (H, II, 265). In his intense desire to possess the Ideal, his

¹³Robert D. Jacobs, Poe, Journalist and Critic (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 211. Jacobs notes "in both 'Usher' and 'Ligeia' the qualities of the houses are identified with those of the owners, so the grotesquerie of the bridal chamber signifies a disordered mind."

disordered brain imagines that the spirit of Ligeia reanimates the dead body of Rowena. He gazes at the apparition and "a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the air, the stature, the demeanor of the figure" paralyzes him (H, II, 267). "There was a mad disorder in my thoughts--a tumult unappeasable," he says (H, II, 268). To his disturbed mind, the figure before him is transformed into Ligeia, and he "shrieked aloud, 'can I never--can I never be mistaken--these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes--of my lost love--of the lady--of the LADY LIGEIA'" (H, II, 268). However, the vision of Ligeia is no more substantial than the "wild visions, opium engendered," which "flitted, shadow-like" before the narrator's disturbed senses (H, II, 264). Impelled by a poetic sentiment too intense for his mortal faculties to satisfy, the narrator is driven to madness. His rational consciousness has disintegrated; his moral faculty is completely atrophied, and his physical senses are disoriented. He has become a microcosm of worldly chaos and has lost the ability to attain the vision of Supernal Beauty, Truth, and Goodness that the True Artist with balanced faculties perceives.

In "The Masque of the Red Death" Prince Prospero, an artist whose passions and imagination overbalance his reason, creates his own world of delirious fantasies apart from the chaos of reality. To escape the horrible pestilence that is devastating his dominions, he takes a thousand friends to one of his castles, "the creation of the prince's own eccentric

yet august taste" (H, III, 250). There they physically and mentally seclude themselves from the moral and physical realities of life. Death, pain, and disease are shut out, and the courtiers revel unconcernedly in the pleasures the Prince has provided. "The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think" (H, III, 251).

Toward the end of the sixth month of their seclusion, "while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad," the Prince gives a magnificent masquerade for his friends (H, III, 251). The seven rooms where the masque is held allegorically represent the seven ages of man, "from the blue of the dawn of life to the black of its night."¹⁴ A gigantic ebony clock stands in the seventh chamber to remind the revelers of their inescapable mortality.

The Prince's disordered faculties, his hypertrophied imagination and passion and his atrophied moral sense, are reflected in the grotesque art work he creates. "His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad" (H, III, 253). And it is the Prince's own guiding taste "which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque" (H, III, 254). He peoples the world of his masquerade with "a multitude of dreams" and "grotesque phantasms" (H, III, 254). "There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and

¹⁴Walter Blair, "Poe's Conception of Incident and Tone in the Tale," Modern Philology, XLI (May, 1944), p. 234.

appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust" (H, III, 254). The "feverish intensity" of the revelers reflects the disease in the mind of their creator. Moral standards are completely ignored and "the license of the night was nearly unlimited" (H, III, 255). But time intrudes in the form of the gigantic ebony clock and when it strikes the hour, "the dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand" (H, III, 254). Then reality intrudes in the form of the Red Death who destroys both the artist and his imaginative world, reducing all to chaos once more.

Prince Prospero is an artist who does not rationally order his imaginative materials but who lets his passions run wild. He irrationally tries to shut out reality and deny the existence of disease and death by creating a perfect imaginative world of total pleasure and moral license. However, the microcosm he creates out of the chaos of the outside world ultimately returns to chaos, with "Darkness and Decay and the Red Death" once more holding "illimitable dominion over all" (H, III, 258). In this story Poe portrays fictionally his aesthetic principle that the romantic excess of imagination needs to be restrained by reason. A disordered mind like Prince Prospero's in which passion and unrestrained imagination overbalance reason and morality is capable of producing only wild, evanescent illusions of art.

Like Prince Prospero, the painter of "The Oval Portrait" suffers from a consuming hypertrophy of imagination which blinds him to morality so that he obsessively destroys his wife in his pursuit of the Ideal. His inordinate passion and extraordinary amount of poetic sentiment impel him to consume his bride's spirit in order to paint a portrait of her which would be a perfect work of art.

The artist is described as "a passionate, and wild and moody man, who became lost in reveries; so that he would not see that the light which fell so ghastly in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride, who pined visibly to all but him" (H, III, 248). "Would" implies a perverse refusal to acknowledge the destructive force of his action upon his wife. As the painting progresses, he grows "wild with the ardor of his work" until at the completion of his portrait he cries in a loud voice, "This is indeed Life itself!"--realizing suddenly in his triumph that his beloved wife is dead (H, III, 249).

Since the painting has sapped the vitality of the artist's wife, it reflects an impressive and "absolute life-likeness of expression" (H, III, 247). The narrator of the story is initially impressed but admits that the picture which first "startled" him, "finally confounded, subdued, and appalled" him (H, III, 247). Because the portrait is the work of a disordered mind, it reflects the passionate and immoral obsession of its creator. Poe believes that a perfect work

of art can be created only by a genius whose harmoniously balanced faculties reflect the Divine Unity of the design of the universe. Although the artist in "The Oval Portrait" longs so intensely for Supernal Beauty that he causes the death of his bride in an effort to create it, he ultimately must be unsuccessful. The disunity of his faculties prevents him from producing a work reflecting Divine Unity.

The dwarf in "Hopfrog" is also a literal artist who "was so inventive in the way of getting up pageants, suggesting novel characters, and arranging costume, for masked balls, that nothing could be done, it seems, without his assistance" (H, V, 218-19). Tortured by the cruel king and inflamed by the "effect of wine upon his excitable brain," the deformed, persecuted artist creates a mad pageant in which he symbolically reduces his tormenters to the beasts they really are and then destroys them. To reinforce the vengeance motif, Poe includes two similar scenes in which a "dead silence" is interrupted by "a harsh grating sound;" one occurs at Hopfrog's initial conception of the mad pageant, after the king has thrown his wine in Tripetta's face, and the other occurs at the finale of the pageant as Hopfrog takes his revenge. The ominous sound also suggests the irrational character of both the artistic idea and the mind of the artist that created it. The sound "came from the fang-like teeth of the dwarf, who ground them and gnashed them as he foamed at the mouth, and glared, with an expression of maniacal rage, into the upturned countenances of the king and his seven companions" (H, V, 227). Hopfrog

has been driven to madness, and this grotesque work of art is his "last jest." Unlike the other disordered artists in the tales--Usher, Prospero, the narrator of "Ligeia," and the painter of "The Oval Portrait"--Hopfrog seemingly escapes destruction and flees with Tripetta to his "own country" away from the sordid realities of life. But Hopfrog's escape is merely an imaginative retreat into madness. Driven insane by the torments in the real world, Hopfrog flees from the unpleasant realities he cannot endure to a beautiful but unreal country created by his disordered imagination where an ugly dwarf can possess the beautiful and exquisite Tripetta and wreak havoc on the most powerful of his enemies. Significantly, Hopfrog "makes his departure for dreamland," Wilbur contends, "by climbing the chandelier chain and vanishing through the skylight." The chain represents the power of imagination, in this case, disordered imagination, which comes down from heaven and flickers from the chandelier.¹⁵

In "William Wilson," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado," Poe presents narrator-protagonists who, though not literally artists, possess the same innate poetic longing for unity which characterizes the artist-protagonists. They suffer from the same imbalance of faculties, that "abnormal predominance of some one faculty... at the expense and to the detriment of all the others," and

¹⁵Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 116.

the same aesthetic craving for unity of being (H, XIV, 177). Driven by a perversity they cannot understand, these frustrated protagonists futilely seek to regain their lost unity of being through murder and self-destruction.

William Wilson, the narrator in the story of the same name, suffers from a progressive hypertrophy of will and passion which finally annihilates his moral faculty and destroys him completely. In his youth, Wilson has a dim remembrance of a time "some point of the past infinitely remote" when he and his double were intimately acquainted--a Jungian-type memory of unity Poe describes in Eureka. In Dr. Bransby's school Wilson exhibits strong physical and mental capabilities and identifies with his moral faculty as represented by the second Wilson. Many points of "strong congeniality" exist between Wilson and his "inseparable" companion (H, III, 307). However, his double's "frequent officious interference with my will" and his "advice not openly given" oppresses Wilson's naturally passionate and imperious disposition (H, III, 310). Like the narrator of "Ligeia," Wilson throws himself into the chaos of the world, indulging in "soulless dissipation," drinking to excess, gambling and cheating at cards, and even attempting the seduction of his host's wife. His dissipation causes his faculties to become more and more disordered, a deterioration which is symbolized by Wilson's progressive inability to perceive clearly the face of his double. At the beginning of the story, Wilson continually scrutinizes the face

of the second Wilson in broad daylight; then one night, while perpetrating a cruel practical joke, he views the face in "vivid" lamplight and is shocked by the corruption already reflected in the features. By the time Wilson's conscience interrupts his physical debaucheries at Eton, no light is present "save that of the exceedingly feeble dawn" and the features of his double are obscured (H, III, 314). At Oxford, when Wilson's double exposes his cheating at cards, every candle in the room is extinguished as if by magic, and the form, who is felt but not seen, makes his revelation in total darkness. In his final appearance, the second Wilson wears a black silk mask which entirely covers his face. Just before he dies, the double exposes "the marked and singular lineaments of his face" to a horrified Wilson who is forced to recognize what he has become (H, III, 325). At this point, the physical and moral aspects of Wilson become so far separated that, as Davidson notes, "one can exist only at the expense of the other; and Wilson, as a being, destroys himself by symbolically killing his double."¹⁶ A voice he recognizes as his own speaks to him from what appears to be his image in a mirror:

"You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead--dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist--and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" (H, III, 325).

In somewhat the same manner the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" suffers from the sense of disunity typical of the

¹⁶Davidson, Poe, A Critical Study, p. 200.

disordered Poe protagonist. His overly acute physical senses dominate his intellect and finally destroy his conscience. In an attempt to attain some unity of being, the narrator first identifies himself with the old man and then kills him. His identification with his intended victim is revealed in his statements that he "loved the old man," felt what he felt, and pitied and understood him. He even identifies the beating of his own heart with that of the old man's.

The narrator is driven by forces of "perversity" to destroy the old man's "evil eye" which represents the moral faculty he lacks. His hypertrophic senses finally impel him to murder; but the murder, instead of solving his identity problem, merely heightens his agony and intensifies his delusions. With the accusing "evil eye" of conscience closed, the narrator gloats over his own cleverness at murder, feeling "the extent of my own powers--of my sagacity" (H, IV, 89). He coolly leads the police to the very spot where the body is concealed. But the perversity which drove the narrator to kill the old man drives him to a frantic confession. He becomes convinced that he hears the sound of the old man's heart beating through the boards of the floor and astonishes the police with his wild articulations of guilt. His excessively acute senses have become so hypertrophied by the removal of the restraining faculty of conscience that they completely obliterate his reason and he betrays himself to destruction.

Like the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator of "The Black Cat" is driven to destruction by the action of

worldly chaos (perversity) upon his faculties. He, too, does not understand the forces acting upon him and cannot account for his crimes. However, he actively pursues a life of drinking and debauchery which changes him from a kind, temperate, compassionate man to purely irrational passion. He cannot survive in his imbalanced state and brings about his own destruction by walling up the cat which will betray him with the body of the wife he murdered.

Montresor in "The Cask of Amontillado" represents the arrogance of intellect whose cool intelligence at weaving a murder plot destroys his humanity. He assumes the role of an avenging god, taking it upon himself to "not only punish, but punish with impunity" the imagined insults of his rival, Fortunato (H, VI, 167). These "imagined insults" are never enumerated but are probably frustrations (perhaps unintentional) of Montresor's hypertrophied will. Fortunato, described as "a man to be respected and even feared," represents the moral element that is lacking in Montresor's character (H, VI, 167).

Montresor exhibits cool cunning in the execution of his plot first to befuddle and then to murder Fortunato. He leads his victim through the catacombs, cleverly giving hints of his diabolical plan--hints which the inebriated Fortunato cannot grasp. It does Fortunato no good to implore Montresor to relent "for the love of God," for to Montresor's hypertrophied intellect, he is his own god and will have his revenge (H, VI, 174).

Since Montresor tells his story from the vantage point of half a century later, he seems to have escaped the destruction that enveloped Poe's other disordered protagonists. However, a careful reading of the last paragraph reveals this is not so. Montresor admits "my heart grew sick" after he buried the "noble" Fortunato. But he attributes his feelings to "the dampness of the catacombs" (H, VI, 175). Nevertheless, his crime evidently has begun to possess him. Even after fifty years, his revenge remains the obsession of his life. As Gargano points out, "the meaning of his existence resides in the tomb in which he has, symbolically, buried himself. In other words, Poe leaves little doubt that the narrator has violated his own mind and humanity, and that the external act has had its destructive inner consequences."¹⁷

The disordered artist Poe portrays in his tales of terror has lost his struggle to extract meaning and order from the irrational universe he inhabits. Yielding to the corrupting forces of worldly chaos irreparably disorders his faculties. Because of his unbalanced state, the disordered artist lacks the ability to satisfy his intense longing for Supernal Unity-Truth-Beauty. His artistic creations merely reflect his deranged intellect and provide meagre satisfaction for his inordinately large amount of poetic sentiment. His frustration, agony, and feelings of disunity grow until he can stand

¹⁷James W. Gargano, "The Question of Poe's Narrators," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 169.

the tension no longer and is driven to seek release through madness or death. Rather than being the avenues to perception of Divine Unity that some critics assert, insanity and death are the last resorts of a tormented soul that can no longer bear to exist as a microcosm of world chaos. The protagonists of the tales of terror are frustrated failures as artists and as human beings because they have perverted their divine nature by yielding to chaos instead of following their God-instant for unity.

CHAPTER III

DUPIN, THE RESOLVENT ARTIST IN THE TALES OF RATIOCINATION

C. August Dupin, the detective in the tales of ratiocination, is Poe's fictional representation of the "resolvent" artist who can reconstruct order from the chaos of worldly events. His highly developed reason, which Poe designates as the "analytic imagination," enables him to solve crimes that have completely baffled the police. Because he can combine his reason with imagination, his scientifically-deduced results have "the whole air of intuition" (H, IV, 146). On the other hand, because he lacks the artistic constructive ability, the perfectly balanced faculties, and the intense poetic sentiment of the True Artist, Dupin is unable to perceive Divine Unity or to create his own artistic approximation of the Ideal. Like the True Artist, Dupin seeks unity and simplicity from worldly chaos; however, while the True Artist creates original works of art approximating Divine Unity, Dupin, at a lower level, merely reconstructs a coherent order from the discordant elements of the crime he is investigating. He discovers the criminal by reconstructing the world in terms of the crime. "If Roderick Usher is the creative artist in impotence and decay," Cox contends, "Dupin is the resolvent artist, reconstructing the world from the crime that haunts it."¹

¹James M. Cox, "Edgar Poe: Style as Pose," Virginia Quarterly Review, XLIV (Winter, 1968), p. 83.

Different as he is from the disordered creative artist in the tales of terror, Dupin, nevertheless, has a great deal in common with Roderick Usher. Like Usher, Dupin is a decadent aristocrat "of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world" (H, IV, 150). His house is reminiscent of Usher's; it is a "time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions...and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain" (H, IV, 151). Dupin's habits resemble those of the aesthetic Usher; he dreams, reads books, writes poetry, and indulges in imaginative fantasies. Dupin and Usher, both poets with unusually sensitive natures, also share a "fantastic gloom" of temper, a "wild fervor" of imagination, and a peculiar sensitivity to light. Dupin, however, has learned to compromise with the world outside; he does leave his house to walk abroad at night and is even able to venture forth in the daylight with the aid of green sunglasses to filter the disordering light of worldly chaos. Unlike the passive Usher who is finally destroyed by worldly chaos, Dupin, by the force of his analytic imagination, resists its corrupting force.

Although Dupin is more successful than Usher in making order of the chaos of the world, he never perceives the highest kind of unity which is the goal of the True Artist because his faculties are not in perfect harmony. His hypertrophied

intellect moves in quest of knowledge apart from morality and feeling. Like the disordered artists in the tales of terror, Dupin operates outside the usual moral order. Society's rules simply do not exist for him, and he has only contempt for its ministers of justice. Dupin admits to his friend, the narrator, that his only reason for leaving his seclusion to solve a crime is "the amusement" it affords him (H, IV, 167).² He enjoys exercising his analytic ability, and he derives egotistic pleasure from demonstrating his intellectual superiority to the police. In addition, he collects monetary rewards for his efforts. Dupin shows little interest in the triumph of justice or in the punishment of the criminal, nor does he exhibit undue concern for his falsely-accused friend, Le Bon, or the persecuted royal lady who is under the power of the Minister D. In some respects, Dupin, himself, is "that monstrum horrendum, an unprincipled man of genius," which he calls the Minister D. (H, VI, 52).

When Dupin is exercising his analytic ability, his peculiar abstract manner shows a singular lack of emotion. "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

²Edward H. Davidson, Poe, A Critical Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 216. Davidson sees Dupin as an intellectual hedonist, enjoying the operations of his own mind; as such, he is "the ultimate dream of the artist who has nothing more to do but enjoy his art."

of the enunciation" (H, IV, 152). Significantly, during such periods of meditation, Dupin usually secludes himself in a dark room, away from the physical realities of life. His peculiar habits and odd manner cause even his friend, the narrator, to describe him as "an excited, or perhaps a diseased intelligence" (H, IV, 152). Even when confronted by physical danger, Dupin maintains an unnatural composure. He seems to be immune from the passions of love, hate, fear, and revenge which torment ordinary mortals.

Dupin's singular lack of the usual emotions is accompanied by a corresponding lack of intense poetic sentiment. He exhibits no noticeable "longing for Supernal Beauty," and his innate desire for Supernal Unity and Truth seems to be satisfied by the earthly unity and truth he discovers in the chaos of the events surrounding a crime. And although Dupin admits that he has "been guilty of certain doggerel," Poe fails to include any of his poetry in the detective tales; in the tales of terror Poe exhibits the poetry of the disordered artist-protagonists, so the omission is clearly intentional (H, VI, 34). The only poems or works of art Dupin quotes are someone else's creation because his own poetry really is "doggerel." As Moldenhauer suggests, Dupin partakes wholly in the psychology of the crimes he investigates because he lacks the "constructive" volition to perform a crime himself.³ He also lacks the driving force of poetic

³Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections Between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Visions," PMLA, LXXXIII (May, 1968), p. 292.

sentiment and the artistic creativity to write good poetry. Dupin's analytic imagination enables him to solve with amazing facility mundane problems which yield to human logic; however, his strength clearly lies in resolving other's disordered ideas and in reconstructing events of other's crimes. He does not perceive Divine Unity, nor can he create art which reflects the Ideal.

Although Dupin's life-style is similar to Usher's, his way of thinking more closely resembles that of Poe, the literary critic. Like Poe the critic, Dupin possesses creative vision and rational analytic ability, as his friend, the narrator suggests in his reflection upon Dupin's "Bi-part Soul," consisting of "creative" and "resolvent" elements (H, IV, 152). The "creative" element is Dupin's intuitive ability to grasp the unifying or explanatory principle amid a mass of irrelevant data. When confronted with the confusing events surrounding a crime, Dupin knows what to observe. His direct insight is akin to artistic imagination. But unlike the creative artist who can let his imagination roam freely, Dupin's imagination is held in check by the physical facts surrounding the crime. He does not create in an artistic sense but merely restructures physical events to conform to the mundane unity he perceives. This restructuring process is accomplished by the "resolvent" element of his "Bi-part Soul." After he has arrived at his intuitive theory of a crime, Dupin must test his theory for consistency and truth by deductive and inductive reasoning processes. By

mechanically sorting through his facts and discarding the irrelevant clues, he finally restructures the entire crime as it originally occurred. Like a good literary critic, Dupin can understand the creative imagination and grasp the unifying principle behind a work of art; he can analyze the work into its elements and test its structural and artistic unity; yet he himself lacks the creative artistry to produce the very work of art which he is so adept in analyzing.

Allen Tate points out that the governing impulse in both the tales of ratiocination and the criticism is "hypertrophy of intellect." That is, the mind of the hero is independent of the human situation in its quest for essential knowledge and displays a genius for creating formal order, a controlling or shaping power which is "archangelic" or "divine."⁴ From the comfort of his armchair, Dupin easily solves crimes which thoroughly baffle the police. And since he is a demi-god, his imperious nature, intellectual pride, and contempt for the rules and tastes of society are justified. A similar attitude exists in Poe's criticism. Daniel has noted that Poe's criticism "reflects his sense of alienation from society" and "the detective stories appear to be extensions of Poe's criticism."⁵ In his critical articles,

⁴Allen Tate, "The Angellic Imagination: Poe and the Power of Words," Kenyon Review, XIV (Summer, 1952), p. 465.

⁵Robert Daniel, "Poe's Detective God," Furioso, VI (Summer, 1951), p. 46

Poe the literary detective arrogantly uncovers and imperiously denounces plagiarism, bad taste, confused thinking, and imperfect structure. Similarly, in the detective stories, Dupin attacks the incompetence and stupidity of society from a position of haughty superiority. When Dupin expresses his contempt for the opinions of society, "Il y a à parier que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenu au plus grand nombre," he is merely echoing Poe's belief that whatever the majority of people believe is usually nonsense (H, VI, 43-4). Poe viewed with scorn the society which failed to recognize his genius, and in the tales of ratiocination, he avenges himself by having Dupin make fools of the ministers of society. Although he exists apart from society, Dupin can solve its problems so successfully that he is sought out by important officials to "save" their reputations by solving crimes they are unable to unravel. And Poe, by presenting Dupin as an intellectual hedonist who can get anything he wants by merely thinking, is ridiculing the nineteenth century concept of success which tended to idolize the materialistic businessman.⁶

Like Poe the literary critic, Dupin is more concerned with difficult, faulty, or incomplete verbal materials than with physical evidence in his solutions of crimes.⁷ A review

⁶Edward H. Davidson, Poe, A Critical Study, p. 216, sees the detective tales as "Poe's war on his age." Poe's method is to pretend to take seriously certain values and then to destroy them at the very moment of treating them with reverence.

⁷Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Murder as a Fine Art," p. 291.

of the detective stories bears out this contention. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," for instance, Dupin is primarily concerned with interpreting the written reports of witnesses to the crime. In "The Mystery of Marie Roget," he critically evaluates the newspaper accounts of the crime for his solution. And in "The Purloined Letter," he is more concerned with the proper reasoning processes than with the actual solution of the crime, which, of course, concerns the theft of a letter.

The detective stories, like so many of the tales of terror, are narrated by a character who is only technically separate from the protagonist.⁸ The narrator of these tales shares Dupin's "perfect seclusion" and reveries and admits that he gives himself up to Dupin's "wild whims with a perfect abandon" (H, IV, 151). He seems to have no mind of his own, but even dreams and thinks in the method of the master, so that Dupin can read his mind at will. In fact, the narrator seems to exist merely as an extension of Dupin's consciousness, rather than as a separate individual. His close association with the detective enables him to perform the important task of chronicling Dupin's actions from a position of admiring puzzlement. As Buranelli notes, the narrator "is the link between the detective and the reader, and his inability to comprehend the meaning of the clues both flatters

⁸Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Murder as a Fine Art," p. 294, states, "the voice of the ratiocination tales is that of an apprentice figure, temperamentally associated with the detective and endowed, though to a lesser degree, with the protagonist's tastes and talents."

the reader and shows off more brilliantly the sagacity of the detective."⁹ And by employing the narrator, Poe is able to present his clues with apparent frankness, but to withhold the special knowledge on which the interpretation of the clues depends.

In the opening pages of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe prepares for the introduction of Dupin by describing at length the characteristics of the "Analyst." This Analyst glories in disentangling enigmas and exhibiting his "preternatural" acumen. His "analytic powers" place him far above the level of the "simple ingenuity" of ordinary men. "His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition" (H, IV, 146). By identifying himself with his opponent, the Analyst can predict his actions and confound his opponent in any game of wits. His "higher powers of the reflective intellect" are challenged more by draughts than by chess, Poe speciously insists, because chess taxes only the attention and concentration, while winning at draughts requires "some strong exertion of the intellect" (H, IV, 147). For the same reason, whist is considered by Poe to be a more profound game than chess because the Analyst must observe the expressions and actions of the other players and penetrate into their thinking in order to win with "apparently intuitive perception" (H, IV, 149). . . Mere constructive or combining power

⁹Vincent Buranelli, Edgar Allen Poe (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 84.

may be observed "in those whose intellect borders otherwise upon idiocy" but such analytic imagination is found only in the man of genius (H, IV, 149).

After his detailed portrayal of the Analyst, Poe introduces him in the person of C. August Dupin. Dupin, who is noted for "the vivid freshness of his imagination," takes an eager delight in displaying his "peculiar analytic ability" by such feats as reading men's minds (H, IV, 152). In a passage that appears to be a parody of the inductive process, Poe describes how Dupin is able to read the narrator's mind through identification of his intellect with his friend's. To the narrator's astonishment, Dupin repeats his whole chain of reasoning which led him to think that Chantilly, a diminutive actor, should play in the Théâtre des Variétés. This far-fetched mind reading incident is supposedly representative of Dupin's miraculous and supernatural analytic ability which will enable him to solve the baffling murders in the Rue Morgue.

From reading newspaper accounts in the Gazette des Tribunaux, Dupin becomes interested in the murders, and he decides to enter into an examination of the crime to demonstrate the stupidity of the police and for "the amusement" the inquiry will afford him. He adds, as an afterthought, that the accused Le Bon, whom the police have arrested, "once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful" (H, IV, 167). With these motives--certainly less than noble--Dupin begins his inquiry by examining the murder scene. In spite

of the previous search conducted by the police, Dupin uncovers a number of rather obvious clues that the officials have managed to overlook. Of course, as Dupin notes, the police have "no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment" (H, IV, 165). Their "simple diligence and activity" cannot approach his analytic method. By holding the object of investigation too closely, the police investigator impairs his vision and loses sight of the object as a whole. He searches so intently for profundity that he overlooks the obvious. As Dupin states, "by undue profundity we perplex and enfeeble thought"; therefore, by reducing the complex to absolute simplicity, Dupin will ultimately solve the mystery (H, IV, 166).

At any rate, the police manage to overlook several gold coins scattered about, a greasy ribbon, and even a tuft of coarse hair clutched in the hand of the murdered Madame L'Espanaye. They also fail to discover the method by which the murderer entered and left the room. Dupin, of course, notices that one of the nails that holds down the bedroom window is broken in two and the secret springs which control the window can be readily manipulated so that the window, open when the murderer arrives, will close after the killer's escape. These clues and the outre characteristics of the crime enable Dupin to reach an easy solution. In fact, he boasts that "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" (H, IV, 169).

From the peculiar voice and the unusual agility of the murderer and the atrocious mutilation of the corpses with no apparent motive (and, of course, the tuft of animal hair), Dupin deduces that the murderer was an "Ourang-Outang" owned by a Maltese sailor who has lost his hair ribbon. As he notes, "it is by the deviations from the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels its way, if at all, in its search for the true" (H, IV, 169). Once he has reconstructed the crime, it is an easy matter for Dupin to trap the sailor into a confession and obtain the release of Le Bon. Then he retires to his home to relish his own erudition and to gloat over his "defeat" of the Prefect of Police, whom he patronizingly compares to a codfish, a creature whose wisdom is, as he says, all head and no body.

After his solution of the murders in the Rue Morgue, Dupin "dismissed the affair at once from his attention, and relapsed into his old habits of moody reverie" (H, V, 3). He and his narrator-friend "slumbered tranquilly in the Present, weaving the dull world around us into dreams" (H, V, 3). Their dreams are disturbed, however, by the Prefect of Police, who intrudes to beg Dupin to save his reputation by solving "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." The police regard Dupin--who has been elevated to "Chevalier" since his last appearance--as a sort of miracle-worker or demi-god. The private reward together with the "liberal proposition" the

Prefect makes Dupin prove sufficient to rouse him from his reveries.¹⁰

The peculiar circumstances in the murders in the Rue Morgue which made its solution simple for Dupin are totally lacking in the murder of Marie Rog  t. Because it is an "ordinary" crime with "nothing particularly outre about it," the case is extremely difficult (H, V, 19). Dupin proposes to solve it using his "Calculus of Probabilities" which "makes chance a matter of absolute calculation" (H, V, 39). Since "a vast, perhaps the larger portion of truth, arises from the seemingly irrelevant," then the irrelevant must be ordered and investigated. The "unlooked for and unimagined" must be subjected to "the mathematical formulae of the schools" (H, V, 39). Therefore, instead of concentrating upon the crime itself, Dupin searches for truth in the contemporary circumstances which surround it. Like a literary critic examining all material relevant to a piece of literature, Dupin minutely scrutinizes all newspaper accounts of the crime and its surrounding events, commenting on the "deficiency of observation," the scientific improbabilities, the inconsistencies of logic, the plagiarism

¹⁰William K. Wimsatt Jr., "Poe and the Mystery of Mary Rogers," *PMLA*, LV (March, 1941), 230-48. "The Mystery of Marie Rog  t," the sequel to the first Dupin story, is based on the murder of a real girl named Mary Rogers whose body had been found floating in the Hudson River. Wimsatt analyzes Dupin's solution of the crime and points out that Poe revised the story which on first publication indicated that the girl was killed by her lover, to conclude in the second publication, that Mary had died accidentally from an abortion. The actual facts in the case have never been determined.

of ideas, and the total disregard of collateral events exhibited by the various newspaper articles. He also continues to disparage the "remissness of the police" and emphasizes his contempt for the Prefect's opinions concerning the case by sleeping through "the seven or eight leaden-footed hours" of their interview. His green glasses which filter out the light of worldly chaos also prove to be the perfect screen to block out the irrationality of the Prefect.

From his investigation, Dupin discovers the clue to the mystery, a rudderless boat which "shall guide us, with a rapidity which will surprise even ourselves, to him who employed it in the midnight of the fatal Sabbath" (H, V, 64). The editors, for "obvious" reasons omit the following up of this clue, simply assuring the readers that the omnipotent Dupin did, of course, solve the case. Ostensibly, the police traced the rudderless boat back to the murderer and confirmed Dupin's theory that Marie was murdered by a sailor who was once her lover. After this weak ending, Poe feels the necessity of adding an apologetic explanation for his own failure to solve, fictionally, the murder of Mary Rogers, by insisting that the Calculus of Probabilities forbids the extension of parallels between the two cases.

Dupin's preference for seclusion and darkness increases during his two years of idleness after his consideration of the murder of Marie Rog  t. When the Prefect calls on him to discuss "The Purloined Letter," Dupin and his friend are

sitting in the dark in silent meditation. At the Prefect's entrance, Dupin arises to light a lamp but sits down again without doing so when he learns that the Prefect has come to ask his opinion on an official matter. "If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark" (H, VI, 29).

Dupin's supercilious attitude has also intensified. He gives the Prefect a hearty welcome, noting that there "was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man" (H, VI, 28). He obviously enjoys the Prefect's limited comprehension, his "cant of diplomacy," and his account of the extremely thorough but unsuccessful search by the police for the purloined letter. When the Prefect states that the royal lady, driven to despair, "has committed the matter to me," the sarcasm of Dupin's reply that "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose be described, or even imagined," is completely lost on the obtuse Prefect (H, VI, 32).

The police, who had overlooked obvious clues in the case of the Rue Morgue murders, have conducted too thorough an investigation in their search for the purloined letter. Although "exceedingly able in their way," the police by searching every chair rung in the Minister's apartment, have used inapplicable measures to find the letter. They have underestimated their opponent, imagining with the Prefect, that because the Minister is a poet, he is also a fool. Having ordinary intellects, they consider only their

own ideas of ingenuity and in their search resort only to the modes in which they would have hidden a letter. Dupin admits that the police are "right in this much--that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course" (H, VI, 42). Because they have "no variation of principle in their investigations," the police make no progress in the case (H, VI, 42).

Dupin, of course, recognizes that the Minister D, who is both a poet and a mathematician, possesses a complex and original mind. Dupin observes of the Minister D, "as a poet and mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect" (H, VI, 43). Poe-like, Dupin proceeds to dispute the value of "that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical," especially the reason of mathematicians (H, VI, 44). Like Poe in Eureka, Dupin argues that "mathematical axioms are not axioms of general truth. What is true of relation--of form and quantity--is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example" (H, VI, 44). The mathematician holds obstinately to his method "through an unaccountable addling of the brains" (H, VI, 45). But since the Minister D is also a poet, he would not be bound by the narrow confines of such reasoning. And since he is a courtier and a "bold

intrigant" as well, he would be familiar with the methods of the police and could not have concealed the letter in any ordinary place. By properly evaluating the genius of his opponent, Dupin sees "that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice" (H, VI, 46). Therefore, he would pick the most obvious hiding place where, the letter, like the overly-large characters on a chart or sign, would "escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious" (H, VI, 47).

Dupin, accordingly, visits the Minister D and thoroughly surveys his apartment from behind his green glasses. Although the letter is completely altered, the size alone forming a point of correspondence, Dupin quickly identifies it because of its "peculiar" characteristics. "The radicalness of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the true methodical habits of D--, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document" together with the "hyper-obtrusive situation" of its location corroborate Dupin's suspicions about the letter (H, VI, 49). He returns the next day to retrieve his snuff box which he had purposefully left behind, and while a pre-planned disturbance in the street distracts the Minister, he substitutes a facsimile for the purloined letter.

When Dupin nonchalantly hands the purloined letter to the Prefect, his narrator-friend is "astounded" but "the

Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets" (H, VI, 39). Once again Dupin's supernaturally impressive exploits stupify the agent of the society that had rejected the genius of Poe.

As in the previous cases, Dupin's reasons for solving the case are egotistical and mercenary ones. He collects a reward of 50,000 francs, confounds the police by performing a "miracle," and also avenges an evil turn the Minister D had once done to him. The Minister's insult impels him to copy a quotation from Crebillon onto the blank sheet he substitutes for the purloined letter. Since the Minister "would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him," Dupin "thought it a pity not to give him a clue" (H, VI, 52). Having the Minister recognize the agent of his intellectual defeat completes the ego satisfaction Dupin receives from his solution of the crime.

In spite of his genius at reconstructing crimes, Dupin possesses the same disordered faculties characteristic of the protagonists of the tales of terror. However, he exhibits none of the destructive tendencies of the disordered creative artists who were driven to madness and death by their inability to satisfy their intense longing for Divine Unity. On the contrary, Dupin possesses a cool, rational sanity and a propensity for self-preservation. Recognizing the corrupting

force of physical reality, Dupin secludes himself as much as possible from the world, and when he must venture out, wears dark glasses to protect his delicate senses. In fact, his very deficiencies work to his advantage because they balance one another so that he is not subject to the tensions and frustrations of the disordered creative artist who must create, but cannot. Dupin's inability to feel normal emotions enables him to escape the fate of the disordered artists in the tales of terror who were destroyed by their uncontrollable passions of love or hate. Even Dupin's revenge is calm, rational, and devoid of passion. In "The Purloined Letter," Dupin states that the Minister D, "at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember" (H, VI, 52). (*Italics mine.*) Likewise, since his longing for Divine Unity is inconsiderable, Dupin can divert it to mundane channels and attain satisfaction by exercising his analytic imagination to create order from the chaos of crime. Fortunately, his pleasure in solving crime places him on the side of the laws of society so that he is not inconvenienced by the fact that his moral faculty seems to be totally inoperative. Unlike William Wilson and the other protagonists of the tales of terror, Dupin can satisfy his destructive urges vicariously by imaginatively becoming the criminal and partaking of the crime he solves--at no danger to himself. And at the same time, he can derive the ego satisfaction he needs from society's recognition of his superior intellect.

Thus, the resolution of the chaotic events of the crime provide Dupin with an artistic outlet, a release for destructive tension, and satisfaction for his inflated ego. Although he lacks the poetic insight, the perfectly balanced faculties, and the constructive artistic ability of the True Artist, Dupin is a very accomplished "resolvent" artist who can reconstruct order from worldly chaos. In his field of endeavor, he is a genius, albeit a "factitious" one whose works reflect his hypertrophied intellect and atrophied moral faculty. Moreover, in his role as "resolvent" artist, Dupin is able to maintain his equilibrium in a world of chaos and to impose his own mundane kind of order on chaotic events--accomplishments which make him the most successful of all Poe's fictional characterizations of man as artist.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARTIST'S ROLE IN THE REAL WORLD

In his literary criticism, Poe deals directly with the problems of the creative artist that he philosophically treats in Eureka and fictionally portrays in his tales. As might be expected from his portrayal of the chaotic condition of the universe in Eureka and his depiction of the destructive effect of worldly chaos on man's artistic nature in the tales, Poe viewed his world as essentially hostile to the creative artist. His own materialistic society, which exalted the businessman over the artist, accorded Poe small recognition and less remuneration for his creative efforts. Although he was an industrious writer, Poe was never able to make a decent living by his pen. Numerous critics and biographers of Poe have testified to his grinding poverty, personal tragedies, and physical and mental debilitation brought about by society's cruel treatment of his genius.¹

Writing in "Marginalia" on the fate of genius, Poe describes what must have been his personal feelings that his

¹Margaret Alterton and Hardin Craig, Edgar Allen Poe (New York: American Book Company, 1935), p. cvii. Alterton and Craig consider the "hard circumstances" of Poe's life and state, "we do not forgive the age that served him as it did." Other critics such as Killis Campbell (The Mind of Poe) and Hervey Allen (Israfel) express similar attitudes.

society was an unfavorable environment for the flowering of genius.

I have sometimes amused myself by endeavoring to fancy what would be the fate of any individual gifted, or rather accursed, with an intellect very far superior to that of his race. Of course, he would be conscious of his superiority; nor could he (if otherwise constituted as man is) help manifesting his consciousness. Thus he would make himself enemies at all points. And since his opinions and speculations would widely differ from those of all mankind--that he would be considered a madman, is evident. How horrible painful such a condition! Hell could invent no greater torture than that of being charged with abnormal weakness on account of being abnormally strong (H, XVI, 165).

Like the Romantics, Poe regards the artist as "set apart" from ordinary men by his superior poetic insight and imagination. The artist is able to perceive abstract and imaginative truth while ordinary men perceive only empirical truth.² From this viewpoint, as Poe states, "a truth to David Hume would very seldom be a truth to Joe" (H, XVI, 193). Because of his superior perception and unique views of life, the artist could expect to be misunderstood and regarded with suspicion by ordinary men--a fact borne out by Poe's own experience.

... Aside from his personal experience of society's hostility

²D. E. S. Maxwell, American Fiction, The Intellectual Background (New York, Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 79, p. 99. Maxwell finds in Poe's works the "paradox of the melancholy awareness of human isolation from society and from other humans individually." Although Poe and the other Romantics consider themselves cast out from society, "their very isolation is the origin of their powers. The secrets they expound, in forms aesthetically pleasing, are those of the nether life common to both outcast and, fearfully admitted, conformist."

to the artist, Poe believed that the physical world of matter in general had a destructive effect on the artist's sensibilities. In Eureka he presented his belief that worldly chaos corrupts man's Divine nature, dulls his poetic instinct, and destroys the individual's belief in his own soul. In his childhood, man feels a primordial sense of unity, accepts his immortality as a natural condition of being, and believes in the superiority of his own soul until "conventional World-Reason" awakens him from the truth of his dream (H, XVI, 312). The function of the True Artist is to recreate this happy dream world through art and restore man's sense of unity. But if he is to maintain his sanity, the artist must resist the temptation to escape reality by fleeing to a refuge in his own imaginative creation. In "The Masque of the Red Death," Poe symbolically portrays the destruction that overtakes the artist who attempts to deny reality by escaping within himself.

Poe's own concern, both in his creative work and his criticism, with the individual's private world of daydreams, reveries, trances, and hallucinations strongly suggests his own preference for the world of imagination. In "Marginalia" Poe describes the psychic visions that come between the period of waking and sleeping as producing "a pleasurable ecstasy as far beyond the most pleasurable of the world of wakefulness, or of dreams, as the Heaven of the Northman theology is beyond its Hell" (H, XVI, 89). Regarding these visions

with awe, Poe is convinced that the ecstasy he experiences "is of a character supernal to the Human Nature"--is a "glimpse of the spirit's outer world" (H, XVI, 89). In "Eleanora" Poe praises the imaginative insight achieved through day-dreams when he says, "they who dream by day are cognizant of many things that escape those who dream only by night. In their grey visions they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in awaking, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret" (H, IV, 236).

In his poetry Poe reveals a similar fascination with the world of dreams. In "Al Aaraaf," he presents a dream world of Platonic Ideals where true Beauty can be experienced directly by the artist. In "Israfel" Poe mourns the poet's earthly limitations and yearns to change places with the angel Israfel, who dwells in a perfect world of Supernal Beauty. In "To Helen" the artist escapes the world of passion through ideal Beauty (Helen) and arrives at his true spiritual home. And in "The City in the Sea" and "Dreamland" Poe depicts strange dead dream worlds. In "For Annie" death, which is portrayed as a welcome relief from the "fever called living," provides man's entry into a beautiful world of spiritual love.³

³Floyd Stovall, ed. The Poems of Edgar Allen Poe (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), p. xxvii. Stovall says that "For Annie" represents the "final stage of a thematic progression in Poe's poems that began with the mood of resentment, passed into that of disillusionment and escape to realms of beauty where the artist is still active though without passion, and finally, through death, into a condition where life survives only as a peaceful memory."

In view of Poe's personal and artistic frustrations, he understandably was tempted to escape from harsh reality to a better world of imagination. Like the tormented artist, Hopfrog, Poe could become a demi-god in his own artistic realm in which aesthetic rather than materialistic standards measured the worth of a man. In a Platonic realm of Ideals, the confusion and chaos of the real world could be forgotten. Yet Poe did not retreat from reality within himself nor did he consider the world of imagination the proper permanent habitat for the True Artist.⁴ The creation of art necessarily implies a return to reality--a report to the rest of mankind. To fulfill his role as the revealer of Divine Unity-Truth-Beauty to mankind, the True Artist, Poe insists, must be a craftsman as well as a seer. He must struggle to combine reason with imagination, to rationally order his intuitive impressions, so that he can transmit them to others. In Poe's theory, the artist's intuitive desire for unity becomes the rational artistic principle that guides his creative efforts. "Unity of effect" is the artist's goal, and to achieve it he must define and shape his aesthetic experience into a unified structure that approximates the ideal harmony, consistency, and beauty of his Divine model. Throughout his criticism, Poe repeatedly insists that the True Artist must be a

⁴Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Robert Regan (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 120. Wilbur takes the opposite view; he maintains that Poe's aesthetic theory is "insane" because Poe believed that art should "repudiate everything human and earthly" and dwell in an Ideal realm of imagination.

craftsman of the most exacting type--a craftsman who is willing to work diligently and patiently to perfect his art. This emphasis on discipline clearly indicates that Poe, both in theory and practice, did not avoid the responsibilities of art and its relationship to society.

Poe views a work of art as a unique creation of the artist, analogous to God's creation of the physical universe. Every work of art, he believes, should contain within itself all that is required for its own comprehension. Thus, the value and meaning of an artistic creation exists within itself and not in its biographical, historical, or philosophic surroundings.⁵ Poe summarizes his doctrine of "art for art's sake" in a passage from "The Poetic Principle."

Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged....We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true Poetic dignity and force:--but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified--more supremely noble than this very poem--this poem per se--this poem which is a poem and nothing more--this poem written solely for the poem's sake (H, XIV, 271-272).

Poe's belief in art for art's sake leads him to oppose what he terms the "heresy of the Didactic," a fallacy which he

⁵Poe applied his doctrine of "art for art's sake" to his critical theory and insisted that the critic must concentrate upon the work of art itself rather than its non-literary aspects--an attitude that earned him the title of "first of the New Critics." See George Snell, "First of the New Critics," Quarterly Review of Literature, II (Summer, 1945), pp. 333-40.

feels has "accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other enemies combined" (H, XIV, 271). Although he professes "as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man," Poe insists that the poet must not make his art the servant of teaching or preaching (H, XIV, 272). He detests allegory because it is the form most often used to inculcate a moral. Needless to say, Poe opposes Emerson and the Transcendentalists because he feels that they used their art to preach their doctrine of philosophy. And unlike the Transcendentalists who regarded moral edification as the goal of art, Poe saw the aim of art as "pleasure."⁶ In his review of Hawthorne, Poe states that "pleasure" is "the end of all fictitious composition" (H, XIII, 145). Likewise, the goal of poetry is to produce that intense pleasure, that "elevation of soul" which alone can satisfy man's poetic sentiment.

Poe opposes naturalism or imitation in art because he views art as the artist's attempt to satisfy man's immortal desire that is "no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us-- but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above" (H, XIV, 293). His definition of art as "the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the Soul" indicates that the artistic imagination must subtly alter its physical material to conform with its perception of the Ideal (H, XVI, 164).

⁶Poe borrowed this idea as well as other portions of his poetic theory from Coleridge. See Floyd Stovall, "Poe's Debt to Coleridge," University of Texas Studies in English, X (1930), pp. 70-127.

Since Poe sees the aim of art as ideality, verisimilitude and photographic representation are "vices" because complete definiteness of meaning confines the reader's mind within the work of art itself--defeating the artist's purpose of inspiring his reader's mind to the Ideal. "Mere oral or written repetition" of the physical forms of beauty is "a duplicate sense of delight" but it is not poetry. The poet who merely imitates, "who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odours, and colours, and sentiments, which greet him in common with all mankind... has failed to prove his divine title" (H, XIV, 273). Poe adds, "we have still a thirst unquenchable to allay" and "he has not shown us the crystal springs" (H, XIV, 273). The True Artist must not excite earthly passions which cannot satisfy man's Divine thirst, but must strive to exalt the soul of his reader to the realm of the Ideal if he is to deserve his "divine title."

Poe urges the artist to strive always for originality, which he defines as novel combinations of physical and imaginative materials. The imaginative activity of the mortal artist is like the creative energies of God--with one important difference. Man cannot "create" in the sense of causing something to come into being for the first time; all his novel conceptions are merely unusual combinations of preexisting ideas. As Poe states in his review of Drake's "The Culprit Fay,"

"what the Diety imagines, is, but was not before. What man imagines, is, but was also. The mind of man cannot imagine what is not" (H, VIII, 283). But even this combinative originality can be attained only by painstaking craftsmanship. Poe warns, "there is no greater mistake than the supposition that a true originality is a mere matter of impulse or inspiration. To originate, is carefully, patiently, and understandingly to combine" (H, XIV, 73).

Poe regards poetry as the most exalted species of composition because it produces the most intense spiritual pleasure by satisfying man's immortal thirst for beauty. Thus, the poet is the highest form of the True Artist. In poetry, the artist's desired effect is "exaltation of soul" inspired by "the rhythmical creation of Beauty" that is the poem (H, XIV, 275). In "The Poetic Principle," Poe affirms that:

in the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognise as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. I make Beauty, therefore--using the word as inclusive of the sublime--I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes:--no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least most readily attainable in the poem (H, XIV, 275).

Since "exaltation of soul" cannot be long maintained, the poem must be short. Poe believes that a long poem is a contradiction in terms because it cannot produce the necessary totality of effect. Without unity of impression, no deep

effect or exaltation of soul can be brought about. Poe condemns "Paradise Lost" as a poem because of its excessive length which results in "a constant alternation of excitement and depression" for the reader. Those who would attempt to praise Milton's sustained poetic effort are guilty, in Poe's view, of a vulgar error comparable to attempting to estimate "Lamartine by the cubic foot, or Pollok by the pound" (H, XIV, 268).

The artist attempts to approximate Supernal Loveliness through novel combinations of the forms of natural beauty. In "The Poetic Principle" Poe enumerates various beauties of earth and heaven that may remind the poet of the beauty above. The poet recognizes "the ambrosia which nourishes his soul" in the lovely sights, sounds, and odors of the physical world, in all noble thoughts, motives, and sensations, and especially in the love of a beautiful woman. His goal in writing a poem is to form these physical impressions into a formal structure of harmony, unity, and beauty that will pleasurably satisfy his reader's longing for Divine Harmony, Unity, and Beauty.

Since the province of the poem is beauty, not truth or goodness, any moral undertones must be only vaguely suggested. If passion, duty, or truth are introduced, they must be toned down "in proper subjection to that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem" (H, XIV, 276). Since the poet cannot fully grasp and duplicate the Ideal Beauty in his

poem, a "certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of true Beauty" (H, XIV, 279). To reflect this sadness, the tone of the poem must be indefinite and melancholy. The emotions presented must be subdued and reflect spiritual rather than physical love. Passion, Poe believes, "degrades," but the "divine Eros--the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionaeon Venus--is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes" (H, XIV, 290). Likewise, the images must be "suggestive" rather than vivid to evoke the proper imaginative response. Poe believes that "we can, at any time, double the beauty of an actual landscape by half-closing our eyes as we look at it" (H, XVI, 164). In his artistic creation, the poet must attempt to convey a similarly indistinct impression through his use of symbolism, associations, and musical sound. The vague exaltation of soul produced by music makes it an absolutely essential element to the poet. Poe feels, "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 (H, XIV, 274).

In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe attempts to explain in detail the craftsmanship behind his creation of "The Raven." As he describes it, the artistic process of creating the poem was entirely mechanical and rational. "No one point in its composition," Poe maintains, "is referrible either to accident or intuition...the work proceeded, step by step, to

its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (H, XIV, 195). Because Poe eliminates the factors of intuition and imagination--elements he elsewhere stresses as essential--from the process of poetic creation that he describes, many critics regard "The Philosophy of Composition" as a hoax.⁷ Poe admits that he is writing his explanation of artistic creation to contradict the Romantic writers "who prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy--an ecstatic intuition," an admission that perhaps explains his excessive emphasis on the mechanical aspects of composition (H, XIV, 194). He may be applying his own principle that exaggeration is sometimes helpful in the presentation of truth.

Actually Poe's method of composition of "The Raven" is essentially identical to his description of the artistic process in "The Poetic Principle." He repeats his insistence on brevity and decides that his poem will be about one hundred lines long so that totality of effect can be maintained. The effect, of course, is that intense and pure elevation of soul

⁷Robert D. Jacobs, Poe, Journalist and Critic, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 435. Jacobs states, "if Poe's mechanistic theory seems absurd in the light of our knowledge of the part the unconscious mind plays in composition, we should remember that Poe, throughout most of his career and particularly during the period between 1842 and 1846, was attempting to refute the idea that artistic genius and skill were incompatible. Thus, as he always did in his literary campaigns, he tended to overstate and to underline." For a similar view, see Kenneth Burke, "The Principle of Composition," Poetry, XCIX (1961), pp. 46-53.

caused by the contemplation of Supernal Beauty. The tone is one of sadness since Poe believes that "melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones" (H, XIV, 198).⁸ The structural elements of the poem such as rhythm, meter, stanza, refrain, and denouement are logically deduced to fit the subject matter, which is the most poetical topic Poe can conceive--the death of a beautiful woman. In choosing the elements of his poem, Poe always seeks "originality" which he insists is "by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition" but must be rationally sought (H, XIV, 203). To the resulting logical structure Poe adds two concluding stanzas to impart richness, "complexity," and "some amount of suggestiveness--some undercurrent, however indefinite, of meaning" (H, XIV, 207).

If Poe seriously intended to prove by his demonstration in "The Philosophy of Composition" that scientific craftsmanship alone could produce a work of art (which is doubtful), what he actually accomplished was to forcefully illustrate that there is more to a poem than the sum total of its logically-deduced parts. An artist must be a craftsman, but he must have a certain amount of inspiration to provide subject material for his craftsmanship.

⁸Ibid., p. 440. Jacobs notes, "if we explain Poe's requirement of melancholy in terms of Eureka, we see that it was the yearning of the God in man for his former estate, and even if the unimaginative man could not experience this yearning unaided, it was potential in his soul and could be awakened by the magic of verse."

In prose, the artist has more latitude in choosing his effect than in poetry, but he must equally as carefully develop an organic structural unity which will produce his intended totality of effect. Poe sets up Divine standards of perfection for the mortal artist to emulate; the universe, the "perfect plot of God," is the artist's model. In fashioning his plot, the artist must seek to create a unique whole of indistinguishable parts with the complete mutuality of adaption and reciprocity of cause and effect and the same simplicity and economy that characterize the design of the universe. As Poe states in Eureka:

The pleasure which we derive from any exertion of human ingenuity, is in direct ratio of the approach to this species of reciprocity. In the construction of plot, for example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the incidents that we shall not be able to determine, of any one of them, whether it depends from any one other or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is really, or practically, unattainable--but only because it is a finite intelligence that constructs. The plots of God are perfect (H, XVI, 292).

Poe repeatedly stresses in his criticism that the artist must strive to construct a plot in which "no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole...an infinite perfection which the true artist bears ever in mind--that unattainable goal to which his eyes are always directed, but of the possibility of attaining which he still endeavours, if wise, to cheat himself into the belief" (H, X, 205).

To attain a plot which possesses the utmost interdependence, relatedness, and coalescence, the artist must

begin with the denouement clearly in view. "In fiction, the denouement--in all other composition the intended effect, should be definitely considered and arranged, before writing the first word; and no word should be then written which does not tend, or form a part of a sentence which tends to the development of the denouement, or the strengthening of the effect. Where plot forms a portion of the contemplated interest, too much preconsideration cannot be had" (H, XIV, 188). And again in his famous review of Hawthorne's Twice Told Tales, Poe elaborates his method for writing the short story.

A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. He has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having deliberately conceived a certain single effect to be wrought, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events, and discusses them in such tone as may best serve him in establishing the preconceived effect. If his very first sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then in his very first step he has committed a blunder. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction (H, XIII, 153).

The denouement, which must be brought about by events originating in the ruling idea, serves as a symbol or revelation of the whole unity of effect. As George Kelly states, "denouement itself becomes psychologically a single impression of the unity for which it is the symbol."⁹

⁹George Kelly, "Poe's Theory of Unity," Philological Quarterly, XXXVII (January, 1958), p. 43.

As in his discussion of the poet's craft, Poe stresses originality, brevity, and underlying meaning in the construction of the tale--a form he feels provides "the fairest field which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose, for the exercise of the highest genius" (H, XIII, 151). In the tale, the artist is not confined to the province of beauty but may choose his subject matter from the broad range of "truth." Although it is only incidental to poetry, Poe says that "Truth is often, and in very great degree, the aim of the tale" (H, XI, 109). Many subjects may be treated in the tale, among these, ratiocination, humor, sarcasm, terror, passion, and horror; the artist is also free to use vivid images, clear direct language, and to depict strong emotions since he is appealing to his reader's emotions or reason rather than to his purely aesthetic sense.

Poe's critical theory represents his attempt to define the artist's craft by setting up rational standards based on a central principle of unity. The artist's methods for writing poetry and prose are essentially similar, differing only inasmuch as the nature of poetry differs from prose. In the poem the artist must strive for "indefiniteness" and a perfect harmony of structure to reflect the perfect harmony of Supernal Beauty. In the tale the artist strives for a perfect consistency of structure to reflect the perfect consistency of the Divine Truth he wishes to reveal. Poe believed that by perfecting his craftsmanship, the artist can approach the

perfection of form in his creation that he intuitively perceives in his Divine model. Whereas his poetic sentiment determines the artist's imaginative vision, his skill as a craftsman determines the structure of his reflection of that vision and the ultimate effect it will produce on his readers. The artist cannot increase his poetic sentiment, but, Poe believes, he can and should struggle to perfect his craftsmanship.

At his creative best, Poe exemplifies in his own work his conception of what the True Artist should be. He was a conscious craftsman who strove always for originality in his creative and critical work.¹⁰ Although he borrows from the Gothic tradition elements to enhance his tales of terror, he gives the tale of sensation a new vitality by concentrating on the realistic horror of his character's state of mind rather than depending upon the usual ghosts, vampires, and ghouls for his effect. If he did not literally invent the detective story, he certainly perfected it and set the pattern for this extremely durable genre.¹¹ And critics such as Killis

¹⁰Floyd Stovall, "The Conscious Art of Edgar Allen Poe," in Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Robert Regan (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 174-5. Stovall, by emphasizing Poe's craftsmanship, attempts to correct the distorted image of Poe the artist presented by critics "who have not taken the trouble to understand his work." Stovall states, "I am convinced that all of Poe's poems were composed with conscious art....Most if not all of them had their origin in thought and express or suggest clearly-formed ideas."

¹¹Dorothy L. Sayers, ed., The Omnibus of Crime, (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1937), pp. 9-10. Sayers says that "between 1840 and 1845 the wayward

Campbell have commented on Poe's "keen insight," his "independent thinking," and the "originality" of his critical articles.¹²

That Poe was a painstaking and energetic craftsman is evidenced by the careful construction of his work and his numerous revision. Alterton points out that "almost no known literary artist ever revised and reissued more frequently than Poe did."¹³ He constantly sought perfection in the form of his art to reflect the perfection he perceived in his Divine model. In his own creative efforts, Poe sought to achieve unity of effect by a perfect blending of form and content and by a carefully ordered organic structural unity of mutually dependent, harmoniously balanced parts. In the best of the tales of terror, the incidents, background, images, and tone combine to produce the pre-determined single effect on the reader's emotions. As Alterton points out, "The Fall of the House of Usher" approaches "perfection in its selection, preservation, and exaltation of a single tone, a tone of insufferable gloom."¹⁴ Objects and elements are so thoroughly blended that the final dissolution of the physical, mental, and spiritual

genius of Edgar Allen Poe (himself a past-master of the horrible) produced five tales, in which the general principles of the detective-story were laid down for ever." Poe created the story of mystery by combining detective and horror genres.

¹²Killis Campbell, The Mind of Poe and Other Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 29.

¹³Margaret Alterton and Hardin Craig, Edgar Allen Poe, p. lxxx.

¹⁴Ibid., p. xcvi.

aspects of the universe of Usher is as inevitable as the final rushing back to unity of the atoms of the cosmos of Eureka. And in "The Cask of Amontillado," Poe exemplifies his critical theory that a plot must consist of mutually dependent parts, each atom springing from the original thesis. Every element of the tale derives from and leads to the working out of Montresor's revenge plot, with setting and tone reinforcing the main theme. In the tales of ratiocination which are devised to affect the reader's intellect, Poe's method is a precise, logical chain of events which perplex and then illuminate. The problem of the crime, the clues surrounding it, the detective's hypothesis, and his verification of his theory produce the solution to the crime in a perfect parallel of the scientific method. Each part of the tale balances every other part and leads inevitably to the desired effect of illumination of the problem.

An examination of Eureka has shown Poe's belief that man's nature is essentially aesthetic--that his basic Divine instinct is a longing for symmetry, harmony, and unity. Trapped in an environment that is disordered and chaotic, the sensitive artist is constantly threatened by the potentially destructive effect of matter upon his mind. In the tales of terror, Poe portrays fictionally the triumph of matter over mind. The disordered protagonists in these tales become microcosms of the cosmic disorder because they yield to

"perversity" instead of following their divine instinct for unity. Dupin, the detective in the tales of ratiocination, proves to be a limited automaton, capable of receiving and ordering physical data to reconstruct the events surrounding a crime, but devoid of normal emotions, moral compunctions, and poetic sentiment. Dupin is unable to create in the true artistic sense Poe sets forth in his critical theories, and yet his very artistic deficiencies make him the kind of "factitious" genius who can triumph over a materialistic society that rejects true genius--a success that is Poe's indictment of the nineteenth century's harsh treatment of the True Artist.

In the present chaotic condition of the cosmos, Poe saw art as man's prime way of perceiving Divine Unity-Truth-Beauty. In Poe's system, it is through art, not religion, that man knows God and discovers his own divinity; it is through art rather than philosophy or science that man understands his own nature and comprehends his relationship to the physical world. Thus, the role of the True Artist encompasses and transcends the functions of priest, teacher, and scientist. His is the difficult task of seeking Divine order from worldly chaos and transmitting his intuitive perceptions to others through the creation of art. Exercising his divinity in acts of artistic creation, the Artist recalls man's immortality and unity as God and satisfies man's immortal longing for Divine Truth and Beauty. He also achieves partial satisfaction for his own longing for Divine Unity, though he cannot fully satisfy his

immortal instinct for "the Beauty above" in this world. But the True Artist's creative successes enable him to endure-- to achieve momentary but intense spiritual satisfaction that fortifies him for his struggles with worldly chaos.¹⁵ Only the True Artist, whom Poe described in his criticism and tried to emulate in practice, fulfills completely his intended role as creator. He represents man at his most God-like; and while his existence in this world may be more painful than ordinary men's, his rewards are more satisfying. He recognizes his mental and spiritual superiority and takes pride in his noble calling, even though society rejects his values. In a letter to F. W. Thomas, Poe insists that "literature is the most noble of professions. In fact, it is about the only one fit for a man." The things that are of value to an artist, Poe states, are "absolutely unpurchasable." "Love, fame, the dominion of intellect, the consciousness of power, the thrilling sense of beauty, the free air of Heaven, exercise of body and mind, with the physical and moral health which result--these and such as these are really all that a poet cares for" (E, XVII, 332).

Since the universe Poe describes in Eureka will become more and more chaotic, reaching a state of matter characterized

¹⁵Robert Jacobs, Poe, Journalist and Critic, p. 422, claims that Poe could not accept the Christian concept of Hell because "to Poe, existence itself was hell enough, and the divine pleasure which could momentarily alleviate the pain of existence could come only from the artist, who would prove his divine title by adapting the given, the raw materials of art, to the limitations of man's cognitive apparatus in such a way that the pleasure would be as pure as possible."

by "the utmost possible Relation," before the Divine purpose is fulfilled and the cosmos contracts into final Unity, the role of the True Artist to project visions of man's primal unity becomes more difficult but also more important as the universe ages. As Davidson points out, "the artist must recast and make relevant the long-separated dualism of man's mind; he must bridge the gap between the chaotic, particularized world of empirical data, and the instinctive, cognitive awareness that mind and matter cohere in a disclosed design."¹⁶ Only the most powerful intellect endowed with supreme intuitive insight and artistic constructive ability could approach such a monumental task with any hope of success. The True Artist must be a God, or at least a demi-god, to accomplish his high mission. Yet, if Poe deifies the True Artist and proposes an impossibly high artistic standard for him to emulate, he is also painfully aware of the mortal artist's limitations and the frustrations and problems that confront the creative artist in this world. All of his creative and critical efforts reveal Poe's struggle to define the nature and function of the creative artist. As Bowra notes of Poe: "In him the man and artist were one. The artist needed harmony and perfection and sought them through art, while the man needed them no less and sought to create a system in which all failures and imperfections would be transcended at the last."¹⁷ Poe's works, when

¹⁶Edward H. Davidson, Poe, A Critical Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 251-2.

¹⁷C. M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 190

considered from the standpoint of his struggle to understand the problems of the creative artist, show that he was far more than the creator of sensational horror tales for a ready audience. Instead, he emerges as a significant commentator on the problems of man as artist in a chaotic world.

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

Poe, Edgar Allen. The Complete Poems and Stories of Edgar Allen Poe, with Selections from His Critical Writings, ed. Arthur H. Quinn and Edward H. O'Neill. 2 vols. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946.

_____. The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe, ed. James A. Harrison. 17 vols. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1902.

_____. The Poems of Edgar Allen Poe, ed. Floyd Stovall. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965.

B. ARTICLES

Abel, Darrel. "A Key to the House of Usher." Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Fall of the House of Usher." Edited by Thomas Woodson. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1969.

_____. "Coleridge's 'Life-in-Death' and Poe's 'Death-in-Life.'" Notes and Queries, II (May, 1955), 218-20.

Anderson, David D. "A Comparison of the Poetic Theories of Emerson and Poe." Personalist, XL (Autumn, 1960), 471-83.

Baily, J. O. "Poe's Theory of the Soul." Carolina Quarterly, II (March, 1950), 38-43.

Bandy, William T. "Who was Monsieur Dupin?" PMLA, LXXIX (September, 1964), 509-10.

Basler, Roy P. "The Interpretation of 'Ligeia.'" Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays. Edited by Robert Regan. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.

Benton, Richard P. "'The Mystery of Marie Roget'--A Defense." Studies in Short Fiction, VI (1969), 144-51.

Blair, Walter. "Poe's Conception of Incident and Tone in the Tale." Modern Philology, XLI (May, 1944), 228-40.

- Burke, Kenneth. "'The Principle of Composition.'" Poetry, XCIX (October, 1961), 46-53.
- Clough, Wilson O. "Poe's 'The City in the Sea' Revisited." Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell. Edited by C. Gohdes. Durham: Duke University Press, 1967, pp. 77-89.
- Cox, James M. "Edgar Poe: Style as Pose." Virginia Quarterly Review, XLIV (Winter, 1968), 67-89.
- Daniel, Robert. "Poe's Detective God." Furioso, VI (Summer, 1951), 45-54.
- Donnell, C. D. "From Earth to Ether: Poe's Flight into Space." PMLA, LXXVII (1962), 86-94.
- Gargano, James W. "The Question of Poe's Narrators." Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays. Edited by Robert Regan. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.
- Griffith, Clark. "'Emersonianism' and 'Poeism': Some Versions of the Romantic Sensibility." Modern Language Quarterly, XXII (June, 1961), 125-34.
- Halline, Allan G. "Moral and Religious Concepts in Poe." Bucknell University Studies, II (January, 1951), 126-50.
- Hawkins, John. "Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue.'" Explicator, XXIII, no. 6 (1965), item 49.
- Hungerford, Edward. "Poe and Phrenology." American Literature, II (November, 1930), 209-31.
- Jacobs, Robert D. "Poe and the Agrarian Critics." Hopkins Review, V (Spring, 1952), 43-54.
- Kelly, George. "Poe's Theory of Unity." Philological Quarterly, XXXVII (January, 1958), 34-44.
- Kronegger, M. E. "The Theory of Unity and Effect in the Works of Edgar Allen Poe and James Joyce." Revue de Litterature Comparee, XL (1966), 226-34.
- Lafleur, Lawrence J. "Edgar Allen Poe as Philosopher." Personalist, XXII (October, 1941), 401-5.
- Lawrence, D. H. "Edgar Allen Poe." Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Fall of the House of Usher". Edited by Thomas Woodson. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1969.

- Lucas, Frank L. "Romanticism in Decay: Poe." Literature and Psychology. London: Cassell, 1951, pp. 130-35.
- Maddison, Carol H. "Poe's Eureka." Texas Studies in Literature and Language, II (1960), 350-67.
- Marchand, Ernest. "Poe as a Social Critic." American Literature, VI (1934), 34-5.
- Marks, Emerson R. "Poe as Literary Theorist: A Reappraisal." American Literature, XXXIII (November, 1961), 296-306.
- Mengeling, Marvin and Frances. "From Fancy to Failure: A Study of the Narrators in the Tales of Edgar Allen Poe." University Review, XXXIII (1967), 293-98.
- Moldenhauer, Joseph J. "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision." PMLA, LXXXIII (May, 1968), 284-97.
- More, Paul E. "A Note on Poe's Method." Studies in Philology, XX (1923), 306-9.
- Quinn, Patrick F. "Poe's Eureka and Emerson's Nature." Emerson Society Quarterly, no. 31 (Second quarter, 1967), 4-7.
- _____. "Poe's Imaginary Voyage." Hudson Review, IV (1951), 562-85.
- Roppolo, Joseph. "Meaning and 'The Masque of the Red Death.'" Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays. Edited by Robert Regan. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.
- San Juan, E. Jr. "The Form of Experience in the Poems of Edgar Allen Poe." Georgia Review, XXI (1967), 65-80.
- Smith, Horatio E. "Poe's Extension of his Theory of the Tale." Modern Philology, XVI (August, 1918), 27-35.
- Smithline, Arnold. "Eureka: Poe as Transcendentalist." Emerson Society Quarterly, no. 39 (Second Quarter, 1965), 25-38.
- Snell, George. "First of the New Critics." Quarterly Review of Literature, II (Summer, 1945), 333-40.
- _____. "Poe: The Terror of the Soul." The Shapers of American Fiction. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1947, pp. 45-60.

- Stauffer, Donald B. "Style and Meaning in 'Ligeia' and 'William Wilson.'" Studies in Short Fiction, II (Summer, 1965), 316-30.
- Stovall, Floyd. "The Conscious Art of Edgar Allen Poe." Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays. Edited by Robert Regan. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.
- _____. "Poe as Poet of Ideas." University of Texas Studies in English, XI (1931), 56-62.
- _____. "Poe's Debt to Coleridge." University of Texas Studies in English, X (1930), 70-127.
- Tate, Allen. "The Angelic Imagination: Poe and the Power of Words." Kenyon Review, XIV (Summer, 1952), 455-75.
- _____. "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe." Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays. Edited by Robert Regan. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.
- Thompson, G. R. "Unity, Death, and Nothingness--Poe's Romantic Skepticism." PMLA, LXXXVI (March, 1970), 226-30.
- Walcutt, Charles C. "The Logic of Poe." College English, II (February, 1941), 438-44.
- Wiener, Philip P. "Poe's Logic and Metaphysic." Personalist, XIV (October, 1933), 268-74.
- Wilbur, Richard. "The House of Poe." Poe, A Collection of Critical Essays. Edited by Robert Regan. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.
- _____. Introduction to Poe: Complete Poems. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1959, pp. 7-39.
- Wilson, Edmund. "Poe as a Literary Critic." Nation, CLV (October, 1942), 452-53.
- Wilson, James S. "Poe's Philosophy of Composition." North American Review, CCXXIII (December, 1926), 675-84.
- Wilt, Napier. "Poe's Attitude Toward his Tales: A New Document." Modern Philology, XXV (August, 1927), 101-5.
- Wimsatt, William K. Jr. "Poe and the Mystery of Mary Rogers." PMLA, LV (March, 1941), 230-48.

C. BOOKS

- Adams, Robert M. Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void during the Nineteenth Century. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Allen, Hervey. Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allen Poe. 2 vols. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926.
- Alterton, Margaret. Origins of Poe's Critical Theory. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1925.
- Alterton, Margaret and Hardin Craig. Edgar Allen Poe: Representative Selections. New York: American Book Company, 1935.
- Bonaparte, Marie. The Life and Works of Edgar Poe, A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation. London: Imago Publishing Company, 1949.
- Bowra, C. M. The Romantic Imagination. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Buranelli, Vincent. Edgar Allen Poe. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961.
- Campbell, Killis. The Mind of Poe and Other Studies. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1933.
- Dameron, J. Lasley and Louis C. Stagg. An Index to Poe's Critical Vocabulary. Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1966.
- Davidson, Edward H. Poe, A Critical Study. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957.
- Feidelson, Charles Jr. Symbolism and American Literature. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953.
- Foerster, Norman. American Criticism: A Study in Literary Theory from Poe to the Present. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928.
- Guerard, Albert L. Art for Art's Sake. New York: Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard Company, 1936.
- Jacobs, Robert D. Poe: Journalist and Critic. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. Edgar Allen Poe, A Study in Genius. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

- Levin, Harry. The Power of Blackness. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960.
- Maxwell, D. E. S. American Fiction: The Intellectual Background. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.
- Parks, Edd. W. Edgar Allen Poe as Literary Critic. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1964.
- Praz, Mario. The Romantic Agony. Translated by Angus Davidson. London: Oxford, 1954.
- Quinn, Arthur Hobson. Edgar Allen Poe: A Critical Biography. New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1941.
- Quinn, Patrick F. The French Face of Edgar Poe. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957.
- Regan, Robert, ed. Poe; A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.
- Sayers, Dorothy L., ed. The Omnibus of Crime. Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1937.
- Stern, Philip, ed. The Portable Poe. New York: The Viking Press, 1945.
- Tate, Allen, The Man of Letters in the Modern World. New York: Meridian Books, 1955.
- Wagenknecht, Edward. Edgar Allen Poe: The Man Behind the Legend. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Walsh, John. Poe the Detective: The Curious Circumstances Behind "The Mystery of Marie Rog t". New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1968.
- Woodson, Thomas, ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Fall of the House of Usher". Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1969.