DESCENT: RECOVERY OF THE GROUND IN EUREKA, POE'S COSMOGONIC MYTH

by

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Descent: Recovery of the Ground in Eureka, Poe's Cosmogonic Myth

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ABSTRACT

Poe was not "a fault of nature," "a find for French eyes," ripe but unaccountable, as through our woollyheadedness we've sought to designate him, but a genius intimately shaped by his locality and time. It is to save our faces that we've given him a crazy reputation, a writer from whose classic accuracies we have not known how else to escape. (IAG, 216)

The depth and seriousness of the genius of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) as an American writer has been largely unappreciated up until the publication of William Carlos Williams' essay, "Edgar Allan Poe," in In the American Grain (1925), where Williams moves towards a definition of Poe's "originality"... "in its original sense of solidity which goes back to the ground, a conviction that he can judge for himself." (IAG, 216) Williams argues that the French were ready to receive the fruits of Poe's labours to shape a conscious methodology of poetry, while his contemporaries in America sought from the beginning to reduce the breadth and complexity of Poe's work to "the grotesque and arabesque," and the man himself to a psychological "case." While Arthur Hobson Quinn's Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography (1941) corrected most of the fallacies centering around Poe's life, the larger
problem of the work remained. In 1959, however, the appearance of Richard Wilbur's clear-sighted discussion of Poe's conscious use of symbol and myth in the Laurel edition of the poems, forced a reconsideration of the works in terms of a development and a wholeness of vision. I will be moving out from the work of Williams and Wilbur to argue that the poems and tales do propose a wholeness—that there is a gradual development in Poe's thought and method which finds its completion in his cosmic myth, Eureka (1848), written at the end of his life. It is in Eureka that Poe draws together the fragments of a cosmology implicit in the poems and tales. It is my purpose not only to show that Eureka is the issue of the work that precedes it, but also to demonstrate that it falls into the ancient tradition of cosmogonic poetry. It thus becomes both the culmination of Poe's work and a refusal of the generally accepted ways of viewing the world prevalent in the Nineteenth century.

But before entering upon an examination of some of the early poems, tales, and finally Eureka itself, I have found it necessary to turn first to some general problems in reading Poe, since much of the criticism emerges as a barrier, rather than an entrance into his work. Thus I will devote the first Section to an examination of the way in which a criticism grounded in Romantic Platonism and Eighteenth Century Neo-classical thought is simply inadequate to deal with the experiential nature of what Poe's work proposes. I want to show how from the beginning,
Poe's work moves out of a refusal of the imposition of static grids of meaning (including those of philosophical realism and idealism) upon experience as process. There is thus a parallel refusal of the Neo-classical sense of language itself as transparent, implicit in the works and criticism—that is, that view of language which assumes word or symbol is referential on a one to one basis to a fixed "outer" reality. By excluding the intelligence of conceptualization from his definition of poetry and turning his back on the topological sense of language, Poe moves toward an elemental (perceptually based) sense of cosmic polarity. Where Romantic and Christian Platonism seek a transcendence of opposites (all the oppositions of a Cartesian dialectic), Poe "descends" into an experiential contrarium where opposites are no longer polar, but alive. In response to the closed systems of Neo-classicism, which tend to stress the abstract and conceptual, Poe places the weight on the particular, the perceptual, and moves towards a form which is open—which seeks to incorporate the reader into the work through a participatory act. In the first Chapter I will also be looking at some of the psychoanalytic work on Poe. Since most of it is grounded in that same view of language and of the world which assumes a static outer reality (over which the subjective or "private" experience of the poet
looms gigantically), I will be arguing that the psychological, alone, is inadequate to deal with Poe. No where is this inadequacy of the psychoanalytic clearer than in Eureka.

In Chapter II I want to turn to some of Poe's statements of theory in light of its ground or core in the thought of S.T. Coleridge. For it is here in Poe's critical essays that one finds the intellectual development leading to Eureka that is paralleled in the more image-centered tales. I will be using primarily Owen Barfield's What Coleridge Thought as a means of entry into Coleridge's sense of opposites. I want to suggest that it was through Coleridge that Poe first gained entrance to a tradition that refuses to reduce experience into hypostatic terms and thus found a ground for his own unique sense of opposites.

Finally, in Chapters III, IV and V, I will be returning to the poems and tales in order to study Poe's enactment of the opposition of self and world as it confronts him in his own time and place.

Chapter VI will be devoted to an examination of Eureka as cosmogony. Here where the poem approaches the void, it plays with meaning and the absence of meaning, the thought and the unthought--that place where image's active compliment (the "imageless" other) confronts the naked self, and the poem begins to break into open-form narration. For in Eureka that which Williams perceives as Poe's
insistence on "method," his "strong impulse to begin at
the beginning" (IAG, 217) emerges as a redefining of the
meaningfulness of language and a final attempt to "clear
the ground" for direct (primary) contact with the world
of his experience.
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for the terrible agony which I have so lately endured--an agony known only to my God and to myself--seems to have passed my soul through fire and purified it from all that is weak.

Henceforward I am strong:--thus those who love me shall see--as well as those who have so relentlessly endeavored to ruin me.

Poe's Letter to Mrs. Whitman

November 25, 1848
The General Proposition is this--Because Nothing was, therefore All Things are.

1--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.

2--Gravity is but the mode in which is manifested the tendency of all things to return into their original unity--is but the reaction of the first Divine Act.

3--The law regulating the return--i.e., the law of Gravitation--is but a necessary result of the necessary and sole possible mode of equable irradiation of matter through space: this equable irradiation is necessary as a basis for the Nebular Theory of Laplace.

4--The Universe of Stars (contradistinguished from the Universe of Space) is limited.

5--Mind is cognizant of Matter only through its two properties, attraction and repulsion: therefore Matter is only attraction and repulsion: a finally consolidated globe-of-globes, being but one particle, would be without attraction--i.e., gravitation: the existence of such a globe presupposed the expulsion of the separative ether which we know to exist between the particles as at present diffused: thus the final globe would be matter without attraction and repulsion: but these are matter: then the final globe would be matter without matter--i.e., no matter at all: it must disappear. This Unity is Nothingness.

6--Matter, springing from Unity, sprang from Nothingness--i.e., was created.

7--All will return to Nothingness, in returning to Unity.

Poe's summary of Eureka
(from a letter to George Eveleth, Feb. 29, 1848)
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

At the end of his life in 1847-1848 Poe writes Eureka, a long, discursive piece which he insists upon calling a poem. In the "Preface" he remarks: "Nevertheless it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead."¹ Since it first appeared few readers have been willing or able to accept it on Poe's terms. Those who have read it at all have cast it aside as, at worst, the final disordered utterance of a diseased intelligence, or at best, as a piece of eccentric pseudoscience. Fewer yet have been able to ascertain any relationship between Eureka and the more image-centered tales of mystery, imagination and horror for which Poe is famous. In 1941, Arthur Hobson Quinn devoted a large section of his excellent biography to an examination of Poe's "prose-poem." In response to those critics who attacked Eureka on the basis of its inaccuracy as science, Quinn submitted it to the scrutiny of the leading scientific minds of our day. His investigations into Eureka proved that rather than evidence of the decline of Poe's genius, it is an amazingly accurate document for its time, even by scientific standards. Sir Arthur Eddington, Plumian Professor of Astronomy at Cambridge responds to Eureka on September 29, 1940, in the following terms:

¹
I think you make out clearly that Eureka is not a work of dotage or disordered mind. It is, I think, the work of a man trying to reconcile the science of his time with the more philosophical and scientific cravings of the mind. Poe, besides being fairly well-informed in science and mathematics, seems to have had the mind of a mathematician, and consequently was not to be put off with vague phrases; and made a credible attempt to introduce precision of thought. 2

Charles P. Olivier, Professor of Astronomy at the University of Pennsylvania, states similarly:

I should say that Poe had read widely and with keen appreciation the general astronomy of the day. So long as he limited himself to choosing between rival hypotheses of others, he usually chose either the right one or the most probable in his day. 3

Yet Arthur Quinn's defense evades the real question--that is--is Eureka a poem, and if so, on what grounds are we to read it as such? "The Preface" and the opening pages of the corrosive, satiric epistle, force us to come to terms immediately with Poe's estimation of its importance as poetry. It is not enough to point out that the conception of the universe as an expanding-contracting organism is still a credible theory--nor that Poe's notion of "reciprocity" in some way anticipates Einstein's "Theory of Relativity." The point of Eureka's accuracy is that it is given to be precise in terms of the imagination, and thus only, precise in terms of the world. Since Eureka presents an argument with the empiricism of science, to defend it on empirical terms alone is to defeat Poe's entire aim.

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In 1840, when Poe was attacked for leaning overmuch toward "German Romanticism" and the "Gothic" he wrote: "If in any of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul,--that I have deduced terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results." I would argue that the refusal to see Poe as anything but a "master of horror" has blinded both criticism and the general reader to clear evidence of an obvious relation between Poe's explorations into fear, insanity and horror in the tales (the Gothic), and the form and content of Eureka. In defense of Eureka today, I can well imagine Poe answering that neither is accuracy and precision the property of science alone--but of the Soul or imagination of man.

The purpose of this paper is to show that there is a wholeness to Poe's work; that Eureka is the natural, if somewhat amazing, outcome of the territory Poe explores in the poems and tales that precede it. I wish to show how the interest in horror, fear, irrationality, surprise and "effect" in the tales and criticism, is pursued to its unavoidable conclusions in Eureka. Here where Poe's concern is with "origins"--the beginning and end of experience in cosmic terms--the orders of fear he had been exploring in the tales take on cosmic dimensions. Here fear is no longer merely human--but prelogical, cosmic--the fear of man cast back into a primitive experi-
ence of time and place.

The final intent of this paper is to show how and why Eureka is indeed a poem—a cosmogonic poem or myth of "origins." For I have found that Eureka emerges clearly as a modern species of the ancient tradition of cosmogonic poetry dating back to Hesiod and pre-Homeric myth. Since the main purpose of my discussion is to illuminate and open Eureka, my investigations into the tales, poems, and criticism that precede it, will be properly tentative and properly progressive in order to show a gradual development toward Poe's cosmic myth. In this way one work tends to inform the next. I do not propose complete exegesis of the early poems and tales in my discussion, but wish rather, to show how they are preliminary steps toward Poe's cosmic myth. The early chapters are offered as an attempt to show how Poe's insistence upon beginnings and origins (expressed in the tales as an interest in extreme psychological states at the edges of perception) is an early concern which leads him into a breaking with traditional, conceptual frames of reference and static grids of meaning. In Eureka the continuing demand for "beginnings" is a demand for direct experience and the delineation of a method of speaking out of one's own experience of the world, rather than resting on dialectic and the language of conceptualization that would remove
man from direct contact with that world as process.

Traditionally the cosmic myth of origins deals with man's first-hand experience as a center or "point of origination" through which the world speaks. It concerns itself with eternally repeated rebirths--the burst-through to the "ground" of man's biological being from which he eternally creates himself. In his discussion of the "myth of origins" C. Kerényi writes:

If we consider this purely internal aspect of our life in spatial terms, then the ideal spot where origination and our knowledge of the origins are identical can only be this central breach point. Going back into ourselves in this way and rendering an account of it, we experience and proclaim the very foundations of our being, that is to say, we are "grounding" ourselves.5

I will be attempting to show how the voice of the solitary "I" narrator (the familiar "I" of the tales) becomes in Eureka for brief moments, capable of speaking out of the depth of its "Soul," which is also the center of the world. By pushing the poetry of personal self-expression to its limits, Poe moves toward a recovery of this primitive "ground" of being. As Kerényi says of the cosmic myth: "The world itself speaks in the images of origination that stream out from it." I wish to show, then, how Eureka begins with scientific vocabulary as a means of demanding back from science a precision and accuracy that had been lost--and then breaking from strict scientific and technical language into the language of image and metaphor in which world and self show forth.

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I have suggested that few American critics have been able to deal adequately with the whole of Poe's work and with Eureka as a part of that whole. I will be moving out from the exceptional work of Richard Wilbur and William Carlos Williams, since their recent essays are the first to treat the fuller implications of Poe's interest in surprise as a concern with origins. In his essay on Poe in In the American Grain (1925), Williams describes Poe's work as "the first great burst through to expression of a re-awakened genius of place" in America, and then links the sense of "place" or "locality" to Poe's demand for "original terms." Wilbur's remarks on Eureka are similar in his introduction to the 1959 Laurel edition of the poems; his insistence that there is a wholeness to Poe's work, moves us further toward an understanding of how Eureka is the outgrowth of the earlier poems and prose.

Wilbur argues that:

The philosophic and esthetic thought of "Al Aaraaf" [1829] was worked out . . . in critical articles, in such prose "dialogues in heaven" as "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," and ultimately in the prose-poem "Eureka." 

Wilbur points out that Poe was forced to abandon the early narrative impulse for the shorter tales and longish narratives, until the appearance of Eureka.

The narrative impulse which had begotten "Tamerlane" was now directed toward the prose tale. The poems accordingly ceased to be efforts at full statement; they became in effect addenda to the prose pieces, embroideries, cryptic distillations.
Wilbur's summary of the content of Eureka sets forth a relation between the cosmic myth and the themes of the poems and tales:

In the beginning, Poe asserts, God was a particle of non-atomic or "spiritual" matter, willed into being by Himself, and existing at the center of space in a state of perfect totality and unity. Then, through some inner necessity, this primordial particle was radiated into space in the form of concentric spheres. Thus the universe was established, and the original unity became diversity. The universe is now at the point of maximum diffusion, and, moved once again by inner necessity, is commencing to contract toward the original unity and final annihilation. At the present moment, according to Poe, God exists only in the diffused matter and spirit of the universe: from which it follows that each soul is in part its own God, and that nothing exists greater than the individual soul. Since "the source of all motion is thought," the universe must be reunited by means of the over-increasing comprehensiveness of the thought of individual souls. In restoring the original unity of things, and so reconstituting God, every soul must logically absorb every other soul; hence every soul will become God.

Wilbur argues that Poe's cosmic myth is a justification of the kind of poetry he writes—that the vision of the artist as God-like and divine enables us to comprehend Poe's insistence upon the poet concerning himself with the reconstitution of Supernal or Ideal beauty alone:

Since the poet's business is to help undo phenomena towards unity, dreaming the oak of the creation back to its original acorn, his negation of human and earthly subject-matter becomes in Poe's cosmic theory positive; his destructiveness becomes creative; his exclusiveness a condition of his inclusiveness; his vagueness a consequence of his unearthly subject-matter; his denial of Intellect a means to ultimate Truth. In short, Poe's myth of the cosmos presents his every apparent limitation as an advantage.
Wilbur is one of the first in America to name Eureka cosmogony, and perhaps the first to indicate the way in which the "plot" of the cosmic myth is implicit in the tales and poems.

Williams' contribution to Poe criticism and particularly to a reading of Eureka lies in his recognition of the importance of Poe's demand for "beginnings"—since "beginnings" are the prime concern of cosmogony. Speaking of what has been called Poe's "provincialism;" his lack of sophistication that "awakened Lowell's derision," Williams writes that it was in Poe an "insistence upon primary distinctions, that seems coldly academic . . . in this case no more than evidence of a strong impulse to begin at the beginning." This impulse, argues Williams, is what "grounds" Poe's work in a direct experience of "place." As I move through Poe's critical essays I want to show how the insistence upon beginnings is there too, a refusal to stand outside experience by reducing it to something static. In this sense Eureka can be seen as Poe's final "descent" into the contradiction of his own experience of his time and place. Though Williams makes no direct comment on Eureka, his remarks lead us to read it as a myth of "beginnings" or origins. Williams attends to a consideration of the way Poe's conscious methodology is an attempt to "clear the ground" for a return to "first principles." Again Williams, like Wilbur, shows that
Poe's apparent limitations are in truth his strengths--language is forced back to an edge where discourse fails and meaning itself is in question:

With Poe words were figures; an old language truly, but one from which he carried over only the most elemental qualities to his new purpose; which was, to find a way to tell his soul. Sometimes he used words so playfully his sentences seem to fly away from sense, the destructive! With the conserving abandon, foreshadowed, of a Gertrude Stein. The particles of language must be clear as sand. 12

There is a direct relation between Poe's experiments in sound and language in the poems--in "effects"--and his later cosmic myth, where the essential power of words both to create and to destroy engages him. In Eureka Poe attempts to deal simultaneously with the creation and destruction of the physical world and the creation-destruction-recreation of the worlds of discourse set up by the poem. There words become acts that reverberate through both the self that speaks them out and the world into which they are spoken. In a world from which man's acts and words had been for the most part removed by conceptual grids of meaning, Poe's methodology can be seen as a means of breaking language down in order to reassert it--to first expose and then re-relate man to a physicality in which his words and acts inhere in one another. As Williams points out, the criticism is nothing if not a struggle for such a methodology.
"childlike," simple, deductive reasoning IS his criticism--a sense of BEGINNING--of originality that presupposes an intrinsic WORTH in the reasoner--a sense of stripped, being clothed, nevertheless. 13

The reasoning voice of the narrator-poet in *Eureka* moves by just such a simple, deductive logic that is not the logic of science alone. By insisting that the intuition or imagination is the very ground of logic and reason, the voice (the "I") is able to incorporate a reasoning intelligence within it.

In 1921 Paul Valéry noted the significance of *Eureka* as a cosmogonic poem and wrote of the staggering effect it had on his mind when he first came upon it. Valéry is one of the first to consider *Eureka* both as "science" and as a poem--as well as the first to associate Poe's theory in *Eureka* with modern theories of relativity. Without reducing *Eureka* to pseudo-science, Valéry assesses its use of scientific method and language as a demand for precision, consistency and order--its "symmetry."

In Poe's system, consistency is both the source of the discovery and the discovery itself. This is an admirable conception: an example and application of reciprocal adaptation. The universe is formed on a plan the profound symmetry of which is present, as it were, in the inner structure of our minds. Hence, the poetic instinct will lead us blindly to the truth. 14

He goes on to speak of the ways in which *Eureka* was ahead of its time, even by science's standards. But not even science can deal with Poe's sense of a correspondential
relation between subject and object; self and world—that is, his sense of formal "symmetry." Valéry continues:

That this tendency approaches recent conceptions becomes evident when one discovers, in the poem under discussion, an affirmation of the symmetrical and reciprocal relationship of matter, time, space, gravity, and light. I emphasize the word symmetrical, for it is, in reality, a formal symmetry which is the essential characteristic of Einstein's conception. 15

Eureka's consistency (which Poe defines as its "truth" as well as its beauty) is not the truth or consistency of descriptive science. Valéry argues that Poe does not confine himself to any mere examination of the physical constituents of the appearances of phenomena, but "introduces life and consciousness into his plan."

At this point how many thoughts occur to the mind! The time is past when one could distinguish easily between the material and the spiritual. Formerly all discussion was based on a complete knowledge of "matter," which it was thought could be limited by definition. In a word, everything depended on appearance.

The appearance of matter is that of a dead substance, a potentiality which becomes activity only through the intervention of something exterior and entirely foreign to its nature. For this definition, inevitable consequences could be drawn. But matter has changed. Our old conception of its nature was derived from pure observation; experiments have lead to an opposite notion. The whole of modern physics, which has created, as it were, relays for our senses has persuaded us that our former definition had neither an absolute nor a speculative value. We find that matter is strangely diverse and infinitely surprising; that it is formed of transformations which continue and are lost in minuteness, even in the abysses of minuteness; we learn that perpetual motion is perhaps realized. In matter an eternal fever rages. 16
Valéry's reflections, like those of Poe in *Eureka* itself, move past mere speculation into an imaginative flight that is nonetheless "grounded" in an experience of living "substance." Ordinary "matter" (when seen afresh) for scientist and poet alike, turns out to be "strangely diverse and infinitely surprising,"--it is alive. In *Eureka*, as in the tales, Poe's sense of surprise, effect, the unexpected, arises as it always does, out of the expected. The known turns over to reveal the unknown; the physical to reveal the spiritual and vice-versa. Valéry saw that in *Eureka* all oppositions are defined in terms of each other--and so "the time is past when one could distinguish easily between the material and the spiritual." Matter itself, the thing most known and defined, turns out to have an unknown component. In *Eureka*, where known and unknown interpenetrate and inform one another, it becomes the poet's task to speak out of that place where the imagination is both the "shaper" and the "shaped"--that edge of consciousness which is "a point of origination." I will be arguing that the preoccupation with fear in the tales is to become in *Eureka* an interest in origins, event, and presence--"first things." It can be seen as Poe's last attempt to make the known, unknown; the unknown, known--to recover the startling presence of the "strange" in things most familiar--one's own voice as it comes back, a finger as it moves a speck of dust, a star as it appears and...
disappears in the sky. It is here in the intuitive grasp
of "process" that the whole of man's physicality is engaged
by the world. It is here that scientific language,
deductive and inductive reasoning, dialectic itself breaks
off and the poem begins to move into image and metaphor.
I wish to show how Eureka opens into what authentic
cosmogony defines as experience of "void." For it is
also only at this midpoint where discourse threatens to
break, that the poem is incomplete and the reader may be
drawn in to complete it by moving back through his own
experience of that experiential "ground." In this sense
Eureka can be seen as one of the first attempts in
American Literature to move into what is called "open-form"
narration. Unfortunately, Valéry's perceptive remarks
have been largely ignored in America.

Before turning to an examination of Eureka as a
modern reappearance of the ancient cosmogonic form, let
us see how its early pages move out of a struggle with
dialectic. In the opening sentences of the text Poe
discloses his general proposition, which it becomes the
task of the poem to unfold:

In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies
the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the
Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation.

(H:v.16,185-6)

Implied in even the generality and condensation of this
statement, is a distinction between two primary conditions
at the ground of being--the original condition of Unity
and the secondary condition of Heterogeneity after an
initial act of separation (imaged in the tales as the Fall)
which upsets that first "Simplicity" of primordial "matter."
"Annihilation" in this context becomes the slow return to
Unity, as Wilbur has suggested. By implication, the end
(annihilation) is present in the beginning--Unity contains
"the germ" or seed of its destruction, just as the condition
of Heterogeneity will be shown to contain the seed of
Unity. Insofar as Poe's universe is proposed as a kind of
divine work of art, the implication for Poe's aesthetic
theory is that the artist must participate in the process
of thing's perfecting through a cosmic return to origins
which has already begun. Beauty is increasing with man's
(particularly the poet's) increasing ability to perceive
it. The exploration of death in the tales becomes in
Eureka this return to a point of unity or irrelation at
the center of the cosmos.

From the above statement of Eureka's bare "Plot,"
Poe then moves into the fictional device of the "hoax"
which we will find him employing in the tales. Here it
becomes a way of providing a frame for the narrative voice,
setting up double and triple perspectives from which that
voice may speak. The "lyrical I" of the earlier poems is
in Eureka, as I hope to show, no more the voice or "I"
of mere self-expression, but an "I" that pushes its way up
out of many qualifying voices and modes of discourse to speak out of "the ground" of being.

An epistle, says the narrator, is "found corked in a bottle and floating in the Mare Tenebrarum--an ocean described by the Nubian geographer, Ptolemy Hephestion, but little frequented in modern days unless by the Transcendentalists and some other divers for crochets." (H:v.16,187-8) The fictional device serves one of several purposes as satire and qualifying irony. For "the hoax," Poe selects a narrative voice that is at once ironical and prophetic, speaking out of futurity and looking back on the "present" age with detachment. Through the frame (as in the earlier satires and burlesques) Poe's irony is an attack on the fallacies and inadequacies of rational thought, that is, inductive and deductive reasoning--"the creeping and crawling systems" which the world had come to accept as "the only two practicable roads to truth." (H:v.16,188) Through his narrator, Poe confronts the modern descendents of Aristotle, whose name has come down through historical confusions, as "Aries Tottle," and those of Bacon or "Hog"--the "noumenalists" and "phenomenalists" respectively. The attack aims both at the Kantian offshoot of Aristotelianism and its present descendents in America, the Transcendentalists, as well as the empiricists or materialists. The letter-writer states:

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His most illustrious disciples were one Tuclid, a geometrician, and one Kant, a Dutchman, the originator of that species of Transcendentalism which, with the change merely of a C for a K, now bears his peculiar name. (H:v.16,188-9)

Poe attacks the Aristotelians or "Rams" for grounding "truth" in "non-existent" axioms as a way of avoiding direct experience. "The simple truth is," Poe says, "that the Aristotelians erected their castles upon a basis far less reliable than air; for no such things as axioms ever existed or can possibly exist at all." (H:v.16,192) The unquestioning acceptance of propositional truth as complete without experience leads most of "modern" philosophy into nothing but "crochets"—things of little use. Secondly Poe's narrator lashes out at the materialists through Bacon's descendent, Mill, and his "Millhorse," Bentham—the "Bedlamites," those,

diggers and peddlers of minute facts, for the most part in physical science—facts all of which they retailed at the same price upon the highway; their value depending, it was supposed, simply upon the fact of their fact, without reference to their applicability or inapplicability in the development of those ultimate and only legitimate facts, called Law. (H:v.16,191)

Since by his own axiom, Mill allows that "the ability or inability to conceive is in no case to be taken as a criterion of axiomatic truth," the letter writer argues, Mill's logic is self-contradictory. For in spite of his axiom, when asked why contradictions cannot "coexist in nature," Mill can give no answer other than that he finds it "impossible to conceive that a tree can be anything else than a tree or not a tree." (H:v.16,194) Poe returns
to perception, arguing that even a "Transcendentalist" may regard a tree "both as a tree and not a tree." That is, experience tells us that contradictions do exist in nature. Therefore that law of "non-contradiction" is not "grounded."

The vehicle of the hoax enables Poe to "clear the ground" of these "two sole roads to truth" and embrace the intuition which in its fashion "speculates," "theorizes," and "guesses" at truth, soaring on wings "utterly incognizant of 'path.'" (H:v.16,195) "The repression of imagination," says the letter-writer, "was an evil not to be counterbalanced even by absolute certainty in the snail process." (H:v.16,190) The epistle, then, becomes both a criticism of the naive, ungrounded, modes of rational thought and a defense of the intuition or imagination, as the only means of grasping process. The universe, like the mind that would participate in it, is alive.

Poe's use of the epistle complicates our reading of the entire poem. For on one level he seems to be satirizing the letter-writer, whose account of history is full of hilarious inaccuracies. Yet the inaccuracies intensify the ironic effect and at the same time lead the reader into a questioning of historical truth as a mode of knowledge. The epistle prepares us for the leap into mythical time and space that is to follow as the narrative voice breaks into reverie. Since Poe distances himself.
from the narrator of what he calls "this somewhat imper-
tinent epistle," (H:v.16,198) we cannot accuse him of waxing unnecessarily rhapsodic over the genius of Newton or Kepler, whose words the letter-writer is repeating:

I care not whether my work be read now or by posterity. I can afford to wait a century for readers when God himself has waited six thousand years for an observer. I triumph. I have stolen the golden secret of the Egyptians. I will indulge my sacred fury. (H:v.16,198)

The narrative voice that interrupts the epistle cannot be identified absolutely with the scientist, the poet or with Poe. Poe himself both does and does not speak in the letter-writer. We cannot be certain what secret Poe's Kepler has stolen. Has he grasped the secret of planetary motion or the secret of life itself, or both? The meaning is unsettled and Poe maintains an ambivalence. We must, however, keep in mind that Poe's Kepler and Newton are not to be identified with the naive rationalism Poe attacks in the epistle. Poe's Newton is metamorphosed for Poe's purpose into a representation of the ideal poet-scientist. He presents a Kepler whose reasoning intellect has been restored within the circle of an all-encompassing "intuition." The transfigured Newton, then, like Poe's Kepler and LaPlace, reach their "scientific" conclusions through the ruling power of the imagination. Poe's Kepler states:

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I know nothing about the machinery of the Universe. Here it is. I grasped it with my soul— I reached it through mere dint of intuition. (H:v.16,197)

The poet-scientist, by reasoning backward to the creation, is capable of raising both himself and the world of his perception. For he alone, through his own "feelings," has discovered a method of "seeing" the scattered presence of the divine that saturates the world. He alone is able to participate actively in the process of annihilation that is both a personal and a cosmic event. We will be following the development of this heightened rationality through the tales that precede Eureka.

As the "epistle" closes and the voice of the poet-scientist breaks in, Poe still has at his disposal the voices he has introduced in the narrative frame. The qualifying irony allows him in the body of the poem to speak out of a whole range of voices, including that of the detective-sleuth, the scientist, the philosopher-metaphysician and the poet. The accuracy of science—even deductive and inductive reason are redeemed for his purposes—those of showing and knowing how the mind arrives at its perceptions. For example, after establishing Unity as the original condition of the matter and spirit of the universe "a priori," Poe reverses his method and deduces that truth "a posteriori." "In fact," he writes,
I have attained a point at which it will be advisable to strengthen my position by reversing my processes. So far, we have gone on "a priori," from an abstract consideration of Simplicity, as that quality most likely to have characterized the original action of God. Let us now see whether the established facts of the Newtonian Gravitation may not afford us, "a posteriori," some legitimate inductions. (H:v.16,215)

The continual warfare of the intuition with the rational mind creates the force that drives image and metaphor to the rescue. As the foe of the tales, the rational mind, busies and buries itself with the dynamics of the dialectic, the intuition intervenes in a flash to seize the ground that lies between the poles of the dialectic. We can now see that by opening with a fictional device, Poe forces his audience immediately to accept the validity of imaginative (fictional) orders of truth. In order to move past the introductory epistle, one must accept the propositions that are true inside Poe's universe of limited space. This moves the reader past his ordinary sense that art is a "made-up" experience and cannot deal with truth. Inside Poe's cosmos, then, meaning and truth will be redefined.

Before turning to the central image or correspondent symbol in Eureka of the cosmic heart (see Chapter VI), let us note how in the following passage metaphor bursts through a nexus of "scientific" considerations. Poe begins by considering the first principle or "Law"
behind "universal agglomeration"--the tendency of all things to return to the state called "unity," . . . "which I repeat, the analogical, symmetrical or poetical instinct of Man had predetermined to understand as something more than a simple hypothesis." (H:v.16,303) Poe looks at the "strictly logical" reasoning accounting for the orbit of "Enck's comet" about our sun and so predicts the eventual precipitation of that comet upon the sun. He argues:

That Enck's comet will be absorbed into the Sun, is probable; that all the comets of the system will be absorbed, is more than merely possible; but, in such case, the principle of absorption must be referred to eccentricity of orbit--to the close approximation to the Sun, of the comets at their perihelia; and is a principle not affecting, in any degree, the ponderous spheres, which are to be regarded as the true material constituents of the Universe. (H:v.16,304)

The point is here that the unexpected reversal occurs as a bursting of image through the discursiveness of science's vocabulary.

Touching comets, in general, let me here suggest, in passing, that we cannot be far wrong in looking upon them as the lightening flashes of the cosmical Heaven. (H:v.16,304) [italics mine]

The reverie has sent him upon a contemplation of the behavior of matter and substance--the "ponderous" spheres. Yet on considering their weight and heaviness he is led back to their opposite--the fast-moving comets--speed and light. Again the language at the climax of the final ingathering of the ponderous orbs, threatens to break under the weight

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of the inexpressible. Language is forced into negation, which would hold a sense of the ever arising unknown as it verges upon the edges of the known:

there must occur, at once, a chaotic or seemingly chaotic precipitation, of the moons upon the planets, of the planets upon the suns, and of the suns upon the nuclei; and the general result of this precipitation must be the gathering of the myriad now-existing stars of the firmament into an almost infinitely less number of almost infinitely superior spheres. In being immeasurably fewer, the worlds of that day will be immeasurably greater than our own. Then, indeed, amid unfathomable abysses, will be glaring unimaginable suns. (H:v.16,307-8) [italics mine]

As the world moves toward final collapse--the mind--language itself--seems in William's words to "fly away from sense."
The past and future are merged in the "august Present," as the "I" voice speaks out of its own dissolution.

How, one may ask, can the lyrical "I" hold itself and the world at this point of collapse? Friedrich Nietzsche explores the distinction between an "I" at the ground of being and the "I" of self-expression in The Birth of Tragedy. His sense of the Dionysian voice that is able to speak out of its own experience and yet to include the world in its utterance may help us with Poe. Nietzsche writes that the lyrical poet is

first and foremost, a Dionysiac artist, become wholly identified with the original Oneness, its pain and contradiction, and producing a replica of the Oneness as music, if music may legitimately be seen as a repetition of the world; however, this music becomes visible to him again, as in a dream similitude, through the Apollonian dream influence. That reflection,
without image or idea, of original pain in music, with its redemption through illusion, now produces a second reflection as a single simile or example. The artist had abrogated his subjectivity earlier, during the Dionysiac phase: the image which now reveals to him his oneness with the heart of the world is a dream scene showing forth vividly, together with original pain, the original delight of illusion. The "I" thus sounds out of the depth of being; what recent writers on esthetics speak of as "subjectivity" is a mere figment. 17

The purpose of this paper is to cast light on what Poe is about in *Eureka* and to show him moving toward a gradual recovery of the "I" dwelling at the ground of being--that is, to reestablish connection with the Heart of the world. Poe's own statements on the musicality of poetry might lead us also to call Poe in *Eureka* a Dionysian artist, wholly identified with "the original Oneness, its pain and contradiction."
NOTES

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3 Quinn, p. 556.


9 Ibid., p. 11.

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11Williams, p. 217.

12Ibid., p. 221.

13Ibid., p. 224.


15Carlson, p. 106.

16Ibid., p. 107.

CHAPTER I

SOME CRITICAL PROBLEMS OF ENTRANCE

If there be any one circle of thought distinctly and palpably marked out from amid the jarring and tumultuous chaos of human intelligence, it is that evergreen and radiant Paradise which the true poet knows, and knows alone, as the limited realm of his authority—as the circumscribed Eden of his dreams. (1836) (H:v.8,281)

This definition of the poetic ground taken from Poe's review of Joseph Rodman Drake's "Culprit Fay," (1836), grows directly out of Poe's early sense of a simple opposition of self and world—between the interior world of dream, associated with visionary perception, as opposed to the exterior world, associated with time, reason and waking consciousness. Here Poe stands in the mainstream of traditional Romantic thought. Yet his response to the Romantic's dilemma is unique, distinguishing him both from the Romantics in England and his American contemporaries. For rather than attempt to heal the breach between subject and object, self and world (all the oppositions of a Cartesian dualism), he affirms it and makes it the ground of his art. As Richard Wilbur has said, "Poe's poetry is not a protest against the separation of mind and world but an extreme assertion of that separation."¹
In this chapter I will be discussing some general problems in reading Poe that have grown out of various attempts to impose static grids of meaning on a body of work grounded from the beginning in an elemental experience of active oppositions. In light of *Eureka* this becomes a problem of consistency in reading which demands that we see how Poe is making use of eighteenth century terms like "taste" and "sentiment," as well as Romantic definitions of the poetic activity, in order to redefine them in terms of his experience. Therefore I will be looking at Poe's statements of theory as tentative steps to *Eureka*, in an attempt to show how they are early struggles with the vocabulary at hand.

Poe's distinction between the Uranian (Ideal) and Venusian (Passionate) beauty in "The Poetic Principle," (1850) and his sense of an active polarity between them as we find it expressed in the tales, establishes the two-fold nature of his vision as well as his seemingly "Platonic" definition of the Soul:

It has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself [the Poetic Principle] is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of this Principle is always found in an elevating excitement of the Soul—quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart—or of that truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade, rather than to elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary—Love—the true, the divine Eros—the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionean Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. (H:v.14,290)
As they are imaged in the tales, earthly passion and earthly reason are of the fallen world in Time. The Uranian Venus is love of the realm outside time, unconfined by the processes of birth, growth, decay, and eventual death. Poe confronts and is confronted by a dialectical frame with Supernal Beauty poised at one pole; the earthly, mundane beauty at the other. He speaks out of the Platonic distinction between "the passions of the heart" and the "excitement of the Soul." But though the ground is Platonic, the poems and tales reveal Supernal beauty, not as an abstract or transcendent concept, but as a timeless beauty unavailable directly to man's "perverted taste" and his "corrupted reason" (H:v.4,203) Such a beauty is perceived directly by the heightened senses, though they be heightened in dissolution or the activity of death itself. Looking ahead to Eureka we are forced to recognize the wholeness Poe's work proposes from the beginning in terms of his bi-polar vision. For only in Eureka does Poe make a concise statement of the experiential quality of spiritual or "Supernal" loveliness. There he will argue that beauty and truth are "felt," that is, sensually experienced through the "intuition"—that knowledge at once of heart and mind. In Eureka Poe retains the twofold vision but will not separate body and soul:
The two Principles Proper, Attraction and Repulsion—the Material and the Spiritual—accompany each other, in the strictest fellowship forever. Thus the Body and The Soul Walk Hand in Hand. (H:v.16,244)

Nonetheless, up to and even after the writing of *Eureka*, Poe will make use of Platonic distinctions.

I would argue, then, that the critical problem in coming to terms with Poe's fascination with death and the destructive energies, as well as his apparent denial of sense, can only be apprehended through an understanding of his struggle with that Platonic vocabulary which would hold his sense of the tension between the real world (which is held in image, corporeal, visible) and that other (which is incorporeal, invisible, imageless). Unfortunately, in the criticism his vocabulary is often misleading. In the first place, he adopts the Platonic definition of Soul and the Christian definition of Spirit as they come out of Neo-Platonism. Yet he is not working within a trinitarium (body, soul, and spirit) but a contrarium. The irony is that he is in a sense moving toward a form of "materialism" that will ultimately force him to define Spirit as nothing but "matter infinitely rarified." It is as if, to avoid the fallacies of both subjectivism and objectivism, Poe goes at the problem from the materialist side of the dialectic. In his intense longing for the pure Supernal experience of the absolutely "other," he breaks through in *Eureka* to a world he did not create, but that in order to
participate in it, he has constantly and imaginatively to remake. He moves into a realm of experience where reality is at once both totally "me" and totally "other." This will lead him toward open form narrative technique, and a parallel refusal of the Neo-classical view of language as transparent (sign to signified), which operates successfully only in the realm of "either/or" absolutism.

But in "The Poetic Principle," where Poe's critical statements find their most mature expression, he is still writing that the poem's concern is with "Supernal" Beauty alone. Poe ties "Beauty" or the means by which we perceive the beautiful to the faculty "Taste." Taste is for Poe that which informs us of the beautiful. In our time the word "taste" has come to mean, mere like or dislike based on personal opinion--we say, "its a matter of taste." But for Poe that word still retained its meaning out of Eighteenth century moral philosophy, meaning "to prove or to try by or as by touch." (O.E.D.) Taste for Poe was a technical, critical term from the Eighteenth Century implying direct knowledge of a thing through an enlightened rational knowledge of the proportionate, the harmonious, the appropriate. The word in his time also implied direct knowledge through the senses as in the phrase "to taste of great sorrow." Thus Poe's sense of the word does not refer one to a totally subjective opinion of a thing--but
to the thing itself. There is, in other words, a direct, perceptual ground by which beauty can be measured. In *Eureka* Poe will attempt to recover this ground experientially, since the eighteenth century term had been reduced to a concept alone.

Hence Poe's sense of the beautiful is not as ephemeral as it appears. "Truth," as Poe ties it to the "pure Intellect" and the "Moral Sense" as he ties it to "Duty" are only peripheral concerns of the "true music" which is poetry. Yet they remain indirectly its concerns. Music in Poe's sense (through the Greek, particularly Pythagoras) is related to "proportion." The "music of the spheres" has to do with the immutable laws of universal harmony. In these terms "Taste" is the cultivation of a sense of balance, order and harmony:

The phrase of which our poets, and more especially our orators, are so fond--the phrase "music of the spheres"--has arisen simply from a misconception of the Platonic word ドウサラ which, with the Athenians, included not merely the harmonies of tune and time, but proportion generally. In recommending the study of "music" as "the best education of the soul," Plato referred to the cultivation of the Taste, in contradistinction from that of the Pure Reason. (H:v.16,163) ("Marginalia," 1849)

Poe's point is that these three categories (Taste, Intellect and Moral Sense) form an order, and within that order the desire to improve must stand in obedience to the desire to delight. When "Taste" rules, "Intellect" and "Moral Sense" take their proper places in a fluid order. It is in this
sense alone that the process of the aspiration for "Supernal Loveliness" becomes the sole subject matter of the poem.

Poe makes his point clearly in his essay on Longfellow's "Ballads and Other Poems":

But the offices of the trio are broadly marked. Just as conscience, or the moral sense, recognizes duty; just as intellect deals with truth; so it is the part of taste alone to inform us of Beauty. And Poesy is the handmaiden but of Taste. Yet we would not be misunderstood. This handmaiden is not forbidden to moralize—-in her own fashion. She is not forbidden to depict—but to reason and preach, of virtue. As, of this latter, conscience recognizes the obligation, so intellect teaches the expediency, while taste contents herself with displaying the beauty; waging war with vice merely on the ground of its inconsistency with fitness, harmony, proportion—in a word with τὸ καλὸν.

(H:v.11,70-71)

Here Taste is sensuous and associated with feeling—while the Moral Sense, until revitalized by the active Taste, is "dead."

In the early poems and tales we will be considering, the dreamer possesses this "Supernal Loveliness" in the form of his original beloved with Eden. When he loses her, for whatever reasons, he becomes aware of her opposite—-the disproportionate, the deformed—and Poe's Edenic landscape becomes his own peculiar Hell. Like Eden, Poe's Hell too
is a circumscribed realm. Clouds take on the shape of demons and the landscape writhes in uncertainty. The waters of Poe's various dark tarns and interior lakes are no longer waters that nourish the soul, they become the poisonous waters that drink up life. The landscape of Poe's Hell reflects the unsettledness of meaning itself and is in a sense the landscape of Eden inverted, turned upside-down. Poe's twin realms, then, become the expression of an elemental polarity. The reversal (or Fall) is a fall out of meaning into experience. Hence the Fall in Poe is not only a "descent" into time, but also a fall out of meaning and rationality, and out of the "rational," Neoclassical view of language. "Taste" becomes the sole faculty capable of leading the dreamer (through sense) back to sanity, meaningfulness and a perceptual connectedness to the world of his experience.

From a preliminary understanding of Poe's sense of an active, experiential polarity (which I will be discussing more fully in Chapters II and III), we are now prepared to turn to the problem of the place of the rational intelligence and "method" itself in Poe's aesthetic. Out of his insistence upon the ineffability of Supernal beauty, ironically, issue Poe's statements on the "power of words," as well as his "Rationale of Verse" (1843) and "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) where Poe is able to claim:
I do not believe that any thought, properly so called, is out of the reach of language. I fancy, rather, that where difficulty in expression is experienced, there is, in the intellect which experiences it, a want either of deliberateness or of method. (H:v.16,88)

In the tales we will find that the heightened method becomes part of the fall or refusal of meaning when the polarity is brought to consciousness. Yet here in "The Poetic Principle," in apparent contradiction to the above statement, Poe seems to be arguing that words cannot hold experience:

> When by Poetry, or when by Music, the most entrancing of the poetic moods, we find ourselves melted into tears, we weep then, not as the Abbate Gravina supposes, through excess of pleasure, but through a certain petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys of which through the poem, or through the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses. (H:v.14,274)

Poe is not saying that words cannot capture or hold the experience of Supernal beauty, but that they must be used precisely, as instruments of mediation, and that as such can hold it only in "brief and indeterminate glimpses" at best. In terms of Poe's sense of an active, experiential polarity this ungraspable quality is the unknown that is not held because it is invisible. Language, as Poe found it, would usually hold the visible and the propositional only. Thus he demands from the language of poetry that it hold the active relation between the presence and absence of beauty—the presence and absence of meaning itself. "Taste" must be "indeterminant" so as to hold
contradiction. As Poe writes in the introductory epistle to Eureka:

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

(H:v.16,195)

Poe's argument, then, is not finally with language, nor with clarity, but with the language of description. As he writes in "Marginalia" ("Democratic Review," April, 1846) in a complaint against the descriptive poet:

He appears however not at any time to have been aware that mere description is not poetry at all. We demand creation—ποίησις.

(H:v.16,102)

Poe demands from his contemporaries presentation, not description of what has happened. He demands from language that it be able to move on many levels at once.

In "Marginalia" ("Democratic Review," Dec. 1844) somewhat earlier, where Poe argues for "a suggestive indefiniteness of meaning with the view of bringing about a definiteness of vague and therefore spiritual effect," (H:v.16,28) we are apt to miss the point. For the above sentence is informed by the sentence following directly upon it: "I know that indefinitiveness is an element of the true music—I mean the true musical expression."

(H:v.16,29) In view of such statements Poe has been attacked for somehow associating vagueness with spirituality and then arguing for "the vague" in poetry. I would claim again that his problem (and ours) is with vocabulary. In-
determinancy is open, not vague. Thus Poe's theory of the indefinite in poetry does not contradict his sense of the poet as craftsman or "maker." "His whole insistence," argues William Carlos Williams, "has been upon method, in opposition to a nameless rapture over nature." By the indefinite Poe means the mysterious, the unknown. For he continues in "Marginalia" ("Graham's Magazine," 1846) to write:

Take away this element of strangeness—of unexpectedness—of novelty—of originality—call it what we will—and all that is ethereal in loveliness is lost at once. We lose—we miss the unknown—the vague—the uncomprehended, because offered before we have time to examine and comprehend. We lose, in short, all that assimilates the beauty of earth with what we dream of the beauty of Heaven. (H:v.16,85-6)

Poe's objection is to a methodology which conceptualizes his experience, limiting the known to what has happened and separating known and unknown. Thus he ties "surprise" (unexpectedness) to origin, event and presence. It then becomes for Poe the business of the imagination to concentize that which presents itself whole to the mind in a condition of perpetual change, to enact the interplay of presence and absence, beauty held in image as well as the loss or disappearance of beauty—its imageless counterpart.

"Method," then, become especially conscious for Poe because it is an examination of meaning in terms of an experiential dialectic between heaven and hell. After the fall out of reason man is caught in a chaos of contradictory,
experiential forces. His only alternative, outside of giving himself up to them, is to descend consciously into the experience of contradiction. Thus it is that in Eureka Poe maintains his definition of "indeterminancy" in poetic expression, insisting at the same time that "distinctness--intelligibility, at all points is the primary feature in my general design. On important topics it is better to be a good deal prolix than even a very little obscure. But abstruseness is a quality appertaining to no subject per se. All are alike, in facility of comprehension, to him who approaches them by properly graduated steps." (H:v.16,199) In Eureka rationality is redeemed, as Poe maintains that the conditions of the steps that lead to his conclusions are not those of inductive or deductive reasoning, yet they "have been imposed upon me, as necessities, in a train of ratiocination as rigorously logical as that which establishes any demonstration in Euclid. . . ." (H:v.16,238) By descending into experience the imagination discovers its own orders of the rational. Even before Poe writes Eureka we find him arguing for the super-rationality of the poetic intelligence. In "Mr. Griswald and the Poets" (Boston Miscellany, November, 1842) we discover one of his most eloquent statements on the way in which what he calls "Ideality," or the intelligence of the poet, corresponds to the "calculating faculties": 7
That we are not a poetical people has been asserted so often and so roundly, both at home and abroad that the slander, through mere dint of repetition, has come to be received as truth. Yet nothing can be farther removed from it. The mistake is but a portion, or corollary, of the old dogma, that the calculating faculties are at war with the ideal; while, in fact, it may be demonstrated that the two divisions of mental power are never to be found in perfection apart. The highest order of the imaginative intellect is always preeminently mathematical; and the converse. (H:v.11,147-8)

In spite of Poe's emphasis on method he has been accused of retreating from the world into a realm of complete irrationality and of denying reason a place in the orders of the imagination.

It has been argued repeatedly that in reaching for Supernal or other-worldly beauty, Poe's artistic purpose is reductive. As exact as D.H. Lawrence's essay, "Edgar Allan Poe," is on Poe's interest in death and the destructive energies, for instance, Lawrence concludes that Poe is interested only in the destructive process; that he reduces woman to a static mechanism "from which he got his extremes of sensation." 8 Lawrence argues that:

Poe is rather a scientist than an artist. He is reducing his own self as a scientist reduces a salt in a crucible. It is an almost chemical analysis of the soul and consciousness. Whereas in true art there is always the double rhythm of creating and destroying. 9

This is an incredible statement, since Poe's entire focus in the tales and in Eureka is exactly upon the rhythm of these vast powers of creation and destruction. Similarly, Sir Maurice Bowra in The Romantic Imagination, 10 argues that
Poe pushes Romanticism to perhaps its furthest extreme by denying the "real" nature, the "real" woman, for her other worldly counterpart. Such a statement is accurate as far as it goes, since Poe's interest is in the presence and absence of the image of the "real" woman. Richard Wilbur makes it clear that Poe's longing for Supernal experience is pursued always at the cost of the ordinary and everyday beauty. Comparing Poe to the English Romantics Bowra writes:

The Romantics sought for another world, but left its outlines and its characters vague; Poe knew what it was and identified it with the world beyond the grave. The romantics had agreed that poetry was in some sense concerned with nothing else, and that this beauty was to be found through the search for supernal reality. The Romantics used the given world as a means of entry into the order of things; Poe thought nothing of this world and tried to concentrate entirely on another known only in hints and suggestions. In Poe the Romantic theory of poetry reached a climax. By reducing it to his own kind of order, he limited the scope of poetry and made it conform to his own narrow ideas.

To say as Wilbur does, that the process of the destruction of the "ordinary and everyday" reality is itself the entrance into the Ideal realm in Poe's tales, is to say something very specific about the uniqueness of Poe's vision in the context of Romanticism. It moves us toward an understanding of the place death assumes in Poe's vision, the way in which death in the tales and poems is the ever-present, active compliment of life. It does not necessarily follow that by pursuing his experience of the real, Poe makes
his art conform to "narrow" ideas. He concentrates on a very few themes and reworks them in various ways. But to concentrate is not necessarily to reduce or to narrow. As we shall see in the tales and poems, the absence of the supernal leaves us with the presence of the everyday. That absence, then, becomes an interrogation of the everyday. Hence, to deal fairly with Poe we must speak out of his struggles within the Neo-Platonic vocabulary. Much of the critical difficulty comes out of attempts to impose a mystical transcendence of opposites on what is truly an affirmation of active oppositions.

The dilemma that lurks forever behind Poe's struggle with vocabulary is that necessity expressed in "Drake-Halleck" to circumscribe the realm of poetry. I would argue that this necessity is related directly to a need Poe saw for the criticism of his time to right an imbalance between art of a prescriptive, moralistic, closed nature, and its opposite--the formless, effusive lyricism of private self-expression which Romanticism at its worst has become. Poe, for instance, criticises a figure so admired as Shelley at the same time as he acknowledges his stature. In "Marginalia," May, 1849, he writes:

Of art--beyond that which is instinctive with Genius--he [Shelley] either had little or disdained all. He really disdained the Rule which is emanation from Law, because his own soul was Law in itself. His rhapsodies are but the rough notes--the stenographic memoranda of poems.

(H:v.16,148-9)
Poe's attack comes out of his response to the many awkward attempts at imitation of the Shelleyian style and manner among his contemporaries in America. His objection is to the overriding selfhood of the "nervous" Romantic—the cult of personality. Poe is after a balance between instinct and analysis, spontaneity and form. He continues to write:

Nor were mature minds unimpressed by the contemplation of a greater and more mature; and thus, gradually, into this school of all Lawlessness,—or obscurity, quaintness and exaggeration,—were interwoven the out-of-place didacticism of Wordsworth, and the more anomalous metaphysicianism of Coleridge. (H:v.16,150)

As a critic Poe was hard on his contemporaries. On the one hand he objected to the tendency he was in America of the 1840's to rely wholly on European and particularly British models, and on the other to abandon all "originality" and universality in a short-sighted attempt to convey themes of purely local (provincial) interest. He argues consistently against a blind adherence to "authority" and as Williams makes clear, stubbornly refuses anything "second-hand."

This drive to the primary becomes a critical problem when critics begin by seeking "sophistication" rather than accuracy in his work. In "Marginalia" (1845) he writes:

When we attend less to "authority" and more to principles, when we look less at merit and more at demerit, (instead of the converse, as some persons suggest,) we shall then be better critics that we are. (H:v.16,81)
The argument with "authority" is decidedly Romantic. But the specific problem for Poe in terms of that argument is that most of what he had to review as literary editor was art of a descriptive nature. "Descriptive poetry," writes Poe in "Fifty Suggestions," (May, June 1945) "is not of the highest order." (H:v.14,182) Faced with this abundance of non- and pseudo-art in his America, the only way Poe could come to grips with his time and place, and yet remain true to his own sense of beauty, (his genius), was to limit poetry to the realm of pure "Taste." Its perversion would be dealt with, through the weapon of irony. Hence we will find that Poe's satiric pieces treat in a comic vein his most serious themes. 12

Neither is Poe insensitive to the political and social issues of his day, as many critics suggest, but extremely concerned with the tendency of an expanding technology to overvalue the general at the expense of the particular. Here, indeed, the political and aesthetic questions overlap for Poe, whose concern as an artist is always with particularity. In "Exordium" (Jan. 1942) Poe encourages his contemporaries to regard criticism "more as an art based immoveably in nature, less as a mere system of fluctuating and conventional dogmas," (H:v.11,2) so as not to fall "subservient" to the will of unscrupulous publishers. Then he complains of the larger problem that:
Escaping these quicksands, our criticism is nevertheless in some danger--some very little danger--of falling into the pit of a most detestable species of cant--the cant of generality. This tendency has been given it, in the first instance, by the onward and tumultuous spirit of the age. With the increase of the thinking-material comes the desire, if not the necessity, of abandoning particulars for masses. (H:v.11,3)

Similarly, in "Anastatic Printing: (1845) where Poe describes the new process which makes it possible for a publisher to produce as many as "a hundred impressions per hour, or even infinitely more," he concludes:

These considerations are of vital importance--but there is yet one beyond them all. The value of every book is a compound of its literary value and its physical or mechanical value as the product of physical labour applied to the physical material. But at present the latter value immensely predominates, even in the works of the most esteemed authors. (H:v.14,158)

Even in the early "Drake-Halleck," Poe challenges his contemporaries to throw off foreign models, as well as the dictates of publishers at home. He warns them to maintain high critical standards at all cost. Then he moves at the larger problem of finding a balance between freedom and restraint, which was the problem of a growing Democracy at that time. His urgent call is that the artist not abandon the universal "Laws" governing Taste at any cost, but that he begin to rediscover those laws in light of the particularity of America:
We are becoming boisterous and arrogant in the pride of a too speedily assumed literary freedom. We throw off, with the most presumptuous and unmeaning hauteur, all deference whatever to foreign opinion—we forget, in the puerile inflation of vanity, that the world is the true theatre of the biblical histrio—we get up a hue and cry about the necessity of encouraging native writers of merit—we blindly fancy that we can accomplish this by indiscriminate puffing of good, bad, and indifferent, without taking the trouble to consider that what we choose to denominate encouragement is thus, but its general application, rendered precisely the reverse. In a word, so far from being ashamed of the many disgraceful literary failures to which our own inordinate vanities and misapplied patriotism have lately given birth, and so far from deeply lamenting that these daily puerilities are of time manufacture, we adhere pertinaciously to our original blindly conceived idea, and thus often find ourselves involved in the gross paradox of liking a stupid book better, because, sure enough, its stupidity is American.

(H:v.8,277)

In these terms Poe's prolonged and somewhat belaboured quarrel with Longfellow over the issue of "Plagiarism" is primarily a quarrel with the tasteless, didactic and unoriginal in art, more than a personal affront on Longfellow himself. In "Ballads and other Poems" (1842) Poe writes:

It may be remembered that, among other points, we demurred to Mr. Longfellow's theses, or rather to their general character. We found fault with the too abtrusive nature of their didacticism.

(H:v.11,68)

And he continues in that same essay:

It will be at once evident that, imbued with the peculiar spirit of German song (a pure conventionality), he (Longfellow) regards the inculcation of a moral as essential. Here we find it necessary to repeat that we have reference only to the general tendency of his compositions; for there are some magnificent exceptions, where, as if by accident, he has permitted his genius to get the better of his conventional prejudice. But didacticism is the prevalent tone of his song. (H:v.11,969)
It is in large part Poe's response to a didacticism which is by nature descriptive, that leads him eventually into a decisive argument with the long poem in "The Poetic Principle," and so with Milton, Poe's only immediate predecessor of stature who attempted to sustain a long narrative within the recognized forms of the Christian tradition. We must attempt to understand why within Poe's circumscribed notion of art, a long poem becomes in "The Poetic Principle," "simply a flat contradiction in terms." (H:v.14,266)

Firstly, Poe develops the short story format out of a direct response to the needs of his time and the demands of the magazine tradition as it was growing up in America:

We now demand the light artillery of the intellect; we need the curt, the condensed, the pointed, the readily diffused—in place of the verbose, the detailed, the voluminous, the inaccessible. (H:v.16,118)

Terseness is expedient in these terms. Partially Poe's failure to continue writing poems was imposed upon him by the celerity of the age. Tales sold—so we wrote tales. And as Wilbur argues:

Poe's exclusion of such "Truth" ["definitive" truth, the conceptual] from poetry—especially after 1829—is the reason why one must often refer to the tales in order to know what the poems are about. 14

Beneath the issue of expediency, however, lies Poe's own articulation of a conscious movement away from verse as he knew it, toward a more "prosaic," directness of expression. Poe turned from verse that did not follow the natural rhythms
of speech, and is in this sense ahead of his time. On criticizing the verse of a contemporary he writes: "Here the poet lacked the skill to make out his line without distorting the natural or colloquial order of the words." (H:v.16,153) In his demand for "directness of expression" he objects to the contrivance of the poetic inversion for the sake of sounding poetical. In "Marginalia," (1849) he writes: "Few things have greater tendency than inversion to render verse feeble and ineffective." (H:v.16,154) And he continues: "In short as regards verbal construction, the more prosaic a poetical style is, the better." (H:v.16,154) As Williams points out, "the tales continue the theories of the criticism, carrying out what they propose":

1. In choice of material, abstract. 2. In method, a logical construction that clips away, in great part, the "scenery" near at hand in order to let the real business of composition show. 3. A primitive awkwardness of diction, lack of polish, colloquialism that is, unexpectedly, especially in the dialogues, much in the vein of Mark Twain.15

Poe's return to the primary, his willingness to search out a methodology in this way, turns him automatically toward the prosaic. And Eureka is by any standards prosaic, discursive--unsophisticated. Yet here in his defense of the prosaic in the criticism, he paves the way for the "lofty claim" that it may be read as a poem.16

By insisting upon briefness Poe is not merely meeting the needs of his time, but also following his sense of the
circumscribed nature of his experience to its logical conclusions. For instance, in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) he tells us that he locates the action of "The Raven" in an enclosed chamber because it is there he is best able to sustain an intense dramatic effect:

It has always appeared to me that a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of the insulated incident—it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place. (H:v.14,204)

Poe is not dealing with the traditional Aristotelian unities of time and place, so much as with his own sense of organic (action-centered) unity. Thus in "The Poetic Principle" Poe moves from his contention that "a long poem does not exist" (H:v.14,204), directly to his discussion of Milton's "Paradise Lost" and the problem of maintaining an intensity of "effect" in a long poem:

There are, no doubt, many who have found difficulty in reconciling the critical dictum that the "Paradise Lost" is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alteration of excitement and depression. After a passage of what we feel to be true poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire. (H:v.14,226-7)
The insistence upon intensity in Poe's notion of "unity of effect" is, then, an insistence upon experience, rather than the didactic, explanatory and descriptive. This expression of difficulty with the long narrative is an early concern. In "Letter to B_" (1831) he complains of the flagging of interest:

By what trivial circumstances man are often led to assert what they do not really believe! Perhaps an inadvertent world has descended to posterity. But, in fact, the Paradise Regained is little, if at all, inferior to the Paradise Lost, and is only supposed so to be because men do not like epics, whatever they may say to the contrary, and reading those of Milton in their natural order, are too much wearied with the first to derive any pleasure from the second. (H:v.7,xxxvii)

And in his review of Hawthorn's "Twice-Told Tales" (1842)

Poe argues in almost the same words that:

Men admire, but are wearied with the "Paradise Lost"; for platitude follows platitude, inevitably, at regular interspaces, (the depressions between the waves of excitement) until the poem, (which, properly considered, is but a succession of brief poems,) having been brought to an end, we discover that the sums of our pleasure and of displeasure have been nearly equal. (H:v.13,151)

These are complex, not fully articulated statements by Poe, which suggest a relation between the problems of form and content. For it is disbelief in Milton's system, the grids of meaning itself, which the long narration attempts to hold, that is the source of boredom. Poe's criticism of the long narrative, then, implies a criticism of a "theory of God" that is no longer credible. In "Twice-Told Tales,"
comparing "Paradise Lost" to "The Iliad," Poe again concludes that Milton was unsuccessful in sustaining an epic narration:

"The Iliad," in its form of epic, has but an imaginary existence; granting it real, however, I can only say of it that it is based on a primitive sense of Art. Of the modern epic nothing can be so well said as that it is a blindfold imitation of a "come-by-chance."

(Poe.v.13,151-2)

Poe's similar conclusion in "The Poetic Principle," that "the Iliad," "is based on an imperfect sense of art," (H.v.14,267) comes out of a failure to see the cosmology in "The Iliad." Perhaps the conclusion is uninformed, but it proceeds out of a sense that Homer's world is no unlike ours as to fail to make primary contact with the ground of our experience. But Poe is correct about one thing. The art of his time, neither in theory nor in practice, had evolved a methodology capable of sustaining a long narration. Poe is saying in these passages, not that the long narrative is forever an impossibility, but that the epic as he had received it from his immediate predecessors, was a descriptive imitation of a primary creation whose original form had been somehow lost in the translation. Seen through the Neo-classical, didactic grids of meaning "The Iliad" has for us "but an imaginary existence." I would argue he is saying, in short, that Milton imposed epic form on material that was not an epic content. Rather than letting the content of his experience find its own appropriate, new form, he followed tradition
"blindfold" and relied on secondhand information. Because there was no match in form and content in the epic given him, Poe favors "effects," "surprise" and "intensity"—which are meant to bind form and content as an event. Poe's use of surprise and horror (the Gothic) as a means of binding form and content can be seen to reach its completion in *Eureka*, where fear turns over and becomes awe as the solitary poet contemplates his own amazing interconnectedness to the universe.

But before *Eureka*, in protest, Poe turns his focus to the unified composition, the organic or totally self-contained plot, the short story, whose form evolves from within rather than being imposed from without. The measure of its structural perfection and "Ideality" is the extent to which it achieves what Poe calls "unity or totality of effect." (H:v.10,122) In "Night and Morning" (April, 1841) Poe first defines plot as "That in which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole." (H:v.10,117) Finally in *Eureka* Poe will draw an analogy between his notion of "plot" construction and the "absolute reciprocity of adaption" (H:v.16,292) in the structure of the universe. So it is important we note him as early as 1841 and 1844 in "Marginalia" defining plot in organic terms through his sense of unity of effect:
The pleasure which we derive from any exertion of human ingenuity, is in the direct ratio of the approach to this species of reciprocity between cause and effect. In the construction of plot, for example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the points, or incidents, that we cannot distinctly see, in respect to any one of them, whether that one depends from any one other, or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is unattainable in fact, --because Man is the constructor. The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a Plot of God. (H:v.16,10)

Unlike Milton, the "plot" remains "unknown" (absent, incomplete) for Poe and yet inside consciousness--inside experience.

Almost word for word Poe brings the above passage to *Eureka*, where matter, the primordial substratum of creation is inter-related in this way by "reciprocity." Such a view of an organically related, living primordial matter in the universe moves him into a refusal of simple causality and toward a vision of the world as a sentient whole. Or as he puts it in *Eureka*:

The effect does not re-act upon the cause; the intention does not change relations with the object. In divine constructions the object is either design or object as we choose to regard it--and we may take at any time a cause for an effect, or the converse--so that we can never absolutely decide which is which. (H:v.16,292)

But long before *Eureka* "reciprocity" is at the heart of Poe's search for a methodology. In his "Preface and Introduction to 'The Conchologist's First Book,'" (1839) he defines the relation of "the animal and shell, with their dependence upon each other" (H:v.14,95) in terms of reciprocity. He points out that the Greek word "conchylion" from which
"conchology" is derived, "embraces in its signification both animal and shell." (H:v.l4,95) In other words, Poe is forced back to the Greek, where the language is not transparent and thus capable of holding his sense of active polarity. In nature, Poe is saying, our fixed notions of causality are useless. The animal does not cause the shell any more than the shell causes the animal that dwells within it. Both are defined in terms of, and give rise to the other through "reciprocity." Here Poe's notion of reciprocity informs his "Ideality." For however absent, incomplete, and unknown, through reciprocity, the Ideal remains inside experience.

In "The Philosophy of Composition (1846) Poe finally ties his definition of "unity of effect" and his sense of "reciprocity" in plot construction to his criticism of Milton and the long narrative:

What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul: and all intense excitements are, through the psychal necessity, brief. For this reason, at least one half of the "Paradise Lost" is essentially prose—a succession of poetical excitements intersperced, inevitably, with corresponding depressions—the whole being deprived through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity, of effect. (H:v.l4,196)

Milton was able to work, however successfully or un成功fully, within static grids of meaning—the framework of Neo-Classical Christianity. The Christianity of Poe's time had degenerated into a form of Deism, a rational positivism, based on the vision of nature as a static mechanism—which
simply did not provide a believable mythos for Poe's experience of the soul. Making the descent into his own fragmented experience, Poe sought unity or wholeness in "effect" and event. Thus we find him writing in "Fifty Suggestions" (1845):

More and more every day do we moderns pavoneggiarse about our Christianity; yet, so far as the spirit of Christianity is concerned, we are immeasurably behind the ancients. Mottoes and proverbs are the indices of national character. . . . (H:v.14,172)

Like the Romantics before him and so many modern poets today, Poe turned back to earlier mythologies (Greek, Egyptian, Hebrew) for his imaginative sources and information. It is through these earlier mythologies that Poe is able to define the polarities of visible--invisible, corporeal--incorporeal, speech--silence, self--other, and known and unknown, as primal (primary) experience. Thus for Poe the interest in the past is a turning to the primary in a refusal to accept the more reflective modes of thought available to him, and not a nostalgia. Similarly his interest in etymology is a turning to the elemental ground (the origins) of language.

Poe's remarks in the criticism reflect a familiarity with the thought of Hesiod, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Porphyry, Empedocles, as well as the Greek dramatists. In his essay, "Poe's Reading," Killis Campbell concludes that Poe, "had in all likelihood read the Iliad, and probably also the Odyssey, though both, I suspect, mainly.
in translation.\textsuperscript{19} In "Marginalia" (1844) Poe himself states succinctly the importance of the Greeks to his mind:

The Greeks were an excitable, unread race, for they had no printed books. \textit{Viva voce} exhortations carried with them, to their quick apprehensions, all the gigantic force of the new. They had much of that vivid interest which the first fable had upon the dawning intellect of the child--an interest which is worn away by the frequent perusal of similar things. (H:v.16,62)

See also Poe's "Pinakidia" (H.v.14,38) for a wealth of observations on the myth-making power of the ancients. It is here that Poe mentions Empedocles in the context of his own sense of attraction and repulsion as the double cosmic forces at the ground of life:

Empedocles professed the system of four elements, and added thereto two principles which he called 'principium anitiae' and 'principium contentionis.' What are these but attraction and repulsion? (H:v.14,67)

Poe is drawn to Empedocles because of their mutual sense of the fundamental double shape of the universe. The \textit{Iliad} also has a double shape of mortal and immortal, basic to the nature of the hero which is basic to Poe's sense of opposites in and out of time. In \textit{Eureka} Poe prefaces his discussion of the universe with an allusion to Empedocles who legend tells us, threw himself from the summit of Mt. Etna in Sicily, Poe writes:

He who from the top of Aetna casts his eyes leisurely around, is affected chiefly by the extent and diversity of the scene. Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its oneness.
Here Poe is after a sense of boundary through Empedocles as a dynamic opposition of bounded and unbounded space. With the ancients he would participate in the vast cyclic movements of the universe. The importance of the Greek chorus says Poe, in his discussion of the drama in "The Classical Family Library" (1835) is that is allows the spectators to participate in these larger events. He writes:

The chorus served to give verisimilitude to the dramatic action, and was, in a word, the ideal spectator. It stood in lieu of the national spirit, and represented the general participation of the human race, in the events going forward upon the stage. (H:v.8,46)

Therefore in the tales and finally in Eureka Poe will follow Aristotle's careful delineation in the Poetics that the characters are there for the sake of the action and not vice versa. Poe applies the dramatic rules (laws) of unity to the construction of plot. He brings this understanding to his notion of "unity of effect." Through the Greeks, who define polarity as primary experience, then, Poe is able to "concretize" his own sense of the dynamic relation between the cosmic and personal.

Unfortunately, by Poe's time man's ability to know--his knowledge of God or the divine in the world, had been reduced or sublimated to the level of his ability to reason or prove God's existence. Yet Poe would insist that man does not reach God through his reason, nor through
the traditional Neo-Classical grids of meaning. As he writes in "Marginalia" (1848):

But what title could have been invented for that idol whose worship blinds man to truth by dazzling him with the opposite. But what title would have been invented for that idol which has propogated, perhaps, more of gross error than all combined?--the one, I mean, which demands from its votaries that they reciprocate cause and effect--by pulling up their pantaloons--and carry themselves on their own heads, in hand baskets from Beersheba to Dan. All--absolutely all the argumentation which I have seen in the nature of the soul, or of the Deity, seems to me nothing but worship of his unnameable idol. (H:v.16,129-30)

Poe's irony cuts to the real issues. As a result of attempts to reason the way to God, God has become an abstraction or an anthropomorphism (an idol) and man has fallen into the two closed systems of philosophical Idealism and Materialism. Transcendentalism at its worst had been reduced to a naive Pantheism which defined the world in subjective terms--as the "totally me." This lead into various forms of mysticism. Materialism, moving in the other direction (without recognizing the imposition of the subject) tended to define the world as the "totally other." Hence nature became an object to be manipulated; controlled from the outside. The penchant of the materialists was then to separate and divide the entirety of the world, re-imposing a "subject" upon its fluidity in terms of power from outside. Poe's interest in response to this tendency in the tales is to explore the sense of the "powerless" at the edges of perception--the death of the old "objective" self:
Like the degenerate forms of the original Greek gods, the Christian Deity had become an abstraction. Poe writes again in "Marginalia" (1844):

The God-abstractions of the modern polytheism are nearly in as sad a state of perplexity and promiscuity as were the more substantial deities of the Greeks. (H:v.16,35)

Unlike Emerson, whom Poe attacked more for his association with Transcendental philosophy than for his work, Poe was unable to work within the formal structure of the Christian trinitarium. In "Marginalia" (1846) Poe accuses Emerson of being "little more than a respectful imitation of Carlyle." (H:v.16,122) In this same passage Poe's dislike of both Emerson and Carlyle is linked to their common appreciation of Milton:

Is it impossible that Mr. E. has ever seen a copy of Seneca? Scarcely--or he would have long ago abandoned his model in utter confusion at the parallel between his own worship of the author of "Sartor Resartus" and the aping of Sallust by Aruntius, as described in the 114th Epistle. (H:v.16,122) [Italics mine]

At its root Poe's argument is with Emerson's synthesis and belief. In Emerson's aesthetic the Holy Spirit becomes an active link between world mind (reason) and world soul (emotions) through the manifestation of the living Word (or divine Logos) as the image of God in the world. In these terms, God the unknown, imageless Creator is concretized (actively imaged or imagined) and made known in the world through the Holy Spirit. As Roy Miki points out in his
thesis, "To Reconcile the People and the Stones," Emerson brought the Christian ground over--concretized it in terms of his own experience, refusing also an abstracted experience of Deity. Like Poe's work, Emerson's in the essays implies a cosmological vision. Poe, stressing the experiential aspect of language, seems not to have recognized the presence of cosmology in Emerson's thought--or rather he stresses an unknown beyond the active polarity where Emerson argues a known. In effect, transcendence is theoretical in Emerson, while in Poe it is experiential. Hence Poe, turning back to earlier myth and following his experience of the ground, was forced to refuse the Christian distinction between Spirit and Soul. Thus he remains within his contrarium. As Poe writes in "Marginalia":

They have ascertained, in China, that the abdomen is the seat of the soul; and the acute Greeks considered it a waste of words to employ more than a single term, ἕρετες for the expression both of the mind and of the diaphragm. (H:v.16,174)

Where Emerson can use the term "Spirit" in its Christian context, Poe cannot. He must move back to an earlier definition of both Spirit and Soul. Thus he develops a natural interest in figures of the period like Franz Anton Mesmer, who defines that "Spiritual" ether that pervades and composes all things as electromagnetic energy. Poe is drawn into a form of "materialism" through Mesmer which places Spirit and matter on a continuum. In Eureka, then,
spirit is associated with "electricity," an elemental or primary power.23

Poe refuses an orthodoxy grounded in dogma which demands that the artist set God in the realm of the eternal unimaginable and thus resign all imaginative power to a set of religious abstractions. Since the Christianity of Poe's time had for the most part settled upon the fixed image of the historical Christ alone, Poe's battle was for an experiential ground capable of holding both historical and symbolical levels of meaning simultaneously. Theological speculation had narrowed into a series of "either-or" propositions. The events of the Fall, Redemption and Judgment had become mere occurrences in linear time. So in "Marginalia" (1844) Poe begins to redefine his sense of time as cosmic--mythic, a-historical--rather than as a mere succession of linear events:

We appreciate time by events alone. For this reason we define time (somewhat improperly) as the succession of events; but the fact itself—that events are our sole means of appreciating time—tends to the engendering of the erroneous idea that events are time. . . . (H:v.16,22)

In the same way, he argues, we measure space by objects—but a succession of objects is not space. He concludes that "Space is precisely analogous with time." (H:v.14,22) In Eureka Poe will push this early statement to its obvious conclusions, redefining space and time as something alive in terms of event and action. Yet the above statement
remains a tentative, directive motion toward a later re-defining of the static notion of time and space Poe had inherited. In *Eureka* we will see that event is given in terms of "reciprocity" and thus capable of holding cosmic and personal meaning simultaneously.

Poe's battle as an artist was with the growing pragmatism of his day that would either make the artist into a mere technician, a servant of the theological, social or political concept (in its most generalized form)—or else turn him into a psychological "case"—a weird and rather curious, but not to be taken seriously outgrowth.\(^{24}\) Poe's first response, sensing the Christian cosmos as he knew it reserved no place for his range and order of perceptions of the double (creative-destructive) energies, was to seek a place for the violent passions of his soul in that intermediate realm midway between heaven and earth of the poem "Al Aaraaf"—the Muslem heaven which offered the advantages of both heaven and hell but the limitations of neither. In May, 1829 Poe writes to his publishers:

> I send you, for your tenderest consideration, a poem. . . . Its title is "Al Aaraaf"—from the Al Aaraaf of the Arabians, a medium between Heaven and Hell where men suffer no punishment, but yet do not attain that tranquil and even happiness which they suppose to be the characteristic of heavenly enjoyment. . . (M:92)

Yet this early long poem remained uncompleted and after 1829 Poe turned his attention to the prose. Wilbur points out its subtle unorthodoxy in the following terms:
The poem, if my reading of it is correct, employs Biblical material to present, and at the same time to disguise, an unorthodox or "Satanic" idea; the idea that the poet will refuse any heaven save that of his own dreams. 25

Poe's reflections on the Miltonic epic and the fragments of his criticisms of Christianity move us toward an understanding of why Eureka takes the shape of a contrarium and why Poe's vision is basically Manichean (dualistic). Since Poe will not make use of the fixed and static symbols of Christianity as they came to him, must set about making his own mythos. Even his sense of the Fall is transformed in the tales--made original to fit his experience of separation from a world-mind and world-soul. In Eureka the poet's job is to re-open the cosmos--to single-handedly bring the world through himself and back out. For there it is the artist-scientist alone who is capable of putting power and intelligence back into the world. But because Poe comes when he does in time (inheriting much from the Eighteenth Century and the Romantic reaction to it) we would be mistaken if we saw a predominant anti-Christian strain in his work. He is anti-didactic; anti-abstractionist. Poe for the most part simply ignores Christianity (taking it for granted) and moves into his own experience--the regions "above" and "below" "nature" as Neo-Classicism defined it, with which the Christianity of his day had for the most part lost touch.
We have seen that Poe's struggle with a critical vocabulary to hold his sense of opposites is part of his conscious method and, hence, an attempt to deal with his time and place. I would argue further that our ability or inability to deal critically with Poe's interest in the inner man, the psychological is also related intimately to the struggle with vocabulary. Poe's interest in interior states of mind, his use of dream imagery (the mental landscape), together with the Romantic aura suggested by his life\textsuperscript{26}--lend him particularly of all American writers to psychoanalytic interpretation. The problem with most of the psychological work on Poe is that it refuses to separate Poe's narrators from Poe himself, while reducing the work to the personality. No imposition of psychological meaning from the outside will suffice for Poe, precisely because his work itself (taken whole) proposes a way of including the psychological within it. It becomes impossible to separate the man from the work, since we discover the man within it. Yet it is necessary to distinguish Poe from his consciously created narrators. In order to understand how the psychological sense of the real does not meet the needs of Poe's art, let us look at perhaps the most serious and complete of the available psychoanalytic studies--Marie Bonaparte's Freudian analysis of Poe: \textit{The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe} (1917).\textsuperscript{27} Marie
Bonaparte assumes a relation between Poe's personal neuroses and psychoses and the way he transforms them as psychic expressionism in his art. I would argue that as useful as her book is to Poe criticism, such an approach prohibits a full entrance into particularly a work like *Eureka*, which is itself a criticism of the scientific premises on which Freudianism is grounded (induction and deduction). To summarize briefly her argument, she says that Poe's early fixation on his mother Elizabeth prevented in later years any mature relationship with a woman, (eventually inducing complete impotency) and that his consequent love-hate of the father figures in his life lead him in *Eureka* to phantasize a total identification with the Father-God-Creator of the Universe. In these terms *Eureka* is a rejection of the mother and of the feminine principle he worshipped in the tales.

The problem is, of course, that Marie Bonaparte assumes the experiential reality of Poe's life is causally related to the created or "made" order in *Eureka*. Her psychological interpretation is grounded in that naive rationalism it is Poe's purpose in *Eureka* to refute. Poe refuses to surrender to the notion that life is the "real" and art the "made-up" experience. Bonaparte theorizes that art is "sublimated" reality and somehow qualitatively less real. It is in a sense "therapeutic." Poe's work,
moving out of an attempt to ground thought in action and
event, refuses such an assumption. In *Eureka* he proposes
an order of the real in which his own philosophical,
metaphysical or "thinking" experience is related directly
to the actual order of the cosmos and participates in that
order through analogy or correspondence rather than by
cause and effect. Poe receives his sense of the doctrine
of correspondences through Swedenborg as well as Coleridge.
In "Marginalia" (1844) we find Poe exploring the notion of
the existence of an active correspondence among the five
senses which refers them to a "spiritual" or "sixth sense"
beyond. Through this single sense or "Sentiment," he
writes, it is as if:

> the orange ray of the spectrum and the buzz of
the gnat (which never rises above the second A),
 affect me with nearly similar sensations. In
 hearing the gnat, I perceive the colour. In
 perceiving the colour, I seem to hear the gnat.

(H:v.16,17-18)

Such a statement Baudelaire will have certainly looked at
with attention. For it implies his own sense of a corres-
pondence among the senses. And in *Eureka*, as I wish to
show in Chapter VI, Poe argues that art is related corres-
pondentially to life. Thus the artist's personal experience
can be taken into account since it grows out of and informs
his art and vice versa. Poe defines this active relation
between inner and outer poles of experience in terms of
"reciprocity"--as I have shown in the criticism. In *Eureka*
"reciprocity" (through the laws of equality and consistency) rules the motion of matter (spirit) in the cosmos, where in his rephrasing of Newton's law of Gravity, "Every atom, of every body, attracts every other atom, both of its own and of every other body, with a force which varies inversely as the squares of the distances between the attracting and attracted atom." (H:v.16,215) We shall see how he translates the scientific world model into a part of experience as we move through Poe's cosmic myth.

Nevertheless, without recourse to Freudian analysis, we may as critics deal with Poe's art in terms of his life. Poe lived life at the poles--swinging from the terror of poverty and dissolution (mental and physical) to periods of relative calm and order with his women--Virginia his wife, Mrs. Clemm, Mrs. Richmond, etc. These poles are held in a relation of mutual reciprocity in the art. Poe's women appear, disappear and reappear both as themselves and as the embodiments of Supernal and everyday beauty in the tales--spanning the poles of life and death. Hence the realm of Poe's experience in time, informs but does not cause the cosmic order. One proceeds from out the other but "the real" is held in what lies between--in the active metamorphosis from the condition of unity to that of multeity, from experience into experience out of time. Freud's assumption of a simple causality is as speculative
as Poe's ground—yet it is assumed to be unquestioned fact as a part of that Neo-classical transparent language which defines its suppositions as absolutes. Poe's system in *Eureka* defies a simple dichotomy between inner and outer. In his cosmic myth, inner movement, as I have attempted to suggest, corresponds to outer—the beating of Poe's own heart is (not is like) the throbbing of the cosmic pulsation from unity to separateness, from the condition of the one to the condition of the many. The image of the heart there is not offered as a simile— but as an active metaphor. The heart becomes in these terms a symbol which both stands for and is the centre of man and the cosmos. For such a statement to be more than the ravings of an egomaniac or a diseased mind, we must accept the terms of Poe's cosmos.

Poe's work as a whole, as I have suggested earlier, implies a theory of the unconscious—though we need not impose a modern psychoanalytic vocabulary upon it. For Poe, what we call the unconscious may be seen as the whole vast region of the unknown that is ever-present in thought and action. It is in *Eureka* that which has not yet come into form (the invisible), yet is present in terms of its absence. Even a definition of the unconscious as the realm of dream experience alone, limits Poe's sense of the mysterious, the unknown—that which is always about to appear—the unexpected. For Poe and his narrators are
confronted by this region in moments of the most heightened and intense consciousness. In "M.S. Found in a Bottle" (1833), for instance, the narrator examines the world of his direct experience with such open-eyed lucidity that his vision of the vortex of the whirlpool is turned inside out, so to speak, and he suddenly confronts the underside of that experience. Through the "method" of reverie the mind leaps upon the means of escape from the whirl. 29

Poe's sense of the "unconscious," then, is closely tied to his sense of the nature of symbols. For we find him calling up in his work images which both stand for and are the actuality. Poe's women are various manifestations of his wife Virginia and anteriorly, his mother Elizabeth who died when he was an impressionable two years old. A figure like "Ligeia" spans both realms and has a foot at either pole of the dialectic. Therefore, Marie Bonaparte's classification of Eureka as Poe's "homo-sexual phantasy" doesn't get us far if we assume that Poe's cosmic myth is grounded in more than the personal history of his life. I would argue that it stands as a cosmic unfolding of life and death, the beginning and the end, fallen and re-instated selfhood--transcending the personal and yet able to include the personal within it.

At this point in our discussion, without further reference to Eureka, it becomes obvious that out of a whole order of dialectical oppositions, among them the opposition
of the imagination and reason, feeling and thinking, dreaming and waking, comes Poe's contracted definition of art. In order to sustain itself against the world the poem must be an intense gesture—brief and suggestive. The pure lyric voice must hold itself up by itself, so to speak, cut off as it is from the world. This at least is Poe's aesthetic up to the writing of *Eureka*, where by establishing a point of contact with the universe he begins to move into open-form narration.
CHAPTER II

POE AND COLERIDGE: THE AFFIRMATION OF OPPOSITES

An initial examination of some of Poe's remarks in the criticism has shown him moving out of his sense of an opposition between Ideal and Supernal beauty and the beauty of the everyday variety. Out of a need to affirm, rather than transcend these opposites Poe is drawn into the thought of S.T. Coleridge who also defines opposition as active "polarity" in a similar sense. In this chapter I will continue through the criticism in an attempt to trace Poe's apprehension of the fluid nature of symbol and language itself to a ground in Coleridge's thought. Floyd Stovall in his essay, "Poe's Debt to Coleridge," has demonstrated adequately the remarkable similarities between Poe's remarks in the essays and certain of Coleridge's statements in the Biographia Literaria (1817). I would agree with Stovall in his conclusion that:

... Poe was more deeply indebted to Coleridge in criticism and in speculative thought than has generally been supposed. In poetry the influence of Coleridge may easily be overestimated, and has been, perhaps, at times. On the whole, I agree with Professor Woodberry's original opinion that Coleridge was "the guiding genius of Poe's entire intellectual life," and regret that he later substituted "early" for "entire."
As an entrance into the thought of Coleridge I will be relying on the work of Owen Barfield in his recent book, *What Coleridge Thought*, where he investigates the development of Coleridge's sense of opposites. Though Poe would not have had access to Coleridge's later essays, letters and the notebooks, upon which Barfield grounds much of his discussion, Poe was from the beginning (at least 1831 and probably earlier) steeped in Coleridge's poems and early critical texts. Not only was he familiar with the important statements of the *Biographia Literaria*, as is evident from his remarks in the early criticism, but he reviewed Allsop's *Letters, Conversations and Recollections of S.T. Coleridge* in 1836. (H:v.9,51-2) Coleridge's "The Friend" (1818) was first published in America in 1831 when Poe was at the height of his career as literary editor. "Table Talk" appeared in 1835 and Poe refers to it several times in the criticism. Though Barfield discusses Coleridge's sense of opposites in light of the later work, the seeds of its development are present in the *Biographia Literaria*. As Stovall writes:

Eureka was published in March, 1848. It is hardly possible, therefore, that Poe could have derived much benefit from the "Theory of Life" [where Coleridge defines his notion of "polarity"] supposing that he had an opportunity to read it. Yet he might have been influenced materially by Coleridge without having read his "Theory of Life," for the germ from which this essay grew is to be found in the *Biographia Literaria*. 8
Then Stovall cites Coleridge's passage in the _Biographia Literaria_ where intelligence is defined as "an indestructible power with two opposite and counteracting forces." In Coleridge's words:

Grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand indefinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligence with the whole system of their representations to rise up before you. 

And further on Coleridge writes that:

as something must be the result of these two forces, both alike infinite, and both alike indestructible; and as rest or neutralization cannot be this result; no other concentration is possible, but that the product must be a tertium alicuid or finite generation. Now this tertium alicuid can be no other than an interpenetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both.

As Stovall concludes: "These passages alone, with their connotations, might have been sufficient to set Poe to work on a train of thinking that would produce such a theory as that of _Eureka_." Before returning, then, to Poe's sense of a substratum or "ground" of interpenetrating opposites in _Eureka_, let us examine some of Poe's earlier remarks on the power and influence of Coleridge's genius upon his mind.

In the early "Letter to B__" (1831) the poetic sentiment is first distinguished from and set against the reasoning intellect and the passions of the heart. Out of a deep respect for Coleridge, Poe marks the beginning of his career as critic with an attack on what he sees to
be Wordsworth's and Coleridge's propensity toward "Meta-
physical" speculation. In the following passage learning
has to be taken to mean reason and system—not the higher
intelligence:

Against the subtleties which would make poetry a
study—not a passion—it becomes the metaphysician
to reason—but the poet to protest. Yet Wordsworth
and Coleridge are men in years; the one imbued in
contemplation from his childhood; the other a giant
in intellect and learning. The diffidence, then,
with which I venture to dispute their authority
would be overwhelming did I not feel, from the
bottom of my heart, that learning has little to do
with the imagination—intellect with the passions—
or age with poetry. (H:v.7,xxxviii-xxxix)

In his rejection of systematic argument and his insistence
upon the primacy of "feeling," here in the criticism, Poe
begins to approach what in the tales becomes an amazing
reversal of language and topical structure into experience.
The problem in dealing with the above passage, however, is
that Coleridge is saying much the same thing as Poe on the
primacy of "feeling" in the aesthetic sense.14 Because Poe
seldom acknowledges his debt to Coleridge after 1836 (at
least directly), we must look to the early criticism to
discover the complexity and ambiguity of his reverence for
the man. Poe's original vociferousness and his later silence
are revealing, suggesting more than anything that the
influence was profound and continuing. Though we must look
to the fiction for our final appraisal of Coleridge's
influence, we see that Poe concludes "Letter to B___" with
resounding and unreserved praise:
Of Coleridge, I cannot speak but with reverence. His towering intellect! his gigantic power... It is lamentable to think that such a mind should be buried in metaphysics, and like the Nyctanthes, waste its perfume upon the night alone. In reading that man's poetry, I tremble like one who stands upon a volcano, conscious from the very darkness bursting from the crater, of the fire and the light that are weltering below. (H:v.7,xlii)

Poe is drawn by powers barely conscious, "weltering below" the surface of Coleridge's thought. Such a statement implies an inarticulated theory of the unconscious itself, the nature of which ties to the nature of symbol. At present I will focus briefly on what Poe understood Coleridge's "metaphysics" to involve in these early statements of theory.

The "Letter to B__"concludes with a definition of poetry opposed to mere philosophy, as that which aims directly at "pleasure" rather than truth:

A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having for its object an indefinite instead of a definite pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained. (H:v.7,xliii)

Poe borrows his definition almost directly from Coleridge, who in the Biographia Literaria (Chapter XIV) writes that, "A Poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth." From this standard Romantic assertion, Poe then moves into a discussion of the "indefinite" in poetry. He continues:
romance presenting perceptible images with definite poetry with indefinite sensations, to which end music is an essential, since, the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music, when combined with a pleasureable idea, is poetry, music, without the idea, is simply music; the idea, without the music, is prose, from its very definitiveness. (H:v.7,xliii)

In these terms Coleridge's philosophical and scientific speculations represent for Poe attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable—to set "fact" next to sheer music. His argument is that since poetry aims directly at unearthly beauty, its purpose is to evoke a sense of the beautiful in the reader. And the most direct way of achieving this "effect" is to suggest rather than to delineate or describe that beauty. In other words, for Poe art must be "indefinite" in order to draw the reader into a participatory act of direct perception—so as to bypass the world of "ordinary" experience. It is here that poetry is most closely allied to music—for Poe, that most precise yet "indefinite" of the art forms.17 Thus Poe's principle of indefiniteness is important because it throws the weight on sound, music and rhythm. "Indefiniteness" in these terms becomes the companion of lost meaning and the loss of an intellectual grid through which to see the world.

Music's "indefiniteness" for Poe has to do finally with its power to liberate thought beyond the threshold of language. Its advantage is that it is not confined by ideas, but moves behind them to evoke the more primitive (in the sense of primary) forms of energy in which they have
their life. Here Poe is in agreement with Coleridge, who in "The Friend" (1818) writes that one ought to:

reserve deep feelings which belong, as by a natural right to those obscure ideas that are necessary to the moral perfection of the human being, notwithstanding, yes, even in consequence, of their obscurity—to reserve these feelings, I repeat, for objects, which their very sublimity renders indefinite, no less than their indefiniteness renders them sublime: namely, to the ideas of being, form, life, the reason, and the law of conscience, freedom, immortality, God! 18

Whatever the ground, the analogy between music and poetry, as the French (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry) recognized, lies at the heart of Poe's aesthetic. Out of it come his later experiments in sound and rhythm like "Ulalume" (1847) and "The Bells" (1849). The musicality of poetry moves it away from the purely mimetic (in the sense of "copying"). Through the music one makes the leap into pure Supernal experience. 19

Poetry then, is for Poe like music, but music it is not. Again he moves toward a definition of poetry through a process of exclusion. Neither is it mere "romance," which with Coleridge Poe would classify as a work of the fancy. Therefore in the "Drake-Halleck" review (April, 1836) Poe makes use of Coleridge's distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination, criticizing lines from Joseph Rodman Drake's "Culprit Fay" as a work of the fancy alone. 20

The truth is, that the only requisite for writing verses of this nature, ad libitum, is a tolerable acquaintance with the qualities of the objects to be detailed, and a very moderate endowment of the faculty of Comparison—which is the chief constituent of Fancy or the powers of combination.

(H:v.8,294-5)
Poetry on the contrary must hold all that is "Protean" and in flux. It must articulate and hold actively what Coleridge calls in his essay "On Poesy or Art" (1818), form as "proceeding"\textsuperscript{21} or the ongoing process of incessant change, but implies earlier in the Biographia Literaria (Chapter XVII) as, "the property of passion . . . not to create; but to set in increased activity."\textsuperscript{22} In Poe's words at the conclusion of "Letter to B__"

Think of poetry, dear B__, think of poetry, and then think of Dr. Samuel Johnson! Think of all that is airy and fairy-like, and then think of all that is hideous and unwieldy; think of his huge bulk, the Elephant! and then--and then think of the Tempest!--the Midsummer Night's Dream--Prospero--Oberon--and Titania! (H:v.7,xliii)

Such a statement is more than simply a rephrasing of the standard Romantic quarrel with authority.\textsuperscript{23} It is a total refusal of Eighteenth Century rationalism and grids of meaning, implying an exclusion of the Neo-classical view of language itself.

Poe's notion of "Ideality" is developed out of a need to redefine the ordering intelligence of the poet. As I indicated in Chapter I, it is a term drawn out of Poe's interest in phrenology\textsuperscript{24} that comes to represent an order of intelligence that refers beyond the powers of the rational intellect--a kind of super-rationality capable of operating outside Eighteenth Century grids of meaning. In the tales and poems, Ideality becomes beauty caught in the process of its own destruction, or as he writes in "Drake-Halleck"--
"beauty heightened in dissolution." (H:v.8,302) Like Coleridge, he sets it against "the Faculty of mere Compari-
son." (H:v.8,300) Philosophically, Ideal beauty, then, refers to a primal "ground" beyond the phenomenal world of casual relationships. Experientially, it is the beauty Poe knew, heightened and intensified in its proximity to death--through his mother Elizabeth, his sister, his wife Virginia, his loves. To perceive this kind of beauty in the world through one's Ideality or imagination is an act at once of feeling and intelligence. One might say that feeling in Poe's thought contains its own aesthetic when it penetrates directly to the world. Ideality at its root is capable of including intelligence, but it is not through the intelligence of conceptualization alone that we perceive.

Consequently in theory Poe links his sense of the beautiful in nature to a kind of happiness or pleasure that can only be defined as "Intellectual." In "Drake-Halleck" he writes:

This sentiment [Ideality] is the sense of the beautiful, of the sublime, and of the mystical. Thence spring immediately admiration of the fair flowers, the fairer forests, the bright valleys and rivers and mountains of the Earth--and love of the gleaming stars and other burning glories of Heaven and of Earth, the unconquerable desire--to know. Poesy is the sentiment of Intellectual Happiness here, and the Hope of a Higher Happiness hereafter. (H:v.8,283)

At this point, in a note, Poe makes a reference to Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." But his insistence on a higher order of intelligence capable of direct knowledge of
the world; his use of Coleridge's distinction between the illuminated or higher reason and the mere understanding, draws him closer to Coleridge's sense of opposites. In Owen Barfield's discussion of the place of "Understanding" and "Reason" in Coleridge's thought, he points out that "reason" is present to the understanding in two modes—higher and lower—positive and negative. To summarize his argument, he shows that for Coleridge, the lower reason conjoined with sense is basically reductive, operating as it does through the law of non-contradiction—that A is not both A and not A. Reason in this sense divides experience into subjective and objective modes. But when the understanding is illuminated by the higher reason, which is capable of holding apparent contradictions through the law of "polarity"—it is then rightly connected to sense, giving man simultaneously subjective detachment and "assurance of an external world."26 By contemplating contradiction in the particularity of the world the mind is then "propelled" to the original one power that manifests as two forces. Herein resides the power of the Imagination which alone is capable of grasping "polarity."

As one moves through the body of Poe's criticism it becomes gradually clearer that from the beginning Poe is dealing with two kinds of reason, two kinds of beauty, two kinds of love and two kinds of intelligence—all given in terms of a lower and a higher nature. The recognition of a
co-inhering dualism at the ground of life draws him into the thought not only of Coleridge, but of Emanuel Swedenborg, (1688-1772), Jacob Boehue (1575-1624) and even Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). The understanding of opposites as an active polarity, which Poe derives primarily through Coleridge (though he knew Swedenborg and Hegel first-hand), links him to a tradition which nourished not only Hegel, but also Karl Marx. Through Coleridge, Poe stays clear of the resolutions of philosophical materialism by placing the "synthesis" (unknown) of "thesis-antithesis" inside experience. What Coleridge calls "polarity" or "the manifestation of one power by opposite forces," is similar to Poe's notion of "reciprocity" or "mutuality of adaptation" as he ties it to structural unity in plot construction in the criticism and to the point of interfusion between the elemental powers of "attraction" and "repulsion" in Eureka. This point of interfusion is in Eureka the place where matter has its very life--where it appears and disappears. In a complaint against the materialists Coleridge himself defines matter as the manifestation of an equilibrium between Attraction and Repulsion:

Such men, and their name is legion--consequently demand a matter as a Datum. As soon as this gross prejudice is cured by the appropriate discipline and the Mind is familiarized to the contemplation of Matter as a product in time, the resulting Phenomenon of the equilibrium of the two antagonist Forces, Attraction and Repulsion, that the Negative and this the Positive Pole . . . the idea of Creation alone remains. 29
Since Poe's vocabulary in *Eureka* is similar, it may be helpful to understand Coleridge's sense of these "two antagonistic forces" before turning to Poe's cosmic myth where "Creation" as well as its opposite, "Destruction" are indeed the issues. There Poe's contention that "attraction and repulsion are matter" becomes a redefinition of substance. Matter as the manifestation of cosmic principles or "laws" is then alive— it is a revelation, an event and hence by definition, non-corporeal.

Here Barfield's work on Coleridge may again be helpful in dealing with Poe, whose experiential ground is similar. In brief, Barfield demonstrates that for Coleridge his thought or "thinking" experience cannot be separated from his sense of the imagination as a "proceeding."

Coleridge's battle, argues Barfield, is with the descriptive methods of science, descriptive metaphysics and rational positivism. Thus his thought is centered in the perception of a participatory relation between self and world, "natura naturata" (nature natured) and "natura naturans" (nature naturing). In these terms, for Coleridge "natura naturans" is to "natura naturata" as thinking is to thought. Imagination then becomes that which mediates between or holds these poles of experience (active and passive) in relation. In "Principles of Genial Criticism: Essay Third" (1814), which Poe could have known, Coleridge defines them as "these two conflicting principles of the FREE LIFE, and
of the confining FORM." In "The Friend" (1812) he writes:

Every power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite as the sole means and condition of its manifestation: and all opposition is a tendency to re-union. This is the universal law of polarity or essential dualism, first promulgated by Heraclitus, 2000 years afterwards republished and made the foundation both of logic, of physics, and of meta-physics by Giordono Bruno. 32

Since "The Friend" appeared in America in 1831, Poe would have certainly read and noted such a passage with enthusiasm. For Coleridge, then, and hence for Poe, who picks up strongly his sense of life as a "proceeding," the business of the imagination is not to create, so much as it is to bring over into form (in all its dynamism) the interplay of dual powers. In this sense imagination becomes an action—a positive and passionate act of mind. In the chapter, "Two Forces of One Power," Barfield moves at the problem of why Coleridge estimates his thoughts and opinions in Chapter XIII of the Biographia Literaria to be (in Coleridge's words), "Directly the reverse of all I had ever been accustomed to consider as truth." As Barfield moves through Coleridge's notion of "polarity" he shows that Coleridge's sense of an active dualism between primary powers at the ground of life leads him into an argument with our whole notion of subjectivity and objectivity—that is science's methodology. Poe also considered Eureka revolutionary—and I think for the same
reasons. The opening to his cosmic mythmakes sense in no other terms:

I shall be so rash, moreover, as to challenge the conclusions, and thus, in effect, to question the sagacity, of many of the greatest and most justly revered of men. (H:v.16,185)

Coleridge's "primary constituent Powers of Nature" are similar to Poe's first principles or "Laws" of creation and destruction in Eureka. Poe's interest in Mesmerism, and Electricity as an elemental power, comes out of a need to define a ground for the imagination in nature. As Barfield makes clear, these two producing and productive powers in Coleridge's thought, which are "quenched in the product," inseparable, yet not indistinguishable, are the ultimate ground of Coleridge's cosmology. They are contrary forces—"real, not mere logical opposites," says Barfield, which "give rise to physical forces, but are not physical." In Coleridge's words, they "counteract each other by their essential nature" and are "prior to all direction"—they are "the primary forces from which the conditions of all possible directions are derivative." Earlier at the opening of Chapter XIII of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge defines them as two forces, "one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity." Poe's intuitive grasp of Coleridge's "polarity" and his unique sense of it in Eureka, enable us to see why Eureka is unapproachable in
psychological terms alone. The following statement from Barfield applies to Poe as well. For neither Coleridge nor Poe want to transcend opposites, but rather to move back to a ground where opposites are held in action. This is the basic work of the imagination for them both:

the positivist or materialist . . . world view . . . begins by postulating a physical process—it shows how this process produced the human brain (of which mind is a function) and then proceeds, on the basis of a brain so conceived, to propound whatever it has to propound about the mind. All this, though rarely stated and perhaps not often consciously formulated, is operative as presupposition today whenever the mind, whether conscious or unconscious, whether in its creative or its analytical aspect, is debated or reflected on. It is the tacit assumption of every received system of psychology, whether neural, Freudian, philosophical, theological or aesthetic. . . . His [Coleridge's] conclusions are rejected for failing to accord with premises on which they are not based. In particular they have suffered from the circumstances that a non-Cartesian psychology will not fit into a Cartesian cosmos. 38

The Cartesian psychology at hand cannot come to terms with Poe either, since his work, like that of Coleridge, is grounded in a non-Cartesian cosmos. In Eureka we find Poe's attempt to synthesize the cosmology implicit in the tales and poems.

An understanding of the way in which Poe, through Coleridge, is dealing with cosmic duality and a two-foldness in a man and nature enables us to return to his definition of intelligence and "Ideality." For intellect is also given by way of a lower and higher nature. Intellect in time is mere "metaphysical acumen." (H:v.8,284) Uranian
or Supernal intelligence is the intelligence of the poet. Consistently in the criticism Poe attacks the rational mind on the casual plane, that is, mere philosophizing, while exhausting the intelligence of the ideal poet-scientist. In these terms, Poe's criticism in "Letter to B__" is not that Coleridge remained a mere philosopher even in his speculative writings, but that those writings in themselves as a means of attaining glimpses of a higher order are indirect. For in "Drake-Halleck,"after citing Coleridge's definition of the Imagination as "a lesser degree of the creative power in God, (H:v.8,283)\(^3\) Poe identifies himself with Coleridge and Coleridge with the Ideal poet. In Coleridge Poe sees the metaphysical powers of intelligence joined in a marriage to those of the Imagination or Ideality. The poem for Poe is in a sense the issue of this marriage. In terms of such a union of opposing mental powers, one might say that the poem resides neither in the mind of the poet, nor in the ear of the receiver, but at the threshold between them. Herein for Poe lies the evocative or incantatory power of words--in its ability to draw the reader to that edge where he partakes in both worlds but is confined by neither. The poem, then, becomes the means of exciting the Ideality--not that faculty abstracted from its source in the pause between opposing energies.

Poe proceeds in "Drake-Halleck" to trace Coleridge's genius "Phrenologically."
It is more than possible that the man who, of all writers, living or dead, has been most successful in writing the purest of all poems—that is to say, poems which excite more purely, most exclusively, and most powerfully the imaginative faculties in men—owed his extraordinary and almost magical pre-eminence rather to metaphysical that poetical powers. We allude to the author of Christabel, of the Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and of Love—to Coleridge—whose head, if we mistake not is character, gives no great phrenological tokens of Ideality, while the organs of Causality and Comparison were most singularly developed. (H:v.8,285)

Poe and his heroes, by contrast, are men of heightened Ideality, whose sense of the beautiful is so intense it pushes over the other side of beauty to behold beauty's opposite—the hideous, inharmonious, the deformed, or "dead." As Poe writes in "Fifty Suggestions" (May-June, 1945):

> An artist is an artist only by dint of his exquisite sense of Beauty—a sense affording him rapturous enjoyment, but at the same time implying, or involving, an equally exquisite sense of Deformity or disproportion. (H:v.14,175)

Here Poe's sense of opposites is clearly articulated—beauty always in the act of turning over to reveal its opposite. In light of Coleridge's sense of "polarity," then, the job of poetry for Poe is to hold or reveal both the "exquisite sense of Beauty" and the "equally exquisite sense of Deformity" in the image of the mournfully beautiful woman. So in "Marginalia" (1849) Poe writes: "The pure Imagination chooses, from either Beauty or Deformity, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined. . . ."

(H:v.16,155-6) Hence as in chemistry: "the admixture of
the two elements results in a something that has nothing of the qualities of one of them or even nothing of the qualities of either." (H:v.16,156) The middle term—the active polarity of extreme beauty and extreme deformity is that something new—that something other. A figure like Poe's "Ligeia" is that "something that has nothing of the qualities of one of them or even nothing of the qualities of either" (beauty or deformity). The poet must perceive her with faculties other than the five senses and the modes of knowledge proposed by science. He must capture, "latch down" that energy without destroying it. Consider Roderick Usher with the wide span of forehead, that "inordinate expansion above the region of the temples," and Ligeia of the lofty and pale brow, the blue veins on which "swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion" against the ravagings of death. Both figures represent Ideal beauty in the tales. It is as if in these figures, who are both themselves and the symbols of poetic energy and beauty in its most heightened condition near death—Poe is able to bring both intellect and passion to his notion of Ideality. In the above passage, then, Poe implies that Coleridge, by nature a reasoner, a scientist, pushes "Causality and Comparison" beyond their limits into a realm where the opposites conjoin in his poems.

So in the tales and poems will we see Poe bringing the opposites sharply together. Ligeia, for instance,
represents both Ideality and what Coleridge would call the "higher reason." The passage on the tremendous learning of Ligeia is comprehensible in no other terms:

I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense--such as I have never known in woman. In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. . . . (H:v.2,253-4)

Ligeia represents more than just learning or intelligence--she is the very source of the poet's information of himself and the world, in short, she is his muse:

I saw not then what I now clearly perceive, that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation at which I was most busily occupied during the earlier years of our marriage. With how vast a triumph--with how vivid a delight--with how much of all that is ethereal in hope--did I feel, as she bent over me in studies but little sought--but less known--that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden. (H:v.2,254)

In terms of "The Poetic Principle" Ligeia's beauty is Uranian and Rowena's (her "ordinary and everyday" counterpart) Dionean. Among Ligeia's great acquisitions of "forbidden" knowledge is that ultimate knowledge of death and the silence beyond both being and becoming. Critical objections to Poe's heroines on the ground that they are "not human" misses the point. For Ligeia is at once woman as Poe knew her experientially (linked to death) and a great symbol (given in image) of the intelligence of the
poet. She is the narrator's guide through the mysteries of "forbidden knowledge," and she is the feminine will that is able to concretize that knowledge in action. She is at once the poet's inmost self and his opposite. She is the dark Uranian Venus, however, only through the poet's imaginative reconstitution of her. Thus the theme of the "will" is central to the tale. Ligeia's words at death pick up the epigram that prefaces the tale.41

And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, not unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will. (H:v.2,248)

Looking ahead to Eureka, as these lines invite us to do, we find that there God is defined as a great two-fold will—that which wills the universe into being (division, separation) and that which remains constant (indwelling) in the universe in its divided condition until the divided material is regathered. In Eureka the will to death (attraction through gravity) is a willing to return to a point of unity, the unseparated condition beyond willing.42

Because of the nature, then, of what his art proposes, Poe demands from symbol that it be able to hold meaning in this double realm. With his master, Coleridge, Poe would agree that symbol:

is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality, which
it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative. 43

Thus in the criticism Poe demands symbolical or "allegorical" expression in its richest sense--which had for the most part vanished in America. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is an example for Poe of allegory in which meaning had become fixed and prescriptive. As he remarks in his review of "Twice-Told Tales": "That "The Pilgrams Progress" is a ludicrously overrated book . . . is a matter upon which no two thinking people disagree. (H:v.13,148-9) In "Night and Morning" (1841) and again in "Twice-Told Tales" (1842) Poe clarifies the nature of the problem--describing the tendency of his time to narrow symbols till they came to represent mere theological ideas. Poe's attack on "allegory" is consistent. But we must be aware that he refuses only allegory of a reductive nature, since his own work contains much of the allegorical expression. Poe writes in "Night and Morning" that:

Pure allegory is at all times an abomination--a remnant of antique barbarism--appealing only to our faculties of comparison, without even a remote interest for our reason, or for our fancy. Metaphor, its softened image, has indisputable force when sparingly and skilfully employed. (H:v.10,130)

In Poe's vocabulary "pure allegory" is the reductive form of higher symbolical expression, and "the metaphorical expression" is its right use: "Direct similies are of too palpably artificial a character to be artistical. An
artist will always contrive to weave his illustrations into the metaphorical form." (H:v.16,27) Finally, in "Twice-Told Tales," through his discussion of Hawthorne's work, Poe once and for all makes the distinction between the two uses of symbol. As for "allegory":

Where the suggested meaning runs through the obvious one in a very profound undercurrent so as never to interfere with the upper one without our own volition, so as never to show itself unless called to the surface, there only, for the proper uses of fictitious narrative, is it available at all. Under the best circumstances, it must always interfere with that unity of effect which to the artist, is worth all the allegory in the world. (H:v.13,148)

Poe's objection is again to art that is moralistic--that "Preaches." But like Coleridge he also objects to a notion of language itself that (in Coleridge's words) "recognizes no medium between literal and metaphorical." In "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) Poe gives us an example from his own poem "The Raven" of the proper use of metaphor. There the bird becomes an emblem of "Mournful and Never-Ending Rememberance"--but never ceases being a bird. The symbolic meaning of the "ghastly visitor" is not imposed upon the poem from outside--but rather evolves out of our participation in it. Meanwhile the surface or narrative level of the poem remains uninterrupted. Poe concludes his discussion of how he composed "The Raven" as follows:

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart," involve the first metaphorical expression in the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore," dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematic--but it is not until the very last line of the
For Poe truth in poetry is multidimensional, complex, layered. For an image or idea to move at many levels simultaneously its "moral" meaning must be held in abeyance until it is called forth. To restrict the interplay of meaning (and the absence of meaning) to a single level is to destroy the richness, the very life of image.

As we proceed through some of the tales and poems to Eureka we shall see that Poe's primary interest is in an unmediated participation in what Coleridge called the "natura naturans" or what in Poe is a supra-sensuous realm beyond the five senses. It is that realm symbolized by dream or trance where "It is as if the five senses were supplanted by five myriad others alien to mortality."

In this context, Poe's realm of Ideality, however contracted against the world of ordinary perceptions, is no more an abstraction of nature, than Ligeia is an abstraction of woman. They are intensifications. Poe's focus is on how to enter that realm of which nature is a function, yet which remains totally independent of the phenomenal world for its life and continuance. Like the realms of the gods, it is permanent. How does one claim the world in this sense? How does one move back to that point of interfusion between world and self where a center
of knowledge is a center of power, as in "Ligeia?" These are issues of "method" and they become the issues of *Eureka.* Thus in spite of Poe's Platonic distinctions, through his ground in Coleridge we can see that the reality of the dream remains experiential.
CHAPTER III

THE CIRCUMSCRIBED EDEN OF THE EARLY TALES AND POEMS

As Williams writes of Poe in *In the American Grain*:

His criticism paves the way for what must be his prose--illustrating his favorite theory that the theory includes the practice. 1

In this section I will be turning to some of the early poems and tales in an attempt to show how Poe's sense of opposites is carried into the fiction--how his sense of the "indefinite" and the fluid nature of language and symbol plays itself out in image. I wish in my discussion to focus primarily on a group of tales concerned with the death of a beautiful woman--including "Morella" (1835), "Bernice" (1835), "Ligcia" (1838), and "Eleonora" (1841). I will be looking at these tales as a group in the light of Poe's statements of theory as they tie to the circumscribed nature of his vision. Finally, I will be returning through these and some of the later tales to the problem of Poe's sense of experience in the framework of Neoclassical grids of meaning.

One of Poe's earliest and perhaps must uncompromising expressions of the opposition of self and world occurs in the poem "Sonnet--To Science" of 1829. The poem was first published as a preface to "Al Aaraaf," one of his
early attempts to sustain a long poem. As Mabbott points out, the sonnet was republished as a motto to "The Island of the Fay" in 1841. (M: 90) I cite the poem for purposes of clarity in my discussion:

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee! or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jeweled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

Wilbur points out that the "happier star" in the poem is to be identified with Poe's "circumscribed Eden," that "limited realm" of the "true poet's authority." This circumscribed realm emerges as a landscape in most of those tales and poems concerned with what Wilbur calls Poe's myth of the Fall. It is the circumscribed realm from which the poet "falls" or descends to enter the mundane world of "dull realities," the world of time, decay and death. It is, for example, the "Valley of the Many-Colored Grass" of "Eleonora" the first home of the lovers of the tale who seem, we are told, "Shut up, as if forever, within a magic prison house of grandeur and glory." (H:v.4,239)

Wilbur explains the interior symbolical meaning of the unfallen Eden of "Eleonora" in the following terms:
The valley of Eleonora, like all such valleys in Poe, represents the original isolate integrity of the poet's soul, and its attunement to universal harmony. Eleonora herself is the genius loci, the principle of beauty and harmony which the valley reflects; in a word, she is Psyche. 2

Using the word "psyche" in its old sense, rather than in the contracted sense of a "soul" distinct from the body, Poe links Eleonora to that vital female principle or "life's breath" which animates the valley prison and joins Poe's heroes through the power of reverie to the locale—in this case the circumscribed realm of the valley itself. Eleonora is the spirit of the valley—the spirit of "place" with which the isolate imagination of the poet is one. She is the poet's soul and his twin or double, who like the Greek "Psyche" or "butterfly" moves through space-time through an order of unfolding appearances and disappearances or metamorphoses. Later in the poem "Ulalume" (1847), the psyche figure reappears:

\[\text{Here once, through an alley Titanic,}\\ \text{Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—}\\ \text{Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul. (M:416)}\]

Like the "Psyche" of "Ulalume," Eleonora is the poet's guide through "an alley Titanic, of cypress," a ravine on a hill-side. Note that the cypress is traditionally associated with death, and so in the tale "Morella" (1842) with the love that endures through death. As Morella dies she says: "But thy days shall be days of sorrow—that sorrow which is the most lasting of impressions, as the
cypress is the most enduring of trees." (H:v.2,31) Similarly, as the poet and his Soul move toward the edges of perception in "Ulalume," they confront death in the form of "the door of a legended tomb." Here as in "Eleonora," Psyche warns the poet of worldly passion, represented by "Venus-Astarte," who appears as a star in the sky overhead to herald the descent into time:

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
    Said--"sadly this star I mistrust--
    Her pallor I strangely mistrust--
    Ah, hasten!--ah, let us not linger!
    Ah fly! let us fly!--for we must."
In terror she spoke; letting sink her
Wings till they trailed in the dust--
In agony sobbed; letting sink her
Plumes till they trailed in the dust--
Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.
(M:417)

It is indeed the light and heat of Venus mistrusts. And so Ligcia, Morella, and Eleonora wither and die as the poet discovers the passions of the outer world where he enters time. From the beginning love and death are linked in this way in the poems and tales. To fall into Eros is to fall prey to time. It is to enter a realm that is not life, but neither is it death--for within it consciousness becomes increasingly more lucid.

A glimpse at Poe's use of the Psyche figure enables us to see how the feminine informs the entire poem in "Sonnet--To Science." The genius loci (imagined in the "jeweled skies," the chaste "Diana," the Hamadryad) is feminine and Time alone remains masculine. "Science" is
herself a goddess and a part of the orders of femininity in the poem. Yet she has turned "Vulture," abandoning the poet for a realm of "dull realities" and thus setting herself against the feminine in nature. She has dragged the chaste Diana from her car and driven Elfin and Hamadryad from the natural world. In short, she has descended into time and the passions of time, "altering all things" with Time's "peering eye." In this sense the poem becomes a defense of the feminine. Constantly in the tales and poems the upset of the original balance between masculine and feminine defines Poe's sense of the fall.

Outside the valley where the orders of femininity and masculinity are overturned, the poet does not forget Psyche. All of his life becomes an attempt to recover her. Hence as Wilbur writes:

Eleonora's ghostly visits to her lover are to be subjectively interpreted as moments of successful reveries, as fitful recoveries of imaginative power. The hero's faithfulness to Eleonora's memory is the poet's nostalgia for "Psyche," for his lost intuitive possession of all things. That is what all of Poe's dead and lamented ladies stand for: Ligeia, Lenore, Morella, the whole troop. 3

But only within the closed circle of the dream are such moments of "successful reverie" possible. Poe's own statements on the dream state are useful in the context of the tales, where reverie becomes a conscious methodology. In "Marginalia" ("Graham's Magazine", March, 1846) Poe writes:
There is . . . a class of fancies, of exquisite delicacy, which are not thoughts, and to which as yet, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language. I use the word fancies at random, and merely because I must use some word; but the idea commonly attached to the term is not even remotely applicable to the shadows of shadows in question. They seem to me rather psychal than intellectual. They arise in the soul (alas, how rarely!) only at its epochs of most intense tranquility—when the bodily and mental health are in perfection—and at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams. I am aware of these "fancies" only when I am upon the very brink of sleep, with the consciousness that I am so. (H:v.16,88)

Poe concludes that these "fancies" are "sensual" beyond our ordinary comprehension of the word. Then he links this entire realm of impressions to his sense of the Supernal beauty, which we have examined earlier:

These "fancies" have in them a pleasurable ecstasy as far beyond the most pleasurable of the world of wakefulness, or of dream, as the Heaven of the North-man theology is beyond its Hell. I regard the visions, even as they arise, with an awe which, in some measure, moderates or tranquilizes the ecstasy—I so regard them, through a conviction (which seems a portion of the ecstasy itself) that this ecstasy, in itself, is of a character supernal to the Human Nature—is a glimpse of the spirit's outer world.

Finally in this same passage Poe explores the problem of how to sustain this condition that is not sleep or wakefulness, heaven or hell, but something in between:

... I have proceeded so far ... as to prevent the lapse from the point of blending between wakefulness and sleep—as to prevent at will, I say, the lapse from this border-ground into the dominion of sleep. Not that I can continue the condition—not that I can render the point more
than a point—but that I can startle myself from
the point itself into the realm of Memory—convey
its impressions, or more properly their recollec-
tions, to a situation where (although still for
a very brief period) I can survey them with the
eye of analysis. (H:v.16,90)

Thus Poe's heroes in the tales and poems are "dreamers" only
in the sense that they are open to a kind of perceptual
receptivity that refuses to separate sleep and wakefulness
and is not defined within the cultural grid.

In the tales Poe's heroes seldom leave the valley
gradually. They fall abruptly and unceremoniously from
first innocence. For the Fall in Poe is not, as in
Christian myth, a result of disobedience. It is rather an
inevitable and usually incomprehensible event. The valley
is that "dream too bright to last" of the poem "To One in
Paradise." (M:214) In this poem of 1833 the silent cry,
"no more, no more, no more" (taken up again in "The Raven"
[1845] as the refrain, "Nevermore"), is not for the loss
of what was, but for the presence of a "not-world" that is,
over which the spirit of the poet hovers in suspension:

A voice from out the Future cries,
"On! on!"--but o'er the Past
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast! (M:214)

As the poet in the poem loses Psyche, it seems as if the
present is about to arise before him. It is then he
discovers that the present is missing; absent, and he is
forced to redefine the present in terms of a pattern of
presence and absence. The horror of the poem is the horror of the soul alone before the void—the place where nothing has yet come into form. The spirit is "Mute, motionless, aghast" not so much before death, as before the absence of life. Psyche has become a ghost. Her presence is suggested in terms of her absence and is defined only in terms of that absence. Hence the poem brings us into the presence of nameless things—"what ethereal dances"—what eternal streams:

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams. (M:215)

Similarly the poem "To Helen" (1831) is construct on a pattern of presence and absence. Helen appears twice in the poem only to disappear at the end. She is first revealed as Helen the daughter of Zeus:

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

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

Associated with the classical world and the beauty of ancient yet familiar things in the first two stanzas, she suddenly reappears, "statue-like" holding an "agate-lamp." She is both an image of the concrete (by way of the particularity
of the image of the lamp) and the "indefinite." She is both alive and dead (statue-like)—both "me" and "other."

In the last line she is absent and becomes the poet's "Psyche" of the regions beyond image that are both strange (unknown) and yet familiar (known)—"the regions which are Holy-Land."

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

As in the poetry, so in the prose the fall is experienced as a sudden breaking from life into that region that is neither life nor death—an anti-world. Likewise, horror in the tales is associated continuously with the act of confronting the void—descending. In the tale "William Wilson" (1839), for example, the hero tells us that: "Men usually grow base by degrees. From me, in an instant, all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle." (H:v.3,299) For Wilson the Fall is death of a totally unique nature, hitherto unexperienced in the world: "I would have them allow—what they cannot refrain from allowing—that although temptation may have erewhile existed as great, man was never thus, at least, tempted before—certainly, never thus fell." (H:v.3,300) For Poe and his narrators the Fall is not a universal experience common to all men. Because it is not shared, it is characterized by or defined in terms of an
agonizing isolation. Here is more than standard Romantic alienation--the alienation of the artist, the superior man from the crowd. Though Poe takes up in some of his early poems the Byronic posture, ultimately he is saying something very different:

From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were--I have not seen
As others saw--I would not bring
My passions from a common spring--
From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow--I would not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone--
And all I lov'd--I lov'd alone. (M:146)

Here as early as 1829 in "Alone" Poe describes an alienation that catapults him into a world of dynamic relation to a nature beyond (above-below) nature, that is elemental and polar (male-female). The poet's sorrow and joy does not issue from the same source or "spring" as that of others. It is in fact not sorrow at all, but something "more than" sorrow--just as the love of woman in "Annabel Lee" (1849) is a "love more than love." (M:478) Outside the cultural frame of reference, meaning reverts (descends) into experience. Hence, "Aloneness" is not suffering except in terms that come from outside. It is a solitude driven beyond solitude's limits, and so Poe's problem becomes one of finding words to catch it, images to suggest without losing the fragility of its orders. For it is a complex experience and there is absolutely nothing on earth to which it can be compared.
Even in this very early poem where we find Poe's first statement of alienation, we also discover in the second stanza his recognition of nature through that alienation, as a vast center of power and (sentient) intelligence.

Then—in my childhood—in the dawn
Of a most stormy life—was drawn
From ev'ry depth of good and ill
The mystery which binds me still—
From the torrent, or the fountain—
From the red cliff of the mountain—
From the sun that 'round me roll'd
In its autumn tint of gold—
From the lightning in the sky
As it passed me flying by
From the thunder, and the storm—
And the cloud that took the form
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)
Of a demon in my view—(M:146-7)

Again the alienation is not from the "real" world or from the mysteries of nature. The point is rather that the poet participates in these great mysteries of a sentient, nature "alone"—and that they are mysteries of the orders of fear; horror. He perceives nature, not with the five senses, so much as with his soul. Thus he moves into a realm where it is as if the senses "think." Abandoning the usual conceptual frame of reference, meaning itself becomes unsettled. Clouds take the form of "demons" when the soul confronts experience without mediation—nakedly. As Thomas Mabbott points out in a note to the poem, a demon for Poe is "powerful, but not necessarily evil." (M:147) Direct, unmediated participation in the world moves the poem into
a realm where the "Moral Sense" is held in suspension. To perceive the world in this way is to participate in it with one's sensual intelligence, one's "Ideality." It is to experience an extreme sense of the absolute "other."

Here the old topical structures begin to break down and language in the poem approaches the edge of a gulf that had been introduced between form and content. Words no longer correspond to things. In *Eureka* we will see that the solitary voice of the poet confronts this abyss of meaninglessness in a similar fashion. There it becomes the agonizing business of the lyric "I" to recover the lost connection between itself and the world by speaking out of the center of its being.

Somewhat later in the tales, we find Poe's heroes exploring the vast gulf between words and things. In "Berenice," (1835) for instance, the hero Egaeus states his own existential isolation in terms similar to those of the poem "Alone."

> The realities of the world affected me as visions, as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn, --not the material of my every-day existence-- but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself. (H:v.2,17)

The descent into his own fragmented experience is described as a reverie in which the mind repeats "monotonously some common word, until the sound, by dint of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind. ... ." (H:v.2,19)
Slightly later in the tale, "The Island of the Fay," (1841) we encounter this same sense of the solitude of the poet or dreamer caught in reverie--unprotected from the world by a shield or screen of "concepts." But this time what may not have been made clear in "Alone" is clearly articulated. The poet does not resign himself to solitude--he asserts it:

In truth, the man who would behold aright the glory of God upon the earth must in solitude behold that glory. To me, at least, the presence--not of human life only, but of life in any other form that that of the green things which grow upon the soil and are voiceless--is a stain upon the landscape--is at war with the natural genius of the scene. I love, indeed to regard the dark valleys, and the gray rocks, and the waters that silently smile, and the forests that sigh in uneasy slumbers, and the proud watchful mountains that look down upon all,—I love to regard these as themselves but the colossal members of one vast animate and sentient whole—a whole whose form (that of the sphere) is the most perfect and most inclusive of all. (H:v.4,194)

The ability to see the world once again in its ancient entirety, to behold "the glory of God" in the world, is owing directly to the dreamer's isolation. It is indeed through this isolation that he recognizes the world as a "vast animate and sentient whole." The image of the world these few sentences imply leads Poe back to the primitive, mythic orientation that is the ground of Eureka's cosmogonic structure. Here through reverie the dreamer identifies wholly with the landscape—with "the green things which grow upon the soil and are voiceless." By achieving even
momentarily this union with the "place," he comes to experience place as presence. Suddenly the life and mind of the world are inseparable from his own.

In his reverie the dreamer's attention is riveted to the interplay between the trees on the shore and the water.

"If ever island were enchanted," said I to myself, "this is it. This haunt of the few gentle Fays who remain from the wreck of the race. Are these green tombs theirs?—or do they yield up their sweet lives as mankind yield up their own? In dying, do they not waste away mournfully, rendering unto God, little by little, their existence, as these trees render up shadow after shadow, exhausting their substance into dissolution? What the wasting tree is to the water that imbibes its shade, growing thus blacker by what it preys upon, may not the life of the Fay be to the death which engulfs it? 

[H:v.4,198]

The "gentle Fays" emerge from the shadows that move between the trees on the shore and the water that devours the life of the trees. One might say they represent that energy between shore and water in a continual process of dissolution—given form by the imagination of the dreamer. The Fays dwell in the traditional realm of the fairy tale in the sense that they are close to nature—"spirits of nature," both "there" and "not there." They hold in image that which renders itself up continually to death and so represent the life of the dreamer. At this point in the narrative the "genius loci" of the scene, the Fay herself, emerges before the dreamer's eyes. As he contemplates her movements from the light to the dark sides of the island he sees in that cycle of near appearance and near disappearance, the
pattern of his own life (as well as the pattern of the seasons) suspended between the poles of life and death, presence and absence:

"The revolution which has just been made by the Fay," I continued musingly, "is the cycle of the brief year of her life. She has floated through her winter and through her summer. She is a year nearer unto Death; for I did not fail to see that, as she came into the shade, her shadow fell from her, and was swallowed up in the dark water, making its blackness more black. . . ." (H.v.4,199)

Both the Fay (whose shadow, like the shadows of the trees is consumed) and the dreamer, again are identified with the trees--the "green things" through which they commune. As the Fay glides in her boat from the western to the eastern ends of the island she passes from an idyllic landscape of light and life--"one radiant harem of garden beauties,"--into a landscape of darkness and gloom, "whelmed in the blackest shade." (H:v.4,197) On the bright side of the island we note the presence of the asphodel, the flower constantly associated in Poe's mind with the passions and intoxications of the heart, and traditionally with the dead. Death as always in Poe is allied with the beauty of woman--through which the patterns of appearance and disappearance are revealed. So with each circuit the Fay grows more sorrowful, "feebler and more indistinct under the watchful eye"--until at last she disappears into the darkness entirely. One might say that her form is revealed to the dreamer as a kind of dialectic between revealing and holding back:
The fay . . . went disconsolately with her boat into the region of the ebony flood, and that she issued thence at all I cannot say, for darkness fell over all things and I beheld her magical figure no more. (H:v.4,199)

If we view the island as the circumscribed domain of a dream, the narrative ends when the dreamer sinks into the imageless oblivion of deep sleep, and darkness, or death, falls over consciousness. The dreamer, the Fay, and the sentient world of vegetable life to which they belong proceed thus rhythmically toward death. It is as if the landscape in its very sentience is at war with life itself in this great striving to know death. At the same time, the sorrow of the Fay (and so of the dreamer) proceeds out of a quarrel with time and the passing of the seasons.

The landscape of "Eleonora" is similar to that of "The Island of the Fay." In "Eleonora" too the asphodel springs up the moment the lovers draw "Eros" from "the waters of the River of Silence" wherein their images lie reflected. They draw fire (passion) from the river of pure energy (light) which originally nourished the valley. This fire stains the entire landscape red with life— the intensity of life within time which is subject to decay. Like the Fay, Eleonora, whose eyes are a reflection of the light of the River in its purest (unseparated) form, has to die: "there crept out a narrow and deep river, brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora." (H:v.4,236) Poe's fascination with the eyes of women throughout the work has
to do with their representing the only link in time to that original balance and purity of light. As Poe writes in the tale:

We had drawn the god Eros from that wave [from the River of Silence] and now we felt that he had enkindled within us the fiery souls of our forefathers. . . . A change fell upon all things. Strange brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flowers had been known before. The tints of the green carpet deepened; and when, one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up, in place of t'am, ten by ten of the ruby-red asphodel. And life arose in our paths; for the tall flamingo, hitherto unseen, with all gay glowing birds, flaunted his scarlet plumage before us. (H:v.4,239)

The pure light separates into distinct, vivid colors. Life in time "contaminates" the valley-life especially in its more sophisticated forms. Note that the bird (the tall flamingo) "flaunts" his scarlet plumage. The fall is not simply a descent into passion, but into the passion that is aware of itself. Passion for Poe represents and is given in terms of this sort of reflective, self-consciousness. In this sense one might say that passionate Eros separates itself out from the inclusive orders of love the valley represents in an original unity, and so separates man from himself by leading him into the vain worshipping of his own image. Note too that the asphodel was present in the valley before the "Fall." It took its place among the other flowers. Poe writes that the valley was:
so besprinkled throughout with the yellow butter-cup, the white daisy, the purple violet, and the ruby-red asphodel, that its the valley's exceeding beauty spoke to our hearts, in loud tones, of the love and of the glory of God. (H:v.4,238) [italics mine]

It is not the presence of the flower or of passion alone that signals the fall as a descent. Rather it is the act of its being separated out and set over all else in the valley. It is this upsetting of a harmonior balance among the orders of nature and of love, that defines the fall for Poe. Originally the asphodel speaks the "glory of God" in the world. Separated out from all else--it speaks only the glory of itself. And Eleonora, like the white daisy, is too "artless and innocent" (H:v.4,238) to survive the intrusion of passionate selfhood. She is immediately removed from the valley through Death. Ironically, death becomes the means both of ingress and egress to and from the valley. For we see at the opening of the tale that:

to reach our happy home, there was need of putting back, with force, the foliage of many thousands of forest trees, and of crushing to death the glories of many millions of flowers. (H:v.4,237)

We have observed how in the criticism Poe's statements move out of a sense of opposites grounded in his understanding of the Coleridgeian symbol. Thus in a tale like "Eleonora," the definition of the will and of the self is by way of a double nature--higher and lower, finite and immortal. "Emmergarde" is Eleonora's counterpart in time. Again in "William Wilson" (1839) where
theory and practice remain consistent, Poe calls up the image of the doppelganger. Wilson's double is the higher self who comes from outside time to mock and torment the lower self. In a sense "William Wilson" is at once a profound psychological study and a tale of absolute horror. The horror is the horror of the discovery that opposition is identity. Wilson and his double are dual manifestations of the same life. Thus when Wilson destroys his double he destroys himself:

It was my antagonist--it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution. His mask and cloak lay, where he had thrown them, upon the floor. Not a thread in all his raiment--not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face was not, even in the most absolute identity, mine own! (H:v.3,325)

The irony of the confrontation comes out of the recognition that a natural order has been inverted. Wilson's higher self, presumably his conscience, is not associated with angelic (higher) intelligence at all, but with the rational mind. Hence Wilson himself (who would under normal circumstances represent the "feeling" pole of the intelligence) comes to be associated with the loss of higher reason--or insanity. All the tales of horror are rooted in this inversion of reason and feeling, sanity and insanity. Reason in Poe, when exhausted above the other faculties, turns tyrant and Poe's heroes find themselves trapped in reason's true domain--Time.
But Poe's heroes stand in time outside the cultural grid, and so it is as a kind of "moral censor" that Wilson's double seems to tyrranize over him. Yet Wilson does not present himself in the tale as a conscious "rebel." He would "reform" but is powerless to do so. It is as if his very "powerlessness" in relation to his double is his "sin." Like almost all of Poe's heroes he describes himself as the passive victim of an hereditary "pervasive" temperament:

I am the descendent of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable; and, in my earliest infancy, I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character... Weakminded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me. (H:v.3,300)

Here the will is held in suspension. The above passage forces us to recognize one of the major themes running through Poe's work— that is, "perverseness." In "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845) Poe defines it as that faculty by which "we act, for the reason that we should not." (H:v.6,147)

Outside the ordinance of the Moral Sense (or traditional morality) it becomes in the tales an almost existential mode of action in a world gone mad. But whether Poe treats perverseness seriously or in a comic vein as in the satires, it has to do always with his sense of a powerful will to destruction. It is this impulse to death that distinguishes Poe's heroes and makes them "evil" in the eyes of the world. Thus Wilson's attitude toward the "pastor" of the prison-
like school of his childhood is highly ambivalent. For the pastor stands within the cultural grid:

Of this church the principle of our school was pastor. With how deep a spirit of wonder and perplexity was I wont to regard him from our remote pew in the gallery, as, with step solemn and slow, he ascended the pulpit! This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast,—could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy? Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution. (H:v.3,302)

Because Poe and his heroes stand outside the cultural frame of reference and within the double realm of active oppositions, a man like the pastor appears by contrast "monstrous," incongruous, absurd. The Poe hero's experience of the divine as co-inhering opposites is so completely alien to that of those about him—that it can be defined only in terms of madness. Thus any experience of God, outside the cultural grid becomes a confrontation with the absolutely "other" and is by definition, terrifying. Poe's heroes are incapable of separating the Supernal and the demonic aspects of deity into the fixed categories of "good" and "evil."

Perhaps Poe's quarrel with Milton and with his contemporary, Longfellow, (with didactic modes of knowledge and poetic expression in general) can be better understood by glancing briefly at Poe's kinship with Herman Melville (1819-1891). Though there is no likelihood Poe knew
Melville, it is fairly certain Melville had some acquaintance with Poe's work. I would argue that like Melville (whose work bears some striking parallels to that of Poe) Poe could not, as Charles Olson puts it in Call Me Ishmael, "put his imagination to work in a world of Christian values." Briefly, Olson's argument is that Christ as hero in the later works contracted Melville's myth-making powers. He writes in that essay:

Hawthorne was right, who said ["If he (Melville) were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential"] Melville could not rest without a belief, he had to have a god. In Moby-Dick he had one. I called him the Ancient of Days. The job was a giants; to make a new god. To do it, it was necessary for Melville, because Christianity surrounded him as it surrounds us, to be as anti-Christ as Ahab was. When he denied Ahab, he lost the Ancient. And Christianity closed in. But he had done his job.

Christ as god contracted his vision. The person of Jesus was another matter. Melville never did come to tolerate the god, and the religion. He merely surrendered to it. The result was creatively a stifling of the myth power in him. Because Christianity surrounded Poe as it surrounded Melville, if he was to ignore it he too would have to construct a counter-myth. I have already suggested that Eureka, where Christ as God is also absent, comes out of this need.

Where Melville comes at "Space" (in Olson's sense of the word)—Poe moves at Time. In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," for instance, the narrator, descending into a conscious experience of death and speaking out of death's preliminary stages of metamorphosis, is aware of Time as
an absolute condition, a mental state: "But there seemed to spring up in the brain . . . a mental pendulous pulsation. It was the moral embodiment of man's abstract idea of Time." (H:v.4,209) Witness "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Devil in the Belfry" where time (through the symbol of the ticking heart or clock) is the central image. Both Poe and Melville are interested in mythic time and space where the two intersect in experience and are no longer abstractions. They both seek to place time and space on an experiential continuum.

Out of a similar awareness of the limitations of a purely historical sense of God's activity in the world, Melville expanded where Poe had to contract. Where Melville's imagination in Moby-Dick turned to the open sea in search of fluid symbol and image--Poe's moved inland toward the still, interior lake, the dank tarn. Where all of Ahab's ambiguous love-hate feelings, his malice and gigantic desire to know; to conquer, are projected upon the whale (a great masculine symbol), so Poe's love-hate resolves itself on the image of woman. Poe and Melville--both move at the same continent, the same geography, the same problem of contact with the "ground" of their experience in similar, but distinct directions. Both affirm only through active denial of the natural world--Poe is not after the "ordinary" woman any more than Melville
is after the "ordinary" whale in *Moby-Dick*. Consequently, Poe's Usher (of "The Fall of the House of Usher") is as incapable of experiencing grace as is the demonic Ahab, who baptises not in the name of God but of the Devil. Let us look again in this context at Poe's "Imp of the Perverse" (1845) where he deals with the death instinct--the impulse to annihilation:

> Induction, *a posteriori* would have brought phrenology to admit, as an innate and primitive principle of human action, a paradoxical something, which we may call *perverseness*, for want of a more characteristic term--through its promptings we act without comprehensible object... through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should not. (*H:v.6, 146-7*)

Ahab also is driven on by something akin to "perverseness" as surely as is Usher. Both figures rush precipitously toward death out of a great desire to know all, to penetrate the mysteries of death. As we learn of Ahab's fate through Ishmael, so we learn of Usher's through Poe's nameless narrator. Furthermore, both Poe and Melville use symbol in a similar way. Men like Usher and Ahab stand out in American literature as bigger than life figures. They are not emblematical types in any fixed sense, yet they rise to mythic proportions, somehow always representing more than themselves.

Both Poe and Melville confront the problem of an unwieldy Democracy in its growing pains directly. They are simultaneously concerned with the dilemma of the tyranny of the great man and the tyranny of the "mob." Melville
confronts the political issue on the microcosm of the ship in Moby-Dick. Poe, (as we shall see in Chapter IV), treats the theme of political and social oppression satirically with the weapon of irony.

The fascination of both Poe and Melville with darkness, and the elemental energies, polarizes them into distinct modes of artistic expression. Poe leaves us the tales on the one hand, and the intense fragility of the poems on the other--fragments of what under other circumstances might have been a mature canon. Melville gives us the rambling, digressive, paratactically structured narrative. Only in Eureka does Poe begin to move into open form (parataxis) and so violate the restrictions of his early work--restrictions imposed upon him by the conflict between his sense of the nature of poetry's activity and his time and place.
CHAPTER IV

POE'S HELL AND THE DESCENT INTO THE RATIONAL MIND

In William Carlos Williams' sense of the word, nineteenth century America is the "ground" on which Poe constructs his circumscribed Eden. In this chapter I intend to explore briefly the way in which that world forced Poe to set off an inviolate space for his art—an enclosed and protected sphere. I want to look more closely at the ways in which Poe's unique battle with the rational intelligence of his time is related to his sense of "Taste" and the "perversion" of Taste in the fluid orders of the poetic intelligence. I hope to show here that to accuse Poe of removing himself from his time and place is a naive oversimplification and that his work is a response to his time—to the political, as well as the aesthetic problems, of his day. In his own way Poe was dealing with the sensitive problem in American thought of the relation of aesthetics to the political in its widest sense: is politics derived from aesthetics and can it defend art? I wish to demonstrate that Poe's circumscription of art is at least in part a refusal to surrender art to political and social ends as a tool of the state, a kind of rational order in either spiritual or pragmatic terms—to limit it to
the realm of the didactic. He is opposed to a delineation of poetic language to an adornment of ideas and idea structures. His opposition to Milton's long poem is essentially a disbelief in its idea structure, . . . ich Poe sees as not alive--so not intense, effective, surprising--a definitive without the essential quality of the non-definitive.

In the tales we get rather startling glimpses of Poe's vision of his world. In "Some Words with a Mummy" (1845) a chat ensues between a group of "professionals" (scientists, scholars, and doctors) and "Allamistakeo," an ancient Egyptian mummy the group has managed to "galvanize" to life through electrical shock--resuscitated from the past and from death into the modern world of supposed technological advance. Poe takes up in an ironic mode the familiar theme of "life-in-death" and the return of the dead from the region of the shadows," which we have seen in "Ligeia." Here the tone is one of satire heightened into irony. As the narrative unfolds we find the narrator himself and his "gang" of serious gentlemen very much the brunt of the joke. The mummy, Allamistakeo, who is both "mistaken" and "mistook" by the group, ends by inadvertently making absolute fools of these pompous bunglers as well as their "science." Here Poe strikes at not only the "scientists" but the paltriness of modern achievements in general when
set against the marvels of ancients Egyptian science,

religion and mathematics:

Having heard us to an end, the Count [Allamist...eo] proceeded to relate a few anecdotes, which rendered it evident that prototypes of Gall and Spurzheim had flourished and faded in Egypt so long ago as to have been nearly forgotten, and that the maneuvers of Mesmer were really very contemptible tricks when put in collation with the positive miracles of the Theban savans, who created lice and a great many other similar things. (H:v.6,133)

From the beginning to the end of the tale the self-infatuated group of "doctors" insists upon treating Allamistakeo as a kind of curiosity--an object to be probed and tested with their instruments. To their great discomfort he rises from the dissecting table to address the group:

I must say, gentlemen, that I am as much surprised as I am mortified, at your behavior. Of Doctor Ponnonner nothing better was to be expected. He is a poor little fat fool who knows no better. I pity and forgive him. But you, Mr. Gliddon--and you, Silk--who have travelled and resided in Egypt until one might imagine you to the manor born--you, I say, who have been so much among us that you speak Egyptian fully as well, I think, as you write your mother tongue--you, whom I have always been led to regard as the firm friend of the mummies--I really did expect more gentlemanly conduct from you. (H:v.6,123)

With Allamistakeo's unexpected revival, the irony of his words--"the co.plete Mummy at our disposal"--come back in full force. In simple terms, the rational mind gets more than it bargains for. When the group questions Allamistakeo on the nature of Egyptian politics, for instance, the narrator writes:
These gentlemen [Messieurs Gliddon and Buckingham] spoke the mother-tongue of the mummy with inimitable fluency and grace; but I could not help observing that (owing, no doubt, to the introduction of images entirely modern, and, of course, entirely novel to the stranger,) the two travellers were reduced, occasionally, to the employment of sensible forms for the purpose of conveying a particular meaning. Mr. Gliddon, at one period, for example, could not make the Egyptian comprehend the term "politics," until he sketched upon the wall, with a bit of charcoal, a little carbuncle-nosed gentleman, out at elbows, standing upon a stump, with his left leg drawn back, his right arm thrown forward, with the fist shut, the eyes rolled up toward Heaven, and the mouth open at an angle of ninety degrees. Just in the same way Mr. Buckingham failed to convey the absolutely modern idea, "wig," until, (at Doctor Ponnonner's suggestion,) he grew very pale in the face, and consented to take off his own. (H:v,6,125) [italics mine]

With the weapon of irony Poe deftly drives to the heart of the political and social questions by revealing the level to which modern man has reduced "the employment of sensible forms"--that is, images--"for the purpose of conveying a particular meaning." Secondly, Poe's irony here reveals the fact that a definition of "politics" itself is incommunicable as a concept. The only "sensible forms" or images through which the group might convey its concept of the politician are those of generality and caricature--the cartoon politician. Consequently they reveal themselves in the process of the conversation to be caricatures of men themselves--like the cartoon figure Mr. Gliddon attempts to describe. Allamistakeo demands direct answers--he must be shown the bald head under the wig before he understands. The narrator continues:
we recovered our spirits, and the Doctor, approaching the Mummy with great dignity, desired it to say candidly, upon its honor as a gentleman, if the Egyptians had comprehended, at any period, the manufacture of either Ponnonner's lozenges, or Brandeth's pills. (H:v.6,137)

If a community of shared images and ideas is central to a definition of the political in its largest sense, then in "Some Words with a Mummy" Poe seems to be suggesting that all we share as a political and social body are items like "Ponnonner's lozenges" and "Brandeth's pills." For, when the mummy challenges the group's "science" and the scientific and cultural advances of the day, they in smug desperation produce these two "marvels" of the modern world which the Egyptian cannot possibly top. Allamistakeo we are told "blushed and hung down his head" in a gesture of embarrassment, which the group takes to be for himself, but which is actually for their impoverishment and the impoverishment of the modern age in which he finds himself. After the "defeat" of the Mummy by the equivocal bottle of pills the narrator concludes:

Upon getting home I found it past four o'clock, and went immediately to bed. It is now ten, A.M. I have been up since seven, penning these memoranda for the benefit of my family and of mankind. The former I shall behold no more. My wife is a shrew. The truth is, I am heartily sick of this life and of the nineteenth century in general. I am convinced that everything is going wrong. Besides, I am anxious to know who will be President in 2045. As soon, therefore, as I shave and swallow a cup of coffee, I shall just step over to Ponnonner's and get embalmed for a couple of hundred years. (H:v6,137-8)

In Poe's comic and satiric tales we must be especially careful to distinguish, without absolutely separating, Poe
from his narrators. Here, for instance, Poe at once mocks his narrator, as well as his audience and himself. In a discussion of Poe's use of irony in the tales, G.R. Thompson makes the point clearly that even in his "serious" and apparently Gothic tales Poe is able to sustain levels of irony and self-parody within his notion of Ideality. Often Poe will at once mock and take seriously the Romantic posture and vision:

This parody of the Romanticist stance has for years been taken with a straight face by readers who have not caught Poe's complex sense of wit and irony, and who insist on hanging on to the sentimental picture of Poe as the youthful visionary dream-poet (who, alas, died so young). 1

The layered quality of Poe's tales, the many points of view from which we may see his narrators, refer us back to a tradition that refuses to resolve contraries into static oppositions. Poe's sense of the Ideal holds both the sublime and the horrible--the divine and the demonic--the serious and the comic. Thus Poe's use of irony and double perspective even in the tales that are not obviously satiric (like "Ligeia"), force us to recognize the structural richness and complexity of Poe's art in its conscious refusal of the didactic. As Thompson writes:

many of Poe's Gothic tales seem to involve supernatural happenings; but insinuated into them, like clues in a detective story, are details which begin to construct dramatic frames around the narrative "voice" of the work. These dramatic frames suggest the delusiveness of the experience as the first-person narrator renders it. As in
Henry James and Joseph Conrad, there is often in Poe a tale within a tale within a tale; and the meaning of the whole lies in the relationship of the various implied stories and their frames rather than in the explicit meaning given to the surface story by the dramatically involved narrator. . . .

Only within the last ten to fifteen years have critics begun to examine Poe's narrators as characters in the total design of his tales and poems, and to suspect that even his most famous Gothic works--like "Usher" and "Ligeia"--have ironic double and triple perspectives playing upon them: supernatural from one point of view, psychological from another point of view, and often burlesque from yet a third. 2

Here, for instance, in "Some Words with a Mummy" where Poe's satiric and caricatural intent is clear, the sheer horror of the dissecting table is not lost, but intensified. The laughter pushes the edges of hysteria:

We searched the corpse [Allamistakeo's] very carefully for the usual openings through which the entrails are extracted, but, to our surprise, we could discover none. No member of the party was at that period aware that entire or unopened mummies are not unfrequently met. The brain it was customary to withdraw through the nose; the intestines through an incision in the side; the body was then shaved, washed, and salted; when laid aside for several weeks, when the operation of embalming, properly so called, began. (H:v6,120)

After the mummy awakes and the conversation begins the comic begins to inform and restate the grotesque through irony so as to sharpen Poe's attack on the dehumanizing features of his society. In this sense art may function as criticism, as it does in this tale, without being reduced or restricted to the merely critical or propagandistic alone. "Some Words with a Mummy" is layered. It is a satire and a tale of the supernatural--it presents a quarrel with the nineteenth
century's sense of "progress," as well as with its loss of a public realm in which symbols and images of our particularity are shared. Note, for instance, in what terms the mummy replies when the scientists question him on Egypt's supposed "primitive" belief in many gods:

Mr. Gliddon I really am astonished to hear you talk in this style," said the Count, resuming his chair. "No nation upon the face of the earth has ever acknowledged more than one god. The Scarabaeus, the Ibis, etc., were with us, (as similar creatures have been with others) the symbols, or media, through which we offered worship to the Creator too august to be more directly approached." (H:v6,129)

Allamistakeo it would seem can scarcely comprehend the group's complete failure to grasp the ancient sense of "the gods" as concrete images and living symbols of one invisible power or deity. For the mummy the gods are the concrete particularity through which the "One god" is revealed in the world. But for the group of scientists who belong to a culture which had conceptualized (anthropomorphized) deity and abstracted divinity from the world, Allamistakeo's words are equally incomprehensible. Poe juxtaposes the ancient, as he understood it, and the modern visions. The irony and burlesque of the tales move out of the failure of language to heal the breach between them. As we recall, at one point in the conversation Mr. Gliddon is "reduced" to sketching "a little carbuncle-nosed gentleman," meant to represent a politician, on the wall.

Somewhat earlier in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una"
(1841) Poe attacks Democracy and the loss of the concrete and particular in the public realm. In a lengthy digression the angel, Monos, describes "man's general condition at this [Poe's] epoch." (H:v4,201) Through Monos, who speaks from "outside" time, Poe attacks the modern notion of "progress" in history:

You will remember that one or two of the wise among our forefathers--wise in fact, although not in the world's esteem--had ventured to doubt the propriety of the term "improvement," as applied to the progress of our civilization. (H:v,201-2)

Monos continues to describe how "the poetic intellect--that intellect which we now feel to have been the most exalted of all"--had lost its authority and been usurped by an over-grown reason. In the realm of time the natural order had been overturned and the poets alone "living and perishing amid the scorn of the 'utilitarians'" (H:v4,202) were capable of looking upon "each advance in practical science as a retrogradation in the true utility." (H:v4,202) Monos proceeds to tell how even the arts themselves were eventually corrupted and the good of intellect (divorced from reason and imagination) destroyed. Through Monos' vision of the nineteenth century Poe exposes the march of "progress" in America as the outcome of the inversion of the natural order in which reason submits to the authority of the imagination. Rather than freeing the poetic intelligence, Democratic institutions had exiled the poets and the particularity the poetic intelligence
The great "movement"—that was the cant term—went on: a diseased commotion, moral and physical. Art—the Arts—arose supreme, and, once enthroned, cast chains upon the intellect which had elevated them to power. Man, because he could not but acknowledge the majesty of Nature, fell into childish exultation at his acquired and still increasing dominion over her elements. Even while he stalked a God in his own fancy, an infantile imbecility came over him. As might be supposed from the origin of his disorder, he grew infected with system, and with abstraction.

He enwrapped himself in generalities. (H:v4,203)

The refusal of the poet's place in the public realm, the public life itself is turned back upon the general and the abstract. The loss of particularity and the ability to give and receive through particulars—the loss of living, working images—defines Poe's sense of hell and the landscape of hell. For as Monos continues:

Among other odd ideas, that of universal equality gained ground; and in the face of analogy and of God—in despite of the loud warning voice of the laws of gradation so visibly pervading all things in Earth and Heaven—wild attempts at an omni-prevalent Democracy were made. Yet this evil sprang necessarily from the leading evil—Knowledge. Man would not both know and succumb. Meantime huge smoking cities arose, innumerable. Green leaves shrank before the hot breath of furnaces. The fair face of Nature was deformed as with the ravages of some loathsome disease. (H:v4,203)

The result of a self-intoxicated Democracy's refusal of particularity is the complete confusion of both natural and supernatural orders. Monos describes the crisis of a world from which beauty has withdrawn almost entirely along with the mind's ability to perceive it—a world in
which man's desire to impose control upon his world from outside has destroyed his ability to know it by setting himself in accord with it. Again we are confronted with Poe's invaded Eden—"deformed as with the ravages of some loathsome disease." Before the "evil days" of the "great movement" Monos describes a world of "holy, august and blissful days, when blue rivers ran undammed, between hills unhewn, into far forest solitudes, primeval, odorous, and unexplored." (H:v.4,202)

It is with the transformation of Eden into its opposite--Poe's Hell--that the importance of the faculty "Taste" emerges in "The Colloquy." For Monos continues:

But now it appears that we had worked out our own destruction in the perversion of our taste, or rather in the blind neglect of its culture in the schools. For, in truth, it was at this crisis that taste alone—that faculty which, holding a middle position between the pure intellect and the moral sense, would never safely have been disregarded—it was now that taste alone could have led us gently back to Beauty, to Nature, and to Life. (H:v.4,203-4)

By holding this middle ground between intellect and moral sense, taste alone is capable of restoring man to his particularity. The infected intellect and the perverted moral sense, cut off from Taste, end in ignoring gradation in Nature and Nature's laws. Taste alone (see the discussion of "Taste" in Section One), which seizes particulars, frees the mind to discover unity within that particularity. The sort of Democratic institutions Poe complains against
are those whose tendency is to impose a uniformity and coherence on the mind from without. Such a state demands that art be dogmatic and discursive. This was the danger Poe saw in the growing Democratic institutions of his day. When taste is overthrown, as it is in Poe's circumscribed Hell, the problem of authority becomes a critical problem. With the exile of the poet from the public realm the poet's image-making faculty, loosed on the private alone, turns back upon him. Poe's heroes are often men obsessed with "particularity" and lost in the "perversions" of total subjectivity, like Egaeus of the tale "Bernice" (1835) who becomes possessed by a single image--the image of Bernice's teeth. Here the overthrow of intellect and the perversion of the moral sense lead us into Poe's interest in insanity and extreme psychological states. Poe's mad heroes are men who cling to image and the image-producing faculty when images are no longer shared publically--when image itself has become fragmented. Images incapable of transmission have a terrifying tendency in Poe's nightmare realms to return to haunt the mind that invokes or calls them up.

In his ironic satires where Poe repeatedly criticizes Democracy or "the Mob," it becomes clear that the political and psychological questions overlap. In order to "clear the ground" Poe's integrity as an artist committed to the particular, leads him to make the descent to the
dark regions of consciousness—to explore themes of death, insanity, revenge, and man's instinctual "perversity"—that is, the irrational modes of consciousness. In tales like "The Business Man" (Feb., 1840) and "The Man of the Crowd" (Dec., 1840) Poe mocks the complacent society that surrounded him for its shallow acceptance of such a rationality—its ability to remain on the surface of things without experience. Even in his random observations of this society the mind of the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd," for instance, is forced back upon the particular:

At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance. (H:v.4,135)

But even as the particularity of the crowd engages him, the narrator is drawn to a recognition of the forces of generalization. Never is his comment on the loss of individuality in the rising middle classes more pointed:

By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied business-like demeanor, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press. Their brows were knit, and their eyes rolled quickly; when pushed against by fellow-wayfarers they evinced no symptom of impatience, but adjusted their clothes and hurried on. Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around. When impeded in their progress, these people suddenly ceased muttering, but redoubled their gesticulations, and awaited, with an absent and overdone smile upon the lips, the
course of the persons impeding them. If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers, and appeared overwhelmed with confusion.--There was nothing very distinctive about these two large classes beyond what I have noted. Their habiliments belonged to that order which is pointedly termed the decent. They were undoubtedly noble-men, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers--the Eupatrids and the commonplaces of society--men of leisure and men actively engaged in affairs of their own--conducting business upon their own responsibility. They did not greatly excite my attention. (Hi:v4,136)

Thus Poe's rejection of the "normal," grows out of an active resistance to this parody of "rationality" incapable of exciting the attention or the imagination. The imagination becomes ontological, moving back through an elemental narration to the beginning of thought where consciousness is layered and double--that is, not complete. The narrative itself becomes an interrogation of consciousness. Therefore what does capture the narrator's attention is the mysterious old man--the stranger, who is also an image of the poet's soul (psyche). The old man becomes the very embodiment of the narrator's own irrational and demonic self--his double--who moves in a realm that is the extreme opposite of the world of the "crowd."

With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepid old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age,)--a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Any thing even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before. I well remember that my first thought, upon beholding it, was that Retzsch,
had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictural incarnations of the fiend. As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of extreme despair. I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated. (H:v.4,140)

Poe's heroes constantly embrace the realm of the irrational and oppositional in this manner, since the world of rationality would dissolve and reduce such a complexity—such an opposition of forces intellectual and emotional.

Poe was one of the first American writers to explore the notion of an inversion of sanity (rationality) and insanity (irrationality) in the world. That is, in the tales and poems the "madman" who "distorts" the world in favor of poetic reverie, (where psychological states are not separated out one from another), is the dreamer or poet. Roderick Usher is one of Poe's "mad" heroes in this sense. The disintegration of his "reason" (since in time reason has become infected) is an indication of Usher's cosmic sanity. In "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Feather" the inmates take over the asylum and cage their keepers. In "Hop-Frog" where Poe explores a revenge theme, the "mad" and persecuted dwarf tars and feathers King and court, suspending the entire company from a blazing chandelier. In these tales Poe strikes again
with the weapon of satire and irony at a shallow and naive rationality, a grid of meaning, that would permanently exile the instincts to the lower depths of the being or deny the presence of the irrational and ontological entirely. Poe's "imp" of "The Imp of the Perverse" embodies that impulse by which, Poe writes, "we act for the reason we should not." His "Angel of the Odd" can be said to represent that element of the unexpected that arises always (almost dialectically) out of the expected. These tales are at once a criticism and rejection of the rational world of sanity and an affirmation of "insanity." They move toward a definition of a higher mode of rationality that includes the irrational. If image has flown from the "rational" world, the Poe hero will enter and explore the enclosure that is his personal, experiential hell in order to recover it.

The place of madness, nonsense and the irrational as qualitatively part of the composition of the real, has become a philosophical problem in our time. Friedrich Nietzsche, though he follows Poe in time, takes a similar stance in his willingness to assert the irrational at all costs--rather than submit to a vacuous rationality. In his "Twilight of the Idols," for example, Nietzsche writes:
The moralism of the Greek philosophers from Plato downwards is pathologically conditioned: likewise their estimation of dialectics. Reason= virtue=happiness means merely: one must imitate Socrates and counter the dark desires by producing a permanent daylight—the daylight of reason. One must be prudent, clear, bright at any cost; every yielding to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads downwards. 6

Through the Platonic tradition, argues Nietzsche, man has abstracted an "interior soul" from the living world and from his instincts. Hence Nietzsche views consciousness in terms of a dialectic, the poles of which move simultaneously upward into the Apollonian (or what Poe would call the Ideal) and downward into experience or the Dionysian—which is for Poe the familiar realm of the irrational. Poe, earlier, and in his own way would explode the notion that reason=virtue=happiness. He takes his own unique stand against "the permanent daylight of reason."

We see him, for instance, in the tales dealing with the contemporary notion of "progress" in history as he found it conjoined with a fanatic belief in the monster "rationality." The potentialities of the machine itself had captured the popular imagination in Poe's time and he was quick to take up the theme—to claim that territory for the imagination. As Leo Marx writes in The Machine in the Garden: "By now around [1850] the image of the American machine has become a transcendent symbol: a physical object invested with political and metaphysical ideality."7 In the 1840's Poe is ahead of his time in
his peculiar fascination with the machine and his interest in scientific discovery in his time. In a short essay, "Maelzel's Chess Player" (February, 1836) he investigates the mystery of a mechanical chess player, eventually to discover in his analysis of it the presence of a man hidden inside the machine--operating it from within. The supposed pure "Automaton a pure machine, unconnected with human agency" (H:v.14,6) when penetrated by the poetic intelligence, is no pure machine at all. By pressing the possibilities of mechanization in a Newtonian universe to its limits, Poe uncovers the unexpected phenomenon of a human hand and human intelligence at the center of the machine. For Poe the machine becomes a miraculous device only when it is inhabited--that is, when it is animated by the human imagination. Ultimately for Poe it is the "machine" that is to provide the most intriguing analogy of all to that most mysterious machine--the machine of the rational mind. In a sense "Maelzel's Chess-Player" is a preliminary study for Eureka where Poe seeks the human hand and intelligence at the center of the "machine" of the universe.

We have noted in the tales leading up to Eureka Poe's exploration of two sorts of circumscribed space--the Edenic and the Demonic realms. "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842) clearly locates us in Poe's hell, where again his fascination is with the machine--the mechanization
of the grinding pendulum itself—which is also a symbol of time. In his realm of nightmare we are to find Poe's narrators busily engaged in the exploration of the rational mind--its wheels and pinions. Here as the dreamer awakes from a kind of death-like stupor it becomes his business to measure the limits of his enclosure. As he descends painfully from sleep into the active condition of reverie we have encountered before in the tales, thought and sense gradually become separated. He minutely describes the process of awakening:

Arousing from the most profound of slumbers, we break the gossamer web of some dream. Yet in a second afterward, (so frail may that web have been) we remember not that we have dreamed. In the return of life from the swoon there are two stages; first, that of the sense of mental or spiritual; secondly, that of the sense of physical existence. (H:v.5,69)

The tale can be seen in terms of a struggle for a sense of "place" and the separation of a rational consciousness out of the abyss of disassociated images of this state of "swoon," which is primarily pre-logical and preconscious. The separation of the original unity into "spiritual" and "physical" and the descent into time is given in terms of pain and madness--"the madness of a memory which busies itself among forbidden things." (H:v.5,70) Poe describes the descent into the oppressing physicality of thought and the return of memory in the following terms:
Very suddenly there came back to my soul motion and sound—the tumultuous motion of the heart, and, in my ears, the sound of its beating. Then a pause in which all is blank. Then again sound, and motion, and touch—a tingling sensation pervading my frame. Then the mere consciousness of existence, without thought—a condition which lasted long. Then, very suddenly, thought, and shuddering terror, and earnest endeavor to comprehend my true state. Then a strong desire to lapse into insensibility. Then a rushing revival of soul and a successful effort to move (H:v.5,70)

Poe's analysis of the stages of awakening from sleep is psychologically exact—but at the same time sleep becomes an analogy for death which is a point of unity. Here and in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the heart itself signals the awareness of the body and of time. After an initial examination of his immediate surroundings, the narrator of "The Pit" learns first that he is a prisoner in a kind of circular room; and secondly that he has been deceived as to its actual dimensions and shape on first inspection:

In its size I had been greatly mistaken. The whole circuit of its walls did not exceed twenty-five yards. For some minutes this occasioned me a world of vain trouble; vain indeed! For what could be of less importance under the terrible circumstances which environed me, than the mere dimensions of my dungeon? But by soul took a wild interest in trifles, and I busied myself in endeavors to account for the error I had committed in my measurement. The truth at length flashed upon me. (H:v.5,76)

There is a sense in such passages that Poe is redefining, even rediscovering consciousness. What is notable about the moment of awakening within the nightmare enclosure is the introduction of the "rational" mind into the world of
dream. The mind takes a "wild interest in trifles" as a means of combating fear. It seeks a sense of place—a knowledge of who and where one is. As Georges Poulet notes in *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, the first terror in Poe is "the terror of thinking"—of consciousness awakening to a sense of its own separateness and vulnerability. The narrator of "The Pit" experiences a similar pain of separateness that Poulet finds in Schopenhauer in his chapter on "Romanticism" where he states:

> The more our thought diversifies and exteriorizes itself, the more it individualizes itself and becomes vulnerable. To think is to suffer. 9

The Poe hero is confronted by the hostility of the "outer" world cut off from his life. Therefore as the dreamer of the tale gradually awakes, the walls of the dungeon begin to narrow imperceptibly—ultimately forcing him toward the center of a circular enclosure where lies the pit or abyss. The self becomes a vulnerable subject in a world of threatening objects or "machines." Throughout the tale the narrator confronts no human life other than his own. We are shown only the mechanism of the "pendulum"—the torturer's device. The powers that operate it remain invisible. Thus the alternatives in Poe's hell remain double: by avoiding the oblivion of the pit or abyss the dreamer finds himself beneath the descending blade of time:

> Looking upward, I surveyed the ceiling of my prison. It was some thirty or forty feet overhead, and constructed much as the side walls. In one of its
panels a very singular figure riveted my whole attention. It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum such as we see on antique clocks. (H:v.5,77)

The final fear in "The Pit and the Pendulum" as in "The Premature Burial" (1844), is the fear of living entombment—of being caught awake (conscious) inside the dream, unable to sustain a world of mental collapse. It is often in Poe expressed as a fear of weight and is in short, the familiar fear of the dream closing down upon itself. The fear comes upon the dreamer not as an event, but as a state and the recognition of a state:

A fearful idea now suddenly drove the blood in torrents upon my heart, and for a brief period, I once more relapsed into insensibility. Upon recovering, I at once started to my feet, trembling convulsively in every fibre. I thrust my arms wildly above and around me in all directions. I felt nothing; yet dreaded to move a step, lest I should be impeded by the walls of a tomb. (H:v.5,72)

His vision is of the body and the mind as a prison, a tomb of hyperactive consciousness to which the insidious outer world has access. Since the rational mind itself is an instrument by means of which his tormentors reach him, the dreamer's only alternative, (finding himself awake), is to meditate intensely on the particulars of his prison—to exclude all other thoughts but those that present themselves directly to his senses. In so doing it is as if the self momentarily forgets to believe in its illusion of separateness.
from the world it inhabits--fear disappears. "The truth at length flashed upon me," says the prisoner. In the same manner the idea of rubbing meat on his bandages so that the rats will chew off his bonds is an idea of which, our narrator tells us, "a moiety only floated indeterminate-
ly through my brain when I raised the food to my burning lips. The whole thought was now present--feeble, scarcely sane, scarcely definite,--but still entire." (H:v.5,82)
The rational mind affords both the means of torture and the means of escape. It is as if when the rational mind exhausts itself through a "pertinacity of attention" (H:v.5,80), the intuition intervenes in a sudden flash.
The prisoner is freed from the descent of the pendulum:

Free!--I had but escaped death in one form of agony, to be delivered unto worse than death in some other. (H:v.5,84)

It is here in the narrative that the walls begin to heat intensely and close in, driving the victim toward the pit. Hell confronts him with the final pair of opposites: hot and cold:

I shrank from the glowing metal to the centre of the cell. Amid the thought of the fiery destruction that impended, the idea of the coolness of the well came over my soul like balm. (H:v5,85)

But the dreamer is saved from despair and from the pit by what can only be interpreted as an act of almost supernatural intervention--help comes from outside the nightmare:
An out-stretched arm caught my own as I fell, fainting, into the abyss. It was that of General Lasalle. The French army had entered Toledo. The Inquisition was in the hands of its enemies.  
(H:v.5,87)

With the termination of the dream the events recorded entered history—the Spain of the Inquisition. Up to the final sentence in the narrative the events could have taken place anywhere in or outside time. Here Poe frames his narrative, his description of hell in the real or known.

As in "The Pit and the Pendulum" Poe in "A descent into the Maelström," (1841) a few years earlier, explores this quality of the "rational" mind which meditates upon its enclosure. In "The Maelström" this faculty of concentration enables the narrator to survive the whirlpool—like the "pit" an image of envelopment.10 The fear of vertigo in Poe, of being sucked into a vortex, is deflected by allowing the rational mind entrance into the whirl. In "The Maelström" fear is held in abeyance by a kind of "insane" fascination with the mystery of the mechanics of the whirlpool itself. The conscious mind heads for the unknown, which is in part unconscious, but also simply unknown, unthought, at the edge of perception. The narrator states:

After a little while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a wish to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make; and my principle grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see. . . . (H:v.2,240)
And later in the narration he continues:

I have already described the unnatural curiosity which had taken the place of my original terrors. It appeared to grow upon me as I drew nearer and nearer to my dreadful doom. I now began to watch with a strange interest, the numerous things that floated in our company. I must have been delirious, for I even sought amusement in speculating upon the relative velocities of their severals descents toward the foam below. (H:v.2,243-4)

The rational mind seeks to lose itself in accuracy similarly in "Berenice" (1835) where Egaeus tells us, "I was wont, to muse for long unwearied hours, with my attention riveted to some frivolous device on the margin or in the typography of a book. . . ." (H:v.2,19) This "monomania" of the "attentive faculties," as Egaeus names it, with which the powers of meditation "busied and buried themselves, in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe," (H:v.2,19) becomes what Poe calls the "daydreaming" faculty. As he writes in "Eleonora" (1841): "They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night." (H:v.4,236) As Poe's fascination with the rational intellect increases in tales like "The Pit and the Pendulum" we become increasingly aware of the delicacy of the line separating the ratiocinative meditation and the hypnogogic reverie. Both are states of a "lucid reason" (H:v.4,236) and move into the regions of madness which, as Poe suggests, may be "the loftiest intelligence." (H:v.4,236) Thus, the condition
of reason or consciousness is not simply given, culturally or otherwise, but alive in an interplay with the unreason-
able, the unconscious, the unknown, the unthought.

The heretofore simple opposition of imagination and reason is complicated the moment we are aware that the rational mind has entered the dream. Poe is interested finally in the rationality or logic of the unconscious itself. As Poe moves toward Eureka there is an intensifying desire to wrestle with the rational mind on its own ground. The condition of lucid reason becomes less and less irreconcilable with the dark underside of consciousness. Like Nietzsche Poe comes to grips with a world from which meaning and the meaning of meaning itself has disappeared, referential meaning is in question, discourse is disturbed, and he sets to work on the mind's experience of this fragmentation.

Poe's development of the detective genre can be seen as another attempt to come to terms with the rational mind. Dupin, the detective persona, embodies both imaginative (irrational) and rational poles of consciousness. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) Dupin is simultaneously a detective and a kind of poet who sequesters himself in an inaccessible mansion—a circumscribed world where we are told that the light of day is never allowed to enter. The narrator writes that:
At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighting a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams. . . . (H:v.4,318)

Through the Dupin figure Poe attempts to wed the dreamer to the analyst. The narrator describes Dupin's analytic-imaginative powers as "merely the result of an excited, or perhaps of a diseased, intelligence." We are reminded of Roderick Usher from whose similarly "diseased" mind we are saved by the presence of the more rational consciousness of the narrator who escapes to tell the tale. Dupin is presented in "The Rue Morgue" in these terms:

His manner at these moments [when the analytic faculty is excited] was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. Observing him in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of a double Dupin--the creative and the resolvent. (H:v.4,152)

The narrator, who is also the dreamer, is unable to comprehend Dupin's intelligence or "Ideality" except through the metaphor of the Bi-Part Soul. And like that of Roderick Usher, Dupin's intelligence can only be understood by the world in terms of insanity or "disease"--as an aberration.

In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" the complexity and irony of the narrative structure grows out of our attitude as readers to Dupin's ambivalent powers as detective. We are aware not so much of the merging of the
imaginative and reasoning faculties, as we are of the narrator's attempt to rationalize the intuition, to both know and show how Dupin arrives at his conclusions. In a sense, with the narrator, through whose eyes we view the events of the narrative, we are "amused with the fancy of a double Dupin." Although the narrative opens by stating that "the mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis," (H:v.4,146) the narrator proceeds to analyze them, to trace the ratiocinative mind backwards through the labyrinth of its deductions and inductions. Dupin retraces the steps by which he is able seemingly to "read" his companion's thoughts:

I could not doubt that you murmured the word 'stereotomy' a term very affectedly applied to this species of pavement. I know you could not say to yourself 'stereotomy' without being brought to think of atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus; and since, when we discussed this subject not very long ago, I mentioned to you how singularly, yet with how little notice, the vague guesses of that noble Greek had met with confirmation in the late nebular cosmogony, I felt that you could not avoid casting your eyes upward to the great nebula in Orion, and I certainly expected that you would do so. You did look up; and I was now assured that I had correctly followed your steps. . . . (H:v.4,155)

The narrator tells us earlier in the opening discourse on method that the analyst's results, "brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition." (H:v.4,146) On one level Dupin's explanation of his "intuition" is a kind of hoax--a
labyrinth in which the rational mind seeks to lose itself. The word "stereotomy" has to do with cutting solids (here "stonecutting") and thus ties the chain of reasoning to the realm of fixed forms. The association is exact since the purpose of Dupin's "ratiocination" is to move beyond fixed forms. What is important about Dupin's wild reasoning is that the "contrived" nature of the telling makes us aware of the presence of an active intelligence shaping the reconstruction. The episode in question becomes a paradigm of the entire tale where we also become aware of an intelligence unraveling a plot it has itself constructed. Dupin might be best defined as a man impersonating a machine. For in Poe's vision, as we have seen in "Maelzel's Chess Player," if you study a machine long enough you discover a man hidden inside, running the workings. The imagination in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" inhabits and activates the machine of the rational mind. The final irony the narrative reveals is that only the logic of a Dupin, capable of including madness, is adequate to discover that the murders were committed by no man at all--but by an ape. The ordinary rational mind would seek a human agency to explain them. As Dupin puts it:

In the manner of thrusting the corpse up the chimney, you will admit that there was something excessively outre--something altogether irreconcilable with our common notions of human action, even when we suppose the actors the most depraved of men. (Hi:v.4,179)
In "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) we witness the absolute disintegration of reason in the fragmentation of consciousness. Here the narrator "rationally" explains the irrational impulse to murder an old man he "loves." Reason is pushed beyond its limits and Poe parodies a condition of "lucid reason" which, ironically, turns back upon the narrator at the end of the tale when his own "over acuteness of the senses" (H:v.5,91) betrays to confess the "crime." One might say that Poe explores reason run wild in its hysterical modes. With the dispassionate intensity of a Dupin the narrator proceeds about the murder of the old man whose only offensiveness is his eye--"the eye of a vulture--a pale blue eye, with a film over it." (H:v.5,88) Like Berenice's teeth, the image of the eye is a meaningless absurdity, disassociated from the entirety of the old man. It arouses again the "attentive faculties" of the imagination, which may deal with duplicity. The narrator knows the old man and his terrors well, for he is his very self--his double:

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief--oh, no!--it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when over-charged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. (H:v.5,90)

Nevertheless he murders him--the point being that his act is unreasonable--absurd. Here the discourse of the narrative
becomes an argument for madness and a contention that madness itself is information. Poe, standing behind his narrator, explores the psychological and experiential themes of obsession and a motiveless revenge:

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded--with what caution--with what foresight with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.

(H.v. 5, 88-9)

Poe's exploration of the rationality of madness implies a view of the world in which any complete embracing of the senses and intellect must by nature lead into a form of hysteria. For by definition it is a world which has rejected the information of the senses and abstracted man from his direct experience. Direct contact with the world is in a sense dangerous. One becomes lost in subjectivity, unable to distinguish the beating of the old man's heart from the beating of one's own. The descent into the senses in a world where a naive objectivity is impossible, is the descent into the personal hell of one's own experience.

Edith Cobb's recent "Work in Progress," "The Ecology of the Imagination in Childhood," enables us to comprehend the origins of Poe's sense of the rational as it evolves in the later tales and in Eureka--where it appears in both its sublime and hysterical modes. In Cobb's language, one might argue that Poe becomes interested not in escaping.
into dream, but of returning consciously to that "prepubertal, halcyon, middle age of childhood, approximately from five or six to eleven or twelve--between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence--when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way, producing in the child a sense of some profound continuity with natural processes and presenting overt evidence of a biological basis of intuition."\textsuperscript{12} Cobb argues that the child's "plasticity of response to environment may be extended through memory into a lifelong renewal of the early power to learn and to evolve." \textsuperscript{13} She has found through her studies of genius that creative thinkers and writers tend to return in memory to this middle-age range in their early life . . . in order to renew the power and impulse to create at its very source, a source which they describe as the experience of emerging not only into the light of consciousness but into a living sense of a dynamic relationship with the outer world. In these memories the child appears to experience both a sense of discontinuity, and awareness of his own unique separateness and identity, and also a continuity, a renewal of relationship with nature as process. \textsuperscript{14}

Poe, similarly, is to argue in \textit{Eureka} that this early "memory" is intuitively or perceptually, even biologically based--that is, grounded in the instincts. In \textit{Eureka} memory triggers the poet's rediscovery of his original relationship to the universe. At the conclusion of \textit{Eureka} Poe writes:
We walk about amid the destinies of a world-existence, encompassed by dim but ever-present Memories of a Destiny more vast—very distant in the bygone time, and infinitely awful. We have a Youth peculiarly haunted by such shadows; yet never mistaking them for dreams. As memories we know them. During our Youth the distinction is too clear to deceive us even for a moment.

\[\text{(H:v.16,311-312)}\]

. . . But now comes the period at which a conventional world-Reason awakens us from the truth of our dream. . . . (H:v.16,312) I have spoken of Memories that haunt us during our youth. They sometimes pursue us even in our Manhood:—assume gradually less and less indefinite shapes:—Now and then speak to us with low voices. . . ."\[\text{(H:v.16,313)}\]

In her essay Cobb speaks of this original perceptual continuity between self and world which some of us are able to regain through memory in the following terms: "This apprehension is certainly not intellectual; I believe it is rational at least in a limited sense, a preverbal experience of an "aesthetic logic."\[15\] Cobb sees this kind of "rationality" as the basis of the child's active relation to the world. And the "aesthetically" rational desire to "animate the inanimate," which she sees as "the prime characteristic of all effective metaphor," is exactly the force that fascinates Poe in "Maelzel's Chess Player."

First Poe animates the mechanical chess player by applying the rational mind to its mystery and then in \textit{Eureka} he attempts to animate, as I have suggested, the mechanism of the inanimate Newtonian universe. Cobb's definition of an "aesthetic logic" moves us closer to the kind of rationality that interests Poe and that ultimately enables him to draw away from his earlier sense of a dichotomy.
between the imaginative and the rational (scientific).

Cobb, too, is best able to define man's form-making impulse through the metaphor of the machine. "It is the activity of creating form," she argues,

which has fascinated the mind of man, most particularly as the power to animate the inanimate, the ability to make things move in the shape of working models and refined machines, the power to produce animation even in the "still" image of the plastic arts. This shaping force, this desire to master and to create motion, not only is at the basis of all human technical invention, but also is the prime characteristic of effective metaphor. 16

The narrator of Eureka can be seen as a kind of cosmic Dupin whose logic is "aesthetically" grounded in Cobb's sense. By combining the powers of the reason and the intuition--bringing them together in the senses--he sets out, like Dupin, to solve a puzzle--but this time it is the puzzle of the universe. Like Dupin, the narrator of Eureka--the poet--proceeds by meeting the opponent Reason on its own ground. The emphasis is again upon method. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" the narrator describes Dupin's "method" in the playing of draughts:

Deprived of ordinary resources, the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not infrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation. (H:v.4,147-8)

In Eureka, as in the tales of detection, one might argue that the opponent is the rational mind, because it limits, closes and is without experiential ground. It is in this...
sense that *Eureka* can be seen to be constructed on a dialectic. W.B. Yeats expresses what is a very similar attitude toward "the opponent" in "Explorations," where he writes:

All that our opponent expresses must be shown for part of our greater expression, that he may become our thrall--be enthralled as they say. Yet our whole is not his whole and he may break away and enthral us in his turn, and there arise between us a struggle like that of the sexes. All life is such a struggle. 17

Through the dialectical struggle that ensues from this battle between seemingly antagonistic regions of the mind, Poe moves toward a science of the intuition in *Eureka* that refuses static absolutes.

In *Eureka* Poe pushes the rational mind to its limits in order to free the "intuition," which he there defines as

but the conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression. (*H:v.16,197*)

The "descent to the ground," then, must be defined in terms of those things necessary to free the intuition or imagination in a given, a unique nexus in time and space, that is Poe's America.
I wish to consider the cluster of tales which enact a conversation or dialogue between two beings, usually male and female, who have survived a final apocalyptic conflagration of the earth to tell their story. I am referring specifically to "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," (1839), "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" (1841) and "The Power of Words" (1845). In each of these dialectically structured tales Poe nears the edge of perception where prose bursts into the intensity of poetic expression. Here as in *Eureka* Poe speaks from within a dialectic of contraries where he is concerned primarily with the mutually informing conditions of life and death--the primary "beginning" and "end" of life on the earth in both its cosmic and experiential sense.

Many of the scientific and philosophical notions found in *Eureka* are worked out in this group of tales. Poe's angels, these "new-fledged" beings, as he calls them, speak from out of the other side of death--the other side of time. Similarly in "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844), which also enacts a dialogue or conversation, the mesmerized patient speaks from "eternity" in this sense. Thus Poe's
mouthpieces at this stage preparatory to *Eureka* have the advantage of possessing a superior knowledge of the "physical-spiritual" world. In the discussion that follows I will attempt to show the way in which Poe defines spiritual existence clearly as a continuation of the physical and experiential in the highest degree.

The group of tales shares a similar structure (form) as well as content. In all three there is a sense that consciousness has burst out of dream--that the dreamer has come fully awake inside the dream at last. In "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," for instance, Charmion greets Eiros with these words:

> Dreams are with us no more; but of these mysteries anon. I rejoice to see you looking life-like and rational. The film of the shadow has already passed from off your eyes. (H:v.4,1), [italics mine]

The stylization of the language suggests the announcement of a discovery--the discovery that rationality is freed at last from time and no longer to be associated with fallen vision. Like Coleridge's higher reason, rationality is raised beyond itself. In terms of a psychoanalytic vocabulary one might say we are again dealing with the rationality of the unconscious. Accordingly, the two beings are renamed, perhaps suggestive of Cleopatra's maids in "Antony and Cleopatra," who find birth on the other side of death here in Poe's cosmos.¹ The tale begins with a renaming to celebrate the occurrence of that
"rebirth." The name, Eiros, invokes associations with the god Eros—the vast power and will of love itself and with Iris, the "rainbow." One might note that the point of Poe's layered and symbolical use of names, here and in the poems, is that meaning is cumulative and evocative so as to suggest mystery, "indefiniteness"—the unknown.²

Eiros: Why do you call me Eiros?

Charmion: So henceforward will you always be called. You must forget, too, my earthly name, and speak to me as Charmion.

Eiros: This is indeed no dream! (H:v.4,1)

In all three tales the themes of apocalypse, a traditional part of a Heaven-Hell; Heaven-Earth dialectic, is central. In "The Power of Words" the angels proceed to describe "the final overthrow of the earth." (H:v.6,141) The "fiery conflagration," a form of purification by fire, becomes the unifying theme of "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion." Here Poe's early interest in the appearance and disappearance of a comet sited by Tycho Brahe (see "Al Aaraaf"), is again taken up into the narrative.³ The use of this particular image reflects Poe's persistent interest in the astronomy of his day, which he transforms into the apocalyptic vision of the tale. A comet approaches the earth, threatening total destruction to its inhabitants:

We could no longer apply to the strange orb any accustomed thoughts. Its historical attributes had disappeared. It oppressed us with a hideous novelty of emotion. We saw it now as an astronomical phenomenon in the heavens, but as an incubus upon our
hearts, and a shadow upon our brains. It had taken, with inconceivable rapidity, the character of a gigantic mantle of rare flame, extending from horizon to horizon. (H:v.4,6)

As the comet's influence bathes the earth we are told that "A wild luxuriance of foliage, utterly unknown before, burst out upon every vegetable thing." (H:v.4,7) The familiar mental landscape of heightened perception makes its reappearance, before "the final sense of pain that was the wild signal for general lamentation and horror." (H:v.4,7) As in "The Domaine of Arhheim" and "The Pit and the Pendulum," to cite only two examples, the "luxuriance" and intensification of light and color warns the reader that consciousness has been driven into that region of perception that leads through annihilation. It is associated with weight and the oppressiveness of a kind of physical sickness or disease:

A wild change had come over all men; and the first sense of pain was the wild signal for general lamentation and horror. The first sense of pain lay in a rigorous constriction of the breast and lungs, and an insufferable dryness of the skin. (H:v.4,7)

Yet here in the "dialogues" the reader is forced to assume that consciousness survives the apocalyptic moment, due to the presence of Poe's "fledged beings" or angels, who tell the tale. Charmion, addressing Eiros, states:

Your allotted days of stupor have expired; and, to-morrow, I will myself induct you into the full joys and wonders of your novel existence.

Eiros. True, I feel no stupor, none at all. The wild sickness and the terrible darkness
have left me, and I hear no longer that mad, rushing horrible sound, like the "voice of many waters." Yet my senses are bewildered, Charmion, with the keeness of their perception of the new. (H:v.14,1-2)

The rebirth is an awakening to a new way of perceiving the world. Although the other side of death and time is fictively proposed as out of this world, Poe argues perception. As Eiros says:

I am overburthened with the majesty of all things--of the unknown now known--of the speculative Future merged in the august and certain Present. (H:v.4,2) [italics mine]

A luminous concept of the "afterlife" or unknown is shattered by its actuality--its experiential nature, its sheer physical "presence."

In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," the awakening suggested in "Eiros and Charmion" is fully explored. Here Poe traces the reverie of wakefulness through the death of the physical senses. The "Colloquy" is not about the death of the body and the birth of the soul in any Neo-Platonic sense, but is in fact a denial of that separation. Here consciousness "descends" into the body itself where it discovers that the knowledge of the world gained through the five senses is false and distorted (inaccurate) in terms of the newly discovered "sixth sense." Consciousness awakes to a knowledge of a "Time" and "Place" with which it is in harmony. Therefore, Monos says:

And now, from the wreck and chaos of the usual senses, there appeared to have arisen within me a sixth, all perfect. In its exercise I found a wild delight--yet a delight still physical, inasmuch as the understanding had in it no part. (H:v.4,209)
The body descends into quiesence and a sense of powerless-
ness--"no muscle quivered; no nerve thrilled; no artery
throbbed"--as the sixth sense emerges. With this sense
the dreamer readjusts "the irregularities of the clock
upon the mantel, and of the watches of the attendents."
(H:v.4,209)

The slightest deviation from the true proportion--
and these deviations were omni-prevalent--affected
me just as violations of abstract truth were wont,
on earth, to affect moral sense. Although no two
of the time-pieces in the chamber struck individual
seconds accurately together, yet I had no difficulty
in holding steadily in mind the tones, and the
respective momentary errors of each. And this--
this keen, perfect, self-existing sentiment of
duration--this sentiment existing (as many could
not possibly have conceived it to exist) independent-
ly of any succession of events--this idea--this
sixth sense, up-springing from the ashes of the
rest, was the first obvious and certain step of the
intemporal soul upon the threshold of the temporal
Eternity. (H:v.4,209)

The experience of the intermingling of the various
senses that Poe explores as the mind passes through what
we call death, is an anticipation of the doctrine of
correspondences--as I have suggested earlier. Here, however,
there is no actual "doctrine," but the seeds of what will
be fully developed by the French symbolists, and Baudelaire
in particular. The following passage from "The Colloquy"
describes the process of consciousness descending into
the senses in order to move through them and out. Monos
speaks:
I breathed no longer. The pulses were still. The heart had ceased to beat. Volition had not departed, but was powerless. The senses were usually active, although eccentrically so--assuming often each other's functions at random. The taste and smell were inextricably confounded, and became one sentiment, abnormal and intense. The rosewater with which your tenderness had moistened by lips to the last, affected me with sweet fancies of flowers--fantastic flowers, far more lovely than any of the old Earth, but whose prototypes we have here blooming around us. The eyelids transparent and bloodless, offered no complete impediment to vision. As volition was in abeyance the balls would not roll in their sockets--but all objects within the range of the visual hemisphere were seen with more or less distinctness; the rays which fell upon the external retina, or into the corner of the eye, producing a more vivid effect than those which struck the front or anterior surface. (H:y.4,206-7)

One might note that in Poe this observation that one sees more clearly out of the corner of the eye than by looking at a thing directly is taken up in many of the tales. It is tied to his sense of the indefinite (in a realm where it is impossible to separate known from unknown and real from unreal), and it is a sign that the dreamer has passed into the preliminary stages of "death"--that is, a state of perception that resembles death from the outside, at the edges of ordinary perception. It is the constant interchanging of life and death--the two ends of experience--and thus a descent. In Monos' words:

after some days there came upon me, as you have said, a breathless and motionless torpor; and this was termed Death by those who stood around me. (H:v.4,206)
In the tale "Hans Phall" (1835) the narrator, as he is drawn into a similar perception of the unseparated, writes:

In the contemplation of the heavenly bodies it struck me forcibly that I could not distinguish a star with nearly as much precision, when I gazed on it with earnest, direct and undeviating attention, as when I suffered my eye only to glance in its vicinity alone. (H:v.2,61)

In Eureka this principle becomes a method of "seeing" by which man comes to perceive things in their entirety and complexity rather than in divisiveness or separation. But here in "The Colloquy" Poe descends into the experience of death as process and proposes not interpretation, but extraordinary experience. To the dreamer sounds present themselves as colors; colors as sounds. Death is the awakening of the divided senses into what Poe calls the "One Sentiment." Here he uses the word "sentiment" in its older sense (eighteenth century) where it ties to direct perception, not mere feeling:

Yet, in the former instance, this effect [that of rays of light from objects falling on the eyeballs] was so far anomalous that I appreciated it only as sound—sound sweet or discordant as the matters presenting themselves at my side were light or dark in shade—curved or angular in outline. The hearing at the same time, although excited in degree, was not irregular in action—estimating real sounds with an extravagance of precision, not less than of sensibility. Touch had undergone a modification more peculiar. Its impressions were tardily received, but pertinaciously retained, and resulted always in the highest physical pleasure. Thus the pressure of your sweet fingers upon my eyelids, at first only recognized through vision, at length, long after their removal, filled my whole being with a sensual delight. All my perceptions were purely sensual. (H:v.4,207)
Poe moves out of Romantic Platonism by embracing the senses; by enacting narratively a journey through the dissolution of sense. Monos is unable finally to separate thought from feeling—sensual delight from spiritual ecstasy. In *Eureka* Poe will defend what the poet "senses" or intuits as truth. There where he is also dealing with the "beginning" and "end" of experience, poetry can at last be offered as a mode of knowledge of the world. Here Monos describes his descent into death as the mourners stand over him:

> the material furnished the passive brain by the senses were not in the least degree wrought into shape by the deceased understanding. Of pain there was some little; of pleasure there was much; but of moral pain or pleasure none at all. Thus your wild sobs floated into my ear with all their mournful cadences, and were appreciated in their every variation of sad tone; but they were soft musical sounds and no more; they conveyed to the extinct reason no intimation of the sorrows which gave them birth; while the large and constant tears which fell upon my face, telling the bystanders of a heart which broke, thrilled every fibre of my frame with ecstasy alone. And this was in truth the Death of which these bystanders spoke reverently, in low whispers—you, sweet Una, gaspingly, with loud cries. (H:v.4,207-8)

Monos experiences in death the fusing of the opposites—pleasure and pain; joy and sorrow, etc. Here the tale is consistent also with Poe's theory in its rejection of the "Moral Sense" as a primary concern of poetry. Monos' experience of pleasure and pain bypasses the "deceased understanding" and the "extinct reason," which tend both to abstract meaning from experience. Of moral pleasure
and pain "there was none." Thus his beloved's sobs affect him as "music" only. He is incapable of attaching the concept "sorrow" to her tears by moving into a realm of pure feeling. 5 Again Poe's tale picks up the threads of his critical statements on the musicality of poetry.

By descending into the realm of sleep where "Death is imaged," the mind breaks with ordinary perception (represented by the "deceased" understanding and the "extinct reason") and becomes aware of Death's opposite--Life. Una, the beloved, is then present to Monos as light and life through the vast power of Love. Una represents Psyche in the tale and she is associated not only with light, but with whiteness and music. Both names--Monos and Una--mean "One," oneness or unity. But it is through the feminine principle of the tale that Love guides the sleeper through death to cosmic wakening. "You alone," Monos says of her, "habited in a white robe, passed in all directions musically about me." (H:v.4,208) Poe is absorbed with the presence and absence of the beloved--the recognition, loss and recovery of her image in death. But here the usual pattern of the early poems and tales is reversed. For it is Monos (the masculine principle) who descends first into the grave and Una (the feminine principle) who hovers over his body--leading him through the underworld of his perceptions. In Euréka
it can be argued that Beauty, that is, the poet's sense of the beautiful, (like Una a feminine principle) becomes such a divine guide, leading the poet to a knowledge of the "place" he inhabits and thus of his cosmic identity. Monos and Una are reunited here in "The Colloquy" through the twin forces of love and death. Death itself becomes the purger or cleanser of man's perceptions. Thus Monos writes:

And now it was, fairest and dearest, that we wrapped our spirits, daily, in dreams. Now it was that, in twilight, we discoursed of the days to come, when the Art-scarred surface of the Earth, having undergone that purification which alone could efface its rectangular obscenities, should clothe itself anew in the verdure and the mountain-slopes and the smiling waters of Paradise, and be rendered at length a fit dwelling-place for man:--for man the Death-purged--for man to whose now exalted intellect there should be poison in knowledge no more--for the redeemed, regenerated, blissful, and now immortal, but still for the material, man. (H:v.4,205)

Faced with the Romantic dilemma of the loss of the image of the beloved as well as a necessity to face the image of his own death--Poe's choice is to explore precisely what happens when her image is removed. As Monos descends into the grave, through Una, he finds that death is continually turning over its other face. Descending into the darkness of the earth he perceives her (Una) as light; descending into the abyss of absolute passivity of the senses (powerlessness, torpor, void) he perceives
her as sensation and activity (power); descending into the processes of the decay and slow putrefaction of his own body he perceives her as music and life. Death and life are experienced as a constant interchange. Una's presence makes him aware of her absence and vice-versa:

At length, as sometimes happened on Earth to the deep slumberer, when some flitting light startled him into awaking, yet left him half enveloped in dreams—so to me, in the strict embrace of the Shadow, came that light which alone might have had power to startle—the light of enduring Love. Men toiled at the grave in which I lay darkling. They up-threw the damp earth. Upon my mouldering bones there descended the coffin of Una.

And now again all was void. The nebulous light had been extinguished... (H:v.4,211)

Gradually in "The Colloquy" consciousness enters upon a sense of union with the "place," a perceiving through the senses of the locality itself. Monos becomes the spirit of place—the genius loci:

The consciousness of being had grown hourly more indistinct, and that of mere "locality" had, in great measure, usurped its position. The idea of entity was becoming merged in that of place. (H:v.4,211)

In terms of the images given in the tale the body has reached the final stages of decay and has begun to merge into the soil. The circumscribed space of the tomb begins to expand and open as consciousness includes a wider realm of activity. All sense of "entity" departs, and only "the autocrats, Place and Time" remain. But
the irony of the tale is that "Time" and "Place" have become absolutes in terms of sense--they are not abstractions. The grave no longer closes down on its inhabitant; he expands his consciousness into it. It becomes a "Home."

Monos both inhabits and is inhabited by the "place."

For that which was not--for that which had no form--for that which had no thought--for that which had no sentience--for that which was soulless, but of which matter formed no portion--for all this nothingness, yet for all this immortality, the grave was still a home, and the corrosive hours, co-mates. (H:v.4,211)

This return to void is Monos' final condition before the completion of the painful metamorphosis through death. It is interesting to note at this point that the condition Monos describes is closely similar to the condition of "unity" or oneness in Eureka. In Poe's cosmic myth matter returns similarly to its "matterless" form, the "original and therefore normal, One." (H:v.16,211) There Poe writes:

The absolutely consolidated globe of globes would be objectless:--therefore not for a moment could it continue to exist. Matter, created for an end, would unquestionably, on fulfillment of that end, be Matter no longer. Let us endeavor to understand that it would disappear and that God would remain all in all. (H:v.16,309)

Because nothingness or void is grounded in experience the return to a condition of absolute unity cannot be seen as a mystical slipping away of the soul into the cosmos. Both here and in Eureka Poe remains inside his dialectic,
refusing to transcend the opposites life and death. His angels become "the redeemed, regenerated, blissful, and now immortal, but still . . . material, man. Poe refuses to subsume body in the abstraction "Soul."

"The Powers of Words" is Poe's creation myth. In "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844) we are told that thought creates--that "All created things are but the thoughts of God." (H:v.5,249) But in "The Power of Words" a planet is literally spoken into being through the physical power of words. Here speech, language or logos itself, becomes a creative action. For Oinos and Agathos, the angels or "new fledged" beings of the tale, have "created" through their love the planet they discover:

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

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

Agathos. They are! They are! This wild star--it is now three centuries since, with clasped hands, and with streaming eyes, at the feet of my beloved--I spoke it--with a few passionate sentences into birth. Its brilliant flowers are the dearest of all unfulfilled dreams, and its raging volcanoes are the passions of the most turbulent and unhallowed of hearts. (H:v.6,143-4)
Like Monos, Oinos has just joined his beloved and is yet unused to the pleasures of immortality in Aidenn. The dialogue is a series of questions and responses in which Agathos instructs Oinos in the knowledge of "angels." The name "Oinos" is associated with wine, "mania," or intoxication, while "Agathos" is derived from the word "Agathism"—according to the Oxford English Dictionary, "the doctrine that all things tend toward ultimate good as distinguished from optimism which holds that all things are now for the best." Bringing the two together one might argue that Poe's angelic beings are associated with that "intoxication" that results from glimpses of the condition of "ultimate good" toward which all things are working. "Good" in this context is ever-changing and thus non-moral or absolute. One might well say that Oinos and Agathos speak out of that primitive, mythic condition which sees things in their original relation to the world. They are able to participate imaginatively (directly) in the results of their actions because they are able to "sense" with the passions the identity of thought and action in event. Agathos leads Oinos step by step through a consideration of the nature of God to the concluding epiphany held in image. The vision of the planet where the opposites (Ideal beauty and death, turbulence) are held, is a revelation of divinity and hence an answer to the original question--what is God?
If God is absolute good, the images of "fierce volcanoes like the passions of a turbulent heart" and the terrible "brilliant flowers" suggest a contradiction within the good itself. Again the opposites emerge clearly as the angels move toward the edges of perception. As in the poem "Ulalume" (1847) Agathos' wings, like Psyche's, droop to the ground, suggesting weight--physical oppression.

In terror she spoke; letting sink her
Wings till they trailed in the dust--
In agony sobbed; letting sink her
Plumes till they trailed in the dust--
Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.
(M:417)

The image of the volcanoes also tie "Ulalume" to "The Power of Words":

These were days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll--
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek,
In the ultimate climes of the Pole--
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the Boreal Pole (M:416)

In both the tale and the poem the ultimate poles of experience are discovered in tumult, agony and a sense of physical disease. The being is in conflict (heart against soul) and the opposites emerge in full intensity. Ultimately God himself (in "The Power of Words") is defined in terms of conflict, dialectic and polarity, and resides in the human heart--the human passions. Oinos and Agathos in their earthly existence created this star which they now survey. Here Poe's thought is close to that of...
Swedenborg who establishes a correspondential relation between human and divine love and wisdom, grounding divine love in the human passions.  

In "The Power of Words" Poe defines creation as a primary, unmediated action. God has withdrawn from the world after a primary act of creation and now the creative faculty resides in man alone. This becomes, in terms of nineteenth century thinking about the nature of God, a highly heretical statement and Poe is aware of its implications:

Oinos. Do you mean to say the Creator is not God?

Agathos. I mean to say that the Deity does not create.

Oinos. Explain!

Agathos. In the beginning only, he created. The seeming creatures which are now, throughout the universe, so perpetually springing into being, can only be considered as the mediate or indirect, not as the direct or immediate results of the Divine creative power.

Oinos. Among men, my Agathos, this idea would be considered heretical in the extreme. (H:v.6,140)

Only the "Angellic Intelligence" now creates, and Poe's angel (Oinos) is lead step by step to the discovery that by participating in the "modifications of old forms--or in other words in their creation of new"--he too is a creator. Creation proceeds by metamorphosis in a world of complete interconnectedness.

Thus "The Power of Words" is also a myth of cosmic awakening. As Agathos states, "There are no dreams in
Aidenn." Poe is no longer interested in the isolate world of dream disassociated from one half of consciousness. His angels inhabit a realm where the distinction between dreaming and waking consciousness has no meaning. Here the unconscious material has been brought into consciousness. Hence creation is a highly conscious, mathematical activity. "It is indeed demonstrable," says Agathos, that every impulse given the air, must, in the end, impress every individual thing that exists within the universe; and the being of infinite understanding—the being whom we have imagined—might trace them upward and onward in their influences upon all particles of matter—upward and onward for ever in their modifications of old forms—or in other words in their creation of new—until he found them reflected—unimpressive at last—back from the throne of the Godhead. And not only could such a being do this, but at any epoch, should a given result be afforded him—should one of these numberless comets, for example, be presented to his inspection—he could have no difficulty in determining, by the analytic retrogradation, to what original impulse it was due. (H:v.6,143)

By arguing that "secondary" creation is the only form of creation possible at this time, Poe locates divinity in the human. Man does not create new forms out of nothing, but participates in the active metamorphosis of created life from form to form. Poe is not arguing for the total immanence of Deity either, but rather, locating the tension between God as immanent (indwelling) and God as transcendent within the human heart.

Aidenn, too, is a realm of heightened conflict and another circumscribed Eden—but this time the enclosure
has expanded dramatically. Because the universe is finite (as in *Eureka*), its walls are the distant stars:

Even the spiritual vision, is it now at all points arrested by the continuous golden walls of the universe?--the walls of the myriads of the shining bodies that mere number has appeared to blend into unity? (*H:v*.*6*,139)

We see, then, that Poe never abandons his sense of the necessity of a universe of limitation. In *Eureka* he is to argue against the abstract notion of infinity and maintain that the universe is a finite sphere. Poe sustains the enclosure of space in *Eureka*, but attempts to transform it into a creative centre rather than a confining prison.

In "The Power of Words" Poe sets forth most clearly his sense of the inpenetrability of the essential mystery that lies at the heart of creation. Here and elsewhere he will insist that man cannot define the nature of God. When Oinos asks, "But does not The Most High know all?", Agathos replies—"That (since he is the Most Happy) must be still the one thing unknown to Him." (*H:v*.*6*,139) To quench the thirst for knowledge, Agathos tells Oinos, "would be to extinguish the soul's self." (*H:v*.*6*,140)

For limited and limitless are part of the texture of human thought. Thus, although space is finite—matter is infinite and the possible combinations (forms) are infinite. Two years earlier in "Mesmeric Revelation," the conversation between the mesmerized patient, Mr. Vankirk, and the
mesmerist, reveals that the nature of the "Volition of God" is the one secret even "fledged beings" cannot know."

The organs of man are adapted to his rudimental condition, and to that only; his ultimate condition, being unorganized, is of unlimited comprehension in all points but one—the nature of the volition of God—that is to say, the motion of the unparticled matter. (H:v.5,251)

In Eureka, too, the nature of Divine Volition, that original act which impells the unparticled matter into its separate state, is robed in mystery. Poe expresses the notion that God is neither spirit nor matter as we usually conceive them, but that which he calls the "unparticled" matter. Poe's sense that this ultimate "matter" is God and that which we call "thought" is this "matter" in motion draws him into a view of the world as emanation (world and anti-world) to be found in the Kabbalah, Böehme, and Swedenborg. In "The Power of Words" the unparticled matter is the "medium of creation." (H:v.6,143) In Coleridge too Poe would have found the distinction between initial and secondary acts of creation—world and emanation (anti-world).

What is gradually revealed to Oinos is his own divinity as a participant in elemental creation. He puts on divinity only as he becomes aware of the results of his physical actions in the world of his own experience.
"We moved our hands," says Agathos, "when we were dwellers on the earth, and, in so doing, we gave vibration to the atmosphere which engirdled it. This vibration was indefinitely extended, till it gave impulse to every particle of the earth's air, which thenceforward, and forever, was actuated by the one movement of the hand."

(H:v.6,141) This experientially proposed sense of total interconnection of self and world is to prove central to *Eureka*. There it becomes the principle of "absolute reciprocity of adaption" I have discussed earlier. In Poe's cosmic myth the spiritual principle of the universe is referred to variously as magnetism, electricity, light, spirit, vitality, consciousness, thought, and rarified matter.

Of the two conditions set forth in "Mesmeric Revelation": the "rudimental and the complete, corresponding to the two conditions of the worm and of the butterfly," (H:v.5,250) the angels symbolize the condition of the butterfly. They are beings "divested of corporate investiture" and freed of the "rudimental organs." (H:v.5,249) In the "painful metamorphosis" of death (H:v.5,250) man exchanges his rudimental body with its limited powers of perception for the complete or "ultimate" body. Thus "man will never be bodiless," (H:v.5,250) says Vankirk:
The ultimate body thus escapes our rudimental senses, and we perceive only the shell which falls, in decaying, from the inner form, not that inner form itself. . . . (H:v.5,250)

In these terms all three dialogue tales are about the metamorphosis through death and the falling away of the rudimental body. Consciousness awakes to a knowledge of the world because, as Vankirk states:

this external world is, to the rudimental life, limited, through the idiosyncrasy of its organs. But in the ultimate, unorganized life, the external world reaches the whole body. (H:v.5,251)

The body returns to the world and becomes world. Oinos and Agathos have entered upon the "ultimate, unorganized" life. This explains why the angel's wings droop as they sweep over the planet their words have brought into being. They have moved into that state of powerlessness which resembles death and the "rudimental" organs are in abeyance. Poe speaks of the "mesmeric state":

When I say that it resembles death, I mean that it resembles the ultimate life; for when I am entranced the senses of my rudimental life are in abeyance, and I perceive external things directly, without organs, through a medium which I shall employ in the ultimate, unorganized state. (H:v.5,250)[italics mine]

Thus here and through the works, physical sickness, langour, etc. represent for Poe this state in which the old senses give way to the new.

A brief glance at the dialogue tales demonstrates the slow and careful philosophical and "scientific" preparation Poe made for Eureka. There he attempts to draw these
ideas into a vision of the world and a poetic order. Before turning to *Eureka* I want to offer the tale "The Sphinx" (1845) as an even later turning point in the development of a dialogue between rational and intuitive modes of perception.

In "The Sphinx" two perspectives are played off one against the other, but are not yet subsumed into a larger vision. Here the narrator represents the dreamer, and the host, the rationalist--the scientist.

My host was of a less excitable temperament... His richly philosophic intellect was not at any time affected by unrealities. (H:v.6,238)

The plot unfolds as follows: the narrator (dreamer) observes a frightening, "Sphinx-like" creature crawling over a hill just outside the cottage window by which the two gentlemen are seated. Later, upon drawing the host's attention to the phenomenon, the dreamer is surprised to find that his friend reports nothing unusual. It is gradually revealed to the reader that where the dreamer sees a "Sphinx," his more rational friend observes only a harmless insect crawling up the window pane:

"Ah, here it is!" he presently exclaimed--[looking up its genus and species in a book] "it is reascending the face of the hill, and a very remarkable looking creature, I admit it to be. Still, it is by no means so large or so distant as you imagined it; for the fact is that, as it wriggles its way up this thread, which some spider has wrought along the window sash, I find it to be about the sixteenth of an inch in its extreme length and also about the sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my eye. (H:v.6,244)
The point of the tale is not simply that perception is relative to the perceiver. Poe sides with neither narrator nor host. The narrator, who is able to perceive imaginatively, that is in image, and to transform the world of bald fact into an other-worldly landscape, is unable to "see" in the sense that he is blinded by his own fear. He is forced to surrender his vision: "I was now immeasurably alarmed," he states,

for I considered the vision either as an omen of my death, or, worse, as the fore-runner of an attack of mania. (H:v.6,242)

On the other hand, the host, who is able to see dispassionately—logically and without fear—is unable to perceive imaginatively. The insects "classifiability" alone renders it harmless to him. He is able to remove himself from the phenomenon by identifying it.

Yet there is a brief moment in the tale when the dreamer's vision threatens to impose upon the host. The host is momentarily alarmed by the dreamer's description of what he sees. We are told that he questions his friend "rigorously" on the matter. (H:v.6,242) The narrator states:

When I had fully satisfied him on this head, he sighed deeply, as if relieved of some intolerable burden, and went on to talk, with what I thought a cruel calmness, of various points of speculative philosophy. (H:v.6,242) [italics mine]
His "knowledge" spares him from his friend's "mania." As in the dialogue tales Poe seeks the experiential tie of man to the world he perceives imaginatively. So his narrator leaves the problem of the descriptive and explanatory to his friend.

The dreamer's fear, however, is coupled with a sense of natural awe and wonderment, closed to his more circumspect companion. He is capable of perceiving that kind of beauty and largeness in the world which is allied with the terrible. His description of the "Sphinx" (which also represents classically the figuration of a question) is as follows:

Extending forward, parallel with the proboscis, and on each side of it, was a gigantic staff, thirty or forty feet in length, formed seemingly of pure crystal, and in shape a perfect prism,—it reflected in the most gorgeous manner the rays of the declining sun. The trunk was fashioned like a wedge with the apex to the earth. From it there were outspread two pairs of wings—each wing nearly one hundred yards in length—one pair being placed above the other, and all thickly covered with metal scales; each scale apparently some ten or twelve feet in diameter. I observed that the upper and lower tiers of wings were connected by a strong chain. But the chief peculiarity of this horrible thing, was the representation of a Death's Head, which covered nearly the whole surface of its breast, and which was as accurately traced in glaring white, upon the dark ground of the body, as if it had been there carefully designed by an artist. (H:v.6,241)

What is ironic about this passage is that the dreamer's description is as "scientifically" exact as his friend's in terms of particularity. He finds, not only Death, in the insect, but a correspondential relation between finite
and absolute. In Eureka Poe will also use a technical vocabulary and scientific information to found a worldview. He uses "descriptive and explanatory" means—but not to close and complete in categories and classification, but to reopen "science" to something that is alive. In his cosmic myth the old dichotomy between reason and imagination is resolved into a single consciousness through which the two visions of "The Sphinx" survive as active contraries.
CHAPTER VI

EUREKA: POE'S COSMOGONIC POEM

One must come to terms with Poe's desire as expressed in the "Preface" that Eureka be read as a poem, and not as a pseudo-scientific or philosophical treatise on the nature of the universe. There, he concludes:

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

(H:v.16,184)

Yet as I have stated in the introduction critics have refused persistently to take Poe seriously. Patrick Quinn, for instance, in The French Face of Edgar Poe states:

There is nothing of poetry, romance, or dream in the disputatious tone of the book, and despite Valéry's essay on it, Eureka must be put aside as one of Poe's failures. . . . He could not deal with his subject directly and by ordered demonstration. He needed imagery and dramatic action. Hence his success in fiction. The special quality of Poe results from his attempt to explore ontological problems through the medium of the imagination rather than the intellect. 1

Quinn's evaluation of Eureka does not consider it as cosmogony and as my earlier use of Edith Cobb makes clear, ontology as experience is always the point of cosmogony. Nevertheless, let us listen to what Valéry has to say about Poe in the essay Quinn cites before turning to our defense of Eureka as a poem. Valéry argues that Poe's universe
in Eureka, "is formed on a plan the profound symmetry of which is present, as it were, in the inner structure of our mind. Hence, the poetic instinct will lead us blindly to the truth." Or as Poe puts it in Eureka, "Man cannot long or widely err, if he suffer himself to be guided by his poetical, which I have maintained to be his truthful, in being his symmetrical, instinct." (H:v.16,302) The question of the grounds on which we are to defend Eureka as a poem must occupy the attention of the audience which Poe himself especially delineates. For he dedicates Eureka:

To the few who love me and whom I love--to those who feel rather than to those who think--to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities--I offer this book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth; constituting it true. (H:v.16,184)

Therefore in the face of Eureka's discursiveness, its use of science and rationality and its tendency to fall into digression, the appeal is not to the mere scientist or the rationalist alone, but to the "dreamer" or poet. The use of digression is, indeed, a mark of its authenticity as cosmogony, for digressiveness is traditionally a quality of the cosmogonic form. In spite of Poe's early attempt to set truth (intellect) outside the poetic concern, he commits himself here to not only a sense of beauty as primordial, but to an extraordinarily Keatsian identification of beauty with truth in the sense that poet meant it when he wrote
in a letter to Benjamin Bailey—"What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not—for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty."³ But instead of comparing Poe to Keats, Coleridge or Shelley, all of whom influenced him, I wish to move toward an alternate method by which to read *Eureka* on Poe's terms, recalling that even in the early criticism he does not exclude truth from poetry, but attempts to circumscribe it within the orders of the imagination.⁴

Patrick Quinn considers *Eureka* a failure as a poem on the grounds of its "disputatious tone," its lack of imagery (in contrast to the image-centered tales) with which to inform the philosophical and scientific ideas it set out to explore. In the first place, I believe it can be shown that *Eureka* is not at all devoid of image in spite of its discursiveness—that, in fact, image and idea are brought carefully together; that *Eureka*'s method is a demonstration of the way in which thought and feeling, idea and image, spring into consciousness and are held simultaneously. To explain or describe the illumination which holds image and idea is the method of science and philosophy—to re-enact them gives us poetry, in this case cosmogonic poetry. The poem for Poe draws consciousness back to the origin of the sudden illumination or "epiphany," which John Senior in his book *The Way Down and Out* defines as:
a significant moment in the consciousness of the character, a moment when the usually meaningless ebb and flow of ideas and perceptions--the "stream of consciousness"--suddenly makes a kind of sense.5

"These moments," Senior continues, "are crossroads in space-time when everything is seen as connected. . . . The significant moment in the stream of consciousness turns out to be a significant moment in the river of time, through all possible geography."6 Science, as Poe found it in the early nineteenth century and in its most constricted sense, had withdrawn perception from this active source or point of origination which is a crossroads, to a place where the image is lost--that is, separated out or abstracted from the "idea"--and so made use of the abstraction alone, setting the experiential aside. What Quinn fails to acknowledge about Eureka is that there Poe sets up a correspondent relatio

What Quinn and numerous critics like him fail to see, is that Poe is interested in not only the illuminations
themselves, but in the periods of unconscious work that precede and follow them. We have seen Poe playing with the role "subliminal" consciousness assumes in mathematical discovery in the tales of ratiocination. Thus when Poe dedicates Eureka to the dreamer, he is also addressing that aspect of dreaming consciousness which becomes luminous through an intense state of concentration which can only be compared metaphorically to scientific activity. Like Coleridge, Poe's early master, Poe is to maintain the centrality of the associative faculty that orders the streaming flow of disassociated subliminal images—that "essemplastic power" which, Coleridge argues, gives "unity to multiplicity." 7 Poe knows that the poet's task is to shape consciously the phantasmagoria of dreams—the "isonomia" or flood of dis-associated parts that must be brought over into a whole. In Eureka Poe comes to the realization that the "illusion" through which art works must find a ground in the real world of outer, perceptually based, concrete experience. Because of what Eureka attempts Poe is dealing simultaneously with the tradition of the poet as "vates," or seer and "maker" or craftsman.

In one sense Quinn is correct. Eureka simply fails if we read it as philosophy and as science. But because Poe does not offer it as either it cannot be judged on its philosophical or scientific merits alone. The philosophical and scientific "discoveries" reached in Eureka, indeed,
appear as common-places of the day when set outside the work itself. For instance, the traditional Romantic and Transcendental identification of the poet with God is a meaningless generality out of the context of the process of the discovery of the way in which human and divine realms (finite and infinite, etc.) intersect or depend on one another.

_Eureka_ holds up to criticism as a cosmogonic poem alone. The relative absence of imagery in _Eureka_ when set against the lyric poems of his early period, or against the tales, is explainable only in these terms. For traditionally the cosmogonic myth concerns itself with those raw and sacred energies that arise in the beginning of "mythic" time out of Chaos and non-being into Being, and with these activating energies in their primordial forms. Traditionally authentic cosmogony is less concerned with man himself and with the isolate human psyche, than it is with the larger "outside" movements that precede the appearance of man. Only through symbolic "annihilation" (which is simultaneously experiential) does the individual recover his original relation to these primal forces--does he actively participate in them and they in him. Thus it is inevitable that the landscape in _Eureka_ is not inhabited by the heroes and heroines of the tales--that the fantastic images of dream do not lie at its centre. To effect a return to a center where man is subsumed in Man in this way, language and symbol themselves must recover their original function--
they must be tied to experience and to actuality and also to the world (Cosmos). In this sense Eureka's central concern is with language and the use we are to make of it. Again Poe's relation to Coleridge and to a tradition where language (both spoken work and thought) is intimately related to action, is the only ground from which we can view Eureka as a poem.

As a cosmogonic poem, Eureka is Poe's singular attempt to reproduce or re-enact through symbolic expression (capable of holding oppositions in active relation) the creative processes that lie outside himself in nature in its largest sense—to transmute "nature" as such and so purify and transfigure himself. In a sense Eureka enacts a kind of ritual purification. It is Poe's last attempt to descend—to retrieve the "anima"—the exiled, feminine portion of his being. Eureka's mysterious centre, which is both the centre and periphery of Pascal's sphere, is a correspondentential symbol for the unknown and always mysterious source of power that molds brute matter into form. This is why the concern in Eureka is with the journey of "matter," with particles of an original "unparticled" matter, through its various stages of metamorphosis from the condition of the one (unseparated) to the condition of the many (separated). In Eureka matter is sentiment and on a continuum with thought or "electricity." Given in these terms Poe sets up a cosmos where thought is an act as much as is bodily.
motion through space. The thoughts of the poet, who in speaking them brings the world through himself and out, have a kind of physicality and extention in the world. Again, we are driven back to Poe's earlier sense of "the power of words." 9

In *Eureka* the idea of Beauty is interwoven with notions of universal order, harmony and rhythm—that is, "music" in the Greek sense of proportion, or as Poe calls poetry in "The Poetic Principle" (and earlier) "The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty." (H:v.14,275) The word "cosmogony" in its ancient sense is tied directly to the word "proportion." Margaret Alterton, in her *Origins of Poe's Critical Theory* identifies Poe's sources in *Eureka.* Pointing out that he probably studied Pythagoras, Plato and Leucippus, she states:

"He [Poe] is evidently impressed with "Pythagoras" doctrine that the world is an harmonious whole—that its very name means Kosmos or order." 10

She argues that from Plato he gained his sense, as expressed particularly in "The Colloquy," that music means creation in its widest sense, that is, proportion and adaption generally. 11 "By giving," she writes

the Platonic word the translation of "proportion" and not its usual meaning of "music," the real sense of music of the spheres comes to light, and with it the Platonic sense of unvarying law that is working in the astronomical world. 12

In "Marginalia" (1849) where Poe develops some of the ideas he is to expand in *Eureka*, he speaks of "that merely mathematical recognition of equality which seems to be at the,
root of all Beauty." (H:v.16,137) In Eureka Beauty becomes the paradoxical process of that destructive, but lawful and mathematical return of the many into the one. In "Marginalia" again (1849) Poe reiterates the notion that music is proportion: "By the 'Music of the spheres' is meant the agreements--the adaptions--in a word, the proportions--developed in the astronomical laws." (H:v.16,163)

Now the "anima" or Psyche of this universal harmony who was dark (Ligeia) in the tales is in Eureka associated with light or the luminous centre from which "Light issues by irradiation." (H:v.16,225) She is entirely pre-human, that is, a primal, transpersonal form of energy, and like Ligeia, undefinable except through the symbols that circumscribe the intangible core of her being. In Eureka light is associated both with thought and with the higher levels of consciousness. It is that strange energy that is neither material nor spiritual--both wave and particle:

To this influence--without daring to touch it at all in any effort at explaining its awful nature--I have referred the various phenomena of electricity, heat, light, magnetism; and more--of vitality, consciousness, and thought--in a word, of spirituality. It will be seen, at once, then, that the ether thus conceived is radically distinct from the ether of the astronomers; inasmuch as theirs is matter and mine not. (H:v.16,305-6)

One might draw an analogy between that luminous centre where the "rarified matter" tends to coalesce--the centre of the limited sphere in Eureka, with the white form that rises before Arthur Gordon Pym at the end of his sea journey in
the narrative of 1837. Yet there the question of what is
the nature of Pym's final "sea change" or ultimate
confrontation remains a mystery. Both "places," however, are
centres or states toward which the narrative moves—centres
of life and death. They can be seen to represent that zone
between the known and the unknown—the zone of both the
marvellous and the terrible. In Eureka the progressive
collapse of the universe is referred to the "awful Future."
Unlike the collapse of the dream on the dreamer it is not
a sinking into darkness but a bursting into light. As Poe
explains:

Of this End the new genesis described, can be but
a very partial postponement. While undergoing
consolidation, the clusters themselves, with a
speed prodigiously accumulative, have been rushing
towards their own general center—and now, with a
thousandfold electric velocity, commensurate only
with their material grandeur and with the spiritual
remnants of the tribe of Stars flash, at length,
into a common embrace. The inevitable catastrophe
is at hand. (H:v.16,808)

One might argue that as Poe moves through "The Narrative of
Arthur Gordon Pym" and toward Eureka black becomes or is
white; darkness is interchangeable with light, that is,
they are held in a dialectic of contraries. On another
level the dark and fair women of Poe's imagination are
held actively. The allure of the southern pole in "Pym"
is analogous to the magnetic, primal centre of gravity or
"attraction" that slowly but inevitably draws all matter-
spirit back to its objectless, imageless source in Eureka.
Image is returned to imagelessness. And the parallel be-
tween "Pym" and Eureka is reinforced further by Poe's use of
the mysterious "Mare Tenebrarum" or imaginary sea outside
time and space in both works, as well as in "Mellonta
Tauta." (1849) Like Coleridge's Mariner, Pym is drawn into
a haunted sea of the imagination, a mental landscape that
is grounded in the actual. We note that the introductory
epistle to Eureka, too, was found "corked in a bottle and
floating on the Mare Tenebrarum--an ocean well described
by the Nubian geographer, Ptolemy Hephestion, but little
frequented in modern days unless by the Transcendentalists
and some other divers from crotchets." (H:v.16,187-8) In
the tale "Hans Pfaall" (1835) the journey is not through
the austral sea, but through space to the moon. In a sense
both Poe's longest narratives and his cosmogonic poem are
journeys of consciousness into and through a sea--a sea
both of time and space.

In final response to Patrick Quinn's remarks on
Eureka I would argue that Poe is able to make use of a
technical and scientific vocabulary because he assigns a
place for the intellect, and ratiocinative intelligence,
within his cosmic order, exactly as he does in the tales
of ratiocination we have previously discussed and in his
critical essays. In Eureka it is as if Poe's lifelong
battle with what he called "the Heresy of the Didactic" in
art is at stake. He must defend poetry as a mode of
knowledge without committing his own heresy. For he suggests that the way in which we arrive at our sense of the beautiful and the truthful are processes metaphorically identical—that we "know" truth through our imaginative perception of beauty, that is, that the senses think. Thus Poe defends the intuition against the reason on the one hand, while insisting upon the rationality of the intuitive processes on the other. It becomes our job as readers to distinguish between inductive and deductive modes of thought, and the superrationality of the intuition. I belabor this point, perhaps, because the failure to make this distinction clear has made Eureka inaccessible to the general reader for too long. Inductive and deductive logic, says the letter-writer of the satiric-ironic epistle, are the two narrow and crooked paths—the one of creeping and the other of crawling—to which, in their ignorant perversity, they [mankind] have dared to confine the Soul—the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of 'path.'

But the point is not merely that Poe is able to use scientific and technical language, but that he chooses subject matter that is organically related to the form of the cosmology. Since he defines form and content in terms of one another both here and in the essays through his notion of unity of effect, we are to see in Eureka that as the content changes to hold a wider range of thought so must the form. In these terms we can see Poe as one of the first in America
to redefine poetic form in this way. His claim that *Eureka* is an innovation rests on this redefinition of form which begins to move him away from classic Romanticism. His rejection of the Miltonic narrative forces him as Williams puts it—"to break the ground"—into a totally other sort of narrative technique than that he had inherited from his immediate predecessors. *Eureka* must include epistemology, ontology, etc. since its business is to re-define our modes of perception and thus the "poem" becomes conscious of itself.

Eventually Poe's search for a science of the intuition, then, leads him to the discovery in *Eureka* that science is a mode of correspondences. We have already seen him working out his sense of the correspondential nature of the physical and so-called "spiritual" senses in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" and those tales of the period following 1840 which I have been called the "metaphysical" or "dialogue" tales. In *Eureka*, which is the issue of these tales, he arrives at a final sense of a correspondential relation between mind and world; the contrary conditions of unity and heterogeneity in their appearances, and the centre and circumference of a universal sphere or circle, which unlike that of Pascal, is limited rather than infinite.

But we must note again that Poe's knowledge of Swedenborg, Pascal, Coleridge, Keats, Schlegel and the English and German philosophers—his investigations into Neo-
Platonic and occult doctrines, etc.—all nourish Eureka, just as his interest in Jeremiah N. Reynold's south polar expeditions influences "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." It is not the intent of this paper to repeat the work of others who have traced Poe's sources for Eureka, but to demonstrate how Poe shaped that information (scientific and philosophical) into a whole—a cosmic order. For in Eureka Poe arrives at a sense of correspondences, thus anticipating the French symbolist movement, by availing himself of every tool the science, theology, metaphysics, religion, and philosophy of his day had to offer. He attempts, for instance, to "remake" Newton's law of gravitation into a cosmic Law of dynamic contraries and to show forth this "Law" in image. The commonplace law of gravity and the more recently discovered force of "electricity" which he receives through the ideas of Mesmer become the cosmic or secondary principles (laws) of the manifest world—the physical and spiritual principles of attraction and repulsion respectively. Poe reaches the discovery that what he conceives as substance is no more or less "substantial" than his notion of spirit. Such a statement involves a complete redefinition of substance and of object. He discovers that the visible world is held in the opposition of these primal forces, attraction and repulsion—forces which are present in potential before matter makes its appearance as phenomena. When attraction and repulsion
cease, matter ceases or is no more—is absent. "In this view," says Poe:

we are enabled to perceive Matter as a Means—not as an End. Its purposes are thus seen to have been comprehended in its diffusion; and with the return into Unity these purposes cease. The absolutely consolidated globe of globes would be objectless:—therefore not for a moment could it continue to exist. Matter, created for an end, would unquestionably, on fulfilment of that end, be Matter no longer. Let us endeavor to understand that it would disappear, and that God would remain all in all. (H:v.16,309)

I would suggest that much of Eureka's beauty as a poem, and therefore its "truth," rests on the notion of correspondences that underlies its structure—and the enactment of these correspondences in image. For the cosmic energies in Eureka are played out on many levels at once. Before turning to a definition of cosmogony by which to measure Eureka, then, let us not forget that as cosmogony, Eureka is the culmination of Poe's aesthetic theory. Here, too, the aesthetic rests on a sense of correspondences in which the universe is analogous, that is corresponds symbolically, to the work of art. Here Poe grounds art in perception and direct experience. One might argue that in Eureka the division of the "unparticled matter" into parts or the divided matter and spirit of the universe, mirrors macro-cosmically the division of consciousness into intellectual (rational) and intuitional (irrational) modes on the microcosmic or personal level. As Poe tells us in Eureka, God exists only in the divided matter and spirit of the
universe. One might say that, like Osiris in the ancient Egyptian myth, God's body is dismembered and scattered throughout the universe in Eureka. Thus Poe is able to assert that at present, "the Awful present," God exists only in the scattered matter and spirit of the universe. For this reason philosophically Eureka has been called a "mechanistic" theory of creation. In spite of the fact that Poe's information comes out of Newtonian and pre-Newtonian science through men like Kepler (1571-1630) and LaPlace (1749-1827) his vision is not naively mechanical. In Eureka it becomes the artist's or "dreamer's" task to re-assimilate God and so to remake elemental Beauty. The artist creates nothing--he simply makes the divine again intelligible. Similarly in Hesiod's "Theogony," our greatest example from antiquity of cosmic-mythmaking, the Muses do not create--they preserve what went before. For this reason Poe chooses not the image-symbol of "the watch" to represent the cosmos--but that of the heart.

Therefore, following the analogy between the universe and the work of art, one can argue from what Poe gives us, that on the microcosmic level consciousness is presently divided into the intuitive and rational faculties. Consciousness, held in the matter and spirit of the universe, exists in division. Just as attraction and repulsion are matter in Eureka, so intellect and intuition are consciousness as we know it. The warfare between these contrary poles
of the mind sustains life in its present divided or, one might say,"Fallen" condition. Poe calls it the "wrongful condition of the Many." (H:v.16,263) Yet when human consciousness in its fragmentation, whose domain is finite like the finite sphere of the universe, is pushed to the limits of divisiveness, the balance is upset and the intuition (through the principle of gravity or attraction) at last begins to dominate reason (complete it), drawing the intellect within its domain. The rational and intuitive modes of thought draw together by the same principles as do matter and spirit:

Thus the two Principles Proper, Attraction and Repulsion—the Material and the Spiritual—accompany each other, in the strictest fellowship, forever. Thus The Body and The Soul walk hand in hand. (H:v.16,244)

It follows by analogy that in the final coalescence when intellect and intuition merge, that consciousness would, like matter, disappear—that is, return to its undifferentiated state. But in Eureka the point is that only consciousness as we know it in the divided condition dies. The death of the self is the birth of the Self. Or as Poe writes at the conclusion of Eureka:

Think that the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness—that Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awful triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah. (H:v.16,314-15)
In other words, as in Swedenborg's cosmology, consciousness increases as it moves toward the centre of the sphere which is also the centre of individual being. Man becomes God. He does not lose his identity, but finds it subsumed in a new one through the death of the old.

Poe concludes *Eureka* with a passage in which he discusses man's inability to believe in his own mortality. He argues that

No thinking being lives who, at some luminous point of his life of thought, has not felt himself lost amid the surges of futile efforts at understanding, or believing, that anything exists greater than his own soul. (H:v.16,312)

Youth, he states, cannot believe "That there was a period at which we did not exist." (H:v.16,312) It cannot believe that an intelligence exists greater than its own or that it is inferior to any other soul. Here Poe is not committing a supreme act of "hubris," but in fact the very opposite. He is locating the presence of divinity, of an identity with the divine, in the depths of the self, and thus acknowledging an outer order. The self which "Youth" identifies with immortality and divinity is not the ego-self, locked in matter, but the freed cosmic Self aware of a proper identity with the God-centre. Such a centre is both "inner" and "outer." Only through memory, Poe tells us, does the soul re-establish connection with this source of energy and divine potency.

In *Eureka*, then, Poe proposes a world-picture in which cosmic law is mirrored actively on all levels—a universe
of order, proportion, and symmetry. It is as if at the place where thought and feeling merge, as they do in the "Colloquy of Monos and Una" and in Eureka, higher or cosmic law intervenes. Through a series of epiphanies which one can trace through the poem, Poe's sentient, spherical universe is held ultimately in the image of a great rhythmically expanding and contracting heart. The recognition that follows upon the revelation of the vision of the heart is itself grounded in the doctrine of correspondences. Poe ventures the supposition of eternal renewal or return of divine life at Eureka's conclusion where he writes:

Guiding our imaginations by that omniprevalent law of laws, the law of periodicity, are we not, indeed, more than justified in entertaining a belief—let us say, rather, in indulging a hope—that the processes we have here ventured to contemplate will be renewed forever, and forever; a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine? (H:v.16,311)

Here Poe pauses. His reverie leads him straight to the image of the heart itself and he asks: "And now—this Heart Divine—what is it? It is our own." (H:v.16,311) At this moment in the poem the revelation which scientific investigation has sought out and the returning proclamation of that revelation of divinity are fused—the word is momentarily one with the thing. Eventually we shall return to examine the image of the universe as a gigantic heart, an image uniting as it does "above" and "below"—human and divine, in the Hermetic and primary sense. For here Eureka falls.
into the mainstream of esoteric, occult and primitive tradition. In John Senior's terms:

"Epiphany" is no mere literary device, but the natural result of a world view of the symbolist movement in literature, and further, that no matter how misunderstood and misapplied, this is essentially the world view of a tradition older than history—"esoteric tradition," or the "perennial philosophy." 15

Through its use of the correspondential symbol *Eureka* aligns itself with that primitive or mythic world view in which all authentic cosmogonic poetry is grounded. Though we must keep in mind that the image of the universe as a heart is not original with Poe, except in his use of it. Emerson's statement in "The Over-Soul" reminds us that the image was "in the air," so to speak, in Poe's America:

> It is the doubling of the heart itself, nay, the infinite enlargement of the heart with a power or growth to a new infinity on every side. 16

Besides the fact that these are very different statements, both making use of the image of the heart, the point is that originality is not the issue here. Again it is the mode of discovery—*the way in which the image reveals itself, that draws *Eureka* into the cosmogonic tradition. Poe is not simply saying that the universe is *like* a pulsing heart, but as I suggested in Chapter I, that metaphorically and thus literally (perceptually) the world *is* a heart—*his* (the poet or dreamer's own) heart. This is not to suggest either, that Emerson does not use the image of the heart
metaphorically. It is simply that in *Eureka*, through the image—or as the image passes through him—the poet discovers a "place" at the centre of his own organism that is correspondingly the centre of the world. Only by enacting the biologically grounded image of the heart does the isolate poet participate in the divine. His heart is the world-heart. He is momentarily God. But for Poe, as we shall see, the problem of sustaining the vision remains.

In a sense Poe makes *Eureka* his most startling and ambitious attempt to open the circumscribed Eden and Hell of the pre-1840 tales by asserting a dynamic relation between self and the world. Eventually I wish to suggest why this act of giving birth to a cosmogony is Poe's last major act as an artist, and why in a sense it is a sacrificial, a self-destructive action--dcstructive in the sense that it demands the obliteration of the old self and the old poetic ground. But as a descendent of that most ancient of literary (originally oral) genres, the cosmogonic myth, *Eureka* is a unique expression of its time and place as well as the culmination of a poetic. Poe died the year following its completion, so it is ultimately the culmination of the whole of his work. The only major poem that follows it is "The Bells," where Poe turns again to the pure musical and rhythmical expression where meaning as we usually define it is caught up and subsumed in pure sound.17 "I have no desire to live since I have done *Eureka,*" says Poe in a
letter to his mother-in-law Maria Clemm--"I could accomplish nothing more." 18

It may serve to set Eureka against the oldest cosmogonic poem in the history of Western civilization: Hesiod's "Theogony." By using "The Theogony" as a kind of model, the way in which Eureka is a sensitive response to and expression of the world of Poe's experience becomes clear. Poe must confront, not the monsters of the Hesiodic landscape, but the mechanistic monstrosities of nineteenth century America. Like Hesiod's Zeus in "The Theogony" Poe must chain, yet dare not exclude the monstrous from his order. And Poe's monsters are not only the monsters of a rising technology, but monsters of a disembodied rationality loosed upon a world from which it considers itself separate. Poe's muse is what he variously calls "intuition," "feeling," and "his fairy guide Imagination," (H:v.16,224) thus defined in Romantic terms.

In Eureka the portals of the "machine" called the universe open to reveal the consciousness of the poet, actively engaged in the business of world-making; of ordering experience, both conscious and unconscious, into a greater whole. As Williams states in "The Wedge," "The Poem is a Machine made of Words." 19 I believe Poe would agree with him. For in Eureka as the "mechanism" of the rational mind is harnessed to the will of the imagination that will we recognize in "Ligeia"--the imagination comes to dwell in
the machine, to inhabit it, just as we see the little man
inhabit the chess automaton in "Maelzel's Chess Player." The "inhabited" mechanism awakes to a knowledge of its own sentience, intelligence and divinity in *Eureka*--its cosmic location. The discovery that the supposed machine is no machine at all leads to the revelation of a human universe. Divinity acts through existing beings and things--through the voice of the poet who is able to name the world.

Hesiod's "Theogony," any authentic cosmogonic myth, is characterized by a concern with "beginnings." Mircea Eliade in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* makes this clear when he writes: "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this obsession with beginnings, which, in sum, is the obsession with the absolute beginning, the cosmogony." In other words the primary function of the cosmogonic myth is to enact a return to origins; to the very beginnings of primordial or mythic, as opposed to merely historical time. *Eureka* stands as a cosmogony in the sense that its first concern is with the "original" condition, which Poe, drawing on the Platonic tradition of the One and the Many, chooses to call the "original and therefore normal" (H:v. 16,211) condition of the One:

Reaction is the return from the condition of as it is and ought not to be into the condition of as it was, originally, and therefore ought to be. (H:v.16,234)
And he continues: "... the greatest of all conceivable reactions must be that produced by the tendency to return into the absolutely original--into the supremely primitive."

(H:v.16,234) In the beginning of primordial time, Poe tells us, God created by an act of sheer will out of himself the "unparticled matter," matter undivided into parts; particles in their "utmost conceivable state of... Simplicity." (H:v.16,206) The assumption of absolute simplicity, then, becomes Eureka's sole assumption, that is, the original intuition of the poem which to perceive requires an act of "rational" faith:

This will be found the sole absolute assumption of my Discourse. I use the word "assumption" in its ordinary sense; yet I maintain that even this my primary assumption, is very, very far indeed, from being really a mere assumption. Nothing was ever more certainly--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:v.16,206)

The birth of this simple unparticled matter out of formlessness or the Void is the initial or primary act of creation. It is the unexplainable mystery that lies at the heart of Poe's cosmos. All other acts or principles are secondary acts of creation set off by the first. Hesiod, too, distinguishes between an initial and secondary acts of creation. There, too, the narrative both begins and ends in Chaos from which all other energies and forms emerge and to which they return. In Eureka the Void or
"place" out of which matter (attraction and repulsion) are born is the absolute centre of non-being on which the world of being, of essence, rests. In both Eureka and in the "Theogony" this condition of non-being, formlessness, undifferentiation or Chaos is the ground or original condition. The two conditions of the one and the many, or what Poe prefers to call homogeneity and heterogeneity, are active contraries in Eureka--they define and have their life in one another. In its particled or divided condition matter (consciousness) seeks "in a word, the utmost possible multiplicity of relation out of the emphatically irrelative One." (H:v.16,208) In the "Theogony" all sacred forms and divine energies (gods, goddesses, monsters, etc.), arise out of Chaos, ("chasm"), that realm in which all manifest creation is grounded. There, too, form only has meaning in terms of the formless; life in terms of death, darkness in terms of light, image in terms of the imageless, the visible in terms of the invisible. This list of contraries could be extended indefinitely. Thus from whatever pole one stands, the dialectic in the cosmogonic order is dynamic, both in Eureka and in the "Theogony." As Poe states:

Right is positive; wrong is negative--is merely the negation of right; as cold is the negation of heat--darkness of light. That a thing may be wrong, it is necessary that there by some other thing in relation to which it is wrong. (H:v.16,233)
Here "wrong" and "right" lose their moral implications. Poe is simply identifying wrongfulness with heterogeneity or the realm of relatedness. The condition of unity is the rightful condition because it is the original condition—the condition of irrelation. We will again take up the problem of dialectics in Eureka as a cosmic myth when set against the "Theogony." For now it is sufficient to recognize the way in which Eureka alligns itself with a primitive and occult world view.

Eureka's initial proposition tells us immediately that we are dealing with a cosmogonic myth: "In the Original Unity of the First Thing, Lies the Secondary Cause of all Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation." (H:v.16,185-6) In the opening proposition we are told that Eureka will attempt to re-enact a cycle that leads back to origins, through the creation of the world as we know it presently, and finally toward the "Annihilation" which is always "inevitable" in the cosmogonic myth because it deals with the beginning and the end. The mythical past and present contain the seed or "Germ" of the mythical future. Thus in Eureka, the poet who is able to tell of past, present and future with one foot in the world of time, assumes the role of "Vates" or prophet. For in mythical time and space where action is symbolic, there is no real separation of past, present and future in any historical sense. All actions occur in the present. "Annihilation".
is in *Eureka* a kind of initiatory death—the death of the old, divided self. It is also the death of a limited mode of perception and a birth into a new way of perceiving the world. We shall see how this is so by examining certain of *Eureka's* concluding passages where it is as if the pure lyric voice is the bare energy itself that charges the entire universe with life. There it is as if the self has found a centre in the local from which to speak, and, briefly, a single overcharged voice fills immensity.

In *Eureka* the illuminations or eruptions of epiphany through the dialectical structure signify the presence of the divine. Poe attempts to read the Creation—beginning and end—with scientific vocabulary. Epiphany occurs when he is forced by the experiential nature of his content, to drop from strict scientific vocabulary into analogy and image. The image of the heart bursts forth from the ground in this sense. At these moments the poem returns us to primordial time—to the beginnings; to the atemporal source from which all images and archetypes flow. The original act of creation, "That of Irradiation from Unity," (*H*v.16, 237) is renewed and made over fresh. The secondary acts of creation (the "principles" of attraction, repulsion, and irradiation or diffusion) in which the poet participates and which he rediscovers, make him into a kind of god. But as in Hesiod's "Theogony," the poet does not claim to create, but to record and preserve the flow of eternal
forms. He himself becomes the link with the outer order in *Eureka*.

Through his participation in the secondary acts of creation the poet in *Eureka* arrives at a sense of his own immortality. He finds it difficult to imagine a time when he did not exist. At the same time he participates in those energies that reside at the centre of both his being and the universe, and to the extent that he is able to mediate between poles of the dialectic—he is invulnerable to anything but mythic death. I mean to suggest mythic death is a transformation, a metamorphosis or change in form. He himself "brings over" the outer images by moving them through himself and out. Thus the portion of him that resides in mythic time and space at the centre of the sphere is in a sense divine—immortal. Thus it is that in

*eureka*, Poe, musing on childhood, is able to state:

> But now comes the period at which a convential World-Reason awakens us from the truth of our dream. Doubt, Surprise and Incomprehensibility arrive at the same moment. They say:—"You live and the time was when you lived not. You have been created. An Intelligence exists greater than your own; and it is only through this Intelligence you live at all." These things we struggle to comprehend and cannot:—cannot, because these things, being untrue, are thus, of necessity, incomprehensible. (H:v.16,312)

In *Eureka*, then, annihilation is a form of creation—just as it is in the tale "Ligeia." It is the necessary act of creation. As Eliade puts it: "Every ritual repetition of the cosmogony is preceded by a symbolic retrogression to.
Chaos. In order to be created anew, the old world must first be annihilated. In *Eureka* the slow return to unity--the gradual coalescence of the substance of the universe to a centre in the local is the ritual annihilation--the symbolic return to a condition of undifferentiation. Poe is careful, we note, to distinguish between a return to a center in the abstract and a return to a center in the local. By loosing his imagination on Newton's law of gravitation, which he first states baldly and scientifically, he asks the reader to pause with him for a moment,

in contemplation of the miraculous--of the ineffable--of the altogether unimaginable complexity of relation involved in the fact that each atom attracts every other atom. (H:v.16,217-18)

From this reverie springs the epiphany in which the poet, through the image of the finger that moves the speck of dust, (H:v.16,218) realizes that the universe is a sensitive network or web. Here he actively participates in the total interconnectedness of life and names that principle the law of "mutual reciprocity." We shall return to the emergence of the image itself. The recognition, however, at this point leads him on to the discovery that there is no universal centre in the abstract, but only a myriad of centres in the local:

Each atom, forming one of a generally uniform globe of atoms, finds more atoms in the direction of the centre of course, than in any other, and in that direction, therefore, is impelled--but is not thus impelled because the centre is the point of its origin. It is not to any point that
the atoms are allied. It is not any locality, either in the concrete or in the abstract, to which I suppose them bound. Nothing like location was conceived as their origin. Their source lies in the principle, Unity. This is their lost parent. (H:v.16,220)

In other words, there is no tendency to a centre as such, but merely, as Poe writes, "the tendency each to each." (H:v.16,220) Here Poe reaches behind science's law to get at principle: Unity is the original source of "Universal Phaenomena." (H:v.16,221) Like Coleridge's antecedent principles or "Laws," Unity is neither concrete nor abstract, noumenal or phenomenal--it lies behind these manifestations in the dual realm, but is none the less real. As in the early "Sonnet--Silence" Poe insists upon the incorporeal "other."

It is through Poe's enactment of what he calls "the still more awful future" of the universe (H:v.16,307) that the most powerful images rise to the surface:

The equilibrium between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of each system, being necessarily destroyed upon attainment of a certain proximity to the nucleus of the cluster to which it belongs, there must occur, at once, a chaotic or seemingly chaotic precipitation, of the moons upon the planets, of the planets upon the suns, and of the suns upon the nuclei; and the general result of this precipitation must be the gathering of the myriad now-existing stars of the firmament into an almost infinitely less number of almost infinitely superior spheres. In being immeasurably fewer, the worlds of that day will be immeasurably greater than our own. Then indeed, amid unfathomable abysses, will be glaring unimaginable suns. But all this will be merely a climatic magnificence foreboding the great End. Of this End the new genesis described can be but a very partial
postponement. While undergoing consolidation, the clusters themselves, with a speed prodigiously accumulative, have been rushing towards their own general centre—and now, with a thousandfold electric velocity, commensurate only with their material grandeur and with the spiritual passion of their appetite for oneness, the majestic remnants of the tribe of Stars flash, at length, into a common embrace. The inevitable catastrophe is at hand. (H:v.16,307-8)

The catastrophe is both amazingly beautiful and amazingly terrible. Here Poe's voice assumes the role of "Vates" or prophet. And it is through this enactment of "the End," the "final epoch" that the images of the poem become active. Fear is transformed into awe. Awareness of immortality and permanence arrives with the vision of mortality and impermanence—one rushing in upon the other as the opposites strive together in that final embrace. The spiritual and the physical ("material grandeur" and "spiritual passion") double in upon one another. Here it is as if all opposites indeed become active in the very process of their destruction or decomposition. Thus it is that in his discussion of archaic or primitive thought, Eliade stresses the necessary integration of creative and destructive forces in the cosmogonic myth as they play themselves out:

For archaic thought, nothing better expresses the idea of an end, of the final completion of anything, than death, just as nothing better expresses the idea of creation, of making, building, constructing, than the cosmogony. The cosmogonic myth serves as a paradigm, the exemplary model, for every kind of making. . . .
Since in the eyes of the primitives the cosmogony primarily represents the manifestation of the creative power of the gods, and therefore a prodigious irruption of the sacred, it is periodically reiterated in order to regenerate the world and human society. For symbolic repetition of the creation implies a reactualization of the primordial event, hence the presence of the Gods and their creative energies. The return to beginnings finds expression in a reactivation of the sacred forces that had then been manifested for the first time. 24

In Eureka the re-enactment of destruction is also the re-enactment of creation. The above passage from Eureka can be seen as an eruption of the sacred and divine energies through which we sense the presence of what Poe calls God. Thus our sense of the meaning of "the descent" is enriched in Eureka. Here the descent is back to origins, through destruction, to re-creation. For through the apocalyptic image of the final return, comes the poet's recognition of the identity of his heart with the Heart Divine. Poe continues:

But are we here to pause? Not so. On the Universal agglomeration and dissolution, we can readily conceive that a new and perhaps totally different series of conditions may ensue—another creation and irradiation, returning into itself—another action and reaction of the Divine Will. (H:v.16,311)

For the isolate poet who must take the burden of the ritual enactment for his time and place (the necessary periodic regeneration of the primordial event) upon himself—the metamorphosis can only be "painful." 25 And Poe refers to death repeatedly as "the painful metamorphosis." (see
"Mesmeric Revelation") In Eureka the single individual is forced to take on the responsibility of what was and should be a communal act, a ritual in which the entire community participates. Therefore when the individual poet takes it upon himself to reactivate those sacred forces and energies that are both creative and destructive, he runs the risk that those energies might overwhelm him. He runs the risk that the "daimon" or mediator between the human and the divine becomes the "demon." Because Poe must break through a Cartesian system where image and idea are not shared in symbol, it is as if the only symbol he has to offer up is the symbol of himself.

Thus in Eureka the narrative voice seems to multiply itself—almost it would seem in an attempt to set up a dialogue with itself. The narrator is by turns, for instance, Dupin, the cosmic detective unraveling the secret of the universe, the scientist, the astronomer, the metaphysician, the philosopher, and the critic. But during the moments of what I wish to call epiphany in the poem, the many voices blend into one, subsumed by the voice of the poet which transcends and contains the lot. At these moments in the poem the pure lyric voice raises to a level of intensity that is almost impossible to sustain, as well as dangerously close to that edge where language fails. It is the edge where silence is the only answer and the poem plays with Void—the absence of idea and image—the absence of meaning
itself. Experientially man finds himself between silence and speech. Critics have, of course, attacked Poe's near hysteria of tone in these passages, the tendency toward overstatement and repetition. I would argue in his defense that such passages are conscious revelations of the condition of divine mania or daimonic possession in keeping with the cosmogonic tradition in which the poet becomes a kind of shaman or vessel through which the "mad" utterance pours.

However unique as an expression of its time, I believe it can be shown that *Eureka* is a "mythologem" in the primitive and original sense of the word. I have found C. Kerényi's definition of mythological poetry in his "Prolegomena" to *Essays on a Science of Mythology* to be a useful measure of the extent to which *Eureka* stands up against the ancient cosmogonic tradition. In *Eureka* Poe is "scientific" in the mythological sense of the word, as we have already noted. In this sense, however, he is one of the first American poets to recognize the need to "demand back" from science what had been lost. In Kerényi's terms:

we can no longer dispense with the freedom from falsehood that true science confers upon us. What we demand besides this freedom, or rather "back" from science, is just this feeling of immediacy between ourselves and scientific subjects. Science herself must throw open the road to mythology that she blacked first with her interpretations and then with her explanations. . . . 27
This "immediacy between ourselves and scientific subjects" is exactly what Poe is after in *Eureka*. Kerényi's statement becomes a kind of defense of *Eureka* and of Poe in the face of accusations like those of Patrick Quinn, who objects to Poe's use of scientific material. But with the weapon of satire, irony and lampoon in the introductory epistle, Poe sets science against science—the sciences of inductive and deductive reasoning ("the creeping and crawling methods") against the science of the Soul "which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of 'path.'" (H:v.16,195)

Kerényi compares the "mythologem" or body of material of which myth is comprised to music. As he states in his essay: "Mythology is the movement of this material: it is something solid and yet mobile, substantial and yet not static, capable of transformation." The material which comprises *Eureka*, drawn as it is from varied sources, both from the worlds of "fact" and "fiction," is of this plastic nature. Through what Poe himself might identify with Coleridge's "essemplastic power" the poet must actualize the potentiality of form even if it demands that the imagination dissolve and dissipate (destroy) in order to create. Kerényi argues that as in music, where the art of the composer and the world of sound, his material, are fused, so in mythology, the shaper and the world he shapes
are brought together and unified. Perception must be held at the edge between these worlds—else sound is merely "sound" or noise. Poe, who is innately sensitive to the intimacies between music and poetry, molds a rhythmical universe whose rhythms are in harmony with the rhythms of his own body—with rhythms we might call biological. Man's universe is discoverable, according to Poe, through his "Symmetrical instinct":

Now symmetry and consistency are convertible terms:—thus Poetry and Truth are one. A thing is consistent in the ratio of its truth—true in the ratio of its consistency. A perfect consistency, I repeat, can be nothing but an absolute truth. We may take it for granted, then, that Man cannot long or widely err, if he suffer himself to be guided by his poetical, which I have maintained to be his truthful, in being his symmetrical, instinct. (H:v.16,302)

In Poe's myth, as we have already suggested, truth, like Beauty, is symmetrical—man's sense of proportion and harmony in the underlying laws of creation lead him to the discovery of both beauty and truth which, like the body and the soul, "Walk Hand in Hand." The principle of analogy becomes a scientific law of the imagination. Poe arrives at a perceptually based knowledge of what Kerényi calls the "combined pictoral, meaningful, and musical aspects of mythology" in _Eureka_, where it is impossible to separate while distinguishing image, meaning and music one from another. The image of the Heart, again, contains its "meaning" in the image itself and in its own music—the music of its rhythmical contractions. The power of "gravity"
which is the strongest force in the universe, and which draws all things together in that final "collapse," is to be associated with the power of Love itself--love the original and divine Eros.

Kerényi argues that as images stream out or "unfold" from the mythologem, that which streams out becomes objectified--that is, it "has become an object with a voice of its own" which must be allowed "to utter its own meaning." In other words, in a cosmogonic poem the forms and divine presences that are "born" out of Chaos soon take on a life of their own--independent from that of their source. In Eureka image and meaning break forth from the ground of Poe's "mythologem" taking on a life of their own in this very way. Poe does not speak through the image--the image is allowed to speak through him. It "utters its own meaning." Again the image of the Heart may serve as an example. The image itself utters the secret of the identity of self and world. Explanation breaks down in its figuring forth. The solid ground of Poe's methodology makes its appearance possible.

Eureka can also be seen as what Kerényi calls an "aetiological" myth. For paradoxically, it "is held to explain itself and everything else in the universe not because it was invented for the purpose of explanation, but because it possesses among other things the property of being explanatory." For this reason alone is Poe
able to treat of as vast a subject as "The Physical, Meta-
physical and Mathematical--of the Material and Spiritual
Universe--of its Essence, Its Origin, Its Creation, Its
Present Condition and Its Destiny," (H:v.16,185) without
moving into the realm of philosophy or becoming hopelessly
lost in generalities. Eureka is saved from the realm of
the merely explanatory by its use of the correspondential
symbol and through the eruption of living images. Poe's
claim that its Beauty constitutes Eureka's truth is directly
tied to the fact that Eureka "possesses the property of
being explanatory" without "being invented for the purpose
of explanation." Poe explains Laplace's Nebular Cosmology in
a lengthy digression halfway through the text, for
instance, in order to offer an analogy and a contrasting
system to his own world-picture of the origins of the
universe. He does not simply explain Laplace's theory,
but makes use of it to contribute to and reinforce his own
system. In the context of the cosmic poem Laplace's system
becomes a kind of paradigm or model within the larger order.
We should again note that digression used in this way is
a characteristic of the cosmogonic poem--which is usually
loosely structured like the "Theogony." In a sense
digression is perhaps the substance of the poem. So, in
spite of Poe's understanding of Aristotelian "mimesis" in
the early criticism and his Platonic statements as well,
Eureka as a cosmogonic poem is expressive of a pre-
Aristotelian notion of art.
As Kerenyi argues, "clarity streams out of every mythology—clarity as regards what is, what happens, and what is supposed to happen." As we have noted, Eureka is cosmogonic in its concern with the origins, the present condition and the future destiny of the universe. Only in this sense does it have a beginning, a middle and an end. But as Poe argues, "In fact, while we find it impossible to fancy an end to space, we have no difficulty in picturing to ourselves any one of an infinity of beginnings." (H:v.16,205) Thus Poe is able to choose arbitrarily a starting point—here the nature of "the Godhead." (H:v.16,205) But in Eureka one "may ascend or descend," writes Poe:

Beginning at our own point of view—at the Earth on which we stand—we pass to the other planets of our system—thence to the Sun—thence to our system considered collectively—and thence, through other systems, indefinitely outwards; or, commencing on high at some point as definite as we can make it or conceive it, we may come down to the habitation of Man. (H:v.16,198)

Poe prefers the descent, of course, but he makes use of both methods, giving us both points of view at once.

Like Eliade, Kerenyi argues that myth's primary aetiological concern is with the "ground" (begrunntend) or "first principles" of cosmic life. He describes these Aristotelian ἀρχαί or beginnings as:

no mere "causes," therefore, but rather primary substances or primary states that never age, can never be surpassed, and produce everything always. . . . They form the ground or foundation of the world, since everything rests on them.
In Kerényi's terms mythology is a "direct unquestioning return to the 'ἀρχάι,'" a spontaneous regression to the "ground." For the mythmaker, he states, "primordiality is the same thing as authenticity." 36

_Eureka_ is concerned with "origins" in this sense, with a seeking out of the first principles of cosmic life. The principle underlying Newton's law of gravitation is the desire or impulse of all matter and spirit to return to a centre where matter and spirit are one—to the principle Unity. Attraction, Repulsion, and Diffusion become the trinity of primal forces in Poe's cosmogony. We must keep in mind, however, that these are secondary principles—the first principle being the original force that separated the unparticled (unqualified) matter.

Poe defines the universe as a Pascalian sphere, "a Sphere of which the center is everywhere, the circumference nowhere." (H:v.16,205) After proceeding to adopt the Godhead or centre of the sphere as a "beginning," a contemplation of that centre leads him through a series of associations into the startling recognition that "in order to comprehend what he is, we should have to be God ourselves." (H:v.16,205) Almost immediately this consideration—or re-creation of origins—leads him to the active experience of his own origin as an identity with the God-centre. In Kerényi's terms: "As a developed organism he (man) experiences his own origin thanks to a kind of identity, as though
he were a reverberation of it multiplied a thousandfold, and his origin were the first note struck." And in *Eureka* this immersion of the self in the Self-centre or "ground" where the "two αρχαι--absolute and relative--coincide," is experienced as just such a reverberation.

"If I venture to displace," muses Poe, 

> by even the billionth of an inch, the microscopic speck of dust which lies now upon the point of my finger, what is the character of that act upon which I have adventured? I have done a deed 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 multitudinous myriads of stars that roll and glow in the majestic presence of their Creator. (H:v.16,218)

At this moment of epiphany the image of the speck of dust on the finger holds the entire movement of the poem at that mid-point or "abyss of the nucleus, about which and from which our whole being organizes itself." The finger does not move and yet the brute potentiality for action is overwhelmingly active. The contemplation of the act becomes a kind of act itself. The pure potentiality of the image becomes that centre or "ideal spot where origination and our knowledge of the origins are identical." Being is "grounded" in an image that is both active and passive--that holds within it present, past and future. At this mid-point human and divine energies may be said to meet. Here, too, self and world are entirely interconnected. The image is a perfect representation of Poe's philosophical
doctrino of "mutual reciprocity." The simple displacement of a speck of dust on a human finger becomes an act of divine potency. In the contemplation of the act identity reverberates a "thousandfold" from the place of origination—the place where the finger meets the speck of dust by way of the participating mind, just as we have seen it reverberate in "The Power of Words." Hence Poe asks, "Does not so evident a brotherhood among the atoms point to a common parentage?" (H:v.16,219) The common parentage lies, of course, in the first principle Unity which is only perceived through the imagination.

With this image Eureka explodes what Georges Poulet in The Metamorphoses of the Circle calls "the Romantic consciousness of the non-identity which distinguishes the self-centre from the circumferential self." In Eureka the world is again seen in its primitive and sentient wholeness, as a sensitive network. The centre is aware, both of its isolation, and of its total and astonishing interrelation with the whole. In the image of the finger that moves the universe, cause and effect are indistinguishable. Time and space are suddenly analogous. In Eureka one might say that the sleeper or concentrated self of the earlier tales discovers his absolute identity with the world.

By descending to the divine midpoint, Poe constructs or "founds" an image of the universe whose geometrical or mathematical (absolute) form is that of the sphere and
whose organic essence (relative form) is held in the image of the beating heart. The recognition in *Eureka* of an identity with the divine moves Poe toward what Edith Cobb calls "a place in which to discover a self."\(^{42}\) The "Place" where "it and I are one,"\(^{43}\) in Henri Bergson's terms, is in *Eureka* the centre of a sentient, finite sphere, which is simultaneously the centre of the human organism. In the descent to this centre where self and world correspond, the forgotten secret of the divine origins of the self is returned to memory.

In seeking out "first principles" Poe moves beyond the mutability of natural laws to reach the absolute or immutable "Laws" of which the unregenerated phenomenal world is an expression. More clearly than Emerson, Poe makes a distinction between "Nature" and the "God of Nature." In *Eureka* he writes:

That Nature and the God of Nature are distinct no thinking being can long doubt. By the former we imply merely the laws of the latter. But with the very idea of God, omnipotent, omniscient, we entertain, also, the idea of the infallibility of his laws. With Him there being neither Past nor Future--with Him all being Now. . . . He who, divesting himself of prejudice, shall have the rare courage to think absolutely for himself, cannot fail to arrive, in the end, at the conclusion that each law of Nature is dependent at all points upon all other laws, and that all are but consequences of one primary exercise of the Divine Volition. Such is the principle of the Cosmogony which, with all necessary deference, I here venture to suggest and to maintain. (H:v.16,254-5)
Poe's notion of God is not orthodox as his rejection of Milton suggests, neither is it Deistic or Pantheistic—it is primitive. For the Godhead is a non-moral force, a pure and original act of will—"That act by which a God, self-existing, became all things at once, through dint of his volition, while all things were thus constituted a portion of God." (H:v.16,225) Poe's God does not create out of nothing, but out of the unparticled matter, that is, out of himself. Poe's God is not a transcendent deity, for he exists in the diffused matter and spirit of the universe. Thus Poe's cosmic map of what he calls the "Awful Present" locates divinity, as I have suggested, in the diffused thought and matter of the universe—incarnate in the poet himself. Poe's cosmogony differs from that of Hesiod, for Poe is forced to seek divinity first through an isolate selfhood—and the whole era of Romanticism stands behind him. At present, Poe seems to be suggesting that divinity must be sought in the depths of the self rather than in the natural world from which it has fled. Only by descending to the very bottom of this selfhood may the original power be again made outer.

But the descent in *Eureka* through an isolate selfhood finally becomes what Kerényi calls a "leap into the world." Such a leap involves an exposure, making completely vulnerable the lyrical "I." As Kerényi states:
Spiritual origin is a sort of leap into the world—and woe is anything that wants to become actual when it corresponds to none of the possible aspects of the world, when it can unite with none of them! 44

Whatever Poe's problems with *Eureka*, it is a precise mapping of the universe of his experience. It is, then, not only a cosmogony, but a *cosmography*. It embodies perhaps more than anything else Poe wrote that drive to the "ground" of his experience of which William Carlos Williams speaks that sets him apart from his contemporaries. Nowhere is his concern with method more exacting. Nowhere is he so insistent on finding a centre in the local from which to apprehend the divine.
NOTES

CHAPTER I


2Poe defines Spirit as rarified matter in Eureka, but also earlier in "Mesmeric Revelation" (August, 1844) and in "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (December, 1845). In "Mesmeric Revelation" he writes:

"He (God) is not spirit, for he exists. Nor is he matter, as you understand it. But there are gradations of matter of which man knows nothing; the grosser impelling the finer, the finer pervading the grosser. The atmosphere, for example, impels the electric principle, while the electric principle permeates the atmosphere. These gradations of matter increase in rarity or fineness, until we arrive at a matter unparticled--without particles--indivisible--one; and here the law of impulsion and permeation is modified. The ultimate, or unparticled matter, not only permeates all things but impels all things--and thus all things within itself. This matter is God. What men attempt to embody in the word "thought," is this matter in motion." (H:v.5,245-6)

In Eureka God is defined ultimately in terms of matter infinitely "rarified" in an unseparated condition of absolute unity at the ground of all opposites.

3The exact way in which Eureka and the world view it implies can be seen to lead Poe into open form narrative, will be discussed in Chapter VI. Here I would only suggest that the dialectical interplay between world (form) and anti-world (void) in Eureka tends to open the narrative at any point to the world. By void I do not mean chaos, but the condition both prior to and subsequent to the coming of the world into form or order (cosmos). Void in Poe's sense is tied to both "the beginning" and "the end" of experience, opposites which enter into an active interplay or polarity. It plays with idea, image, meaning and their absence.
Poe's insistence that "Taste" is solidly grounded in nature is tied to this sense that criticism itself is not grounded in mere opinion. In "Exordium" (1842) he writes:

"That the public attention, in America, has of late days, been more than usually directed to the matter of literary criticism, is plainly apparent. Our periodicals are beginning to acknowledge the importance of the science (shall we so term it?), and to disdain the flippant opinion which so long has been made its substitute." (H:v.11,1)

And in that same essay he continues:

"our views of literature in general having expanded, we begin to demand the use--to inquire into the offices and province of criticism--to regard it more as an art based immovably in nature, less as a mere system of fluctuating and conventional dogmas." (H:v.11,2)

See the tale by this name, "The Power of Words" (June, 1845), for Poe's "creation myth." (H:v.6,139) We shall be turning to it in Chapter V. In "Marginalia" (1846) Poe writes:

"Now, so entire is my faith in the power of words, that, at times, I have believed it possible to embody even the evanescence of fancies such as I have attempted to describe." (H:v.16,89)

William Carlos Williams, in his essay on Poe in In the American Grain, is perhaps the first to define clearly Poe's struggle as a struggle with method. Poe's concern, writes Williams, "was to detach a method' from the smear of common usage--it is the work of nine-tenths of his criticism." (Williams, p. 221) Williams turns us back to the criticism where he argues that it is Poe's labor to "clear the ground"--to confront America with fresh terms by first forcing himself "to lift his head through a successful banality." (Williams, p. 226) Williams argues that Poe's battle for "originality" was a war with the conceptualizing faculties which allow man to abstract himself from direct experience--and so with a criticism and an aesthetic which contented itself "to be called by somebody else's terms." (Williams, p. 226) Williams cites the following passage from Poe's "Orion" (1844) on the importance of method to criticism:
"If a man--if an Orphicist--or Seer--or whatever else he may choose to call himself, while the rest of the world calls him an ass--if this gentleman have an idea which he does not understand himself, the best thing he can do is to say nothing about it; . . . but if he have any idea which is actually intelligible to himself, and if he sincerely wishes to render it intelligible to others, we then hold it as indisputable that he should employ those forms of speech which are the best adapted to further his object. He should speak to the people's in that people's ordinary tongue. He should arrange words such as are habitually employed for the preliminary and introductory ideas to be conveyed--he should arrange them in collocations such as those in which we are accustomed to see those words arranged."

"Meantime we earnestly ask if bread-and-butter be the vast IDEA in question--if bread-and-butter be any portion of this vast IDEA? For we have often observed that when a SEER has to speak of even so usual a thing as bread-and-butter, he can never be induced to mention it outright. . . ." (H:v.11,252-3)

See also Poe's statement on the importance of clarity and simplicity of method in "Rufus Dawes" (October, 1842):

"The wildest and most erratic effusion of the Muse, not utterly worthless, will be found more or less indebted to method for whatever of value it embodies; and we shall discover, conversely, that, in any analysis of even the wildest effusion, we labour without method only to labour without end." (H:v.11,133)

7 Williams cites this passage and calls attention to Poe's use of the provincial "we," (Williams, p. 218) which indicates that Poe had a sense of belonging to a social and political community where thought and language is or should be a shared activity. I will be discussing Poe's sense of the political in Chapter IV.


Poe's use of irony will be discussed in Chapter IV. The ironic mode of the introductory epistle to Eureka, where Poe takes up the theme of the "perversion of Taste," is a clear example of his attempt to "clear the ground" and frame the narration with a fictional device.


Wilbur, ed., p. 29.

Williams, p. 230.

As Poe writes in the "Preface" to Eureka: "I present the composition as an Art Product alone: let us say as a Romance; or, if I be not urging to lofty a claim, as a Poem." (H:v.16,183)

It is not within the scope of this paper to trace in detail Poe's use of earlier myth, except where it turns up in the works I am considering. Poe's use of "Psyche" (see Chapter III) is one example of the way in which he turns back to an earlier image of the "Soul." See Roy Miki's "To Reconcile the People and the Stones" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1969) for an excellent discussion of the importance of the Greek world for Emerson and William Carlos Williams. I would argue that its importance for Poe is similar. Miki argues that the return to earlier sources is a return to modes of thought where the process of abstracting thought from image (reflective thought) had not yet set in. In his chapter on Emerson, Miki writes:

"Emerson turns to a mode of thought that contains experience by being an extension of it. Once again the Greek world, precisely because it concretized its relation to the universe through its mythology, is important to Emerson." (Miki, p. 60)

I would argue with Miki, that for Poe also the interest in early myth is an interest in the "primary."

Campbell, p. 192. Campbell also points out that Poe was familiar with the Koran, using "Sale's translation and his 'Preliminary Discourse.'" (Campbell, p. 193).

In "Pinakidia" (1836) Poe argues:

"No man doubts the immortality of the soul--yet of all truths this truth of immortality is the most difficult to prove by any mere series of syllogisms." (H:v.14,40-41)

In Eureka Poe will take up his notion of man's blind adherence to two "narrow and crooked paths to truth--the one of creeping and the other of crawling--to which, in their ignorant perversity, they have dared to confine the Soul--the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions utterly incognizant of path!" (H:v.16,195) Again Poe is arguing that philosophy and science have ignored a middle ground between knowledge of "fact" (detail) and abstraction (axiomatic truth)--that is, direct experience.

See Poe's criticism of the Transcendentalists in "Boston and the Bostonians" (1845) and his comments on Emerson's handwriting in "A Chapter on Autography" (1841). Here Poe is generous with Emerson, commending several of his poems, but naming him a "mystic for mysticism's sake" and accusing him of obscurity. (H:v.15,250) As Arthur Quinn points out in his biography:

"Poe . . . treated his contemporary [Emerson] more justly than did Emerson, who dismissed Poe much later with the phrase, 'the jingle-man.'" (Quinn, p. 328).

Roy Miki's thesis, "To Reconcile the People and the Stones," shows us how the Christian terms are brought over into Emerson's total vision. The "Over-Soul" or principle of unity in the world, Emerson calls the Holy Ghost. Miki substantiates the way in which Emerson "grounds" his notion of "Soul." In Miki's words:

"The most well-known of Emerson's terms, the metaphor 'Over-Soul' is perhaps an unfortunate description of the source because it suggests, especially when taken literally, a cause that
exists outside of and "over" the world. But it must be understood in the context of metamorphosis: as the 'secret' cause inheres in the physicality of objects, so the Over-Soul inheres in the physicality of man's life." (Miki, p. 52)

"Mesmerism" has come to mean for us simply the "hypnotic" or trance condition used in modern psychology, but through the philosophy of Franz Anton Mesmer, Poe is drawn into a psychological order very different from the one in which we feel at home. "Mesmerism" flourished at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries in Europe and hit America between June and July of 1841. The interest in Mesmer's propositions was intense in the U.S. and clinics were set up first in Boston for the study of "Animal Magnetism." Poe picked up the subject as a journalist sensitive to popular interest around 1841 and we can see him adapting Mesmer's notions to his own sense of duality in the fiction. See "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," (April, 1844) "Mesmeric Revelation" (August, 1844), and "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (December, 1845) for the development toward Eureka of Mesmer's ideas. Sidney E. Lind in his article, "Poe and Mesmerism," (PMLA, LXII [1947], 1086) points out that Poe used Townshend's Facts in Mesmerism for much of his information. In "A Chapter of Suggestions" (1845) Poe states that the "mesmeric condition is the extreme of reverie," (H:v.14,187) thus linking the mesmeric trance condition to his own sense of heightened sensitivity at the brink of sleep or death. Several good books on Mesmer are: Margaret Goldsmith's Franz Anton Mesmer--the History of an Idea (London: A. Barker, 1934), Ann Jensen's and Mary Lou Watkins' Franz Anton Mesmer--Physician Extraordinaire (New York: Harrett Publications, 1967) and Robert Darnton's Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France ((Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968). We should note that Mesmer, born in 1734, was not known for his theories until after his death. Yet his sense of the world and, correspondentially, the human body as saturated in a kind of "electric fluid" connecting all things, draws him into the same traditions that nourished Emanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Böhme (see Chapter II). Poe's own attraction-repulsion principle is a kind of "magnetic," reciprocal action and reaction by which the parts co-inhere in the whole of the cosmos. Margaret Goldsmith writes in her book on Mesmer's basic propositions, that for Mesmer:

"the human body . . . is saturated with this electric fluid, which can be connected up with the similar fluid in other living matter, such as plants and trees." (Goldsmith, p. 109)
This universally diffused, continuous "subtle fluid" pervading all things becomes "electricity" in Eureka and is so named the "spiritual" principle of the universe. It is the "unparticled matter" that is so physical, we must call it "spirit"—for lack of a better vocabulary. Mesmer's vision, like Poe's, rests on a sense of bipolarity—the poles of magnetic energy residing both in the body (self) and in the world, poles which under the mesmerist's guidance may be "communicated, altered, destroyed, and reinforced." (Goldsmith, 109-113)

24 Williams makes this point best in In the American Grain, where he states:

"It is natural that the French (foreigners, unacquainted with American conditions) should be attracted by the SURFACE of his genius and copy the wrong thing, (but the expressive thing), the strange, the bizarre (the recoil) without sensing the actuality, of which that is the complement,—and we get for Poe a REPUTATION for the eccentric genius, maimed, the curious, the sick—at least the unexplainable crop-up, unrelated to his ground—which had become his inheritance." (Williams, p. 222)

25 Wilbur, ed., p. 32.

26 See Arthur Hobson Quinn's biographical study for information on Poe's life—his "child-wife," Virginia Clemm, whom Poe married in 1836; his arguments with his foster father, John Allan; his reputation for "dissolute" behavior; his drinking, his use of drugs, etc. Quinn, by giving us the facts of his life, makes it evident that our image of Poe must be balanced by our knowledge of Poe's work as an editor and critic, his attempts to start his own magazine, "The Stylus," and his devotion to his family.

27 See especially Marie Bonaparte's introduction and the chapters on "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" and Eureka. (Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe [London: Imago Publications, 1949], 594-636). This work was first published in 1917.


29 I will be discussing the significance of Poe's descent of the rational mind into experience in Chapter V.
NOTES

CHAPTER II

1 Floyd Stovall, "Poe's Debt to Coleridge," UTSE, X (1930), 70-127. For further discussion of Poe and Coleridge see Margaret Alston's Origins of Poe's Critical Theory. Stovall demonstrates fairly conclusively that Poe was familiar with the Biographia Literaria (1817) as early or earlier than 1829, the date of the publication of "Al Aaraaf." Stovall also argues that most of the ideas Poe holds in common with Schlegel on "unity of interest" or "effect" comes through Coleridge first. (Stovall, p. 81). It is helpful to our discussion to note that as late as 1844 in a letter to James R. Lowell, Poe still considers Coleridge one of the "sole" poets:

"I am profoundly excited by music, and by some poems--those of Tennyson especially--whom, with Keats, Shelley, Coleridge (occasionally), and a few others of like thought and expression, I regard as the sole poets." (John Ward Ostrum, ed., Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, I [New York: Gordian Press, 1966], pp. 257-258.

2 Stovall, pp. 70-74. Stovall writes that Poe:

"is much impressed with the erudition of the Biographia Literaria. His praise of its author, therefore, is spontaneous and genuine; his occasional strictures, on the other hand, which seem mild enough when compared with his flippant ridicule of Wordsworth, may be charged to the conceit of youth. His references to Coleridge are most favorable around 1836; after that they are mostly noncommittal or derogatory. Corresponding to this change there is perceptible in his work an increasing reluctance to acknowledge his obligations to Coleridge. His passion for originality made him suspicious of others and inordinately apprehensive lest unwittingly he should lay himself open to the charge of imitation. (Stovall, p. 73)

3 Stovall, p. 127.

5 As Stovall writes: that

"Poe had read the Biographia Literaria (1817) before the "Letter to B__" goes without saying, for the critical theories there mentioned were unquestionably borrowed from Coleridge's book. These same theories, moreover . . . were conceived at least as early as 1829, the date of the publication of "Al Aaraaf." It is highly probable, therefore, that Poe had read the Biographia Literaria at that date or earlier. The very fact that Coleridge was one of the most famous and influential poets and critics living at the time would have led the young American poet and critic to read his literary autobiography at his first opportunity." (Stovall, p. 81)

6 In that review Poe writes:

"We feel even a deeper interest in this book than in the late Table-Talk. But with us (we are not ashamed to confess it) the most trivial memorial of Coleridge is a treasure of inestimable price. (H:v.9,51)

7 Stovall, p. 125. Stovall is referring to Coleridge's posthumous essay, "Hints Toward the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life" where (like Poe in Eureka) Coleridge defines the "essential dualism of Nature" in terms of attraction and repulsion.

8 Ibid., p. 126.


10 Ibid., p. 126.

11 Ibid., p. 127.

12 Stovall, p. 126.

13 The "Letter to B__" was printed as a preface to a collection of Poe's early poems in 1831, where it was titled, "Letter to Mr. __." The identity of B__ is uncertain, according to Arthur Hobson Quinn, who suggests that he was probably Poe's publisher, Elam Bliss. Poe's distinction between Ideal or Supernal beauty and the everyday beauty in time, is implicit in "Letter to B__," though not expressed in those terms until the "Drake-Halleck" review of 1836.
Poe probably is responding to Coleridge's statement in the *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XVIII, that "the property of passion is not to create; but to set in increased activity." (David Perkins, ed., *English Romantic Writers* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967], p. 464). Ultimately both Poe and Coleridge deny passion the creative function—in the sense of bringing something out of nothing. As we shall see, it is through Coleridge that Poe derives his sense of an absolute and dynamic relation between deep thinking and deep feeling.

The image of the volcano suggests that what is "unconscious" is not "repressed"—but simply not brought over into form. Note Poe's use of "volcanic" imagery in the poem "Ulalume." (1847):

These were days when my heart was volcanic  
As the scoriac rivers that roll--  
As the lavas that restlessly roll  
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek,  
In the ultimate climes of the Pole--  
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek,  
In the realms of the Boreal Pole.

Cited in *English Romantic Writers*, p. 454.

The relation of music to poetry is central throughout the criticism. In his review of Longfellow's Ballads (*Ballads and other Poems,* April, 1842) Poe writes:

"It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains that end upon which we have commented—the creation of Supernal beauty." (H:v.11,74-5)

And further on he continues:

"It may be, indeed, that this august aim is here even partially or imperfectly attained, in fact. The elements of that beauty which is felt in sound, may be the mutual or common heritage of Earth and Heaven. In the soul's struggle at combination it is thus not impossible that a harp may strike notes not unfamiliar to the angels... Contenting ourselves, therefore, with the firm conviction that music (in its modifications of rhythm and rhyme) is of so vast a moment in Poesy as never to be neglected by him who is truly poetical— is of so mighty a force in furthering the great aim intended that he is mad who rejects its assistance—content with this
idea we shall not pause to maintain its absolute essentiality, for the mere sake of rounding a definition. We will but add, at this point, that the highest possible development of the Poetical Sentiment is to be found in the union of song with music, in its popular sense." (H:v.11,75)

Both here and finally in "The Poetic Principle" Poe defines poetry as "The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty." (H:v.11,275) The above statement brings to mind the poem "Israfel" (1831) where the poet strikes chords on the lyre, "not unfamiliar to the angels." But more importantly here, such statements allow us to come to terms with Poe's use of exaggerated rhythms, rhyme and the ballad form in the poetry. Poe's aim is to join music in its higher Platonic sense of "proportion," "harmony" and "order"--together with music in the "popular" sense of song or ballad.

18 Cited in Poe's Debt to Coleridge, p. 87.

19 This is not necessarily to say one bypasses the senses, for one moves into the Supernal realm in Poe through them. The point is that an intuitive leap is required which no amount of cause and effect reasoning can impel. In the poem "Al Aaraaf" (1829) the Supernal realm mid-way between heaven and earth is created and sustained through the power of music. There Nesace, the spirit of Beauty and ruler of the star, sings the star into being and awakens the spirits of Al Aaraaf with song. The "Ligeia" of the poem, like the Ligeia of the tale by the same name, is the spirit of universal "harmony" whose "Harshest idea/Will to melody run." (M:109)

20 The entire "Drake-Halleck" essay is much indebted to Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIV. Two months later in June, 1836, Poe writes in his review of Letters, Conversations and Recollections of S.T. Coleridge:

"It has always been a matter of wonder to us that the Biographia Literaria here mentioned in the footnote has never been republished in America. It is, perhaps, the most deeply interesting of the prose writings of Coleridge, and affords a clearer view into his mental constitution than any other of his works. Why cannot some of our publishers undertake it? They would be rendering an important service to the cause of psychological science in America, by introducing a work of great scope and power in itself, and well calculated to do away with the generally received impression here entertained of the mysticism of the writer. (H:v.9,52)
This passage speaks for itself on the extent to which Poe recognized the importance of Coleridge's thought "psychologically"—and ought to do away with some of our notions of Poe's "mysticism." He calls here for an art that is grounded in experience. Poe reviewed this collection of Coleridge's work (which contains some of the letters) as well as "Table Talk" in 1844. (H:v.16,61)

21 Cited in *English Romantic Writers*, p. 459. The complete statement is as follows:

"Remember that there is a difference between form as proceeding, and shape as superinduced;--the latter is either the death or the imprisonment of the thing;--the former is its self-witnessing and self-effected sphere of agency."

22 Cited in *English Romantic Writers*, p. 464.

23 In the "Letter to B___" Poe encourages his contemporaries not to trust age-old authority for its own sake on the basis of the mere opinion of others, but to look for themselves:

"This neighbor's opinion has, in like manner, been adopted from one above him, and so, ascendingly, to a few gifted individuals who kneel around the summit, beholding, face to face, the master spirit who stands upon the pinnacle." (H:v.7,xxxi)

Likewise in "Fifty Suggestions" (Text: "Graham's Magazine," May, June, 1845) Poe also complains against those who allow indirect opinion to define the terms of their experience:

"The world is infested, just now, by a new sect of philosophers, who have not yet suspected themselves of forming a sect, and who, consequently, have adopted no name. They are the 'Believers in everything Old.'" (H:v.14,179)

Eventually this complaint against authority will lead Poe into the business of finding a conscious methodology which does not separate form from content and man from direct contact with his world. Speaking of the art of "versification" in America in the "Rationale of Verse" (March, 1843) Poe complains that:

"They [our versifiers] pretend to no analysis; they propose nothing like system; they make no attempt to even rule; everything depends upon 'authority.'" (H:v.14,211)
Again the problem of authority is linked to the lack of a methodology.

24 Poe's interest in "phrenology" (the study of a correspondential relation between mental faculties and the conformation of the human skull) as a science informs much of his work and it is interesting to see him adapting its terminology to the criticism. It is an interest Poe shares with Coleridge, who also uses the term "Ideal" to describe the beauty the imagination seizes in process. See Coleridge's "Poetry is Ideal" (1811), cited in English Romantic Writers (p. 501). See also Poe's essay: "Phrenology, and the Moral Influence of Phrenology" (H:v.8,252), where he considers it as a science.

25 In the note Poe writes:

"The consciousness of this truth was possessed by no mortal more fully than by Shelley, although he has only once especially alluded to it."(H:v.8,283) Then follow lines from Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.' (H:v.8,283)

26 Barfield, pp. 110-111.

27 Poe would have received Hegel first through Coleridge, for as Barfield points out, Coleridge adopts "Hegelian (more properly Fichtean) terminology" (Barfield, p. 31), when he writes of the two primal powers at the ground of life. In "The Friend," Coleridge writes:

"The principle may be thus expressed. The identity of thesis and antithesis is the substance of all being; their opposition the condition of all existence or being manifested; and everything or phenomenon is the exponent of a synthesis as long as the opposite energies are retained in that synthesis." (cited in What Coleridge Thought, p. 31)

Similarly in Eureka, Poe, like Coleridge, and Hegel, will draw on both the terminology of philosophy and of science to express his sense of an underlying polarity that "manifests" itself in time by holding oppositions actively. Poe quotes Hegel directly on the "value" of philosophy in "Marginalia" (June, 1849):
"Philosophy," says Hegel, 'is utterly useless and fruitless, and, for this very reason, is the sublimest of all pursuits, the most deserving attention, and the most worthy of our zeal.'"

Poe mentions Swedenborg several times in the criticism and he was certainly familiar with Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell, since it is one of the books in Usher's library. (H:v.3,287)

Also one should note that "Swedenborgianism" was currently popular in America of the 1840's and Swedenborg societies had been established in all the major cities on the coast (particularly in the north). Poe often associates the "Swedenborgians" with Transcendentalism, New England and Emerson. A good basic introduction to Swedenborg's sense of cosmic dualism is his Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom (London: Swedenborg Society, 1833).

Poe and Swedenborg are particularly allied in their shared sense of a primal (infinite/uncreated, finite/created) duality. Through Swedenborg Poe would have picked up a sense of "communication by correspondence" between all opposites--finite and infinite; created and uncreated. Also Swedenborg is clear on the notion that the equilibrium of all things is from action and reaction," in the Divine Love and Wisdom. Poe's cosmos moves from a point of unity to a state of diffusion and back again, through a similar sense of a principle of action and reaction.

Poe was probably familiar with the thought of the German philosopher Jacob Böehme, though there is no direct reference to him in the works. Yet it is likely that Poe received Böehme both through Swedenborg and Coleridge, as well as his often mentioned studies in the "German philosophers." Through Böehme would have come an understanding of "emanation;" of world as the outer form or "figure" of an inner spiritual realm. For Böehme's thought, too, is grounded in a sense of actively joined opposites. Eureka can be seen as an unfolding of world and anti-world in this sense. Like Swedenborg, Böehme moves within a contrarium including a vast range of dynamically related oppositions--appearing, disappearing and reappearing. They are given in terms of finite-infinite, good-evil, darkness-light, etc. Through Böehme comes also the notion we find in Eureka of the universe as the diffused or scattered substance (body) of God. God is for Böehme and for Poe in Eureka, both spiritual emanation and substance. The spiritual "ether" is at once physical and spiritual. In Böehme's words in The Aurora (London: James Clarke, 1969):
"In the Holy Ghost alone, who is in God, and also in the whole nature, out of which all things were made, in him alone canst thou search into the whole body or corporeity of God, which is nature . . . ." (Boehme, p. 53)

See Boehme's The Aurora (London: James Clarke, 1960) and The Signature of all Things, where we receive Boehme's understanding of nature as a battleground or field of two forces in opposition:

"Seeing then there are so many and diverse forms, that the one always produces and affords out of its property a will different in one from another, we herein understand the contrariety and combat in the Being of all beings, how that one does oppose, poison, and kill another, that is, overcome its essence, and the spirit of the essence, and introduce it into another form, whence sickness and pains arise, when one essence destroys another . . . the one heals another, and brings it to health; and if this were not, there were no nature, but an eternal stillness, and no will; for the contrary will make the motion, and the original of the seeking, that the opposite sound seeks the rest, and yet in the seeking it only elevates and more inkindles itself." (Boehme, p. 13)

The above statement is an almost exact condensation of the "plot" of the tale "Ligeia." Through Boehme one might argue that the "combat" (which is the theme of the tale) is to see Ligeia herself revealed through a struggle of opposing powers. Ligeia herself is ultimately revealed through a struggle of opposing powers. She is the visible manifestation of that which is ever destroying and renewing itself. The poet must "will" to see (imagine) the divine in the world by reviving Ligeia from the disease of death itself. He must singlehandedly catch the energy she is at that point of interfusion of opposites--the creative and destructive powers she alone holds. Again it is always in proximity to death that the divine "manifests" itself in the world for Poe. In "Ligeia" he writes:

"Why shall I pause to relate how, time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revification was repeated; how each terrific relapse was only into a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death; how each agony wore the aspect of a struggle with some invisible foe; and how each struggle was succeeded by I know not what of wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse?" (H:v.2,266-7) [italics mine]

28 Cited in What Coleridge Thought, p. 35.
Cited in What Coleridge Thought from "an extract from Coleridge's notes written on his copy of the De Divisione Naturae of John Scotus Erigena." (p. 25)

In his chapter "Naturata and Naturans" Barfield points out that Coleridge defines "Natura" as "that which is about to be born, that which is always becoming." (p. 22) Therefore these powers may be seen to correspond to life and death as interpenetrating opposites--"naturata" being alive, active. Or as Barfield writes:

"Thus, the distinction between natura naturans and natura naturata reveals itself as resembling in quality that distinction between the act of thought and its product . . . natura naturata being [and he quotes Coleridge] 'the productive power suspended and, as it were, quenched in the product.'" (p. 24)

In a manner similar to that of Coleridge, Poe criticises Aristotle's failure to distinguish clearly between what Coleridge calls "natura naturans" and "natura naturata"--the laws which give rise to phenomena and phenomena themselves. This is clearly argued in Eureka at the opening of the treatise. In "Marginalia" (Nov. 1844) Poe writes:

"The fact is, that Aristotle's Treatise on Morals is next in succession to his book on Physics, and this he supposes the rational order of study. His Ethics, therefore, commence with the word--Μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ whence we take the word Metaphysics." (N, v. 16, p. 25)

By "metaphysics" Aristotle meant simply, "after Physics." Barfield argues that as Coleridge saw it, the failure to make this distinction lead him into the reductive classification of reality into phenomena (things) and noumena (abstractions)--leaving no middle ground. (Barfield, p. 24).

Cited in English Romantic Writers, p. 444.

Cited in What Coleridge Thought, p. 31.

Ibid., p. 27.

Ibid., p. 15.

Barfield, p. 36.

Poe refers to Coleridge's definition of the Secondary Imagination in Chapter XIII of the Biographia Literaria. It remains Poe's working definition of the Imagination:

"The imagination then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and Prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. (Cited in English Romantic Writers, p. 452)

Of the tale "Ligeia" (1838).

Poe links this remark, which crystallizes the theme of the tale, to Joseph Glanville, one of the "Cambridge Platonists" of the 16th century who explored the supernatural in Saducismus Triumphatus; or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions (London: Bettesworth and J. Battey, 1966). David Galloway in a note to "Ligeia" in his Penguin edition of the Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, points out that Glanville's "idealism" . . . embraced ancient Hebrew Cabbalism." (p. 527) Hence Poe's interest in Glanville again links the story "Ligeia" to traditions which view the world as an animate whole.

In Eureka Poe uses the term "Divine Volition." Divine Volition has there a double mode of operation in the "diffusive" and the "concentrating" powers of attraction and repulsion.


Ibid., p. 503.
NOTES

CHAPTER III

1Williams, p. 228.

2Wilbur, p. 15.

3Ibid., p. 6.

4In a note to the poem Mabbott notes that "To One in Paradise" was printed first in Poe's tale "The Visionary" which became "The Assignation." The poem was probably written before the end of 1833. I would add that it was at this time that Poe began to devote himself almost entirely to short-story writing.

5Later in "Marginalia" (Text: "Southern Literary Messenger," June, 1849) Poe will define art as "the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the Soul." (H:v.16,164) Through the hypnogogic condition of trance or reverie one moves back through the perceptions of the five senses in separation, into a realm or "ground" of Soul perceptions which give rise to the senses. In these terms to perceive through the "veil of the Soul" is not to perceive with the five senses as we know them (in separation), but through a "sixth" to which they give rise.

6There have been several good studies tracing the parallels between Poe's "Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" and Melville's Moby-Dick. See, for instance, John J. McAleer's "Poe and Gothic Elements in Moby-Dick,"ESQ, No. 27, 34).

7Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael (San Francisco: City Lights, 1947), p. 103.

8Olson, p. 102.
NOTES
CHAPTER IV


2Thompson, p. 20.

3"The Cask of Amontillado" (Nov. 1946) is perhaps Poe's classic tale of revenge. "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Feather" was published November, 1845, and "Hop-Frog" in March, 1849.


5Poe's sense of the unexpected as it arises out of the expected is structurally a way of sustaining dramatic intensity--a basic principle of suspense. Thus fear arises not just out of a series of linear events, but appears out of an enactment of those events as a state.

6Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ (New York: Hazell Watson & Viney, 1968), p. 33. To Nietzsche, Socartes represents the beginning of dialectical thought and the end in Greek culture of a form of discourse which is grounded in and refers to experience.


9Poulet, p. 109.

10Though the images of the whirlpool and the pit are similar in that they both represent disorientation, the abyss and a moving toward the edges of perception for Poe, it is important to note their differences for him as well.
The fears they invoke are distinct and Poe's choice of symbol is usually exact to suit the "effect" he wishes to envoke in the reader. The "pit" in "The Pit and the Pendulum" is horrifying because of its absolute motionlessness and its invisibility, while the fear of the whirl is a fear of a quick, sudden motion that sucks up all in its path.


12 Cobb, p. 538.

13 Ibid., p. 538.

14 Ibid., p. 539.

15 Ibid., p. 539.

16 Ibid., p. 539.

NOTES

CHAPTER V

1 "Antony and Cleopatra" also deals with patterns of life and death, image and illusion as a vast rhythm. Eiros and Charmion, Cleopatra's maids, die with her at the end of the play.

2 It is also important to notice that Poe's interest in language and the roots of words (etymology) is part of his conscious methodology. Again he is dealing with the loss and recovery of meaning and the meaning of meaning—to insist upon an ultimate mystery at the ground of life.

3 In May, 1829, Poe wrote to Isaac Lea, of the Publishers Carey, Lea & Carey:

"I send you, for your tenderest consideration, a poem--Its title is "Al Aaraaf"--from the Al Aaraaf of the Arabians, a medium between Heaven and Hell where men suffer no punishment, but yet do not attain that tranquil and even happiness which they suppose to be the characteristic of heavenly enjoyment. . . .

I have placed this "Al Aaraaf" in the celebrated star discovered by Tycho Brahe which appeared and disappeared so suddenly--It is represented as a messenger star of the Deity, and, at the time of its discovery by Tycho, as on an embassy to our world. One of the peculiarities of Al Aaraaf is that, even after death, those who make choice of the star as their residence do not enjoy immortality--but, after a second life of high excitement, sink into forgetfulness and death. . . ."

(M:92)

Even as late as the "dialogue tales" Poe yet refuses the "tranquil and even happiness" of the traditional Christian heaven--seeking a supernal realm where the oppositions are held in experience.

4 Poe draws upon the eighteenth century meaning of the word "sentiment," to suggest an intellectual or emotional "perception," rather than "a tender and refined feeling." (OED) It is also a term which comes out of his interest in Phrenology where the term is "used as the name
for the class of 'faculties' (including Veneration, Self-esteem, Benevolence, Wonder, etc.) which are concerned with emotion, and to which 'organs' are assigned at the top of the brain." (OED) Thus the term relates to the body as well as the mind, drawing the mental and physical together.

5 Edith Cobb's sense of "aesthetic logic" is again helpful—enabling us to get at Poe's distinction between knowledge of the senses "heightened in dissolution," and knowledge of the "deceased understanding." Again Poe borrows Coleridge's language to distinguish the two kinds of reason.

6 Constantly within Poe's symbolism the rectangular shape is associated with fallen vision and the landscape of hell—the sphere or circular shape, with Supernal beauty. In Eureka the universe is spherical and symmetrical—so as to suggest unity of vision, and a universe of limitation (spacial) within limitless space.

7 Agathism was a currently popular doctrine in the nineteenth century.

8 In Swedenborg's thought there is a marriage or active correspondence between the body and the mind, human love and divine wisdom. The influx of one into the other is called love. In the image of the sun, love and wisdom conjoin to produce light in a continual process of action and reaction. When in "The Colloquy" Una descends into the earth as light, she symbolizes such an influx and illumination of the darkness of the grave. Poe, however, is far from Swedenborg, in his refusal to see language as transparent. Light can as easily represent the demonic in his thought. Thus he remains always inside the experience of opposites. His main debt to Swedenborg comes through his notion of correspondences. See Swedenborg's Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom (London: Swedenborg Society, British and Foreign, 1833).
NOTES

CHAPTER VI


3 See any edition of Keats' letters for the letter to Bailey (November 22, 1817).

4 The sense of beauty as primordial in Keats—"whether it existed before or not"—also ties his poetry to the ontological—the beginnings or "ground" of being and becoming which is fundamental to cosmogonic thought. Knowledge is based on direct perception, so problems of epistemology—whether beauty exists in itself previously or otherwise is not the issue—but that we remake it through ourselves by participating in it. Poe's argument in Eureka is that perception is primary.

5 John Senior, The Way Down and Out (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. xii. Senior's work on symbolism is useful to Poe criticism because of the way in which it moves toward a definition of the roots of the symbolist movement—of which Poe can be seen to be a forerunner in America.

6 Senior, p. xii-xiv.

7 See again Coleridge's constant use of the term running throughout the Biographia Literaria, as well as his "Principles of Genial Criticism: Essay Third." In "On Poesy or Art" (cited in David Perkins, English Romantic Writers, p. 495) he writes:

"This unity in multeity I have elsewhere stated as the principle of beauty. It is equally the source of pleasure in variety, and in fact a higher term including both."
Here Coleridge pauses and then continues to link this first principle between the opposites "sameness and variety" or "unity in multeity" to his notion of form as a "proceeding."

"Remember that there is a difference between form as proceeding, and shape as superinduced;--the latter is either the death or the imprisonment of the thing;--the former is its self-witnessing and self-effected sphere of agency." (Perkins, p. 495)

Poe defines thought as analogous to electricity in the physical world in "Mesmeric Revelation." In this tale he also moves through his own sense of Coleridge's distinction between thoughts and the process of thinking:

"Motion is the action of mind--not of thinking. The unparticled matter, or God, in quiescence, is (as nearly as we can conceive it) what men call mind. And the power of self-movement (equivalent in effect to human volition) is, in the unparticled matter, the result of its unity and omniprevalence. . . ." (H:v.5,246)

For Poe, that which impells the "unparticled" or "infinitely rarified" matter is linked to the spiritual principle in the universe and to Mesmer's notion of electricity" pervading all things as an ether. It is closely tied to what in Coleridge's thought is "the two forces of One Power"--through which all opposites appear and in which they are individualized. Again Owen Barfield's discussion of this ground of interpenetrating opposites in What Coleridge Thought, is excellent. For Coleridge, too, electricity is a good analogy to the principle of "polarity." As Barfield points out in the chapter, "Two Forces of One Power," "polarity" is the law behind electricity which "reigns through all nature." This law is a kind of ultimate phenomena, "behind which the understanding cannot go." As Poe strains toward a similar sense of ultimate principles he writes in "Mesmeric Revelation":

"But the consideration of the atomic constitution being now taken away, the nature of the mass inevitably glides into what we conceive spirit, since it is impossible to imagine what is not. When we flatter ourselves that we have formed its conception, we have merely deceived our understanding by the consideration of infinitely rarified matter." (H:v.5,247)

Poe's sense of the correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm comes primarily through Swedenborg and ties Poe's thought to the esoteric traditions in which Swedenborg was immersed.

13 The public about the time Poe wrote "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" was greatly interested in an expedition then setting out to explore the Antarctic regions, fathered by a J.N. Reynolds, with whom Poe was briefly acquainted. For a fuller discussion of Poe's use of Kepler, Newton, LaPlace, Herschell, Dr. Nichol, Alexander Von Humboldt, James Hogg, etc., see Margaret Alterton's Origins of Poe's Critical Theory and Arthur Hobson Quinn's Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography.

14 In Eureka the Keplers, Newtons and LaPlaces become representatives of the ideal imaginative scientist. Poe's attempt is to push their theories beyond their own natural limitations as mere science, by infusing them with imaginative life.

15 Senior, p. xiv.

16 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson, I (Boston: Bellknap Press, 1903), p. 293.

17 "The Bells" was first published in November, 1849, shortly after the completion of Eureka. I would suggest that Poe's intention in this poem is to push sound beyond its bounds, making the ear aware not so much of bells themselves, but a hideous yet enthralling clanging and roaring which bells suggest but cannot alone recreate. Here in a different way than in Eureka, dropping discourse, Poe plays with sound and the absence of sound, meaning and the absence of meaning in sound--the breakdown and remaking of meaning through pure "effect."


20 I have discussed "Maelzel's Chess Player" in an earlier chapter.

22 Eliade, p. xiii.

23 Ibid., p. xiii.

24 Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

25 See Poe's description of the "painful metamorphosis" into eternal life in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una." Here Monos enacts a descent into the grave through the realm of death with Una as his guide.


27 Jung and Kerényi, pp. 1-2.

28 Ibid., p. 2.

29 Ibid., p. 4.

30 Ibid., p. 3.

31 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

32 Poe studied the Celestial Mechanics of Pierre Simon LaPlace (1749-1827) quite thoroughly and adapted his "Nebular Cosmology" to *Eureka*. It is interesting to note that LaPlace's notable work in mathematics included development of a theory of probabilities. Poe argues that the assumptions on which LaPlace grounds his theories (mathematical) are the same as those on which he (Poe) grounds his imaginative vision. Both men confine themselves to a definition of limited space and to a sense of gravity as the "omniprevalent law" governing the motion of a diffused matter in the universe of limitation. LaPlace's theories, according to Poe, are imaginative "leaps" from which he, like the poet, moves out. Poe's analysis of LaPlace's notion that the sun threw off a series of nebular rings of matter which coalesced into the planets, terminates as follows:
"His [LaPlace's] original idea seems to have been a compound of the true Epicurean atoms with the false nebulae of his contemporaries; and thus his theory presents us with the singular anomaly of absolute truth deduced, as a mathematical result, from a hybrid datum of ancient imagination intertangled with modern inacumen. LaPlace's real strength lay, in fact, in an almost miraculous mathematical instinct:--on this he relied; and in no instance did it fail or deceive him:--in the case of the Nebular Cosmogony, it led him, blindfolded, through a labyrinth of Error, into one of the most luminous and stupendous temples of Truth." (H:v.16,266)

Poe's argument is that where men like LaPlace rely on their perceptive powers of intelligence (imaginative), their scientific genius does not fail them. As Poe has told us in the first sentence of Eureka:

"I shall be so rash, moreover, as to challenge the conclusions, and thus, in effect, to question the sagacity, of many of the greatest and most justly reverenced of men." (H:v.16,185)

Poe's seeming brashness and audacity in challenging the greatest scientific minds of his day, must be attributed in part to his argument with the methods of science and the limitations it had imposed upon the man of genius. For here we find him praising LaPlace's genius in spite of those limitations. Where LaPlace fell down, Poe seems to be saying, is where he relied on secondhand information rather than his own two eyes:

"The fact is, this great man had, very properly, an inferior faith in his own merely perceptive powers. In respect, therefore, to the actual existence of nebulae--an existence so confidently maintained by his telescopic contemporaries--[the empiricists]--he depended less upon what he saw than upon what he heard." (H:v.16,266)

33 Jung and Kerényi, p. 6.

34 Ibid., p. 7.


36 Ibid., p. 7.

37 Ibid., p. 8.
38 Ibid., p. 9.

39 Ibid., p. 9.

40 Ibid., p. 9.


42 Cobb, p. 540.


44 Jung and Kerényi, p. 21.
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