FROM PLATO TO COLERIDGE: THE INFLUENCE OF THE PLATONIC TRADITION ON POE'S CRITICAL ESSAYS, TALES, AND POEMS

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PREFACE

My introduction to classical philosophy, especially the writings of Plato and Aristotle, had its origin during the years I was preparing for the philosophy comprehensive exam of the Baccalaureat Series A, through the guidance of my philosophy professor and friend, Mr. Girardot. Yet my inclination towards philosophy was preceded by an early infatuation with Poe's haunting poems and tales. For a young mind nurtured in a tradition that sanctified Beaudelaire and hailed Symbolism as a model in French poetry, the reading of "Le Corbeau," or "The Raven" was not an exotic exercise; it was instead so much of a commonplace that the name of the author of "Tamerlaine" was a household name. The legend that Mallarme learned English merely for the sake of intimacy with Poe's writings itself added a special note to the already-established fame of the American poet.

This study examines Poe's interest in the Platonic tradition and the importance of Platonic elements in his critical and creative writings from a thematic as well as structural point of view. The findings of the study are that the body of thoughts which gives a special cast to Poe's mind can be summed up as "Platonism." Indeed, Poe draws upon ideas characteristic of Plato's Dialogues and

of the writings of Plato's followers and admirers to impart his compositions with substance and structure.

The members of my committee have been exceptionally supportive and enlightening. I wish to thank Dr. Jane-Marie Luecke for her sympathetic encouragement and to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Azim Nanji for his unconditional support. I benefited much from the unforgettable services of Dr. Jeffrey Walker. I wish to thank him very much for his comments and suggestions as well as for his lectures on American literature. An all--inclusive list of my major adviser's services would be a long one. An initial list would include the ensuing contributions: enlightening lectures on fiction, patient guidance, and objective criticism.

I owe an overwhelming debt to Dr. Leonard T. Grant, President of Elmira College, for his multifaceted support; he served both as a mentor and a role model. I shall definitely resort to understatement when phrasing my indebtedness to Dr. Marsden, Dana Professor of English at Elmira College. He is more than a professor to me, more than a counselor. One cannot have un meilleur confidant and maitre de pensees.

I extend my gratefulness to the Fountain and Gleason families. I take this opportunity to acknowledge Marie A. Fountain's immense help through the years. Special praise is due to the Hamissous of Niger, Mrs. Barbara Lee of Elmira, Noy Promsuwansiri, and again Marie Rohrberger.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In his introduction to Poe's "Marginalia," James A. Harrison writes that the reader interested in Poe's "literary collectanea, can now follow him into this quaint region with the assurance that the poet's whole activity in this department has been faithfully placed before him. Repetitions there are . . . but this is probably due to the fact that the 'Marginalia' extended over a period of five years."[1] Yet this collection of miscellaneous passages is more than literary "chit-chat"; on the contrary, the passages constitute indispensable materials because, like the "Pinakidia"--another Poe compilation of disparate "quotations from the poets, aphorisms from the philosophers, lines and memorabilia from the men of literary generations gone by,"[2]--the "Marginalia" casts light upon the possible sources of the ideas informing Poe's works and on his position towards certain issues. It is in one of his "Marginalia" entries, for instance, that he makes this revealing utterance about reading:

> I have seen many computations respecting
> the greatest amount of erudition attainable
> by an individual in his life-time; but these

> computations are falsely based, and fall infinitely beneath the truth. It is that, in general, we retain, we remember to available purpose, scarcely one-hundredth of what we read; yet there are minds which not only retain all receipts, but keep them at compound interest.[3]

This paragraph is of cardinal importance for the student of Poe, for it unequivocally delineates the writer's attitude towards reading and intellectual enrichment. Poe suggestively adds that "knowledge breeds knowledge, as gold gold; for he who reads really much, finds his capacity to read increase in geometrical ratio" (XVI, 13).

When we notice the number of writers and works that Poe refers or alludes to in both his creative and critical works, we can safely assume that his statement about reading finds its roots in his own experience and that his vast reading is an integral part of his writings, as reflected by the various sources of his quotations and the large number of bibliophiles among his characters. For instance, the narrator of "Morella," like that of "Berenice," confides about his spouse and himself,

> Morella's erudition was profound. . . . I felt this, and in many matters, became her pupil. I soon however, found that, perhaps on account of her Presburg education, she placed before me

> a number of those mystical writings which are usually considered the mere dross of the early German literature. These, for what reason I could not imagine, were her favorite and constant study--and that, in process of time they became my own, should be attributed to the simple but effectual influence of habit and example.[4]

Among other learned Poe characters, we notice the narrator of "Ligeia"; even the self-deprecatory narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is preoccupied with books. Relating how he met the French detective, Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, he intimates,

> Our first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre. . . . It was at length arranged that we should live together during my stay in the city.... Had the routine of our life at this place been known to the world, we should have been regarded as madmen. . . . At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighted a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams--reading, writing, or conversing until warned by the clock of the advent of . . . Darkness[5]

Of course the list of learned characters in Poe's writings, especially in his short stories, cannot be complete without a reference to "The Fall of the House of Usher," where the narrator confides that Roderick Usher has a strong bent for reading.

In the hostile opinions of some men of letters, however, Poe's reading experience is limited. Poe indeed had many foes who, in reaction to Poe's attacks on their own works, retaliated with questions about the extent of his readings and with charges based on a half truth which, if closely examined, proves to be no truth at all.[6] As Charles Baudelaire puts it, "many people sought revenge. They spared no pain in hurling reproaches at him as his literary productions increased. Everyone is familiar with the long, banal litany: immorality, lack of feeling, lack of conclusion, absurdity, useless literature."[7]

It may be argued that some of the allegations against Poe were justified and that the fault lies partly with Poe himself, whose strictures against his contemporaries may have been harsh and at times unjustified; yet we cannot fail to recognize that some of the allegations against him stemmed from his enemies's hasty inferences drawn from Poe's peculiar rendering of neurotic characters like the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse."

Those foes who found fault with his personality, drew pictures of Poe that were reminiscent of William Wilson and

Roderick Usher; they often assumed that Poe and each of his neurotic dramatis personae are identical literary twins and that he must be held responsible for all their wild or perverse utterances; their shrieks and groans are too often perceived as coming from himself.[8] The trend started with Poe's first editor and biographer, the notorious Rufus Wilmot Griswold, who, in his "Ludwig" obituary, linked Poe to his fictional creation:

> Every genuine author in a greater or less degree leaves in his works, whatever their design, traces of his personal character; elements of his immortal being, in which the individual survives the person. While we read the pages of the Fall of the House of Usher, or of Mesmeric Revelation, we see in the solemn and stately gloom which invests one, and in the subtle metaphysical analysis of both, indications of the idiosyncracies,--of what was most peculiar--in the author's intellectual nature. But we see here only the better phases of this nature, only the symbols of his juster action, for his harsh experience had deprived him of all faith in man or woman. . . . Nearly all that [Poe] wrote in the last two or three years--including much of his best poetry--was in some sense biographical; in draperies of his

> imagination, those who had taken the trouble to trace his steps, could perceive, but slightly covered the figure of himself.[9]

In an earlier passage of the obituary, Griswold speculated about Poe's so-called "idiosyncracies" in these terms:

> He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses . . . or with his glances introverted to a heart gnawed in gloom. (p. 21)

Griswold's statements about Poe's personality, which remind one of Poe's "decrepit old man" in his tale "The Man of the Crowd," paved the way for a biographical reading of Poe's writings. Almost eight decades after Griswold's obituary, D.H. Lawrence, without Griswold's deprecatory intent, conjectured in his Studies in Classical American Literature that Poe "is absolutely concerned with the disintegration-process of his own psyche." He adds,

> Poe is rather a scientist than an artist. He is reducing his own self as a scientist reduces a salt in crucible. It is an almost chemical analyst of the soul and consciousness.[10]

Thus began, with Griswold and then Lawrence among many others, a biographical interest, which diverted

attention from the significance Poe's content might possess and reached its climax in Marie Bonaparte's Freudian interpretation of his writings and conclusion that Poe's neuroses dictated his compositions.[11]

In addition to attacking Poe-the-man, hostile critics also found fault with his writings, and among the early detractors of Poe's work were "the conservatives," "the hackneys," and "the cultivated old clergymen of the 'North American Review.'"[12] Emerson, for instance, referred to Poe, in a statement reported by William D. Howells, as "the jingle-man!"[13] Following this line of criticism, Henry James once declared Poe a "charlatan":

> It seems to us that to take him with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness one's self. An enthusiam for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection. Baudelaire thought him a profound philosopher, the neglect of whose golden utterances stamped his native land with infamy. Nevertheless, Poe was vastly the greater charlatan of the two, as well as the greater genius.[14]

Echoing Henry Jame's contention and announcing T.S. Eliot's statement that Poe was a man "of slipshod writing, puerile thinking unsupported by wide reading or profound scholarship,"[15] Aldous Huxley proclaimed in Vulgarity and Literature that Poe was "cursed with

incorrigible bad taste; he adds, "To most sensitive and high-souled man we should find it hard to forgive, shall we say, the wearing of a diamond ring on every finger. Poe does the equivalent in poetry; we notice the solecism and shudder."[16]

Emerson's and James' invectives against Poe also find their way into the writings of critics like W.C. Brownell, Norman Foerster, and Yvor Winters,[17] whose allegations show that some of the critical attacks against Poe undoubtedly derive from a misreading of his parodies. We know that Poe was in the habit of ridiculing the compositions of other writers as well as his own and often for the mere fun of it. "The Signora Psyche Zenobia" for example is as much a satire of tales published in Blackwood as it is a parody of his stories. In this tale, Poe's narrator is given advice in the following terms:

> . . . above all things is it necessary that your article have an air of erudition, or at least afford evidence of extensive general reading. . . . By casting your eye down almost any page of any book in the world, you will be able to perceive at once a host of little scraps of either learning or bel-esprit-ism, which are the very thing for the spicing of a Blackwood article.[18]

Any reader familiar with Poe's own writings will easily notice that the devices satirized in the story also echo Poe's frequent use of allusions, references, and quotations. Yet the tale is a clear evidence of Poe's seriousness about writing and genuine scholarship because, for the satire of the Blackwood tales to make sense at all, Poe himself must be against feigned erudition.

If Poe had enemies, he also counted a large number of defenders and admirers. Among the earliest favorable critical evaluations of Poe's work, we notice that of Margaret Fuller, who, despite Poe's attack on her writings, declares, "the writings of Mr. Poe are a refreshment";[19] in the same year, James Russell Lowell proclaimed Poe as "the most discriminating, philosophical, and fearless critic upon imaginative works who has written in America."[20] However, the most objective defenses of Poe-the-man and Poe-the-writer are of our century. Based on biographical and textual scholarship, modern criticism has cast light upon the extent of Poe's readings and the sources of the ideas that pervade his critical as well as creative works.

The considerable body of evidence at hand shows that the author of "Eureka" was indeed acquainted with many of the writers of the works which he mentions in his writings and that he possessed an encyclopedic mind.[21] As a result of Poe's vast reading, sundry conjectures have sprung forth concerning the variety of his readings,

his knowledge of foreign languages,[22] and particularly the origin of his ideas, which some scholars date back as far as generations before Plato. Cecil Don McVicker for instance connects Poe to Anacreon by establishing a structural parallel between "The Raven" and an Anacreontic poem fragment.[23] Following McVicker's path, Peter C. Page finds another classical pre-Platonic influence on Poe in the Greek philosopher Empedocles. In his article, Page points out that the "addition of Empedocles to Poe's list of 'savans' is likely to fuel further speculation concerning 'Eureka.'"[24] Some critics go even farther back in time to associate Poe with the Hebrew Bible. In his Biblical Allusions in Poe, William Forrest declares that Poe possessed a thorough knowledge of the Bible and that he was influenced by the Holy Book.[25]

Other critics like Palmer Cobb attach Poe's ideas to more contemporary periods by establishing a connection between Poe and German writers of the eighteenth century,[26] notably A.W. von Schlegel and E.T.A. Hoffman. Echoing G. Gruener's German reading of Poe's writings, Cobb's statement finds extension in Henry A. Pochman's study of the influence of German literature on Poe's writings.[27] It is also enlightening to notice the variety of non-Western cultures that are believed to have been sources of inspiration for Poe. In his study of Poe's works, especially of "The Fall of the House of Usher," Barton

Levi St. Armand, associating Poe's writings with the tenets of gnostic philosophy, asserts that when Poe's works are closely examined, we can easily discover a profound and detailed metaphysic which finds its roots in ancient Egypt:

> Poe's metaphysic derives precisely from those very unorthodox and even heretical doctrines which were current at the beginnings of Christianity itself and then suppressed or driven underground by the actions of such dogmatic Church councils as that of Nicea. It was from the philosophical tree of peculiar images and mystic speculation which flourished at Alexandria in the Egypt of the first and second centuries A.D. that Poe drew much of his imagery.[28]

Richard P. Benton suggests that "there is evidence in Poe's writings . . . which makes it certain that he read an essay on the Chinese drama and that he very likely read a Chinese novel or play."[29] The influence of the Arabic culture on Poe also finds its stewards among Poe scholars; following Moffit Cecil's track, Athar Murtza calls attention to the significance of the Koran as "another source that may have been germinal in the creation of Poe's tale"; that is "The Pit and the Pendulum."[30]

Although we cannot rule out the possibility of the influence of various writers and thinkers--an eclectic mind like Poe's could very well appreciate and absorb different and even contradictory theories--it is instructive to recognize the massive influence of Platonic ideas on Poe the critic and the artist. Until the publication of Margaret Alterton's Origin of Poe's Critical Theories, the influence of Plato and his admirers on Poe's criticism and creative writings has been neglected, if it has not been unnoticed. When one realizes the number of times that Poe uses Platonic catchwords like "soul," "immortality," "beauty," and "prison-house," terms all so suggestive of Plato's Dialogues and of the literature of the Platonic tradition, this neglect becomes stunning. The surprise increases when one discovers the frequency of Poe's allusions to Plato himself or to other Platonic writers like P.B. Shelley and S. Coleridge, the direct quotations from Plato's writings, his use of the Platonic dialogue technique, and the ease with which he moves in the realm of Platonic metaphysics.

Margaret Alterton breaks wholly new ground by asserting that Plato is a major source for Poe's critical theories,[31] yet she fails to perceive Plato's themes as pervading elements in Poe's creative writings. Her findings, although narrow in scope, have been seminal. In the past two or three decades for instances, the impact of Platonism on Poe's stories and poems has been subjected

increasingly to serious analysis. Richard. P. Benton led the way with his article "Platonic Allegory in Poe's 'Eleonora,'" which opens with the following statement: "A close examination of Poe's romance 'Eleonora' suggests that it is an allegory about the role of love in man's life and that this allegory was constructed upon a Platonic model."[32] Benton's findings about the influence of Platonism on Poe has been corroborated by more recent critical investigations.[33] These studies, however, although they open an instructive window into Poe's indebtedness to Platonism, are limited. A familiarity with Plato's Dialogues, the writings of Platonic thinkers, and with Poe's own compositions, will easily reveal that the extant studies are limited to a small number of tales and poems and that their very discussion of the presence of Platonic theories in Poe's writings is so brief as to be adequate.

The purpose of my study is to examine closely the influence of Platonism on Poe and to explore the pervasiveness of Platonic conventions in the creative as well as critical writings of Poe. Before embarking upon this undertaking, however, it is necessary to define what is meant by "Platonism," for the term is often a matter of confusion among scholars and an undecipherable shibboleth for the uninitiated student. The perplexity becomes more entangling when we add hyphenated expressions like "post-Platonic," "Christian-Platonism," and "neo-

-Platonism," which are themselves syncretic and richly figurative. The difficulty in hand then suggests the need for, with Poe scholarship in mind, a succinct definition of "Platonism" and related words in terms of origin, development, and significance in Western culture.

The sources of Poe's Platonism, as evidenced by his frequent allusions and direct quotations, are dual in kind; they stem both from Plato's own works and from those of his followers and interpreters, whose writings A.N. Whitehead interestingly calls in his Process and Reality a "series" of footnotes to Plato."[34] The clarification of "direct Platonism," of the body of thoughts found in Plato's Dialogues and letters, and of "hyphenated Platonism"--the imitations of interpretations of Plato's works--will be the subject of the second chapter.

It is important beforehand to call attention to the fact that the Dialogues are composed of several concepts presented as issues to be discussed by the conversants and which provide substance as well as structure to the text. The ideas expressed by the characters in the Dialogues are not to be ascribed to Plato, who, through an astute handling of point of view, keeps himself out of sight. As W.K.C. Guthrie points out, "he never writes in his person, and mentions himself twice only, both times in intimate connexion with Socrates."[35] Obviously, Plato's aim is not to establish a rigorous philosophical system

of fixed principles but to impart the essence of philosophy;[36] that is rigorous inquiry into ideas through the dialectical process.

Despite the characters' disparity of opinions about the issues discussed, there surfaces from the reading of the Dialogues a sense of order strong enough to impart unity. The "Symposium," for instance, offers a clear picture of Plato's concept of oneness among many. In this Dialogue, the conversants agree to sing praises to the god of love. Each of them lavishes encomiums in his own way, yet they achieve a cohesion as a group. In some other Dialogues, the interlocution starts with a set of questions-answer-refutations and progresses until the participants agree upon a final point.

The Dialogues, individually or as a whole, are meant by Plato to be thoughts in movement. The very dynamism of the developmental process of Platonic themes, upon which rests the posterity of Plato's philosophy, defines the expression "hyphenated," or "indirect Platonism." The survey of the line of Western thinkers whose writings serve aptly as milestones delineating the developmental stages of Platonism does not claim to be an inclusive presentation of the history of hyphenated Platonism, for such an undertaking cannot be the writer's task in this study. Accordingly, the survey will encompasss only the most representative writers whose abiding interest

in the works of Plato and in the scholarship on Plato have had on impact on Poe that is more than tangential or implicit.

The core of this study will investigate Poe's indebtedness to the Platonic tradition from two perspectives: thematic and structural. Chapter III will analyze the extent of Poe's interest in the Platonic spirit and method of inquiry through his defense of Platonism against Aristotle and thinkers whose ideas and methods Poe associates with Aristotle. Chapter IV will center on Poe's debt to the Platonic tradition for his ideas about the universe; the chapter will also analyze how Poe incorporates the theories of Platonic astronomers for critical and creative purposes. Chapter V will deal with Poe's borrowing of the Platonic treatment of love, and Chapter VI will investigate Poe's use of the Platonic icon of the metaphorical circle. The most original and noteworthy part of this study concerns Poe's use of Platonic ideas as narrative technique, for if Platonism has been sporadically traced as a source of thematic inspiration for Poe, no critical comment, as far as I know, has been made in connection with the narrative technique used in most of his tales.

NOTES

[1] James A. Harrison, ed., Introd., The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe (New York: AMS Press, 1902) XVI viii. All quotations from Poe's works will come from this edition: the Roman represents the volume number and the Arabic the page number.

[2] Harrison, Introd., XVI viii

[3] Edgar Allan Poe, XVI 13.

[4] Poe, II 27-28.

[5] Poe, IV 150-51.

[6] Floyd Stovall, "Poe as a Poet of Ideas," University of Texas Studies in English 11 (1931): 56. In this article, Stovall argues against the contention that Poe was an artist of word and not a poet of ideas.

[7] Charles Baudelaire, "Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and His Works," rpt. in Baudelaire on Poe, eds.,trans. Lois and Francis F. Hyslop, Jr. (Stage College, Pa.: Bald Eagle Press, 1952) 66.

[8] James Gargano, "The Question of Poe's Narrators," College English 25 (1963), rpt. in Critics on Poe, ed. David B. Kesterson (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1973) 57.

[9] See Rufus Wilmot Griswold's obituary published in New York Daily Tribune, 9 October 1849, rpt. in Critics on Poe 22.

[10] D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classical American Literature (New York: The Viking Press, 1923) 65.

[11] Marie Bonaparte, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-analytic Interpretation (London: Imago Publishing Co., Ltd., 1949) 22.

[12] Poe, "Tale-Writing--Nathaniel Hawthorne.--Twice-Told Tales," XIII 143.

[13] William D. Howells, Literary Friends and Acquaintances (New York: 1901) 63-65. The account appears in his chapter "My First Visit to New England." See also his article "A Hundred Years of American Verse," The North American Review 172 (1901) 152-53 for Emerson's statement.

[14] Henry James, "Charles Baudelaire," The Nation 22 (1876) 280. See also his work Hawthorne (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1879) 62, where he talks about Poe's vulgarity and pretentiousness.

[15] T.S. Eliot, "From Poe To Valery," The Hudson Review 2 (1949) 327.

[16] Aldous Huxley, Vulgarity in Literature: Digressions from a Theme (London: Chatto and Windus, 1830) 27.

[17] See W.C. Brownell's essay in Scribner's Magazine 40 (January, 1909) 68-84; Norman Foerster, American Criticism: A Study in Theory from Poe to the Present (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1928) 1-51; Yvor Winters, "Edgar Allan Poe: A Crisis in the History of American Obscurantism," American Literature 8 (1937) 379-401.

[18] Poe, "Zenobia," II 277.

[19] See Margaret Fuller's article in the New York Daily Tribune 11 July 1845 1, rpt. in Critics on Poe 13-14.

[20] James Russell Lowell, "Edgar Allan Poe," Graham's American Monthly Magazine 26 (Feb.,1845) 49.

[21] See Killis Campbell, "Poe's reading," UTSE 5 (1925) 166-96.

[22] For Poe's knowledge of Italian, see H.M. Belden, "Poe's 'The City in the Sea' and Dante's City of Dis," American Literature 7 (November, 1935) 332-34; see also Killis Campbell's "Poe's Reading," in which he points out that Poe could read Italian, German, Spanish, and Greek. He also writes that Poe could read French with ease. About Poe's knowledge of Greek, see Haldeen Braddy, Glorious Incense (Washington, D.C.: The Scarecrow Press, 1953) 81-83.

[23] Cecil Don McVicker, "Poe and 'Anacreon': A Classical Influence on 'The Raven'?" Poe Studies 1

(April,1968) 29-30. He writes, "it is possible that Poe first met with some of the basic structural and symbolic elements which he ultimately incorporated into 'The Raven' in his youthful perusal of Greek poetry, namely, in the writings of Anacreon or his translators or imitators."

[24] Peter C. Page, "Poe, Empedocles, and Intuition in Eureka," Poe Studies 11 (Dec.,1978) 21-26. In his opinion, Poe's borrowings might have come from a long familiarity with Empedocles' ideas; the writings of Empedocles might have struck Poe as being remarkably close to the Romantic notions of Poe's day. Let us note here that Page's statement is corroborated by Poe's following note in "Pinakidia": "Empedocles professed the system of four elements, and added thereto two principles which he called principium amicitiae and principium-contentionis. What are these but attraction and repulsion?" XIV 67. See also Burton R. Pollin, "Empedocles in Poe: A Contribution of Bielfield," Poe Studies 13 (June,1980) 8-9 for the influence of Empedocles on Poe.

[25] William M. Forrest, Biblical Allusions in Poe (New York: Macmillan, 1928) 1-3.

[26] Palmer Cobb, "The Influence of E.T.A. Hoffman on the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe," SP 3 (1908) 1-104; see also G. Gruener, "Notes on the Influence of E.T.A. Hoffman upon Edgar Allan Poe," PMLA 19 (March,1904) 1-25;

Albert J. Lubell, "Poe and A.W. Schlegel," JEGP 52 (January,1953) 1-12.

[27] Henry A. Pochmann, German Culture in America (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1957) 392.

[28] Barton Levi St. Armand, "Usher Unveiled: Poe and the Metaphysic of Gnoticism," Poe Studies 5 (June,1972) 1.

[29] Richard P. Benton, "Poe's Acquaintance with Chinese Literature," Poe Studies 2 (April,1969) 34.

[30] L. Moffit Cecil, "Poe's Arabesque," Comparative Literature 28 (1966) 55-69; see also Athar Murtuza, "An Arabian Source for Poe's 'The Pit and the Pendulum,'" Poe Studies 5 (December,1972) 52.

[31] Margaret Alterton, Origins of Poe's Critical Theory (New York: Russel & Russel, Inc., 1965) 111-12.

[32] Richard P. Benton,"Platonic Allegory in Poe's 'Eleonora,'" NCF 22 (1967) 293-97.

[33] See J.M. Armistead, "Poe and Lyric Conventions: The Example of 'For Annie,'" Poe Studies 8 (June,1975) 1-4; E. Arthur Robinson, "Cosmic Vision in Poe's 'Eleonora,'" Poe Studies 9 (1976) 45; Kent Ljungquist, "The Influence of 'Adonais,'" Poe Studies 10 (1977) 27-28; and Lou Ann Kriegisch, "'Ulalume'--A Platonic Profanation of Beauty and Love," Poe Studies 11 (June,1978) 29-31.

[34] Alfred N. Whitehead, Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology (New York: The Free Press, 1978) 39.

[35] W.K.C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) IV 8.

[36] Frantisek Novotny, The Poshumous Life of Plato (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff,1977) 20.

CHAPTER II

THE SOURCES OF POE'S PLATONISM

Direct Platonism

The essence of Plato's philosophy finds its best expression in the dialogues between the conversants. The dialectic structure of the interlocution, itself a metaphor of the Platonic dyad, often finds its resolution in synthesis. The learned conversations of the characters often revolve around divergent facets of an issue, but as the conversation evolves, reconciliation is achieved in a final statement usually made by Socrates. The opinions of the conversants are each a truth, but a partial one; as such, they are nothing but shadows of divine truth, from which they emanate and towards which they tend. Thus, in the realm of truth, as Plato suggests in his "Epistle," there exist two kinds of truth--one that is partial and that the naked eye can see and one that is complete and that the divinely-inspired eye only can perceive.[1] This difference, which marks the limitations of man and the transcendence of "Oneness" underlies the ontological and epistemological ideas of the Dialogues, as best expressed in "Timaeus," a Plato Dialogue that Poe more likely read.

It is of course difficult to pinpoint, with the exception of "Symposium," "The Republic," and "Laws,"

which Plato Dialogues Poe read, for Poe kept no diary or journal and left no biographical account of himself beyond the brief and inaccurate memorandum that he sent Griswold.[2] Yet there is enough textual evidence that Poe read "Timaeus." We can point out, for instance, his preoccupation with cosmology, his references to Plato in his cosmological tale "The Colloquy of Monos and Unas," and finally the fact that, although Plato approached the topic of cosmological order in "Gorgias" and "Philebus," in no other Dialogue does he treat the topic more substantially than in "Timaeus."

We can also draw inferences that Poe read "Timaeus" from the fact that this Dialogue was widely read by Plato's admirers and that it circulated extensively both in the original and in translation. Cicer, for instance, a Plato scholar whom Poe mentions several times and more likely read,[3] was familiar with the Dialogue and even translated part of it. Evaluating the significance of the Dialogue in the history of the Platonic tradition, W.K.C. Guthrie, one of the leading Plato scholar of this century, writes,

> The influence of the Timaeus down to the Renaissance was enormous, and interest in it has continued unabated, if from different motives, to the present day. One of its most perceptive commentators, T.H. Martin, called it "the most

> quoted and least understood" of Plato's dialogues. Plato's younger contemporaries were already disputing its meaning. Aristotle cites it more often than any other dialogues, and thought it worth while to write an epitome. Whatever he may have known of any "unwritten doctrines," he took the Timaeus as a serious exposition of Plato's own philosophy and science.[4]

Among other contributors to the wide reputation of "Timaeus," we also have Plutarch, whom Poe refers to in name at various occasions.[5]

According to the doctrine of creation in "Timaeus," the Demiurge created first the other gods, his offspring, to whom he later assigned the task of making man. Then ensued his creation of cosmos out of disparate elements:

> . . . finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of order he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other."[6]

So that the cosmos might become closer to the perfection of its maker, it was endowed with a soul which is invisible and everlasting and a body which is sensible and mortal. To complete his creation, the Demiurge brought into existence the animal category-- man and the other

species. He ascribed himself the task to furnish the immortal principle of the soul and bade the other gods to fashion the bodies of man and other animals:

> Gods, children of gods, who are my works, and of whom I am the artificer and father . . . now listen to my instructrions--Three tribes of mortal beings remain to be created--without them the universe will be incomplete, for it will not contain every kind of animal which it ought to contain, if it is to be perfect. On the other hand, if they were created by me and received life at my hands, they would be on an equality with the gods. In order then that they may be mortal, and that this universe may be truly universal, do ye, according to your natures, betake yourselves to the formation of animals, imitating the power which was shown by me in creating you. The part of them worthy of the name immortal, which is called divine and is the guiding principle of those who are willing to follow justice and you--of that divine part I will myself sow the seed, and having made a beginning, I will hand the work over to you. And do ye then interweave the mortal with the immortal, and make and beget living creatures, and give them food, and make them to grow, and receive them again in death. (pp. 22-23)

This passage is of paramount importance, for it sets the tone for two concepts that pervade both Plato's Dialogues and Poe's writings: the ideas of oneness and of the immortality of the soul. The passage also suggests that the completeness of the cosmos is a reflector of the Demiurge in the same manner a copy is a mirror of its original. Each part of the cosmos tells of the whole, for "everything that becomes or is created must be created by some cause"(p. 12). The notion that the soul partakes of the immortality and wholeness of its creator recurs in Plato's other Dialogues. "Phaedo" for instance proclaims that "our souls existed long ago, before they were in human shape, apart from the bodies, and then had wisdom."[7]

As the "Timaeus" progresses in its explanation of the genesis of life, we learn that the Demiurge made the soul of the cosmos in a bowl and later used the remnants from the making of the cosmic soul and the same bowl to fashion the animal souls; then he assighed each animal soul to a star, "showed them the nature of the universe, and declared to them the laws of destiny" (p. 23). All souls would start existence at the same time and none would suffer a disadvantage at the Demiurge's hands. The souls that lived well during their appointed time would return and dwell in their native stars to experience a blessed retirement. Those souls that failed to live righteously would continually be changed into lower brutes at their next births and would not cease from their meta-

morphoses until they conquer their evil nature.

The proclamation in the Dialogues that the soul existed before the making of the body, in which it is encased, ultimately leads to the Platonic theory of knowledge, which finds its best expression in "Phaedo" and "Meno," two Dialogues in which Socrates presents the idea that the soul possesses knowledge but loses it at birth; he also declares that knowledge is recollection: "if we got it before birth, and lost it at birth, and if afterwards, using our senses about these things, we recover the knowledge which once before we had, would not what we call learning be to recover our knowledge?"[8] In "Meno," the question of recollection and knowledge is not rhetorically asked but demonstrated. Socrates summons his interlocutor's servant-boy to show that, since the soul is immortal and passed through several incarnations, it has viewed all things everywhere and has knowledge of them all. The conclusion of Socrates' argument is that one may gain knowledge if one does not weary in seeking knowledge. He also distinguishes three categories of knowers: the Philosopher--who is earnest in his quest for wisdom because "virtue is shown as coming to us by divine dispensation, but we shall only know truth about this clearly when ... we first try to search out what virtue is in itself"[9]--the lover, who through the contemplation of mortal beauty can discover divine beauty, and finally the poet, who is divinely possessed and inspired when he utters his songs of truth.

Indirect Platonism

The centuries that separated Plato's writings from Poe's were not always characterized by steady and active studies of Plato; however, there was enough interest in his works among lay as well as religious scholars to secure the continuity of the Platonic tradition established by Plato's Dialogues and later propounded by "indirect Platonism." Plato's Academy, which Poe refers to in his tale "The Signora Psyche Zenobia," was founded in the fourth century B.C. and served as the fountainhead of the Platonic tradition and as a major vehicle for Plato's writings. When Plato died in 347 B.C., it is this very school and his writings that he bequeathed to the intellectual world. The school thrived until A.D. 529, thus counting several generations of disciples, who in their effort to diffuse the ideas in the Dialogues often modified those ideas through commentaries and interpretations. It is in this sense that Frantisek Novotny writes that Plato's philosophy matured and gave "birth to new ideas whose proliferation further disseminated the vital force of the original thoughts."[10]

The first bearer of the Platonic banner whose works Poe might have read in depth is Aristotle. Acclaimed by posterity as the greatest of all Plato's disciples at the Academy, Aristotle was, in the early stage of his development as a philosopher, an "emphatic and enthusiastic defender of Platonism."[11] Later, Aristotle deviated from

Platonism to develop his own world-view. It is this very deviation from the essential tenets of Platonism and his equation of reality with sense perception that are the subject of Poe's sarcastic allusions in "Eureka," "Bon-Bon: A Tale," and "Lionizing: A Tale." Controversial as they might have been, Aristotle's philosophical treatises contributed largely to the dissemination of the ideas in Plato's Dialogues at least in two ways: first they defined what he thought was the philosophy of Plato; second, they brought attention to the Dialogues by criticizing some quintessential tenets of Platonism. The ideas in the Dialogues might have reached Poe through the Platonism of Aristotle's early writings, but there is reason to believe that Poe read Plato's Dialogues before Aristotle's philosophical treatises. What is certain is that Aristotle's rejection of the cardinal principles in the Dialogues was offensive to Poe and had hardened his adherence to Platonism, as his "Eureka" reflects.

Poe's adherence to Platonism might have also been reinforced by Marcus Tullius Cicero's writings, although from a different angle. Unlike Aristotle, Cicero was a loyal steward of the doctrines in the Dialogues; his unconditional respect for Plato alone may account for Poe's admiration of Cicero himself, whom Poe refers to more than a dozen times in his works. This Roman scholar and statesman distinguished himself as a fervent student of Greek philosophy, especially of Plato's Dialogues. He was well

acquainted with the four Greek schools of his day and counted among the philosophers that he admired the Epicurean Zeno, the Stoic Posidonius, and the Peripatetic Staseas.[12] However, he was closer to the Academics in thoughts as a result of his education under the Academic Philo, who might have ignited Cicero's early interest in philosophy and in Plato, as Cicero's Brutus suggests. In his Academica, Cicero also mentions his studies under another Academic teacher, Antiochus. Though he found much to admire in some of the other Greek schools, Cicero identified himself with the Academy and the Platonic tradition.[13]

Cicero admired Plato more than any other philosopher and always referred to him in the most praising terms. For instance, in his letter to his friend Atticus, he refers to Plato as "our god," in De Legibus as "the divine man," and in Tusculanae Disputations as the "sacred and noble."[14] The style of Plato's Dialogues also found its way into Cicero's writings, for he considered Plato not only as the leading figure in philosophy but also as the finest stylist, the paradigm of "gravitate et suavitate," or depth and sweetness.[15] Several reminiscences of Plato technique are easily found in Cicero's writings. His De Republica, for instance, follows the structure of Plato's "Republic" and his De Legibus is patterned after Plato's "Laws."

Cicero also imitates Plato in his technique of characterization: where Plato uses Socrates, Cicero uses voices like Crassus in De Oratore, Scipio in De Republica, and Marcus in De Legibus. Explaining to Atticus why at one point in De Oratore he had to omit one of his characters, Cicero intimates,"You missed the character of Scavola from the scene. It was not without good reason that I removed him. Our god Plato did the same in his Republic."[16]

Cicero's Dialogues are not however sheer imitations of Plato's. In Socratic terms, his Dialogues are not dialectical in essence, for they do not search , by means of questions and answers, for a solution to the problem at hand.[17] Cicero's Dialogues resemble more those of Plato in which subsidiary persons listen to the exposition of the main character. occasionally interrupting him to express their agreement with the latter's statements. By comparison, Poe's Dialogues are closer to Cicero's in technique of narration, although closer to Plato's metaphysic in content. The similarity between Poe's and Cicero's technique of narration may be a matter of pure coincidence, but one can hardly discard the possibility that Platonism, direct or indirect, might have reached Poe, among many other channels, through Cicero's references to Plato and his translation of passages from Plato's works, especially "Timaeus," "Symposium," and "Phaedrus," three Dialogues that discuss the soul as

immortal and self-moving.

Cicero's endeavor to secure position for the philosophy of Plato in the Italian culture was not in vain, for his admiration for Plato easily found extension in the works of Italian writers of later periods, especially in the writings of Saint Augustine (354-430), Dante (1265-1321), and Petrarch (1304-1374). St. Augustine whom Poe refers to four times in his works,[18] was a major figure in the development of the Platonic tradition. His life, spanning the transitional years from Paganism to Christianity, was marked by his early affiliation to Manicheanism, a period that Poe suggestively alludes to in his article "Literary Small Talk."[19] St. Augustine ultimately departed from Manicheanism to join Jerome Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and the circle of Christian Neo-Platonists around Ambrose, a group that incorporated Platonism into its theology.[20] But years before his conversion, St. Augustine was already in contact with Plato's philosophy in the writings of Cicero, especially in Cicero's Hortensius and his translation of "Timaeus."[21]

In Milan, St. Augustine discovered the answers to the questions that worried him about Manichean doctrines.[22] He wrote in his Confessions, for instance, how lucky he was to have read the Platonists, who "led in many ways to the belief in God and His word."[23] Like the Milan Neo-Platonists, he found Plato's philosophy congenial to his Christian beliefs. Poe's allusions to St. Augustine's

early affiliation to Manicheanism and his quotation from St. Augustine's De Libris Manichoeis,[24] all suggest that he read at least some of St. Augustine's works, if not all, and must have noticed the Platonism of Saint Augustine's doctrines.

The influence of Saint Augustine was more noticeable in the writings of Dante and Petrarch. Both Saint Augustine's theory of divine love and the journey motif in his Confessions are salient elements of most of Dante's and Petrarch's compositions, although these two writers added a coloration of their own.

Poe, as his creative and critical works indicate, was acquainted with the writings of both Dante and Petrarch. His first mention of Dante appears in his attack on a certain Mr. Everett's contention in the North American Review that W. Irving was a better prose writer than Southey:

> There are points of approximation between Irving and Southey, and they cannot be compared. Why not say at once, for it could be said as wisely, and as satisfactorily, that Dante's verse is superior to that of Metastasio.[25]

Poe's interest in Dante's works also surfaces in his note to his review of Joseph R. Drake's The Culprit of Fay, and other Poems. Selecting "examples of entire poems of the

purest ideality," Poe cites Dante's Divine Comedy with the poems of two other Platonist writers--P.B. Shelley and S. Coleridge.[26]

Poe's references to Dante is not limited to allusions; he also makes extensive comments on Dante's works. In his favorable review of Francis Lieber's Reminiscences of an Intercourse with Mr. Niehbuhr, the Historian, Poe praises Niehbuhr's essay on Dante's Divine Comedy in these terms:

> This essay, we think, will prove of deeper interest to readers of Italian than even Mr. Lieber has anticipated. Its opinions differ singularly from those of all the commentators on Dante--the most of whom maintain that the wood (la selva) in this famous Allegory, should be understood as the condition of the human soul, shrouded in vice; the hill (il colle) encircled by light, but difficult of access, as virtue; and the furious beasts (le fere) which attack the poet in his attempt at ascending, as carnal sins.[27]

Poe also cites a line from one of Dante's most Platonic works. The line "O voi che per la via d'amor passate" [O ye who pass by the way of love][28] itself suggests that Poe was not only acquainted with Dante's Vita Nuova but also might have read the work in the original. As a whole,

the various references to and quotations from the Vita Nuovo and Divine Comedy, all point to Poe's abiding interest in Dante's works.

Poe's was also acquainted with the writings and biography of Dante's literary successor, Petrarch. In his review of Thomas Campbell's Life of Petrarch, Poe lavishes praises upon Petrarch in these terms:

> Petrarch is most important when we look upon him as the bridge by which, over the dark gulf of the Middle Ages, the knowledge of the Old World made its passage into the new. His influence on what is termed the revival of letters was, perhaps, greater that that of any man who ever lived--certainly far greater than that of any of his immediate contemporaries. His ardent zeal in recovering and transcribing the lost treasures of antique lore cannot be too highly appreciated. But for him, many of our most valued classics might have been numbered with Pindar's hymns and dithyrambics. He devoted days and nights to this labour of love, snatching numerous precious books from the very brink of oblivion. His judgment in these things was very strikingly correct; while his erudition, for the age in which he lived and for the opportunities he enjoyed, has always been a subject of surprise.[29]

A great admirer of Plato and Cicero, Petrarch was more of a poet than a philosopher in the technical sense. Although his fame rested essentially on his poems, he was also recognized as a serious scholar. An avid reader, he collected, annotated, and copied the works of his predecessors, especially those of Plato, Seneca, and Cicero. To Seneca, whom Poe assigned the line "Nil sapientia odisius acumine nimio" [nothing is more hateful to wisdom than too much cleverness], Petrarch is indebted for "moral declamation and the Stoic notions that appear in his writings."[30] Even greater is Petrarch's enthusiasm for Cicero, to whom he owes the form of his Dialogues, much of his information on Greek literature, and probably his strong interest in Plato.

Petrarch, like Cicero, was convinced that Plato was the greatest of all philosophers, greater than Aristotle, who had been the chief authority of Medieval Scholaticism.[31] Announcing Poe, Petrarch criticized some of Aristotle's ideas as well as derivative Aristotelianism, or the philosophy of those who have used his doctrines and methods in their own thinking. Yet, unlike Poe, Petrarch was far from holding Aristotle in contempt: he rejected such Aristotle theories as the attainment of perfect bliss during present life, but he recognized the superiority of the original Aristotle to his medieval translators, commentators, and followers.

Petrarch-the-poet found a rich legacy in the lyrical compositions of Dante. He followed, for instance, Dante's conceit of a bereaved lover worshipping a departed mistress now living among the stars. This topic, with its Platonic resonance, found its way both into the writings of Renaissance poets and later in Poe's works. Petrarch's celebration of the virtues of the departed Laura is thematically and stylistically presented in the canon of Vita Nuovo, which sings the divine grace of Beatrice, Dante's beloved mistress living in the skies. The Vita Nuovo also announced the theme of Divine Comedy, a work that marked a significant stage in Dante's philosophical and artistic development, as he shifted from the secularity of Convivio and De Monarchia to a more mystic and Platonic philosophy.

Another feature that Dante and Petrarch had in common is that they were not only influenced by the Platonic literature of the preceding periods but also by the literary conventions of their medieval society. Both were for instance under the influence of the lyrics of medieval courtly love propounded by the troubadors from Provence. The new twist that Dante and Petrarch added to the Platonic love of Plato's Dialogues is that the two Italian writers, where Plato presents ideal love through the friendship between two males, use the love relationship between a man and a woman. It is the very blending of Plato's ideas and metaphors with Christian theories,

Church icons like the "divine mother," and courtly lyricism that the Florentine Academy[32] inherited from the poems in praise of Beatrice and Laura and passed to the English writers of the Renaissance period.

The major Platonist poets of Renaissance England were Spenser, Sidney, and Shakespeare. How much these writers influenced Poe is hard to estimate. All that we can safely assert is that Poe read some of the works of these writers[33] and must have been exposed to their Platonism. Equally difficult to determine are all the roads by which the Platonic tradition reached Spenser, Shakespeare, and Sidney; yet it is clear that the vein of Platonism that runs through the writings of the three poets derives at least from two sources: the work of Plato--either in the original Greek or in translation--and commentaries on Plato's Dialogues and letters, mainly by the Italian Neo-Platonists of Florence.

Like Marsilio Ficino, Spenser followed the path of earlier Christian scholars by intermingling direct Platonism with the doctrines of the Church.[34] In his poem An Hymne of Heavenly Love, for instance, Spenser displays a strong affinity with Italian Neo-Platonism by alloying Plato's imagery with Christian icons.[35] Another Platonic element in Spenser is his treatment of beauty and love as reflections of divine perfection and as forces that inspire towards the good. His Faerie Queene, for example, introduces King Arthur as "the most fitte for

the excellency of his person."[36] However, Spenser adds that Arthur's education under Timon, "who in youthly yeares hath beene / In warlike feates the expertest man alive," needs to be perfected for the prince to be able "to read aright / The course of heavenly cause, or understand / The secret meaning of th'eternall might, / That rules mens wayes, and rules the thoughts of living wight" (F.Q., p. 119). More explicitly, Arthur needs to be helped by an uplifting force, notably the vision of the divine woman, the Faerie Queene.

The topic of love and beauty as well as other Platonic ideas that pervade Spenser's writings also surfaces in Sidney's works. Like Spenser, Sidney treats love as an inspirer of virtues. The locus classicus of Platonic love in Sidney is his Arcadia. The theme of love is presented as early as the very first chapter of the book. Introduced with description of the pastoral landscape, love is felt in the entire universe: "It was in the time that the earth begins to put on her apparel against the approach of her lover."[37] Let us notice here that the opening of the book also presents nature as a woman, with the landscape reflecting the Neo-Platonic idea that woman as the mother-figure constitutes the fountain of virtue.

Shakespeare deviated from the tradition of Platonic courtly love by reintroducing the idea of ideal love between males, in the canon of Plato's Dialogues.

There is nothing like Shakespeare's metaphor of a man's love for a boy in the literature of Renaissance England. Plato's idealization of this kind of relationship found no adept, if we exclude Shakespeare, among his English admirers and imitators. However, despite Shakespeare's singularity, his sonnets featuring the beloved boy echo the tradition of the sonnets of his era, a tradition that praises the beauty of love and its divine power. It is much in this sense that Paul Ramsey writes that "the poems to the young man are like prayers to God, and the boy is 'a god in love.'"[38]

Another noticeable innovation in Shakespeare is the metaphor of the "dark lady." The lady of the traditional sonneteer is presented as the paradigm of beauty, described in terms of flowers, jewels, and other precious icons. Her forehead is crystal, her cheek rose, her teeth ivory, and her neck alabaster.[39] Shakespeare's twenty six sonnets to his mistress present a woman of a different appearance:

> My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
> If snow be white, why then her breast are dun;
> If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
> I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
> But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
> And in some perfumes is there more delight

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love her to speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.[40]

Although this dark lady is unique in the body of Renaissance love sonnets, Shakespeare's poems to the lady are still noticeably Petrarchan: in them, we find the lover's frustations, lamentations, moral struggles, and spiritual growth.

The influence of Platonism ultimately abated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the rise of Rationalism, but it found a new momentum in the Romantic period. In a graph, the line representing the resurgence of Platonism in Western literature crosses the descending line of Rationalism somewhere in the 1770's in Germany and 1798 in England. Although the Romantic movement was more than a mere extension of the Renaissance, it showed striking similarities with the latter in terms of its attitude towards Platonic ideas such as poetic inspiration, beauty, and love.

The major Romantic writers upon whom Platonism had the most visible influence were probably Coleridge, Wordsworth, and P.B. Shelley, three major poets

whose works Poe was acquainted with. Poe often made comments on their writings, although from different perspectives; he, for instance, usually attacked Wordsworth on the one hand and praised Coleridge and Shelley on the other hand.[41] Poe's critical and creative writings also show some striking affinities with the works of Coleridge and Shelley as to allow a Coleridgean or Shelleyan reading of some of his most Platonic compositions.[42]

In retrospection, Poe's frequent allusions, references, and quotations from the writers of the Platonic tradition clearly show that the ideas in Plato's Dialogues reached him through direct as well as indirect Platonism. The following chapters, therefore, discuss Poe's use of Platonic theories and imagery in his writings.

NOTES

[1] See Plato's "Epistle" 7. 341 b-d, rpt. in Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, IV, 1.

[2] K. Campbell, "Poe's Reading," 166.

[3] For the page references of Poe's numerous statements about Cicero, see Burton R. Pollin's index book Dictionary of Names and Titles in Poe's Collected Works (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969) 20.

[4] W.K.C. Guthrie, 241.

[5] Poe refers to Plutarch in the four following works: "Some Words with a Mummy," VI 133; "Paul Ulric: or the Adventures of an Enthusiast," VIII 203; "Pinikidia," XIV 39 and 62; "Marginalia," XVI 7, 30, and 91.

[6] Plato, "Timaeus," rpt. in The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Random House, Inc., 1937) II 14. All subsequent quotations from "Timaeus" will come from this edition.

[7] Plato, "Phaedo," rpt. in Great Dialogues of Plato, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1959) 480. All subsequent quotations from "Phaedo" will come from this edition.

[8] Plato, "Phaedo," 479.

[9] Plato, "Meno," Great Dialogues, 68.

[10] Frantisek Novotny, 15.

[11] G.B. Kerford, "Aristotle," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2nd ed., I 153.

[12] P.H. De Lacy, "Cicero," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, II 113.

[13] For Cicero's study under Philo, see Cicero's De Natura Deorum, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge UP, 1979) I vi-vii. For his study under Antiochus, see Academica, trans. Hackam, same ed., II 7.

[14] Cicero, Atticus, trans. E.O. Windstedt (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1912) IV 16; De Legibus, trans. Clinton W. Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) 15; Tusculane Disputationes, trans. J.E. King (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971) 37.

[15] Cicero, De Oratore, trans. E.W. Sutton (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1942) 62

[16] Cicero, Atticus, 16.

[17] Novotny, 67.

[18] Poe, "Berenice," II 21: here Poe calls St. Augustine's "City of God" a great work; see also "Paul Ulric," where he states, "the divine Plato, called by some the philosopher of the Christians," with St. Augustine probably in mind; see "Marginalia," XVI 166.

[19] Poe, "Literary Small Talk," XIV 90.

[20] R.A. Markus, "St. Augustine" The Enc. of Philosophy, I 198.

[21] St. Augustine, Confessions, trans. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: The Wesminster Press, 1955) 64-65. For secondary information, see Novotny, 200.

[22] Confessions 64-65: "In the ordinary course of study I came upon a certain book of Cicero's, whose language almost all admire, though not his heart. This particular of his contains an exhortation to philosophy and was called Hortensius. Now it was this book which quite definitely changed my whole attitude and turned my prayers toward thee, O Lord, and gave me new hope and new desires." See also page 134-56.

[23] Confessions, 144-46.

[24] Poe, "Marginalia," XVI 45 note 3.

[25] Poe, VIII 49.

[26] Poe, VIII 299

[27] Poe, VIII 164. For a discussion of Poe's reading of Dante, see Joseph Chesley Matthews, "Did Poe Read Dante?" UTSE 18 (1938) 123-36.

[28] Poe, XIV 56. Line in Dante's Vita Nuova, trans.

Emerson, ed. J.Chesley Matthew (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960) 8.

[29] Poe, X 202-03.

[30] Paul O. Kristeller, "Petrarch," The Encyc. of Philosophy, VI 127.

[31] Petrarch, "Triumph of Fame," in Tryumphes of of Fraunces Petrarcke, trans. Lord Morley, ed. D.D. Carnicelli (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 142. See also Novotny, 327-28.

[32] See P.O. Kristeller, "Florentine Academy," The Encyc. of Philosophy, III, 206-07. See also Nesca A. Robb's Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), 57-89. The author presents the Platonic ideas of the group under the leadership of Marsilio Ficino.

[33] For Poe's references to the three Renaissance writers, see Pollin's Dictionary, which lists more than thirty-five times the name of Shakespeare, nine and eight times the names of Sidney and Spenser respectively. See also K. Campbell's "Poe's Reading"; Christopher P. Baker, "Spenser and 'The City in the Sea,'" Poe Studies 5 (December,1972) 5.

[34] See A.W. Satterthwaite, Spenser, Ronsard, and Du Bellay (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) 133.

[35] Spenser, An Hymne of Heavenly Love in Complete Works (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908) 750-54. See also Satterthwaite's comment, p. 138.

[36] Spenser, The Faerie Queene, ed. A.C. Hamilton (New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1977) I xi 6-9.

[37] Sir Philip Sidney, The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia, in The Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954) I 5.

[38] Paul Ramsey, The Fickle Glass (New York: AMS Press, 1979) 149.

[39] Edward Hubler, "Shakespeare and the Unromantic Lady," rpt. in Discussion of Shakespeare's Sonnets, ed. Barbara Herrnstein (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company,1964) 31.

[40] William Shakespeare, Sonnets, eds. Douglas Bush and Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1961) 152.

[41] Poe, "Poets and Poetry of America," XI 235, where he calls Wordsworth an incomprehensible poet. For his attack of Wordsworth with regard to didacticism, see "Stanley Thorn," XI 12-13; "The Drama of Exile," XII 33; "Marginalia," XVI 100&150. About Coleridge, see "Marginalia," 60-61; "Autography," XV 245; "Mystification,"

IV 106. About Shelley, see "The Landscape of Garden," IV 176; "Drake-Halleck," VIII 283, 299-301. This list is not all inclusive.

[42] See F. Stovall, "Poe's Debt to Coleridge," UTSE 10 (July, 1930) 70-127; K. Campbell, "Poe's reading"; Harry T. Baker, "Coleridge's Influence on Poe's Poetry," Modern Language Note 25 (March,1910) 94-95. For Shelleyan readings of Poe's works, see Kent Ljungquist, "The Influence of 'Adonais' on 'Eleonora,'" Poe Studies.

CHAPTER III

POE' DEFENSE OF PLATONISM AGAINST ARISTOTLE AND ARISTOTELIANISM

In the early part of his explanation of the creation of the soul, Timaeus tells his listeners that the Demiurge first made the soul of the cosmos in a bowl; then He used the same receptacle and the remnants from the materials with which He fashioned the cosmic soul to create the soul of animal categories. As such, Timaeus implies, the animal soul reflects the cosmic soul, and correlatively every part tells of the whole. In a like manner, Poe's "Eureka" aptly reflects the whole of Poe's composition. In terms of style, "Eureka" is a treatise in the same way "The Philosophy of Composition" or "The Poetic Principle" is a treatise; yet, to do justice to Poe, the composition is also a "poem" and a "romance" because of "the beauty that abounds in its Truth"[1] and its claim "to a certain latitude both as to its fashion and material."[2] If "Eureka" combines the style of Poe's essays, tales, and poems, it also alloys the sundry ideas that inform Poe's creative and critical works. Thus, because the treatise justifiably serves as an epilogue to Poe's entire literary production; it is the last work that Poe published--and because it stands as the <u>locus classicus</u> of Poe's theories, it is

relevant then to begin our study of Poe's Platonism with "Eureka."

Platonic elements surface in the very opening chapters of the treatise. Presenting the direction of "Eureka," Poe writes, "I design to speak of the Physical, Metaphysical, and Mathematical--of the Material and Spiritual Universe: of its Essence, its Origins, its Creation, its Present Condition and its Destiny" (XVI, 185). All these ideas are of course familiar to the scholar of the Platonic tradition and can be easily traced back to Plato's Dialogues. Yet Poe's announced topics are not without a peculiar difficulty. Because of the eclectic nature of the essay, the problem at hand is to decide the order of exposition of the diverse Platonic elements in the composition. Since one must start somewhere, I have chosen to begin with the Platonic background of Poe's attacks of Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition.

Poe's first reference to Aristotle in "Eureka" occurs in an ironic letter "found corked in a bottle and floating on the Mare Tenebrarum--an ocean well described by the Nubian geographer, Ptolemy Hepheston" (XVI, 187). The mocking tone of the letter is not surprising, for it is characteristic of the kind of lampoons that Poe often directs at Aristotle. As early as in "Bon-Bon," which appeared in the 1835 Southern Literary Messenger, Poe draws a derisive picture that has since remained the archetype of Poe's attitude towards Aristotle. To better understand

Poe's habitual satiric remarks, we need to place his rejection of Aristotle in its proper historical perspective. We may admit that Poe's attacks on Aristotle and Aristotelianism were partisan--he joined the time-worn conflict between the adepts of direct and indirect Aristotelianism and the defenders of Platonism, siding with the latter group--but we cannot fail to notice that he took great pain to understand the spirit and essence of Aristotle's writings.

Poe probably read Aristotle in the original as the appropriateness of most of his comments and allusions suggests. Equally possible is his reading of bibiographical comments on Aristotle. He mentions, for instance, Hermippus, Theophrastus, Andronicus, and Ptolemy Heuphestion, all of them historically credited with preserving some of Aristotle's writings, disseminating his theories, and with providing valuable information about his life.[3] It is then not surprising that Poe alludes to Aristotle's family tradition with striking cogency.

Aristotle, as Poe might have learned from Diogenes, was born in 384 B.C., forty years after Plato. He was the son of Nichomachus, a court physician to King Amyntas--the grand-father of Alexander the Great. Both Aristotle's father and mother claimed Ascelepiad descent, a claim which is not without importance since it suggests that they came from a long line of physicians and that Aristotle was introduced to biology, medicine, and other physical

sciences at an early age.[4] Poe alludes to Aristotle's inherited bent for biology in "Lion-izing--A Tale" and in "Bon-Bon." In the former, the persona confides,

> The first action of my life was the taking hold of my nose with both hands. My mother saw this and called me a genius. My father wept for joy, and bought me a treatise on nosology. Before I was breeched I had not only mastered the treatise, but had collected into a common-place book all that is said on the subject, by Pliny, Aristotle. . . .[5]

When his father died, Aristotle was later sent, at the age of seventeen, to enter the well-established Academy, where for twenty years he was Plato's disciple.[6] But an early thread of tradition has it that he had a quarrel with Plato that might have led to a break between the two. It is in this sense that Diogenes Laertius writes,

> . . . he seceded from the Academy while Plato was still alive. Hence the remark attributed to the latter: "Aristotle spurns me, as colts kick out at the mother who bore them." Hermippus in his Lives mentions that he was absent as Athenian envoy at the court of Philip when Xenocrates became head of the Academy, and that on his return, when he saw the school under a new head, he made choice of a public walk in the Lyceum where he would

> walk up and down discussing philosophy with his pupils. . . . Hence the name "peripatetic."[7]

Diogenes' mention of Hermippus in this passage suggests that he might have received part of his information about Aristotle from Hermippus, whose "most conspicuous contribution to Aristotle's bibliography was his determined effort to depict Aristotle as the founder of an original school of philosophy which was wholly independent of Plato and Platonic teachings.[8] What seems to give weight to the legend of Aristotle's secession is his numerous attacks on theories that he assigned to Plato and his successors at the Academy. Another reason is that, although he was a distinguished disciple, he was not elected as Plato's successor.

When Plato died in 347 B.C., Aristotle was long past the stage of being nothing but a receptive pupil--in the Academy, he had in fact the opportunity of teaching. Plato was ultimately succeeded by his nephew Speusippus to the direction of the Academy. The assumption in relation to this succession is that, if an election was held--as in the election of Xenocrates when Speusippus died--Speusippus' points of view might have found favor with the majority and been sharply opposed to Aristotle's.[9] Aristotle left Athens probably as a result of the choice of Speusippus as the new head. When he returned in 335 B.C., he ran his own school and took a stand opposite to Platonism.

The strictures against Aristotle were then begun centuries before Poe, but there was some room left for Poe to

contribute a few lines, such as his allusions to Aristotle's "terrible temper" in "Bon-Bon." In "Eureka," Poe is out of sympathy with Aristotle for two majors reasons: Aristotle's anti-Platonism and his dogmatism. Aristotle's anti-platonism, as seen by Poe, can be evaluated as residing in his rejection of the central Platonic concepts of knowledge and reality. Because we can hardly grasp Poe's criticism of Aristotle unless we understand the Platonic theories that Aristotle attacked, in what follows I shall elucidate the theories of knowledge and reality in Plato's Dialogues; next, I shall present an account of Aristotle's criticism of these theories in favor of his own. Then will ensue the analysis of Poe's rejection of Aristotle's anti-Platonism and of Aristotelian empiricism.

Plato's Theory of knowledge and Reality

Plato was well aware of the difference between a philosopher and a physiologist and did not feel called upon to offer a physiological account of knowledge.[10] His rejection of knowledge as the product of the senses has its roots in the works of some of the early thinkers mentioned in the Dialogues. Protagoras, for example, initiated the idea that "man is the measure of all things." This statement pervaded early Greek philosophy though some of Plato's predecessors rejected it.[11] Socrates' own rejection of this doctrine that knowledge comes from the senses is discussed in Plato's "Theaetetus." Because of the significance of "Theaetetus"

in the Platonic tradition, short quotations cannot of course suffice to indicate the nature of the central Platonic concepts that surface in the Dialogue. Therefore, I will present, with the aid of passages from "Theaetetus" as a guiding thread, the Platonic theories attacked by Aristotle and defended by Poe. The section we are concerned with involves Socrates and Theaetetus, a brilliant sciences student at the Academy.

> TH. It seems to me that one who knows something is perceiving the thing he knows, and, so far as I can see at present, knowledge is nothing but perception.
> SOC. Good; that is the right spirit in which to express one's opinion. But now suppose we examine your offspring together, and see whether it is a mere wind-egg or has some life in it. Perception, you say, is knowledge?
> TH. Yes.
> SOC. The account you give of the nature of knowledge is not, by any means, to be despised. It is the same that was given by Protagoras, though he stated it in a different way. He says, you will remember, that "man is the measure of all things--alike of the being of things that are and of the not-being of things that are not." No doubt you have read that.
> TH. Yes, often.
> SOC. He puts it in this sort of way, doesn't

he?--that any given thing "is to me as it appears to you," you and I being men.

TH. Yes, that is how he puts it.

SOC. Well, what a wise man says is not likely to be non-sense. So let us follow up his meaning. Sometimes, when the same wind is blowing, one of us feels chilly, the other quite cold.

TH. Certainly.

SOC. Well, in that case are we to say that the wind in itself is cold or not? Or shall we agree with Protagoras that it is cold to the one who feels chilly, and not the other?

TH. That seems reasonable.

SOC. And further that it so "appears" to each of us?

TH. Yes.

SOC. And "appears" means that he "perceives it so?

TH. True.

SOC. "Appearing" then is the same thing as "perceiving in the case of what is hot or anything of that kind. They are to each man such as he perceives them.

TH. So it seems.

SOC. Perception, then, is always of something that is, and, as being knowledge, it is infallible.

TH. That is clear.

SOC. Can it be, then, that Protagoras was a very ingenious person who threw out this dark saying for the benefit of the common herd like ourselves, and

> reserved the truth as a secret doctrine to be revealed to his disciples?
>
> TH. What do you mean by that?
>
> SOC. I will tell you; and indeed the doctrine is a remarkable one. It declares that nothing is <u>one</u> thing just by itself, nor can you rightly call it by some definite name, nor even say it is of any definite sort. On the contrary, if you call it "large," it will be found to be also small; if "heavy," to be also light; and so on all through, because nothing is <u>one</u> thing or <u>some</u> thing or of definite sort. All the things we are pleased to say "are," really are in the process of becoming, as a result of movement and change and of blending one with another. We are wrong to speak of them as "being," for none of them ever is; they are always becoming. In this matter let us take it that, with the exception of Parmenides, the whole series of philosophers agree--Protagoras, Heracleitus, Empedocles.[12]

Protagoras' statement, around which this part of the Dialogue revolves, defines knowledge, <u>prima facie</u>, as deriving from the senses. This is the doctrine that Theaetetus as well as the "common herd" adheres to. But Socrates is quick to add that the truth of the aphorism--that sense--knowledge is not reliable because it is too subjective, thus totally relative--has been kept "secret" for the benefit of Protagoras' disciples. At the surface level

then, knowledge comes from the senses, declares Protagoras. Whatever seems to a man to be green is green to that man, for all the beliefs that a man holds are based on his experience; all opinions are equally true. If a stick of incense smells like olive, it is so to that person smelling it. The stick of incense may have as many smells as there are people to whom it smells different. It is not the case that the stick of incense smells like olive, though it is so to individual Y; rather it has the smell of olive for Y, the smell of hyacinthine for X, and the smell of lavender for Z. Neither of the percipients has any ground for saying that another is wrong. Each of them is the sole measure of what he perceives.[13] At a deeper level, Protagoras implies that objective knowledge is not possible because our perception of matters, or phenomena is subject to fluctuation; the beliefs of a man in a normal condition of body and mind are better than those of a sick man. The things that appear yellow to the jaundiced eye is really yellow to it, but that does not alter the fact that it would be better for the sick man if the same things appeared different to him.[14]

To give full weight to his interpretation of Protogoras' doctrine--the fluctuating quality of things--Socrates brings in Heraclitus' declaration that all things fleet away, or Panta rei. To avoid any over reading, let us point out that Socrates, although he agrees with Protagoras and Heraclitus that sense-knowledge is not real knowledge, rejects

their all-inclusive phrase "all things" in "man is the measure of all things" and in "all things fleet away." For Socrates, there exist things that are eternal, unchangeable, knowable, and of which man is not the measure. For him then, on the one hand, we cannot know the physical world because its constituents, the phenomena, are always changing; on the other hand, there exist objects that cannot admit the slightest modification and that are intelligible. These beings, Socrates once said, are not to X as they appear to X and to Y as they appear to Y: they "have a permanent essence of their own.[15] Socrates calls the permanent beings Ideas, and defines them as Arche, or first principles of knowledge and creation:"In my opinion, the Ideas are, as it were, patterns fixed in nature, and other things are like them."[16] To illustrate his statement, he presents the metaphor of the carpenter-artist, who makes his shuttle by looking to the Idea of the shuttle; "Suppose the shuttle is broken in making, will he make another, looking to the broken one? or will he looks to the Idea according to which he made the other?" Here, the carpenter becomes a creator, a maker, by imitating the Highest Creator, who does not need a sample to fashion beings. The object that the carpenter creates emanates from an Idea, which itself is a reflector of the divine Idea of creation. What distinguishes the carpenter-artist from the common carpenter is that he does not use experience but understanding of the first principles. The common carpenter will instead use

his experience: he makes the shuttle not from the concept of a shuttle but from a man-made copy. Implied in Socrates' example is the notion that Ideas are more real and that they constitute the surest way to knowledge; therefore, knowledge of Ideas should be our greater concern, if not the only one. People who do not ask themselves the abstract question "what is beauty?" but collect their ideas of beauty from observing beautiful things cannot be said to know what beauty is:

> SOC. . . . So tell me in a generous spirit, what you think knowledge is.
> TH. Well, Socrates, I cannot refuse since you and Theodorus ask me. Anyhow, if I do make a mistake, you will set me right.
> SOC. By all means, if we can.
> TH. Then I think the things one can learn from Theodorus are knowledge--geometry and all the sciences you mentioned just now; and then there are crafts of the cobbler and other workmen. Each of these are knowledge and nothing else.
> SOC. You are generous indeed, my dear Theaetetus--so open-handed that, when you are asked for one simple thing, you offer a whole variety.
> TH. What do you mean, Socrates?
> SOC. There may be nothing in it, but I will explain what notion is. When you speak of

cobbling, you mean by that word precisely a knowledge of shoe-making?

TH. Precisely.

SOC. And you speak of carpentry, you mean just a knowledge of how to make wooden furniture?

TH. Yes.

SOC. In both cases, then, you are defining what the craft is a knowledge of?

TH. Yes.

SOC. But the question you were asked, Theaetetus, was not, what are the objects of knowledge, nor how many sorts of knowledge there are. We did not want to count them, but to find out what the thing itself--knowledge--is. Is there nothing in that?

TH. No, you are quite right.

SOC. Take another example. Suppose we were asked about some obvious common thing, for instance, what clay is; it would be absurd to answer: potters' clay, and oven-makers' clay, and brick-makers' clay.[17]

What is clear in this passage then is the notion that we cannot know what "clay" is by just observing objects made of clay, nor can we know what knowledge is by observing a collected account of the properties of knowledge.

Aristotle's Anti-Platonism

The body of Aristotle's criticism of Plato and his successors at the Academy consists of a wide range of topics, includings ethics, cosmology, and physics, but the key to his reaction against the philosophy of Plato is his rejection on the theory of Ideas, or Forms and his attack on the Platonic philosophy of mathematics.[18] In Book A of Metaphysics, for instance, he writes "none of the ways which are used to show that the Forms exist appears convincing."[19] A few paragraphs later, he asks, "what do the Forms contribute to the eternal things among the sensibles . . . they do not in any way help either towards the knowledge of the other things" (p. 30). What this last passage in particular shows is that Aristotle differed from Plato not only in terms of theories but also in terms of temperament and methods. These differences are nicely captured in Novotny's comparison of the two philosophers:

> Plato was a poet, an admirer of mathematics, an appreciator of permanence, a synthesist, a romantic; his soul craves for completion and for the universal, the divine and human; it is concerned with observing all time and all beings. . . . Aristotle was a scholar with a special predilection for natural sciences, particularly biology, and fond of the process

> of development, an analyst, a classic . . . while Plato based his philosophy on a world of super-sensible beings, and only attempted in the second place to explain also the sensible world by means of philosophic imagination, Aristotle found the basis for his philosophy in the knowledge derived from methodical experience, allowing to observe things, their relations and changes. He did not believe in the free flight of the poet but in the patient observation of particulars, differentiation, classification and logical conclusions by which he wanted to gain certainty.[20]

Aristotle rejects the Platonic theories of his day first on the ground that Plato was mistaken to seek knowledge in the Ideas, or Forms. Aristotle believed that in order to acquire knowledge, one should start from the particulars, or the phenomenal world. His attack of Plato's theories of Ideas is of course to be closely associated with his own interest in the natural sciences. Owing to his bent for biology, he saw life as a sort of continuum from the lowest the highest and most complex living things.[21] For him, the elements of the species should be the starting-point of the quest for knowledge because it is through the individual specimen that we will know about the species. In a like manner, Aristotle suggests, the

physical world and its study are indispensable instruments of knowledge. According to Aristotle then, it is the science of the particulars that should be our concern. The science of the universal should be left to God; it is not a productive science:

> . . . we observe that men of experience succeed more than men who have the theory but have no experience. The cause of this is that experience is knowledge of individuals but art is universal knowledge, all actions and productions deal with individuals. The doctor does not cure "a man" universally taken.

A few paragraphs later, Aristotle conclusively appends, "Accordingly, the possession of this science might justly be regarded as not befitting man . . . as Simonides says, 'God alone should have this prerogative.'"[22] In an equally revealing passage from his treatise De Partibus Animalium, Aristotle, addressing himself to a group of disciples, encourages them to pursue natural sciences--especially biology--although he admits that the supersensible is the most honorable object of knowledge:

> Of natural substances, some are ungenerated and indestructible throughout eternity, others share in generation and destruction. The former [that is, the heavenly bodies] are precious and divine, but we have less opportunity to in-

> vestigate them since the evidence available to the senses, by means of which one might study them and the things that we long to know about, is very scanty. But concerning the things that perish, that is plants and animals, we have much better means of obtaining information since we live among them. For anyone who is willing to take sufficient trouble can learn a great deal concerning each one of their kinds . . . for even in those that are not attractive to the senses, yet to the intellect the craftsmanship of nature provides extraordinary pleasures for those who can recognize the causes in things and who are naturally inclined to philosophy. For if we derive enjoyment from looking at imitations of these things because we are then contemplating the art of the craftsman--whether painter or sculptor--who made them, it would be strange and absurd not to delight far more in studying the natural objects themselves, provided at least that we can perceive their causes. And so we must not feel a childish disgust at the investigation of the meaner animals. For there is something of the marvellous in all natural things.[23]

Aristotle also criticized Plato for his belief in mathematical Ideas. He attacked Plato's adherence to the

the theory of numbers of the Pythagoreans, who proclaimed that things derive their existence from mathematical Ideas. Aristotle was even less sympathetic to the theories of the immediate successors of Plato as directors of the Academy--Speusippus and Xenocrates--who emphasized mathematics and the idea of knowledge through mathematical abstractness. Like Plato, they believed that numbers exist in their own right, independent of human thought, timeless, and non-spatial. They also conceived it to be the task of the true philosopher to explore the mathematic reality in order to discover the supersensible and the sensible as well because numbers exist between the sensible things and the Ideas, "differing from the sensible things in being eternal and immovable, and from the Forms in that there are many alike."[24]

Poe's Defense of Platonism against Aristotle

Poe's defense of Platonism against Aristotle essentially takes the form of attacks directed at Aristotle's abiding interest in the natural sciences and at his dogmatism. Poe understood very well the difference between Aristotle's fixed and clear-cut set of doctrines and Plato's eclectic, and poetic universe of ideas, where truths are revealed through metaphors and myths. Assessing Aristotle's obsession with physical sciences, Poe

points out:

> . . . the fame of this great man depended mainly upon his demonstration that sneezing is a natural provision, by means of which over-profound thinkers are enabled to expel superfluous ideas through the nose.[25]

Earlier in "Bon-Bon," Poe ridiculed Aristotle's bent for empirical demonstration and classification but used the the term "proboscis" instead of "nose," probably alluding to Aristotle's taxonomic lexicon.

It is of course to his works on natural sciences, notably biology, that we should refer if we want to gain a better idea of Aristotle's empiric explanations of the universe. In his De Partibus Animalium as well as in Physica, which Poe translates in "Bon-Bon" as Sur la Nature, Aristotle proclaims that elements in nature are directed toward an end:

> Human hair Man has the hairiest head of all the animals. First, this is necessarily so because of the fluidity of his brain and the sutures in his skull. For there must be necessarily the largest outgrowth where there is most fluid and heat. Secondly, it is for giving protection, so that the hair may give shelter and protection from excesses of cold

> and heat. The human brain, being the biggest and the most fluid of all, needs the greatest amount of protection, since the more fluid a thing is the more liable is it to excessive heating or chilling.
>
> Eyebrows and eyelashes Both eyebrows and eyelashes exist for the protection of the eyes. The eyebrows, like the eaves of a house, give protection from the fluid running down from the head; the eyelashes, like the palisades sometimes put up in front of an enclosure, are there to keep out things that might get in. The eyebrows are at the junction of two bones--which is why they often get so thick in old age that they have to be cut. The eyelashes are at the ends of small blood--vessels. For these vessels come to an end where the skin itself terminates. At these places the moisture that comes off, being corporeal, must necessarily cause the formation of hairs, unless it is diverted by nature to some other use.[26]

If Poe felt uncomfortable with Aristotle's scientism, he also resented Aristotle's dogmatism and aphoristic style. The sententiousness of his statements can indeed hardly escape a poetically-attuned soul like Poe. Not to mention his passion for syllogism, Aristotle often seems

to indulge in unrestrained declarations. In his Rhetoric, for instance, he proclaims, "All men have had an abiding passion for truth and truthfulness"[27] in Metaphysics, he heralded that "all men by nature desire understanding" and that "all animals, except men, live with the aid of appearances and memory, and they participate but little in experience."[28] It is statements of this nature that Poe lampooned in a passage of Dialogue between Bon-Bon, whom Poe associates with Aristotle, and the devil to whom Bon-Bon has sold his soul:

> "As I was saying," resumed the visitor, "as I was observing a little while ago, there are some very outre notions in that book of yours, Monsieur Bon-Bon. What for instance do you mean by all that ambug about the soul? Pray, sir, what is the soul?"
>
> "The--hiccup!--soul," replied the metaphysician, referring to his MS., "is undoubtedly--"
>
> "No, sir!"
>
> "Undubitably--"
>
> "No, sir!"
>
> "Indisputably--"
>
> "No, sir!"
>
> "Evidently--"
>
> "No, sir!"
>
> "Incontrovertibly--"

"No, sir!"

"Hiccup!--"

"No, sir!"

"And beyond all question, a--"

"No, sir! the soul is no such thing."[29]

It is clear in this passage that Poe, by calling Bon-Bon a "metaphysician" and by having him utter a series of adverbial exclamations, has in mind both Aristotle, author of the Metaphysics, and the generations of thinkers who, like Aristotle, acclaimed sense-perception, experimentation, and rationalism as the road to knowledge.

Poe's Criticism of Aristotelianism

For Poe, Aristotelianism begins with Aristotle but finds extension in the writings of some later thinkers. In his assessment of Aristotelian influences, he has in mind both the period before Bacon, when "Aries Tottle flourished supreme" among lay as well as religious thinkers, and the period that started with "the advent of one Hog, surnamed'the Ettrick shepherd,' who preached an entirely different system, which he called the á posteriori or inductive"[30] and encroached upon the nineteenth century.

Poe was well aware of the difference between Bacon and Aristotle; he might have read The Advancement of Learning, where Bacon refers to Aristotle's belief and

to the dogmatism in the Aristotelian tradition at several occasions. In one instance, explaining why the philosophy of Aristotle "hath been kept low, at a stay without growth or advancement," [31] Bacon comments that "knowledge derived from Aristotle, and exempted from liberty of examination, will not rise again higher than the knowledge of Aristotle" (p. 188). Bacon condemns here the Aristotelian tradition for retarding the advancement of knowledge by suppressing a reassessment of Aristotle's doctrines and by encouraging "absolute resignation or perpetual captivity" (p. 188). It is however in Novum Organum--which Poe probably read, as his article "A Chapter of Suggestions" implies--that we find the most condemnatory statements about Aristotle's philosophy:

> . . . the Rational school of philosophers snatches from experience a variety of common instances, neither duly ascertained nor diligently examined and weighed, and leaves all the rest to meditation and agitation of wit.
>
> There is also another class of philosophers, who having bestowed much diligent and careful labour on a few experiments, have thence made bold to educe and construct systems; wresting all other facts in a strange fashion to conformity therewith.
>
> And there is yet a third class, consisting

of those who out of faith and veneration mix their philosophy with theology and traditions; among whom the vanity of some has gone so far aside as to seek the origin of sciences among spirits and genii. So that this parent stock of errors--this false philosophy--is of three kinds: the Sophistical, the Empirical, and the Supertitious.

The most conspicuous example of the first class was Aristotle, who corrupted natural philosophy by his logic: fashioning the world out of categories . . . in the physics of Aristotle you hear hardly anything but the words of logic; which in his metaphysics also, under a more imposing name, and more forsooth as a realist than a nominalist, he has handed over again. Nor let any weight be given to the fact, that in his books on animals and his problems, and other of his treatises, there is frequent dealing with experiment. For he had come to his conclusion before; he did not consult experience, as he should have done, in order to the framing of his decisions and axioms; but having first determined the question according to his will, he then resorts to experience, and bending her into conformity with his placets leads her about like a captive

> in a procession; so that even on this count, he is more guilty than his modern followers, the schoolmen who have abandoned experience altogether.[32]

Poe agrees with Bacon that Aristotle's logic is fallacious, but he certainly is not of Bacon's opinion that "our only hope therefore lies in true induction."[33] To Poe, Aristotle's "deductive or _à priori_" philosophy and Bacon's "_à posteriori_ or inductive are of the same nature: it is terminology only, not content nor method, that sets them apart from each other. This similarity in both content and method was obvious even to the "savans" who, in response, put "an end to all controversy on the topic by the promulgation of a Median law, to the effect that Aristotelian and Baconian roads are, and of right ought to be, the sole possible avenues to knowledge."[33]

Another feature that Aristotle and Bacon shared is their rejection of Platonism in favor of the pragmatic science of nature, some of their main contentions being that science, the highway to knowledge, is based on sense-observations and that theories constitute hindrances. It is in this sense that Bacon writes that "there are and can be only two ways of searching in the truth. The one flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms . . . the other derives axioms from the senses and the particulars."[35] In other

words, senses and particulars are the sources of true knowledge; any theory not resulting from sense-observation but deriving from principles not based on experience and thus cannot be scientifically verified is worthless. The supposition of the existence of innate ideas external to the mind and independent from observation is meaningless abstraction. For Bacon in particular, the flight to theoretical speculation and to the universals, is far more dangerous to the search into true knowledge than Aristotle's syllogism:

> But the corruption of philosophy by superstition and an admixture of theology is far more widely spread, and does the greatest harm, whether to entire systems or to their parts. For the human understanding is obnoxious to the influence of the imagination no less than to the influence of the common notions. For the contentious and sophistical kind of philosophy ensnares the understanding; but this kind, being fanciful and tumid and half-poetical, misleads it more by flattery. . . .
>
> Of this kind we have among the Greeks a striking example in Pythagoras, though he united with it a coarser and more cumbrous superstition; another in Plato and his school, more dangerous and subtle.[36]

Namely, Bacon, like Aristotle, maintained that mathematics from Pythagoras, to Plato, and to "the second school of Plato, Proclus and the rest,"[37] has no contact with reality and added but very little to the stock of knowledge. He called for a science less abstract, less remote, and more natural than mathematics.[38]

Evaluating the impact of Aristotle and Bacon on the Western mind, Poe calls their philosophy and method an impediment to knowledge:

> . . . a more intolerable set of bigots and tyrants never existed on the face of the earth. Their creed, their text and their sermon were, alike, the one word '<u>fact</u>'--but, for the most part, even of this one word, they knew not even the meaning. On those who ventured to <u>disturb</u> their facts with the view of putting them in order and to use, the disciples of Hog had no mercy whatever. All attempts at generalization were met at once by the words 'theoretical,' 'theory,' 'theorist'--all <u>thought</u>, to be brief, was properly resented as a personal affront to themselves. Cultivating the natural sciences to the exclusion of Metaphysics, the Mathematics, and Logic, many of the Bacon-engendered philosophers--one idead, one-sided, and lame of a leg--were more wretchedly helpless--more miserably ignorant, in view of all the comprehensible objects of knowledge, than the veriest unlettered hind who

> proves that he knows something at least, in admitting that he knows absolutely nothing.
>
> Nor had our forefathers any better right to talk about certainty, when pursuing, in blind confidence, the à priori path of axioms, or of the Ram. At innumerable points this path was scarcely as straight as a ram's horn. The simple truth is, that the Aristotelians erected their castles upon a basis far less reliable than air.[39]

Notably, to the Aristotelianism of the generations of scholars who "confined investigation to crawling,"[40] Poe opposes the Platonism of the Keplers, the Laplaces, and the Newtons, who possessed the "sacred fire." To the deductive and experimental methods of the former group, he opposes the intuitive and theoretical method of the latter:

> . . . investigation has been taken out of the hands of the ground-moles, and given as duty, rather than as a task, to the true--to the only thinkers--to the generally-educated men of ardent imagination. These latter--our Keplers--our Laplaces--'speculate'--'theorize' . . . the fact of gravitation? Newton deduced it from the laws of Kepler. Kepler admitted that these laws he guessed--these laws whose investigation disclosed to the greatest of British astronomers that principle, the basis of all (existing) physical principle. . . . Yes!--these

> laws Keplers guessed--that is to say, he imagined them. Had he been asked to point out either the deductive or inductive route by which he attained them, his reply might have been--'I know nothing about routes--But I do know the machinery of the universe. . . . I grasped it with my soul--I reached it through mere dint of intuition.[41]

When Poe in the following paragraph calls Kepler "that divine old man" (p.198), he probably has in mind Kepler's laws of motion and their significance in the history of Western ideas, especially in relation to the Platonic tradition. Kepler's three laws of planetary motion, which Poe calls " the wonderfully complex laws of revolution,"[42] were of seminal importance: they rejected the reigning Aristotelian dogma of uniform motion of the planets in perfect circles. More significantly, in the context of Poe's "Eureka," the laws made obsolete the Aristotelian doctrine according to which the earth is the center of the universe and that all earthy matter is heavy because it is its nature to strive toward the center--the earth. Kepler refutes Aristotle's geocentric theory that the earth attracts matters because it is at the center of the universe by putting forward in the preface to his Astronomia Nova that the earth attract some matters only because it is heavier: if the earth and the moon are not kept in their orbits by an equivalent force, the earth would ascend toward the moon one fifty-fourth of the distance.

The geocentrism that Kepler rejects finds its roots in pre-Socratic Greece and its extension in the astronomy of Aristotle and Ptolemy. As early as the seventh century before Christ, Thales taught that the earth was the center of the universe. Three centuries later, Aristotle made the statement in his On the Heavens, where it is asserted that "the earth and the universe have the same center" and that "the earth does not move, neither does it lie anywhere but at the centre."[43] One sure channel through which the history this early period of astronnomy is transmitted is Cosmos of Alexander von Humboldt, whom Poe dedicated "Eureka" to. In Humboldt's book, Poe might have also read about the Pythagoreans and their theory of astronomy, which Kepler adhered to. When the disciples were preoccupied with disseminating the views of their master in the sixth century, Pythagoras (580--500 BC) founded his own school, which propounded through the centuries that the earth revolves around the sun ; both through the idea of the motion of the earth and the subordination of the earth to the sun, we can notice here the rejection of geocentrism.

In the fourth century before Christ, Aristotle resuscitated geocentrism in opposition to Pythagorean heliocentrim and gave it his stamp of authority. His position ultimately crystallized in the writings of Ptolemy, who proclaimed,

> In brief, all the observed order of the increases and decreases of day and night would be thrown

> into utter confusion if the earth were not in the middle. And there would be added the fact that the eclipses of the moon could not take place for all parts of the heavens by a diametrical opposition to the sun, for the earth would often not be interposed between them in their diametrical oppositions, but at distances less than a semicircle.[44]

When in the thirteenth century both the works of Aristotle and Ptolemy became more available, geocentrism and other Aristotelian tenets flourished, pervading religious as well as secular learning. St. Thomas Aquinas for instance commented on Aristotle's On the Heavens in his Opera Omnia while Scholaticism systematized Aristotelian doctrines and implant--ed them so strongly into the framework of medieval theology that even after the publication of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo on heliocentrism, Aristotelianism could not be disposed of. Aristotle reigned supreme to such an extent that "it was believed that finding and demonstrating the truth called for and demanded supporting a thesis with citations from the philosopher."[45] Humboldt's Cosmos alludes to the tenacity of Aristotelianism in general and goecentrism in particular in these terms:

> And if, in the dark period of the Middle Ages, Christian fanaticism, and the lingering influence of the Ptolemaic school, revived a belief in the

> immobility of the Earth and if, in the hypothesis of the Alexandrian, Cosmas Ludicopleustes, the globe again assumed the form of the disk of Thales, it must not be forgotten that a German cardinal, Nicholas de Cuss, was the first who had the courage and the independence of mind again to ascribe to our planet, almost a hundred years before Copernicus, both rotation on its axis and translation in space.46

In a later passage, Humboldt writes in reaction to the anachronism of Aristotelian geocentrism,

> Confirmed and extended by the results of physical astronomy . . . the fundamental views of Copernicus have indicated to theoretical astronomy paths which could not fail to lead to sure results. (p.305)

Copernicus's heliocentrism however found supporters in his own epoch, despite the intolerance of the defenders of traditional Aristotelianism. In the next decades, it found extension both in the works of Kepler and Galileo. Because of Poe's abiding interest in Kepler's astronomy and Platonic mysticism, it is necessary that we understand the nature of Keplerism. An inclusive exposition of Kepler's theories would be however out of place in this study, not because of the difficulties of the materials but because of Poe's higher interest in the intellectual spirit that animated Kepler than in the mathematical exactness of his

calculations and laws.

One trait that Poe and Kepler had in common was their anti-conformism to the prevailing doctrines of their times. Born in sixteenth century Europe, Kepler developed as a scientist in an atmosphere hostile to his beliefs in free expression of truths, ancient and new. The establishment of his time still conceived the universe in terms of Aristotelian geocentrism, despite the promulgation of a new truth in the De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium [On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres.]

With the publication of Copernicus' De Revolutionibus, Aristotelian astronomy faced its first real challenge, and the impulses that led Copernicus' heliocentric theory are Platonic in origin and essence. As a student in Bologna, Italy, Copernicus was exposed to a new intellectual milieu that adopted the Pythagorean mathematical structure of the universe. In Bologna, Copernicus studied under Domenico Maria da Novara, a Neo-Platoninst astronomer who fully suscribed to Pythagorean theories. Like the other Neo--Platonists in Bologna, Domenico, dissatisfied with Aristotelianism and its cumbrous intricacy, put forward that the simplest and most harmonious mathematical system is the most capable of representing the first model of things created by God. Connecting Copernicus to Domenico in his assessment of the intellectual stumuli that spurred Copernicus's awakening, Francis R. Johnson writes,

Doubtless because of Novara's influence, Copernicus

> conceived the idea of devoting himself to the task of working out a new and simpler geometrical system of astronomy, which would overcome the current objections to Ptolemy and be in closer accord with the neo-Platonic idea that the universe was designed by the Creator in terms of harmonious mathematical laws.[47]

De Revolutionibus presented the intellectual world with Copernicus' first published statement against Aristotelian geocentrism and about his adherence to Platonic Pythagoreanism. Confirmed defenders of Aristotelianism, for whom there was no going beyond Aristotle, the ultimate fountainhead of wisdom and learning,[48] coalesced to reject the Copernican theory that the earth turns around the sun. Their opposition Copernicus himself anticipated:

> Thinking therefore within myself that to ascribe movement to the Earth must indeed seem an absurd performance on my part to those who know that many centuries have consented to the establishment of the contrary judgment, namely that the Earth is placed immovably as the central point in the middle of the Universe, I hesitated long whether, on the one hand, I should give to the light these my Commentaries written to prove the Earth's motion, or whether, on the other hand, it were better to follow the example of the

> Pythagoreans and others who were wont to impart their philosophic mysteries only to intimates and friends, and then not in writing but by word of mouth, as the letter of Lysis to Hipparchus witnesses. In my judgment they did so not, as some would have it, through jealousy of sharing their doctrines, but as fearing lest these so noble and hardly won discoveries of the learned should be despised by such as either care not to study aught save for gain, or--if by the encouragement and example of others they are stimulated to philosophic liberal pursuit--yet by reason of the dullness of their wits are in the company of philosophers as drones among bees. Reflecting thus, the thought of the scorn which I had to fear on account of the novelty and incongruity of my theory, well-nigh induced me to abandon my project. [49]

Copernicus of course did not abandon his project. The work was read with reservation, especially in the Church. The combination of theological dogmas and Scholastic pseudo-scientific theories prevented Church authorities from perceiving a possible reconciliation of biblical tenets with the ideas in De Revolutionibus. Because of this theological prejudice, the circulation of Copernicus' treatise, although it was not forbidden, was authorized only under the condition that the passages explicit about heliocentrism be "altered so as to assert that this idea,

though false, was introduced merely as a mathematical hypothesis for simplifying calculations."[50] Reputedly, Andrew Osiander, a Lutheran theologian who supervised the printing of the work, inserted a foreward announcing the treatise as a mere hypothesis: "it is not necessary that these hypotheses be true, or even probable."[51] According to Francis R. Johnson, Osiander added the foreword because of his theological biases.[52] However, there is reason to believe that the insertion of the preface was motivated by Osiander's concern for his dying friend and his understanding that the circulation of the book depended largely upon its not vexing the establishment. Copernicus, who was seized with paralysis towards the end of 1542, lived long enough to see an advance copy of his work on May 24, 1543, the same day he died.

Such then was the era in which both Copernicus and Kepler lived-- a period of religious intransigency that found its extension in the Rationalism of Poe's epoch. Kepler's intellectual development was spurred on at Tübingen under the guidance of his professor of mathematics and astronomy, Michael Maestlin. Kepler's teacher was aware of the prevailing theological orthodoxy all the more as the professor he replaced had been dismissed from his chair for not conforming to the reigning theology. To be sure, as Max Caspar poinst out, Maestlin did not want to lose his position:

> He did not want to risk his secure professorship and could not speak out of turn without endangering the peace and order in a college welded together by numerous bonds of kinship and intermarriage, where the theological faculty wielded the baton. Accordingly, only with careful restraint and in intimate circles, did he tell what Copernicus had taught about the structure of the universe. Yet in the youthful enthusiastic head of his pupil the spark ignited. Maestlin's considerations and repressions were alien to the young and unencumbered Kepler who, open and dauntless, entered into disputations in favor of the new astronomical theory. Several years later he wrote about the stimulation he received which was so exceedingly momentous for his work. He also described the impression which it aroused. These are his words: "Already in Tübingen when I followed attentively the instruction of the famous Magister Michael Maestlin, I perceived how clumsy in many respects is the hitherto customary notion of the structure of the universe."[53]

Kepler's dissenting impetuousness that these lines bring to surface remained one his most salient traits. This characteristic, which Poe recognized in Kepler and admired, worried some of his friends who were wholeheartedly

attentive to his welfare. One such a friend was Matthias Hafenreffer, who was Kepler's professor of theology. Though "Hafenreffer himself secretly adhered to the Copernican theory," writes Caspar, "it is he who, for the time being, restrained Kepler from openly supporting its consistency with Holy Scripture" (p.50). It was clear to Kepler that he had either to remain silent about his conviction or lay himself open to sanctions. Remaining silent about Copernicus's theory, which he cherished reverently, was difficult to Kepler. At the end of his education in Tübingen, he was not summoned to the altar but to mathematics teaching in Graz. The motive behind his being appointed to Graz is still a matter of controversy. While in Graz, he published his first book, the Mystery of the Universe in 1597. Initially, Kepler wanted to declare his support of the Copernican theory and demonstrate its non-contradiction with Holy Scripture. Such a challenge to the reigning theological dictum would have exposed him to harsh punishments. In reaction to Kepler's intention to speak out, Hafenreffer sent the following note:

> I give you the brotherly advice by no means to support and defend that agreement openly; for many good people would take offense, and not unjustly, and your entire work could be entirely hampered or else burdened with the grievous reproach of having created disunity. For I have no doubt that, should that point of view be

supported and defended, it would find adversa-
-ry. . . . If, therefore, my brotherly advice
is heeded, as I certainly hope, so proceed in
the presentation of such hypotheses clearly only
as a mathematician, who does not have to bother
himself about the question whether these theories
correspond to existing things or not. For I am of
the opinion that the mathematician has achieved his
goal when he advances hypotheses to which the
phenomena correspond as closely as possible; you
yourself would also withdraw, I believe, if some-
one could offer still better ones. . . . If, as I
strongly trust, you follow these[advice] and satisfy your-
self with the role of pure mathematician, then I
do not doubt that your thoughts will give the
greatest enjoyment to a great many people, as they
certainly do to me. However, should you attempt
to openly defend and bring that theory into agree-
ment with Holy Scripture, which God the Omnipotent
and All-merciful may prevent, then I certainly
would fear that this thing would lead to schisms
and drastic measures. In that event, I should
only wish that I, for my part, had never heard
your thoughts which considered from the mathemat-
ical standpoint alone are excellent and distinguised.
There already reigns more dispute in the church of
Christ than the weak can endure.[54]

Kepler compromised by eliminating the passage about the consistency of Copernican astronomy with the Bible and by adopting a less controversial stand. He appeased Maestlin, who was supervising the printing of the book in these terms:

> Since, however, the majority of scholars cannot rise either to the high conception of Copernicus, well now, we shall imitate the Pythagoreans also in their customs. If someone asks us for our opinion in private, then we wish to analyze our theory clearly for him. In public, though, we wish to be silent.[55]

Later in his life, however, Kepler decided to liberate himself from the yoke of the prevailing theological dogma. Seeing himself as a priest of God in regard to His construction of the universe, Kepler could no longer tolerate compromises:

> Because I am absolutely convinced of the Copernican theory, a solemn awe prevents me from teaching anything else, be it for the glory of my mind or for the pleasure of those people who are annoyed at the strangeness of this theory. I am satisfied to use my discovery to guard the gate of the temple in which Copernicus celebrates at the high altar.[56]

Kepler's non-conformism ultimately led to his ruin: he

was refused the position of professorship at the university of Tübingen in 1611 and was soon after excluded from communion. "It is only now," Poe writes, "that men begin to appreciate that divine old man."[57]

The spirit of Aristotelianism, as Poe saw it, found its extension, through the next centuries, in the works of F. Bacon and the writings of later exponents of "facts" and "observation" like Locke, the Scottish philosophers of Common Sense, and John Stuart Mill. Locke, whose works Poe referred to several times, supported theories of knowledge reminiscent of Aristotle and Bacon. A strong advocate of experimentation like Bacon, Locke exhibited an Aristotelian bent for natural sciences, especially medicine. He was , however, more influential as a philosopher than as a scientist. His theory that probably had the most lasting effect on his followers was the notion that we receive all our ideas from experience and that there exist no innate ideas stamped on our minds before existence:

> It is an established opinion amongst some men, that there are in the understanding certain <u>innate principles</u> . . . which the soul receives in its very first being, and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only show . . . how men, barely by the use of their

> natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions; and may arrive at certainty, without any such original notions or principles. For I imagine any one will easily grant that it would be impertinent to suppose the ideas of colours innate in a creature to whom God hath given sight, and a power to receive them by the eyes from external objects: and no less unreasonable would it be to attribute several truths to the impressions of nature and innate characters, when we may observe in ourselves faculties fit to attain as easy and certain knowledge of them as if they were originally imprinted on the mind.[58]

Locke's doctrine of knowledge, which clearly opposes the epistemological theory formulated in the Dialogues, postulates that since knowledge comes with experience, one can control the formation of the mind so as to direct it towards the good by controlling the experience of people from childhood. This view, which is close to what we may call "cultural engineering," had significant influences through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries since it encouraged the control of the cultural environment and expounded a cult of reason, or what Poe call "the dictates of common sense."[57] Locke's epistemology

historically provided the foundation on which future Rationalists constructed the ascendency of Reason, or common sense in English and American literature. In England, the publication of Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding was acclaimed with praise among the rising bourgeoisie, whose pragmatism was in concordance with the principles of Rationalism and whose purchasing power controlled the type of literature in circulation. The new readers were eager to have the kind of education that would allow them to gain practical knowledge in their lines of business as well as to acquire social prestige and mobility. This new reading public, as Lovett observed, was also characterized by its Puritanism:

> The zeal of the religious for right conduct and an orthodox moral standard, and the concern of the nouveau riche for good manners exercised an obvious influence on the material and purpose of the English novelist of the eighteenth century. This social purpose was worked out in terms of the ordinary life of the merchant or country squire; though the apprentice and the serving--maid came in frequently for their share of consideration. Fiction portrayed vices and virtues of the average man, the dangers that beset him and his sons, and especially his daughters; together with the opportunities which might reward his benevolence and industry.[60]

Under the influence of such readers then developed the didactic novel of manners and of sensibility. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719), with its mixture of travel, manners, and moral reflections, presented an ingenious, God-fearing, and pragmatic character calculated to embody the virtues cherished by its potential readers. Richardson's Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded (1740) was another work typical of the period. The piety and ethical conduct of the heroine was very appealing to the readers. The novel of sensibility itself, imbibing the conventions of the novel of manners, dramatized the fall of a misfortunate character, aiming both at teaching morals and at stimulating the readers to sensibility and generosity.

Early American fiction followed the track of English novels, pervaded by the same Rationalism and didacticism. In America, like in England, the public was warned against the reading of fiction, especially of romance literature, which was regarded as the product of imagination and thus the quintessence of evil. Readers were encouraged to engage in "fruitful" activities that could lead to moral and social welfare. They were advised to direct their attention to useful books such as history books and away from fiction, which lacks truth. Fiction, in the opinion of the Rationalists, was antithetical to reality because it had nothing to do with actuality and corrupts the normal development of reason.

Many American fiction writers in the last quarter of

the eighteenth century, which probably corresponded to the acme of Rationalism in America, divorced their fiction from romance and imagination, claiming their work to be a report of factual events. These writers were the humble agents of the Zeitgeist, the "puppets," to use Poe's phrase, "willing enough to perform in literature the little things."[61] They reverted to didactic apologetics in their titles or subtitles and in their prefaces. Following the examples of English novels of manners and sensibility, American fiction claiming authenticity often warned against fiction reading. Thus W.H. Brown's The Power of Sympathy (1789), Hannah Foster's The Coquette (1797), and Tabitha Tenney's Female Qixotism (1801) all aimed at imparting moralistic admonitions by emphasizing the fate of a girl who lost her sense of reality because of her indiscriminate readings. Despite their clamorous claims for truth and blatant didacticism of early American fiction, novels as well as romances were still subjected to strictures such as follows:

> When we hear novels celebrated as means for teaching young people the knowledge of human nature, we seem to perceive in the language something so ambiguous and undefined, something which needs so much commentary and qualification, that, like the gordian knot it is better to cut it at once than to waste time in unravelling its complications. I say, therefore, when we shall

> see great orators formed by silent meditation, and treat anatomists formed by the study of copperplate skeletons and dissections, then, and not till then, shall we behold judges of human life and character produced by novel reading. To study human nature you must mix with mankind: it is in the drawing room, not in the library, in the forum, not in the cloister, that the nature of man can be learned, because it is in the former places, not in the latter, that it is displayed in its true colours and proportions.[62]

The attacks on fiction became more vehement when the genre was Gothic--the type of fiction that Poe liked to write. Gothic novels, because of their use of the supernatural, were often at variance with the prevailing intellectual atmosphere of Rationalism. Finding their origin in medieval Romance, the actions of Gothic novels often center on a protagonist's quest for virtue or for a male protagonist's search for a beloved mistress in captivity in a mysterious place. Another feature that Gothic fiction has in common with medieval Romance was the incorporation of specters, witches, the marvelous and the improbable. These traits of the Romance from the Middle Ages to the period preceding the "Age of Reason," were what Rationalists like Locke saw as the most offensive products of imagination, as opposed to common sense. Imagination

itself became equated with lack of refinement and with madness. Since the concern of the Rationalists was to create an atmosphere conducive to the development of reason, we can easily see why it was necessary for the Rationalists to attack fiction reading in general and romance in particular. The Gothic novel, by resurrecting imaginative literature was symbolic of an age weary of the narrow possibility of Neoclassicism with its emphasis on judgment and common sense. Thus, in his preface to the second edition of The Castle of Otranto, Horace Walpole proclaimed his desire "to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention," leaving behind the strict adherence to facts and reason. For Walpole, Rationalism, by placing the fiction writer in the position of only reporting the commonplace, the near, and the familiar, deprived the artist of the faculty most essential in literary production. Poe echoes Walpole in his statement that imagination is a "burning thurst," that "belongs to the immortal essence of man's nature. It is equally a consequence and an indication of his perennial life."[63] However, if Walpole championed the use of imagination and incorporated the marvelous and the irrational, he also imbibed the didacticism of his era by attempting , for instance, to educate the readers through the punishment of the villain at the end of the story and the restoration of social order.

In America too, Romance writers were confined to

the realm of commonplace actualities. In reaction to the prevailing distrust of imagination explicit in the common sense of Rationalism, these writers hailed freedom of invention or, in Hawthorne's term, "latitude." Despite their disengagement of their works from realism, writers both in fiction and poetry in nineteenth century America could hardly escape the thrust of didacticism. Poe pointed it out and criticized the didacticism in the literature of his day, which he saw as a vestige of Aristotelian dogmatism. In reference to H.W. Longfellow, for instance, Poe writes,

> We have said that Mr. Longfellow's conception of the <u>aims</u> of poesy is erroneous; and that thus, laboring at a disadvantage, he does violent wrong to his own high powers ... didacticism is the prevalent <u>tone</u> of his song. His invention, his imagery, his all, is made subservient to the elucidation of some one or more points (but rarely of more than one) which he looks upon as <u>truth</u>. And that this mode of procedure will find stern defenders should never excite surprise, so long as the world is full to overflowing with cant and conventicles. There are men who will scramble on all fours through the muddiest sloughs of vice to pick up a single apple of virtue.[64]

In Poe's eyes, writers like Longfellow, although they championed freedom of imagination, corrupted their writings "with the obtrusive nature of their didacticism." Poe's most elaborate statement about his contemporaries preoccupations with morality is probably to be found in a passage from "The Poetic Principle." Because of the significance of the passage and its close hyphenation of any form of didacticism or dogmatism to Aristotelianism, I shall cite at length his objection to the quest for "Moral Sense" in didactic literature:

> . . . a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated, but one which, in the brief period it has already endured, may be said to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other enemies combined. I allude to the heresy of <u>The Didactic</u>. It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans especially have patronized this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full. . . . He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate

oils and water of poetry and Truth.

> Dividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position which, in the mind, it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme; but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the offices of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction.[65]

"Eureka" echoes the same strictures expressed in this passage from "The Poetic Principle," although the treatise uses astronomic history and the difference in method and spirit between the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions as vehicles for its attacks on Aristotelianism.

NOTES

[1] Poe, "Eureka," XVI 183.

[2] Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface, The House of the Seven Gables (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1950) xi. For the definition of "romance," see also his preface to The Marble Faun; Or, the Romance of Monte Beni (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961) 6-8.

[3] For Poe's various references to Aristotle, see Pollin's Dictionary, p. 5. More especially, see Poe's following articles: "The Classical Family Library," VIII 45 about Aristotle's Poetics; he also quotes a line in Greek from the Poetics: see Poe's "Stanley Thorn," XI 12 and his "The Drama of Exile," XII 15. For Poe's reference to Aristotle Metaphysics, see "Pinakidia," XIV 68-69, "Marginalia," XVI 25; for his reference to Aristotle scientific works, see his "The Conchologist's First Book," XIV 95. Poe's most extensive references to Aristotle are found in "Eureka," XVI 179-315. Poe mentions Hermippus in "Philothea," IX 95, Theophrastus in "Some Passages in the Life of a Lion (Lionizing)," II 39, in "Georgia Scenes," VIII 258. With regard to Theophrastus' botanical works--here we can easily grasp the tie with Aristotle--see "Pinakidia," 42. Poe mentions Andronicus in "Bon-Bon," II 142. Ptolemy Heupheston is mentioned in "Berenice," II 21 and in "Eureka," 187-88.

[4] For biographical information about Aristotle, see W.K.C. Guthrie, Greek Philosophy VI 1-35; Anton-Herman Chroust, Aristotle (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973) I 73-117; Novotny, 27-39; and G.B. Kerford, "Aristotle," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 151-62.

[5] Poe, "Lion-izing--A Tale," II 323; see also "Some Passages in the Life of a Lion," II 35.

[6] Guthrie, 20.

[7] Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938) 445-46.

[8] Anton-Herman Chroust, "Aristotle's Alleged 'Revolt' against Plato," Journal of the History of Philosophy 11 (January,1973) 91.

[9] W.K.C. Guthrie, 24

[10] The discussion that sense knowledge is not be accounted as true knowledge pervades most of Plato's writings, if not all. Because of the pervasive nature of the question, an all-inclusive listing of the Dialogues discussing the topic would be too lengthy for this dissertation. A thorough computation of passages presenting the concept is available in Evelyn Abbot's A Subject Index to the Dialogues of Plato (New York: Burt Franklin

1971) 30.

[11] For the Dialogues presenting Protagora's philosophy, see Evelyn Abbot, 50. For a discussion of Protagoras' ideas, see G.B. Kerferd, "Protagoras of Abdera," The Encyc. of Philosophy, VI 505-07.

[12] Plato, "Theaetetus," rpt. in Plato's Theory of Knowledge, Trans. Francis . Conford (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957) 29-37.

[13] See I.M. Crombie, An Examination of Plato's Doctrine (New York: The Humanities Press, 1963) I 15.

[14] Guthrie, 116.

[15] Plato, "Cratylus," Jowett, Trans., 175.

[16] Plato, "Parmenides," Jowett, 93.

17 Plato, "Theaetetus," Cornford, trans., 21-22.

[18] For the discussion of Aristotles' criticism of Plato, see G.E.R. Lloyd's Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of his Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 42.

[19] Aristotle, Metaphysics, rpt. in Aristotle's Metaphysics, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966) 29.

[20] Novotny, 26-27.

[21] See J.L. Ackrill, Aristotle the Philosopher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 56.

[22] Aristotle, Metaphysics, trans. Apostle, 13, 15-16.

[23] Aristotle, De Partibus Animalium, rpt. in LLoyd, Aristotle, 69.

[24] Aristotle, Metaphysics, trans. Apostle, 24.

[25] Poe, "Eureka," XVI 188.

[26] Aristotle, De Partibus Animalium, rpt. in Ackrill's Aristotle, 48.

[27] Aristotle, Rhetoric 1355 a 16, trans. Apostle, 607.

[28] Aristotle, Metaphysics, trans. Apostle, 12.

[29] Poe, "Bon-Bon," II 141.

[30] Poe, "Eureka," 189.

[31] Francis Bacon, The Advancement of Knowledge, rpt. in Selected Writings of Francis Bacon (New York: The Modern Library, 1955) 188.

[32] Bacon, Novum Organum, in Selected W., 481-82.

[33] Bacon. Novum, 464.

[34] Poe, "Eureka," 189.

[35] Bacon, Novum, 465.

[36] Bacon, Novum, 483.

[37] Bacon, The Advancement of Knowledge, 191.

[38] See Paul Hazard's European Thought in the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954) 131.

[39] Poe, "Eureka," 191-92.

[40] Poe, "Eureka," 190.

[41] Poe "Eureka," 196-97.

[42] Poe, "Eureka," 278.

[43] Aristotle, On the Heavens, W.K.C. Guthrie, rpt. in Theories of the Universe, ed. Milton K. Munitz (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957) 97.

[44] Ptolemy, The Almagest, trans. R.C. Talaferro, rpt. in Theories of the Universe, 110.

[45] Max Caspar, Kepler, trans., ed. C. Doris Hellman (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1950) 18.

[46] Alexander von Humblodt, Cosmos: A Sketch of A Physical Description of the Universe, trans. E.C. Otte (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1850) II 109.

[47] Francis R. Johnson, Astronomical Thought in Renaissance England, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937) 96.

[48] Theories of the Universe, 134.

[49] Copernicus, De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium, rpt. in F.R. Johnson, Astronomical Thought, 149-50.

[50] F.R. Johnson, 114.

[51] See foreword to Copernicus' De Revolutionibus, rpt. in Great Books of the Western World, chief ed. Robert M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1948), 505.

[52] F.R. Johnson, 115.

[53] Caspar, 46-47.

[54] Matthias Hafenreffer, Letter, in Caspar's Kepler, 68.

[55] Kepler, Letter, in Kepler, 68-69.

[56] Kepler, Letter, in Kepler, 89.

[57] Poe, "Eureka," 197-98.

[58] John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, rpt. in Great Books, 95.

[59] Poe, "Drake-Halleck," VIII 284.

[60] R.M. Lovett and H.S. Hughes, The History of of the Novel in England (New York: Houghton Mufflin Company, 1932) 38-39.

[61] Poe, "Charles O" Malley," XI 89.

[62] See Terence Martin, The Instructed Vision (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961) 65-66. See also Donald Ringe, American Gothic Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (Kentucky: the University Press of Kentucky, 1982) 1-12; Eino Railo, The Haunted Castle, London,1927) 168-71. All three books provide useful information about the rise of American Gothic fiction and the problems writers like Poe faced.

[63] Poe, "Ballads and other Poems," XI 71.

[64] Poe, "Ballads," XI 69.

[65] Poe, "The Poetic Principle," XIV 271-72.

CHAPTER IV

POE'S PLATONIC COSMIC VISION

Poe's vision of the universe, as his writings show, is hierarchical. He places the world of ideas--which manifests itself in faculties such as imagination and intuition--at the top of the ladder, and the world of the corporeal, the tangible, the phenomenal, at the bottom. Man, being of soul and body, partakes of the world of ideas through his soul and of the world of phenomena through his corporeal senses. Man's vehicle for ascension to empyreal Beauty, in Poe's mind, is an art that elevates "itself above mortal affairs just so far as to get a comprehensive and general view"[1] of cosmic "Loveliness," which is the manifestation of God. As a result of his imaginative power and his eclectic mind, Poe unhesitantly perceives the cosmic world as the design of God, and poetry as the incarnation of astronomy, and correlatively, the poet as the closest image of God. It is of course indispensable that we understand that poetry for Poe means artistic creation in its broadest sense:

> The Poetic Sentiment, of course, may develope itself in various modes--in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance--very especially in

> Music--and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden.[2]

It is also enlightening that we understand that for Poe true poetry reveals the Divine both in the work and in the word: the structure of a poem aspires to the architecture, or the framework of the universe and the sound of the poet's utterances to the music of the spheres, or the voice of God. It is this very symbiosis of structure and sound, of matter and essence in poetry that reproduces divine beauty, which itself results from "the volition of God" and defines Poe's cosmic vision.

Much of the essence of Poe's statements about the universe belongs to the Platonic tradition, as his borrowings of ideas such as the "volition," or "will," of God show well. Already in the motto to "Morella," Poe consciously attached his vision of the universe to Plato's writings by citing from "Symposium" the line Αυτο καθ' αυτο, which he translates as "Itself, by itself."[3] This phrase, famous among Platonist thinkers, is traditionally connected to the Dialogues in their assertion of God as the prime-mover, or the transcendent first principle of creation. In Plato's "Timaeus," for instance, we read that "everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause, nothing can be created."[4] The first creator is God himself, who transcends all creation. The reason for His

creation, Plato reports, is His goodness:

> He was good, and . . . desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be. This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world, as we shall do well in believing in the testimony of wise men: God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable.[5]

God's "goodness" becomes in Poe's hands the "volition of Gods," and the pre-existing disorder which He transformed into order becomes "nullity" in "Eureka." Poe's borrowings from Platonic cosmogony also includes his notions of God-in-the-work and of God-in-the-word, two Pythagorean concepts that deserve our attention if we are to grasp the subtleties of Poe's cosmic vision and the close relationship between this vision and his aesthetic theories.

God in the Work

In Poe's mind, God made the universe, which is by virtue of its perfection spherical, "the final globe of globes "[6] He also ascribes the universe the number <u>one</u> because it is of an absolute wholeness: "Oneness, then, is that I predicate of the originally created Matter."[7] In each of these instances, Poe clearly betrays a following of Pythagoreanism, a body of thoughts that Plato

rescued from oblivion and disseminated in the Western world through his Dialogues.[8] The Pythagoreans, whom Socrates praises in Plato's Republic as having "a shining place among the rest of men,"[9] formed an important society that kept its doctrines in secret and passed them by word of mouth to the disciples. Because of the esoteric nature of their teaching, little is known about the school except what Plato and his successors report in their writings.

The Pythagoreans developed a science of numbers based on cosmic harmony. The world, according to them, is a perfect whole, a paradigm of exactness and regularity supremely exemplified by the circle and proportionality. They provided, for instance, a mathematical expression of equality, an idea that occupies a central position in Poe's "The Rationale of Verse." For Pythagoreans, equality and synonymous concepts like justice correspond to the number 4(2x2), which is the first square: in the equation 2 x 2 the first number treats the second in the same way in which the second treats the first, each doubling the other. This arithmetical reciprocity corresponds to the geometrical square S^2, or S x S. Thus existing in two mathematical forms, equality is also found in human society in the form of justice.[10] These concepts Poe might have found in Plato's Dialogues or in the writings of Philolaus, to whom Poe ascribes a theory about comets.[11]

Plato not only reported about the teachings of

Pythagorean philosophers before him, but he also imbibed and incorporated their ideas into his own world-view, showing the same preoccupation with numbers, harmony, and order. In "Timaeus," for instance, it is reported that God organized a pre-existing chaos into order, endowing it with a regularity and beauty exemplified by the cycle of seasons:

> . . . the various elements had different places before they were arranged so as to form the universe. At first, they were all without reason and measure. But when the world began to get into order, fire and water and earth and air had only certain faint traces of themselves, and were altogether such as everything might be expected to be in the absence of God; this, I say, was their nature at that time, and God fashioned them by form and number.[12]

The Pythagorean mysticism that surfaces in this passage and pervades many of Plato's other Dialogues became a source of inspiration for Kepler, one of the major thinkers through whom Plato's inheritance from Pythagoreanism reached Poe.

At an early age, Kepler showed pronounced inclinations towards mysticism and religions, setting himself a penance to atone for his errors. He entered the college of Tübingen after having attended seminaries, and took religious studies to heart. He soon became distinguished

by his bent for meditation and metaphysical speculations; "from the very beginning, " Caspar writes, "his whole thinking was stamped in accordance with Platonic and Neo-Platonic speculation. From this, just as from the system of ideas which tradition connects with the name of Pythagoras, he received the strongest impetus for his work."[13] An adherent to the belief that God made the universe and discloses Himself in the work, Kepler published in 1597 his first book, The Mystery of the Universe. This work, which Poe might have been acquainted with or read about in Humboldt's survey of the history of astronomy,shows all the features that Poe admired in Kepler, notably his acknowledgment of intuition as a sure road to knowledge, his poetic enthusiasm, and his Platonic mysticism: he built for instance his theory of the spheres around the sun as the center and, using poetical analogy, called it the "symbol of the Father." To gain a better sense of Kepler's poetic language and imagery, we probably need to contemplate some of the passages in The Mystery:

> For as regards light; since the sun is very beautiful with light and is as if the eye of the world, like a source of light or very brilliant torch, the sun illuminates, paints, and adorns the bodies of the rest of the world. . . .
>
> As regards heat: the sun is the fireplace of the world; the globes in the intermediate space warm

> themselves at this fireplace, and the sphere of the fixed stars keeps the heat from flowing out, like the wall of the world, or a skin or garment--to use the metaphor of the Psalm of David.
>
> . . . most rightly is the sun held to be the heart of the world and the seat of reason and life, and the principal one among three primary members of the world; and these praises are true in the philosophic sense, since the poets honor the sun as the king of the stars, but the Sidonians, Chaldees, and Persians--by an idiom of language observed in German too-- as the queen of the heavens, and the Platonists, as the king of intellectual fire.[14]

Speculating further, Kepler attached his scientific discoveries to the Pythagorean theory of numbers and measures. Assessing Kepler's discoveries and connecting them to the Pythagorean mysticism of the Platonic tradition, Poe, in reference to what he calls "the three immortal laws guessed by the imaginative Kepler," writes, "the point to be considered is, who guesses. In guessing with Plato we spend our time to better purpose."[15]

Poe received particular stimulation from the Pythagoreanism of Plato and Kepler, which provided him with solid bases and apt metaphors for his aesthetic theories. Poe, like Kepler in the first of his three laws of the

universe, distinguishes the geometrical structure of the universe--the position of the physical solids, such as the planets, in relation to each other-- as a paradigm of God in the work and incorporates the concept into his own critical theories. In his "The Rationale of Verse," for instance, he recognizes the importance of versification: "Verse originates in the human enjoyment of equality," an idea that "embraces those of similarity, proportion, identity, repetition, and adaptation or fitness."[16] However, Poe is quick to point out that the structure of a poem is not as important as its movement. For Poe, poetry is more than architecture; it is essentially the motion of mental images and of sounds. The poet should not discard structure, but for him to deserve the title of image of God, he must emulate Divine creation in its essence. Kepler before Poe made it clear that the physical structure of the universe is less significant than the movement of the spheres, for motion is life: it is in this very idea that the second of the three Keplerian laws which Poe mentioned finds its roots.

Following Kepler's line of thought, Poe assigned the stars life, or motion and calls it "Dynamics," or "revolution":

> Our solar system, as has been mentioned, consists in chief, of one sun and sixteen planets certainly, but in all probability a few others, revolving around it as a centre, and attended by seventeen

> moons of which we know, with possibly several more of which as yet we know nothing.[17]

He further points out, "it was required that the stars should do all this . . . to accomplish all these Divine purposes" (XVI, 291), which participates in "the plots of God" (XVI, 292).

Poe's most illuminating statement about his own imitation of the plot of God is made in "The Philosophy of Composition," which provides us with an example of the "Dynamics" of mental images; that is the process by which "The Raven" attained "its completion with precision and rigid consequences of a mathematical problem."[18] First, Poe confides, he determined the length of the poem, thus starting with the physical structure of his creation in the manner the Divine started with the architecture of the universe before endowing it with life, or motion. We can see here that Poe follows the Platonic tradition, for such an imitation of the divine creation was common among the Platonic thinkers of previous eras. Then Poe proceeded to the second and most essential phase by providing the conceptual framework of his poems; that is the mental diagram of how, in his own mind, one idea followed another in an interrelated motion of intricate causality, so as to create the "artistic effects" necessary for the stimulation of the imagination in the reader: "this revolution of thought," Poe writes, "is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader,"[19]

because "the human mind seems to perform, by some invariable laws, a sort of cycle, like those of the heavenly bodies."[20] Poe later adds,"poesy is thus seen to be a response."[21]

God in the Word

What Poetry is a response to is not limited to imitating God in His work--the structure and motion of the universe; "poesy" is also a response to God's word, which manifests itself in sound. This idea, which defines the last of the three Keplerian laws, is what Poe might have read in Kepler's third book; "Great is the absolute nature of Harmonics with all its details, as set forth in my third book," Kepler writes.[22] The key-word in this sentence is "Harmonics," for Poe's interest in music was a determinant factor in his art. However, before discussing the added influence of harmonics on Poe's writings, it would be profitable if we consider the centrality of music in the Platonic tradition. In so doing, we will be able not only to understand the context of Poe's statement about harmonics but also to gain an insight into his handling of the matter for critical and fictional purposes.

When we say harmonics, we think first of all about end-result, or musical performance; that is the audition of melody. Such a reaction is the most natural because it relates to the immediate sense of hearing. However, harmonics transcends the realm of sense-perception to

encompass speculative music, or musica theoretica. Our pre-historic ancestors probably did not possess the necessary sophistication for metaphysical studies of harmonics, but surely they could experience the sensation of music in blessed rapture. Sense-perceived music then was our first endowment because all men, prehistoric or modern, unless plagued by hearing defects, could hear "the music of things,"[23] to borrow Poe's phrase. He could hear harmonious sounds in the "mystic wind" that passes "murmuring in the melody,"[24] in "the music of the radiant bird" and in

> The sound of the rain
> Which leaps down to the flower,
> And dances again
> In the rhythm of the shower--
> The murmur that springs
> From the growing grass.[26]

In addition, all men are endowed with faculties to emit harmonious sounds through mimesis or intuition. If a man falls outside this general principle, it must be due to an accident--birth defect or other contingencies.

However, in the course of his history, man developed into a theorist and started creating on the basis of speculation, and not on the basis of experience alone. This is the era we plunge into with Pythagoras and his followers. Dealing then with speculative music, we need

to point out that harmonics deals with the metaphysical speculation on the law of harmony as well as on the epistemological and aesthetic function of music. Earlier in this chapter, we were exposed to the Pythagorean idea that God created the universe out of goodness and that He placed the spheres in designed positions. We need to be also aware that the Pythagoreans added a third concept--the music of the spheres--thus providing the last link to the triad of God's manifestation in the universe. According to Pythagoras and his school, the spheres in their revolutions emit sounds that require a divine gift for their discernment. This music, designed according to numerical proportion, is God's expression or God in the word. The divinely gifted can hear the music of the voice of God and transmit it to the human tribe through artistic creation; in this sense, the artist becomes the arch-poet--the closest image to God--and his music becomes the microcosm of the ultimate macrocosm.

Origin of Poe's Ideas about Music

Music cannot be declared to have started at a particular epoch of man's existence; however, it is sufficient for the purpose of analyzing the origin of Poe's ideas about music to begin with Pythagoras, the remotest source of a tradition that reached Poe through Plato and his admirers. Pythagoras, to whom posterity ascribes the foundation of harmonics as a science, and his school were concerned with both the structure of music and its raison

d'etre. They believed that the movement of the celestial bodies in their divinely-designed revolutions through the skies produced a harmony of sounds as if they constituted a choir. On the basis of this concept, the Pythagoreans established that the art of music was an imitation of the movement of the celestial bodies. Music was thus a unity composed of numerical notes advancing to set intervals or simultaneously. It is reported that Pythagoras discovered the octave and the interval in the octave through the following experiment: he stretched a taut string over a piece of wood, placed his finger on the happy medium of this monochord, and plucked the string. He found out that each half of the string vibrated twice as fast as the whole string of the monochord, each half producing a tone which sounded like the original one emitted from the full string but on a higher level of pitch.[27] This is the theory of the relationship of pitch to the length of the string, a theory which is still valid. On the basis of this relationship between distance and pitch, Pythagoreans explained not only musical but also planetary intervals. The spheres thus became a cosmic lyre, the music which Pythagoras is said to have imitated in the heptachord, an instrument of music, whose seven strings were thought to parallel the number of the spheres and to reveal to man the celestial choir that only few could hear.[28] This music was held to be intrinsically good because of its divine origin, and true art was believed to partake of this goodness.

In the "Sophist," two kinds of art are distinguished, one that is creative and one that is productive. The productive is concerned with the gratification of man's social needs, such as the skills necessary for good citizenship in the republic while the creative deals with the soul and man's lofty aspiration towards the divine. Another distinction to be aware of is that the creative art is inspired while the productive is the result of training. The works of certain music-makers belong to neither of these two categories; they are the makings of the masters of counterfeits and blasphemes who claim divine inspiration and produce not for the good of the republic but for selfish reasons. These artists have no place in the city. These distinctions are necessary if we are to recognize what Poe found in the Dialogues, what ideas he accepted and incorporated, and what concepts he discarded.

The Dialogues repeatedly stress the salutory role that music can play in society. In the "Republic," for instance, Socrates supports the view that we should be aware that music has many shades of meaning. First of all, it is a component of poetry, which means any kind of creation. Second, music means literature on the one hand and song on the other hand. Lyric hyphenates literature to song because it "is made up of three parts, words and tune and rhythm."[29] By virtue of its inherent harmony, music is presented as an ideal educational instrument in the establishment of temperance and virtue; as such, it

must govern the upbringing of youth especially in their early years:

> . . . the beginning is always the chief thing in every process, especially for whatever is young and tender; for it is then most easily moulded and each takes the shape which you wish to impress on each.[30]

Since there is a direct correlation between the republic and its members, Socrates emphasizes, it is necessary that the youth of the city be educated to guarantee the permanence of the legacy bequeathed upon it. Accordingly, it is unwise to "carelessly allow the children," Socrates adds, "to hear any chance fables moulded by chance persons."[31] Their education must be conducted by adequate teachers, points out an Athenian in "Laws," who are ready to "choose the best, and that which is nearest to the best; for otherwise they will never be able to charm the souls of young men in the way of virtue."[32]

The "chance persons" that Socrates has in mind form a particular tribe of poets that he wants to exclude from the republic because they implant a "spirit so evil and dissolute, so ungenerous and unseemly, whether in the likeness of livings things, or in buildings, or in any other thing "[33] that they should not be accepted as citizens. To protect the youth against bad poetry, the state must compel the malevolent artist to abide by the teaching

of "good speaking then and good concord," or it must

> . . . search for those craftsmen who by good natural powers can track out the nature of the beautiful and the graceful, and then our young people, dwelling, as it were, in wholesome country, will take in good from every direction; with works of beauty around them meeting their sight and hearing there will be, as it were, breezes blowing health to them from favourable regions, and, from childhood up, bringing them unconsciously into likeness and love and harmony with the beauty of speech.[34]

In Socrates' opinion, the means to use are first music and then gymnastic. The music of the universe must be duplicated in man-made music for the benefit of the soul, which guides the person on earth and shows him the way to heaven. Then gymnastics, which partakes of the attributes of music--order, harmony, and movement-- must be complementary and subordinate to music so that the two fit together in proper scale:

> . . . education in music and the fine arts is most potent, because by this chiefly rhythm and harmony sink into the inmost part of the soul and fasten most firmly upon it, bringing grace-fulness and making it graceful if one is well trained, but otherwise just the opposite. . . .[35]

The major objection that Socrates has against the "bad poets" is that they are superficial and subversive. The poets that Socrates has particularly in mind are the story-tellers and the instrumentalists, or musicians who play melodies without words. He acknowledges that story--telling can play a significant part in the education of young people, but he also points out that some poets corrupt the mind of the youth by telling false stories about the gods and heroes. Socrates, as Plato's Dialogues suggest, did not adhere to the myths perpetrated by Homer and Hesiod. For him, the gods cannot do any wrong because they are goodness and goodness can do no injustice:

> How Hera was tied up by her son, and how Hephaistos was thrown out of heaven by his father when he wanted to save his mother from a beating, and the battles between gods which Homer describes, we must not admit into our city, whether they are explained as allegory or not. For the young person is not able to judge what is allegory and what is not; but he will keep in his mind indelible and unchangeable whatever opinions he receives at that age. Therefore perhaps we must be specially careful that what they hear first are the noblest things told in the best fables for encouraging virtue.[36]

Socrates also contends that the gods are not to be accounted for the errors of humans, an idea formulated in "Timaeus" as the choice of the soul to lead a virtuous existence on earth or the opposite. All souls were given a fair start, with equal chances to strive towards the divine and to rest in peace in Heaven. If they fail to do so, the fault is theirs and they must atone for it in as many transmigrations as necessary. Therefore, if some souls are astray and miserable, "to say that God made them so, is what the poet must not be suffered to do."[37] Socrates concludes that "to call God the cause of harm to onyone, being good himself, is a falsehood" which has no place in the state. Adults should be warned against these blasphemes, and children must not hear or read them if they are to grow pious and virtuous.

Another art form that Socrates wanted the youth to be protected from is drama. He attacked the drama of his time on the basis that it featured bad characters and evil actions. The characters in the plays were either violent or excessively subdued. To allow children to imitate these bad examples cannot be justified; otherwise, the state might witness its downfall. Children, undiscriminating because of lack of experience, might think that crime, when not found, is advantageous and that "beating their breasts" or shouting out of wrath is manly.

Socrates also reproached the dramatist to teach fear of death and the preference of life in slavery over death.

Lines such as "I'd rather be a serf or labouring man / Under some yeoman on a little farm / Than be king paramount of all the dead,"[38] must be wiped out. All the references to fearful places and names--Styx, Cocytos, the River of Lamentation, the River Hate--poets should not use to scare the future guardians of the state since their stories are "neither true nor useful for those who are to be warlike."[39] The idea of fear of death is also developed in "Apology," where Socrates, sentenced to death, encouraged his listeners and the judges not to be afraid of death.

Among the corruptors of minds Socrates also includes the tribe of melodists. These musicians, or instrumentalists corrupt art by deviating from its essence; that is to reproduce the word of God in its harmony and goodness. Socrates reproached the instrumentalists for disregarding the primacy of the word. For Socrates, the word is the message of God's goodness, which itself is the first principle of creation: volition, or goodness precedes creation, and the latter is the expression of the former. If human creation has to be close to the paradigm, the cosmic order must be respected in its essential sequence: "tune and rhythm," Socrates emphasizes, "must follow the words."[40] The musician who disregards the principle that melody must be subordinated to the word and that it must exist only for the sake of making divinely-inspired lines closer to the songs from the motion of the celestial spheres

is, in Socrates'mind, to be feared for the damage he can inflict upon a mind. Contrarily, the good musician helps the soul to rise towards the skies instead of leading it away from cosmic harmony into fancy and folly.

Poe was strongly interested in the philosophy of music that Plato's "Republic" ascribes to Socrates. In his "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," for instance, Poe presents two translated passages from the "Republic," which read as follows:

> It will be hard to discover a better [method of education] than that which the experience of so many ages has already discovered; and this may be summed up as consisting in gymnastics for the body, and music for the soul. --Repub. lib.2. For this reason is a musical education most essential; since it causes Rhythm and Harmony to penetrate most intimately into the soul, taking the strongest hold up on it, filling it with beauty and making the man beautiful-minded. . . . He will praise and admire the beautiful; will receive it with joy into his soul, will feed upon it, and assimilate his own condition with it. -- Ibid. lib. 3.[41]

To these translations, Poe adds his own explanation of the significance of music in ancient Greece:

> Music . . . had, however, among the Athenians, a far more comprehensive signification than with us. It included not only the harmonies of time and of tune, but the poetic diction, sentiment, and creation, each in its widest sense. The study of music was with them, in fact, the general cultivation of the taste--of that which recognises the beautiful--in contra--distinction from reason. . . .[42]

One concept from Poe's statements that deserves our attention is that of "the beautiful." Like Socrates, Poe declares beauty to be the essence of creation and restricts music,poesy included, to the search for the divine.

Another idea that Poe borrows from the Dialogues, among many other Platonic writings, is that of divine inspiration, or the power of the word--an idea that he uses at several turns as if to answer what he calls "the grovelling and degrading assumptions ... set forth in the little query of Monsieur Casimir Perier--'A quoi un poete est-il bon?'"[43] One particular Plato Dialogue that might have influenced Poe is "Ion." Through the very conversation between Socrates and Ion, the titular character in this Dialogue, we learn about the divine role of the poet. Socrates contends, for instance, that the poet derives some divine power by inspiration from the

Muses and Apollo and passes it to the common people listening to him:

> . . . some divine power is moving you, such as there is in that stone which Euripides called the Magnesian, but most people call it the Heracleian stone. This magnet attracts iron rings, and not only that, but puts the same power into the iron rings, so that they can do the same as the stone does; they attract other rings, so that sometimes there is a whole long string of these rings hanging together, and all depend for their power on that one stone. So the Muse not only inspires people herself, but through these inspired ones others are inspired and dangle in a string. In fact all the good poets . . . are inspired and possessed when they utter all these beautiful poems, and so are the good lyric poets; these are not in their right mind when they make their beautiful songs. . . . As soon as they mount on their harmony and rhythm, they become frantic and possessed. . . . A very strong piece of evidence for the argument is Tynnichos of Chalcis, who never made a poem which a man would think worth mentioning except only the hymn of praise which all the world sings, well-nigh most beautiful of all lyrics, really

> and truly "a godsend from the Muses" as he calls it himself. Here most of all I think God has shown us, beyond all dispute, that these beautiful poems are not human, not made by man, but divine and made by God; and the poets are nothing but the gods' interpreters, possessed each by whatever god it may be. Just to prove this, God purposely sang the most beautiful of songs through the meanest of poets.[44]

Echoing Socrates, Poe writes in "Ballads and other Poems" that the poets

> Inspired with a prescient ecstasy . . . struggle by multiform novelty of combination among the things and thoughts of Time, to anticipate some portion of that loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain solely to Eternity. And the result of such effort, on the part of souls fittingly constituted, is alone what mankind have agreed to denominate Poetry.[45]

Not only does Poe use this concept of divine inspiration in his critical writings, but he also incorporates it into his fiction, as best illustrated by his cosmic tales--"The Power of Words," "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," "The Colloquy of Monos and Una." Among other significant tales that revolve around the "revelation-in-the-word" motif come to mind "The Mesmeric Revelation"

and "Some Words with a Mummy." In "The Power of Words," Poe shows two characters in reunion in the skies. Agathos, who is the first of the two to have departed from life on earth, initiates Oinos, the newcomer, in the blissful secret of life after death: "Question me then, my Oinos, freely and without fear," says Agathos. "Come! we will leave to the left the loud harmony of the Pleiades, and swoop outward from the throne into the starry meadows beyond Orion. . . . [46] Agathos proceeds to explain, in terms reminiscent of the statement of Plato's Timaeus, that "In the beginning only, he [God] created."[47] Then, as if drawing directly from Plato's opposition of Idea to Phenomena, Agathos reveals, "The seeming creatures which are now, throughout the universe, so perpetually springing into being, can only be considered as the mediate ... of the Divine creative power."[48]

In his other tale, "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," Eiros has just joined Charmion in Aidenn and learns from her former lover on earth what her new life in the stars is going to be like:

> Dreams are with us no more; -- but of these mysteries anon. I rejoice to see you looking life-like. . . . The film of the shadow has already passed from off your eyes. Be of heart, and fear nothing. Your allotted days of stupor have expired; and, tomorrow, I will

> myself induct you into the full joys and wonders of your novel existence.[49]

This pattern of revelatory conversation between an initiator and his listener finds its extension in the tale "Mesmeric Revelation." Here, Poe uses a death-like condition, mesmerism, to dramatize the power of the word. The mesmerist narrator, P., confides that his patient, Vankirk, "was suffering with acute pain in the region of the heart, and breathed with great difficulty."[50] This physical sickness is further suggested to reflect the state of the patient's soul, lost in metaphysical skepticism:

> I sent for you to-night . . . not so much to administer to my bodily ailment, as to satisfy me concerning certain phychal impressions which, of late, have occasioned me much anxiety and surprise. I need not tell you how skeptical I have hitherto been on the topic of the soul's immortality. I cannot deny that there has always existed, as if in that very soul which I have been denying, a vague half-sentiment of its own existence. But this half-sentiment at no time amounted to conviction. With it my reason had nothing to do. All attempts at logical inquiry resulted, indeed, in leaving me more skeptical than before.[51]

P., in a manner reminiscent of Plato's Socratic method of discovery, agrees to lead Vankirk through " a series of well-directed questions."[52] First, he will "cast him into an abnormal condition, whose phenomena resemble very closely those of death" because only in death or in death-like conditions can we liberate ourselves from the yoke of the body to see "through channels supposed unknown, matters beyond the scope of the physical organs."[53] P. induces Vankirk to sleep and notices that the patient's physical pain has abated: "His breathing became immediately more easy, and he seemed to suffer no physical uneasiness."[54] Then he proceeds to his series of questions, thus conducting Vankirk "out of the realm of ordinary thought."[55]

One last work that deserves our attention is "A Descent into the Maelström." If the sages in "The Power of Words," "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," and "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" have wisdom on the one hand; if, on the one hand, the mesmerist P. possesses the capability of hypnotizing so as to impart knowledge, the fisherman in " A Descent" combines all theses attributes to fully embody the quintessence of Poe's vision of the true poet. The story of the sailor reaches us through a second narration: the fisherman tells his disciple what happened to him in open sea and how it happened. However, despite the fact that the events are related from two removes, they still remain very captivating, or--to use a Platonic term--magnetic. Through the young man then we

learn about the old fisherman's ordeal, which finds its roots in a sin of pride.

On the surface level, "Descent" is a sea tale like its predecessor "MS. Found in a Bottle." On the deeper level, however, it is a tale of a psychic voyage, stories and poems--a voyage composed of a series of crises. Such peregrinations, Margareth J. Yonce suggests, are "accounts of archetypal voyages, whose meaning for their participants encompassed and exemplified the central meaning of existence."[56] At the outset of the story, the fisherman is presented as a rationalist and a materialist whose ignorance of things divine is illustrated by his greed for capital:

> . . . among the whole of the Lofoden coastmen, we three were the only ones who made a regular business of going out to the islands, as I tell you. . . . There fish can be got at all hours, without much risk, and therefore these places are preferred. The choice spots over here among the rocks, however, not only yield the finest variety, but in far greater abundance; so that we often got in a single day, what the more timid of the craft could not scrape together in a week. In fact, we made it a matter of desperate speculation--the risk of life standing of labor, and courage answering capital.

> . . . Here we used to remain until nearly time for slackwater again, when we weighed and made for home.[57]

The key-word in this passage is "speculation," which establishes the origins of the fisherman's propensity towards ratiocination and presents his earthly preoccupations as the antithesis of the quest for the Spiritual, or the Ideal. The sailor then announces characters like Montresor as well as the narrators in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," all victims of their belief that they possess reasoning power.

As the story unfolds, we discover that what caused the fisherman's ordeal is his fallibility--the very postulate of his human condition. However, the sailor is too much of a self-deceiving braggart at this point to understand the limitation of human reasoning or sensory faculties. "We never set out upon this expedition without a steady side wind for going and coming," he proclaims, "one that we felt sure would not fail us before our return--and we seldom made a mis-calulation" (p. 233). Equally boastful is Montresor, whose nature is mirrored through the person of Fortunato, the doppelgänger whom he immures. About his victim Montresor says,

> He had a weak point--this Fortunato--although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his

> connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiam is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practise imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmary, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack. . . . (p. 167)

This passage establishes Fortunato as the alter ego of Montresor, especially when the latter confides, "I did not differ from him materially." By ridiculing Fortunato, Montresor mocks at his own self without realizing it. The clownish creature who had drunk to excess and whose head is symbolically "surmounted by the conical cap and bells" is no one else but Montresor, as the pun on his name suggests--Montresor easily translates into Italian as Fortunato. Here then we have the same individual clad in different accoutrement, "a tight--fitting parti-stripped dress." The hatred that Montresor nourishes for his apparent nemesis is exactly the aversion he has towards that part of him that alienates him from the good. His lack of humility, his overweening pride, is a trangression of nature--a crime that requires atonement through self-immolation. The plan of nature is revealed through Montresor's own statement:

> I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when

> retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who had done the wrong.
>
> It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile <u>now</u> was at the thought of his immolation. (p. 167)

Thus Montresor becomes the agent of his own punishment: by immuring the corporeal Fortunato, he kills his soul. The irony is that Montresor's seeming ingenuity--he easily beguiles Fortunato into following him to the catacombs of the Montresors--turns into unequivocal ingenuousness, for he never understood, unlike the old fisherman, the portent of his murderous act. [58]

Although the crime of the fisherman involves no murder, it is nonetheless as serious as Montresor's act. The fisherman not only relies on his speculative power, but he also seeks to discover the secret of nature by using man-made instruments, such as watches. If the sailor has his own way of assessing the passage of time, nature likewise has its own way of showing the fisherman the superficiality of his artifice and of teaching him about "the self-love and arrogance of man."[59] It is in this sense that we are invited to read the fisherman's

exclamation as he discovers himself engulfed in the whirlpool:

> . . . soon, a hideous thought flashed upon me. I dragged my watch from its fob. It was not going. I glanced at its face by the moonlight, and then burst into tears as I flung it far away into the ocean. <u>It had run down at seven o'clock! We were behind the time of the slack, and the whirl of the Strömm was in full fury</u>! (p. 238)

The watch then becomes the lure through which nature shows the fisherman the fickleness of man's attempt to break through the secret of the universe by means of reasoning or artifacts.

The turning point in the story is the fisherman's discovery, through "revelation," of the might of the Divine: he becomes an instant seer and abandons himself to the will of God:

> Having made up my mind to hope no more, I got rid of a great deal of that terror which unmanned me at first. I suppose it was despair that strung my nerves. . . . I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a

> manifestation of God's power. I do believe that I blushed with shame when this idea crossed my mind. (pp. 239-40)

Thus the fisherman frees himself from the burden of physical survival at all costs, a principle his brothers still live by. The rebirth of the fisherman after he emerges from the first fury of the pool is well illustrated through the contrast between his happiness to find his brother alive and the latter's selfishness. In an impulse of self-preservation, the brother denies him a hold on the ringbolt. Ironically, by letting his brother have his way, the fisherman escapes death while his brother drowns with the ringbolt.

What is significant in Poe's use of the technique of double narration is that he succeeds in duplicating the old fisherman's experience and in dramatizing the concept of the magnetism of Divine power and beauty. Poe shows that it is only when the fisherman abandons his worldly aspirations that he gains enough aesthetic distance that ultimately allows him to understand the secret essence of the universe around him. This is the crucial moment when he grasps the mystery of the cosmos, as announced by the motto to the story:

> The ways of God in Nature, as in Providence, are not as <u>our</u> ways; nor are the models that we frame any way commensurate to the vastness,

> profundity, and unsearchableness of His works, which have depth in them greater than the well of Democritus. (p.225)

Thus, without his detachment from wordly concerns, the sailor might never have been able to appreciate "how magnificent" the deadly Maelström was.

His odyssey then becomes a journey toward transcendent knowledge and no longer towards a rationalistic or empirical assessment and interpretation of Nature. This initial phase of the fisherman's transformation into an aesthetic man is soon followed by his search for more understanding of "supernal beauty": he becomes more "possessed with keenest curiosity about the whirl itself" (p. 240) and with "a wild effort to reach the Beauty above."[60] He now wants to explore the depths of the whirlpool--even at the cost of his own life--because he has discovered the fickleness of earthly existence in comparison to Divine beauty. This aspiration towards the "sublime" is what fundamentally defines Poe's vision of the true poet and pervades his writings. Thus he uses in this tale the imagery of the redemptive voyage, while in others he uses icons ranging from the lamp in "To Helen" to the "music of things" in "Al Aaraaf."

In the last part of his narration, the fisherman's story-telling becomes organically poetic as he looks upon the tableau of a boat spinning around amidst "the rays of the full moon" that "streamed in a flood of

golden glory" (p. 208). "Poetry is the sole requisite," G. Sweeney writes in this connection, "and it is to poetry that the sailor resorts in order to narrate his experience . . . his picture of the Maelström and of his experience is flooded with tropes."[61] By telling his tale and correspondingly creating more distance from the events, the fisherman allows his disciple to grasp, through a more powerful magnifying glass, the significance of the truth that has been revealed to him in the whirlpool; in so doing, the sailor emerges as the inspired poet who has been chosen to spread, like Plato's Tynnichos of Chalcis,[62] the Word.

Substantially, "Descent" concerns the disciple and us the readers. The young man is indeed more than a simple narrator telling a story about the spiritual growth of the fisherman. At the outset of the tale, we learn that he is worthy of the revelation passed on to him, for, although he has a vast reading of scientific treatises about the Maelström, he is quick to understand the limitations of rationalist explanations of nature as he watches the vast and tumultous expanse of the ocean:

> The ordinary accounts of this vortex had by no means prepared me for what I saw. That of Jonas Ramus, which is perhaps the most circumstantial of any, cannot impart the faintest conception either of the magnificence, or of the horror of the scene--or of the wild

> bewildering sense of the novel which confounds the beholder. (p. 229)

When the young narrator passes on his own experience and what he learned from the old fisherman, he also displays how thoroughly he imbibed the poetry of revelation. Like the sailor, he speaks in the manner of the prophets, rejecting technological jargons in favor of metaphors; thus where Jonas Ramus compares the sound from the whirlpool to geographical features like cataracts, the young man uses the image of "a vast herd " of buffaloes moaning upon the prairie. As his story reaches us, the disciple ultimately fulfills his role of a trailblazer whose torch guides to a "pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense."[63]

In "Descent" as well as the other tales and poems considered in this chapter, Poe obviously relies upon the concept of the revelatory power of Logos, or God in His word for thematic purposes, and it is in this sense that we are invited to read his imagery of "a great pervading sound, as if from the very mouth of Him,"[64] imagery that defines Poe's Platonic vision of the cosmos and provides his aesthetic theories with substance.

NOTES

[1] Poe, "A Chapter of Suggestions," XIV 186.

[2] Poe, "The Poetic Principle," XIV 274.

[3] See Poe's motto to "Morella," II 27.

[4] Plato, "Timaeus," 12.

[5] "Timaeus," 14.

6 "Eureka," 309.

7 "Eureka," 207.

[8] W.K.C. Guthrie, "Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism," The Encyc. of Phil., VII 37.

[9] See Socrates's line: Plato's "Republic," trans. Rouse, 399.

[10] For Philolaus on Plato, see Arthur Berry's A Short History of Astronomy (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1961) 25.

[11] "Pinakidia," XIV 42-43. For Plato's dissemination of the concepts of Pythagoreans, see Cicero's statement: "I shall for my part, in tracing them out, follow the time-honoured distinction made first by Pythagoras and after him Plato," Tusculan Disp. 339.

[12] Plato, "Timaeus," 33.

[13] Max Caspar, 44.

[14] Kepler, Mystery, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, rpt. in Theories of the Universe, 199-200.

[15] "Eureka,' 279.

[16] "The Rationale of Verse," XIV 218

[17] "Eureka," 277.

[18] "The Philos. of Comp.," XIV 195.

[19] Poe, XIV 206.

[20] Poe, "Slavery in the United States," VIII 266.

[21] "Ballad," XI 73.

[22] Kepler, Harmonice Mundi rpt. in Max Caspar, 268.

23 "Al Aaraaf," VII 34.

[24] "The Lake: To--," VII 21.

[25] "To Isadore," VII 229.

[26] "Al Aaraaf," 34.

[27] See Julius Portnoy's The Philosopher and Music (New York: The Humanities Press, 1954) 9.

[28] See Gretchen L. Finney, Musical Background for English Literature: 1580-1650 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976) 6. Both she and Portnoy point

out that Pythagoras attributed the origin of music to the movement of the stars which were so arranged that they produced a harmony of celestial tones as they circled through the heavens. A divine hand created the stars, placed each in its proper orbit, and then set them in motion so that in their movement they would refect the perfect order of harmony that governs the universe.

[29] "Republic," Rouse, 196.

[30] "Republic," 174.

[31] "Republic," 174.

[32] "Laws," Jowett, 448.

[33] "Repubic," Rouse, 200.

[34] "Republic," 200.

[35] "Republic," 200-01.

[36] "Republic," 176.

[37] "Republic," 178.

[38] See Homer, rpt. in "Republic," 182.

[39] "Republic," 182.

[40] "Republic," 197.

[41] Poe, "The Colloquy," IV 204.

[42] Poe, IV 204.

[43] Poe, "Undine: A Miniature Romance," X 30.

[44] "Ion," Rouse, 18-19.

[45] "Ballads," XI 72.

[46] Poe, VI 140.

[47] Poe, VI 140.

[48] Poe, VI 140.

[49] Poe, IV 1.

[50] Poe, V 242.

[51] Poe, V 242-43.

[52] Poe, V 244.

[53] Poe, V 241.

[54] Poe, V 244.

[55] Daniel Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972). 169.

[56] Margareth J. Yonce, "The Spiritual Descent into the Maelström: A Debt to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'" Poe Studies 2 (April,1969) 26.

[57] "Descent," II 233.

[58] James W. Gargano, "The Question of Poe's

Narrators," College English 25 (1963) 5. He writes, "Far from being his author's mouthpiece, the narrator, Montresor, is one of the supreme examples in fiction of a deluded rationalist who cannot glimpse the moral implications of his planned folly. Poe's fine ironic sense makes clear that Montresor . . . is both a compulsive and pursued man. . . . But the greatest irony of all, to which Montresor is never sensitive, is that the 'injuries' supposedly perpetrated by Fortunato are illusory and that the vengeance meant for the victim recoils upon Montresor himself."

[59] Poe, "Instinct VS Reason--A Black Cat," rpt. in Selected Poetry and Prose of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (New York: Random House, Inc., 1951) 358.

[60] "The Poetic Principle," XIV 273.

[61] Gerard M. Sweeney, "Beauty and Truth: Poe's 'A Descent into the Maelström,'" Poe Studies 6 (June,1973) 23.

[62] "Ion," Rouse, 19.

[63] "The Philos. of Comp.," XIV 197.

[64] "The Conversation Of Eiros and Charmion," IV 8.

CHAPTER V

AN ANALYSIS OF POE'S POEMS AND TALES OF THE BEREAVED LOVER IN RELATION TO THE PLATONIC TRADITION

In his creative as well as critical writings, Poe places a strong emphasis on the principle of "Beauty." Taken in its broadest sense, the term means for Poe the concept that allows him to invest his works with universal significance[1] and that elevates the soul. In its narrowest sense, "Beauty" represents the ultimate point of artistic creation where theme and form converge to produce a harmonious alloy; in relation to this acceptation, Poe insists at every turn that the "direct causes" of "Art" in general and poetry in particular are "Beauty."[2] We can test this principle of harmonious correlation between subject-matter and technique of narration by examining Poe's use of "Platonic love" as a topic and a method of narration.

One of the most distinctive features of Poe is his preoccupation with the issues of love and beauty, both from a thematic and structural point of view. Most of his works are pervaded by the presence of beautiful ladies and the effect--often debilitating-- that the demise of these women has upon the men who love them. It is this

recurrent pattern that closely links Poe to the Platonic tradition. In fact, Platonism and Neo-Platonic lyricism were especially congenial to the spirit of Poe, and the influence of the Platonic tradition on his writings surfaces in the early stage of his career. Commenting on Poe's natural bent for lyricism, Charles W. Kent aptly points out, "the very beginnings of his life are romantic. . . . Converging lines of romantic tendencies met in this child of strolling players , . . and it is not improbable that the unregulated and intemperate lives of his forebears may have given both direction and color to his life."[3] Additional facts about his lyricism are provided by his letters as an adult. In his letter of October 1, 1848 to Helen Whitman, he writes, "I have pressed your letter again and again to my lips, sweetest Helen--bathing in tears of joy, or of a 'divine despair.'"[4] Another time, Poe writes, "I felt, for the first time in my life . . . the existence of spiritual influence altogether out of the reach of my reason. I saw that you were Helen--my Helen--the Helen of a thousand dreams--she whose visionary lips had so often lingered upon my own in the divine trance of passion."[5] The lyricism that surfaces in this letter also pervades Poe's two poems called "To Helen"; the first, published in 1831, was dedicated to Mrs. Jane Stith Stanard, and the second, published in 1848, was dedicated to Helen Whitman.

If Poe's claim that he wrote the first "To Helen"

when he was fourteen is exact, the poem can rightfully stand as a first-hand testimony of the writer's familiarity with ancient literature and as a proof of his precocious lyricism as well.[6] The first "To Helen" makes rich classical allusions to Greek mythology and history. Mrs. Stanard, to whom the poem is dedicated, is presented as the ideal woman, and Poe's selection of a name for her is significant. As the Greek legend goes, "Helen" is a beautiful woman who appears to young men in the form of their first love.[7] In reality, Poe encountered many "Helens," notably Mrs. Helen Whitman, who entralled his heart in the last part of his life.

Poe's celebration of these women in particular and of beauty in the female principle in general betrays a following of the Western literary tradition of Ideal love, which finds its origin in Plato's locus classicus about love, "Symposium," a passage from which Poe uses as a motto to "Morella." In Athens of Plato's days, love between youths was very common and hailed as the purest embodiment of heroic friendship; the older of the pair was called "the lover" and the younger "the beloved."[8] The youthful attachment was encouraged owing to military considerations: it was the duty of the lover to train up the beloved. However, this type of attachment between youth was prohibited by certain Greek states because of unorthodox practices. Writing in this sense, Callaghan points out that physical attraction was often the reason

for the formation of friendship among young men and that the unorthodox character of the relationship was obvious to Plato.[9] In the "Symposium," Plato presents through the persona of Pausanias the principle of spiritual love in opposition to physical love; the latter affords vulgar pleasure or the pleasure of the senses while the former leads to the pleasures of the soul. "A base man," Pausanias declares, "is that common lover who loves the body rather than the soul."[10] Implied in this statement is the idea that the sensual love renders the soul gross so as to impede its heavenward flight. In addition, Pausanias associates physical love with the earthly Aphrodite, or Pandemus and equates spiritual love with the heavenly Urania:

> Of course there are two goddesses. One I take it is older, and motherless, daughter of Heaven, whom we call Heavenly Aphrodite, the other younger, a daughter of Zeus and Dione, whom we call, as you know, Common . . . . The Love, then, which belongs to Common Aphrodite is really and truly common and works at random; and this is the love which inferior men feel.[11]

The Christian Church of the Renaissance period, combined with the tradition of chivalry,[12] transformed the concept of love between youths into love between man and woman, with the woman becoming the concrete symbol of

heavenly love. In this new version of heavenly love, the Neoplatonic lover worships the beloved woman, and the beloved shows him the way to heaven. In Plato, we will remember, the lover shows the way; he guides the beloved. Neoplatonism, tinged with Christian ideals, finds in Dante, who celebrates Beatrice, and in Petrarch, who worships Laura, two excellent stewards of seminal importance.[13] Neoplatonic writers before the English Renaissance invested the beloved with the attributes of the Divine Mother: she is a virgin and is venerated for her eternal chastity. English Neoplatonic writers, like Sidney and Spenser, borrowed the concept of the venerable lady but departed from the idea of eternal virginity; they transformed the purely ascetic vision of love into virtuous marriage.[14]

The concept of love and of the beautiful woman in Poe's poems and tales operates as a synthesis of the Platonic and the Neoplatonic currents; in his writings, we find both the celebration of chastity and virtuous matrimony. The tale "Eleonora" offers a good example of this synthesis. At the beginning of the tale, the narrator relates, for instance, how he and Eleonora remained chaste in their relationship over fifteen years.[15] This immaculate relationship itself suggestively takes place in an environment reminiscent of the prelapserian garden:

> We had always dwelled together, beneath a tropical sun, in the valley of the Many-Colored

> Grass . . . beyond the mountains at the upper end of our encircled domain, there crept out a narrow and deep river, brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora. . . . No murmur rose from its bed, and so gently it wandered along, that the pearly pebbles upon which we loved to gaze, far down within its bosom, stirred not at all, but lay in a motionless content, each in its own old station, shining on gloriously forever.
>
> The margin of the river, and of the many dazzling rivulets that glided, through devious ways, into its channel, as well as the spaces that extended from the margins away down into the depths of the streams until they reached the bed of pebbles at the bottom,--these spots, not less than the whole surface of the valley, from the river to the mountains that girdled it in, were carpeted all by a soft green grass, thick, short, perfectly even, and vanilla-cup, the white daisy, the purple violet, and the ruby--red asphodel, that <u>its exceeding beauty spoke</u> to our hearts, <u>in loud tones, of the love and of the glory of God</u>.[16] [Emphasis is mine]

Poe's association of the young couple with this Edenic garden invites a reading of the opening chapters as the acme of the relation between the narrator and his

beloved Eleonora in its "golden glory."[17] This is the song to untouched flowers living in perfect harmony with the world around them--a hymn sung again in "Annabel Lee":

> I was a child and she was a child,
> In this kingdom by the sea,
> But we loved with a love that was more than love.
> I and my Annabel Lee--
> With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
> coveted her and me.[18]

The recurrence of the theme of ideal childhood in a paradisial environment in his works strongly suggests that for Poe these years of innocence constitute the purest stage of our earthly existence, when the "Naiad" is not torn from her flood, the "Elfin" not from the green grass, and the poet not from summer dreams.

Let us add that even when these women reach the silver age of their existence, most of them retain their spiritual loveliness, as reflected by their immaculate appearance. The rare delicacy of their features, their voices well tuned to the music of the celestial spheres, all point to their tenderness and purity. Writing in this sense, F. Stovall says about Poe's ideal woman that she is "tall, slender, and majestic, with a light and . . . 'marble hand.'"[19] This is indeed the picture of most women we encounter in Poe's tales of the dead women as well as in his poems of supernal beauty.

In the "To Helen" of 1831, one of Poe's most celebrated poems, the poet responds to the beauty of the lady in these terms: "Helen, thy beauty is to me/ Like those Nicean barks."[20] These lines from the first stanza of the poem lavish praise on the lady and are skillfully supported by the images in the other stanzas. The dominant impression of the poem is that of a caring woman who illuminates the path leading the lover to his "native shores." Helen here is invested with the attributes of a mother; the Nicean vessel she is equated with recalls the cradle where the child lies in safety. "The hyacinth hair, the classic face, the Naiad airs which lead the poet 'home' gleam," Marie Bonaparte convincingly writes, "with the light of that face and form--the mother's."[21] Another idea that surfaces in the poem is that of journey and home-coming established by the bark simile. Here the lover goes on a voyage but returns safely because guided by the beloved. Writing in this sense, W.M. Rossetti points out that the wanderer is a conqueror, a victor.[22] Because the beloved brings the lover to "glory" and to "grandeur," the latter sings the virtue of the lady through "light" images: she has golden hair--like Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura--and holds "the agate lamp," a recurrent icon in Poe's poems.

The praise that the lover bestows upon this archetypal Helen is also an invocation to the deity of heavenly love and to her power to elevate man: "Helen,"

J.M. Pemberton points out, "clearly becomes for the persona a magnetic personification of 'inspirational beau--ty . . . Helen does literally glow or radiate, with light as well as with her more abstract, aesthetic beauty."[23] As such, the hymn to the lady brings into relief the transcendence of the soul, upon which Poe's mystic vision of the world rests.

Poe's handling of the transcendence of the soul, although rooted in the Platonic tradition, is however different from that of his predecessors in that his use of the concept is essentially aesthetic: beauty is an end in itself. In Plato, "beauty" makes man virtuous for the best of his society; thus, it is subordinate to a higher order; for Christian Neoplatonic writers, Absolute beauty is subordinate to God Himself; in Poe, Absolute beauty is the ultimate value to which everything tends, including aesthetic aspirations; this principle is clearly stated in his essay "The Poetic Principle":

> An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odours, and sentiments amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds,

> and colours, and odours, and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight. . . . It is desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us--but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above . . . . And thus when by Poetry--or when by Music, the most entrancing of the Poetic moods--we find ourselves melted into tears--we weep then--not as the Abbate Gravina 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 for ever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which through the poem, or through music, we attain the but brief and indeterminate glimpses.[24]

This passage sums up Poe's theory of the Beautiful and establishes his conviction that "a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul."[25] Implied in this statement is the idea that the poem, as a piece of creation, elevates the soul only if it tends towards Beauty as to become a vehicle of Beauty, which is the supreme transcendence; by its very nature, Beauty is the composite of abstraction, or the qualitative Oneness, and the concrete, the physical Oneness; the former is intangible while the latter material; nevertheless, the

two merge to form the absolute transcendence: Beauty, or the metaphysical Oneness. What is noticeable in Poe's writings is that his ideas, lofty as they may be, are not original; but, as Harry T. Baker poignantly puts it, "no service is done to the poet's memory by attempts to prove that his product is unique,"[26] Poe himself does not pretend to be an original thinker, preferring the role of the artist to that of "those thinkers . . . with whom darkness and depth are synonymous."[27]

As an artist then, Poe places a strong emphasis upon attaining Oneness by harmoniously combining ideas and technique. For him, technique or the modus operandi,[28] as he calls it, is the necessary complement to ideas in the achievement of a total, organic effect. Since the design of artistic creation is to reach that total effect, "in the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not the one pre-established design."[29] This principle of composition finds its highest expression in Poe's handling of structure, which illustrates the combination of abstract ideas--love, creation, death, inspiration--and concrete elements such as style and narrative technique.

Most of Poe's poems and tales dramatizing the topos of the beautiful woman basically follow three patterns. Pattern one presents the physical beauty of the lady and then shifts to her spiritual beauty; this structure fits the poems that are especially dedicated to living beings.[30]

Pattern two, usually governing the structure of the poems but not the tales, is a song for the dead lady by the bereaved lover in its most elegiac form. We have a few examples of this pattern with "Lenore" (1831), "Eulalie" (1845), and "Ulalume" (1847). The best example is probably "Annabel Lee" (1844); this poem of six stanzas sets in its first two stanzas the nature of the beloved; the next two provide an idea of how she died; the last two conclude upon the perennial quality of the love relationship. There, is of course, a close relationship between pattern one and two in the sense that the latter evolves from the former: the first "To Helen," presumably written in 1823 but published in 1831, already contains elements later used in poems of structure two. Pattern three presents the death of a beautiful lady followed by the madness of the bereaved; this "madness," which can take several forms, may be equated with the Christian notion of the "Fall." Pattern three, which is an extension of two, finds its origin in pattern one; it is the structure that Poe uses in most his arabesque tales. Generally speaking, each of the three patterns is closely linked to the topos of ideal love and beauty; as such, each is organic in relation to its theme and translates Poe's assertion that "effects should be made to spring from its dire causes" and "attained through means best adapted."[31]

Pattern one, for instance, governs the structure of the "To Helen" poems dedicated to Mrs. Stanard and Mrs. Whitman. The two poems start with the physical description of the beloved. If we exclude the first stanza of the "To Helen" of 1831, we have the physical portrait of the lady (her hair, her face, and airs); then the description moves to the abstract and presents her spiritual beauty. The "To Helen" of 1848 offers another illustration of the pattern. The first stanza of the poem establishes the physical beauty of the lady through the use of concrete images such as the roses, which yield their odorous scent to die. The death of the roses suggests their physical existence and the condition of that very existence. Here, we are not very far from Socrates' speech to Cebes and Simmias, where Socrates points out that it is the "compounded" which is liable to scatter while the uncompounded is indissoluble and unchanging; in other words, the soul is eternal while the body, the compounded, changes continually.[32] The death allusion is resumed in the fourth stanza:

> The Pearly lustre of the moon went out:
> The mossy banks and the meandering paths,
> The happy flowers and the repining trees,
> Were seen no more: the very roses' odors
> Died in the arms of the adoring airs.
> All--all expired save thee--save less than thou:
> Save only the divine light in thine eyes--

Save but the soul in thine uplifted eyes.
I saw but them--they were the world to me.
I saw but them--saw only them for hours--
Saw only them until the moon went down.
What wild heart-histories seemed to lie enwritten
Upon those crystalline, celestial spheres!
How dark a wo! . . . [33]

The divine light in the lady's eye, like the "agate lamp" in the "To Helen" of 1831, represents the immortal soul. The theme of the dying body is approached again in the last stanza of the poem, and the lines themselves are a clear statement of the concept:

But now, at length, dear Dian sank from sight,
Into a western couch of thunder-cloud;
And thou, a ghost, amid the entombing trees
Didst glide away. Only thine eyes remained;
They would not go--they never have gone;
Lighting my lonely pathway home that night,
They have not left me (as my hopes have) since;
They follow me--they lead me through the years.
They are my ministers--yet I their slave.
Their office is to illumine and enkindle--
My duty, to be saved by their bright light,
And purified in their electric fire,
And sanctified in their elysian fire.
They fill my soul with Beauty (which is hope),

And are far up in Heaven--the stars I kneel to
In the sad, silent watches of my night;
While even in the meridian glare of day
I see them still--two sweetly scintillant
Venuses, unextinguished by the sun! (p. 109)

The opposition between body and soul is not only reflected by the contrast between death and light images but also by Poe's use of Greek mythological figures; he opposes Dian, mother of Pandemus,or earthly lover to Venus, the heavenly Aphrodite. The structural pattern of this poem, with a few modifications, governs other poems like "Eulalie.--A Song" and "For Annie."

Pattern two is elegiac in stance; in poems governed by this form, the narrator celebrates, in the form of reminiscences, the physical and spiritual beauty of the deceased lady, as illustrated by "Annabel Lee":

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of ANNABEL LEE;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.[34]

In relation to the Platonic tradition, this pattern is characteristic of the works of Renaissance poets, notably Dante, Petrarch, Sidney, and Spenser. In his Vita Nuovo,

for example, Dante structurally moves from the celebration of the beloved's physical beauty to that of her spiritual beauty. Thus Dante writes,

> Nine times already after my birth was the heaven of light returned to the same point in its proper gyration, when to my eyes first appeared the gracious lady of my mind who was called Beatrice by . . . many she appeared to me clothed with very noble humble colour, & becoming purple, girt & adorned in the guise which belonged to her very tender youth. . . . In this point, the animal spirit which dwells in the chamber, in which all the sensuous spirits carry their perceptions, began to marvel much and speaking specially to the spirits of sight. . . . [35]

At the end of the work, Dante discovers the spiritual beauty of Beatrice, which leads him out of his worldly preoccupation for a new life, hence the title of the poem. A similar structure governs the spiritual growth of the persona Petrarch in Canonziere. In the course of this work, we learn about Petrarch's physical desire of the lady: "Her golden hair was loosed on the breeze which wound it in a thousand sweet knots, and the lively light burned beyond measure. . . . "[36] The work ends with Petrarch's substitution of the Virgin Mary for Laura. We find a more contemporary example of poems dramatizing the bereaved

lover's passage from physical contemplation to spiritual contemplation in Sidneys' new version of The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia. The two lovers of the departed woman, Strephon and Claius, confide,

> Certainly as her eyelids are more pleasant to behold, then two kiddes climing up a faire tree, and browsing on her tendrest braunches, and yet are nothing, compared to the day-shining starres . . . as her breath is more sweete then a gentle Southwest wind, which comes creeping over flowrie fieldes and shaddowed waters . . . and yet is nothing, compared to the hony flowing speach that breath doth carrie: no more all that our eyes can see of her . . . is to be matched with the flocke of unspeakable vertues laidup delightfully in that best folde.[37]

Through Urania's love, which sustains them, the two shepherds transcend "the trade of ordinary worldings" (p.6) and move from the mere adoration of Urania's physical beauty to the veneration of her spiritual virtues. They refer to her as the shepherd of the shepherds, who guides them to heavenly wisdom. Using the device of the rhetorical question, they ask,

> Who can better witnesse that then we, whose experience is grounded upon feeling? hath not the

> only love of her made us . . . raise up our thoughts . . . so as great clearkes do not disdaine our conference . . . hath not she throwne upon our desires . . . hath not in any, but in her, love-fellowship maintained friendship betweene rivals, and beautie taught the beholders chastitie? (pp. 7-8)

The shepherds' elevation from love of the beautiful lady to love of beauty itself places them above the level of existence where the self operates merely as a body. In recapitulation, Poe's poems governed by pattern two structurally and thematically evolve from the bereaved lover's remembrance of the departed woman's physical beauty to the celebration of her divine attributes. In the same way that pattern two incorporates structural elements from pattern one, pattern three borrows from one and two.

Pattern three, with the exception of "The Raven," is restricted to the tales. Dramatizing the effect of the beloved woman's death upon the beraved narrator, tales governed by this structure often begin with the introduction of the notion of bereavement through the idea of lost beauty. As such Berenice, like Morella, Eleonora, and Ligeia, is referred to in these terms:

> Ah! vividly is her image before me now, as in the early days of her light-heartedness and joy! Oh! gorgeous yet fantastic beauty! Oh! sylph amid

> the shrubberies of Arnheim!--Oh! Naiad among its fountains!--and then--then all is mystery and terror, and a tale which should not be told. Disease--a fatal disease--fell like the simoon upon her frame, and, even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! Alas! the destroyer came and went, and the victim--where was she? I knew her . . . no longer as Berenice.[38]

The four arabesque tales "Berenice," "Morella," "Ligeia," and "Eleonora" all rely significantly on a melancholy stance, which is best conveyed by the unfortunate death of the beautiful woman; In Poe's own conviction, the death of the beautiful lady is "the most poetical topic in the world--and . . . the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."[39] He initially made it clear that "melancholy is . . . the most legitimate of all the poetical tones" (p. 198). Inasmuch as the beautiful lady is a metaphor for Beauty, the loss of the beloved symbolizes the Fall and the division of Oneness, two important concepts in the Platonic tradition.

All four of the tales are presented as reminiscences of a past relationship between a woman and a lover, and in both

"Berenice" and "Eleonora" the narrators recall the years when they and their beloved were young and innocent. Thus Eleonora's lover reminisces about the purity of their lives in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass, where no "unguided footstep ever came upon the vale" and where they "lived all alone knowing nothing of the world without the valley."[40] However, this bower of bliss was fragile although "it lay far way up among a range of giant hills that hung beetling round about it" (p. 237); any penetration would be harmful because there would be "need of putting back, with force, the foliage of ... trees, of crushing to death the glories of many millions of fragrant flowers"(p. 237). In this valley then Eleonora and her lover lived in Edenic harmony until their first embrace:

> Hand in hand about this valley, for fifteen years, roamed I with Eleonora before Love entered within our hearts. It was one evening at the close of the third lustrum of her life, and of the fourth of my own, that we sat locked in each other's embrace, beneath the serpent-like trees [emphasis is mine], and looked down within the waters of the River of Silence at our images therein. . . . We had drawn the God Eros from that wave, and now we felt that he had enkindled within us the fiery souls of our forefathers. The passions which had for centuries distinguished

> our race, came thronging with fancies for which they had been equally noted. . . . (pp. 238-39)

Soon after, Poe's Adam and Eve are deprived of the idyllic innocence of the valley, and happiness ceases to exist. This fall, resulting from the youth's discovery of carnal pleasure, of course plays a significant part in the structure of the tale as it leads to the death of the woman. This archetypal Fall pervades many of Poe's poems and tales, sometimes taking the form of a fatal journey to unknow regions, sometimes that of a descent into an unfathomable abyss.

The tales of the bereaved lover also dramatize another Platonic idea--the division of Oneness into particles and the quest of the particles for a reunion. Lest we miss the centrality of this idea in his works, Poe incorporates the concept again into "Eureka." Using the imagery of astronomy, Poe calls the division "diffusion" and the reunion quest "gravitation."[41] He explains that atoms are the result of the fission of the primordial cluster of atoms, or Oneness, which "has been affected by forcing the originally and therefore normally One into the abnormal condition of Many" (p.207). This condition being undesirable, the particles are in perpetual need for a return to their original unity. Poe's statement suggestively echoes the Dialogues of Plato, whom he refers to, a few paragraphs later, in the most reverent manner. In the

Symposium, Plato's character Aristophanes declares that love is the mutual longing of the separated halves of an originally human whole and that man always desires

> . . . to be united and melted together with his beloved, and to become one from two. For the reason is that this was our ancient natural shape, when we were one whole; and so the desire for the whole and the pursuit of it is named Love.[42]

In a similar manner Poe states,

> Does not so evident a brotherhood among the atoms point to a common parentage? . . . Their source lies in the principle, Unity. This is their lost parent. This they seek always--immediately--in all directions--wherever it is even partially to be found; thus appeasing, in some measure, the ineradicable tendency, while on the way to its absolute satisfaction in the end. (pp. 219-20)

As pattern three evolves from one and two, it adds a new structural element--the madness of the bereaved lover, which often means the perdition of the soul. Thus the lover of Berenice confides how he spent his nights looking at the "flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire," and how spent his days in trifling dreams; "such were," he adds,

"a few of the most pernicious vagaries induced by a condition of the mental faculties" (p. 19). The narrators of "Morella" and "Ligeia" undergo the same experience, both suffering from mental disorders. One exception from the tales of the perdition of the soul after the beloved woman's death is "Eleonora." Like the other women, Eleonora dies, and her lover loses his mind. However, the bereaved husband recovers in the end, thus embodying the concept of the Fortunate Fall. Unlike the narrators of the three other tales, the lover of Eleonora gains absolution:

> . . . once again in the silence of the night, there came through my lattice the soft sighs which had forsaken me; and they modelled themselves into familiar and sweet voice, saying,
>
> "Sleep in peace!--for the Spirit of Love reigneth and ruleth, and, in taking to thy passionate heart her who is Ermengarde, thou art absolved, for reason which shall be made known to thee in Heaven, of thy vows to Eleonora."[43]

This absolution is announced in the motto, which translates as "under the protection of a specific form, the soul is safe."[44] The absolution is further expressed through the idea of divine madness and its power to lead to "glimpses of eternity, and . . . the great secret" (p. 236). Accordingly, despite the narrator's betrayal of the immortal Eleonora

through his marriage of the "etheral Emengarde," his ordeal ends with a reassuring note.

In conclusion to this chapter, let us note that the inclusion of the "divine madness" concept and the belief in its inspiring power all pave the way for a Platonic reading of the tales of the bereaved lover. In fact, if Poe derived his interpretation of "divine madness" from any source, it is doubtless Plato's "Phaedrus," the Dialogue where Socrates declares that "there is also a madness that is a gift, and the source of the chiefest blessings granted to men."[45] A Platonic reading is further suggested by the resuscitation motif. Each of the departed women comes back to life--at least in the mind of the narrators--a reapparition which Poe alludes to in "Morella" as the transmigration of the soul, or "the modified palingenesis of the Pythagoreans," with doubtless in mind Socrate's adaptation of the concept of reincarnation in "Phaedrus."[46]

NOTES

[1] Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," XIV 197.

[2] Poe, XIV 197.

[3] Charles Kent, Introduction, Poe's Poems, ed. Charles Kent (New York: Macmillan, 1903) xxvii-xxxvii.

[4] Poe, Letter, rpt. in Poe's Helen, ed. Caroline Tichnor (London: The Bodleh Head, 1917) 57.

[5] Poe, Letter, in Tichnor, 71.

[6] T.O. Mabbott, ed., Notes, Selected Poetry, 408.

[7] Mabbott, 408.

[8] M. Bhattacherje, Platonic Ideas in Spenser (Connecticut: Greenwood press, 1970) 27.

[9] William Callaghan, An Outline of Plato's Republic and Dialogues (Boston: Student Outline Company, 1966) 101.

[10] Plato, "Symposium, in Rouse, 69-118.

[11] "Symposium," 76.

[12] For an in-depth discussion of Platonic and Neo-Platonic love, see Nesca Robb's Neo-Platonism of the Italian Renaissance. In this work, the author points out, "Platonic love in its original form was not love between the sexes but a philosophical ideal built upon

the Greek life and was in many states regulated by strict laws which did not, however, prevent its degenerating very far from its ideal aim. Socrates, according to his ancient commentators, tried to restore to the emotion its proper moral value, and Plato further elaborated and philosophized his principles. . . . Neoplatonism . . . left the classical view unchanged but as soon as it began to pass into popular literature it was modified by the mediaeval Christian tradition, especially as that was manifested in Petrarch, and by the actual conditions of a society where women were conspicuous (181-82). In an earlier passage, the book reveals that "the 'trattato d'amore' arrived at a peculiar stage of development during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that separates it from earlier and later treatises on the same topic. To understand that development one must visualize the conditions that fostered it. Italian society was at this period essentially a society of courts, but of courts where intellectual gifts were valued quite as highly as nobility of birth (179).

[13] For the discussion of Petrarch's Platonism, see Charles Trinkhaus, The Poet as Philosopher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 69-70. For Dante's concept of love, see M. Shapiro, Woman Earthly and Divine in the Comedie of Dante (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975).

[14] Mark Rose, Heroic Love: Studies in Spenser and Sidney (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) 2-5.

[15] Poe, "Eleonora," IV 238.

[16] "Eleonora," 237-38.

[17] Poe, "A Descent," II 242.

[18] Poe, "Annabel Lee," VII 117.

[19] F. Stovall, "The Woman of Poe's Poem," 202.

[20] Poe, "To Helen," VII 46.

21 Bonaparte, 20.

[22] W. M. Rossetti, "Edgar Poe's 'Nicean Bark,'" Notes and Queries 11 (April,1885), 323-24.

[23] J.M. Pemberton, "Poe's 'To Helen,'" 6-7.

[24] Poe, "The Poetic Principle," XIV, 273-74.

[25] Poe, XIV 266.

[26] Harry T. Baker, 95.

[27] "Eureka," XVI 204.

[28] "The Phil. of Comp.," XIV 195.

[29] Poe, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," XIII 153.

[30] See the "To Helen" poems, VII 46 & 107.

[31] Poe, XIV 198.

[32] See Plato in W. Callaghan, 95.

[33] "To Helen," VII 108.

[34] "Annabel Lee," VII 117.

[35] Dante, trans. Emerson, 1-2.

[36] Petrarch, Canzoniere, rpt. in Petrarch and Petrarchism, trans. Stephen Minto (New York: Manchester University Press, 1980) 48.

[37] Sidney, Arcadia, 7.

[38] "Berenice," II 18.

[39] Poe, XIV 201.

[40] "Eleonora," IV 237.

41 "Eureka," XVI 210.

42 Plato, in Rouse, 88.

43 Poe, IV 243-44.

[44] Mabbott, Selected Poetry, 421.

[45] Plato, "Phaedrus," in Jowett, I 248-49. This Dialogue makes the most pervasive statement about divine madness: see 244-65.

[46] For the topic of transmigration of the souls in Plato, see Jowett: "Meno, 81; "Phaedo," 70 & 81; "Phaedrus," 248; and "Timaeus," 42 & 92.

CHAPTER VI

AN ANALYSIS OF POE'S USE OF THE METAPHORICAL CIRCLE IN RELATION TO PLATONISM: THE EXAMPLE OF HIS SHORT FICTION

In his parable of the Cave,[1] Plato weaves his epistemological and ontological theories into a characteristic symbiosis that presents the "soul" as a captive in a prison, which is the body; he then transforms into human terms the topos of the captivity by introducing a group of prisoners in an enclosure. He further formulates that, because of the deceptive nature of the cave, the world of man is the realm of appearance rather than reality and that the soul must fulfill its essence, that is, liberate itself from captivity for its designed ascension towards the Ideal. The metaphor of imprisonment of the soul and its final journey to the Ideal, which pervades Plato's Dialogues, likewise occupies a central position in Poe's writings both from the viewpoint of thematic concerns and narrative development.

Poe's stories abound in references to prison-like structures such as vessels, tombs, caves, and houses, and these enclosures are frequently used to mirror the state of displacement of the captive soul. As early as the tale

"Metzengerstein"-- published in 1831, it is the first of Poe's acknowledged stories to be printed--Poe introduces the motif of the imprisonment of the soul. Presented in French, and this probably for emphasis, the motto reads, "The soul . . . demeure qu'une seule fois dans un corps sensible . . ."[2] [The soul dwells but once in a material body]. This metaphor of the incarceration of the soul is extended in the second part of the motto, which introduces man's limitation with regard to knowledge as a result of the imprisonment: "un cheval, un chien, un homme meme, n'est que la ressemblance peu tangible de ces animaux" [a horse, a dog, even a human being--it is only an intangible phantom of those creatures].[3] Here we can easily recognize the allusion to Plato's doctrine that the residence of the soul in the prison-house--the body--is the parable of "ignorance as a picture of the condition of our nature."[4] Elaborating on this doctrine, Plato further formulates that the displacement of the soul in its captive state infects mankind with "desires and fears and all kinds of fancies" (p. 469).

This French motto operates in fact like a premise from which the story not only evolves but also around which the tale oraganically revolves like "an irradiation from a center."[5] The story opens with a felicitous description of the locale as an enclosed world the architecture of which consists of the Berlifitzing and Metzengerstein fortresses. These two structures are presented like two

hostile forces. More importantly, they stand as retreats in which the feud between the two belligerent families is nurtured like a seed in a hothouse: "the estates, which were contiguous, had long exercised a rival influence."[6] The notion of cultivated rivalry between the two family circles is intensified by the intrusion motif: "the inhabitants of the Castle Berlifitzing might look, from their lofty buttresses, into the very windows of the Palace Metzengerstein" (p. 186). The polarity that surfaces here takes a symbolic coloration, as the story evolves, to ultimately represent the metaphysical conflict between the corporeal and the spiritual, the body and the soul. In "Phaedo," Plato, contrasting the soul to the body, links the latter with the material:

> . . . the body provides thousands of busy distractions because of its necessary food . . . wars and factions all come from the body and its desires . . . and we are compelled to desire wealth the body, being slaves to its culture. . . .[7]

This concept finds further illustration in "Phaedrus," where the soul is portrayed as a charioteer guided by two horses representing the spiritual and the material: one horse wants to soar into the sphere of divine truth; the other wants to immerse itself in the affair of physical life. Trying to steer while it is trapped in its prison-house,

the soul thus stands between two opposing forces. In terms of this metaphysical picture of our existence, which is optimistic in essence, man is supposed to transform from body-lover or, as Plato puts it, from "philosoma" to wisdom-lover.[8] This transformation hardly ever occurs on earth in Poe's stories. Furthermore, Poe makes it clear in "Metzengerstein" that here on earth "the mortality of the Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of the Berlifitzing" (p. 186). In the tale, the youth of the Baron and the senility of his enemy both announce the precedence of the body over the soul and the inevitable victory of Metzengerstein, whose material wealth is comparable only to his "shameful debaucheries." The boundaries of his domain, with its main park that "embraced a circuit of fifty miles," ultimately becomes the arena of self-indulgence of "a petty Caligula." The retreat of the Baron after the death of his enemy sets the tone for an apparently self-imposed imprisonment that finally leads to his displacement. As such, the Baron stands as the embodiment of the lost soul or the charioteer gone astray. The fate of Metzengerstein is predictable because announced through the portentous recurrence of words such as "fatality," "prediction," and "prophecy." Indispensable to the understanding of the Baron's irrational behavior, the determinism that surfaces in the story echoes unmistakably the condition of mankind in Plato's myth of creation.[9] Unless the soul is "freed

from the body as if from a prison," Plato intimates in "Phaedo," "the soul will remain mixed up with so great an evil."[10] Such an evil is what Poe calls in aesthetic terms "passion" or the "intoxication of the heart."[11]

Evil, which starts in the story with the imprisonment imagery, evolves gradually from stasis to kinesis as the lost soul meanders in webs of constriction. For instance, the pictorialism of Poe's tales of the displaced soul customarily progresses from immobile to animated elements. As such, the Baron's horse, which is the controlling symbol in the story, is first presented as a static painting motif: "The horse itself, in the fore-ground of the design, stood motionless and statue-like."[12] Metzgerstein's attachment "to his lately-acquired charger," a bond which Poe calls "perverse," enters into the metaphoric delineation of a journey into "all-nothingness." Preferring "the society of a horse" to that of men, the Baron, "utterly companionless," shows sign of "morbid melancholy"; his descent into the abyss of madness is accelerated as we last see him riveted to the saddle of his carrier, drifted away "amid the whirlwind of chaotic fire."

The Platonic themes that pervade this tale also surface in Poe's other stories, In fact, it is a critical commonplace that Poe's tales are not only interrelated but also closely connected to his other works, poetic or critical. For instance, the metaphorical boat as the

carrier of the soul in the poem "To Helen" is also visible in "MS Found in a Bottle," with the difference that this tale, because written in the vein of "Metzengerstein," transforms the vessel from a ship that carries "The way--worn wanderer . . . / To his own native shore" into a floating prison that drifts the soul to the haunting regions of the South Pole. What brings about the narrator's death is suggestively his quest for knowledge in the town of Batavia, which was remembered in history books for its past misfortune.[13] The narrator's contamination finds extension in the confession of his passion for historical sites; "I have been all my life a dealer in antiquities, and have imbibed the shadows of fallen colums at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin" (p. 13). The idea of infection from ruins, which is very suggestive of the defilement of the soul by the body, reaches its final stage with the narrator's death, as he disappears in the whirlpool.

What further indicates the presence of Plato's topics is the self-contained Platonic expressions that frequently surface in the text and the allusions to writers upon whom the influence of Plato is significant. The narrator intimates, for instance, "at times we gasped for breath at an elevation beyond the albatros" (p. 6). The particular use of the definite article <u>the</u> where we normally expect an indefinite article gives substantive force to a Coleridgean reading of the passage. Additional elements

that betray hints of The Ancient Mariner are in the very events that occur in "MS Found in a Bottle." In both "MS" and The Ancient Mariner, the story-teller has desecrated his soul through an evil act not defined in plain terms but through inference. The two narrators have both embarked for the South Pole; the other passengers are killed during the voyage, and, remaining the sole witnesses of their damnation on board, they encounter another watercraft. The narrator in Coleridge's poem is rescued and thus symbolically saved from total perdition, while the writer of the MS, like many other narrators in Poe's short stories, is characteristically engulfed in a watery hell, in an "eternal night." What also surfaces in the two works and hyphens them in a close affinity is the vulnerability of the soul: in a singular acte gratuit, the sinner is in utter misery. The gratuitous act in The Ancient Mariner is of course the killing of the albatros, while in "MS" it results from the narrator's obsession with material possession but essentially from his preoccupation with worldly knowledge:

> Hereditary wealth afforded me an education of no common order, and a contemplative turn of mind enabled me to methodize the stores which early study very diligently garnered up. . . . I have often been reproached with the aridity of my genius; a deficiency of imagination has

> been imputed to me as a crime. . . . Indeed, a strong relish for physical philosophy has, I fear, tinctured my mind with a very common error of this age--I mean the habit of referring occurences, even the least susceptible of such reference, to the principles of that science. (p. 1)

As the narrator becomes more and more helpless, the gradation of the captivity motif goes from the image of a soul encased in a worldy body, to that of body and soul together imprisoned in a ship, and finally to the image of the ship and its contents engulfed in a larger circle--the whirlpool.

An early sign of Poe's borrowing from Plato's myth of the conflict between the soul and the body, as presented in the story of the charioteer is the poem "Sonnet--Silence":

> There are some qualities--some incorporate things
> That have a double life, which thus is made
> A type of that twin entity which springs
> From matter and light, evinced in solid and shade.
> There is a two-fold Silence--sea and shore--
> Body and soul. . . .[14]

Here Silence objectifies the condition of the human. When this entity is all soul, "No power hath he of evil in himself"; on the contrary, when body takes precedence over

soul, Silence becomes a tyrant:

> But should some urgent fate (untimely lot!)
> Bring thee to meet his shadow (nameless elf,
> That haunteth the lone regions where hath trod
> No foot of man,) commend thyself to God! (p. 85)

This idea of the captivity of the soul is probably the most pervasive topic in Poe's works. Even the tales and poems of the bereaved lover contains elements of the duality between the soul and the body. In these works, as long as the beloved lady lives, the lover finds a spiritual guide in her. However, when she dies, in most cases, the lover, like the narrators in "Ligeia" and "Eleonora," becomes all body and marries another woman in the pursuit of his sexual gratification. The use of the metaphorical circle and its postulate--the captivity of the soul-- is then no occasional subject for Poe but a central theme.

Structurally speaking, most of Poe's writings focussing on the motif of the displacement of the soul as a result of the precedence of the body over the soul basically follow three narrative patterns. Pattern one presents the isolation of the character, the mental sickness of the character, and finally the evolution of the mental disease until it reaches its last stage--death. Pattern two dramatizes the eruption of "perverseness," which is followed by murder and the criminal's self--betrayal. In pattern three, the narrator undergoes an ordeal but is finally saved from the abyss of terror.

Pattern one governs four major tales: "Metzengerstein," "MS Found in a Bottle," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "William Wilson." The first two, published together in Poe's first collection of stories,[15] introduce the motif of the displaced soul both as a thematic and structural device; this device also governs the theme and form of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson" with slight additions, like the use of the doppel-ganger element. The first time we meet Usher, we learn that he is a withdrawn individual whose "reserve had been always excessive and habitual."[16] He is cut off from the world around him, and the only friend he has confides, "although, as boys, we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend" (p. 275). We also learn that his disposition is hereditary and finds its origin in the family matrimonial tradition: "the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was . . . lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain" (p. 275).

Usher's very disposition, a syncretism of nature and nurture, finds its objectification in the Usher estate. Like its proprietor, the domain is isolated, "nestled" amid decayed trees which stood around." The circular motif which emerges here finds its most immediate sources in "Metzengerstein" and "MS," tales that also begin with the enclosure motif as the symbol of the imprisoned soul and of

its fate. Lamenting over his own destiny, Usher says that he is the victim of an ancestral evil; "I shall perish," he utters. "I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost" (p. 280). As such, the image of the circle not only reflects Usher's physical isolation but also his spiritual limitation.

Evolving from the isolation motif, the structure of "The Fall of the House of Usher" reaches its second stage as it shows Usher's growing insanity. The passage of time as well as the progression from one space to another conveys, throughout the rest of the tale, the gradual descent of the character into madness; this temporal and spatial journey into the realm of insanity is illustrated by Usher's own painting, the architectural objectification of the interior of his mind:

> A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls. . . . Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth." (p. 283)

The house that Roderick Usher built here plays a symbolic role that is duplicated by the music metaphor that permeates the tale. The descendant of an "ancient family . . . noted time out of mind for . . . the devotion to

. . . musical science," Roderick has lost, in the last days of his existence, his ability to absorb art in its totality. His excessively acute sensibility has stultified his appreciative power in the manner matrimonial practices in the Usher family have drained to nothingness the genetic energy of the last members. Compared to their ancestors, Roderick and Madeline are the "inverted images" of a once healthy family. This change, announced by the shifting of the mansion from a once stately building to a decaying structure, is corroborated by the incorporated poem, "The Haunted Palace," where architectural and musical elements are fused into one organic entity that reflects the passage from an ideal age to its opposite. The very structure of the poem illumines that of the tale. "The Haunted Palace" opens with the remembrance of the golden age of the domain, when

> In the greenest of our valleys,
> By the good angels tenanted,
> Once a fair and stately palace--
> Radiant palace--reared its head.
> In the monarch Thought's dominion--
> It stood there!
> Never seraph spread a pinion
> Over fabric half so fair.
>
> Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
> On its roof did float and flow;

. . . . . .

Wanderers in that happy valley
  Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
  To a lute's well-tuned law,
Round about a throne, where sitting
  (Porphyrogene!)
In state his glory well befitting,
  The ruler of the realm was seen.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
  Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing
  And sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
  Was but to sing,
In voices of surpassing beauty,
  The wit and wisdom of their King.

In the closing stanzas, we discover that the palace has been invaded by sorrow and that correspondingly the past radiance is but recollection:

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
  Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
  Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
And, round about his home, the glory

That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

And travellers now within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows, see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody;
While, like a rapid ghastly river,
Through the pale door,
A hideous throng rush out forever,
And laugh--but smile no more. (pp. 285-86)

Like the palace, Roderick Usher is no more what he has been in his youth; he no longer moves "musically / To a lute's well-tuned law" but to "the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the guitar" (p. 284), the last cord of which probably broke as Madeline succumbed.

Madeline's death marks another stage in Roderick's isolation and dissolution. Alive, she was "his sole companion for long years--his last and only relative on earth" (p. 281); now that she is dead, Roderick's displacement takes a new step toward inexorable annihilation. The terror to which Roderick is found "a bound slave" looms in a nearer distance, all inevitable. Like the transfer of the narrator of "MS" from one boat to another, Madeline's passage from life to death indicates that Roderick is now closer to the brink of the precipice

than he was at the beginning of the tale. Later, we see her taken down to a vault, the depiction of which is almost identical to that of the vault in Usher's painting; the enclosures are both subterranean caves with a long archway. As such, the descent of the sister's body objectifies the worsening of the brother's physical and, more importantly, spiritual breakdown. Roderick's dissolution reaches its final earthly phase with the crumbling down of the house. In the opening of the tale, the narrator alludes to the decaying of the house, but here at the end, we see the building disappear; the "once barely-discernible fissure rapidly widened . . . and the deep and dank tarn . . . closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher'" (p. 297). This very ending hyphens "The Fall of the House of Usher" to "Metzengerstein," where the fall of the castle also mirrors the death of the proprietor.

The structure of "William Wilson" is similar to that of "The Fall of the House of Usher" although the events composing the narratives of the two tales are entirely different. Like the other tales of pattern one, "William Wilson" opens with the topic of the isolation of the soul; we learn for instance that Wilson is a victim of familial traits, that he is "the slave of circumstances beyond human control"[17] Like his forerunner Usher, William Wilson is the "descendant of a race" which is usually associated with evil in Poe's fiction. Immediate-

ly following the establishment of hereditary dispositions is the presentation of the character's isolation; the the places he lived in are explicitly depicted as prison--like recesses. Wilson himself confides, "a high and solid wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prison-like rampart formed the limit of our domain" (p. 301). The development of William Wilson into an "outcast" links him closely to the other characters who embody the imprisonment of the soul and its displacement. The gradual worsening of his condition takes, like in "Metzengerstein," "MS," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," the form of a journey into utter evil; we follow him from his home village to Eton, Oxford, and finally to Rome, in other words, from his cheating at cards--among many other felonies--to his adulterous scheme with the wife of his host, Duke di Broglio. Assessing his own evolution, Wilson acknowledges, "from comparatively trivial wickedness, I passed, with the stride of a giant, into more than the enormities of an Elah-Gabalus" (p. 299). Wilson lived long enough to tell his story from his death-bed, but the murder of his doppelgänger many years before anticipated William Wison's death.

"William Wilson" enriches pattern one with a new element--the perverse murder. Unless we consider Usher as the killer of his sister,[18] "William Wilson" is the first tale that presents the narrator as a murderer. In

"Metzengerstein," "MS," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," the main characters die, but, in their lifetimes, they have killed no one. As such, although "William Wilson" distinctively belongs to pattern one, it also announces a new variation in the treatment of the motif of the lost soul. In the way "The Fall of the House of Usher" borrows from the tales of the bereaved lovers, the stories of pattern two find their origin in "William Wilson."

Pattern two, respectively governing the structure of "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Imp of the Perverse," basically opens with the awakening of perverseness. While in pattern one we could easily trace the origin of the character's evil disposition, here in pattern two the source of the narrators' abnormal behavior is not clear. The murderer of the old man in "The Tale-Tale Heart" reveals for instance, "it is impossible to say how the first idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night."[19] Likewise, the narrator of "the Imp of the Perverse" points out that "there is no answer except that we feel <u>perverse</u>, using the word with no comprehension of the principle."[20] In all the stories of pattern two, the perverse act is closely linked to the mataphor of the polarity between the soul and the body, that is the loss of the soul and, as Poe puts it, "the gradual wasting away of the person."[21] In "The Black Cat," for instance, the murderer confides, "my original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from

my body; and more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame."[22] More elaborately presented in "The Imp of the Perverse," the metaphoric polarity takes the coloration of a battle between the soul and the body:

> The last hour for action is at hand. We tremble with violence of the conflict within us,--of the definite with the indefinite--of the substance with the shadow. But, if the contest have proceeded thus far, it is the shadow which prevails,--we struggle in vain. The clock strikes, and is the knell of our welfare.[23]

Ensuing the enactment of the perverse act, which results from the awakening of the craving for evil, is the criminal's self-denunciation. Obviously, the three stages that constitute the structure of the tales of the perverse murder--the awakening of perverseness, the crime, and the self-betrayal--all represent the dissolution of narrators' souls "by slow . . . gradation," with each stage standing as a postmark indicating the distance that the murderer covers in the realm of malevolence.

Pattern three governs the structure of two major tales, "A Decent into the Maelström" and "The Pit and the Pendulum." The structural development of "the Descent into the Maelström" probably finds its best objective

correlative in the formation of the whirlpool of the Maelström:

> . . . prodigious streaks of foam became apparent where none had been seen. These streaks, at length, spreading out to a great distance, and entering into combination, took unto themselves the gyratory motion of the subsided vortices, and seemed to form the germ of another more vast. Suddenly--very suddenly--this assumed a distinct and definite existence, in a circle. . . .[24]

Correspondingly, the tale opens with a long expository exordium of seventeen paragraphs and slowly unfolds towards its center: the captivity of the fisherman within a wheeling, watery prison--the Maelström. The ordeal of the three brothers soon "acquires a monstrous velocity" until the only survivor among the three finds himself floating exactly where the pool of the Mosko-ström had started. The ending of the story is also announced by the nautical imagery: "the gyration of the whirl grew, gradually, less and less violent" (p.246), as if to allow the fisherman to be rescued.

This tale of the perdition of the soul adds two elements to pattern three, one directly Platonic and the other Neoplatonic. In the parable of the Cave, Plato, allowing one of the prisoners in the cave to be

released from his fetters and thus from the ignorance in which he has been kept captive, later argues that the prisoner's discovery of the world outside the cave, where he and his friends have been kept since their birth, because it makes him more enlightened, also makes his experience trifling in the eyes of the other prisoners, who never left the cave: "they would laugh and say he had spoiled his eyesight by going up there."[25] The ending of "The Descent into the Maelström" presents a similar conclusion: "A boat picked me up . . . . Those who drew me on board were my old mates and daily companions. . . . I told them my story--they did not believe it" (p. 247). The ignorance of his friends prevented them to believe him, whose newly-acquired knowledge is reflected by the change of color of the fisherman's hair: "my hair, which had been raven-black the day before, was as white as you see it now" (p. 247). The fisherman loses his youth, but, as announced by the epistemological statement of the Glanvill motto, he has gained some knowledge that allows him to rightfully serve as a spiritual guide: "I brought you here," the fisherman tells his disciple, "to tell you the whole story" (p. 226).

The relationship between the fisherman and his disciple suggestively parallels that between Dante and Virgil in Divine Comedy. Like Dante, who visits Hell under the guidance of Virgil, the narrator of "The Descent into the Maelström" experiences the ordeal of the fisher-

man; as the latter tells his story, the narrator hears the waters "heaving, boiling, hissing" and sees them "gyrating in gigantic and innumerable vortices" (p. 228). Despite the grimness of the experience, the tale ends with an optimistic note; there is in fact a strong sense of hope that surfaces in the initiatory relationship between the fisherman and the narrator-disciple.

It is essential to notice that Poe's creative writings as a whole operate like comedy in its primary meaning as best illustrated by Dante's Divine Comedy; that is Poe's creative works impart a strong sense of human errors . but they also assert the deliverance of mankind after a long and tormenting sojourn in the material world. In "The Imp of the Perverse," the narrator calls his ordeal "the mightmare of the soul" but concludes his speech with a hopeful note of future deliverance: "To-day I wear these chains, and am here! To-morrow I shall be fetterless!--but where?" This question, which finds its own answer in Poe's trilogy of Dialogues--"The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," and "The Power of Words"--echoes Socrates' conversation in "Republic" and "Phaedo." In the seventh book of "Republic," Socrates proclaims that the release of the prisoners from their fetters, which bind them to wordly affairs, is the sine qua non condition for the rising into the realm of eternity."[26] Later in "Phaedo," Socrates states, on the eve of his death, that death

purifies the soul because the soul is separated from the body and thus released. Using the journey motif, he adds, "there is great reason to hope that, going whither I go, when I have come to the end of my journey, I shall attain that which has been the pursuit of my life."[27] The destination of the traveller which Socrates and the narrator of "The Imp" allude to is what Poe calls "Aidenn," a name that possibly derives from "Eden." In the trilogy, which T.O. Mabbott aptly calls Poe's Platonic Diaogues,[28] Poe defines "Aidenn" as the Place where the delivered soul can attain that which has been the pursuit of his life--immortality.

For these stories centering on the motif of enclosure, Poe is also much indebted to Plato and the Platonic tradition. The elements that provide these tales form and substance are considerably similar to the concepts that Plato develops in his Dialogues. The polarity between the soul and the body that Plato deals with through the symbolism of the metaphorical circles, the descent into perverseness, and the sense of perdition, all recur in Poe's stories in the form of circular enclosures and spherical motions.

NOTES

[1] "Republic," in Rouse, 312-18.

[2] Poe, "Metzengerstein," II 185-86.

[3] Poe, II 186.

[4]"Republic," 312.

[5] "Eureka," 228.

[6] Poe, II. 186.

[7] "Republic," 469.

[8] "Phaedrus," in Jowett, 257-62.

[9] "Timaeus," 16-28.

[10] "Phaedo," in Rouse, 469.

[11] "Phaedo," 401.

[12] "Metzengerstein," II 188.

[13] T,O. Mabbott, ed., Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), Note 3, 146. For the passage in "MS.," see II 2.

[14] Poe, VII 85.

[15] Mabbott, Collected Works, 451.

[16] III 275.

[17] III 300.

[18] See Patrick F. Quinn, "Poe: That Spectre in My Path," rpt. in Psychoanalysis and American Fiction, ed. Irving Malin (New York: Dutton, 1965) 67.

[19] Poe, IV 88.

[20] Poe, VI 148.

[21] "House of Usher," III 282.

[22] Poe, V 145.

[23] Poe, VI 148-49.

[24] Poe, II 228-29.

[25] "Republic," in Rouse, 375.

[26] "Plato," in Rouse, 313-14.

[27] "Phaedo," in Jowett, I 450.

[28] Mabbott,ed., Collected Works, 451.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The general conclusion drawn forth from the study of Poe's works in relation to Plato's Dialogues and the writings of thinkers upon whom Plato had a direct or indirect impact is that the body of thoughts which gives a special cast to Poe's mind can be summed up as "Platonism." Indeed Poe assimilated many of Plato's theories. Ideas that at once come to mind when we think of Plato and Poe are the concepts of true knowledge and of reality, which ramify into notions like quest for absolute beauty and otherworldliness.

In reply to the need for a succinct definition of the phrase Platonic tradition, this study orients the reader to a clear distinction between direct Platonism and indirect Platonism; it also offers a survey of the Platonic writers--from Plato to his early nineteenth--century followers--whose works influenced Poe's critical and creative compositions. Two broad purposes are served in delineating the channels through which the Platonic tradition reached Poe. One consists in bringing into surface the nature of ideas that irrigate Poe's body of thoughts; the other deals with Poe's use of these ideas for narrative concerns.

This study of course does not include all Platonist writers who might have had an influence upon Poe but only those whose impact is judged the most visible and can be established textually and unequivocably. Correspondingly because my approach is selective rather than all-inclusive, there is room left for potential research into the Platonic sources of Poe's works. The study also does not center on all ideas that give the Platonic tradition its special coloration but essentially on the concepts that without any doubt inform and provide his works with substance.

The Platonic ideas appraised in this study can be listed under four topics--the difference between knowledge of transcendent Ideas and that of the sensible, the manifestation of the Divine through his creation, the power of love, and the polarity between soul and body--all of which bear witness to Poe's indebtedness to his Platonic predecessors. However, to do justice to the author of "Eureka," we need to recognize that Poe was not a servile follower of the tradition to which he attached most of his conceits. Poe obviously adhered to Plato's epistemo-ontological theories, incorporated them, and defended them against strictures. Nevertheless, he did not espouse Plato's concern with the establishment of a happy city-state and his belief that human beings can reach wisdom by following good examples. While Socrates, for instance, emphasizes the importance of education in

Plato's "Republic," Poe on the contrary negated the possibility of progress on earth and showed little interest in the actual. He implied this view in his critical works, dramatized it in his poems and tales, but no other Poe composition expresses his Weltanschauung better than his letter of July 2, 1844 to Lowell:

> I really perceive that vanity about which most men merely prate--the vanity of the human or temporal life. I live continually in a reverie of the future. I have no faith in human perfectibility. I think that human exertion will have no appreciable effect upon humanity. Man is now only more active--not more happy--nor more wise, than he was 6000 years ago. The result will never vary. . . .[1]

Poe then accepted the first part of Plato's belief--true knowledge is divinely inspired--but refused the second part--the human mind can however get closer to divine knowledge through an adequate education. It is in this sense that Hoffman writes that Poe's "tales are abstracted from reality" and that he is "an artist who tends towards the expression of the pure archetype with little as possible of the texture of actuality in his work."[2]

It is also important to recognize that although Poe augments his tales and poems employing materials from the Platonic tradition, he often incorporates them with

a distinct note of originality. Plato presents Hades and Heaven both as part of life after death. In opposition, Poe places Hades here on earth, pictures it in the form of a pit, a vault, or a vortex, and dramatizes life in Hades through his characters's ordeals. Such a life is what Arthur Gordon Pym enacts during his odysseys, as he goes from one nightmarish experience to another.

Poe also shows originality in his treatment of the departed beautiful woman. He retains some aspects of the convention, such as the loss of a golden age and grief. He however deviates from the main current by bringing the dead women back to earth and thus avails himself with a device for gothic effect. According to the Pythagorean doctrine of the transmigration of the soul that Plato incorporates in his Dialogues, when the soul returns to an earthly life, it does so in the form of lower categories, such as animals. Poe resurrects his female characters in the form of revengeful specters, like Madeline in "The House of Usher."

One last example of Poe's originality is his use of the Platonic notion of poetic madness to handle point of view. Many of his narrators claim divine madness in an attempt to discard any thought of their being lunatic. Thus the narrator of "Eleonora" points out,

> I am come of a race noted for vigor of fancy and ardor of passion. Men have called me

> mad; but the question is not yet settled whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence . . . .[3]

This statement is echoed in "Berenice," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Black Cat." What Poe succeeds in imparting is essentially a strong sense of ambivalence about the reliability of the narrators; that is what the narrators say may be taken at face value as actuality or simply as the product of a deranged mind. As these few examples then reveal, deviations--subtle as they may be--abound in Poe's handling of Platonic elements and allow ample room for further investigations into the nature of his borrowings from Platonism as well as into the extent of his innovations and contribution to the posterity of the Platonic tradition.

NOTES

[1] Poe, Letter to James R. Lowell, New York 2 July 1844, in The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. John Ward Ostrom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948) 256.

[2] D. Hoffman, 331.

[3] For other arabesque tales with the metempsychosis motif, see "Morella," "Berenice," "Ligeia," and "Eleonora."

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