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LANGUAGE AND THE VOID: POE'S DISCOURSE OF HORROR

The University of Oklahoma PH.D. 1982

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A DISSERTATION

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1982

LANGUAGE AND THE VOID: POE'S DISCOURSE OF HORROR

APPROVED BY

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE AND THE VOID

Poe knew well the language of horror, but he also knew the horror of language, of language and the void. His best tales, it is generally acknowledged, are those tales of horror termed the "arabesques," an arabesque being "a prose equivalent of a poem."[1] These tales, like Poe's poems, attempt to bring about an effect of beauty, which Poe regarded as the aim of poetry. The world of these tales with beauty as their aim is a world, I will argue, riddled with images of language, of print, created by the juxtaposition of black and white, the two colors which permeate Poe's tales. Language, specifically print, black print on a white page--white, also the void, the blank page always waiting beyond print, beyond language--was what Poe had to use to achieve the desired effect of beauty.

The paradox is that in fact what Poe does--or tries to do--is to use language to transcend itself. What Jacques Derrida says of Rousseau can be said of Poe:

> Between prelanguage and the linguistic catastrophe instituting the division of discourse, [Poe] attempts to recapture a sort of happy pause, the instantaneity of a full language, the image stabilizing what was

> no more than a point of pure passage: a language without discourse, a speech without sentence, without syntax, without parts, without grammar, a language of pure effusion, beyond the cry, but short of the hinge . . . that articulates and at the same time disarticulates the immediate unity of meaning, within which the being of the subject distinguishes itself neither from its act nor from its attributes. . . . But language cannot be truly born except by the disruption and fracture of that happy plenitude.[2]

The connection to Poe here becomes clear. What is an example of a word taken from "a language of pure effusion"? "Eureka" is one example. It is "beyond the cry, but short of the hinge" that both articulates and disarticulates "the immediate unity of meaning." So it is indeed telling that Poe titled his essay on the nature of "the material and spiritual universe" nothing other than Eureka. And it is just as telling that he presented Eureka "as a Poem"--"not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth."[3]

A discussion of Eureka is, in fact, a useful preface to an analysis of the language of horror in Poe's arabesques, which is the focus of the following chapters. For in Eureka, as we shall see, Poe presents an aesthetic universe, a universe which moves from unity to annihilation, a unity and annihilation which haunt the psyches of the poetagonists in the tales of horror. Eureka begins with the general proposition that "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the germ of

their Inevitable Annihilation" (XVI, 185-86). From this Poe derives what he describes as the Divine Being's "almost Infinite Self-Diffusion":

> What you call the Universe is but his present expansive existence. He now feels his life through an infinity of imperfect pleasures--the partial and pain-intertangled pleasures of those inconceivably numerous things which you designate as his creatures but which are really but infinite individuations of Himself. All these creatures--all--those which you term animate, as well as those to whom you deny life for no better reason than that you do not behold it in operation--all these creatures have, in a greater or less degree, a capacity for pleasure and for pain: but the general sum of their sensations is precisely that amount of happiness which appertains by right to the Divine Being when concentrated within Himself. These creatures are all too, more or less conscious Intelligences; conscious, first, of a proper identity, conscious secondly and by faint indeterminate glimpses, of an identity with the Divine Being of whom we speak--of an identity with God. Of the two classes of consciousness, fancy that the former will grow weaker, the latter stronger, during the long succession of ages which must elapse before these myriads of individual Intelligences become blended--into One. Think that the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness--that Man--for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah. (XVI, 314-15)

Eureka, we see, is Poe's deciphering of the text of the world or the universe. Everything in this universe will eventually be seen to contribute to its approaching unity, a unity which Poe also posits as necessary in fiction.

Unity will be seen to be necessary to Poe's conceptions of Truth and Beauty. But what is Beauty to Poe? First,

it is Beauty that concerns Poe in his Preface to Eureka, where he declares that "I offer this Book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth; constituting it true. . . . I present the composition as an Art-Product alone:--let us say as a Romance; or, if I be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem." And, adds Poe, "it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead." Elsewhere, in "The Poetic Principle," he defines "the Poetry of words as The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty. Its sole arbiter is Taste. . . . Unless incidentally it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth" (XIV, 275). Thus we see why Poe offers his "Book of Truths" not "in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth"--a Poem is what effects Beauty, and so calling Eureka a Poem Poe must offer it on the grounds of its Beauty. Elaborating upon Beauty, Poe tells us that the Poetic Principle is "the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty," and that "the manifestation of the Principle is always found in an elevating excitement of the Soul" (XIV, 290). With Eureka, Poe uses life, the universe, as an excuse to write about art, about representation. This is made clear by comparing Poe's qualities of the universe, as put forth in Eureka, with those of his aesthetics.[4] In "The Philosophy of

Composition," for instance, Poe declares "that every plot . . . must be elaborated to its dénouement" (XIV, 193): "commencing with the consideration of an effect. . . . Keeping originality always in view" (XIV, 194); "with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression" (XIV, 196); "Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. . . . When . . . men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect--they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of the soul" (XIV, 197).

These, then, are central to Poe's aesthetic. Poe's description of the universe in Eureka fits this aesthetic--in fact, Poe describes it in almost identical terms:

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

God, then, has authored the plot of the universe, with each "incident" perfectly dependent upon every other. And each of God's self-diffused identities is conscious "by faint indeterminate glimpses, of an identity with the Divine Being." This assertion, too, can be traced to Poe's aesthetics,

for it is "through the poem . . . we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses [of Beauty]" (XIV, 274). What Poe presents here are two analogous "indeterminate glimpses," one of "Beauty" and one of "the Divine Being." The two--Beauty and the Divine Being--are easily reconciled. They both point to the crux of Poe's aesthetic--oneness, elsewhere referred to as "unity of impression" or "totality." Poe presents us, then, with an aesthetic and philosophy of fragmentation: the many shall return into the one, or in art, the many incidents, or words, shall result in the single effect. Fragmentation is only a temporary, imperfect condition in both life and art: it is the moment between dismembering and re-membering (terms that will be explored in the following chapters) when language seems to stand in the void. This helps to explain the recurrent images in Poe of black and white--images of print--in which black fragments are distinguished on a background of what Melville calls the "all-color" of white. As I have pointed out elsewhere, in regard to Whitman, the use of such printing imagery

> both asserts and undermines the great romantic analogy with nature. That is, throughout Leaves [of Grass] Whitman is attempting to naturalize the artificial world of books and print by equating it with the organic world of "leaves"; and, at the same time, he assumes the almost magical role of poet by making, artificially in print, a natural world. To these ends throughout his poetry Whitman uses the language of printing to serve both as metaphors for his vision and literal descriptions of his work.[5]

The difference between Whitman and Poe, of course, is that Poe wanted to use language to transcend the natural world, not create one. Language was a means, not an end, for Poe. Finally, too, Poe's dictum of a single sitting for the reading of a poem or tale (a dictum which he broke in writing The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and The Journal of Julius Rodman) is seen more clearly; nothing can compensate for the loss of totality in art, for it is this very loss at the origin of the universe that accounts for Poe's frequent overwhelming sense of melancholy.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Poe reverts to a vocabulary of aesthetics--as he began with in his preface--as he nears the end of Eureka. Along with the passages already mentioned, Poe writes that

> the sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended upon with an almost blindfold reliance. It is the poetical essence of the Universe--of the Universe which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems. Now symmetry and consistency are convertible terms:--thus Poetry and Truth are one.
>
> (XVI, 302)

This looks back to the preface, where we are told that "Beauty . . . abounds in [Eureka's] Truth . . . constituting it true." Moreover, in a crucial passage of Poe's argument, he tells us that his assumption of a non-material ether "ever in attendance upon matter" is fitted to "the poetical fancy of mankind" as regards the end of the universe, that

the astronomers' postulate of a material ether would have been too collateral a cause to account for the end of the universe. Using literary terms, he writes that:

> Man's instinct of the Divine capacity to adapt, would have rebelled against the demonstration. We should have been forced to regard the Universe with some such sense of dissatisfaction as we experience in contemplating an unnecessarily complex work of human art. Creation would have affected us as an imperfect plot in a romance, where the dénoûement is awkwardly brought about by interposed incidents external and foreign to the main subject; instead of springing out of the bosom of the thesis--out of the heart of the ruling idea--instead of arising as a result of the primary proposition--as inseparable and inevitable part and parcel of the fundamental conception of the book.
>
> (XVI, 306)

Poe desires an end to the universe, then--an end to a work of art. Perhaps he would disagree, finally, with Henry James, that "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle in which they shall happily appear to do so."[6] Whether Poe is right or not in giving an end to the relations of the universe, he has in any case drawn, in Eureka, "by a geometry of his own, the circle in which they shall happily appear to do so." Perhaps, as Frank Kermode declares in The Sense of of an Ending, "the End is a fact of life and a fact of the imagination, working out from the middle, the human crisis. As the theologians say, we 'live from the End,' even if

the world should be endless. We need ends."[7] And we need an end that is inherent in the beginning, lest we have an "imperfect plot." Poe resolves this need for an ending: "Think that the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness--that Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah. In the meantime bear in mind that all is Life--Life--Life within Life--the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine" (XVI, 314-15; notice that Poe actually puts the word "Life" within "Life" on both sides of it--"Life within Life" indeed). Thus we see Poe's visionary end for a fragmented universe.

Whereas God created a natural text (the world, the universe), Poe could only answer with the creation of a written text. As God's thought created (creates) the universe, language--the written word--creates man's thought; whereas God's world and nature's language is what Poe calls "unorganized," the language of man is differentiating and logical. That is, as Poe puts it in Marginalia, "It is certain that the mere act of inditing, tends, in a great degree, to the logicalization of thought" (XVI, 87). But, as corollary to this, Poe elsewhere writes of the physical "natural" power of words that "every word [is] an impulse

on the air" (VI, 143). Indeed, the brief opening paragraphs of Eureka are concerned only with speech and writing:

> It is with humility really unassumed . . . that I pen the opening sentence of this work.
>
> What terms shall I find sufficiently simple in their sublimity--sufficiently sublime in their simplicity--for the mere enunciation of my theme?
>
> I design to speak of . . .the Material and Spiritual Universe.

Here Poe reveals some anxiety as to the power of words to convey what needs to be conveyed. The problem is that his ultimate idea--the supernal Beauty of Unity, the Oneness--possesses the nature of that class of fancies which he has found "absolutely impossible to adapt [to] language" (XVI, 88). He hopes, ultimately, that the very language of Eureka--a "poem"--will effect a glimpse of supernal Beauty. Since words, though, are only a means to the end of supernal Beauty, they become superfluous once the desired effect has been effected. Discourse is divisive--it breaks up experience like a bad plot. Hence Poe's fragments: attempts to discover a unitary language that stops at a transcendental moment. Thus the first sentence quoted above--"It is with humility . . . "--is peculiar inasmuch as "the opening sentence" it refers to is itself. The fragment--the "word" that conveys emotion without meaning and immediately disappears in its effect, a "word" like "Eureka!"--is therefore Poe's aim.

It is language dismembered to the point of disappearance, standing, as I argue in Chapter III, without a context, and disappearing in the void of "Oneness." This is the experience Poe attempts to create; and it is with nostalgia that he attempts to recall and re-member it.

Poe gradually moves from a self-conscious use of language to a related consciousness of writing to a reader; that is, in his concluding sentences he has moved from first person points of view ("I," "we") to a speaker (actually, "Memories") addressing all of us, an "us" which includes Poe (XVI, 313). By doing this, Poe achieves a unity that strengthens the effect he is trying to create in the readers (inasmuch as readers are more affected by being addressed as "you"). In fact, Poe's concluding sentences are given as imperatives, commanding the reader to act as directed.

Strangely, this concluding passage is a brief address which leaves Eureka open. That is, the narrator switches from his own voice to that of "Memories," and the concluding two sentences move from a suggestion of the future to "In the meantime . . . ," which implies time for further discourse. Poe is acknowledging the fact that the ultimate unity has not yet arrived, and in so doing he acknowledges that nothing can be complete until the moment at which all returns to its original unity--but that art, possibly his Poem about

the universe, can, in the world of language, represent unity. That is, what Poe implies is that an aesthetics of unity can only be represented in fragmentation. In Eureka we are left to look forward to an approaching unity whose representation in Eureka presents the very division that Poe eschews. But how aptly Poe writes of the return of unity: the final passage is addressed to us by "Memories," the very height of something simultaneously present and absent, just as Oneness is both not here and yet always already implied in the fragmentation of the universe. So Poe leaves us being addressed by Memories, leaves us prisoners of an absent voice. Yet even his open-ended ending was contained in Eureka's beginning, where Poe refers to a sequel which he never gives (XVI, 186; unless, of course, by "sequel" Poe meant the pages following the reference).

Poe describes "Memories" as the

> Memories that haunt us during our youth. They sometimes pursue us even in our Manhood:--assume gradually less and less indefinite shapes: now and then speak to us with low voices.
>
> (XVI, 313)

These quiet Memories are traces of Poe's supernal Beauty, of which we are only able to attain (through poetry) brief and indeterminate glimpses. He gives a clearer idea of this in Marginalia, where he writes that there is a class of fancies "which are not thoughts," that

> seem to me rather psychal than intellectual. They arise in the soul . . . only at its epochs of most intense tranquillity . . . and at those mere points of time [Derrida's "happy pause"] where the confines of the walking world blend with those of the world of dreams. . . . this condition exists but for an inappreciable point of time--yet it is crowded with these "shadows of shadows": and for absolute thought there is demanded time's endurance. These "fancies" have in them a pleasurable ecstasy. . . . I regard the visions, even as they arise, with an awe which, in some measure, moderates or tranquillizes the ecstasy--I so regard them, through a conviction (which seems a portion of the ecstasy itself) that this ecstasy, in itself, is of a character supernal to the human nature--is a glimpse of the spirit's outer world.
>
> (XVI, 88-89)

Poe goes on to assert that he can, from this frontier between waking and sleeping, startle himself into wakefulness "and thus transfer the point itself into the realm of Memory" (XVI, 90). These passages are analogous to the passages on "Memories" which end Eureka, which Memories tell us that the general sum of the Divine Being's creatures "is precisely that amount of happiness which appertains by right to the Divine Being when concentrated within Himself" (XVI, 314). In both cases the soul is made to glimpse supernal Beauty, that transcendent sense of original and destined Unity or Oneness. And in both cases Poe feels "awe" at the sense of supernal Beauty, or Oneness: in the opening sentence of Eureka, Poe refers to "a sentiment of awe" that results just from his intention to write of the universe, and in the concluding passage he refers to "that awfully triumphant

epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah."

Leslie Fiedler gets strangely close to Poe when he talks of "boundaries of identity" and the visions in which his (Fiedler's) stories culminate:

> I suppose I think of boundaries in the sense of terminal boundaries: beginnings and ends, and the fading of ends into beginnings. Maybe it's the ambiguity of the negative which interests me more than anything: the yes that's under the no, the beginning that's under the end. In a funny way, I think of myself as a secret affirmative writer pretending to be a nihilist. I know that someplace there are absolute categories; I equally know that we never perceive them.[8]

But when asked if he would like to perceive them, Fiedler refers to the visions in which his stories culminate: "That's the dream: maybe I'm only teased by it because I know that it's always just out of my grasp. . . . those visions at the end of the stories are, in a way, momentary glimpses of a place where the contradictions are resolved."[9] "Momentary glimpses of a place where the contradictions are resolved" (contradictions, interestingly, only occur in language)--this is, of course, Poe's sense of supernal Beauty, of Unity, of Oneness, where contradiction is resolved because relations are dissolved. It is, as Poe says in a passage crucial to my concluding chapter, the ultimate life that underlies death; this description compares death to the mesmeric state, when "the senses of my rudimental

life are in abeyance, and I perceive external things directly, without organs, through a medium which I shall employ in the ultimate, unorganized life" (V, 250). Yet this too is a contradiction--the very concept of Oneness is incoherent to us because we think in terms of binary oppositions, relations: and oneness denies yet implicitly asserts multiplicity. It is both everything and nothing. The problem, finally, is that "Oneness" can not escape its divisive nature as language; that "life," as Riddel argues in discussing "The Philosophy of Composition," is always contradicted by the "death" inscribed in language: "Beauty and Death are inextricable in the same sense that Image and Death (or language and death) are inextricable, in the sense that metaphor, the figure of the woman who is absent from the poet's room, signifies the death inscribed in every utterance as that absence which is imaged in every utterance, in every displacement."[10] So Fiedler and Poe talk only of glimpses of Oneness; because, being an incoherent concept, it does not lend itself to thought. It is as Poe writes, "rather psychal than intellectual." Thus for Poe language is never really an end in itself: it is used to effect glimpses of supernal Beauty. Language, regarded as complementary to self-consciousness, is useful only insofar as it can transcend itself, erase itself. Poetry is not a structure of words, but rather the proper effect of such a structure.

Thus Poe promises an eventual recognition of our existence "as that of Jehovah" (again incoherency lurks--how can a person "recognize" anything in a state of Oneness?), of an "identity with the Divine Being." Finally, Poe himself is a "divine being," not only in the sense that he means it, but also in the sense that he is a being who "divines" things--"divine" in its meaning of to discover intuitively. So we arrive at Poe's view of the successful poet/artist as one who combines analysis and imagination, as one who discovers intuitively. And so we see Eureka, Poe's prose poem, as punningly correct in its subject matter. That is, Poe fuses his theories of art and the universe in what--using his request that we recognize Eureka as a poem--we can sum up as a theory of the "uni-verse." This splitting is loaded with suggestion. From the oneness of "uni" we move to "verse," verse as a line of metrical writing, as a division in chapters of the Bible (very appropriate to Eureka), to its meaning as a verb, to make verse, to tell or celebrate in verse (the final passage of Eureka almost suggests this sense of celebration).

It is easy to move from this entertaining of "universe" and Eureka to Poe's fiction. Toward the end of Eureka, after establishing "Attraction" and "Repulsion" as equivalent expressions of logic, Poe describes his theory of the universe:

> Now the very definition of Attraction implies particularity--the existence of parts, particles, or atoms; for we define it as the tendency of "each atom &c. to every other atom," & c. according to a certain law. Of course where there are no parts--where there is absolute Unity--where the tendency to oneness is satisfied--there can be no Attraction:--this has been fully shown, and all Philosophy admits it. When, on fulfillment of its purposes, then, Matter shall have returned into its original condition of One--a condition which presupposes the expulsion of the separative ether, whose province and whose capacity are limited to keeping the atoms apart until that day when, this ether being no longer needed, the overwhelming pressure of the finally collective Attraction shall at length just sufficiently predominate and expel it:--when, I say, Matter, finally, expelling the Ether, shall have returned into absolute Unity,--it will then (to speak paradoxically for the moment) be Matter without Attraction and without Repulsion--in other words, Matter without Matter--in other words, again, Matter no more. In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into the Nothingness which, to all Finite Perception, Unity must be--into that Material Nihility from which alone we can conceive it to have been evolved--to have been created by the Volition of God.
>
> (XVI, 310-11)

Here we have connections to Poe's fiction. Eureka, Poe's critique of God the author's plot of the universe, is, as already discussed, an aesthetic theory. Poe's definition of plot, for example, partakes of the same diction he uses in Eureka. Plot is, he writes, "that from which no component atom can be removed, and in which none of the component atoms can be displaced, without ruin to the whole" (XIV, 188). It becomes clear that Poe (or anyone else) cannot discuss oneness without discussing fragmentation. Indeed, oneness is, to repeat, finally incomprehensible--how can we conceive of something which has no relation to anything else, we

whose consciousness functions according to binary oppositions; oneness transcends any opposition.

Yet Poe's critical theory stresses this oneness--this oneness akin to that which he sees as the plot of the universe. Repeatedly, Poe remarks on the need for "a certain single effect" (XIII, 148), "totality" (XIII, 153), "unity of effect" (XIII, 148), "unity of impression" (XIV, 196), "the one, pre-established design" (XIII, 153), and so on and on throughout his critical writings. What this effort for oneness is marked by, however, is a distinct fragmentedness in style and structure. Kenneth Burke sees this fragmentedness as inherent in literature: "Insofar as the title of a book could be said to sum up the nature of that book, then the breakdown of the book into parts, chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words would be technically a 'fall' from the Edenic unity of the title, or epitomizing 'god-term.' The parts of the book reduce its 'idea' to 'matter.'"[11] Burke's statement, though, is especially apt for Poe's fiction, which is often riddled with a "fragmented" style that can usually be attributed to "fragmented"--in identity--narrators; and especially apt for Poe's literary theory, so concerned with "oneness," so concerned with transcending earthly "matter."

The oneness Burke refers to, then, gets close to

the heart of Poe. Poe wrote that the best writer (of tales) will conceive of "a certain single effect to be wrought" (XIII, 153), and that the tale will be of a length that can be read at a single sitting--"As the novel cannot be read at one sitting, it cannot avail itself of the immense benefit of totality" (XIII, 153). This is his reasoning for all literary work as he presents it in "The Philosophy of Composition:"

> If any literary work is too long to read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression--for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. . . . What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones--that is to say, of brief poetical effects. (XIV, 196)

Poe, as mentioned earlier, does break the aesthetic of the "single setting" with Arthur Gordon Pym and Julius Rodman, but he wrote Pym because he was asked to write a longer work, and he never finished Julius Rodman. Perhaps he can be forgiven these exceptions to his rule. Poe's poetry and fiction--primarily short tales--are otherwise well-aligned with his critical theory. It is, though, an aesthetic apart from this world; it is an experience that is isolated in its totality, constantly threatened by intrusion from the outside world (a threat that is analogously seen in Coleridge's description of the outside interruption

that destroyed his writing of Kubla Khan). From this persepective, literature is apart from this world, its unity being dependent upon an absence of consciousness of the outside world, the "natural" world. Yet, literature originates from the real world, is nurtured by it, but, finally, to use an old metaphor, must have its umbilical cord cut, and be able to stand--or crawl--on its own. This, anyway, is one way of viewing literature's relation to the so-called real world.

The theories of art that attempt to reconcile art to the world are, ultimately, reduced to arguing on moral, not aesthetic, grounds. That is, any theory of art is founded on some aspect of unity, on accounting for the complete art product. Yet the world denies any such accountability. It leaves that unity to be found in art, or, rather, to be created in it--inasmuch as meaning is not found, but created, as an historical view of the continually changing critical strategies shows. This is also why works of art are never emptied, but always being filled.

Returning to Burke, we can see that his reference to the "unity of the title" of a work as its "epitomizing 'god-term'" hides a question of whether that "unity," that Oneness, is itself open to hermeneutics, or whether its unity, in transcending relation, denies by definition any

such operation. It is clear that the text itself, what Burke calls "the breakdown of the book into parts, chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words" is open to a multitude of such operations. This explains why Poe would deny meaning to the highest literary art form, because it denies that unity he desires; and it explains why he is concerned with the effect of a work, not the work itself, which is a "matter" of "parts, chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words." If language is regarded as only a structure we impose on reality, then it becomes clear why language is not an end in itself. It must, ultimately, be used to transcend itself and the "matter" it refers to. Perhaps, too, Burke's statement explains the nature of titles to be brief, usually a single phrase or clause, often a single word, maybe a single letter.

Even though Poe wants to use language to transcend itself, his fiction can be seen as tending toward metafiction, a metafiction that is ultimately analogous to the Uroboros, the snake swallowing it own tail. In the case of Poe's metafiction, the snake is language, and so it is indeed language swallowing its own tale. With this impossible image we can return to the opening passage of this introduction from Derrida which, we now see, accurately describes Poe and his attempt "to recapture a sort of happy pause" between "prelanguage and the linguistic catastrophe

instituting the division of discourse." This too is impossible: life without language can not be described by language. The "happy pause" is at the birth of self-consciousness, but it is only at the death of self-consciousness that it can be remembered. Thus death is a fit subject for Poe. It reappropriates that lost moment at the same time that it creates a sense of an ending, the unity that Poe stresses. Kenneth Burke has noted of Poe's poetics,

> for Poe, the object of his ideal, beautifully solemn poem would be "supremeness, perfection." . . . perfection means literally a finishedness. The "perfect" is the completely done. In this sense, Death provides a quite relevant source of imagery for the idea of perfection. . . .
>
> Another notion of perfection is associated with the idea of a person in full bloom. And could any topic more fully meet this test than the theme of persons in love? Thus, if the dead person were associated with the height of love, another requirement of Poetics would be met.[12]

So we see death or the threat of death as a recurring symbol of unity or completion throughout the tales of love, murder, and horror.

But there is more to it than this. As Burke writes elsewhere,

> the imagery of death reduces the motive to ultimate terms . . . an "entelechial" pattern of thought whereby a thing's nature would be classed according to the fruition, maturing, or ideal fulfillment, proper to its kind.
>
> . . . an imagery of slaying (slaying of either the self or another) is to be considered merely as

> a special case of identification in general. . . . the imagery of slaying is a special kind of transformation, and transformation involves the ideas and imagery of identification. That is, the killing of something is the changing of it, and the statement of the thing's nature before and after the change is an identifying of it.[13]

Burke does not deny the usual motives for slaying, but sees identification as the motive of wider scope, the other motives as species of it. Indeed, Poe is concerned with identification. The bereaved lover tales that are narrated by the bereaved lovers give only the first name of the lost loves. The significance of a proper noun has been an issue with structuralists and post-structuralists because it operates apart from a system of differences. "The proper noun, asserting a direct and literal correspondence between name and referent, posits the absolute and transcendental presence of its object."[14] Thus the bereaved lovers want to possess the presence identified by, or in, Morella, Ligeia and Berenice, all of whom are also symbols of knowledge, of something long forgotten--namely that "happy pause" between "prelanguage and the linguistic catastrophe instituting the division of discourse."

The following chapters will explore the "division of discourse" in Poe's arabesques. As essentially tales of horror, the arabesques deserve specific attention in regard to the relation of horror and language, or the horror

of language and the void. The play between language and the void (generally synonymous with death, a common element of the arabesques) serves as the precarious center for the discussions, the first of which examines The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym as a tale that questions the possibility of ever achieving unity in a world of language, a world fragmented by language. The second chapter is a discussion of The Journal of Julius Rodman in light of Pym, and suggests that the division between pretext and text, the meaningful but uninterpretable and the interpretable, is a concern central to the two tales. The last three chapters examine the bereaved lover tales, the murder tales, and the remaining horror tales, respectively. Unity is discussed in terms of absence and presence, memory, naming, and knowledge.

All five chapters have some focus on print and language imagery, which is comprised of the recurring images of black and white that permeate the tales. The appearance of the print and language imagery that I emphasize is not simply a mechanical input to the tales. Rather, the fact is that such imagery is a reflection of an integral part of Poe's vision, and so a necessary element in his writing. Though some of these black/white images are more directly tied to print and language, all are significant when seen in relation to their occurrences throughout the tales. Indeed,

it is just this pervasiveness of black/white images which makes them significant. This imagery springs, no doubt, from Poe's submersion in print; his intense concern with words covered not just his own writing, but the many literary battles in which he was involved. As well as being a poet and fiction writer, he was an editor, a journalist, and a writer of essays, reviews, and literary theory. His concern or obsession is seen too in the proposed names for the literary magazine he hoped to edit, names such as Penn and Stylus. His world was a world of print, and it is not surprising that his best work constantly reveals the nature of the medium that was, essentially, his lifeblood.

But it also springs, I will argue, from the aesthetic I have been describing here. It springs from the suggestive juxtaposition of the "all-color" of white and the distinguishing and differentiating mark of language, the pretext on the page which can be "recognized" only when it is violated. The printed page presents and represents the juxtaposition of the space of nature and the time of speech; that is, it marks the divisions of language as if they were, somehow, non-linguistic, an illusion to be overcome, as "matter" is, by spirit and energy: in a word, by "effect." In his parody, "X-ing a Paragrab," Poe has an editor of a newspaper compose an entire paragraph attacking another paper's editor

with every word (save articles, participles, and the sole contrary noun, time) containing the vowel o, which he calls "the beautiful vowel--the emblem of Eternity" (VI, 232). Through a theft of characters, the paragraph appears the next day with all the o's replaced by x's:

> The exigency here described is by no means of rare occurrence in printing-offices; and I cannot tell how to account for it, but the fact is indisputable, that when the exigency [of missing characters] does occur, it almost always happens that x is adopted as a substitute for the letter deficient. The true reason, perhaps, is that x is rather the most superabundant letter in the cases, or at least was so in old times--long enough to render the substitution in question an habitual thing with printers.
> (VI, 235)

Another reason, not considered by Poe's narrator, is that x is the character most like a mark, most hieroglyphical, most "material." That is why the tale ends with the x used as a mark: trying to explain the editor's x's the printer says that he was continually drinking "XXX ale, and, as a naiteral consekvence, it just puffed him up savage, and made him X (cross) in the X-treme" (VI, 237).

That is, in this tale Poe gives an allegory of the "emblem of Eternity" replaced by a material mark-- a "mystical and cabalistical article" in which "hieroglyphics" of "some diabolical treason lay concealed"--which displaces it. Such violence, Riddel argues, is inscribed in language: for Poe such language--marking and violating the "void"

of the undifferentiated page--creates death in the place of "ultimate, unorganized life." Thus Poe's use of print imagery, simultaneously literal and figurative,[15] is doubly horrible: it violates the unity of Eternity and, in Poe's hands, aims to re-member that unity in the void.

NOTES

[1]Daniel Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe (Garden City, New York, 1973), p. 203.

[2]Of Grammatology, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 279-80.

[3]The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (1902; rpt. New York, 1965), XVI, 183. All subsequent references to Poe's works will be cited parenthetically by volume and page.

[4]Charles Schaefer discusses Eureka as an aesthetic analogue to Poe's critical theory in "Poe's 'Eureka': The Macrocosmic Analogue," JAAC, 29 (1971), 353-65.

[5]Stephen Mainville and Ronald Schleifer, "Whitman's Printed Leaves: The Literal and the Metaphorical in Leaves of Grass," Arizona Quarterly, 37 (1981), 18.

[6]Henry James, Preface to Roderick Hudson in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1962), p. 5.

[7]Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (1967; rpt. New York, 1977), p. 58.

[8]Geoffrey Green, "Reestablishing Innocence: A Conversation with Leslie Fiedler," Genre, 14 (1981), pp. 148-49.

[9]Quoted by Green, p. 149.

[10]Joseph N. Riddel, "A Somewhat Polemical Introduction: The Elliptical Poem," Genre, 11 (1978), 465.

[11]The Rhetoric of Religion (Boston, 1961), p. 175.

[12]Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), pp. 19-20.

[13]A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), pp. 19-20.

[14]Ronald Schleifer, "Principles, Proper Names, and the Personae of Yeats's The Wind Among the Reeds," Eire Ireland, 16 (1981), p. 73.

[15]See "Whitman's Printed Leaves" for a longer discussion of how print imagery in a printed book doubles its figurative use with a literal reference.

CHAPTER II

FRAGMENTED DISCOURSE: THE NARRATIVE OF ARTHUR GORDON PYM

Arthur Gordon Pym's narrative, the anonymous author of the concluding "Note" to The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym tells us, is incomplete, a fragment. Yet the "fragmentary" structure of Pym brings us to the heart of Poe. In contrast to The Journal of Julius Rodman, an actual fragment, Pym is only presented as a fragment. That is, the anonymous author of the "Note" informs us that "It is feared that the few remaining chapters which were to have completed his narrative, and which were retained by him, while the above were in type, for the purpose of revision, have been irrecoverably lost through the accident by which he perished himself" (III, 243). Pym, though, is complete: the "Note" itself is the novel's conclusion. Nonetheless, the issue of Pym's unity has been the topic of much commentary. I would like to approach the issue of unity, however, through a discussion of the novel's fragmentary nature. In fact, within the larger context of Pym as fragmentary is an emphasis on fragmentation inherent in the novel's very style and method.

This quality of fragmentation initially led to rather derogatory commentary upon Pym. First of all, Pym did not receive critical attention until the early sixties. In the mid-sixties J. W. Ridgely and Iola S. Haverstick reached several conclusions about Pym by drawing upon "the admittedly scanty biographical and other external information, the studies of the sources which Poe used, and a line-by-line analysis of the basic texts."[1] Their three conclusions--which were shared, at least in part, by many other critics of Pym[2]--were that: "(1) First and last Poe planned Pym as a hoax, though the purpose of his deception shifted. . . . (2) The book has only a spurious unity, achieved by Poe's showmanship rather than by careful structuring. . . . (3) More fundamentally, the story lacks a controlling theme and has no uncontrovertible serious meaning--symbolic, psychoanalytic, existentialist, racist, or otherwise."[3] Ridgely and Haverstick, with these findings, berated Pym as inconsistent in plot and character, and put forth the thesis that "The only explanation which will account for this unusually flawed text is that Poe worked on it at several periods between the end of 1836 and the early summer of 1838, that he changed his mind several times about the direction of his story line, and that he made a hurried but inefficient attempt to turn his disconnected narrative into a whole at the very moment when the volume was being put to press."[4]

Ridgely's and Haverstick's article, though, did not terminate further Pym criticism. Alexander Hammond, in fact, after noting that Ridgely himself had since written two more articles on Pym (as of the time of Hammond's own article), went on to question the findings of Ridgely and Haverstick, plausibly arguing against their inferential dating of certain stages of Pym's composition.[5] John Carlos Rowe has a more significant response in answer to those critics who have faulted aspects of Pym: "What critics have considered difficulties and inconsistencies in the text," Rowe writes, "may also be considered self-conscious disruptions of the impuse toward coherent design and completed meanings."[6] Rowe's suggestion subverts the views of those critics who have discussed Pym's lack of unity in theme and structure. What is happening is that, "In its fundamental investigation of the problematics of writing, Pym . . . questions the nature and possibility of literary form."[7] Indeed, Rowe is very right in regarding unity--"coherent design and completed meaning"--as a crucial issue in Pym. But, inherent in Pym, and ultimately tied with the issue of unity and literary form, is a language riddled with piece imagery and patterns, a language of fragmentation which not only embodies a central theme in Pym, but also embodies its very method. Further, this quality is in keeping with more recent readings of Pym, and is more often than not a present though unpronounced aspect of them.

First, the structure of Pym itself must be examined in terms of piece-whole imagery, from a perspective which encompasses the tripartite structure of Pym as a whole. The Preface, the narrative (Chapters 1-25), and the Note comprise the external structure of Pym. The Preface--allegedly written by Pym--serves to introduce Pym as a true account of Pym's adventures. Pym is presented as a truthful, though originally unwilling, writer—his unwillingness arising from his fear of being unable to write "from mere memory" the "positively marvelous" nature of his adventures, and a "distrust in [his] own abilities as a writer" (III, 1-2). These comments, of course, characterize Pym as frank yet modest. Such presumably attractive qualities predispose the reader to accept Pym's narrative more readily than he would otherwise. But deception is at work here. Poe (Poe as the anonymous author of Pym) presents Pym as the author of the Preface, and Pym writes that he is about to relate actual incidents. He mentions that Mr. Poe wrote the earlier portion of the narrative, and he the rest, adding that "the difference in point of style will be readily perceived" (III, 3). Poe, however, is beginning his story with a deception, a deception which presents Pym's narrative as composed of fragments from different authors.[8]

It is precisely this element of deception which has, ironically, been misinterpreted and so resulted in much

negative criticism of Pym (and Poe). Several critics have regarded the Preface as an attempt to set the reader up for a hoax. One critic refers to Pym merely as "the Pym hoax" and claims it was successful because of Poe's "use of timely material."[9] The "hoax," though, was not successful in either tricking readers or selling copies.[10] Ridgely and Haverstick also regard Pym as a "hoax": "first and last Poe planned Pym as a hoax. . . ."[11] In both of these instances the significance of the Preface is being very much lost. The Preface is much more than a "hoax"; it is an initiation into the theme of deception.[12]

The narrative is itself structurally intact. It moves from Pym's adventures revolving around the Ariel, to those revolving around the Grampus, to those revolving around the Jane Guy. Furthermore, the chapters are appropriately proportioned to each of these divisions. The Ariel segment is contained in Chapter 1, while both the Grampus and the Jane Guy segments receive twelve chapters.[13] Edward Davidson's comments on the Ariel segment reveal its dramatic import: "The first chapter, or prologue, of Pym is a highly dramatic yet abbreviated narrative of everything that the rest of the book will contain. . . . Each of the . . . main narrative episodes in Pym is to some degree, a development of a theme suggestively treated in that night's adventure aboard the 'Ariel' . . . . deception, self-loss, death,

rebirth."[14] Thus the narrative (Chapters 1-25) has its own tripartite framework within the larger tripartite structure of the whole of Pym.

The Note concludes Pym. Like the Preface, it is brief (2-3 pages) and has a tone of honesty. The anonymous editor who wrote the Note refers to Pym's recent and well known death and the simultaneous loss of "two or three final chapters," and presents an interpretation of the mysterious figures formed in and by the chasms (III, 243-45).[15] This editor also informs the reader of Mr. Poe's refusal to complete the narrative with his knowledge (Pym implies in the Preface that he has told Mr. Poe his complete story) "for satisfactory reasons connected with the general inaccuracy of the details afforded him, and his disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narration" (III, 243). Pym's narrative, then, is purported to be a fragment, lacking "two or three final chapters." But, nonetheless, Pym is a whole, with the narrative itself structurally intact, and with a Note that completes the tripartite structure of the book as a whole. Indeed, like the Preface, the Note is written from a perspective which suggests to the reader information (the writer of the Note refers to it as "an appendix") to enlighten the reader as to the significance of the narrative, that the meaning of the narrative lies

in an understanding of "Tsalal" and the chasms. With the Note the structure of Pym is perfectly balanced--a brief Preface and a brief Note enclose a fantastic narrative in intimations of fragmented truth.

The meaning of Pym, then, is to be found in a perspective which views the parts of Pym as a whole. The tripartite structure--Preface, narrative (with its own tripartite structure), and Note--is only one of several such patterns in Pym; others may be seen in the three chasms and in the three points of view used in Pym (Pym, Mr. Poe, and the unnamed editor). Piecing these triplicities together will result in wholeness, and thus in communication and meaning. Along with these tripartite patterns is a strong line of "piece" imagery. An examination of piece imagery and tripartite patterns follows, and will be helpful in revealing the meaning and theme of communication in Pym.

The quantity of piece imagery (imagery using words such as "piece," "part," "portion," and "fragment") that pervades Pym is immense.[16] Representative of the numerous piece images are "two of those almost inconceivable pieces of good fortune" (III, 12); "the harrowing and yet indefinable horror with which I was inspired by the fragmentary warning" (III, 41); and "some portion of his body or head" (III, 35). Now, Poe not only uses piece imagery extensively, but he also uses it in an almost forced manner. "Good

fortune" is not usually regarded as being composed of "almost inconceivable pieces," and "pieces" here almost implies wholes. In the instance of the warning, horror becomes "indefinable" because the warning is only "fragmentary." The third reference describes the body and head as being composed of portions, and implies too that the body and head are the two physical parts of a creature.

Pym also refers to minds and perception in terms of piece imagery. He experiences "a state of partial insensibility" (III, 102), a "species of partial oblivion" (III, 150; "partial oblivion," notice, is impossible to imagine), and "a partial interchange of character [with Augustus]" (III, 18). Different states of consciousness exist (i.e., dreaming, waking), as do partial states of these states. Pym's "partial interchange of character" implies that a schizophrenic quality (disintegration of character) afflicts his personality, which should be considered as a factor affecting Pym's reliability as narrator (discussed in conclusion of this chapter).

Furthermore, Pym has, at various times, "no connected chain of reflection" (III, 33), "some portion of presence of mind" (III, 33), and "scattered senses" (III, 204). This use of piece imagery suggests the necessity of having wholeness of mind and a logically connected thought pattern. "Whole" imagery is, in fact, in juxtaposition with piece

imagery throughout Pym. This juxtaposition stresses the wholeness which the piece images lack, but which is needed before pieces may become meaningful. Wholeness is one of the two areas outside of pieceness, the other being nothingness. Wholeness and nothingness are ultimately identical.

The word "whole" is used more than any of the "piece" words in Pym. Wholeness results in positive effects, as do system and unity. Examples of this include "upon the whole" (III, 200), which conveys the concept of "all things considered" or "taken in perspective"; and "when the whole dreadful secret of the concussion broke upon us in one moment and at one view" (III, 207), where the wholeness of the "dreadful secret" is made ironic by its having "broke upon us" and further stressed by the image of oneness in "one moment" and "one view." System and unity are seen in passages where Peter's shirt, "with my own, formed the rope necessary for the adventure" (III, 228-29), and "the party of Too-wit. . . . was momentarily strengthened by smaller detachments. . . . There appeared so much of system of this. . . ." (III, 188). Strength and utility, then, result from the wholeness attained in system and unity.

That wholeness is more desirable than pieceness is seen in the violent piece imagery, where wholeness is destroyed: "the windlass shattered into fragments. . . . [a] pitiable condition" (III, 97); "large sharks [were visible],

the clashing of whose horrible teeth, as their prey [Augustus's corpse] was torn to pieces among them, might have been heard at the distance of a mile. We shrunk within ourselves in the extremity of horror at the sound" (III, 140); and "a vague conception . . . that the whole foundations of the solid globe were suddenly rent asunder, and that the day of universal dissolution was at hand" (III, 203). Pym, in the second passage, desires the nothingness which Augustus has become through being torn to pieces: to become nothing he attempts to shrink within himself. This reaction is later paralleled when Pym tries not to think of the absyss below the cliff he must descend; his trying not to think of this only leads him "to anticipate the feelings with which [he] shall fall" (III, 229). The final passage reveals a "piece" view of the world, with expectations of a violent end.

Piece imagery becomes significant, then, when seen in contrast to whole imagery. This is clear when Pym describes "a most shameful piece of neglect on the part of Captain Barnard" (III, 68); and when he describes Peters's teeth, which were "never even partially covered" (III, 52). The description of the half-breed (another piece image) Peters's teeth should be compared to the covered teeth of the Tsalal savages (III, 241), to the teeth of the dead seaman (III, 111, 113), to "the strange animal with the

scarlet teeth" (III, 217), and to the "horrible teeth" of the sharks (III, 140). The second passage implies that there are many pieces which Barnard must take care of to fulfill his part (i.e., his role as captain) which is, by implication, a part of some whole (or a whole crew, perhaps). Bernard's "most shameful piece of neglect" suggests a deficiency in his part as captain, which may have a connection with his loss of the Grampus to the mutineers.

The piece imagery in the remainder of this discussion, it should be noticed, has more and more to do with language and writing. The piece images, in fact, begin to take shape. All of the piece images, along with the juxtaposed whole images, form a foundation on which the piece patterns are built.[17] The piece patterns repeatedly contain a quality of triplicity. Numerous minor groupings of three also occur. Pym's three part name is the first. All three of the crafts on which Pym sails further from Nantucket are destroyed: the Ariel, Grampus, and Jane Guy--each ends up in pieces. Two groupings of three occur in the incident of the death ship. First, three seamen are seen on board the ship (III, 110). Then, when Pym realized the three seamen are corpses, he refers to "the triple horror of that spectacle": numerous rotting bodies, the third seaman being eaten by a seagull, and the piece of flesh dropped by a seagull (III, 111-13). The death ship is the first ship to pass by the ship-wrecked Pym and his companions; it is the third ship, the Jane Guy, which rescues them.

An extremely detailed tripartite pattern is developed in the passages describing Pym's reading of Augustus's note. He fails at first, concluding that "Not a syllable was there, however--nothing but a dreary and unsatisfactory blank" (III, 38). When Pym realizes that he had looked at "only one side of the paper" (III, 39), the question of his reliability arises, for Augustus later informs Pym that he had written the note on "the back of a letter--a duplicate of the forged letter" (III, 60). Thus the letter would have had writing on both sides, as several critics have remarked.[18] David Ketterer, however, noting the emphasis on the number "three" in the description concerning the letter, writes that "This [the letter] is a three-sided piece of paper. Pym and the reader are encouraged to entertain this illogical reality as analogous to the ultimate realm beyond reason and writing where Pym is headed."[19] Such a "three-sided" analysis accords well with the present focus.

Pym, then, must read the other side of the paper. But he "had childishly torn it in pieces and thrown it away" (III, 39). Now one sees that a process is necessary to find and fit together pieces so that they become meaningful. Then Pym must examine the whole of the pieces from the proper perspective. With the help of Tiger, Pym finds the pieces of the letter--"it having been torn, it seems, only into

three pieces" (III, 39). A tripartite structure is thus clearly presented, the first of three to be given in relation to the letter.

"Fitting the pieces together gave me no clue in this respect [i.e., which side is the writing on?], although it assured me that the words (if there were any) would be found all on one side, and connected in a proper manner, as written" (III, 40). Pym determines the side he has already looked at by detecting by touch the remaining fragments of phosphorous (which he had used for light). Now, to see the side with writing he must make it visible. Using the last of the phosphorous, he sees that "this time several lines of MS. in a large hand, and apparently in red ink, became distinctly visible" (III, 40-41). Revealed are "the whole three sentences before me--for I saw there were three. In my anxiety, however, to read all at once, I succeeded only in reading the seven concluding words, which thus appeared--'blood--your life depends upon lying close'" (III, 41). The second tripartite pattern of the letter is thus heavily stressed--"the whole three sentences . . . for I saw there were three." "The whole three" is of particular effect; it implies a wholeness, a oneness; it is not merely "three," or "all three," but "the whole three." It carries with it, as do all of the tripartite patterns, the idea of a threefold unity, of the Trinity, of any other

pagan or Christian beliefs concerning the mysterious oneness of patterns of three.

"And 'blood' too, that word of all words--so rife at all times with mystery, and suffering, and terror--how trebly full of import did it now appear" (III, 41). The tripartite pattern connected with the letter is described by Pym; later he will learn that the word "blood" refers to Augustus's having written the note with his blood. Again the idea of the Trinity arises, strengthened by Pym's referring to "mystery" (mystery of the Trinity) and "suffering" (of Christ). The Son of God was the word made flesh; Augustus's blood is the flesh made word.

Much later in the work, the three chasms discovered by Pym and Peters present another detailed tripartite pattern. The Note explains that "when conjoined with one another in the precise order which the chasms themselves presented . . . [the chasms] constitute an Ethiopian verbal root . . . 'To be shady'--whence all the inflections of shadow or darkness" (III, 244). This information should be "taken in connection with statements made in the body of the narrative" (III, 244). Again, by putting three parts together in their "precise order," and by looking at the whole in the proper perspective--in this case from the perspective of "statements made in the body of the narrative"--one may perceive the meaning. One must look back, for example, to statements

referring to black and white, qualities which carry one of the themes of Pym. The same is true of the markings on the chasm wall, which may translate into "'To be white'" (III, 244) and "'The region of the south'" (III, 244): "'Tsalal' . . . may be found, upon minute philological scrutiny, to betray either some alliance with the chasms themselves, or some reference to the Ethiopian characters so mysteriously written in their windings" (III, 245). This conclusion is drawn after the reader is told that the meaning of the chasms and their markings "should be regarded, perhaps, in connection with some of the most faintly detailed incidents of the narrative; although in no visible manner is this chain of connection complete" (III, 245).

The chasms and their markings have been variously and interestingly interpreted. Maurice Mourier, in parody, arranges and interprets the figures of the chasms to spell "e. A. Poe."[20] More seriously, Daniel Wells connects the figures of the chasms so as to spell, in longhand and reverse, "Poe."[21] So, as Wells writes, "Poe signs his name, as it were, to his island,"[22] and by so doing, to his novel. The three chasms, connected, give the reader the signature of the author that Poe denies being. Just as the three chasms, then, must be viewed as a whole to perceive their meaning, so must the meaning of their whole be connected with other "whole parts" to perceive new and larger patterns

with new and larger meanings. This process, carried to its logical conclusion, would result in one all-encompassing whole.

This one all-encompassing whole may be seen in the final image with which Pym leaves us: "And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow" (III, 242). "The succession of verbs ["rushed," "arose," "was"] in these three sentences represents the movement toward that "still point that moves even in its stillness."[23] The tripartite pattern is clear in this idea--three sentences, three progressive verbs, with both sequences culminating in the final image of the "shrouded human figure." A tripartite pattern is also clear in the focal process in the final sentence; the focus is first on "hue," then "skin," then "figure," but "hue" is and remains the subject (with the parallel set of prepositional phrases "of the perfect whiteness of the snow" returning us to the subject "hue"). This is the reverse of an otherwise similarly structured description of the water on Tsalal: "the whole mass of liquid was made up of a number of distinct veins, each of a distinct hue" (III, 187), where the focus begins with the "whole," then

moves to "veins," and finally focuses on the "hue." In the case of the "shrouded human figure," by placing "hue" as the subject in the concluding sentence, the description of the hue as being "of the perfect whiteness of the snow" is of the most importance. The hue was "perfect whiteness." The hue, the skin, and the figure become one in whiteness. And whiteness, the reflection of all light, is not a real color. In becoming itself (i.e., whiteness), in becoming whole, it becomes the absence of all color; it becomes nothingness. Perhaps it is an image of "pure transcendence,"[24] but if so it may also be described in the terms of this chapter, as a whole, which, in becoming whole, becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

The piece images and patterns, then, particularly the tripartite patterns, may be used to explore the meaning of Pym. One tripartite pattern, however, remains to be examined: the triple point of view in Pym--Pym, Mr. Poe, and the unnamed editor. This tripartite pattern is interwoven with the themes of communication and deception, as developed both within and by the structure of Pym.

First of all, Pym may be shown to be unreliable--he himself refers to his often strained mind. Kennedy presents several factual inconsistencies in Pym,[25] to which list I would add Pym's incredible statement that his wound from

a timber bolt driven through his neck, "although of an ugly appearance, proved of little real consequence" (III, 16). Such inconsistencies may also suggest a dream state, in which case Pym's narrative would be a dream voyage (a dream may have "an ugly appearance," but would be "of little real consequence"); and, of course, dreams are often taken as messages to be interpreted. Or, the inconsistencies may be seen as Rowe suggests, as "self-conscious disruptions of the impulse toward coherent design and completed meaning."[26] In any case, Pym's unreliability fits well in a tale whose more prevalent themes include those of communication and deception; for just as Pym's false statements may negate themselves, so does the final tripartite image of the narrative, whose parts, in becoming a whole, become nothing (although, it appears, a very significant "nothing").

But, beyond Pym's unreliability, point of view may be still further twisted. On one level, Pym is composed of three points of view--Pym's, Pym's as told by Mr. Poe, and the unnamed editor's.[27] On another level, though, Pym is told from a somewhat different point of view--first person, schizophrenic, this point of view belonging to a narrator who has disintegrated into three voices. That one point of view is "consistent" throughout the whole text of Pym is supported by the similarity in the styles of Pym, Mr. Poe, and the unnamed editor. Such a statement needs much

supporting evidence. Some evidence lies in the similarity in tone of Pym, Mr. Poe, and the unnamed editor, and also in the similar diction of these three--as seen especially in the consistent use of piece imagery throughout Pym. Such a vocabulary, fraught with images of pieceness, is, of course, perfectly suited to such a fragmented narrator.

That Pym is not truthful--he presents as fact what could only be fiction--also serves as evidence that Pym is narrated from a schizophrenic point of view. Pym's lies, as mentioned above, lead to a view of Pym as not what it appears to be--not a "real" narrative told by an Arthur Gordon Pym, with a Preface by Pym and a Note by an unnamed editor, with some pages of the narrative written by a Mr. Poe. That the narrator of Pym lies about events reveals a personality that possesses the ability to lie about identities. It may be reasonably concluded that Pym is narrated by a single, anonymous "I," who changes his identity, but not his style.

If Pym is accepted as the work of one schizophrenic narrator, then the meaning of the structure of Pym is affected. From the structure of Pym arise questions about Pym as a work of fiction--questions concerning the nature of Pym, Mr. Poe, the unnamed editor, and the disintegrated narrator. Questions also arise concerning the nature of

the passages, themselves fragments, in Pym which are paraphrased or simply taken verbatim from various sources,[28] some acknowledged by the fictitious Pym and some not. Indeed, the structure of Pym leads the reader into a labyrinth of reality where fact and fiction are alarmingly entangled. To escape this maze it is necessary to see through the structure of Pym, to see that Pym transcends its Preface, narrative, and Note, for beyond these parts lies the anonymous and disintegrated mind in which they are united.

Ultimately, Pym's disintegration, his madness--if it be madness--may be seen, perhaps, as leading to a religious vision or experience, as contained in the image of the "shrouded human figure." The meaning of the final figure seen by Pym may be considered in light of piece images and tripartite patterns. These images and patterns could not be understood until their component parts were seen in perspective--and Pym did not achieve this perspective until experiencing it in the white, shrouded figure. The pieceness of Pym leads, as stated earlier, to one of two bordering qualities: wholeness and nothingness. It is in the white, shrouded figure that one finds all three qualities simultaneously: wholeness, pieceness, and nothingness--the three qualities mysteriously and paradoxically united in one image.

The mystery and paradox of this image may be interpreted as consistent with religious experience. As stated

above, religious significance is found in the tripartite patterns, suggestive of the mystery of the Trinity, of all beliefs concerning the mysterious oneness of patterns of three. In the instance of Pym's letter from Augustus, it was seen that whereas Christ was the Word made flesh, Augustus's blood is the flesh made word. And in the "editor's" Note, the discussion of the meaning of the chasms is concluded with the Biblical sounding statement, "'I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock'" (III, 245; this statement also points to the chasms spelling "Poe" when connected). Though an element of parody may be seen in these instances it is overcome by Pym's transcending experience. Pym thanks God throughout the narrative for his salvation: and Pym and his companions are often immersed in water and pulled out again--minor baptisms. Pym's rush into the cataract may also be seen as baptismal, as a death, perhaps, and rebirth. The last two journal entries are, significantly, March 21 and March 22, the beginning of spring, the time of renewal and rebirth. Pym, then, goes through a death experience in the cataract, but he is reborn: he returns with his story--resurrected by Poe, the creator, who has signed his name inside a work ascribed to another, much as God gives his word in the Bible through his own created beings-characters.

Several valid interpretations of the final image of the narrative have been offered, none of which is necessarily opposed to my emphasis on pieceness and wholeness, but rather coalesce with it. Richard Wilbur believes the figure represents "the coming reunion of the voyager's soul with God--or what is the same thing--with the divinity in himself."[29] Very close to this is Joseph Moldenhauer's view that "the artistic mind is Poe's subject in the Narrative," to which he adds:

> Poe projects as the end of Arthur's voyage a condition of perfect unity. . . . Here all contradictions are resolved, including the philosophically crucial one of solipsism and selflessness, for in death the realities shadowed forth by the imagination and the secret design of the world are one. This convergence of poetic vision and the mind of God, whether in the artist's perceptions of supernal beauty or in the enduring union of self and all in death, affirms the sufficiency of the soul and the inconsequence of personal identity.[30]

Supporting Moldenhauer is Wells's reading that the giant white cataract at the end of the "Poe-lar" journey symbolizes "the magical, mystical source of Tsalal and its creatures, Poe's own creative imagination."[31] Further, Wells writes, "Engraved in the hills is Poe's name [that is, as formed by connecting the figures of the chasms], undercutting the claims to authenticity of the landscape and the characters," and so stressing the need to "conjoin geography and philosophy, chasm and creativity."[32]

But, finally, Poe himself elsewhere gives some words which are appropriate for Pym. Indeed, in Eureka, as we saw, a central concern is unity, Poe's general proposition being that "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (XVI, 185-186). And, in support of Marie Bonaparte's psychoanalytic interpretation of the final image in Pym as representing the return of the son to his mother, Rowe points to Poe's remarks in Eureka concerning atoms of fragmentation: "Their [atoms of fragmentation] 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."[33] Rowe is concerned with illusion and deception here, but the nature of Poe's passage is one of pieceness and wholeness, of a desire for Unity even if it be only "partially" satisfied. Poe goes on in Eureka to give a passage which corresponds wholly and succinctly to Pym's final experience of the white figure: "In sinking into Unity, [Matter] will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all Finite Perception, Unity must be--into that Material Nihility from which alone we can conceive it to have been evoked--to have been created

by the Volition of God" (XVI, 311). Indeed, this describes perfectly Pym's final experience. Pym is the "Matter" that in sinking into Unity (wholeness)--represented by the white figure, discussed above as "wholeness"--sinks paradoxically and simultaneously into Nothingness--also represented by the white figure, white being both the reflection and absence of all color. And, too, the "Volition of God" which is responsible for this creation corresponds to the artist (Poe) as creator. The parallel between this passage from Eureka and Pym's final experience with the white figure is, indeed, phenomenal.

Finally, what is significant about the enigmatic white figure is that Pym survives it; he is not destroyed in the cataract. His desire to know the unknown, though a self-destructive urge, results in rebirth. To experience the loss of self does not result in annihilation: it is a life-giving experience. The whiteness which envelops Pym is itself his redeeming experience, this whiteness which is best explained in the white figure, in which the hue, the skin, and the figure become one in whiteness. For it is this image which finally allows Pym his transcending experience; it is this image which is the culmination of all the previous tripartite patterns. Through experiencing the oneness of wholeness, pieceness, and nothingness, Pym

is redeemed: he experiences the essential mystery (Eureka!) Even his accidental death upon his return to the States, ironical as it may be in light of the incredible adventures he survived, can not alter the significance of his earlier transcending experience.

And ironical his death is. It is Pym's death that brings the anonymous author of the "Note" to tell us that we are without the "two or three final chapters (for there were but two or three)" (III, 243; again we are faced with the number "three"). Ironically, though, the death that leaves Pym a fragment simultaneously "completes" Pym. That is, one's life is always a fragment until the closure of death. The author of one's own narrative can never supply the final pages, or chapters.

Nonetheless, Pym is, in another sense, complete. Pym did, after all, have the final two or three chapters written and was simply holding them for "revision." Thus, within the limits of its own fiction, Pym's narrative is concluded, but its conclusion happens to have been displaced, dislocated. The final chapters are displaced, of course, only within the fiction of their own fiction, just as Pym's death is placed within that same fiction: "The circumstances connected with the late sudden and distressing death of Mr. Pym are already well known to the public through the

medium of the daily press" (III, 243; the daily press is itself a never completed journal of the world). In fact, Pym's death, printed in Pym, is once more removed into the print of "the daily press." In any case, the silence at the end of Pym, as I will argue, is a linguistic and temporal image corresponding to the spatial image of white. It is the languages of Pym and Julius Rodman that the next chapter will examine.

NOTES

[1]J. V. Ridgely and Iola S. Haverstick, "Chartless Voyage: The Many Narratives of Arthur Gordon Pym," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 8 (1966), 63.

[2]For example; L. Moffitt Cecil, "The Two Narratives of Arthur Gordon Pym," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 5 (1963), 232-41; and Sydney P. Moss, "Arthur Gordon Pym, or The Fallacy of Thematic Interpretation," The University Review, 33 (1967), 299-306.

[3]Ridgely and Haverstick, 79-80.

[4]Ridgely and Haverstick, 63.

[5]"The Composition of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: Notes Toward a Re-Examination," The American Transcendental Quarterly, 37 (1978), 9-20.

[6]"Writing and Truth in Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," Glyph 2 (1977), 104.

[7]Rowe, 104.

[8]According to R. A. Stewart, Mr. Poe's portion ends after the third paragraph of Chapter 4, and there Pym's begins (III, 329).

[9]Ted N. Weissbuch, "Edgar Allan Poe: Hoaxer in the American Tradition," New York Historical Society Quarterly, 45 (1961), 291-309.

[10]Arthur Hobson Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography (New York, 1963), pp. 263-64.

[11]Ridgely and Haverstick, 79.

[12]J. Gerald Kennedy--in "'The Infernal Twoness' in Arthur Gordon Pym," Topic: 30, 16 (1976), 46--has noted the deceptive quality of the Preface, stating that "the real subject of the Preface is the relationship between truth and fiction." Elsewhere--in "The Preface as a Key to the Satire in Pym," Studies in the Novel, 5 (1973), 191-96--Kennedy suggests that the Preface may be seen as a key to the satire in Pym, while Evelyn J. Hinz--in "'Tekeli-li': The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym as Satire," Genre, 3 (1970), 379-99--sees Pym as "an excellent Menippean satire which has consistently been criticized as a faulty novel." Such a strong emphasis on satire, though, is misleading. Hinz, for instance, concludes that Pym is "a presentation of total and horrifying incomprehension." This focuses on Pym instead of on Pym; that is, it is limited to the character of Pym rather than the issues raised by the book as a whole, by the Preface, narrative, and Note. (It is also wrong, I think, in its evaluation of Pym's experience, as will be shown in later pages.) Though there may be elements of satire in Pym, the novel is not, finally, a satire, Menippean or otherwise; the direction of most recent criticism on Pym strongly implies as much.

[13]This division has been discussed by Charles O'Donnell, "From Earth to Ether: Poe's Flight into Space," PMLA, 77 (1962), 89; and by David Ketterer, "Devious Voyage: The Singular Narrative of A. Gordon Pym," The American Transcendental Quarterly, 37 (1978), 30-32.

[14]Edward H. Davidson, Poe: A Critical Study (Cambridge, 1964), p. 164.

[15]Sidney Kaplan confirms the unnamed editor's translations in his introduction to Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (New York, 1960), p. xxi. Barton Levi St. Armand presents a source that questions the accuracy of the hieroglyph for "To be white," in his "The Dragon and the Uroboros: Themes of Metamorphosis in Arthur Gordon Pym," The American Transcendental Quarterly, 37 (1978), 70-71.

[16]Word frequency is as follows: "piece" is used twenty-nine times; "part" is used sixty-seven times; "portion" is used forty-seven times; and "fragment" is used twelve times.

[17]Kenneth Burke makes a relevant statement about book titles in his Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (Boston, 1961), p. 175. Writes Burke: "Insofar as the title of a book could be said to sum up the nature of that book, then the breakdown of the book into parts, chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words would be technically a 'fall' from the Edenic unity of the title, or epitomizing 'god-term.' The parts of the book reduce its 'idea' to 'matter.'"

[18]Kennedy, for one, in "'The Infernal Twoness' in Arthur Gordon Pym," 52-53.

[19]"Devious Voyage: The Singular Narrative of A. Gordon Pym," 27.

[20]"Le tombeau d'Edgar Poe," Esprit, 42 (1974), 917-18. Mourier (914-15) also deciphers the hieroglyphic indentures ΠΕΨΥΡΗC as E.A.P.&A.G.Pym. I interpret them as: Π=r; Ε=s; Ψ=not U=I; Υ=e; P=P; H=H; C=C. Then, rearranged, as CIPHerS. Poe, I trust, would approve.

[21]"Engraved Within the Hills: Further Perspectives on the Ending of Pym," Poe Studies, 10 (1977), 14.

[22]Wells, 14.

[23]David Halliburton, Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View (Princeton, 1973), p. 277.

[24]Halliburton, p. 278.

[25]"'The Infernal Twoness' in Arthur Gordon Pym," 49-53.

[26]Rowe, 104.

[27]Poe's identification with Pym is strongly hinted at. This is seen in the similarity of the beat of their tripartite names--Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Gordon Pym--and also in Pym's reference to "Edgarton" on the opening page of the narrative. This identification, though, exists only when the reader accepts Edgar Allan Poe as the author of Pym, for it is significant that Poe's name did not originally appear on the title page. A parallel to Poe's deception here is found in the note Augustus forges, in which he signs the note as written by Mr. Ross. In both instances falsity is presented as fact, as the real author remains hidden behind a forged signature.

[28]J. O. Bailey, "Sources for Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym, 'Hans Pfaal,' and Other Pieces," PMLA, 57 (1942), 513-35; Keith Huntress, "Another Source for Poe's 'The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,'" American Literature, 16 (1944), 19-25.

[29]"Introduction," Edgar Allan Poe, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (Boston, 1973), p. xxiv.

[30]"Imagination and Perversity in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 13 (1971), 271, 278-79.

[31]Wells, 13.

[32]Wells, 15. Along Wells's line, Claude Richard--in "L'Ecriture d'Arthur Gordon Pym," Delta, 1 (1975), 95-124--and Jean Ricardou--in "The Singular Character of the Water," trans. by Frank Towne, Poe Studies, 9 (1976), 1-6--stress the self-referential nature of Pym. Richard points to the need to connect elements in order to achieve unity. Ricardou, after his often quoted discussion of the description of the water on Tsalal, goes on to suggest that the final image of the narrative reveals a "Journey to the Bottom of the Page." "Reading," Ricardou concludes, "cannot be carried on when the eyes are at the same level as the words; words can be made out only from a distance."

[33]Rowe, 117.

CHAPTER III

SELF-REFLEXIVE DISCOURSE: LANGUAGE AND THE VOID IN POE'S GOTHIC FRONTIERS

Poe, in his two longer works, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and the unfinished Journal of Julius Rodman, attempts to create an air of geographical authenticity by including passages from actual explorers' journals.[1] In both of these works, the narrators travel into a frontier beyond the bounds of civilized, cultured man. Rodman literally purports to be an account of "the first passage across the Rocky Mountains of North America ever achieved by civilized man," and Pym, as some critics have suggested, metaphorically disguises the American frontier as a seascape,[2] with Pym and his companions sailing into a group of islands in the 84th parallel of the southern latitude, and from there journeying even further south. While it is misleading to suggest that Poe uses the sea and the island of Tsalal as a disguised version of the American frontier, and equally misleading to suggest that he means to present a literal account of a journey into an actual, geographically locatable frontier in Rodman, the literal and metaphorical "frontiers" of these longer works are crucial if we are to understand

their fragmentary form, their "enactment" of meaning, and the conjunction of form and action--the self-consciousness of writing. That is, Poe's frontier is the frontier of the unconscious, the unknown, the limit of consciousness, a frontier that is experienced rather than located. What the frontiers in Rodman and Pym have in common--as the alleged editor of Rodman's journal writes of Rodman's journey--is that they are marked upon maps as "unexplored" (IV, 10). As such, as "marked" but "unexplored," they bring together--they form the "frontier" between--consciousness and unconsciousness, significance and nature, language and the void.

In short, Poe's unexplored frontiers are not to be found on any map, in any external geography; they are interior frontiers. Gaston Bachelard realizes this when he explains that on first reading Pym he found it a boring book, but later returned to the book and found it to be, after all, one of Poe's great works. And he came to this realization by "setting the drama this time where it really belongs . . . , on the frontier between the conscious and the unconscious. I then became aware that this adventure, which in appearance hurtles across two oceans, is in reality an adventure of the unconscious, an adventure taking place in the nighttime of the soul."[3] Patrick Quinn uses the

notion of "frontier" as an ambiguously literal metaphor when he notes Bachelard's admiration of Poe as "one of the few writers who have been able to work along the frontier between the real and the dream worlds, a shadowy frontier where the writer's experience is strangely blended of elements drawn from both those realms."[4] Thus we are brought into Poe's frontier, what Richard Wilbur calls the hypnagogic state, the frontier between waking and dreaming. Yet "frontier" is a more encompassing concept in regard to Poe's writing: Poe worked not only on the frontier along the "real and the dream worlds," or between the "the conscious and unconscious," but also between subject and object, the "psychal" and the physical. What, exactly, though, is to be found in Poe's frontiers as they are presented in Rodman and Pym? What is waiting to be discovered by Pym and Rodman as they journey into the uncivilized, uncharted, unexplored frontiers of the unknown?

What waits for them are creations of questionable origin, hieroglyphic inscriptions representing the mark of the creator, the mark of the maker, the artist. The writing on the wall, with its significance questionable in Rodman, becomes more suggestive, more easily seen as intentional in Pym. One might even say the intentional but uninterpretable mark is the frontier between consciousness

and what is unconscious: its very existence makes it a trace of consciousness, yet its meaninglessness cannot be distinguished from dumb, unconscious nature. That is, the frontier presents a pretext of language, one which simultaneously is the condition of and implies an aspect of civilization: in Poe the frontier at least seems to offer the possibility that man might be able to "read," to find significance in, the wilderness, thus making it his own. That is what the Gothic romance suggests, that there is some significance--even if it is the significance of meaningful horror--behind, to be "read" in, the world.[5] Behind the text of the Gothic novel always already lurks a possible pretext of the supernatural significance which the text hints at and represents, something to be read in and behind the Gothic text. That is, the Gothic participates in what Paul de Man calls "classical eighteenth-century theories of representation [which] presistently strive to reduce music and poetry to the status of painting . . . [and in which] the possibility of making the invisible visible, of giving presence to what can only be imagined, is repeatedly stated as the main function of art." Thus,

> it confirms rather than undermines the plenitude of the represented entity. It functions as a mnemotechnic sign that brings back something that happened not to be there at the moment, but whose existence in another place at another time, or in a different mode of consciousness is not challenged.[6]

Poe's frontier in the same way offers meaningful marks, but it also offers the place of meaning, both text and pretext, supernatural and nature. This is why the frontier itself, unlike the Gothic landscapes of the European tradition, is more than a metaphor of meaning. It is also the place meaning is enacted, figure and place at once. Poe's frontier, then, is both full and empty, confirming and undermining "the plenitude of the represented entity": it is present and a representation, literal and metaphorical.

Poe quit writing Rodman after completing only the first six chapters. Even though critics have not dealt extensively with the book, it is not without interest, particularly since it tends to shed light on what Poe does in the much more accomplished Pym. We can see that Rodman is a fragment; in Pym the alleged editor claims that his narrative, too, is a fragment, that it lacks two or three final chapters, these having been lost in the accident which kills Pym. This claim, though, remains a part of the completed novel; it has to do with its overall "fragmentary" structure. Such fragments--literal in the case of Rodman; figurative in the case of Pym--form a "frontier" of their own between the known and unknown. And it points to the double project of Poe's landscape: the American frontier, after all, is the dividing line between what is complete

and what has not yet been discovered, the zone that literary fragments themselves offer, as Hugh Kenner has noted, between denoted and suggested significance.[7] And in Poe's work when we follow the ambiguous significance of the text and pretext of the frontier itself--the ambiguity between the natural and the supernatural--we find that this fragmentary, Gothic, written text uncannily presents both the text and pretext of the landscape it describes.

i

Particularly, then, those passages in Rodman dealing with questions of art and nature, of human language and (or "in") an inhuman landscape, can help us determine what lies behind Poe's use of comparable passages in Pym, and both can help us to define Poe's strange frontiers. The issues of art and nature, language and meaninglessness, are confronted by Rodman, a man with the qualities of an artist. The alleged editor describes Rodman as "urged solely by a desire to seek, in the bosom of the wilderness, that peace which his peculiar disposition would not suffer him to enjoy among men" (IV, 10-11). This desire to find peace in the "bosom" of the wilderness ties Rodman to Pym who, in a milky sea, is "rushed into the embraces of [a] cataract," where a white-skinned, "shrouded human figure" arises. Rodman, too, we are told,

> was possessed with a burning love of Nature; and worshipped her, perhaps, more in her dreary and savage aspects, than in her manifestations of placidity and joy. He stalked through that immense and often terrible wilderness with an evident rapture at his heart which we envy him as we read. He was, indeed, the man to journey amid all that solemn desolation which he, plainly, so loved to depict. His was the proper spirit to perceive; his the true ability to feel.
>
> (IV, 13-14)

Indeed, Rodman in a sense creates the character of his frontier. Rodman's descriptions, the editor informs us, are often derived "from the sombre hue of his own spirit" (IV, 36). Pym raises Rodman's qualities to their masochistic height. He tells us that

> My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown.
>
> (III, 17)

We sense much of Poe's own personality in these descriptions, but one of Poe's nice touches in these two miserably happy characters is that both have the power either materially to lead an expedition into, or rhetorically to convince a captain to sail with his crew into, such unknown areas as they enter, even though practical considerations (profit motive) lose priority. As Rodman eventually states, "we appeared to be a band of voyagers without interest in view, mere travellers for pleasure" (IV, 76). What disturbs Rodman, however, even after they are fairly well into the

wilderness, is that "I could not help being aware that some civilized footsteps, although few, had preceded me in my journey--that some eyes before mine had been enraptured with the scenes around me. . . . I was anxious to get on; to get, if possible, beyond the extreme bounds of civilization . . ." (IV, 77). "To get, if possible, beyond the extreme bounds of civilization" is, after all, a recurrent desire of Poe's: Eureka is perhaps the most extreme example. In Rodman, as well as in Pym, this desire has two aspects. Negatively, it is a desire to leave society, civilization, consciousness, behind. But, positively, though somewhat redundantly, it is a desire to enter the unconscious, or, as Rodman describes it, "a territory as yet altogether unknown to white people, and perhaps abounding in the magnificent works of God . . ." (IV, 34). In both cases it is the ambiguous achievement of the frontier.

"Magnificent works of God," I assume, refers to natural wonders, but those "works" that are most eye-catching to Rodman are those which hint of the involvement of a human hand. Rodman wonders about origins:

> I could not make up my mind whether these hillocks were of natural or artifical construction.
> (IV, 40)

> On the edges of the creeks there was a wild mass of flowers which looked more like Art than Nature, so profusely and fantistically were their vivid colors blended together.
> (IV, 42)

Or Rodman describes scenery as being more beautiful than artifically made gardens, as beautiful as--or even more beautiful than--scenes in old books:

> The prairies exceed in beauty anything told in the tales of the Arabian Nights.
>
> (IV, 42)

> The whole bore a wonderful resemblance to an artificial flower garden, but was infinitely more beautiful, looking rather like some of those scenes of enchantment which we read of in old books.
>
> (IV, 44)

Who, we might wonder, is the creator, the artist, the author of such "scenes of enchantment which we read of in old books"? In the case of the hillocks, Rodman suggests the makers might be natives, Indians (IV, 40). In other cases, he suggests animals: "many . . . islands [were] . . . crossed in various directions by narrow, mazy paths, like the alleys in an English flower-garden; and in these alleys we could always see either elks or antelopes, who had no doubt made them" (IV, 42); and elsewhere Rodman's editor summarizes Rodman's description of the artistic and architectural skill of a group of beavers (IV, 45-50). But, even with these at times half-hearted explanations, the idea of some other, more intentional creator lingers. As Rodman says, it is precisely the "fantastically" blended colors that imply the intention of art, as if the fantastic is literally un-natural and as if the unnatural implies an author.

These issues arise, for the reader at least, more forcefully. most conspicuously, when Rodman arrives at a "wall of the most singular appearance . . . soaring in height . . . and . . . with a very regular artificial character" (IV, 90). This area is described in detail:

> These cliffs present indeed the most extraordinary aspect, rising perpendicularly from the water. The last mentioned are composed of very white soft sandstone, which readily receives the impression of the water. In the upper portion of them appears a sort of frieze or cornice formed by the intervention of several thin horizontal strata of a white freestone, hard, and unaffected by the rains. Above them is a dark rich soil, sloping gradually back from the water to the extent of a mile or thereabouts, when other hills spring up abruptly to the height of full five hundred feet more.
>
> The face of these remarkable cliffs, as might be supposed, is checkered with a variety of lines formed by the trickling of the rains upon the soft material, so that a fertile fancy might easily imagine them to be gigantic monuments reared by human art, and carved over with hieroglyphical devices. Sometimes there are complete niches (like those we see for statues in common temples) formed by the dropping out bodily of large fragments of the sandstone; and there are several points where staircases and long corridors appear, as accidental fractures in the freestone cornice happened to let the rain trickle down uniformly upon the softer material below.
> (IV, 90-91)

Poe gives us, specifically, cliffs whose face is composed of "very white sandstone, which readily receives the impression of the water," this "very white" face having "a variety of lines formed by the trickling of the rains," "carved over with hieroglyphical devices," so that a "fertile

fancy might easily imagine them to be gigantic monuments reared by human art." In American Hieroglyphics John Irwin cites this same passage in order to make an Egyptian connection, to point to the analogy between the Nile and the Mississippi/Missouri, which he sees at work in Rodman and central to Pym. Irwin is interested in language and origins in his discussion of Poe, as well as questions of "originality" and "novelty" in the case of Rodman. Thus, Irwin concludes that "In Rodman's account the correlation between the phonetic writing of human history and the hieroglyphic writing of natural history is suggested by the black/white imagery in the description of the cliffs, for just as the crossing of vertical and horizontal lines is one bipolar opposition that grounds writing, so the differentiation of black and white is another."[8] In the Gothic frontier of Pym, as we shall see, phonetic and hieroglyphic writing are confused, bringing together what Irwin later calls the "necessity" of the recurring "literal" figures of hieroglyphics and the "arbitrariness" of the forms of phonetics and what I will call the confusion of "contexts."

But there is another conflation embedded in this "frontier" of Poe. Here, as elsewhere in his work, Poe uses water as a symbol of both the unconscious and ink--what I have called the "pretext" of writing, an apt

representation of the "frontier." Water is both the pretext and text of writing; it is the place of meaning and meaning itself; carving the cliffs, water literally enacts meaning, the "symbolic" meaning of staircase and hieroglyphics. What we have here is a symbol of creation, of language, one of the "magnificent works of God." It is creation inscribed on and in nature--on and in Poe's frontier--in such a way that nature seems fantastically unnatural--that is, meaningful. Meaning, Gothic meaning, is fantastically--as Henry James says, "revoltingly"[9] --against nature, a turn of the screw. And in its place, in Poe, are inscribed meaningful, uninterpretable marks. In this wilderness, this frontier of the unconscious, stand pages, "very white," carved over with hieroglyphics and with "staircases and long corridors" which go nowhere.

Rodman, if finished, would, I suspect, have given us a larger context in which to decipher, to make some significance out of, the strange "pages" of the white-faced cliffs. (Their context is lost, however, for "Besides the main walls there are . . . inferior ones. . . . Sometimes these . . . run in parallel lines . . . sometimes they leave the river and go back until lost amid the hills" [IV, 91-92].) But such contextlessness, after all, is what the completed Pym strives for in its claims to be a fragment: it is, after all, precisely the contextlessness--of the cliffs,

of their corridors--which is fantastically unnatural. "Really, universally," Henry James said (he might have said "naturally"), "relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so."[10] The "pages" of the cliffs, when regarded as standing for language--and they literally do "stand" out of the frontier, above their natural context--tempt us to inhabit them, to move through them "where staircases and corridors appear"; they tempt us with the supernatural appearance of meaning. In Pym, we will see, Pym unknowingly but literally moves through language; indeed, once Pym moves out of language he moves out of any reality. Here, in Rodman, the landscape itself is a fantastic language which creates at least the illusion of a human habitation in the wilderness.

Here, then, is a sense of Poe's frontier: placing language in the void of nature, he situates himself between meaning and a plenitude so vast--as vast as cliffs and sea--that all meaning cannot create its context of intelligibility. Like the quotation marks Jacques Derrida multiplies in "Limited Inc"--creating as he often does (and as Poe does with his water imagery) a sense of limitless ink--the frontier in Poe multiplies contexts of meaning to the point of

uninterpretability, lost, as it were, in the maze of possible intentional meanings. This is what Derrida's quotation marks imply--"""Copyright @ 1977 by John R. Searle"""[11]--intentions destroying by multiplying contexts, until, like Rodman's cliffs, they create literally unreadable hieroglyphics. It is in this way, then, as I have said, that Poe's frontier joins supernature and nature, a text of seemingly meaningful signs, and a pretext, a "place," of dumb nature.

The mysterious significance and dreamy nature of Rodman's pages are heightened by the atmosphere in which they are perceived: "We passed these singular bluffs in a bright moonlight, and their effect upon my imagination I shall never forget. They had all the air of enchanted structures (such as I have dreamed of,) and the twittering of myriads of martins, which have built their nests in the holes that every where perforate the mass, aided this conception not a little" (IV, 91). Here we see Poe-Rodman the pioneer in another frontier, no longer locatable, but experienced, the frontier between waking and dreaming, between the conscious and the unconscious, the realm of the artist. And this realm is unreal, the misty, "enchanted" world, at once meaningful and meaningless, intentional and contextless, artificial and natural, whose mystic, mythic

atmosphere is heightened not only by moonlight, but also by the presence of those ancient undecipherable symbols and omens of the Other World: birds. But this is almost as far as Rodman journeys; it is Pym who completes a similar journey.

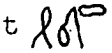
Rodman's narrative soon breaks off, but not before leaving us with a final interesting incident. Rodman and three others--one being the interpreter Jules--climb to the topmost of several terraces "to see what could be seen" (IV, 97). No sooner do they sit down than they are attacked by two huge brown bears. Jules slides down to the next terrace, but does so with such velocity that he is hurled also over the third; Rodman assumes Jules will be hurled over the remaining terraces to his death. The remaining men stay to face the bears, one of which falls to the second terrace (and is eventually left for the crows), and the other which is killed by a pistol shot through the eye. This event is described in such a way as to make it seem of some significance; that is, climbing to the top of the terrace for a perspective "to see what could be seen," only to immediately encounter "two enormous brown bears (the first we had yet encountered during the voyage)" (IV, 97) that can only be killed by shooting them through the eye, seems to represent more than a simple adventure. Perhaps

this event's significance, mythical or other, if indeed it has any, is tied to the necessity of undergoing experience itself. Experience is uninterpretable--it can't be passed on in words; it can't be defined, bordered, as the frontier seems to border civilization. For we learn that Jules (the interpreter) survived: when Rodman and his companions return to camp, "Jules was there all alive, but cruelly bruised--so much so indeed that he had been unable to give any intelligible account of his accident or of our whereabouts" (IV, 101). In this case, the failure to communicate--to give an "intelligible account" of what happened--is both literal and symbolic; it contains the ambiguity, the confusion of the literal and figurative, in Poe's frontier. It is, after all, the contextlessness of the frontier--the fact that in "nature" nothing really "stops," that nothing is out of "place"--[12] that makes the intention of meaning at once clearly distinguishable and unintelligible. The signs of Jules' adventure, like the signs of Rodman's cliff, are clearly to be interpreted even as they destroy the interpreter's voice.

ii

In Pym (published in 1838) Poe had already done what he might have found himself heading for in Rodman (published

serially in 1841-42)--perhaps this helps account for the breaking off of Rodman just as it appears to get interesting. Ironically, though, as I mentioned earlier in regard to the unfinished Rodman, Pym's narrative breaks off at the climactic moment, as Pym and Peters are being swept into the cataract; and Pym ends with the editor's Note stating that the final two or three chapters of Pym's narrative were lost at the time of Pym's death. There is, I think a viable explanation for this beyond the suggestions already made, that can be best reached by drawing some more parallels between Pym and Rodman.

Like Rodman, Pym desires to move beyond the bounds of civilization, to go where no white men have gone before. And Pym does reach unexplored, unknown territory when he reaches the island of Tsalal, and then canoes, finally, into the cataract to the "shrouded human figure" (III, 242). Tsalal itself bears comparison to the white, sandstone "pages" in Rodman. Like the pages, lined by trickling water, Tsalal is lined by chasms (originally, perhaps, carved out of water) which, as we learn in the Note, "when conjoined with one another in the precise order which the chasms themselves presented . . . constitute an Ethiopian verbal root--the root  "To be shady' . . ." (III, 244). And as noted in the previous chapter, these figures also

spell "Poe" in longhand, in reverse[13]--so Tsalal's creator, or author, signs his name to his literal and figurative page. Like the stone pages in Rodman, then, with their stairways and corridors offering men passage into their inscriptions, inviting them to live in a language, the island of Tsalal is page-like, also inscribed with hieroglyphics through which men literally find passage. Unlike Rodman, Pym does not have the necessary perspective from which to perceive his page, though he and Peters, upon entering the first chasm (or "figure," as Pym calls it), "could scarcely bring ourselves to believe it altogether the work of nature" (III, 221): and, more so than Rodman, Pym, though curious to enter the unknown, refuses to perceive writing on the wall. This we see when Pym, with Peters inside one of the chasms, rejects Peters' opinion that the indentures in the marl which possess "some little resemblance to alphabetical characters" are actually such (III, 225).[14] But the editor offers possible interpretations of these two lines of indentures, or alphabetical characters: "To be white" and "The region of the south" (III, 224).

We see here that Pym is blind to significance even when he faces it from a proper perspective. This is a reflection of his more understandable but analogous failure to view the figures of the chasms from a comprehensive

perspective; that is, one must look at the page as a whole if he is to make sense of it--one cannot live in it (in the page, in language) and still perceive its significance. Significance, then, both needs and eschews contexts: to be meaningful something must be seen "whole," yet that "wholeness" is always fragmentarily unnatural precisely because, as James says, "relations stop nowhere." That "stop"--outside nature and outside language--whether it be origin or end, is what Poe always seeks. And seeking it, he turns to a fantastically unnatural nature, a nature which can be read but not understood, that makes up his frontiers in Rodman and Pym. It is impossible for us to step outside of language; language is, quite literally, that in which we relate. To step out of language--out of our human context--is to become fantastically unnatural; it is to inhabit the inhuman void, the pretext of humanity.

This is why for a writer (albeit an initially unwilling one) Pym is so strangely adverse to using or apprehending any interpreting symbols, why he is so unrelentingly literal. Such literalness is in contrast to what makes the writer distinct from others, his ability to use language as symbol. This is what makes Pym, ultimately, a Gothic hero. There are no symbols in Gothic fiction: everything, even such "unlocatable" things as fears, anxieties, "frontiers" of

feeling, literally inhabit its world. Rodman's white pages finally do not represent anything: they present literally writing in the void of wilderness; Pym's chasms are simply, literally, places to be. There are no symbols in Gothic fiction even if, from the outside everything seems symbolic. This distinction can be seen in Pym: the quality which makes the writer (or, in a larger sense, any human) what he is--language-using--is represented in the most northerly of the indentures examined by Pym and Peters and is precisely what Pym cannot see. He sees the literal figure--"With a very slight exertion of the imagination," he writes, "the left, or most northern of these indentures might have been taken for the intentional, although rude, representation of a human figure standing erect, with outstretched arm" (III, 225)--but he refuses to acknowledge the figurative, alphabetical, arbitrary figures. Moreover, in the figure to the left in the text not only is the arm outstretched toward the alphabetical characters, but this "human figure" is also suggestive of an alphabetical character, looking as much like an "A" as like a human figure. This human, alphabetical character fuses the word and flesh: the human is the linguistic, the arbitrary and symbolic figure--the great symbol, first and last, Roland Barthes says, is the human body itself[15] (and we might add, remembering Rodman's

cliff, the house which houses it)--and it is precisely the simultaneous embodiment and denial of such "unnatural" symbolic significance which is the Gothic. The Gothic, as Tzvetan Todorov says, marks the "hesitation"--the "frontier"--between the natural and the supernatural,[16] but it does so by confusing the literal and the metaphorical. Irwin explains the markings in terms of the peculiar opposition between art and nature, an opposition that threatens to dissolve. He writes:

> Yet Pym's and Peters' uncertainty about whether the markings are natural or "man-made" reflects a deeper uncertainty inherent in the very opposition between nature and art--a constructive uncertainty that the markings in the chasm are intended to exhibit. Though the hieroglyphic figure on the wall evokes a language whose characters are necessary, natural shapes rather than arbitrary, man-made signs, the very fact that the hieroglyph in this case is the representation of a human figure tends to make the "natural/man-made" distinction problematic. For it suggests, on the one hand, that since man is as naturally occurring an object as trees or rocks or rivers, his arbitrary designs, the traces of his movements, are just as much natural shapes as are leaves or fissures or erosions: and it suggests, on the other hand, that the concept of the "natural," as a function of the differential opposition "natural/man-made," is itself something man-made.
>
> This latter sense is especially evident in the two different senses of the natural that are implicit in the chasm episode, for the natural as distinguished from the man-made can mean either the necessary as opposed to the arbitrary or the random as opposed to the arbitrary. Obviously, not all naturally occuring shapes are interpreted as "necessary" shapes (in the sense of inherently meaningful), but only those that, like the shape of a leaf or the outline of an animal body, show a <u>recurring form</u> (the very

> fact of whose recurrence indicates a purposive design by the Author of nature). Natural shapes that are produced in a nonrecurring fashion are classified as random or meaningless.[17]

Irwin presents a central problem of the frontier in Poe. The frontier is both "necessary" and "random": that is, its landscape is embedded in a context that encompasses "everything," and simultaneously it is contextless accidents. As Irwin says, it is both meaningful and meaningless, meaning and the place of meaning--language and the void.

In any case, Pym remains unreceptive to the figures he literally encounters (though he copies down the figures of the chasms and the indentures by means of his "pocket-book and pencil"; III, 223). After being forced from the island, Pym begins his final chapter--"We now found ourselves in the wide and desolate Antartic Ocean . . ." (III, 236). Pym's description is, not surprisingly, similar to Walter Prescott Webb's description of the frontier as "a vast and vacant land without culture."[18] And Pym is now, more than ever, entering "a vast and vacant land [place] without culture," or, in Rodman's phrase, moving "beyond the extreme bounds of civilization," inasmuch as he is leaving behind language, as represented by the island of Tsalal, a page lined with the inscriptions of the chasms and the "signature" of the author. Indeed, from this perspective we can agree with Jean Ricardou's assertion that Pym's final adventure

(or "passage," as I would call it) is "a Journey to the Bottom of the Page."[19] The white material falling into the milky sea (III, 240-41) reinforces this reading, as does the emphasis on whiteness in the final lines of Pym's narrative:

> And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow.
> (III, 242)

And, Ricardou points out, whiteness, the blankness at the bottom of the page, overcomes, in this final passage, even the black mark Nu-Nu, who dies, who has "been erased."[20] As Irwin asserts, "Writing in search of its origin is the self-dissolving voyage to the abyss."[21] (He insists, though, that we "cannot understand Pym's voyage as a quest for linguistic origins unless we see that the imagery of the search for the Abyssinian source of the Nile has been superimposed on the voyage to the polar abyss," which in turn must be viewed in light of associations with "narcissistic doubling and hieroglyphic [pictographic] writing."[22]) The blankness beyond the page, or the blank page itself with its undifferentiated white, then, is the ultimate Gothic frontier, and Pym's experience of this is what is lost in the chapters which were "to have completed his narrative"

(III, 243; Rodman, I would guess, was headed toward an experience similar to Pym's--what else is there?).

But what could Pym have written to have described the always waiting to be discovered blankness of the page? Even beyond the stone "pages" Rodman saw only further walls, "Sometimes . . . run in parallel lines . . . sometimes . . . lost amid the hills . . . (IV, 91). Finally, what awaits the explorer is some form of the void, the void of the plenitudinously literal; Pym reaches the "white curtain," the "veil" which once passed through is indescribable; even as Pym, Peters, and Nu-Nu move closer to the white curtain, silence becomes--appropriately--more prevalent: "Peters spoke little. . . . Nu-Nu breathed, and no more" (III, 241). And so we have the ultimate silence, the silence of the absence of Pym's final chapters (which he had held for "revision"; III, 243). Finally what is indescribable is the void of the literal, its contextless plenitude, beyond the frontier of differentiated human symbols--that which Poe and the Gothic seek to hide and reveal.

Poe, then, moves Pym into the final frontier, the void of the blank page, the inarticulate plenitude--both necessary and accidental--behind and beyond language. Pym survives this void, however (it is the return to civilization that kills him), perhaps because he acted in accordance

with a dictum of Fredrick Jackson Turner, who asserts that "at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish. . . ."[23] The same is true of the Gothic world (or frontier): when characters enter it they must leave behind preconceptions and be open to discovery of the unknown.[24] Pym, by acting passively or dreamily, survives by his nonresistant attraction to the unknown (though, he seems to survive in spite of himself and his passivity at times): he survives in his unrelenting literality. That is, Pym's blindness to the possible significance of the hieroglyphics results not simply from the "rational" explanation he offers, but from his more radical refusal to see meaning anywhere. Pym experiences passively; though open to new experience, he "experiences the experiences" both literally and passively, both being unimaginative and ultimately inhuman. Thus Pym, the monster of literality, becomes a symbol of the Gothic frontier he survives: "naturally," he becomes part of the landscape he inhabits.

Finally, the silent void of the blank page and the full and noisy "whiteness" of nature which lies behind or beyond language seem the same thing, their conjunction forming a frontier which is the ultimate representation of a

"literal" absence of significance. Taylor Stoehr has observed of Poe that

> Although he is continually hinting that there is some hidden meaning lurking behind every appearance, about to be dreadfully revealed, in fact the "unspeakable horror" is precisely that there is nothing there . . . everything collapses, the characters fall into the abyss, the story ends. . . . Reality is the pulse of the logos. From this point of view, the "unspeakable horror" is both the void and all reality, a horror only so long as it is unspeakable, and nothing at all once spoken.[25]

Stoehr is correct, but he needs to emphasize that the "nothing" is also "everything," accident and necessity at once, the silence of the literal which "stops nowhere." Still, his assertion can be applied to Pym, particularly if we replace "unspeakable horror" with "intensely exciting secrets" (III, 178). Further, we can move easily from Stoehr's remarks about Poe to Todorov's more general comments about the supernatural: "The supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent: the supernatural. The supernatural thereby becomes a symbol of language. . . ."[26] While the supernatural landscapes of Poe--Rodman's cliffs, Pym's chasms--are literally the "symbols of language," Poe can, in their literality, present (and represent) both nature and supernature, presence and absence; and in so doing he creates the pretext as well as text, a space--a

"frontier"--between the meaningful and the interpretable. Uncannily, Poe's landscapes are born of language and give birth to language, human text and inhuman nature. They create a Gothic frontier.

NOTES

[1]John Irwin in American Hieroglyphics (New Haven, 1980), pp. 74-75, examines Rodman's basis in The History of the Expedition Under the Commands of Captains Lewis and Clark.

[2]Edwin Fussell, in Frontier: American Literature and the American West (Princeton, NJ, 1965), pp. 150 ff.; and Leslie Fiedler, in Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1966), pp. 391 ff., are among those critics who have discussed Pym as a western.

[3]Gaston Bachelard, quoted by Patrick F. Quinn in The French Face of Edgar Poe (Carbondale, 1957), p. 291.

[4]Quinn, p. 25.

[5]For an elaboration of this argument, see Ronald Schleifer, "The Trap of the Imagination: The Gothic Tradition, Fiction, and 'The Turn of the Screw,' " Criticism, 22 (1980), 297-319. Schleifer contrasts the traditional Gothic of Dracula and the "modern" Gothic of The Turn; I will argue Poe's landscapes are a "Gothic" frontier between the two.

[6]In Blindness and Insight, quoted by Schleifer, p. 303.

[7]Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley, 1971) p. 123, discusses the significance of literary fragments.

[8]American Hieroglyphics, pp. 70-76. Following his discussion of Rodman, Irwin presents a fine reading of Pym based on the image complex of the Mississippi/Missouri Rivers, the Nile, and the South Pole, and the related significance of hieroglyphics and doubling. Though an earlier version of this chapter was originally presented in early 1980 at the Southwestern Popular Culture Convention, I am indebted to Irwin for the rich suggestiveness of his insights into Poe and language. For "randomness" and "necessity," see p. 168.

[9]The Turn of the Screw, quoted in Schleifer, p. 310.

[10]Henry James, Preface to Roderick Hudson in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1962), p. 5.

[11]"Limited Inc," trans. Samuel Weber, Glyph, 2 (1977), 164.

[12]See Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. Jeffery Mehlman, Yale French Studies, 48 (1972), 55: "What is hidden is never but what is missing from its place, as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in a library. And even if the book be on an adjacent shelf or in the next slot, it would be hidden there, however visibly it may appear. For it can literally be said that something is missing from its place only of what can change it: the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheavel we subject it to, is always in its place."

[13]Daniel Wells, "Engraved Within the Hills: Further Perspectives on the Ending of Pym," Poe Studies, 10 (1977), 14.

[14]For another instance of Pym's refusal to acknowledge the significance of markings--in this case in opposition to Captain Guy, who makes out the figure of a tortoise on a piece of wood--see III, 177.

[15]Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. by Richard Miller (New York, 1974), pp. 214-15.

[16]Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York, 1975), p. 25.

[17]Irwin, p. 168.

[18]Walter Prescott Webb, "The American Frontier Concept" in The Frontier in American Literature, ed. by Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones (New York, 1969), p. 8.

[19]Jean Ricardou, "The Singular Character of the Water," trans. by Frank Towne, Poe Studies, 9 (1976), 4.

[20]Ricardou, 5.

[21]Irwin, p. 91.

[22]Irwin, p. 115.

[23]Fredrick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the American Frontier" in The Frontier in American Literature, p. 11.

[24]Certainly this is true for several of Poe's narrators. A negative example is the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle," who, finding himself on a gigantic ship, "unwittingly daubed with a tar-brush the edges of a neatly-folded studding sail which lay near me on a barrel," only to later find "The studding-sail is now bent upon the ship, and the thoughtless touches of the brush are spread out into the word DISCOVERY" (II, 10). The white sail with the word "DISCOVERY" on it looks forward to the void of the blank page in Arthur Gordon Pym. This author-explorer, though, literally goes down (not to return) with the gigantic ship, swallowed by the plenitude of the sea. The narrator of "A Descent into the Maelstron" does better, resisting the urge of his imp of the perverse to explore the depths of the maelstrom, and using his analytical powers to save himself from being swallowed.

[25]Taylor Stoehr, "'Unspeakable Horror' in Poe," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 78 (1979), 330-31

[26]Todorov, p. 82.

CHAPTER IV

REMEMBERED DISCOURSE: POE'S BEREAVED LOVERS

The death of a beautiful woman--in Poe's view the most poetical of subjects--is a standard element in his love stories. Tied to this element of death are the issues of knowing, of naming (or not naming), of memory. Significant, too, is the appearance of art in the form of paintings, nested narratives (a narrative within a narrative), and poems; and, of course, we have the ever-present print and language imagery, indicative of Poe's self-reflexive fiction. Taken together, these elements comprise Poe's language of love, which becomes a language of representation insofar as the women (at least in the last tales discussed in this chapter) represent what the narrators desire.

Paul de Man's distinction between the symbol and allegory is useful here. He writes that "Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of

this temporal difference."[1] The women are identified with, or symbolize, a cosmic knowledge; the males want to possess the knowledge the women already possess. They believe it will lead to the remembrance of something long forgotten. The narrator of "Ligeia," for instance, wants to read the expression within Ligeia's eyes, while Egaeus regards Berenice's teeth as ideas. The bereaved lovers are haunted by memories, memories of an immemorial ideal that can be approached but not defined through print and language, that can be represented but not repossessed, except in death.

"The Oval Portrait," a very short tale, differs somewhat from the other tales that will be discussed in this chapter. We see the bereaved lover only in the half-nested narrative that concludes the tale, and the bereaved lover's bride only in the portriat and that same half-nested narrative. Nonetheless, the narrator may not be reliable; he is in a "desperately wounded condition" (IV, 245), an "incipient delirium" (IV, 245). How he was wounded we are not told. What he gives us is a description of a large part of the night he spends in a remote room in an apparently temporarily abandoned chateau. His description of the hours he passes gazing at paintings and reading a volume about them is strangely tied to the description of how the oval portrait came to be.

The parallels between the descriptions are several. As the bride sat for long periods of time posing for her husband, the narrator reads and gazes as "the hours flew by" (IV, 246). Both the bride and the narrator are profoundly affected by the oval portrait--the bride is drained of life, of color, as the portrait becomes more and more lifelike, and the narrator tells us that his viewing of the portrait served "to dissipate the dreamy stupor which was stealing over my senses, and to startle me at once into waking life" (IV, 246). Ironically, the portrait that apparently drains the bride of life is responsible for the narrator's transition from a state of "dreamy stupor" into "waking life" (IV, 246). But there is a final similarity between the bride and the narrator; as the bride is painted into the portrait, the narrator reads himself into the narrative that describes the oval portrait. In a way, both lose their consciousness to the oval portrait. The bride's life ends in the oval portrait; the narrator's tale ends in the half-nested narrative (the narrative in the volume the narrator reads, from which we do not return to the "actual" narrative). Moreover, as the oval portrait is a painting of "a young girl just ripening into womanhood," (IV, 246), "The Oval Portrait" is a tale just "ripening" into its own completion.

And as the young girl is the subject of the oval portrait, we can view the narrator as the subject of "The Oval Portrait."

But the tale is completed by not being completed. That is, its completion is the half-nested narrative that describes the making of the oval portrait. We never get the "whole story" of the narrator's experience. Like the oval portrait, "a mere head and shoulders" (IV, 246), "The Oval Portrait" is also only "a head and shoulders," and both the portrait and the "Portrait" "[melt] imperceptibly into the vague yet deep shadow which formed the back-ground of the whole. The frame was oval . . ." (IV, 247). Thus, just as the frame of the oval portrait is oval, the frame of "The Oval Portrait" is similarly circular with both "portraits" circling back to the other. Appropriately, the chateau itself is a combination of "gloom and grandeur" (IV, 245), its decor "tattered and antique" (IV, 245), as the words which discuss the oval portrait are "vague and quaint" (IV, 247). All of this doubleness is a reflection of the tale itself, or, more exactly, of the doubling of the oval portrait with "The Oval Portrait." It implies, too, the doubling of life and art, with one reflecting the other.

The tale stresses the power of art in a perhaps

sacrilegious way. The artist creates life through his art--"'This is indeed Life itself!'" he exclaims upon finishing the portrait (IV, 249)--but in so doing destroys his bride. Moreover, the wedding of the two is presented as sinful: "And evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter. He passionate, studious, austere, and having already a bride in his Art . . ." (IV, 247). The painter is,then, a bigamist, who has made a mistake in wedding a mortal. That is, love should be ideal: Art is thus the ideal bride. Love should not be real: a human bride is real, born of nature and so corruptible.

Further, the narrator appears to celebrate a black mass of sorts. In a room covered with paintings (Art), at night, the narrator tells his valet "to close the heavy shutters of the room . . . to light the tongues of a tall candelabrum which stood by the head of my bed--and to throw open far and wide the fringed curtain of black velvet which enveloped the bed itself" (IV, 245). This description of the setting is soon followed by another description: "Long--long I read--and devoutly, devotedly I gazed. Rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by, and the deep midnight came" (IV, 246). It is at this "deep midnight" that the narrator, the priest of this black mass, shifts the position of the candelabrum, and the "rays of numerous candles [reveal]. . .

in vivid light . . . the portrait of a young girl ripening into womanhood" (IV, 246). Finally, the narrator tells us that he "found the spell of the picture in an absolute life-likeness of expression," and that with "deep and reverent awe I replaced the candelabrum in its former position" (IV, 247). The "evil hour" when the bride "saw, and loved, and wedded the painter" has already been paralleled by the narrator, who "remained, for an hour perhaps, half sitting, half reclining, with my vision riveted upon the portrait" (IV, 247). Strange indeed. The narrator, in bed at "deep midnight," consummates his union with the "young girl just ripening into womanhood" by gazing at (love strikes through the eye) and reading of her. She is the ideal mistress, both woman and Art. How did the narrator respond to this seduction? He tells us: he was at first startled, then "confounded, subdued and appalled" (IV, 247). The narrator, finally, is one of the lovers of this tale.

Art, then, is seen as evil in the demonic setting of this tale; art is linked not only to creation, but to destruction (of the human) as well. The artist/painter seems, vampire like, to literally draw the lifeblood out of his bride/model, while the painting itself leaves the painter first "entranced," then "tremulous and very pallid, and aghast" (IV, 249), and the narrator first startled,

then "confounded, subdued and appalled" (IV, 247). Perhaps some of what horror there is in this tale results from the fact that both the rational and the irrational--or natural and supernatural--explanations for what happens are horrible. The irrational explanation is frightening simply because it is frightening to think that a painting can absorb the life of the model it is based on. The rational explanation, that the bride simply pined away, is horrible because it shows the artist as so possessed that he values art above life. In fact, women should not marry artists, Poe's tales suggest. In "Berenice," Egaeus--who is descended from a race of visionaries--"in an evil moment" spoke to Berenice of marriage (II, 22), and in "The Oblong Box," as we shall see, the painter Wyatt's new bride accompanies him only as a fresh corpse. Art is ineed a jealous lover. "The Oval Portrait," however, is successfully wed to the oval portrait, though it is perhaps an incestuous marriage, the oval portrait being an offspring of the tale as a whole. As such, and as discussed above, it reveals the characteristics of its origin.

Finally, "The Oval Portrait" has a significant similarity to most of the other love stories. It presents a narrator of whom we can ask: is his sanity questionable? On the one hand, this seems possible; the narrator has been wounded, and feels delirium coming on. On the other hand, the

narrator's reaction to the portrait meshes with the account he finds in the small volume. Perhaps this tale is most akin to "Berenice," in which the bride-to-be is, like the girl in "The Oval Portrait," light-hearted and joyful, only to fall prey to a debilitating disease. In both tales, the husband and husband-to-be take something from the brides--Egaeus takes Berenice's teeth; the painter takes the girl's "color" or life. We can imagine that the whiteness of Berenice's teeth is almost matched by the girl's pallor, which must have matched the painter's white canvas before it took on the girl's color.

Like the narrator of "The Oval Portrait," the narrators of "The Oblong Box" and "The Assignation" are not the lovers (which term I use with a grimace) in the tales, though unlike the narrator in "The Oval Portrait," these two narrators do directly encounter the male lovers in their respective tales. Both narrators also have an affliction much like that of Egaeus in "Berenice," whose "monomania . . . consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties in the mind in metaphysical science termed the attentive. . . . that nervous intensity of interest with which, in [Egaeus'] case, the powers of mediation (not to speak technically) busied and buried themselves, in the contemplation of even the

most ordinary objects of the universe" (II, 19). Similarly, the narrator of "The Assignation" tells us that "There are some subjects upon which I take pleasure in being minute" (II, 114), while the narrator of "The Oblong Box" declares that "I was, just at that epoch, in one of those moody frames of mind which make a man abnormally inquisitive about trifles" (V, 275). All three of these afflictions present a type of paralysis resulting from an obsession with some object or subject. The narrator of "The Oblong Box" is absorbed in wondering why Wyatt had an extra state room, and the story is weaker for relying on this question as its center. The resolution of the question--that the box contained the corpse of Wyatt's bride--is not particularly effective, and this weakness is not redeemed by the narrator's concluding remarks that he is haunted by Wyatt's countenance and hysterical laugh (which followed the narrator's joking to Wyatt about the box). What the tale lacks is Poe's working in of images of print and language, which are found in the best of his horror tales.

"The Assignation" is a somewhat stronger tale, which is attributable at least in part to its inclusion of print imagery and incorporation of verse to reflect (unknowingly to the reader) the outcome of the tale. Like so many of Poe's tales, this one begins with an epigraph that will

be fulfilled by the two lovers. The narrator's acquaintance, (the male lover in this tale) termed a "visionary" by the narrator, and a collector of art works, repeats the epigraph just before he dies, so it now has the added force of the tale behind it.

Following the epigraph, the tale begins with a paragraph of lavish praise for the narrator's acquaintance, then moves into the story of the narrator's last encounter with his acquaintance. Here, appropriately, images of black dominate. The narrator recalls "the deep midnight" when "a female voice . . . broke suddenly upon the night, in one wild, hysterical, and long continued shriek" (II, 110). The gondolier of the gondola in which the narrator was riding loses his only oar, "lost it in the pitchy darkness beyond a chance of recovery" (II, 110). Similarly, the scream has occurred because "A child, slipping from the arms of its own mother, has fallen from an upper window of the [Ducal Palace] into the deep and dim canal. The quiet waters have closed placidly over their victim . . ." (II, 110). The mother stands helpless as swimmers try to rescue the child, while the narrator is "left to the guidance of the current . . . Like some huge and sable-feathered condor . . . when a thousand flambeaux flashing from . . . the Ducal Palace, turned all at once that deep gloom into a preternatural

day" (II, 110). This contrast of light and dark is matched by the contrast between "the black marble," "the black mirror of marble" (II, 111) upon which the Marchesa Aphrodite stands, and her "snowy-white and gauze-like drapery . . . [a] statue-like form" (II, 111). The simile here presents the Marchesa as form, as statue, as art.

However, unlike the girl in "The Oval Portrait" who is drained of life by her artist/husband, the statue-like Marchesa is brought to life by the rescue of her child by the narrator's acquaintance: "the statue has started into life! The pallor of the marble countenance, the swelling of the marble bosom, the very purity of the marble feet, we behold suddenly flushed over with a tide of ungovernable crimson . . . " (II, 113). The blood which brings the Marchesa to life, however, also betokens death. Indeed, the words which the Marchesa utters to the rescuer will later be seen to have been referring to the "consummation" of their love--a double suicide--" 'Thou hast conquered . . . thou hast conquered--one hour after sunrise--we shall meet--so let it be!' " (II, 114). The crimson will be replaced by pallor.

Like the Marchesa, the narrator's acquaintance is presented in black and white. He has "a profusion of curling, black hair, from which a forehead of unusual breadth gleamed

forth at intervals all light and ivory" (II, 115). When the narrator visits him shortly after sunrise the next day, "The rays of the newly risen sun poured in upon the whole [room and its furnishings and its works of art]," but the time of the lovers' consummation is near, and suggested by an additional detail--the sun's rays pour in "through windows formed each of a single pane of crimson-tinted glass" (II, 116). The crimson, though, is temporary; black/white imagery returns with the suicide of the narrator's acquaintance, who drinks several goblets of white wine and dies, as a servant brings word of the Marchesa's own death. The narrator leaves us with images of his acquaintance's "livid" lips and "blackened goblet" (II, 124).

With this ending, the lines of verse incorporated in the tale fall into place, reflecting the action of the tale. We are left to wonder if this tale analogously reflects Socrates' words that "the statuary found his statue in the block of marble" (II, 119), and Michael Angelo's that "The best artist has no concept which the marble itself does not contain" (II, 119). We can see that to a great extent the tale-teller finds his tale in a block of experience which he shapes with both originality and an eye to past works. We see in "The Assignation" a resignation to art;

that is, the narrator's acquaintance's life follows to its death the verses quoted in the tale. The lovers' assignation is with the fulfillment of the verse as well as with themselves; life follows art as an instance of the ideal. The narrator's acquaintance and the Marchesa, both described as marble, are shaped by their experience into works or images of art. The narrator's experience, like a block of marble, is shaped in its telling by what is left out, or chiselled off. And, as Michael Angelo says of the artist and his block of marble, the writer has no story which language itself does not contain.

"Morella" and "Eleonora" present us with two narrators who name their lovers but remain unnamed themselves. The two women are extraordinary in different ways. "The loveliness of Eleonora was that of the Seraphim" (IV, 239), while "Morella's erudition was profound" (II, 27). Critics have discussed these tales as being about the struggle to achieve harmony between the individual and the universe,[2] but there is more going on in these tales in regard to their writing than has been noted before. The relationships between the narrators and the women are both brought out to some extent by the use of print imagery, but memory and naming are also significant in these tales.

"Eleonora" begins with the narrator telling us that:

> 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--whether much that is glorious--whether all that is profound--does not spring from disease of thought--from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intelect.
> (IV, 236)

The narrator goes on to postulate that he is mad, but qualifies this by stating that:

> . . . there are two distinct conditions of my mental existence--the condition of a lucid reason, not to be disputed, and belonging to the memory of events forming the first epoch of my life--and a condition of shadow and doubt, appertaining to the present, and to the recollection of what constitutes the second great era of my being. Therefore, what I shall tell of the earlier period, believe; and to what I may relate of the later time, give only such credit as may seem due; or doubt it altogether.
> (IV, 236-37)

What is questionable about these passages is the narrator's acquiescence that he is mad, and presently in a period of "shadow and doubt," only to assert that we should believe what he writes (at least of the first epoch). That is, if he is presently in a period of shadow and doubt, and mad to boot, how can we accept his description of the earlier period? How do we know that his present state of mind hasn't distorted the facts, that he is sane as he writes that he is now penning "calmly and distinctly" (similar to the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart") his remembrances of "She whom I loved in youth" (IV, 237)?

The narrator's description is of an ideal, fantastically beautiful place, the "Valley of the Many-Colored Grass," where the narrator lives with his cousin Eleonora and her mother; no one else inhabits their "encircled domain." There is, though, "a narrow and deep river . . . winding stealthily around in many courses" (IV, 237). The narrator and Eleonora call it the "River of Silence," "for there seemed to be a hushing influence in its flow. No murmur arose from its bed . . . " (IV, 237). Fantastic trees with bark of "ebony and silver" might be fancied "giant serpents" (IV, 238). We have, then, silence and in the black and silver bark/paper an image of print, and in the serpent a symbol of language; while the yellow, white, purple, and red flowers "spoke to our hearts, in loud tones, of the love and of the glory of God" (IV, 238).

The valley changes, however, when "Love" enters the hearts of the narrator and Eleonora. "We sat," the narrator remarks, "locked in each other's embrace, beneath the serpent-like trees, and looked down within the waters of the River of Silence at our images therein. We spoke no words during the rest of the day . . . " (IV, 239). Ominous images lurk in this description: "serpent-like trees" carries the association of deceptive, self-consuming language, and

Narcissus is recalled in the lovers' gazing at their image in the River of Silence; all of this, and the lovers' own silence, points toward death.

Death because physical love is generally destructive to Poe's characters. Nonetheless, for the narrator and Eleonora, "The passions . . . came thronging" and "breathed a delirious bliss over the Valley . . ." (IV, 239). From the River of Silence "issued, little by little, a murmur that swelled, at length, into a lulling melody . . ." (IV, 239). And red predominates: "when, one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up . . . teen by ten of the ruby-red asphodel"; "the tall flamingo . . . flaunted his scarlet plumage before us"; "now, too, a voluminous cloud . . . floated out . . . all gorgeous in crimson and gold . . . and shutting us up . . . within a magic prison-house of grandeur and of glory" (IV, 239). Red is associated with blood in Poe's tales, and thus to the physical world. In the bereaved lover tales, physical love is tied to death, since it is a love destroyed by and in time in the physical world. Thus red is a symbol of blood and death in the bereaved lovers tales. Red, that is, is the "magic" blood-red "prison-house" of love, and within three sweet paragraphs Eleonora is dead--having happily heard the narrator vow "that I would never bind myself in marriage to any daughter

of Earth--that I would in no manner prove recreant to her dear memory or to the memory of the devout affection with which she has blessed me" (IV, 240). Interestingly, he concludes the first epoch of his life with the words, "Thus far I have faithfully said" (IV, 241), for it is up to this point that he has faithfully loved Eleonora. The faithfulness of his love is wed to the faithfulness of his narrative. Nor is Eleonora the only one to depart from the valley, for "the ruby-red asphodels withered away . . . [replaced by] dark eye-like violets that writhed uneasily" (IV, 241): "the tall flamingo flaunted no longer his scarlet plumage . . . but flew sadly from the vale" (IV, 242); and "the voluminous cloud uprose" (IV, 242). The river's "lulling melody . . . died little by little . . . until the stream returned, at length, utterly, into the solemnity of its original silence" (IV, 242). Red, the symbol of physical passion, is removed after the death of Eleonora, its literal counterpart.

All is not silent, however. In response to the narrator's vow to be faithful to her memory, Eleonora promised him "that she would watch over [him] or [her] spirit when departed, and, if so it were permitted her, return to [him] visibly in the watches of the night . . . that she would, at least, give [him] frequent indications of her presence:

sighing upon [him] in the evening wind . . ." (IV, 241). Here we see, of course, Poe's association of speech (sighing in the wind) with presence as opposed to the "re-present-ation of writing and art. She does sigh for him, but this is not enough for the narrator, who declares that "At length the valley pained me through its memories of Eleonora" (IV, 242). He remembers Eleonora even after he moves to "a strange city, where all things might have served to blot from re-collection the sweet dreams I had dreamed so long . . ." (IV, 243). But his soul "proved true to its vows, and the indications of the presence of Eleonora were still given to me in the silent hours of the night" (IV, 243). Eleonora, then, is both present and absent, as memories are double-edged in being absent in their re-present-ation.

However, the indications of the presence of Eleonora stopped--"Suddenly these manifestations they ceased" (IV, 243). At the same time, "there came from some far, far distant and unknown land . . . a maiden to whose beauty my whole recreant heart yielded at once" (IV, 243). The narrator's memories of Eleonora also cease at this time: "as I looked down into the depths of [Ermengrade's] memorial eyes I thought only of them--and of her" (IV, 243). The narrator concludes, "I wedded;--nor dreaded the curse I had invoked; and its bitterness was not visited upon

me" (IV, 243). And once more the soft sighs return in a voice that absolves the narrator of his vows, "for the Spirit of Love reigneth and ruleth . . ."(IV, 244).

Why, we ask, is the narrator absolved of his vow? Why does he not dread the curse he invoked if he broke his vow, a curse that involved "a penalty the exceeding great horror of which will not permit me to make record of it here" (IV, 240-41)? Perhaps he does not break his vow. The first part of his vow is "that I would never bind myself in marriage to any daughter of Earth." But the narrator weds Ermengrade--" the ethereal Ermengrade," "the seraph Ermengrade," the "divine . . . the angel Ermengrade" (IV 243). Ermengrade is not "any daughter of Earth"--indeed she is from "some far, far distant and unknown land." The second part of the narrator's vow is that "I would in no manner prove recreant to her dear memory, or to the memory of the devout affection with which she had blessed me" But the narrator no longer has memories of Eleonora--he thinks only of Ermengrade.

And here we arrive at a central issue of love and memory. Poe was probably familiar with Simonides' theory of memory which appears in several works, including Cicero's De Oratore.[3] Poe alludes to Simonides in "Berenice" (II, 22),

and very often refers to or discusses memory, particularly, and not surprisingly, in tales of bereaved lovers. Simonides argues that a good memory is founded upon the ability to associate the things to be remembered with places and images. Cicero writes

> [Simonides] inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it.[4]

The "places" referred to were generally considered to be rooms in a building, and the images were to be striking enough to stand out. Poe's narrators, though, are agonized by memories because they want to escape from space (place) and time, the earthly world--so to recall things by associating them with places and images of objects is painful. Memories keep one locked in time, inasmuch as they keep one a prisoner of the past, and they keep one--according to Simonides' method--locked in space (place) because things are recalled by associating them with images of objects in a place.

So, when Ermengrade rids the narrator of his memories of Eleonora, she rids him of the shackles of space and time. Ermengrade can do this because she is from beyond space

and time, she is "ethereal," a "divine" angel from the "unknown." Thus she allows the narrator to escape the bonds of memory, something not achieved by other Poe narrators.

Ermengarde's name, perhaps, reinforces the argument here. One critic has pointed out that the Old German "ermen" means "universal" or "immense."[5] A more likely interpretation, it seems to me, is in French (which Poe certainly knew): "grade" is French for "to guard or keep," and "ermen" shuffled to "mener" means "to lead or take." Ermengarde may be seen as guarding or keeping the narrator and leading or taking him from space and time. This could coincide, too, with the epigraph to the tale: "Under the protection of a specific form, the soul is safe." (Perhaps Ermengarde is Eleonora: this would be another way of seeing the narrator as having kept his vow.) This narrator, perhaps alone of Poe's narrators, is absorbed in the vision of supernal beauty reflected in Ermengarde's "memorial eyes"; "memorial" in that they recall that state of original unity and harmony, of oneness (all terms synonymous with supernal beauty), of which Poe's narrator's usually only achieve glimpses, but with which the narrator of "Eleonora" is now one in being wedded to Ermengarde.

"Itself, by itself solely, ONE everlastingly, and single," is the epigraph taken from Plato that Poe uses

for "Morella." Morella's return in the body of her and the narrator's child is further reflected in her interest in "the notion of that identity which at death is or is not lost forever . . ." (II, 29). Yet, although the narrator marries Morella, the "fires" with which his soul burned "were not of Eros . . . I could in manner define their unusual meaning" (II, 27). And the narrator becomes Morella's pupil because "Morella's erudition was profound. . . . her powers of mind gigantic" (II, 27). The narrator's powers of mind do not appear to be gigantic. He is, as mentioned above, unable--or perhaps unwilling--to define, to name his feelings toward Morella. When "poring over forbidden pages," the narrator undergoes a change of attitude resulting from Morella's presence: "joy suddenly faded into horror, and the most beautiful into the most hideous . . ." (II, 28). When he is unable to bear Morella's presence, he tells us that "the mystery of his wife's manner oppressed me as a spell. . . . She seemed . . . conscious of a cause, to me unknown, for the gradual alienation of my regard . . . " (II, 29). The narrator is unable to sort out, to define or name what he feels--or fears.

Nor does he do much with the puzzling remarks with which Morella, dying, leaves him: "I am dying, yet shall I live," and "her whom in life thou didst abhor, in death

thou shalt adore" (II, 30). The child born when Morella dies "grew strangely in stature and intellect, and was the perfect resemblance of her who had departed, and I loved her with a love more fervent that I had believed it possible to feel for any denizen on earth" (II, 31). The child, Morella's memory personified, is no "denizen of earth." The narrator seems to know, subconsciously, what is happening, for his "pure affection" becomes tainted with "gloom" "horror," and "grief" (II, 31). Nonetheless, he fails to name his horror, just as he fails to name his child. Remembering the "wild tales and thrilling theories of the entombed Morella" (II, 32), the narrator keeps his child secluded (entombed) at home. The narrator sees that the child is not only like Morella, but is Morella, but still refuses to name his fear or child: "my daughter remained nameless" (II, 32), while "Morella's name died with her at her death. Of the mother I had never spoken to the daughter" (II, 33). Not naming (as with the narrator's curse in "Eleonora") serves to create or increase horror, because something not named can not be grasped.

Thus, at the child's baptism, the narrator hesitates for a name, but then chooses "to disturb the memory of the buried dead" (II, 33). But to define, to name, is murderous. (Words . . . are murderous things," writes Poe in

Marginalia.) Here identifying the child as Morella, a memory, acknowledges absence, and accordingly, death ensues. Indeed, the name "Morella" is comprised of "a root signifying 'death' with another . . . suggesting 'light.' "[6] Naming the child "Morella," the narrator then watches as the features of his child take on the "hues of death," and the child falls "prostrate on the black slabs of our ancestral vault, [responding]--'I am here!' " (II, 33). Here too we see an instance of print or language imagery (white/hues of death and black/slabs), imagery which is appropriately rare in this tale which is about the avoidance of naming, of defining. And the "ancestral vault" is the proper place for this naming which kills. The narrator is damned to memory: "Years--years may pass away, but the memory of that epoch--never!" (II, 33). To him, the figures of the earth all appear as Morella, and the winds and sea murmur "Morella." For the narrator, everything (every figure and every sound) is not "Itself, by itself solely, ONE everlasting, and single"--Morella, with intimations of Eureka's promise of oneness.

The elements of naming, remembering, and print and language imagery are developed more effectively in "Ligeia" and "Berenice." Indeed, "Ligeia" opens with a series of remarks by the narrator concerning his memory. He cannot

remember how, when, or even precisely where, [he] first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia" (II, 248). Perhaps he "cannot now bring these points to mind, because . . . [Ligeia] made [her] way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive that they have been unnoticed and unknown" (II, 248). Moreover, he tells us, "And now, while I write, a recollection flashes upon me that I have never known the paternal name of [Ligeia]" (II, 249). Why is this so? He answers that "I but indistinctly recall the fact itself--what wonder that I have utterly forgotten the circumstances which originated or attended it?" (II, 249). As Hoffman asserts about this piece of forgetfulness, "You knew that name well, too well for remembrance,"[7] implying that the narrator and Ligeia shared the same paternal name.

Ligeia's paternal name is not the only thing that is buried, for the narrator writes of himself: "Buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outer world, it is by that sweet word alone--by Ligeia--that I bring before mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more" (II, 249). That is, it is by naming that he re-presents Ligeia. His memory keeps the image alive, keeps the past present: "There is one

dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the person of Ligeia" (II, 249). Like the narrator of "Morella," this narrator sees not the outer world, but images of his dead wife. And although the narrator describes the appearance of Ligeia, he is describing something else, for, again, as Hoffman points out, "She epitomizes all knowledge. . . . She is also the epitome of ideality."[8]

But the narrator's description suggests more than Hoffman gives us. Ligeia is described in images of black and white. She has a "lofty and pale forehead . . . the skin rivalling the purest ivory . . . and then the raven-black, the glossy . . . tresses. . . . the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them . . . " (II, 250). And, finally, "The hue of the orbs [eyes] was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows . . . had the same tint" (II, 251). Black and white, print and language imagery, is the key to Ligeia as a representation of knowledge. The narrator's relationship with Ligeia is one bound by books, by reading. The narrator describes her learning: "the learning of Ligeia . . . was immense. . . . In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and . . . in . . . the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. . . . her

knowledge . . . traversed . . . all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science . . . " (II, 253-54). The narrator hopes, through Ligeia's guidance, to "pass onward to the goal of wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden" (II, 254). As it is through the eyes that one reads, it is within Ligeia's eyes, in their expression, that the narrator hopes to find the meaning of the "something more profound than the well of Democritus." Knowledge and narrative are fused if we consider that, as Joseph M. Garrison, Jr. has suggested, "the narrator is telling his story not to display any abilities he may have as a raconteur but with the hope, perhaps not even consciously acknowledged, that he may arrive at some understanding of his continued preoccupation with Ligeia and that he may learn why he now conceives of himself as a person who is 'buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outer world. . . . ' "[9] The narrator himself, of course, is now writing a tale "adapted to deaden impressions of the outer world." He is attracted to print, not speech; to absence, not presence. It is a knowledge of this absence that the narrator hopes to attain through the writing of his narrative.

In a passage that is one of the most central to Poe's

thought, the narrator attempts to describe the problem of defining this "something" in Ligeia's eyes: "in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves upon the very verge of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia's eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression--felt it approaching--yet not quite be mine--and so at length entirely depart" (II, 252). What the narrator is on the verge of remembering is nothing: the "something long forgotten" is nothing. This he can not quite "recall to memory," however, because one can not remember nothing (since it is not something). Language finally fails this narrator. What is on the tip of his tongue, so to speak, is remembering life without language--Derrida's "happy pause"--which can not be described by language. As Poe writes in Marginalia, what is being glimpsed is a class of fancies "which are not thoughts," that seem to him "rather psychal than intellectual" (XVI, 88). Thus when the narrator tries to define the "expression" of Ligeia's eyes, he can only exclaim, "Ah, word of no meaning!" (II, 251). He might as well exclaim "Eureka!," a word of pure effusion.

What he can do is find "in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression"

(II, 252). But a circle ends where it begins, and the narrator prefaces his description of the circle of analogies with the remark that "Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it" (II, 252). Again, the analogies get the narrator nowhere, because one can not remember something without language--and it is language which is the source of self-consciousness. As Emile Benveniste writes, "We can never get back to man separate from language and we shall never see him inventing it." This is because "it is through language that man constitutes himself as a subject," through "instances of discourse."[10] The narrator is caught up in his circle of analogies, which are relations or "instances of discourse." The original unity, the "something long forgotten," will never be recalled in words, thus we have an irony in the narrator's final link in his circle of analogies--"passages from books" (II, 252). Indeed, this self-conscious narrator narrates a self-reflexive tale, for the tale itself is a passage that attempts to create the effect of Ligeia's expression. (Hoffman suggests that after reading the final passage of the tale, we are gripped by terror because "we are reminded of something we are on the verge of remembering but cannot"; pp. 254-55.) The impossibility of this

remembering can be seen by dismembering the word itself: "re-membering" implies a split, and it requires both a rememberer and a remembered. It requires a consciousness of self and language, and such a consciousness preempts unity.

With Ligeia's death, the narrator is appropriately left "groping benighted," for "Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries. . . . Wanting the radiant luster of her eyes, letters . . . grew duller than Saturnian lead" (II, 254). It appears that Ligeia's voice (reading a text) gave it light and life; her voice transformed writing's absence into presence. Ligeia is also something of a poet. In the poem she has the narrator recite, she portrays man as living in a circle whose last link is death in

> That motley drama! . . .
> . . . . . .
> With its phantom chased forever more,
> By a crowd that seize it not,
> Through a circle that ever returneth in
> To the self-same spot . . .
>
> (II, 256-57)

The poem revolves around a theater or drama metaphor, with the tragedy named "Man." The poem depicts Ligeia's own struggle with inevitable ("a circle that ever returneth") death, a struggle which she perhaps at least temporarily wins at the close of the tale. The phantom death may be

as elusive as the expression in Ligeia's eyes; it may be what the narrator's earlier circle of analogies of that expression "ever returneth in," conquering a crowd that "seize it not" and sees it not. But Ligeia, with eyes "far larger than the ordinary" (II, 251) sees the phantom death, and so can seize it. Ligeia accordingly completes the circle, following life into death, after which the narrator weds Lady Rowena "as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia" (II, 259). The narrator's "memory flew back . . . to Ligeia," he tells us. "I revelled in recollections of her" (II, 261). And of his and Lady Rowena's bridal chamber, he can "minutely remember the details of the chamber--yet I am sadly forgetful on topics of deep moment--and here there was no system, no keeping, in the fantastic display, to take hold upon the memory" (II, 259). The narrator appears to be saying that, paradoxically, he remembered the details of the room in spite of there being no system of retention, while he forgot significant topics. If so, he has no doubt willed himself to forget, for as mentioned earlier, according to Simonides' method of remembering, the best way to remember things is to associate what one wants to remember with rooms and images of objects in the rooms. The narrator's memory is comparable to those of persons described by psycho-analysts

as having hypermnesia in remembering a great number of earlier details. But this hypermnesia turns out to be "protective": "it selected meaningless elements for remembering and covered the amnesias of the same period."[11] The narrator's treatment of Rowena probably accounts for his choice of memories.

Moreover, the narrator's ability to remember is seen in his detailed description of the room. The "topics of deep moment" are possibly related to the series of recurring attacks that end in Rowena's death (but only after she drinks from a goblet of wine into which the narrator sees three or four drops of a red liquid fall), a series that is later reversed as the narrator sees a similar series of attacks on Rowena's body result in the return of Ligeia. This return may be regarded as a recalling of Ligeia. During the series of revivifications, the narrator repeatedly recalls Ligeia: "Then rushed upon me a thousand memories of Ligeia" (II, 264); "I . . . again gave myself up to passionate waking visions of Ligeia" (II, 265); "And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia" (II, 266). Finally, the shrouded figure stands: memory has recalled, indeed revived, re-membered, Ligeia. We are left with a black/white image--"she let fall from her head . . . the ghastly [i.e., white] cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth . . . long and

dishevelled hair; it was blacker than the raven wings of the midnight!" (II, 268).[12] Concluding his narrative in black and white, this narrator tries to leave us with a glimpse of the effect of the expression of Ligeia's eyes, which open slowly: "'Here then, at least . . . can I never--can I never be mistaken--these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes--of my lost love--of the lady--of the Lady Ligeia" (II, 268; the staggered but slowly progressive movement of this sentence, ending in the naming of Ligeia, imitates the series of revivifications or attacks upon Rowena, which also culminate in the appearance of Ligeia). Her hair and eyes are just the way he remembers them, as he temporarily, at least, conquers death--the part of memory that is its quality of absence--through the presence of the fullness of Ligeia's eyes.

The narrator of "Berenice" is not interested in eyes, but rather is taken (or vice versa) by Berenice's teeth. And, as the narrator of "Ligeia" "forgets" Ligeia's paternal name and doesn't give his, the narrator of "Berenice" tells us only that "My baptismal name is Egaeus; that of my family I will not mention" (II, 16). Hoffman convincingly explains this tendency of Poe's narrators, by referring to a passage from Porphyry's On the Life of Plotinus:

> Plotinus, the philosopher our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body.
>
> So deeply rooted was this feeling that he could never be induced to tell of his ancestry, his parentage, or his birthplace.[13]

For Egaeus, books, ideas, dreams are used to ward off the curses of the body--ancestry, parentage, birthplace. Or rather he calls his ancestors "visionaries," tells us his mother is dead (no mention of his father), and informs us that his birthplace was the library--all of which suggest qualities contrary to the body, to the physical world. The library chamber is important: "The recollections of my earliest years are connected with that chamber, and with its volumes. Here died my mother. Herein was I born" (II, 17). Egaeus also believes his soul has had a previous existence, which he describes as "a remembrance of aërial forms--of spiritual and meaning eyes--of sounds . . . -- a remembrance which will not be excluded; a memory like a shadow . . . in the impossibility of my getting rid of it while the sunlight of my reason shall exist" (II, 17). Madness, the death of identity, would get rid of this memory. From this world, Egaeus is born into a world of books, in which he spends his boyhood, followed by years of reverie.

Indeed, Egaeus is born "into a place of imagination" on two counts. First, he is, in the context of the tale,

born in a library. Second, he is, if we step outside the tale, a character in a book. There is much truth in his declaration that "The realities of the world affected me as visions . . . while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn,--not the material of my every-day existence--but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself" (II, 17).

Having given us only this much of the tale, Egaeus breaks the flow. He exclaims: "Berenice!--I call upon her name--Berenice!--and from the gray ruins of memory a thousand tumultuous recollections are started at the sound! Ah! vividly is her image before me now . . . " (11, 18). Egaeus joins the narrators of "Eleonora," "Morella," and "Ligeia" in calling the names of their lost loves, and he also pictures memory as being housed, though here the house is "gray ruins." "Ruins," perhaps, because these memories are housed in an older building than the more unpleasant memories which are to follow. In fact, Egaeus' outburst is only to prolong getting to the rest of his tale--"a tale which should not be told" (II, 18).

Egaeus, "in an evil moment . . . spoke to [Berenice] of marriage," even though his passions "<u>always were</u> of the mind" (II, 22). Her disease puts Berenice in the grave

before the marriage occurs, however. Her disease, "a species of epilepsy not infrequently terminating in trance itself" (II, 18), can be compared to the narrator's own disease, a "monomania" in which the "attentive" properties of his mind "busied and buried themselves, in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe" (II, 19). Egaeus' books at this time "partook . . . in their imaginative and inconsequential nature, of the characteristic qualities of the disorder itself" (II, 20). Thus we see that Egaeus' monomania may be seen as stemming from books, a paralysis occasioned by print. Two of Egaeus' pastimes are "to repeat monotonously some common word, until the sound . . . ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind; to lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of absolute bodily quiescence long and obstinately persevered in" (II, 19). Egaeus reaches marginal states of being by waiting out reality until it loses its realness, and he loses himself.

Indeed, the rest of the tale is pervaded with images of white, particularly of Berenice's teeth. After seeing Berenice give "a smile of peculiar meaning" (II, 23), Egaeus is not able to forget "the white and ghastly spectrum of the teeth"; every detail of her teeth, he tells us, "that

period of her smile had sufficed to brand in upon my memory. I saw them now even more unequivocally than I beheld them then" (II, 23). Berenice's teeth, "long, narrow, and excessively white" (II, 23), become the object of Egaeus' monomania. And then Egaeus gives us the key to the tale: "of Berenice I more seriously believed que toutes ses dents étaient des idées" (II, 24; the French translates "that all her teeth were ideas"). So he covets them because "I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason." (At this point, Egaeus must have forgotten the "memory like a shadow" of his soul's previous existence, which memory he would have until the "sunlight of [his] reason departed"; II, 17). Typically, Egaeus wants to possess knowledge; thus it is that he violates the grave and pulls out Berenice's teeth. They must have appeared to him as two rows of books in a library, wherein he was born. But his memory fails him concerning the period after Berenice's interment; "Yet its memory was replete with horror--horror more horrible from being vague. . . . It was a fearful page in the record of my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections" (II, 25). It is a page, of course, that Egaeus does not want to read. Egaeus says a mouthful here. It is vague

in that he is on the verge of remembering his dismembering of Berenice--analogous, ultimately, to remembering his own dismemberment from the original unity.

But this "fearful page" sums up the language of love in Poe's bereaved lover tales. It is a language of memory entwined with a desire for unspeakable knowledge, and self-reflexively based upon images of print, language, and art, which finally collapse into themselves. The status of the women in these tales, women with musical, melodious voices, is also precarious. As Walter Ong says of music, "pure music shrugs off all effort at representation. It is pure presentation."[14] Moreover, as Ong goes on to say, "In being about no object, in the last analysis it also is the voice of no person."[15] Finally, "music utters a 'word' which actually falls short of being a voice."[16] But it is an incomprehensible "word," a word which is similar to the pretext of nature that we found in Julius Rodman, a "word" which appears meaningful but is not, finally, interpretable.

The males in these tales want to know their female counterparts, but the emphasis is on intellectual or spiritual knowledge, not sexual. Sexual knowledge is destructive. Only the narrator of "Eleonora" survives such a passion, and that is because he conquers memory--he forgets Eleonora--

and is united with Ermengrade in divine harmony. This tale is not so much a tale as an allegory, but what the allegory "narrates" is the "identification," the "divine harmony" of de Man's definition of symbolism. Thus Poe avoids what de Man calls "the void . . . of temporal difference" marked by allegory even while he emphasizes the fictive nature of his discourse in the way de Man's allegory does.

This is why Poe's bereaved lovers destroy their loved ones, by idealizing them, by trying to "abstract" themselves from themselves. They are at least wise when emphasizing knowledge over physical beauty, for such beauty is destroyed by time. With their lovers dead, these men can try to control memory as they need to to satisfy their psyches. Yet, though they often try to control memory (i.e., by forgetting certain things), it is likely that memory controls them just as much as they control it. (For one thing, their present is deadened by irrepressible memories of their lost loves, of the absent presence of memory.) In some cases--"Morella," "Ligeia"--the bereaved lovers succeed, perhaps, in bringing about a return of the lost lover, a sort of actualizing of memory (a physical repetition rather than a mental one), though the lasting success of such materializings is dubious.

The paradox is that "Forgetting is a form of death ever present within life."[17] That is, it is a paradox because Poe's bereaved lovers want to remember something long forgotten, but since this something is beyond the compass of language, it can not be had except in a total forgetting. Death is the forgetting they desire to remember. It is symbolized by the women in the tales, women who, as mentioned above, are, with their musical voices, finally an uninterpretable and supernatural "word" that becomes silent in its expression of nothingness. For Poe's bereaved lovers, the way they were is not a source of solely pleasure. The unity of nothingness symbolized by the brief unions between the lovers is unattainable until the split caused by language and self-consciousness is bridged by death in a return to the way we were.

NOTES

[1]Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in Interpretation: Theory and Practice, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore, 1969), p. 191.

[2]See, for instance, Martin Bickman, "Animatopeia: Morella as Siren of the Self," Poe Studies, 8 (1975), 29-32; E. Arthur Robinson, "Cosmic Vision in Poe's 'Eleonora,'" Poe Studies, 9 (1976), 44-46' and Richard P. Benton, "Platonic Allegory in Poe's 'Eleonora,'" Nineteenth Century Fiction, 20 (1967), 293-97.

[3]I have taken information on the art of memory from Frances A. Yates, The Art of Memory (Chicago, 1966).

[4]Quoted by Yates, p. 2.

[5]Sam S. Baskett, "A Damsel with a Dulcimer," Modern Language Notes, 73 (1958), 332-38.

[6]Bickman, 30.

[7]Daniel Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe (Garden City, New York, 1973), p. 242.

[8]Hoffman, p. 244.

[9]"The Irony of 'Ligeia,'" Emerson Society Quarterly, 60 (1970), Supp., pt. 1, 14.

[10]Problems in General Linguistics, tr. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Florida, 1971), pp. 224, 217.

[11]Bertram D. Lewin, The Image and the Past (New York, 1968), p. 16.

[12]This image can be viewed in light of "The Raven," which is also loaded with print imagery stemming from memories of a lost love. The narrator of the poem is absorbed in his books.

[13]Quoted by Hoffman, pp. 201-202.

[14]Walter J. Ong, The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies (New York, 1962), p.33.

[15]Ong, p. 34.

[16]Ong, p. 34.

[17]Milan Kundera, Afterword in The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, trans. by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 235.

CHAPTER V

DISMEMBERED DISCOURSE: DEATH SENTENCES IN POE'S MURDEROUS NARRATIVES

In his poetry, Poe uses the sound of words to destroy the sense of words, in order to destroy mundane reality and effect glimpses of supernal beauty. We might say that he wants sound to murder the sense of the written word. In his four major first-person murder tales, however, he reverses this technique: he uses the written word to murder sound. I am not referring here to the fact that these tales are written narratives, written by their respective first-person narrator/murderer. I am referring rather to the fact that these four narratives rarely present direct discourse (dialogue) and when they do it is instructive. The four major first-person murder tales include "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado." I do not include "William Wilson" because that tale is not, essentially, about the murder, even if there indeed is an actual murder. Nor do I include "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" or "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt": these tales do not use a first-person narrator/murderer.

Murder will out. The four murder tales are confessions and descriptions of murders committed by the first-person narrators. The confessions have stemmed from pangs of guilt, from the self-destructive (though also self-redemptive) need to confess. In "The Imp of the Perverse" the narrator blurts out, unconsciously, unwillingly, a confession of the crime he has carried within him for years, a confession which now "consigned me to the hangman" (VI, 153). In "The Tell-Tale Heart" the narrator leads the police to the chamber where he has hidden the dismembered body of the old man beneath the floorboards, and, believing he hears the old man's heartbeat, tells the police to tear up the planks. And in "The Black Cat" the narrator, again in the presence of the police, taps on the very bricks behind which he has placed the corpse of his wife, only to be answered by the cry of the cat "whose informing voice," he tells us, "consigned me to the hangman." Self-confessed murderers, directly or indirectly, are these three narrators.

The hangman is a repeated and fitting end for at least two of these self-confessing narrators. Critics have pointed to the appropriateness of such ends, discussing the parallels between the means of murder and the means of punishment. What has not been emphasized, however, is

the perhaps too obvious consequence of being hanged; that is, of having one's voice strangled, stifled, silenced, at what might be considered its source. And even the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" tells us that "I gasped for breath" (V, 94). As if in anticipation of their soon to be silenced voices, the narrators pen written confessions. On the precipice of oblivion, they are free to re-present their crimes, by writing them--and by writing they have hopes of righting them. But what the narrators reveal is their blindness to their own sense of guilt: they show remorse not for the murders but for the "informing voices" that damned them. Their crimes include both the murders and the confessional narratives; both ought to have remained concealed for the sake of the murderer, and should not have come to light.

Many critics have noted the infrequency of dialogue in the arabesques. Robert Crossley, in particular, has suggested that "penned talk produces the closet monologue which is the distinctive form of Poe's tales of terror."[1] The closet monologue is a "narrative soliloquy," "a soliloquy neither staged nor delivered. A closet soliloquy. A soliloquy . . . for printed voice."[2] The narrators of the tales of terror are unable to speak to other persons. Thus we have the cause of the closet monologue: "a tongue-tied

narrator, desperately anxious to dramatize himself, resorting to the unspoken speech, the silent soliloquy, the book of himself composed for the only person fully capable of attending and responding to his printed anguish--himself."[3] Certainly Crossley has hit upon an important technique of Poe's here. Nonetheless, in spite of their disclaimers and protestations to the contrary, I would add that Poe's narrators do desire the belief of the reader: the disclaimers and protestations to the contrary are rhetorical devices aimed at gaining the reader's belief, if not sympathy. In any case, Crossley's argument is convincing; and no one, of course, would deny that there is not much dialogue in the tales of terror, though there is some. But there is more to be said about discourse, direct and indirect--particularly in the murder tales.

In a tale, of course, indirect discourse is twice removed from its initial (fictional) reality, in that it is not only not spoken (the reader doesn't hear it spoken), but neither is it represented as being spoken. Rather it is paraphrased in print. The significance of this is that a narrator has more control over the event as it is written than he had over it as it occurred; in representing it he

chooses what to include and how to write it. In any case, I argue, obviously, that for Poe's narrator/murderers there is a large difference between direct and indirect discourse, that even though both are of necessity presented in print, direct discourse still implies the voice of its speaker. It implies the immediacy and presence of the actual fictional event in which it was spoken. Finally, the absence of any direct discourse of anyone but the narrator, with the exception of that already noted, places the tale in a single voice, a single, subjective reality.

Let me return to Crossley and his concluding remarks:

> The acts of enclosure, suffocation, and live burial which so frequently occur in Poe's tales are figures of the characteristic process his narrating protagonists undergo in committing their memoirs to paper. The self-destructive monologues, in which narrators plaster themselves up in their writing closets, demonstrate fictively what Poe announced aphoristically in the Marginalia: "Words--printed ones especially--are murderous things."[4]

The passage from Poe is in a different context in Marginalia. It precedes his remark that "Keats did (or did not) die of a criticism, Cromwell, of Titus' pamphlet 'Killing no Murder,' and Montfleury perished of the 'Andromache'" (XVI, 74). But words are murderous in other ways. They murder the world by separating, fragmenting man from it. This fragmenting is a kind of death that, ironically, is only overcome through death. Finally, I confess to

"murdering" Poe's statement that "Words--printed ones especially--are murderous things," by separating, fragmenting it from its context. Nonetheless, my motives are pure.

Although Crossley's image of the isolation of the writer hits the mark here, with words "murdering" closet writers by separating them from the world, the passage from Marginalia is even more illuminating in regard to the tales of murder mentioned above. "Words--printed ones especially--are murderous things." In the murder tales, of course, it is the narrator's speech that first brings the crime to light. To bring to light, however, is to bring to write. Finally, too, writing is the actual crime, for it is deliberate, self-conscious--as opposed to the more indeliberate, unconscious speech. Speech, in fact, seems often not our own--often our own voices, when we hear them played back to us, sound not our own, unfamiliar, other. Speech often seems out of control, impulsive.

Indeed, Poe's narrator/murderers have no control over their speech. In "The Imp of the Perverse" the narrator, out on the street, can not stop himself from voicing his confession. He begins by saying, in an undertone, "'I am safe,'" then, elaborating, " 'I am safe--I am safe--yes--if I be not fool enough to make open confession' " (VI, 152).

But soon after, he tells us, "The long-imprisoned secret burst forth from my soul":

> They say that I spoke with distinct enunciation, but with marked emphasis and passionate hurry, as if in dread of interruption before concluding the brief but pregnant sentences that consigned me to the hangman and hell.
>
> Having related all that was necessary for the fullest judicial conviction, I fell prostrate in a swoon.
>
> (VI, 152-53)

Here we see the narrator/murderer is wholly unconscious of his spoken confession. Unconscious, too, of the strangely sexual undertones of his confession: the "passionate hurry," the "dread of interruption" before concluding the "pregnant sentences" that consigned him to "the hangman and hell," the falling "prostrate in a swoon."[5] And, in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator tells us, "I felt that I must scream or die. . . . 'Villains!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed!' " (V, 94). In this instance, it is not, as the narrator tells us, that he must "scream or die," but, more likely, "scream and die," confess and be hanged. Finally, in "The Black Cat," as the narrator taps on the wall directly behind which he has hidden his wife's corpse, and speaks to the police about the fine construction of the house, he tells us that "I scarcely knew what I uttered at all" (V, 155). Upon the revelation of his guilt, this narrator, like the narrator of "The Imp

of the Perverse," reacts by "swooning" (V, 155). On one level, then, the conscious (un-conscience) written word is trying to explain, to justify the unconscious (conscience) voice, or speech. It tries to make speech--the other--its own, by adapting (adopting) it to print. It tries to make the unfamiliar familiar. But the voice of conscience erupts in direct discourse, which suffuses the text with the presence of speech it implies.

A few words on the relation between conscience and consciousness might be helpful here. The etymology of the two words reveals the connection between the two concepts. Edward Engelberg, in his study The Unknown Distance: From Consciousness to Conscience, asserts that "by slow degrees, the words and concepts, Conscience and Consciousness, have drifted apart from their once nearly identical meaning."[6] Because the existence of two words (conscience and consciousness) to replace one occurred earliest in English and German, Engelberg confines his study primarily to these languages: "It is clear that in German, English, and in the Romance languages, conscience and consciousness are intimately related, the latter word growing out of the former" (Engelberg, p. 8). Eventually, conscience came to reside in consciousness. In many cases, the two words are used one for the other. Engelberg points out, for

example, that when we refer to "'social consciousness' we mean, of course, a 'social conscience,' a responsibility or obligation to be aware of" (Engelberg, pp. 8-9). However, the separation of the two words grew as "conscience became increasingly associated with good or bad, that is, with moral definitions" (Engelberg, p. 12). Engelberg gives the definitions of "conscience" in the OED. First, " 'inward knowledge, consciousness; inmost thought, mind.' " Second, the more common definition, " 'consciousness of right and wrong' " (OED, quoted by Engelberg, p. 12). Consciousness, then, is a condition for conscience: "conscience is something of which one is conscious" (Engelberg, p. 12).

In Poe's murder tales, however, the narrators have tried to bury or wall up their conscience along with their victims, to bury conscience beneath their consciousness. But the voice of conscience will not stay buried--from the grave (as in Madeline Usher's return) it arises silently, then turns to a whisper, perhaps becoming more and more distinct, perhaps culminating in a scream that repossesses consciousness as its own. And strangely, the horror that the narrators feel is not at the consciousness of what they have done, but more at the subtle (or not so subtle) workings of conscience. It is nonetheless the split between conscience and consciousness that reflects the internal

conflicts in the murderer/narrators. Indeed, conscience is more often notable for its absence.

Where does the voice of conscience arise in the murder tales?--This question brings us to a concern with speech in these tales. Notably, in Poe's major murder tales, the narrators recount almost no direct dialogue, with the exception of the narrator of "The Cask of Amontillado." True, in Poe's arabesques in general there is only limited direct discourse; but it is there. Here the absence is clearly much more extreme. The "almost" that I mention refers to the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," who recounts the old man's once crying out, "Who's there?"

There is one other notable exception, however: that is that each of the narrators, with the exception of the narrator of "The Cask of Amontillado," does re-present direct discourse when recounting his confession, the moments when he gave himself away to the authorities, either directly or indirectly. This can be explained. These are the transitional periods, the boundaries between the unconscious, immediate experience of speech, and the self-conscious, self-reflexive experience of writing (i.e. "penning" their narratives). The written narratives allow the narrators peace of mind (though they nonetheless appear somewhat anxious concerning their fates). The written narratives,

that is, seem to allow the narrators to transcend the chaos inherent in the immediate experience, the unconsciousness (conscienceness) of their damning speech. Speech, like the murders, is marked by immediacy, by the presentness or presence of immediate experience. It is nauseating, de trop.

Direct discourse (dialogue, speech presented in quotation marks) is, one might argue, actually written. That is, it is presented (or represented) through print on a page. But, although this is true, the distinction between direct and indirect discourse remains an important one. After all, writers intend direct discourse to represent what was actually spoken, to give it the voice of its speaker; thus the use of quotation marks. I would agree that when we look at the direct discourse as printed words on a page that they are exactly that--print on a page. My point is that it is illuminating to examine the worlds and words of Poe's murder tales in light of their absence of direct discourse.

Colin MacCabe's discussion of inverted commas (quotation marks) in classic realistic texts (he uses George Eliot's Middlemarch as an example) and the works of Joyce is useful here. MacCabe shows how in a text such as Middlemarch the meta-language (the narrative that is presented

without quotation marks) is assumed to be the valid reality against which other discourses--discourse within quotation marks--can be measured. But, "whereas we have to read against the meta-language in a realistic text, Joyce's texts, without inverted commas, lack any final and privileged discourse within them which dominates the others through its claim of access to the real."[7]

The connection here to Poe's first person murder tales is that they too use (or don't use) quotation marks in order to control reality. But there are complications. Unlike Eliot's reliable or sane narrators, Poe's narrators are unreliable. We can say it is half true of their tales what MacCabe says of Joyce, "In place of a discourse which attempts to place and situate everything, we have discourses which are determined in their situation by the reader."[8] In Poe, the narrator tries to "place and situate everything," but it is the direct discourse that serves to reinforce the notion that there is an objective reality. But unlike Eliot's direct discourse, whose meaning is determined according to the author's privileged discourse, the direct discourse of Poe is strangely closer to an objective reality, the truth of the matter. It is, at least, an intermediary between the narrator/murderer's subjectivity and the fact of what has been done (between thought and action, perhaps).

But the trace of the truth of the matter is exactly what the narrator has tried to bury under indirect discourse.

To return, now, to an instance of direct discourse that isn't a narrator/murderer's confession: What can be made of the old man's cry of "Who's there?" in "The Tell-Tale Heart"? It is, I think, a fitting and telling exception to Poe's usual technique in these tales--"The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Black Cat"--where the narrator/murderers are apprehended. Aside from the confessional dialogue just mentioned, it is the only instance of spoken discourse given in these tales. Accordingly, it should be accounted for. The outburst occurs during the narrator's eighth night of secretly looking in upon the old man. The narrator, after describing the darkness of the old man's room, describes how, when he was slowly opening the door of the room, he "had [his] head in, and was about to open the lantern, when [his] thumb slipped upon the fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out--'Who's there?' " (V, 90). Here we have a break in the narrative, in the flow of indirect discourse. Not only are we presented with direct discourse, but direct discourse from a character other than the narrator/murderer. The only other voice we hear in these three tales, then,

speaks only these two words, the question--"Who's there?" But what a question it is for the narrator, who is there to murder this voice, this voice that belongs to the "Evil Eye" which the narrator hopes to rid himself of forever.

But what is this question? For one thing it is an opportunity (if this be not too absurd a word) for the narrator to communicate with the old man. Extraordinary as this "opportunity" is, it is not matched by any other such opportunities in the other two tales, where there is hardly a hint of verbal discourse between the narrator/murderers and their victims. (Indeed, the narrators seem most profuse when conversing with the authorities.) But what a chilling question for the narrator. He could respond, and act as though all were well. He chooses, however, to do nothing--"I kept quite still and said nothing" (V, 90). Why, we might wonder, does the old man not call the narrator by his name here? They seem to live alone in the house; who else could be at the old man's door but the narrator? But the narrator/murderers and their victims are nameless in these tales. The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" informs us that the mornings after the nights he looked into the old man's room, he "spoke courageously to him, calling him by name" (V, 89), but we are never given the name. Perhaps they share the same name, as perhaps the murderer

and victim in "The Imp of the Perverse" share the same name, as the murderer and victim in "The Black Cat" share the same name, as the murderer and victim in "The Cask of Amontillado" have, in a sense, interchangeable names.

"Who's there?" cries out the old man. But the narrator does not respond with his name. The question has intruded upon the narrator's own gradual intrusion into the room. We might view the question in light of Jacques Lacan's notion of the unconscious as "the discourse of the Other."[9] Indeed, it is a peculiar instance of Lacan's concept, for it is literally a voice that breaks the flow of the narration. It suggests not the presence of another consciousness, however, but the emergence of the unconscious. "Discontinuity," writes Lacan, "is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us a a phenomenon--discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation. . . . the <u>one</u> that is introduced by the experience of the unconscious is the <u>one</u> of the split, of the stroke, of rupture. . . . Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge--just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence."[10] Immediately following the old man's question, silence does emerge as silence in the text: "I kept quiet still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did

not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening . . . " (V, 90). The question "Who's there?" brings us to what is left out of the text, and what is left out of the text is the answer to the question. And in the other two tales, "The Black Cat" and "The Imp of the Perverse," the question itself is left out of the text, but emerges from the text nonetheless. Poe's narrator/murderers will never, as the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" claims he will, "tell you the whole story" (V, 88), for "the whole story" includes discontinuity, gaps, which are presented only through their absence.

Like the old man, we can ask "Who's there?" but whereas the old man is answered with stillness and silence, we are given the stillness and silence of the printed narrative, of the narrator's "whole story." But it speaks to us. It tells us that the "Evil Eye" is more than an excuse for killing the old man, although the narrator's description of his motive sounds shaky. The narrator explains that

> It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture--a pale blue eye, with a film over it. . . . very gradually--I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.
>
> (V, 88)

The remainder of the tale confirms the narrator's obsession with the old man's eye, his obsession to be rid of it. His abhorrence of the eye is, of course, a result of his associations with it. As Hoffman concludes, "the evil in that Evil Eye is likely a mingling of the stern reproaches of conscience with the reminder of his own subjection to time, age, and death."[11]

Certainly Hoffman's is one way of reading the tale. But we see too that the narrator repeatedly projects his own thoughts and feelings upon the old man. Some of these projections have been pointed out over and over. The most significant is the narrator's mistaking his own heartbeat for the old man's, which drives him to confess the murder. He makes the same sort of mistake earlier, when he gazes upon the old man's open eye. He tells us that "there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. . . . It was the beating of the old man's heart" (V, 91). More likely, caught up in the excitement of the moment, the narrator hears his own heart beating. The increasing loudness of the heartbeat drives him to action, and he finally stops the old man's heartbeat. In light of Hoffman's remark, we can see that the narrator metaphorically destroys or stops time, inasmuch as the heart is identified with a watch. We can wonder, too, if the groan the narrator reports as coming from the old man is not actually his own. This occurs after the hour which

silently follows the old man's cry of "Who's there?" "Presently," the narrator tells us, "I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror . . . it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. . . . Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me" (V, 90). Indeed, the terror that the narrator feels is "mortal" or of mortality. Very possibly, it is his own groan that he now hears. He projects, also, fears and fancies upon the old man, in some detail, in the passage that begins, "I knew what the old man felt . . ." (V, 90-91).

Finally, though, what may be the most convincing projection of all occurs when the narrator leaps into the old man's room. This is how he describes it: "The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once--only once" (V, 92). How many screams are presented here? Two, of course--the narrator's "loud yell" and the old man's single shriek. Yet, the police arrive on the scene because "A shriek had been heard by a neighbor" (V, 93). Perhaps this is insignificant; one shriek, two shrieks--what difference, finally? Still, in such a tightly-woven tale,

where emphasis has been put on the number of shrieks from the old man, it seems not that such a discrepancy would appear. Indeed, the narrator accounts to the police for the shriek--"The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream" (V, 93; note that there is no direct discourse, even here). His explanation satisfies the police; that is, they don't say that there was another shriek to account for. Perhaps, then, the discrepancy stems from the narrator. Perhaps there was only one shriek, the narrator's, just as the heartbeat and the groan were, I would argue, the narrator's. If so, if there was only one shriek, it offers strong mutual support for concluding that the heartbeat and groan the narrator hears are assuredly his own, only projected upon the old man.

Moreover, all of this projection is subtly reinforced by a doubling motif, like the double throb of a heartbeat, a doubling of words and phrases in the narrative. The narrator looks in upon the old man every night at twelve--12 (one-two), that time which separates one day from the next. Over and over, the narrator repeats a word or phrase. Examples abound--here are several: "nervous--very, very dreadfully nervous" (V, 88); "a dark lantern, all closed, closed" (V, 89); slowly--very, very slowly" (V, 89);

"steadily, steadily" (V, 90); "all in vain. All in vain" (V, 91); "to feel . . . to feel" (V, 91); "a very, very little crevice" (V, 91); "how stealthily, stealthily" (V, 91); "It was open--wide, wide open" (V, 91)" "It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder" (V, 92); "he was stone, stone dead" (V, 92). There are others, as well as mention of the "dreadful echo" of his groans of terror (V, 90), and "the hellish tattoo of the heart" (V, 91).

All of this projection and doubling on the narrator's part points to a self-consciousness that is, literally, maddening. But a question needs to be asked here: might not the Evil Eye itself be a projection? That is, the old man's Evil Eye is projected upon him by the narrator. It is his own Evil Eye that the narrator wants destroyed. Indeed, the lantern functions as the narrator's Evil Eye, which he throws open upon entering the old man's room. It casts--or projects--its single evil ray (like the thread of the spider; V, 91) upon the old man night after night. It is, finally, his own self-consciousness that the narrator wants to destroy. It is the "Evil I" that he wants destroyed--this Eye/I that is the object of the paralyzing question upon which this tale turns: "Who's there?"--I (eye) am. For we have two eyes, of course, and, in a general sense, two I's, one self-conscious and one not so, one that observes

and one that acts and feels. The narrator here wants out of his doubleness. He reduces two eyes to one Evil Eye; and, by killing the old man, he reduces two I's to one. But death to the Evil Eye/I, the one that observes, the self-conscious I, is death for the subject himself (we see this also in "William Wilson"). It is not the old man that the narrator wants dead, then, but himself. It is Poe's ever-recurring death wish, the self-destructive urge, the imp of the perverse.

"The Tell-Tale Heart," then, presents us with a dreadfully self-conscious narrator--as we might well have guessed when, early in the narrative, he tells us that "I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts" (V, 89-90). Indeed, the narrator can not contain his "triumph" any more than he can let the floor boards contain a beating heart. What this leads to is a revelation, a telling. But tales, not murders, are told. We can see this if we slightly alter the concluding words of the narrator (where he accuses the police rather than himself of dissembling!). He tells us, " 'Villains!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed--tear up the planks! here, here!--it is the beating of his hideous heart!' " (V, 94). Alter this slightly, and

we have, " 'Villains!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed!--tear up the planks! hear, hear!--it is the telling of my hideous tale!'" With this we can see that just as it is the narrator's heart that has been heard, it is his heart that needs to be opened as a book ("tear up the planks") to be revealed, to be read (red); it is his tale that he needs to tell, that he can no longer contain. He needs to tell his tale, for his heart, like the hearts of the narrators of the other murder tales, is indeed a "tell-tale" heart, whose blood is as dark as, but no thicker than,ink.

Committing the murder allows the narrator to commit it to paper, to write it (right it) in black and white, and in doing so remove it from the realm of immediate experience. Just so the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse" finds the murder he commits cause to pen a narrative to explain his fetters. Like the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," this narrator <u>needs</u> to pen his tale as much as he <u>needs</u> to speak his confession. In fact, the opening two-thirds of his tale is actually a brief disquisition of what he terms "perverseness," a principle he defines as explaining that "through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should <u>not</u>" (VI, 147). He explains the principle quite cogently, quite calmly, with three examples to illustrate

the principle, and presents his own concluding tale as another illustration of perverseness.

Strangely, this narrator writes not to explain or rationalize the murder he committed, but rather to explain and rationalize the paradoxical cause of his confession (his imp of the perverse). His tale, curiously, holds several references to language--reading, writing, and speaking--within it. The first illustration of perverseness, for instance, is that "There lives no man who at some period, has not been tormented . . . by an earnest desire to tantalize a listener by circumlocution. The speaker is aware that he displeases . . . yet, the thought strikes him, that by certain involutions and parentheses, this anger may be engendered. . . . The impulse increases . . . and . . . (to the deep regret and mortification of the speaker, and in defiance of all consequences,) is indulged" (VI, 148). Here we see the narrator's imp of the perverse at work in this very example, or in the tale as a whole, which, as mentioned above, takes two-thirds of its length before arriving at the (apparent) "story." Indeed, the narrator is aware of his prolonged preface: "Had I not been thus prolix, you might either have misunderstood me altogether, or, with the rabble, have fancied me mad" (VI, 150; note here the narrator's concern with being considered mad-- he

who seeks to justify not the murder he committed, but his confession!).

Second, this narrator/murderer comes across the means of the murder "in reading some French memoirs" (VI, 150), from which he borrows the idea of poisoning a candle used for reading: "The idea struck my fancy at once. I knew my victim's habit of reading in bed. I knew, too, that his apartment was narrow and ill-ventilated" (VI, 150-51). Reading, then, is doubly involved in this murder, first as the source for the means, and second as the habit that allows the means to be put to use. The narrator's knowledge of his victim's home and habits also suggests a close relationship (blood?), but the reader is, as usual, never told what it is.

Finally, the narrator's confession is tied to language, to song lyrics, to the often unconscious habit of repeating in one's head a line from a song: "It is quite a common thing to be . . . annoyed with the ringing in our ears, or rather in our memories, of the burthen of some ordinary song, or some unimpressive snatches from an opera. . . . In this manner . . . I would perpetually catch myself pondering upon my security, and repeating, in a low under-tone, the phrase, 'I am safe' " (VI, 152). Eventually, however,

the imp of the perverse emerges when the narrator, murmuring "these customary syllables . . . re-modelled them thus: 'I am safe--I am safe--yes--if I be not fool enough to make open confession' " (VI, 151-52). Here, in a variation of the power of words (in the tale of that name), the spoken word brings its subject into being, in a reverse fashion. Like someone chanting a mantra to oneself until it is automatic, this narrator's phrase of "I am safe" permanently impinges ("imp"-inges indeed, in this eight-page tale where eighteen instances of the sequence of the letters i-m-p are found, with only one of them referring directly to the imp of the perverse) upon his mind, until it is twisted into the suggestion of a confession which demands to be and so demands to be spoken. "Could I have torn out my tongue," the narrator declares, "I would have done it" (VI, 152). Several forms of language subtly prevade this tale, where reading is doubly involved in the murder, and a confession demands to be spoken even as the narrator "gasped for breath" prior to speaking the "pregnant sentences that consigned [him] to the hangman" (VI, 153). Typically, this narrator's imp has brought him to the end of his rope, with the image of eternity, the circle, the noose, tightening around his voice box.

"The Black Cat," one of Poe's richest, funniest,

most horrible tales, also presents varied aspects of print and speech. It also reveals more of the significance of dismembered discourse, direct discourse which has been transformed into indirect discourse, dismembered from its speaker, made inseparable from the surrounding narrative just as one of Poe's putrified bodies rots into what it rests upon, its context, losing its individuality.[12] This, as was suggested earlier, is because direct discourse, speech, like the murders, is marked by immediacy, by the presentness or presence of immediate experience. As the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse" says of his spoken self-suggestion that he "might possibly be fool enough to confess the murder of which [he] had been guilty" (VI, 152)--"it confronted me as if the very ghost of him whom I had murdered--and beckoned me on to death" (VI, 152). Here the effect of the direct discourse is to re-present the past--"the very ghost of him whom I had murdered"--, all of which culminates in the death sentence.

The narrator/murderer of "The Black Cat" also gives himself away, and at the peak of his "triumph," that feeling shared by many if not all of Poe's narrator/murderers. But I would like to digress briefly here, to take a look at Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny,' " after a few words from Poe's "Philosophy of Composition."

Poe, in "The Philosophy of Composition," after designating "Beauty as the province of the poem," goes on to say that "the object, Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable, to a certain extent, in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose" (XIV, 198). "Truth, in fact, demands a precision," Poe explains, and then adds, in what has for some time struck me as a rather puzzling remark, "and Passion a homeliness (the truly passionate will comprehend me) which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul" (XIV, 198). Poe's divisions between Truth, Passion, and Beauty are, of course, common knowledge, yet his association of homeliness with Passion is one that I had always passed over with a slight irritation--an irritation stemming, perhaps, not from what I might have supposed to be the incomprehensibility of the association, but from the faint suspicion that he was somehow correct.

Then I recalled that the opening sentence of "The Black Cat" reads: "For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief" (V, 143). "Most homely narrative": certainly the meshing of "wild" and "homely" points toward the meshing

of "Passion" and "homeliness." The passion in "The Black Cat" is of a wild, violent nature. And the homeliness is, well, homely, evinced more clearly in the narrator's almost absurdly exaggerated partiality and tenderness for animals: he and his wife possess "birds, gold fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey [an "imp"?], and a cat" (V, 144). We see Poe has listed animals that live in the sky, water, on land, in the ground, in trees. The cat is mentioned last and is extra, apparently, but is the narrator's ""favorite," and the animals other than the cat are hardly mentioned again. Here, then, is a tale which promises to illustrate Poe's assertion that Passion demands a homeliness. The passion in the tale is that of the narrator and is destructive, as he violently abuses both Pluto (the cat) and his wife, whom he doesn't name.

Hoffman discusses the tale in Freudian terms; the cat, he explains, is a displacement of the narrator's wife.[13] But Freud can be used further in opening up this tale. His essay "The 'Uncanny,'" that is, is eye-opening when taken in conjunction with "The Black Cat," and, in fact, suggests much more concerning Poe's aesthetic theory and practice. Although Freud used literature and aesthetics in "The 'Uncanny'" only as a support to his psychoanalytic interest in the concept, the significance of "The 'Uncanny'" to "The Black Cat" becomes clear when we look at the original German title of Freud's essay—"Das Unheimliche." The literal translation of "unheimlich" is "unhomely"; "uncanny" is not an exact equivalent of

"unheimlich."[14] "'Unheimlich' is obviously the opposite of 'heimlich' ('homely'), 'heimlich' ('native')--the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar," Freud says early in his attempt to define "uncanny" (Freud, XVII, 220). Freud presents pages of the German definition of "heimlich." There are essentially two aspects of the word. First, it is defined as "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc." (quoted in Freud, XVII, 222). Second, it is defined as "Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others." Further, "Note especially the negative 'un-': eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear: 'Seeming quite unheimlich and ghostly to him.'" And, "'"Unheimlich" is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light' (Schelling)" (quoted by Freud, in Freud, XVII, 223, 224). Finally, Freud quotes this passage from Grimm's dictionary:

> Heimlich
> . . . in a slightly different sense: 'I feel heimlich, well, free from fear.' . . .
> Heimlich is also used of a place free from ghostly influences . . . familiar, friendly, intimate.
> . . . From the idea of 'homelike', 'belonging to the house', the further idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret; and this idea is expanded in many ways. . . . Heimlich, as used of knowledge--mystic, allegorical. . . . Heimlich in a different sense, as withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious. . . . Heimlich also has the meaning of that which is

> obscure, inaccessible to knowledge. . . . The notion of something hidden and dangerous . . . is still further developed, so that 'heimlich' comes to have the meaning usually ascribed to unheimlich'. Thus, 'at times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is heimlich and full of terrors for him'. (Klinger, Theater, 3.298.)
>
> (Freud, XVII, 225-26)

"Thus," concludes Freud, "heimlich" "is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich" (Freud, XVII, 226). We can see, though, how "heimlich" as mystic or allegorical knowledge could blend into "heimlich" as "withdrawn from knowledge . . . obscure." And we can see how "heimlich" as "belonging to the house, . . . familiar" could lead to "concealed, . . . withheld from others": what for one "belongs to the house" would be "withheld from others."

Finally, Freud distinguishes between the uncanny in "real life" and in literature. In real life, he says, "an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes [castration complex, womb fantasies, etc.] which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs [animistic beliefs: omnipotence of thoughts (such as the "evil eye"), the prompt fulfillment of wishes, secret injurious powers, return of the dead, mysterious repetition of the same thing] which have been

surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" (Freud, XVII, 249). In literature (fiction) these uncanny effects occur only if "the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. . . . in this case he can even increase his effect . . . by bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact" (Freud, XVII, 250). Freud is here accounting for fiction which presents a world where events that would otherwise be uncanny are not regarded as such (fairy tales, for example, where the uncanny is accepted as common).

Patterns in "The Black Cat" parallelpatterns in the definitions of "heimlich." Just as "unheimlich" as "belonging to the house, . . . familiar" eventually merges with "concealed, . . . withheld from others," ("unfamiliar," we could say), so too does the narrator's cat move from being familiar to unfamiliar. In fact, the narrator and his residence itself also follow this pattern. The narrator's disposition changes from one marked by "docility and humanity" (V, 143) to one marked by intemperance and abuse, from homely to unhomely. His residence literally changes from familiar to unfamiliar: after his first apartment is gutted by fire, he is forced to move into an old building.

Most significant, of course, is the change or transformation of the cat. It is a most curious transformation

in several respects. The narrator's original cat, Pluto, is large and entirely black. Pluto, of course, loses an eye when he irritates the narrator, who cuts out the eye with a pen-knife. Pluto begins, hereafter, to flee at the approach of the narrator ("as might be expected"). This may be seen as a change of some degree, but it is Pluto's replacement, after the narrator perversely hangs Pluto, that brings about the complete movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar and the merger of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The new cat, as Pluto was, is "a black cat--a very large one--fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white covering nearly the whole region of his breast" (V, 149). Pluto's replacement, then, is almost the same as but different than Pluto, familiar but not familiar; particularly as the narrator's original feelings of kindliness toward each cat change, and become, in the case of the new cat, those of dislike, annoyance, hatred, and, finally, "an absolute <u>dread</u> of the beast" (V, 150).

This returns us to the uncanny, to the "unheimlich" as "eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear." Further, "unheimlich" as "The name for everything that ought to have

remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light." What "comes to light" in the case of Pluto's replacement is "a rigorous distinctness of outline" on the breast, which has before been but an indefinite mark: the image of the gallows. This image, of course, points back to the figure of a gigantic cat with a rope around its neck which was "graven in bas relief upon the white surface" of the freshly plastered wall which had withstood the fire. This earlier image is an "impression" or "portraiture" of the hanged Pluto. It introduces the differentiation of black and white that makes up writing: the black is from Pluto, the white from the surface upon which the bas relief figure is graven.

It is the outline, the image, "the representation of an object" on Pluto's substitute around which this tale revolves. As mentioned above, this image points backwards (back-words) to the bas relief figure, as well as to the actual hanging of Pluto. It also points forwards (fore-words) to the narrator's own hanging (his death sentence). As the central image in the tale, it is an image of language, for Pluto's substitute presents both black and white, a black and white differentiation that is gradually transformed from indefiniteness to a distinct outline, an image, "the representation of an object . . . the gallows" (V, 151).

The tale coalesces in this image. As this is a

"representation of an object," the second cat is itself a "re-present-ation" of Pluto, and both are representations of language, of a sign for a signified. Indeed, this strange fusion of flesh and word or sign is reinforced in the passage which follows the description of the gallows, where the narrator tells of waking to find "the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight--an incarnate Night-Mare that I had no power to shake off--incumbent eternally upon my heart!" (V, 151). In this passage, loaded with images of graven images and of images of words and flesh, there is a fusion of the literal and the metaphorical. For example, it is literally true that the narrator finds the "vast weight" of "the thing" (as well as its breath, also associated with language) "incumbent . . . upon [his] heart," and it is from this literal truth that the metaphorical springs, that the narrator finds the cat's "vast weight . . . incumbent eternally upon [his] heart." (In this instance "heart" is meant as the seat of the emotions. "Incumbent," of course, may mean both lying on and super-imposed upon.)

The passages immediately following the description of the image of the gallows outlined on the cat also include binary oppositions that are reducible to black and white. "Neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest

any more!" the narrator exclaims. And, he tells us: "the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates--the darkest and most evil of thoughts" (V, 151). Here images of black and white abound in day and night, good and evil. The narrator, subsumed now only in evil, in black and all its destructive associations, can well lament his being "a man, fashioned in the image of the High God" (V, 151)--for he has certainly been fashioned with recalcitrant material. Indeed, with the murder of his wife, the utter blackness of his soul is shown.

And with the walling up of his wife and (unknowingly) the cat, the narrator returns us to the origins of the uncanny, to the fusion of "heimlich" and "unheimlich": "From the idea of 'homelike', 'belonging to the house', the further idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret." These weavings of the known and the unknown, the homely and the unhomely, the familiar and the unfamiliar, comprise the tapestry of this tale. But it is, finally, the opposition of, the differentiation between black and white, ink and paper, print and page, that is at the heart of this story. For it is the cold-blooded penning of his narrative that reveals the blackness of this narrator's soul. His happiness is "supreme" only when he believes that the cat, too, is gone.

"The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little" (V, 154), he tells us. And here we may read "guilt" as "gilt," as "blood"--and blood as ink. Thus we return to the self-conscious, writing-self-conscious opening of the tale: "For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen . . ." (V, 143).

The passages concerning Pluto and Pluto's substitute--not the narrator's wife--bring out the writing-self-consciousness and images of language. We see the bas relief figure formed, supposedly, from Pluto's corpse, and the representation of the gallows on Pluto's substitute. Further, it is the narrator's description of his mutilation of Pluto, his taking out of Pluto's eye (I) that is followed by the sentence, "I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity" (V, 145; he feels no such blushing, burning, or shuddering when he buries an axe in his wife's brain). The reference to "pen" repeats the same word in the preceding sentence: "I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket" (V, 145; "pen" is used nowhere else except in the opening sentence of the tale). This double-edged use of "pen" reveals the cold-blooded nature of the narrator/murderer; both are "telling" references, he the author of each action, each action

fused, finally, with the other. It is this uncanny fusion here and elsewhere in Poe that places him as a forerunner of later writers of more explicit self-referential fiction. Everything in Poe exists in relation to, in suspension with language, pen and paper, ink and page.

The narrator/murderer's hands are both blood-stained and ink-stained, as he tries to remove the former with the latter, not realizing that this only renders the one more indelible. The narrator insists, perversely, on revealing his bloody story by calling attention to the very wall behind which he has placed his wife: "In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all" (V, 155)--"rabid," certainly, for he has earlier been bitten by Pluto. He accompanies his words to the authorities with a tap on the wall, only to fear "the fangs of the Arch-fiend," deceptive, betraying language. The response is from "a voice within the tomb," "at first . . . like the sobbing of a child . . . then . . . utterly anomalous and inhuman" (V, 155)--a cry both human and inhuman, both meaningful and meaningless. It is perhaps a reflection of the narrator's own preceding speech to the authorities, itself meaningful and meaningless, literally true but at the same time, and more significantly, a perverse, nonsensical confession of murder, pointing first to the corpse within

the wall, second to the guilt walled within the narrator. And each of these is embodied in the "informing voice" of the cat, that "voice" which is simultaneously human and inhuman.

So this tale which begins with a self-consciousness of its being a penned narrative ends with a damnation of and damning voice. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, this narrator/murderer, like those in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Imp of the Perverse," includes direct discourse at the moment he reveals his guilt, and all three narrators revel in their sense of triumph. This triumph is too much for them to contain, however. Like a constant ringing in the ears or memory, the phrase "I am safe" is repeated in the head of the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse." The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" seats the authorities in the room where he hid the body of the old man, and he, "in the wild audacity of [his] perfect triumph," places his chair "upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim" (V, 93). Finally, the narrator of "The Black Cat," at the moment when the police are about to leave, tells us, "I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness" (V, 154).

One other similarity between these three tales deserves notice: each tale presents instances of a movement from indistinct to distinct, or from familiar to unfamiliar. In "The Imp of the Perverse" the movement occurs when the narrator's imp of the perverse comes into effect, while the narrator is enjoying his "absolute security" (VI, 151): "It afforded me more real delight than all the mere worldly advantages accruing from my sin. But there arrived at length an epoch, from which the pleasurable feeling grew, by scarcely perceptible gradations, into a haunting and harassing thought. . . . at last, I would perpetually catch myself pondering upon my security, and repeating, in a low under-tone, the phrase, 'I am safe' " (VI, 151). From here for the narrator it is but a step to the thought that "I am safe . . . if I be not fool enough to make open confession" (VI, 152). This leads to his confession, which he speaks "with a distinct enunciation" (VI, 152).

This coincides, naturally enough, with the example the narrator has given earlier of the workings of the imp, where

> We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss--we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness, and dizziness, and horror, become merged in a cloud of unnameable feelings. By gradations, still more

> imperceptible, this cloud assumes shape, as did the vapor from the bottle out of which arose the genius in the Arabian Nights. But out of this our cloud upon the precipice's edge, there grows into palpability, a shape, far more terrible than any genius, or any demon of a tale, and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height. . . . If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backwards from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed.
>
> (VI, 149-50)

In each of these instances, the movement is from indistinct to distinct. But the final effect--a confession or a fall--is in opposition to the state of mind which preceded the indistinct. That is, the "victim" in each case would not have ever considered confessing or falling. The movement is uncannily similar, in fact, to Freud's discussion of the uncanny, where he describes the movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and the merger of the two. Each holds within it a trace of the other. Here we see the instinct for safety, self-preservation, giving way to, leading to, finally merging with, an urge for self-destruction--a movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

We see this movement again in "The Tell-Tale Heart." The narrator tells of his decision to murder the old man: "It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived it haunted me day and night [like a black

cat?]. . . . by degrees--very gradually--I made up my mind to take the life of the old man" (V, 88). Later, with the police in the room of the old man, the narrator describes a similar but more intense movement:

> I was singularly at ease . . . they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct:--it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness--until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.
> . . . the sound increased. . . . It was a low, dull, quick sound--much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. . . . the noise steadily increased. . . . the noise steadily increased. . . . the noise steadily increased. . . . the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder--louder--louder! . . . louder! louder! louder! louder!
> "Villains!" I shrieked. . . . "I admit the deed! . . . here, here!--it is the beating of his hideous heart!"
> (V, 93-94)

Here the movement is from indistinct to distinct, until the sound finally matches the description of the watch in cotton given earlier in the tale. As in "The Imp of the Perverse," the movement is from safety to self-destruction (confession).

When we look at "The Black Cat," we again see gradual movements, from indistinct to distinct. There is first of all, of course, the narrator's description of the development of his intemperance: "my general temperament and character--through the instrumentality of the Fiend

Intemperance--had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others" (V, 144-45). There is also the gradual heightening of the narrator's feeling toward Pluto's substitute after he brings it home. He tells us:

> I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. . . . By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature. . . . gradually--very gradually--I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.
>
> (V, 149-50)

Like the movements already described, this one begins ambiguously but moves in the direction of destruction. Here the tension between the cat and the narrator is clearer. It is the tension between presence and absence. That is, the narrator is repelled by the cat because the cat presents (or represents) presence, speech, immediacy. The narrator flees from ""its presence" (the grossness of it-ness, thing-ness), as from "the breath of a pestilence." But the "pestilence" here is the plague of presence bespoken in "breath" as speech. This breath as speech is reinforced in the passage quoted earlier, "the hot breath of <u>the thing</u> upon my face," where breath again betokens speech, and the grossness of "<u>the thing</u>" is emphasized. It is all <u>de trop</u>,

associated to the horror of a murder committed in its own present, a present the murderer can not escape (in the narrative the murder is always already present), and which in this case results in "unutterable fear" (V, 151); the presence-ness of the cat silences the narrator. Ironically, the cat's presence moves the narrator to "unutterable loathing," (my italics) "to flee silently," two reactions of absence, the first in ironic counterpart to the cat's breath/speech, the second literally presenting the narrator's attraction to absence. And all of this foreshadows the later "informing voice" (breath) that will consign the narrator "to the hangman" (pestilence/destruction), with the appropriate image of the narrator's own absence of breath as it is stopped by the hangman's noose--a noose, O, the circle, nothing, zero, symbolic of both death and eternity, of Uroboros: serpents and language, deceptive, self-consuming, impossibly self-sustaining.

A significant instance of the movement from indistinct to distinct, from familiar to unfamiliar, occurs in a passage previously cited, the gallows passage, in which the narrator tells of

> one of the merest chimeras it would be possible to conceive. . . . the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed [Pluto]. The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by slow

> degrees--degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my Reason struggled to reject as fanciful--it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name--and for this, above all, I loathed and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared--it was now, I say, the image of a hideous--of a ghastly thing--of the GALLOWS!
>
> (V, 150-51)

"Chimaeras," "the character of the mark," "representation of an object," "image"--images of language pervade and resonate in this passage, with "the mark of white hair . . . which constituted the sole visible difference" making (marking) all the difference in the world, for it creates the opposition, the differentiation of print and page, black and white. (Pluto's substitute isn't named, but is known in relation to Pluto.) The mark represents language, self-consciousness, the fall from grace, from unity. The image of the gallows is the center of this tale--the noose, a circle, nothingness, Uroboros again, self-consuming, swallowing his own tale. And certainly the narrator senses that it is what Pluto's substitute represents that he dreads, not the cat itself. His "absolute dread of the beast," he tells us, "was not exactly a dread of physical evil--and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it" (V, 150)--for the intensity of his dread results from the image of the gallows outlined on the cat. The narrator's

"Night-Mare" is language, writing, made incarnate in Pluto's substitute, convoluted speech in "the hot breath of the thing." If Pluto was black, undifferentiated, unmediated being, his substitute is both a literal and metaphorical representation of the fall from that unified state, a state both brought into being by and destroyed by language, by the thing made word. The narrator's inability to clearly define or distinguish his dread results from the confusion of sign and thing simultaneously presented--literally embodied--in Pluto's substitute.

So it is that the narrator finally rights/writes his crime in revealing the corpse of his wife. His description is telling: "Upon the head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!" (V, 155). It is, of course, his own voice that has consigned him to the hangman. The "informing voice" of Pluto's substitute is, as mentioned above, an embodiment of (or substitute for) the narrator's own informing voice, the voice of conscience, "walled up" like "the monster in the tomb": but, typically Poesque, conscience, buried alive, refuses to leave the narrator free. It responds to the narrator's own irrational voice with a voice both human

and inhuman, natural and unnatural, And so this tale is the narrator's attempt to "unburthen [his] soul" (V, 143). In so doing, he has revealed, ironically, not so much his humanity as his inhumanity, for it is his inhumanity that is the "monster" of his final sentence--"I had walled the monster up within the tomb!" He has attempted to wall up his inhumanity within or behind the tale. His narrative is both "the sobbing of a child" and the inhuman, "a howl--a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph." Like the cry, the tale itself at first appears human, but swells "into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman" (V, 155). The "informing voice" of "the hideous beast" is, finally, only a single aspect of its "craft" (V, 155), of language, of a self-consciousness (conscience) that literally turns upon itself in consigning the narrator to the hangman.

Moving to "The Cask of Amontillado," we see that it is filled to the brim with direct discourse, distinguishing it from the other three tales. Indeed, Montresor's cup runneth over with his conversation with Fortunato. In this tale, typically, the narrator/murderer Montresor

walls up his victim. Untypically, at least in regard to the other three murder tales, he walls him up alive. In fact, the two carry on a conversation even as Montresor is plastering Fortunato behind the wall. Moreover , the narrator/murderer in this tale is the only one of the four narrators in question who does not confess his crime to the authorities. Confession, it appears, is necessary to silence the voice. Though the murder was committed fifty years earlier, the direct discourse gives it an immediacy, a presence, lacking in the tales of the other narrator/ murderers. Montresor's final words in the tale, "In pace requiescat!," reflect his own lack of peace. (Indeed, "rest in peace" might be better suited to the victim in "The Tell-Tale Heart," who we might hope will rest in piece[s].) Those who confess rest in peace; there is no resting in peace for Montresor because of the noise of the voice which he has not penned to silence. Thus, though an exception to the technique of dismembering direct discourse from the murder narratives, "The Cask of Amontillado" is an exception that indeed proves the rule. Direct discourse must be dismembered, displaced, its immediacy removed--buried, plastered over, levelled by the trowel of indirect discourse, so as not to stand out from its context. It must itself be murdered, silenced, as the hangman's noose silences the

voices of Poe's self-confessed narrator/murders.

Montresor's punishment for his crime, then, is the voice, the dialogue, the direct discourse of the tale which he carries with him. Indeed, the final exchange of dialogue between Montresor and Fortunato possesses a haunting nature. First of all, Montresor responds to Fortunato's "loud and shrill screams" by echoing them. When there is only a single stone left to complete the walling up of Fortunato, Montresor tells us that:

> . . . there came from out of the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said--
>
> "Ha! ha! ha!--he! he! he!--a very good joke, indeed--an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the pilazzo--he! he! he!--over our wine--he! he! he!:
>
> "The Amontillado!" I said.
>
> "He! he! he!--he! he!--yes, the Amontillado. . . . Will not they be awaiting us at the pilazzo . . . ? Let us be gone."
>
> "Yes," I said, "let us be gone."
>
> "For the love of God, Montresor!"
>
> "Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"
>
> But to these words I harkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud--
>
> "Fortunato!"
>
> No answer. I called again--
>
> "Fortunato!"
>
> No answer still, I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture. . . . There came forth only a jingling of the bells [of Fortunato's fool's cap]. My heart grew sick; on account of the dampness of the catacombs. . . . In pace requiescat!
>
> (VI, 174-75)

This, the conclusion of "The Cask of Amontillado," is curious

in two respects. First, Montresor's description of Fortunato's voice: it is "a sad voice," which Montresor can hardly recognize as that of "the noble Fortunato." Strangely, Montresor refers to Fortunato, who had done him a "thousand injuries" (VI, 167), as "noble." There is indeed a confusion of identity here. Montresor can not fit the "sad voice" to "the noble Fortunato." One wonders if the "sad voice" isn't actually that of Montresor. As mentioned earlier, it is one's own voice that one often has difficulty in recognizing. Perhaps this explains Montresor's difficulty. And, second, the rest of the dialogue is a repetition, more echoes: "The Amontillado!"--"Yes . . . the Amontillado."; "Let us be gone."--Yes . . . let us be gone."; "For the love of God, Montresor!"--"Yes . . . for the love of God!" Until, finally, we have Montresor clearly repeating only himself: "Fortunato!"--"Fortunato!"

Fortunato's voice is, if not actually Montresor's, at least dissociatied from Fortunato, a weaker attempt at what the other narrator/murderers accomplish in ridding their narratives of direct discourse. Montresor does not write, "Fortunato said," but rather "The voice said." One way or another, though, Montresor carries Fortunato's voice with him. It serves as a perpetual presence of the murder: voice is presence. Moreover, our other three narrator/murderers took care to silence the voices of their victims.

Montresor, however, does a hideous thing: he walls up Fortunato while Fortunato is still living, still speaking. This, certainly, is a fate worse than death. So, finally, Fortunato's voice is not absent, but present, in Montresor's narrative. Fortunato's body may lie rotting, or rotted, but disembodied, his voice haunts Montresor--and we know Montresor is lying when he tells us that his heart grew sick, "on account of the dampness of the catacombs."

The "dampness of the catacombs" carries further significance, for the catacombs are made of granite, which is dripping with niter. Granite, hard and in Pym black in color, and niter, a white color, comprise the recurrent black and white imagery, indicative of paper and ink, in Poe's works. We are reminded of the hieroglyphic-like chasms formed by rock (granite) and water in Pym, and the hieroglyphic-faced cliffs in Julius Rodman, also formed by rock and water. Also, the OED includes an example entry for niter, "the word of the Lord, that washeth purely"--Poe reversing nitre as the "word of the Lord" to words as murderous, unhealthy things. Together, these associations and the repeated references to the granite as well as the numerous references to the nitre with its dampness and consequent ill effects on Fortunato's health, fit Poe's constant patterns of language imagery as they simultaneously create a setting

reflective of language. As in Pym and Julius Rodman, we have characters moving through settings of language.

So, Montresor's heart doesn't grow sick on account of the "dampness of the catacombs." Montresor's heart grows sick on account of his guilt. Yet his motive is the most clearly stated of any of those of the narrator/murderers. He tells us in the opening sentence of his tale that, "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had born as best I could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge" (VI, 167). So it is Fortunato's adding insult to injury that aggravates Montresor. Along this line, although the nature of neither the injuries nor the insult is given, it seems likely that the insult, if not also the "thousand injuries," was a verbal affront--this, anyway, is the usual nature of an insult. If so, it is in keeping with Poe's notion that "Words--printed ones especially--are murderous things" (XVI, 74). It is with spoken words of praise, however, that Montresor leads Fortunato to his entombment. But, fifty years later, it is with printed words that Montresor tries to lay his murder to rest.

Montresor's deceptive use of language is not seen only in his dialogue with Fortunato. He also manipulates his attendants into leaving his home by telling them that he will be gone until morning, but that they are not to

leave the house. "These orders were sufficient, I well knew," he tells us, "to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned" (VI, 169). This parallels his encouraging Fortunato to turn back from the vaults, which results in Fortunato's insistence that they continue. This deceptive use of language is reflected ironically in Montresor's coat of arms, which is described as "'A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are embedded in the heel'" (VI, 171). The irony, of course, is that Fortunato is linked to the serpent by way of the deceptive use of language. Soon after his description of the coat of arms to Fortunato, Montresor tells us, "I followed immediately at his heels" (VI, 173), and, an instant later he has Fortunato fettered to a wall. Like the serpent in his coat of arms, Montresor is at Fortunato's heel, with fangs of deceptive language.

We also see a grotesque burlesque involving language and codes. Montresor tells us that Fortunato throws a "bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand" VI, 171). Montresor tells Fortunato he doesn't understand, and we then get the following exchange, beginning with Fortunato:

> "Then you are not of the brotherhood."
> "How?"
> "You are not of the masons."
> "Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."
> "You? Impossible! A mason?"
> "A mason," I replied.
> "A sign," he said, "a sign."
> "It is this," I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my roquelaire a trowel.
> "You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces.
> (VI, 172)

Here we see direct discourse with a vengeance as Montresor presents the trowel that he will use in walling up Fortunato. It is a reversal of the usual use of a signifier to represent a signified in that it presents the signified as a sign (signifier). Indeed, it is "direct" discourse in that it directly represents with the object itself. Fortunato also accuses Montresor of a jest after Montresor fetters him to the wall. Here Montresor takes Fortunato literally, intentionally confusing him. Consistently, then, Montresor uses language to deceive and manipulate, a serpent speaking with a forked tongue. What is interesting in the instance with the trowel is Fortunato's reaction, his exclaiming that Montresor jests, and his recoiling from this. The literalness of Montresor's response, apparently, shocks Fortunato into recoiling--as if suddenly confronting a snake. Yet, the tension between Fortunato and Montresor is appropriate. It is the tension between Montresor's apparently honest but actually manipulative and deceptive use of language, and Fortunato's use of a secret code, a disguised form of

language associated, perhaps, with the "disguise" Fortunato is dressed in for the carnival season. Neither "disguise," neither the secret code nor the carnival outfit, is to be taken literally. On the other hand, neither should Montresor's deceptively straightforward literality be taken for what it appears to be. Appropriately, in contrast to Fortunato's outfit of motley with conical cap and bells, Montresor is wrapped in a roquelaire and wears a mask of black silk (VI, 169). Montresor's dress suggests his sinister, darkly concealed use of language, Fortunato's his explicity disguised use of language.

But masonry has more to do with this tale. A letter of Herman Melville's is helpful in this regard. Melville writes that "There is one thing certain, that, chemically speaking, mortal was the precipitate of the Fall; & with a brickbat, or a cobble-stone boulder, Cain killed Abel."[15] Applying this to "The Cask of Amontillado," we can see the association between mortar and mortal, and murder and death, that Montresor murders Fortunato with mortar, as Cain killed Abel. Pervading all of this is language--manipulative, murderous, mortal language, or, more precisely, words. And we are back to Poe's statement that "Words--printed ones especially--are murderous things." Montresor, having first used his trowel and mortar and brick to wall up

Fortunato, has now used pen and ink and paper to wall up the murder of Fortunato. He fails, because Fortunato's voice, put living in the tomb, is never silenced, but put living in the tomb of the tale.

So we see that Montresor is not freed of Fortunato's accusing voice, the voice of conscience which has not allowed Montresor to rest in peace. None of the other narrator/murderers' victims is put living in the grave. Their voices are deprived of presence by the narrators' translation of them from reality to print, by transforming direct discourse or voice to indirect discourse. Even the narrators' own voices, last heard in uttering confessions, are silenced in anticipation of the hangman. Writing itself denotes absence; and writing, removing themselves from immediate experience, absenting themselves prematurely from existence, these narrators produce narratives that are only fictive escapes reflecting their authors' anticipation of their own impending absences. Their murderous narratives are their own death sentences.

NOTES

[1]Robert Crossley, "Poe's Closet Monologues," Genre, 10 (1977), p. 232.

[2]Crossley, p. 217.

[3]Crossley, pp. 218-19.

[4]Crossley, p. 232. The passage from Marginalia is from XVI, 74.

[5]Indeed, between Crossley's discussion of the writing-closet nature of these narrators, and the swooning of the narrators of "The Imp of the Perverse" and "The Black Cat," we may be peculiarly reminded of the sentimental heroines of the early epistolary novels.

[6]Edward Engelberg, The Unknown Distance: From Consciousness to Conscience (Cambridge, 1972), p. 1. Further references cited parenthetically by author and page.

[7]Colin MacCabe, James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word (New York, 1979), p. 27.

[8]MacCabe, p. 28.

[9]Jacques Lacan, The Four Funamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1978), p. 131.

[10]Lacan, pp. 25-26.

[11]Daniel Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe (Garden City, New York, 1972), p. 224.

[12]In a way, all written discourse is dismembered discourse when looked at against speech. In speaking, one does not leave gaps between words. In written discourse, spaces are left between words (though this did not prevent me, in the preceding paragraph, from dismembering the word "impinges" into "imp-inges.") Because of its material reality, writing is more susceptible than speech to dismemberment.

[13]Hoffman, pp. 230-37.

[14]Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,' " in The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London, Toronto, 1955), XVII, p. 219 n. 1. Further references cited parenthetically by author, volume, and page. J. Millis Miller makes a metaphorical use of the concept of the uncanny in "The Critic as Host," in Deconstruction and Criticism (New York, 1979), pp. 217-53. He discusses, at one point, the poem as "that ambiguous gift, food, host in the sense of victim, sacrifice. It is broken, divided, passed around, consumed by the critics canny and uncanny who are in that odd relation to one another of host and parasite" (p. 225).

[15]This is taken from a letter of Melville's to Evert Duyckinck, printed in Elinor Melville Metcalf's Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge, 1953) p. 88. I am indebted to Roy R. Male for bringing the letter, which is rich in suggestion, to my attention.

CHAPTER VI

DEADLY DISCOURSE: HORROR AND THE POE-SCRIPT OF NATURE

In the preceding two chapters I have been examining Poe's discourse in his tales in relation to the categories of space (dismembered discourse) and time (remembered discourse), but even the examination of Poe's longer narratives in the first chapters participate in this distinction in the treatment of fragments (a metaphor of space) and of Poe's pseudo-historical discourses. In all these cases Poe seems to want to transcend one or the other of these categories and achieve some kind of union with the object of desire. But in all of these texts--and especially in the tales--the subject of discourse is never transcended: the indirect discourse of his murderers and the memorial discourse of his lovers never achieve a sense of the world, a sense of nature. In this chapter--a kind of postscript to the whole--I will examine those tales in which the world of time and space seems horribly, unavoidably there.

Nature for Poe is the world of time and space: it is a world, like that the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum" finds himself in, where both time and space are

unavoidable. An apt emblem for such a sense of nature--one to which we will return--is the whirlpool, that vortex which seems to combine spatial and temporal aspects of nature in inexorable energy: "a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water . . . speeding dizzily round and round" (II, 229). We have seen such images of nature in both Pym and Rodman--Rodman's endless cliffs (IV, 91-92) and the "limitless cataract" which Pym approaches with a "hideous velocity" (III, 241). Poe presents a sense of undifferentiated nature defined against the more human sense of language.

But there are other ways in which language and nature (in Poe's sense) correspond to the imagery of printing I have been describing throughout this study. The void, or death--the postscript of nature--is approached in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" and "Mesmeric Revelation." The narrators, both called Mr. P., mesmerize a dying man. In "Mesmeric Revelation" the patient gives a "Eureka"-like description of the nature of God as discussed in Chapter I, and then, in less than a minute after being brought out of the trance, dies. Mr. P. wonders if the patient has "been addressing me from the region of the shadows" (V, 254). Mesmerism is compared to death by the patient during his trance:

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

What death brings, then, is a condition that transcends not only sense, but language, since speech or writing could not exist in the "unorganized" (without organs) life (death). What language "organizes," as we have seen, is the difference between space and time, a difference within "unorganized" being.

Mr. P. mesmerizes the dying M. Valdemar in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," but Valdemar has little to say during his trance state, after which being brought out of he, in a minute or less, "absolutely rotted away. . . . Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome--of detestable putridity" (VI, 166). Such an image of momentary rotting, like the whirlpool, confuses spatial and temporal images: the decaying body can be seen as a spatial vehicle for time and, in the same image, the momentary (and past tense) "rotted away" can be read as a temporal figure for the unorganized "liquid mass of . . . putridity." In either case, the "ultimate, unorganized life" is life without a clear difference between time and space--a life (so to speak) of death. Valdemar

fits Burke's definition of man as "rotten with perfection" in a fashion that Burke would, I think, approve of.[1] Death "completes" or "perfects" Valdemar, but does so in a literally "rotten" way.

Moreover, in the "Case of M. Valdemar" there is some rather peculiar black/white imagery of print that marks the relation between the difference between black and white and that between time and space. The imagery first occurs in the description of Valdemar, who is "particularly noticeable" for "the whiteness of his whiskers, in violent contrast to the blackness of his hair" (VI, 155). The second instance of black/white imagery occurs after Valdemar is mesmerized. His appearance changes: "the skin generally assumed a cadaverous hue, resembling not so much parchment as white paper. . . . the mouth widely extended, and disclosing in full view the swollen and blackened tongue" (VI, 162). This image is one of the most suggestive in Poe. It identifies the white of the page with the sense of death we have seen in Poe--the white of "unorganized," nature--ambiguously both "putrid" and "ultimate life"--while the black tongue identifies language--especially in its temporal aspect as speech--against this nature. The printed page, then, metaphorically represents the spaciousness of unorganized nature and the temporality of human speech--both categories, we have seen, Poe attempts to deny.

In the horror stories these can not be denied as characters are forced to confront them in a variety of often deadly encounters. "Who is he?" William Wilson repeatedly asks himself in his encounters with his look-alike namesake in "William Wilson." It is not, in one sense, a question that Wilson can't answer, for he knows that his counterpart has Wilson's own name, birthday, "Height, and . . . contour of person and outline of feature" (III, 308). Moreover, aside from the double's inability to raise his voice above a whisper, he is able to imitate Wilson "both in words and in actions" (III, 309). The double offers Wilson good advice, which supports the suggestion of both the tale's epigraph--"What say of it? what say (of) conscience grim/That spectre in my path?"--and critics that the double is Wilson's conscience. Such a reading accounts for the conclusion of the tale, when, at the masquerade in a costume identical to Wilson's, the double is killed by Wilson, but leaves him with the words, spoken in a voice now as loud as Wilson's: "'You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead--dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me didst thou exist--and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself!'" (III, 325). The identity of Wilson's antagonist is doubly ambiguous since only Wilson notices the resemblance, and

in the concluding scene is confused by a large mirror which reflects his own image "but with features all pale and dabbled in blood" (III, 325). "Thus it appeared . . . but was not," he tells us. But if we accept the double's final words, Wilson is doomed because his identity is interdependent on his double, his conscience.

If the double accounts for the conclusion, it doesn't account, in the context we have created, for the fact that the double talks so much, for what Lacan calls "the discourse of the Other."[2] That is,Wilson's double may be seen as the Other, as discussed in Chapter V in terms of Lacan's notion of the unconscious. Indeed, the Other Wilson, if we may call him that, is repeatedly distinguished by his voice, his discourse, a whisper that attains the volume of Wilson's own voice only in the final scene. Most critics claim that Wilson, in killing him, "hast murdered [himself]," transforming the Other into an aspect of the double. But this identification of Wilson and his Other--by the critics, and perhaps by Poe--is an attempt to destroy the differences of time and space, to achieve some kind of "ultimate, unorganized life."

Thus the epigraph and the end of the story transform Wilson's story from that of murder to an allegory of conscience--a drama within the mind--in which the world of

time and space becomes inconsequential. Even if we view Wilson and his double as the real self and the ideal self, rather than as will and conscience (or id and super-ego), his story remains "aesthetically" detached from the world. "Life" and "art" can be substituted for "real" and "ideal" in light of the double as an imitation of Wilson. What is stressed in the imitation is conscience, which shapes reality--in this case Wilson's chaotic experience, with Wilson having no restraints, no limits, no form to his experiences--a reality which is essentially ego-centric. Indeed, the only time Wilson in his encounters with the outside world tries to show self-control is when he gambles, at which time he cheats by shaping facsimiles of the cards they use so that the proper effect--Wilson winning--will be achieved by denying chance: i.e., denying the efficacies of time and space outside of himself. There is something of a perverse aesthetic parallel here, with Wilson the artist manipulating the players through a shaping that is pre-arranged to lead to the desired effect, all with an air of verisimilitude.

Indeed, Wilson as artist--or con-artist or "hoaxer"--is revealed in his role as narrator. He feels free to alter some of the facts of his experience, as he shows in his opening lines:

> Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation. This has already been too much an object for the scorn--for the horror--for the detestation of my race.
> (III, 299)

Instead of blackening the page both metaphorically and literally with his real name, Wilson uses a name other than his real one, again denying the efficacies of time and space; choosing a name, in fact, that fits thematically into the tale he has to tell--a tale which remakes will instead of events.

Still, it is not clear how much of what Wilson says of his double is not of Wilson's own creation. The double, if we take Wilson's word as true, is something of an artist himself, making himself into an imitation of Wilson that others do not not notice because, perhaps, of "the masterly air of the copyist, who, disdaining the letter, (which in a painting is all the obtuse can see,) gave but the full spirit of his original for my individual contemplation and chagrin!" (III, 310). At one point, the double has an effect on Wilson similar to the remembered discourse the women in the bereaved lover tales produce. This occurs when the double brings to Wilson's mind a description much like the definition of the uncanny, "dim visions of my earliest infancy--wild, confused and thronging memories of a time

when memory herself was yet unborn. . . . the belief of my having been acquainted with the being who stood before me [his double], at some epoch very long ago--some point of the past even infinitely remote" (III, 311). And, like the narrator/murderers in the murder tales, Wilson hopes to justify his actions, to include "in the details I am about to give, some little oasis of fatality amid a wilderness of error" (III, 300). Like the narrators of dismembered discourse, he hopes for sympathy now that "Death approaches" (III, 299). Interestingly, his narrative is an appeal to clear himself, not his name, for he does not give his real name. In this tale the narrator is concerned with the identity that lies beyond a name--even though he gives a fictitious name that identifies him accurately as "will" or "will's son" (Will-iam Wil-son). Like his double, it is finally not the letter but the spirit that he wants to convey. That spirit is not in a name, but like that of the women, a kind of nameless energy--the will--which, as Nietzsche says, must be asserted against something. The horror of Poe's horror stories treated in this chapter--that which makes them somewhat different from the dismembered discourses of murder and the remembered discourses of love--is the simple but horrible fact that there is a world outside of mind, language beyond the discourse of the narrator.

This is why Poe so often begins with an epigraph--language or putative language of an Other--only to make it finally the narrator's own.

As death approaches William Wilson, it also approaches closely the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum." In the latter the reality coordinates, time and space, close in threateningly on the narrator, temporarily reducing him to a fearful idiot. We see time in the slowly descending blade of the pendulum, and space in the walls which slowly close in on the narrator before his rescue. Indeed, the narrator is saved only in the last inches of the story. But the opening passages, in which the narrator is given a death sentence, are laden with images of black and white, culminating in an image of undifferentiated nature.

Given the death sentence, the narrator falls into a delirium in which he does not hear, but sees. What he sees is, literally, language, and he describes it in images of print and language:

> I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white--whiter than the sheet upon which I trace these words--and thin even to grotesqueness; thin with the intensity of their expression of firmness--of immoveable resolution--of stern contempt of human torture. I saw that the decrees of what to me was Fate, were still issuing from those lips. I saw them writhe with a deadly locution. I saw them fashion the syllables of my name; and I shuddered because no sound succeeded. I saw, too, for a few moments of delirious horror, the soft and nearly imperceptible waving of the sable draperies

> which enwrapped the walls of the apartment. And then my vision fell upon the seven tall candles upon the table. At first they wore the aspect of charity, and seemed white slender angels who would save me; but then, all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit, and I felt every fibre in my frame thrill as if I had touched the wire of a galvanic battery, while the angel forms became meaningless spectres, with heads of flame, and I saw that from them there would be no help. And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there might be in the grave . . . the tall candles sank into nothingness; their flames went out utterly; the blackness of darkness supervened; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, and the night were the universe.
> (V, 67-68)

Here we see a most interesting series of print and language images, for they are intricately tied to the language which the narrator is describing. Indeed, everything here is described in terms of black and white, after the narrator tells us that the last thing he heard was "The sentence--the dread sentence of death" (V, 67). (We recall Poe's remark that "Words . . . are murderous things"; XVI, 74). The black/robe and white/lips begin the imagery, with the whiteness of the lips being compared to the whiteness of the sheet upon which the narrator writes, and the lips are "thin,"--paper thin, perhaps. It is appropriate that images of language or print come to the narrator's mind, since he is so involved in what the judges say. The description of the lips as "thin with the intensity of their expression of firmness--of immoveable resolution," is a description

which is ironically closer to print than speech, print being more permanent, firmer, more "immoveable"; and this is reinforced by what follows, with the narrator not hearing what the judges say, but rather reading their lips--"I saw them fashion the syllables of my name."

The next part of the passage introduces another image of black/white differentiation with the "sable draperies" and white candles. The sense of hopelessness which he then feels leads to a thought of the grave, "like a rich musical note." The "musical note" is appropriate for the grave, for music suggests the harmony and unity which is promised by the grave. (Music is pure presentation, whereas language is representation.)[3] With this, the narrator loses sight of the white candles, which sink into "nothingness," and with the loss of the black/white differentiation he too is lost in undifferentiated "blackness," and in a loss of sensations that are "swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades." This is like the descent into the maelström, into undifferentiated nature, as well as like the "unorganized" life with its loss of perception through the mediation of organs.

The blackness keeps the narrator from seeing the "nothing" he fears to see: "It was not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there

should be nothing to see" (V, 71)--lest he should be removed from time and space. But though the black/white imagery is reduced to only blackness at this point, the narrator refers repeatedly to what he has read. For instance, he never thinks himself dead, because "such a supposition, notwithstanding what we read in fiction, is altogether inconsistent with real existence" (V, 71). Nonetheless, he is disturbed by some of the tales he has read or heard: "Of the dungeons there had been strange things narrated--fables I had always deemed them" (V, 72). And, as he follows the wall with his hand, he steps "with all the careful distrust with which certain antique narratives had inspired me" (V, 72). Escaping the fall into the pit, he writes, "And the death just avoided, was of that very character which I had regarded as fabulous and frivolous in the tales respecting the Inquisition" (V, 75). So the narrator's own tale confirms what he had previously not believed, though as a tale itself, written by Poe, it joins similar tales as "fabulous and frivolous." But if the issue of reality is raised in these references to tales, its very nature is threatened in the deaths which are planned for the narrator. That is, the closing walls and pendulum serve to destroy, for the narrator, what I earlier called the reality coordinates, space and time. Moreover, the narrator

discovers that the representation of Time, the painted figure on the ceiling, becomes horribly real when the pendulum starts its descent. Its movement, strangely, parallels the act of reading, which is back and forth, and down. When this "reading"is finished, that is, when the narrator finishes "reading" the "line by line" (V, 79) descent of the pendulum, he too will be "finished," at the end of the page. To escape the threats of the closing walls and the pendulum, the narrator has only one option--the abyss of the watery pit, the void, which waits just beyond space and time. Indeed, this narrator is running out of space, out of time.

The poetagonists of "MS. Found in a Bottle" and "A Descent into the Maelström" also face watery deaths, with images of black and white recurring, particularly at the beginnings and endings of the tales. The old man telling the story of his descent into the maelstrom has had his hair change from "a jetty black to white" in less than a day (II, 225). He tells "the whole story" on a cliff right over the spot where it happened, and the description of this place is permeated with print imagery. There is "a wide expanse of ocean, whose water wore so inky a hue" (II, 226); and "To the right and left, as far as the eye could reach, there lay outstretched, like ramparts of the world,

lines of horribly black and beetling cliff, whose character of gloom was but the more forcibly illustrated by the surf which reared high up against it its white and ghastly crest, howling and shrieking for ever" (II, 227). Much like the cliffs in Julius Rodman that we discussed in Chapter III, the cliffs here are a symbol of language, quite fitting as a narrator recounts a tale told to him about this place, a tale trying to represent in words an experience that leaves its teller, much like Jules in Julius Rodman, "speechless from the memory of its horror," and turns his hair from black to white. The text of nature, the whirlpool that mixes time and space, "shrieks" and "howls" its own story as the old man tells his. The language of nature is uninterpretable; the old man senses this when, after giving the "true names" of some islands, adds, "'but why it has been thought necessary to name them at all, is more than either you or I can understand"' (II, 228). It is necessary to name, of course, because it is the only way man can begin to impose structure upon the uninterpretable text of nature. Language, for instance, separates time and space. The old man senses the futility of this naming, senses the formless horror that always already waits behind the veil of language. Indeed, we are given a description of "the horror" of the scene of the whirlpool, which has an edge of "gleaming

spray" of which "no particle . . . slipped into the mouth of the teriffic funnel, whose interior . . . was a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water . . . speeding dizzily round and round . . . , and sending forth to the winds an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar" (II, 229). This is nature's uninterpretable voice--described at the outset of this chapter as combining spatial and temporal aspects of nature--which can't be understood, perhaps, until one reaches the origin of the whirlpool.

The old man tells a story to convince the narrator that he knows something of the maelstrom, but he has not learned the ultimate mystery of the whirlpool because when he looked into the bottom he "'could make out nothing distinctly, on account of a thick mist. . . . but the yell that went up to the Heavens from out of that mist, I dare not attempt to describe.'" (II, 243). Moreover, the wind and spray of the maelstrom "'blind, deafen, and strangle you'"--three acts that would prevent reading, listening, and speaking; once inside the maelstrom, however, one is rid of these "'annoyances'" (II, 240). The old man survives, finally, without fathoming the mystery of the maelstrom's origin. He is transformed by the experience and his old mates don't recognize him; his hair, as mentioned, has changed from black to white, he is speechless, and "the whole experience of [his] countenance has changed" (II, 247).

His speechlessness reflects the uninterpretability, the horror, of undifferentiated nature.

The narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" does not survive his experience, but is swallowed in a whirlpool, his manuscript surviving because he puts it in a bottle and throws it out to sea. To induce our belief in his tales he writes that to his mind "the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity"--though two sentences later he writes that he went to sea because of "a kind of nervous restlessness which haunted me as a fiend" (II, 2). The ship he eventually ends up on is peculiar. The persons on it speak in a language not understood by the narrator, and he is not visible to them--"Concealment is utter folly on my part, for the people will not see" (II, 9). He is able to get writing supplies from the captain's cabin to record his experience. His experience is one of discovery, as is suggested when he takes a brush and marks up a sail. This black (tar)/white (sail) image is sharpened when he finds that "The studding-sail is now bent upon the ship, and the thoughtless touches of the brush are spread out into the word DISCOVERY" (II, 10). Here is an image of writing as discovery, of writing as leading to its own discovery. Indeed, the captain of the ship is something of an author, with the ship analogous to a narrative. As

the narrator tells us, "I must suppose the ship to be within the influence of some strong current, or impetuous under-tow" (II, 12), which is what a tale must be--"within the influence of some strong current" with an "under-tow" of meaning. Indeed, the captain, the narrator, and Poe all fit the description the narrator gives of the captain: "In stature he is nearly my own height; that is, about five feet eight inches. He is of a well-knit and compact frame of body, neither robust nor remarkably otherwise" (II, 12). Poe has written himself into this tale in both the captain and the narrator, and in these two is both active and passive--both in and out of control of the narrative.

The tale concludes in threatening images of black and white:

> All in the immediate vicinity of the ship is the blackness of eternal night, and a chaos of formless water; but, about a league on either side of us, may be seen, indistinctly and at intervals, stupendous ramparts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky, and looking like the walls of the universe. * * *
>
> As I imagined, the ship proves to be in a current; if that appellation can properly be given to a tide which, howling and shrieking by the white ice, thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract.
>
> (II, 13-14)

The images here suggest black ink and white pages, water and ice as the uninterpretable pretext of nature, whose "voice" is "howling and shrieking" as the ship, in a current,

an under-tow of meaning, is "hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge--some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction" (II, 14). It is the same secret which waited for Pym, but this narrator does not return:

> The ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles. . . . plunging madly . . . and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering, oh God! and--going down.
>
> (II, 14-15)

Language breaks down here, in the image of the ice opening up and the narrator/author is swallowed in unlimited ink as we read toward the void at the end of the page. Language finally breaks down in its struggle to give form to the void, in its effort to interpret the pretext of nature.

"The Man of the Crowd" begins with hints of indecipherable meaning. The unnamed narrator declares, "It was well said of a certain German book that 'es lässt sich nicht lesen'--it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told" (IV, 134). In this tale the narrator attempts to "read" the "secret" of the man of the crowd. The tale progresses through movements from the internal to the external (the same movement that a secret being told has, as it moves from private to public). The narrator, in a coffeehouse, shifts his attention from his newspaper to the people around

him, to the street scene outside a window. He gives up "all care of things within the hotel, and becomes absorbed in contemplation of the scene without" (IV, 135).

He then presents a process of focus. He looks at the people "in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations" (IV, 135). He proceeds to "details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance" (IV, 135). This description of the people can be transformed to one of language, which can be seen "in masses"--sentences--and then examined in detail, in its variety of nouns, verbs, objects, and so on, as the narrator classifies the people as clerks, merchants, tradesmen, and so on.

Indeed, the narrator is able to "read" each person, each "word," by the "wild effects of the light" (IV, 139). Thus, "With my brow to the glass," the narrator tells us, as if reading through a reading glass, "I could frequently read . . . the history of long years" (IV, 139). His attention, however, is caught by an old man who reminds the narrator of "the fiend," and whose "meaning" conveyed a series of contradictory concepts. " 'How wild a history,' " the narrator says to himself, " 'is written within that bosom!' " (IV, 140). "To keep the man in view--to know more of him," the narrator moves from within the coffeehouse

to without on the street (IV, 140). He follows the man through the streets, where the old man at one point, as a tale without a plot, "crossed and recrossed the way repeatedly with no apparent aim" (IV, 141). The narrator follows the old man into the next morning, but the old man continues only to roam purposelessly throughout the following day, with the narrator finally "stopping fully in front of the wanderer, [gazing] at him steadfastly in the face" (IV, 145). The old man does not notice the narrator, who concludes that the old man

> ". . . is the type and genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the 'Hortulus Animae,' and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that es lässt sich nicht lesen."

So the narrator is able to read "the face" as the "type and genius of deep crime." But this method of reading is wrong; he needs to read this "type" of old man in relation to his position in the crowd. The old man, the man of the crowd, holds his identity not in himself, but in relation to others. Still, the narrator would have trouble identifying the old man who, as a sort of noun or pronoun, possesses many meanings--as many as there are nouns--which accounts for the narrator's earlier remark on the rush of contradictory ideas the old man brought to mind. Caught up in the crowd

of language himself, the narrator does not have the perspective he needs to read the old man. The old man's meaning is lost in the old man and is to be found only in the context of the crowd. The old man's movement, in fact, repeats itself in both its temporal and spatial aspects. That is, he traverses the same space day after day, caught in space and time. His movement, repeating itself in a circle, like the whirlpool we saw earlier, fuses time and space in a way that makes them as uninterpretable as the howling and shrieking "voice" of nature, so that "it does not permit itself to be read." Its secret is akin to the "secret" of nature--of the whirlpool in "MS. Found in a Bottle"--"whose attainment is destruction."

A desire to identify, to name, is found in "Hop-Frog" and "The Masque of the Red Death." In "Hop-Frog," Hop-Frog screams to the crowd of masqueraders, in reference to the costumed king and his ministers, whom he has chained together in their ourang-outang costumes, that " 'I shall soon find out who they are!' " (VI, 227). He does so by burning them into "a fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass," and announcing

> "I now see distinctly. . . . They are a great king and his seven privy-councillors--a king who does not scruple to strike a defenceless girl, and his seven councillors who abet him in the outrage. As for myself, I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester--and this is my last jest."
>
> (VI, 228)

With this, Hop-Frog escapes, never to be seen again.

The passage, of course, is ironic. Hop-Frog "distinctly" identifies the king and his ministers as they burn into an "indistinguishable mass." He identifies them as one and the same, first by costuming them all as identical ourang-outangs, and then by burning them into the "indistinguishable mass" that shows their true nature as "hideous," like the "liquid mass of . . . putridity" we saw in the case of M. Valdemar, with all its rich suggestiveness. The king might have appreciated the horrible joke if he wasn't its butt, for he preferred practical jokes to verbal ones (VI, 216). It is not surprising, in this light, that the king prefers the dwarf Trippetta, a dancer, to Hop-Frog, a jester, since Trippetta is concerned with action and Hop-Frog with language. Indeed, Poe probably felt a certain relish in toasting the king for such a gross preference. Hop-Frog, when he does act in chaining the king and his ministers, does so "with the rapidity of thought" (VI, 226). Finally, his name, given to him by the seven ministers in reference to the way he moves, will be left behind in his escape. Though he identifies himself as "Hop-Frog, the jester," he adds that "this is my last jest." Thus, he rejects that identity conferred upon him by the ministers in regard to how he moves, and he rejects his identity as

Hop-Frog the jester, since he will jest no more. He will define himself in relation to Trippetta, with whom, apparently, he escapes back to their own country, back to that context, that space, which properly defines them.

"The Masque of the Red Death," like "Hop-Frog," is a tale which leads to a scene of identifying a masquerader. At Prince Prospero's masquerade, the revellers, at midnight, "become aware of the presence of a masked figure" (IV, 255):

> The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. . . . the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in <u>blood</u>.
>
> (VI, 256)

Prospero demands to know who the intruder is, but confronting him alone, he dies. At this the revellers seize the intruder, but "gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave-cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form" (IV, 258). One critic has suggested that the "mask" of the Red Death is indeed a mask, and identifies the Red Death as the principle of life--the principle of life, blood, masquerades as the Red Death.[4] This is a credible reading since after the references to absence--"unutterable" and "untenanted"--what is acknowledged is the "presence of the

Red Death" (IV, 258). "Presence" here might point toward the principle of life as presence, though it also may refer to the presence of absence (death) that now holds "dominion over all" (IV, 258), which is to say over nothing. Appropriately, the confrontations with the Red Death occur in the "velvet apartment," which is the black and the last apartment of a group of seven. The horror results from not being able to identify something without "any tangible form"--in ironic contrast to the identification made by Hop-Frog only after reducing the king and his ministers to an "indistinguishable mass." In both cases, naming, defining, or identifying as a function of language is inextricably linked to horror, a horror originating in the formlessness of undifferentiated nature, a nature which language seeks to structure, but which structure is always already cracked, like the house of Usher, and--again like the house of Usher--self-consuming.

Death is also the end of another tale involving mesmerism, "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains." In this tale, Augustus Bedloe, in a repetition of time and space, dies a death which another man, apparently his double, had died almost fifty years earlier. Though he returns to the living he believes that he actually died. The connection of Bedloe's mesmeric treatment, which he receives from his doctor is

not made explicit, though Bedloe does describe feeling "a shock of a galvanic battery" after his "death." Moreover, the doctor was a friend of Bedloe's look-alike, Mr. Oldeb, and when Bedloe does die it is in a manner directly analogous to his earlier "death."

In Bedloe's obituary, his name is spelled without the last "e", which the editor of the paper explains by saying, "It is a mere typographical error. (The name) is Bedloe with an e, all of the world over, and I never knew it to be spelt otherwise in my life' " (V, 176). The narrator's response puts a new emphasis on the tale. He replies,

> Then," said I mutteringly, as I turned upon my heel, "then indeed has it come to pass that one truth is stranger than any fiction--for Bedlo, without the e, what is it but Oldeb conversed ? And this man tells me it is a typographical error."
> (V, 176)

The implication here is that language is a force of its own, that the "typographical error" was not an error, but pointed instead to the connection between Oldeb and Bedlo, a connection represented in language, that can only be represented in language because, as we say in Pym and Julius Rodman, man lives in language. In fact, it can only be represented in writing, because only writing reveals the "e" on "Bedloe." Finally, fiction is more than a "typographical error," more than an accident, or falsity,

or fiction. Indeed, Bedloe's death, caused by an error in distinguishing a venomous vermicular sangsue from a medicinal leech, is more than an error, for it made his death perfectly analogous to his--as well as Oldeb's--earlier death. Both "errors," then, the medicinal and the typographical, brought about a certain symmetry or consistency. Both errors, that is, were aesthetically right. That is, the rightness is the symmetry or perfect consistency of Eureka: the logic of language over the formlessness of nature; or, better, the logic of language leading to the formlessness of "ultimate, unorganized life."

We arrive now at what is probably Poe's most aesthetically right tale, "The Fall of the House of Usher." The parallels that Roderick's poem, "The Haunted Palace," and the passages from the "Mad Trist" that the narrator reads to Roderick, have with the tale itself have often been commented upon. "The Haunted Palace" describes Usher's state of mind, while the parallel action of Ethelred in the "Mad Trist" and Madeline is pointed out by Roderick. I would take a step further and argue that "The Haunted Palace" and the "Mad Trist" not only parallel part of the action of the tale, but in fact are part of the action of the tale. That is, the tale revolves around not just the dissolution of the incestuous house of Usher, but around the dissolution of incestuous, self-consuming language.

The fissure in the house of Usher is the split between the objective and subjective, between reality and self-consciousness or language. We see, for instance, that when the narrator tries to take Usher's mind off what is happening in "reality," he does so by using language, namely by reading the "Mad Trist." The "Mad Trist," however, echoes, or re-presents reality (the "reality" of Madeline's coming): it is both the same as and different from reality. There is a further splitting, perhaps, in Roderick's last words, in which Roderick may be seen as talking not to the narrator but to himself. He begins this passage with the words, " 'Not hear it?--yes, I hear it' " (III, 295), but the opening question is not a response to anything anyone but himself has asked. Thus, the "madman" he addresses in shrieking " 'Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!' " (III, 296) is himself, and madness threatens either way, whether Madeline is there or not.

If it is true that what distinguishes literary language from non-literary language is that the former points inward, then this tale exemplifies that well. Everything in this tale collapses, collapses inward, just as Madeline "fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother" (III, 296). "The Haunted Palace" and the "Mad Trist" also fall inward in the narrative, and, like Madeline's and Roderick's death

embrace, consummate their marriage in textual intercourse that is as incestuous as the family of Usher, which "entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain" (III, 275). Rather than being "unnatural," incest in Poe is the most "natural" of human events, confusing, as nature does throughout Poe, time and space in undifferentiated being. So too "The Haunted Palace" and the "Mad Trist" lie in "the direct line of descent" of the narrative, "with very trifling and very temporary variation"; they are all of the same family.

Interestingly, the only colors mentioned in the opening descriptive paragraph of the tale are white and black. They are tied to page and print, paper and ink. That is, the white is noted in the "white trunks of decayed trees" (III, 273), while the black is found in the "black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled luster" (III, 274). So we have white/tree and black/water, paper and ink. The house of Usher is reflected in the tarn, and, finally, collapses into it, into water and the unconscious, into ink, formless ink. White occurs too in Roderick's painting of the long, white tunnel, which is described in terms much like those of the tunnel through which the narrator and Roderick carry Madeline to her coffin. It is the white

of the void, from which Madeline returns in a final image of black and white, when, through the panels at which Roderick points, described as "ebony jaws," Madeline, with "blood upon her white robes" (III, 296), falls upon Roderick, who dies "a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (III, 296)--the terrors of incestuously embracing Madeline to carry on the family name, but which he simultaneously avoids and accepts in the union of the self-consuming death embrace. Like the house of Usher, language reflects its own nature and repeats itself with "very trifling and very temporary variation," becoming more and more itself, until it consumes itself, Uroboros swallowing its own tail, language swallowing its own tale. "Naturally," "The Fall of the House of Usher," crumbles as a result of the fissure of language, because language finally breaks down and merges with its reflection of the void.

With this, we see that underlying Poe's use of the language of horror is his sense of the horror of language. The connection between horror and language is clarified somewhat by Todorov's remarks, quoted at the end of Chapter II: "The supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent: the supernatural. The supernatural thereby becomes a symbol of language." It is fitting,

then, that Poe's tales concern themselves to varying degrees with the nature of language--especially the longer tales, Pym and Julius Rodman, which, as we saw, are journeys into and through language. Language, fragmented and self-reflexive in Pym and Julius Rodman, and, in the shorter tales, remembered, dismembered, and deadly; like the house of Usher, self-perpetuating and, finally, like Uroboros, self-consuming. It marks--"organizes"--time and space, even while Poe attempts to obliterate this distinction.

This precariousness of language accounts for its horror. It is the precariousness of identity, of self-conscious narrators who often, perhaps paradoxically, refuse to identify themselves. What they want to recapture with language is Derrida's "happy pause," that "point of pure passage" between "prelanguage and linguistic catastrophe." To recapture, to remember this "happy pause," one must forget identity. But identity is housed in that self-consciousness that exists simultaneously with language, and language does not "re-member," but fragments. The very nature of language, then, forbids the fulfillment of the poetagonists' desires. The horror, finally, is in language; it is the horror of being trapped in language, of being buried alive, for Poe "the most hideous of fates" (V, 72). That is, being buried

alive in language is a horror of language, for Poe's heroes will never write themselves back to that "something long forgotten," scratch as they will in black and white with pen and ink.

Finally, the void that lies before and after language accounts for a second horror of language. That is, if language is only a system of signifiers, an artificial construct, it does not leave much between us and the void, between us and undifferentiated nature. (If, as Todorov says, the supernatural is a symbol of language, what does this tell us about the nature of language?) Poe's self-consuming tales, prevaded as they are with print and language imagery, are the perfect means for an artist whose end is to bring about a particular effect. That is, as they fulfill their purpose (to create a desired effect), they not only transcend but also obliterate language, bringing about the death of the text in its self-consumption. This, perhaps, is Poe's ultimate achievement, his ultimate "life," using language to attain the void--making nothing out of something.

NOTES

[1]Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966). Burke discusses the phrase on pp. 16-20.

[2]Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1978), p. 131.

[3]Walter J. Ong, The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies (New York, 1962), p. 33.

[4]Joseph Patrick Roppolo, "Meaning and 'The Masque of the Red Death,'" Tulane Studies in English, 13 (1963), 59-69.

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