"The Finishing Stroke":

Edgar Allan Poe's Aesthetics of Unity

by

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# Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe's tales are almost always divided into the two categories of detective and terror. This division has become an accepted generalization, so much so that many seem to have lost sight of the fact that the source of both the tales of terror and the detective fiction of Edgar Allan Poe is the same author with the same world view. The underlying anxiety of Poe's fiction is the pain of separation from, and a desire for reunion with, the divine source of creation. This anxiety is the source of tension, terror, madness, fragmentation, and death wish in Poe's tales. Poe's obsession with this view is so central to his fiction that upon a close reading of his work one can see the idea emerge and re-emerge in his tales continuously although in different ways and forms. As various as these tales are, they seem to explore the same idea again and again. They either take us back to the moment before creation or forward to the moment after death because both moments represent the ideal state of unity with the divine origin of the universe.

This idea, though variously explored in imaginative tales, finally manifests itself in the form of a serious philosophical statement in *Eureka* (1848). Both chronologically and philosophically, *Eureka* finalizes Poe's tales. In the form of a philosophical statement, *Eureka* summarizes the anxiety of the tales. It takes us back to the moment of the creation of the material universe by the Divine Will and follows the road to the final moment of reunion with that source. Rejecting the common categorization of Poe's fiction under the two seemingly unrelated categories, this thesis seeks to study the unified source of consciousness and the single philosophical world view behind the tales. In doing so, it will be shown how the tales become the many facets of the philosophy which is finally stated in *Eureka*.

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For my mother who taught me forbearance

**Introduction:** *From Unity to Multiplicity*

> The willing into being the primordial Particle, has completed the act, or more properly the *conception*, of Creation. We now proceed to the ultimate purpose ... the constitution of the Universe from it, the Particle.
>
> This constitution has been effected by *forcing* the originally and therefore normally *One* into the abnormal condition of *Many*. An action of this character implies reaction. A diffusion from Unity, under the conditions, involves a tendency to return into Unity – a tendency ineradicable until satisfied. But on these points I will speak more fully hereafter.
>
> *Eureka*

And so he does – in his tales. Poe's philosophy of the universe in *Eureka* has already been acted out by his tales. The philosophical world view that Poe finally declares in one statement in *Eureka* has been explored and stated in many different unique ways in his tales. One philosophical statement, many tales; one primordial particle, many issuing fragments. This is the drama of *"One"* and *"Many"* (*Tales* 1278) that Poe examines in different ways in his tales and finally projects onto the physical universe in his *Eureka*. The condition of *"One,"* as stated in *Eureka*, is the ideal primordial state from which all that exists diffuses into the space, and into which all existence tends to return. This *"One"* is associated with God, with the condition of God, that ideal state in which the many-faceted material universe had not been separated from its immaterial divine source. *"Many,"* therefore, is the state of being one of the many derivatives of the *"One."* This state is represented by the physical world which, while having some attributes of its creator, is comprised of eternal fragments characterized by a multiplicity that signifies the very absence of oneness. *"One"* is all spirit. *"Many"* is body separated from spirit. Because the

many particles of the physical universe have been diffused from their original state of oneness, they are driven by a tendency, according to *Eureka*, to return to their original unity. Every material being, then, goes through the phases of unity, multiplicity, and back to unity again. This, says Poe in *Eureka*, is the principal desire of all physical particles. It is also the principal desire of his tales.

The consistent and unfailing struggle of Poe's protagonists is to return to the unity from which they have been separated, to wed the separate conditions of physicality and spirituality, and to experience an ideal state in which body and spirit become "*One*" again. What exists in "the Existing Condition of the Universe" and in "the awful Present" (1353) is "abnormal," diffused from its unity, lost in the horrible abyss of a universe of relativity, fallen from the irrelative state of *oneness*. What existed at the "Beginning" (1304) was "normal," unity, oneness with the "*Spirit Divine*" (1359). This is the unifying force, the "theme" of all Poe's fiction: the desire to return to the ideal unity — a desire, however, that is never "satisfied." For this struggle to seek and become one with the ever-existing "Unity" is but a "journey to the End" (1347), only to come to the awful realization that we are alone in this universe, that there is no omniscient spirit to begin with, that "this Heart Divine — what is it? *It is our own*" (1356). Consequently, in Poe death — that condition so sought for and so obsessive for his narrators — does not coincide with the popular notion of death. It does not mark the end of suffering or the advent of a meaningful unity. Rather, it signifies the collapse into a *oneness* that necessitates the loss of identity, the surcease of materiality, nothingness. Death equals the everlasting suspension of all material in nothingness[1]. It is this struggle for a state of perfection,

in which matter and spirit are one, and its ultimate failure that characterizes all of Poe's tales and that creates the tension, madness, and terror that is so characteristic of Poe.

Poe's model of the universe is embodied in his own work. What he had explored in so *"Many"* forms in his tales is finally brought together in *"One"* final statement – *Eureka*. Thus, it is not difficult to find philosophical statements in *Eureka* of fictional representations in the tales and vice versa. Obviously, the parallel between *Eureka* and the tales is not one to one or all-inclusive. However, there does seem to exist a relationship between the two in that the tales are the many fictional attempts of Poe's at the concept of unity, while *Eureka* is the one philosophical statement he tried to make regarding the same concept. The "primordial Particle" that has been "willed into being" by Poe in the universe of his fiction parallels the primordial particle of creation in *Eureka* in that it enacts the same constant tendency to return from surface to beyond, from the body to the spirit, from diffusion to origin. This struggle is the central motif of all Poe's tales, if not all of his work. The struggle to return into the original unity, into the ideal *oneness*, is the *modus operandi* of Poe's fiction. This view of the universe is not only included *in* but also embodied *by* the tales. They may vary in form and kind, they may be *"Many"* in number, but they all draw towards the unity whence they came, towards the *"One."*

*Eureka* is Poe's cosmological philosophy. It is a prose poem in which for the first time Poe gives his philosophical view of the universe a factual – as opposed to fictional – treatment. In this way, *Eureka* becomes the summarizing statement of the philosophy Poe visits many times in his tales. Its outline can be summarized briefly.

At the beginning god made "Matter" in its utmost simplicity – i.e. a particle in the state of oneness – from "Nihility." This was followed by "the First Act" through which this infinitely indivisible particle was willed into diffusion. From then on, "*One*" turned into "*Many*," absolute "irrelation" into "relation," "normal" into "abnormal." Ever since the moment of diffusion, the atoms are driven by a tendency to return to their primal condition of oneness. This is made possible through the principle of "Attraction." But there is also another principle by which matter exists: "Repulsion." This principle allows atoms to "approximate" each other without ever converging. But in the "Awful Future" all matter will rush back into "a common embrace" – the final unity. But since this unity is a *condition* and not a location in time or space, the two principles of attraction and repulsion by which matter exists will cease to exist. Therefore, the final unity is nothingness, "Material Nihility." The origin and the return to origin are thus always problematic for Poe. His narrators pine for the primal state of ideal unity but are also horrified by it. Just like the atomic particles in *Eureka*, they are attracted to a general centre of oneness, but are horrified by it too because the moment of unity signifies a plunge into nothingness. The climactic moment of Roderick Usher and his sister Madeline's embrace into destruction is a perfect example of this desire/fear of final unity. In "Morella" the narrator cannot resist but is also horrified by the coalescing of the "*Identity*" of his daughter and his wife. Such moments are numerous in Poe's stories. Despite its horror, the desire for unity remains at the centre of Poe's tales and as the source of both action and horror for his protagonists.

The implications of the struggle for unity are manifold. They manifest themselves equally well in all of Poe's fiction – including the "Gothic" tales, the "detective" stories, and tales belonging to other classifications of the sort – in both content and form. However, in keeping with the conventional way of approaching Poe taxonomically, I shall divide the present study in three categories into which Poe's tales can be roughly divided: the so-called "women" or "marriage" tales, the tales of ratiocination, and the tales of the uncanny (by which I mean the tales of madness, the perverse, crime, revenge, sensationalism, and terror). The women tales studied will be "Berenice," "Morella," "Ligeia," and "Eleonora." Of the detective tales, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," "The Gold-Bug," and "The Purloined Letter" will be examined. The tales studied from the last group include "The Fall of the House of Usher," "William Wilson," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," "The Cask of Amontillado," and "Hop-Frog." All of these representative tales revolve, each in its unique way, around the theme of the struggle for a final unity of body and spirit. I approach the tales in this "diffusing" fashion in order to show at the end that Poe's fiction, no matter in how many traditions and/or classifications we divide and sub-divide it, draws from *one* thesis. Poe's tales are *"Many"* in form, *"One"* in essence.

Perhaps the identity of no other author's work has been split by others the way Poe's has. A given that seems to present itself when we are about to read a Poe story is that, generally speaking, it is going to be in either of the two major categories: Poe the "Gothic," or Poe the "detective."[2] I intend to show that the often implied or stated notion of the two Poes does not really do justice to his art if not taken in relation with

the underlying and prevalent oneness of Poe's work. In David Punter's words, "one of the many things which is remarkable about Poe is that he instantly upsets any such generalizations as one might go on to make" (176). This is not to say that the tales' underlying desire toward the condition of oneness is another way of generalizing Poe's tales. Just like the atomic particles Poe describes in *Eureka*, the tales aspire toward a "condition" of unity while each maintains its unique attributes. What the tales share is a common tendency, not a common classification. These tales – labeled as Gothic, grotesque, burlesque, satirical, hoaxical, psychological, or any other such classification – are unique *processes* of finding a single meaning. The principles that characterize the tales are a simultaneous desire for and fear of achieving ultimate meaning, final unity.

As numerous critics and scholars have argued, there are obvious elements of the "Gothic machinery" in Poe's "Gothic" tales. Likewise, there are many elements – such as the existence of a crime, detection, analysis, and finally solution – in his tales of ratiocination that render them definable under the "detective" category. No objections so far. But such categorizations seem to ignore "the effect of the *dénouement*" that Poe stresses in his "The Philosophy of Composition" in favor of the classification. One may ask, as Poe asks, if the *dénouement* effect of the tales so classified is taken into account. Or are we classifying them for the sake of classifying them? For example, should one be mainly concerned with, as Elizabeth MacAndrew mentions, whether a certain work is "borderline" Gothic (96) or "High Gothic?" (106) What is the *dénouement* effect of the works of an author who was so concerned with the *dénouement* effect? There are, no doubt, many representative scholarly works on

Edgar Allan Poe that address such questions, some of which I shall discuss in detail below. However, I should like to mention in passing that the motif of *"Oneness"* is so central in Poe that no matter from what angle or perspective critics approach Poe's work, and whether they address such questions or not, they almost always return to it, even if unconsciously. It is this struggle for unity that characterizes Poe's fiction and therefore the works of criticism on his works.

It seems that many scholars who have written on "The Fall of the House of Usher," for instance, find it difficult to resist interpreting the tale psychoanalytically or as Gothic. While there are undoubtedly many psychoanalytic and Gothic elements in the tale, the final effect of the tale defies the limitations of this or the other interpretation. Does the tale only aim at dramatizing Gothic gloom, or perfecting Gothic conventions (although it might be doing so)? Is the tale a study of the struggle between id and super ego, or an enactment of the unconscious urges for incest which symbolically means becoming one with the mother? [3] Even if so, what are the *dénouement* effects that the story wants to achieve by doing so, and how do these effects relate to the rest of Poe's works? Therefore, while the tale does use many Gothic elements and psychological images, its end aim is beyond being a mere tale of Gothic gloom or psychological themes.

Likewise, ratiocination and the analytic approach to a solution are not the characteristics of only the "detective" tales. Poe was doing it, long before writing his "detective" stories, in tales such as "The Pit and the Pendulum," "A Descent into the Maelström,"[4] "William Wilson," and "The Imp of the Perverse," to mention but a few. In "The Pit and the Pendulum" almost all of the story is dedicated to the

analysis of the oval dungeon in order to work out its "pattern," much in the same way that Dupin works out the pattern of a criminal's moves by identifying with him. In "A Descent into the Maelström," in the frenzy of the ever-descending whirlpool, the narrator spends his time meticulously analyzing the "secret" of the gigantic whirlpool's operation as a result of which he manages to find the "clue" to save his life. In "William Wilson" the attention to detail and chasing techniques with which one half pursues the other are reminiscent of and elaborated upon later in the Dupin trilogy. Finally, in "The Imp of the Perverse" the agent of investigation is reversed, and the process of analysis and investigation is performed by the "criminal" who analyzes the best possible way to commit his murder. Although ethically on the other end of the detective-criminal scale, the Dupin-like narrator finds his clues, like Dupin, in obscure books in the dark corners of his library, a place where Dupin performs his odd habits of research and thinking as well. Even by the few general examples I have cited above, it is easy to see how in attempting to study the *dénouement* of Poe's tales, traditions and classifications simply collapse.

I should also like to mention that I want to show how Poe's work displays the "totality of effect" he speaks of in "The Poetic Principle." The consciousness that lurks behind Poe's tales is characterized, like its narrators, by a desire for the final unification of material and spirit, even though this unification is always accompanied by a fear of total annihilation.

In *Poe: A Critical Study* (1957), for example, Edward H. Davidson argues "that works of art are not at the mercy of psychology and 'psychologism' but have meanings quite beyond anything material or temporal" (Davidson viii). Being

"beyond anything material or temporal" in Poe's work refers to the ideal state which is free of material spatiality and temporality. We shall see later that attempting to be beyond spatio-temporal materiality is the common feature of many of Poe's tales. The physical world, however, is bound to time and space. Davidson goes on to say that the only hope Poe's characters can dream of in such a state is "a condition which once existed but which they would never be able to follow, even if they were able to recapture it" (Davidson 122). In their desperate struggle for unification with that ideal preexistent state, Poe's narrators are well aware that unity is ultimately impossible. Even if it were possible, they seem to realize, it would mean the total annihilation of materiality. This is the case because the merging of material with its all-spirit origin would mean that the two principles proper – attraction and repulsion – by which, according to *Eureka*, all matter exists would cease to exist and matter would be "*Matter no more.*" Absolute unification, then, equals nothingness.

Poe's protagonists, like the Romantic hero, reject man-made religion as the sure way to their divine origin and seek pure unity with god beyond physicality, i.e. either before the moment of creation or after death. That is why, Davidson continues, Poe takes "creation either back to its primal origin or forward to its ultimate consummation" (Davidson 188). Poe's universe then is one in which people, separated from their origin, "are condemned to live as if they are in some long after-time of belief and morality" (Davidson 189). That is why, I want to argue, many of Poe's characters assume the god-like arrogance of a Romantic figure. Morality and evil lose their meaning and individuals assume the right to do as they see fit. I will show that this is what is happening in tales such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The

Cask of Amontillado" where "no other god but the self as god can wreak such vengeance" (Davidson 190). The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" gives himself up to the police because he thinks that by doing so "he may thereby return to full selfhood or primal being" (Davidson 203). In "The Fall of the House of Usher," for instance, Roderick's being in its vital body-mind unity undergoes deterioration and destruction. Like "The Fall of the House of Usher," "William Wilson" deals with the dilemma of whether "the self was born isolated and alone" (Davidson 199) or if it has to find its own way to the original unity.

Poe's detective tales too, though seemingly different from others, show the same underlying desire to possess the source or origin of the world before it is disintegrated from its original state of order by a criminal act. Davidson believes that behind all the tales of ratiocination, Poe posited "a final relationship between reality and the ideal, the seen and the unseen, the perceived and the imagined" (Davidson 217). I want to add that the relationship Davidson speaks of exists not only in the tales of ratiocination but also in other tales where the relationship becomes the main obsession of the narrators, so much so that they strive to turn "the relationship between reality and the ideal, the seen and the unseen, the perceived and the imagined," into "irrelation" which according to *Eureka* is the true condition of *oneness*. Davidson continues that "just as the material world chemically and metaphysically moves through its various phases from unity to multiplicity and back again, so the human mind may struggle to return to the functioning Idea behind the mask of appearances" (Davidson 220). In other words, the movement in Poe's tales is, as I argued above, from *one* to *many* and back to *one* again. By displaying the

world in its state of multiplicity, these tales, particularly the tales of ratiocination, reveal the desire to seek a condition whereby fragmentation gives way to wholeness. If the secret of a crime represents a multiplicity of causes, the solution to it signifies the ideal state in which cause and effect, seen and unseen are unified.

The movement toward oneness in Poe has been noticed by some other critics. Yet, most of these critics see the movement symbolized in one or another symbol, for instance from body to soul, from life to death, or from love to hatred. D. H. Lawrence, for example, argues in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1961) that "the trouble about man is that he insists on being master of his own fate, and he insists on *oneness*" (Lawrence 67). Lawrence sees humanity's tragic flaw in its tendency to aspire towards utter possession and oneness with the *other*. This tendency can equally manifest itself in "the lust of hate" (Lawrence 79) or in "the lust of love" (Lawrence 80). In either case, "the dissolution of both souls" (Lawrence 80) concludes this desire. In "The Cask of Amontillado" the desire to entirely possess Fortunato's soul, hence symbolically becoming one with him, characterizes Montresor's utter hatred. The tragedy of Poe's "love" or "hate" stories is, according to D. H. Lawrence, "this longing for identification, utter merging" (Lawrence 76). Lawrence sees the desire for "utter merging" in Poe's tales embodied by extreme love and hate, but he does not take into consideration that in Poe love and hate, too, often tend to merge into an unknown emotion associated with horror. Likewise, Allan Tate argues in his famous essay "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" (1950), that all the characters in Poe's tales "represent one degree or another in a movement towards an archetypal condition: the survival of the soul in a dead body" (Tate 44). Although Tate notices

the significance of the body/soul dichotomy in Poe, he ignores the fact that the dominant metaphor of Poe's work, the clash between and movement from matter to spirit, is not necessarily lodged in physical bodies (though many times it is). Often this desire is projected onto objects, dreams, or mere ideas. Still, for Tate too "the central dramatic situation ... moves towards spiritual unity through disintegration" (Tate 47).

Noticing the bi-polar tension of Poe's fiction in his essay "The House of Poe" (1959), Richard Wilbur seems to fall into a similar generalization: "These, then, are Poe's great subjects: first, the war between the poetic and the external world; second, the war between the poetic soul and the earthly self to which it is bound. All of Poe's major stories are allegorical presentations of these conflicts, and everything he wrote bore somehow upon them" (Wilbur 87). Wilbur goes on to argue that *circumscription*, one of the recurrent motifs in and a favorite of Poe, symbolizes the isolation of the poetic soul in its visionary trance from the external physical world. We can see how the concepts of isolation and desire for unity emerge from this motif. In mentioning "The Haunted Palace," Roderick's poem, Wilbur mentions that "the two states of the palace — before and after — are, as we can see, two states of mind" (Wilbur 91). While this is partly true, what Wilbur mentions, but fails to notice, is the emphasis on the states of "before" and "after" in the poem. In the bigger picture, given Poe's cosmic vision in his tales, "The Haunted Palace" is an intertext of "House of Usher," both of which point to the two states before and after creation when the primal unity fell into the tragic state of multiplicity and therefore decay. As Wilbur himself later notices, in this palace of the mind "all its dreams are efforts both to

recall and to stimulate its primal, unfallen state" (Wilbur 91). Consequently, the House of Usher dematerializes at the end because "Roderick Usher has become all soul" (Wilbur 94). Wilbur seems to notice, but fails to mention that with unity comes the "*Inevitable Annihilation*" (*Tales* 1261) that the author of *Eureka* talks about.

As I mentioned, the detective tales, even if we could definitely classify them so, are not different from the "non-detective" stories in their struggle to achieve unity, though the symbolism at work may be different. In his *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (1972), Daniel Hoffman notices the movement in the detective tales toward an origin. He asserts that Dupin disentangles mysteries better than us because of his poetic intuition and "because he is just so much closer to the origins of our being" (Hoffman 110). Hoffman calls Dupin a "Romantic genius" whose main interest is not merely solving a crime but to crack the codes of "the secrets written into the world by the Author" of this universe, through which the genius makes himself in reality "coequal with the perpetrator of the code" (Hoffman 127). We shall see later that the prophetic detective figure is the sole link between multiplicity and unity. I shall also argue that the desire of feeling oneself "coequal" with the "Author of this universe" finds its counterpart in other tales such as "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "Hop-Frog," among others, where the desire to replace god is the symbolic equivalent of the desperate struggle for unity with god. Hoffman further comments that the *Arabesque* elements in Poe link his work "with the desired condition toward which his imagination ever impels him: renunciation and transcendence of the body" (Hoffman 208). I shall show that Poe's obsession with arabesque décor, designs, or faces (like Roderick's or Ligeia's) is the

result of the similarity such forms bear with the structure of the universe. The arabesque structures are characterized by unpredictability, contingency, illusion, meaninglessness. Arabesques in Poe, then, represent the lack of a unified design or purpose. They symbolize repetition and contingency much in the same way as the physical world repeats the divine impulse through cycles of life and death, and is contingent. That is why arabesque designs are so central in Poe's symbolism (especially in "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher") inspiring a simultaneous sense of awe and horror in his narrators.

That an aspiration towards transcendence is the "full design" (Halliburton 15) of Poe's imaginative works is one of the ideas explored in David Halliburton's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View* (1973). The aspiration toward transcendence shows itself in the women tales, for instance, where Poe's narrators seek the incarnation of the ideal in a woman. In "Berenice," however, Egaeus has trouble interpreting his actions as well as those of Berenice because, according to Halliburton, he does not remember the past. The only memories he has of the past are dream-like and vague images of "aerial forms." This dream-like memory, says Halliburton, is "the reminder of a pre-existence" (Halliburton 205) in which all was wholeness. In "Morella," the figure of Morella is a god-like principle that exists beyond time and space and haunts the narrator's existence. Halliburton suggests that Morella cannot be limited in terms relative to the physical world and "like the truth that Poe discusses in *Eureka* she is an 'absolute Irrelation'" (Halliburton 223). The narrator of "Morella" then represents Every Man whose sole desire is a merger with the god-like, ideal state associated with Morella, but who can never realize the desire.

Like the other figures of the ideal in Poe's women tales, Morella is the emblem of an

ideal condition of wholeness which can only be experienced after her death, and

which in turn symbolizes the inevitable annihilation of matter at the moment of its

unity with spirit.

In speaking about Poe's tales of ratiocination, Halliburton offers an interesting

insight about "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in which a group of binary pairs in

Dupin's analytical process point to the overall motif of the tale. Therefore, Dupin's

movement in the following fashion "dream-observation, deduction-induction, a

priori-a posteriori, creative-resolvent" all point to the over-arching "inner-outer"

(Halliburton 238) movement. For Halliburton, the fact that "The Mystery of Marie

Rogêt" starts with a quotation from Novalis, "who saw both a 'real' and an 'ideal'

series of events" (Halliburton 244) leads Dupin to adopt the technique of the

"Calculus of Probabilities." Thus, "there are two kinds of design, the human and the

divine, but ... the connections between them are problematic. That such

considerations enter such a work at all affirms once again Poe's tendency to see every

phenomenon in relation to something greater than itself" (Halliburton 244-5).

Similarly, in "The Fall of the House of Usher," the "During / passing / country

– At length / found / house" (Halliburton 280) system not only tells us what is

happening in the tale, but also shows the "ontological structure it embodies"

(Halliburton 280). What Halliburton rightly points out is the problematic relationship

between the two worlds, the ideal and the real. But he fails to mention that

Roderick's anxiety comes from his simultaneous fear/wish to unify the two worlds.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" starts at that point in *Eureka* "where the diffusion,

nearing its end, prepares the way for a dissolution that is actually a return to oneness" (Halliburton 289). Thus, the fall of the House of Usher "is the fall of being – through matter – into the gulf beyond" (Halliburton 299). Likewise, in the "Mask of the Red Death," Prospero's insatiable desire for fullness, for being everywhere, for wanting everyone to live "literally inside him: within his walls, within his will, within his taste," equates him with the "expansive consciousness in *Eureka*, which transforms itself not only into the universe but into God himself" (Halliburton 312). I have already shown that the desire to become coequal with god is shared by many Poe protagonists. I want to add that the desire is always (except in one case, "The Cask of Amontillado") frustrated in that oneness with god means the annihilation of self. The narrator's irresistible drive to self-destruction in tales such as "The Imp of the Perverse," "Black Cat," and "The Tell-Tale Heart" prove this point.

G. R. Thompson in his *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (1973) draws attention to the "dreamlike states" in many of Poe's tales which situate them in a "region between dreaming and waking" (Thompson 104). This is one of the most unifying structural devices of Poe's tales precisely because, I want to argue, the states of dreaming and waking are the structural equivalents of the states of *oneness* and *diffusion*. Dreaming in Poe refers to the original state of oneness with the spirit that Poe's narrators always remember so vaguely, while waking represents diffusion into the chaotic universe. Such a state of in-betweenness, Thompson himself points out later, is mirrored in "the eerie in-between emotional state of grotesque 'ratiocination' [which] can be seen as the basic ironic technique of Poe's fiction" (Thompson 119). This is also seen in "'Eleonora,' 'A Tale of the Ragged

Mountains,' 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,' and 'Mesmeric Revelation' – all of which deal with suspended animation or metempsychosis from one state of being to another" (Thompson 141). Regarding the journeys that Poe's protagonists make in these states in the hope of finding truth, Thompson notices, as I also mentioned in my thesis, that their "great discovery is of nothingness, of illusion only" (Thompson 165). The journey to discover what lies beyond in "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" and "MS. Found in a Bottle," for instance, "discovers nothing" (Thompson 168). Thompson also notices that the basis of these journeys "is the discrepancy between appearance and actuality" (Thompson 174-5). As I have argued above, matter in Poe's tales is appearance, illusion, relation whereas spirit is actuality, truth, irrelation. It also points to the death wish with which Poe's protagonists are possessed. Death in Poe becomes that simultaneously feared and wished for climactic moment of deliverance from materiality and reunion with the primal unity. Materiality, then, represents imprisonment and diffusion. And death is the welcome apocalypse through which becomes possible the world's reunion in the oneness from which it has separated. This discrepancy makes Poe's narrators "yearn for knowledge of the secret that lies beyond death" (Thompson 176). Paul Valéry agrees "that the essence of Poe's dramatic and philosophical world view was this tension between nothingness and existence" (Thompson 193), a tension that is triggered by the desire to make existence/appearance/matter one with what lies beyond/essence/spirit/. The dream-like quality of Poe's tales, therefore, which manifests itself both in the external space (gloomy chambers, decaying houses, etc.) and in the minds of Poe's narrators (madmen, opium takers, gloomy poetic souls, etc.), points to the fact that the

continuous struggle in all these tales – namely, overcoming the body-spirit duality and experiencing an ideal totality – is but a *dream*. Dream is a state in which one can get closest to an ideal unity. Reality is a state that constantly cancels the former out. This is why the relation between dream and reality is so problematic in Poe, and also why it is often difficult to differentiate between the two states in Poe's tales.

Art is another way through which the desire for unity manifests itself in Poe's fiction. In other words, by using his/her power of imagination, the artist equates the supreme imagination that wills existence into being. The artist, through the use of language, desires to make his creation equivalent to, or one with, god's creation. But since language is bound to the limited and arbitrary relationship between signified and signifier, the artist's desire for equation/unity with the divine creator of universe is continually frustrated. I will show below how the desire for unity in Poe manifests itself in language. Language becomes the symbol of duality, the ultimate failure of humanity to unify meaning and sign. The contingent relationship between word and meaning reflects the contingent nature of the physical universe. "This proliferating surplus of meaning in words," (Williams 8) as Michael J. S. Williams puts it, accounts for the often frustrated desire for unity in Poe's tales. The aspiration towards "indefinite suggestiveness" in language, however, is always frustrated since Poe's "narrators who turn to the symbol as offering access to absolute being discover in it the disjunction between signifier and signified that they yearn to escape" (Williams 9). The climactic moment in Poe's tales, then, is, according to Williams, "that of absolute identity between word and world, signifier and signified," which "is the ironic consummation of romantic desire for a natural signification: the world is

destroyed at the moment when word and world become one" (Williams 12). The final failure is recognized when Poe's narrators realize that any unity between limited creation and unlimited creator (in language as in the external world) will inevitably lead to the destruction of the former.

"Morella," for example, becomes an "allegory of the sign" (Williams 31) in which the becoming "ONE" of the two selves symbolizes the becoming one of the signifier and the signified, the result of which is the inevitable collapse and dissolution of both. The core of William Wilson's anxiety, likewise, is his desire for an "unambiguous relationship between name and named," which stems from "his desire for congruence between inner and outer, essence and appearance" (Williams 41). His paradox is the paradox of one who believes outward appearance should always signify an inner essence. That is why he is horrified by the duplication of himself, the killing of whom inevitably results in his own dissolution. Such aspiration towards "the romantic symbol, of the ideal sign in which signifier and signified are supposedly one," (Williams 82) characterizes "Berenice" and "Ligeia" too where the narrators are "obsessive idealists" who "yearn for the plenitude of the 'spiritual' and refuse to accept the arbitrary nature of language in a contingent world; they claim instead a symbolic ligation with absolute being, a transcendental realm, or an original moment. Their narratives, however, demonstrate the futility of their claim and identify the quest for the symbol as the impossible project of a deluded mind" (Williams 82-3). Finally, Dupin's technique of "thorough identification" with his adversary would mean that "the self so considered is a sign in which a perfect correspondence exists between outside and inside, between surface 'expression' and

inner 'thoughts and sentiments.' Second, such a method is grounded in the power of adequate self-reflection" (Williams 143), which we have already seen fail. Dupin's failure is that, according to Williams and Derrida, he "lays claim to mastery both of language and of himself" (Williams 143). Williams's argument regarding the Poe narrators' desire to unify sign and signifier is in line with my thesis with the difference that I maintain that the struggle for the unification of two conditions and its final failure in Poe is not limited only to language. It manifests itself in many different ways and on different levels in each tale.

In his essay "Mysteries We Reread, Mysteries of Rereading: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story" (1994), John T. Irwin adds to this discussion by pointing out the fact that "thorough identification" with another is ultimately impossible because the only way we can identify with others is through their spoken words and external behavior which do not necessarily reflect that person's inner thoughts. Therefore, during each act of analyzing the opponent's thoughts, the Dupin-figure is in fact analyzing his own act of analysis. Irwin argues that Lacan, Derrida, and Barbara Johnson fall into the same trap by analyzing each other's and thus their own acts of analysis in analyzing Dupin's act of analysis[5]. In this way, "the self-including gesture of analyzing the act of analysis involves a doubling back in which self-consciousness, attempting to be absolutely even with itself, finds that it is originally and essentially at odds with itself" (Irwin 34). Now since by definition an odd number is that which leaves a remainder of one if divided by two, "in that simple game of even and odd in which self-consciousness analyzes itself, the question inevitably arises as to whether, when the mind's desire to be absolutely even with

itself is divided into the mind's essential condition of being at odds with itself, the one that is always left over is the same as the number one that precedes two, that is, the same as that mythic, original, undivided unity prior to all parting/pairing" (Irwin 38). All I want to make use of for my thesis in this intricate web of numbers game (performed respectively by Dupin, Lacan, Derrida, Johnson, Irwin) is that every time Dupin tries to unify the purloined letter with its original owner, he is left with an odd "*One.*" In other words, the struggle to possess the content of the purloined letter (of which we are never told in the story) always leads to a failure, so much so that the struggle is turned towards possessing the process of its purloining. I shall elaborate on this in the proper place, but, briefly, the central desire in this tale is to unify the secret content of the letter (or the secret beyond) with its effect (or its result in the physical world). The secret content is never revealed and what little success there is, is of simply shifting the process without ever being able to unify it with its inaugurating first act.

Elsewhere, in his book *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (1994), Irwin refers to the textual self-inclusion in "The Purloined Letter" as "one of the earliest and most sophisticated of a group of American symbolist works" (Irwin 22). In this way the tale is also about the mystery of writing where "letter (written characters) on the surface of a sheet of paper somehow physically 'contain' or 'conceal' something metaphysical (thought)" (Irwin 22). The words/signifiers then simultaneously leave thoughts/signified in the open view and conceal them precisely in the way the purloined letter functions in the story of that name. This notion of Poe's reveals itself more clearly in his fascination with

cryptograms. The idea that words physically contain the metaphysical becomes for Irwin "a figure of the body/mind relationship with the self, the problematic way the body physically contains or grounds intellection" (Irwin 23). Whether one sees the struggle for unity in Poe's tales embodied in the constant clash between the physical/metaphysical (Wilbur), inside/outside (Irwin), signifier/signified (Williams), or any other such dichotomy, the movement in Poe's fiction remains the same: it is from an ideal state of oneness to diffusion from that state, and finally back to the condition of unity. The unspeakable horror that dominates this movement, though, is the realization that, according to *Eureka*, unity equals annihilation.

Tony Magistrale and Sidney Poger's recent contribution, *Poe's Children: Connections between Tales of Terror and Detection* (1999), is about Poe's principal motifs and their influence on other writers to this date. According to Magistrale and Poger, the paradigm of a Poe horror story has many characteristics, "the most common of which is isolation or sequestration" (Magistrale and Poger 15). The argument continues by asserting that "in almost every case, these isolatoes are in rebellion against some restrictive moral or physical law that denies them their high poetic place in the universe" (Magistrale and Poger 15). This rebellion, as we have seen, is the romantic hero's rejection of the rituals of earthly religion and intellectual pretensions in order to communicate and become unified with that god-like spirit inside. As Magistrale and Poger notice, in their movement towards "an identity above the material world ... Poe's characters would annihilate time in order to transcend the limitations of a conventionally regulated world" (Magistrale and Poger 16). Similarly, Poe's ethereal women signify "the central theme of passionate

longing for immortality" (Magistrale and Poger 17). Thus we are reminded again of protagonists in Poe who desire to find and become one with an identity above the material world. Their "isolation" symbolizes the state of multiplicity while their desire for a transcendence beyond earthly limits signifies the aspiration towards oneness. What Magistrale and Poger leave out of their argument is the simultaneous desire and fear that these narrators experience in their struggle for unity. The desire is subsumed by the fear since the narrators of Poe are aware that the ultimate result of this desire is collapse and nothingness – failure.

In all the readings I have cited above, one situation seems to repeatedly surface: a protagonist who is cut off from an original state of meaningful unity and struggles to regain that state. This protagonist might emerge in a Dupin whose desire is to capture the outside world's complex and contingent relations in order to create a state of irrelation, that is to find a unified meaning (solution to a crime). He might be a William Wilson who longs for a primal state when his name and identity were not split in two. Just like the author of *Eureka*, Poe's narrators seek *one* meaning in a universe that was authored by the sublime author, God. Yet, in their search for one meaning they realize that god's text is characterized by multiplicity and difference. [6] Hence their desire for one meaning is constantly frustrated. Not surprisingly then, and as I argued above, Poe's own work does not yield a single meaning and breaks down classifications. The closest one can get to finding "meaning" in Poe's tales is through following the *process* of looking for meaning, as Dupin does in "The Purloined Letter." The reader, like Poe's protagonists, finds meaning in lack of meaning.

In studying Poe's tales, I am aware of the fact that I am placing them in chapters that put these tales together in the conventional categories of "women," "detective," or "the uncanny." By doing this I intend to approach Poe's tales from the perspective in which they are usually perceived in order to reach a new understanding: that the tales in all of these classifications yield the same results and are therefore the products of a single consciousness. The chief anxiety of this consciousness is to transcend the present state of multiplicity in the physical world and experience the condition of primal unity before creation. The anxiety, however, leads to utter hopelessness after discovering that all the roads to final unity end in failure. Finally, due to space limitations and in order to value the economy of argument, though not all inclusive, I have tried to be as inclusive as possible in choosing most of the representative tales which I feel exemplify Poe's works of fiction in one way or another.

**Chapter One:** *The Pain of Lost Identities*

> The human brain has obviously a leaning to the "*Infinite*," and fondles
> the phantom of the idea. It seems to long with a passionate fervor for
> this impossible conception, with the hope of intellectually believing it
> when conceived.
>
> *Eureka*

The quotation perfectly summarizes what happens in the "women" tales.

Granted, I have said above that "the leaning to the '*Infinite* '" is the leaning of all the

tales. But the key phrases that make this quotation a perfect summary of the

"women" tales are "the phantom of the idea," and "intellectually believing it when

conceived." What ties the four women tales together is one characteristic that they all

share. The women in these tales are all the same: "the phantom of the idea." They

are phantoms that embody for the narrator the "idea" of the unification of body and

spirit. In all of these tales there is a struggle under which both the women and the

narrator toil and suffer. This struggle is the struggle to make one the physical body

with the spirit, a struggle which to be successful, Poe tells us in *Eureka*, has to end in

an "Inevitable *Annihilation.*" It is no wonder, then, that all four women die. Whether

Poe is "anti-feminist" because he kills all four women, or whether he is "feminist"

because all four women represent a transcendental state for him is not the issue here. [7]

Rather their bodies and deaths become the site of the "idea" of the inevitable

annihilation that is the result of the unification of body and spirit. The "intellectually

believing" of this "idea" is the second common feature in these tales, particularly in

"Morella" and "Ligeia" where the two women are associated with supreme intellect

which the narrator labours to intellectually comprehend – and of course unsuccessfully because the very idea is an "impossible conception."

*Berenice*

"*Des idées!*" (*Tales* 231). This is what haunts Egaeus throughout the tale, first *des idées* about his vague and forgotten past, then *des idées* embodied in the person of Berenice, and finally *des idées* suggested by her teeth. What terrifies and unnerves Egaeus in all these *idées* is that they are "replete with horror – horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity" (232). It all comes down to this then: there are vague ideas that haunt and terrify Egaeus. That these ideas are vague and confusing he tells us in the very first paragraph: "How is it," he asks, "that from beauty I have derived a type of unloveliness? – from the covenant of peace a simile of sorrow?" (225). That the origin of these ideas is in a blissful yet uncertain past he also tells us in the first paragraph: "either the memory of past bliss is the anguish of to-day, or the agonies which *are* have their origin in the ecstasies which *might have been*" (225). Egaeus's agony throughout the tale is to find and possess an "idea" that is fully and truly one with its ideal image: "ah therefore it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason" (231). This ideal image, as we know with Poe, is always lost or forgotten in an unknown past. The famous Poe formula again: the struggle to unify the physical present with the idea of the unknown yet blissful past.

The desire to make the ideal past one with "the awful Present" (*Tales* 1353) manifests itself on three levels in this tale. On the first level, it is embodied in Egaeus's remembrance of the preexistence of his soul, "a remembrance of aërial

forms – of spiritual and meaning eyes – of sounds, musical yet sad – a remembrance which will not be excluded; a memory like a shadow, vague, variable, indefinite, unsteady; and like a shadow, too, in the impossibility of my getting rid of it while the sunlight of my reason shall exist" (225). On the second level, the desire manifests itself in Egaeus's remembrance of a blissful past represented by Berenice's "light-heartedness and joy": "Berenice! – I call upon her name – Berenice! – and from the gray ruins of memory a thousand tumultuous recollections are startled at the sound! Ah! vividly is her image before me now, as in the early days of her light-heartedness and joy! Oh! gorgeous yet fantastic beauty! ... – and then – then all is misery and terror, and a tale which should not be told" (226) – a tale which should not be told because it relates the horrifying culmination of his monomaniac desire to possess physical objects that to him bear "the white and ghastly *spectrum*" (230) of an unknown source. But the tale is told and it is the tale of the possession of the teeth that represent the ethereal Berenice who is no more and who in turn represents the blissful past. Every time Egaeus tries to replace his subjective past with an objective present, hence forgetting the "awful Present" as the absence of the ideal past, he fails. At first the object is Berenice's body, which for him embodies the ideal state of a remote past. Then the object is Berenice's teeth that represent the lost Berenice.

The narrator tells us at the beginning of the story that his baptismal name is Egaeus, "that of my family I will not mention" (225). Of course he will not mention it. Egaeus is the typical Poe narrator who either does not remember (as in "Ligeia") or does not want to mention his family (as in "William Wilson"), which is the emblem of his past. Poe's narrators are, in David Halliburton's words, "ahistorical"

beings, men of "problematic origins" (245). Egaeus could not mention his family name even if he knew it. For it is uncertain, vague, and of an unspeakable past. Because family has to do with *origins* and the source of one's existence, family names and family histories in Poe, as in "Berenice," symbolize the narrator's unknown origin. All he can tell us about his family is that they are "a race of visionaries" (225).

Casting our minds back to *Eureka*, we remember what Poe said about the "awful Future." This "great End" is when all the material objects in the world rush "towards their own general centre … and with their spiritual passion for oneness," they collapse "into a common embrace. The inevitable catastrophe is at hand" (*Tales* 1353). This "common embrace," as Poe tells us elsewhere in *Eureka*, is the very same source whence all the material world was diffused into the space. The "awful Future," then, is when the present (of that future moment) becomes one with the past (the common embrace). Egaeus's telling us that his family is a race of visionaries points to its ability to see this awful future in visions. For this reason visions of the present and the past haunt and horrify him in so many different forms throughout the story. These visions characterize his particular kind of monomania.

The particular nature of his monomania, Egaeus tells us, is distinct from the mental features ascribed to a daydreamer "of ardent imagination." Whereas the daydreamer "loses sight of" the object of his contemplation "in a wilderness of deductions and suggestions issuing therefrom, until … he finds … his musings entirely vanished and forgotten," Egaeus's meditations keep "pertinaciously returning in upon the original object as a centre" (228). In other words, what he is interested in

is not what different deductions and suggestions may issue from the object of his contemplation (much in the same way atoms issued from the original particle in *Eureka*), but the very object itself, "the original object as a centre." He does this in the desperate hope to find one sign, one *"frivolous"* object that may show oneness with its signifying origin. In his obsessive desire for the ideal "idea," he constantly repeats this process. He says he would "repeat monotonously some common word, until the sound, by dint of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind" (227). That common word is the ideal sign where name and named are one; it is the symbol or "idea" of the ideal *oneness*. Yet, no material sign can be one with the "idea" which is why he says the sound "ceased to convey any *idea* whatever to the mind" (my emphasis).

Egaeus looks for the conflation of his desired abstract "idea" in concrete, physical objects, first in the body of Berenice, then in her teeth. Obviously, Berenice is the most important material entity that embodies the abstract "idea" for Egaeus because he looks at her "not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream – not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the *abstraction* of such a being – not as a thing to admire, but to analyze – not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation" (229 my emphasis). Egaeus himself points this out when he draws our attention to the fact that it is not "the alteration ... in the *moral* condition of Berenice" that attracts his "intense and abnormal meditation," but "in the less important but more startling changes wrought in the *physical* frame of Berenice" (229). Therefore, it is not surprising that after

Berenice's death, he would seek to house the "idea" in another concrete object – her teeth[8].

Berenice dies and Egaeus's obsession with her teeth grows. They become shinier and more visible than before because for him they come to completely embody the idea that had been formerly embodied by Berenice herself. That is why Egaeus sees "them *now* even more unequivocally than I beheld them *then*. The teeth! – the teeth! – they were here, and there, and every where, and visibly and palpably before me" (230). They become the mere objects of "the full fury of my monomania" so much so that "in the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth" (231). For the utter possession of *des idées* that he now sees embodied in the teeth, "I longed with a phrenzied desire" (231). The usual Poesque failure to possess the "idea" is here symbolized in Egaeus's apparent ignorance of having committed the horrible act of extracting Berenice's teeth. When, in his "awakened" position, he drops the box and sees, in sheer terror, thirty-two white teeth roll out with a rattling sound, he symbolically realizes that what he has done in his dream, has been but a dream, the dream of possessing the idea in an object. The utter possession of the "idea" is an "impossibility" (225). Egaeus joins the long line of Poe narrators who have and who will realize the ultimate failure of the ideal.

I will end this section by drawing attention once again to the importance of the relation between past ideal and present idea in this story. Because these ideas, *des idées*, symbolize for Egaeus the equivalent of the ideal – which, as I argued above, is the apocalyptic moment when the awful future rejoins the ideal past in a horrible embrace – he is haunted both by a desire to possess them and a fear to encounter

them. That is why after the change in Berenice's physical frame that now houses the "idea," Egaeus says, "and *now* – now I shuddered in her presence, and grew pale at her approach" (229). Likewise, when the teeth come to house the same "idea" by replacing Berenice, he again wishes, in terror, "that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died!" (230). As we shall see, this simultaneous desire to possess and unspeakable fear of the ideal totality, utter unity of object and idea, haunts all of Poe's protagonists.

*Morella*

"Morella" (1835) is another variation on the motif of the simultaneous desire and fear of experiencing the state of being "ONE." The difference between this story and "Berenice" is that unlike Egaeus, the narrator of "Morella" does not suffer from a similar monomania whereby physical objects are contemplated as signs that embody an abstract idea. The narrator of "Morella" seems to have advanced from this view because he realizes the abstractedness of the idea of bodily and spiritual *oneness* and does not seek the "idea" in physical objects. Although lodged in the physical bodies of the two Morellas, it is the abstract idea of "*Identity*" that fills the narrator with both joy and horror. Michael J. S. Williams argues that "'Equivocation' – whereby one word signifies (at least) doubly – is also crucial to 'Morella' ..., in which the narrator's predicament turns on the double reference of the name 'Morella'" (25). Without contesting this idea, I would like to add that besides "equivocation" there is also at play in this story the idea of "equability," as Poe mentions in *Eureka*, where there exists in the universe "an infinite complexity of relation out of irrelation" (*Tales* 1293). Hence the narrator sees the oneness of the two Morellas but cannot

comprehend the "complexity of [this] relation out of irrelation." The struggle of the narrator of "Morella," then, is to overcome the unsettling and fragmenting dichotomy of relation-irrelation, and experience an *"Identity"* that is, as stated in the tale's epigraph, "itself, by itself solely, ONE everlastingly, and single" (*Tales* 234).

The relation-irrelation duality plays itself out in several different ways in this story, so much so that it becomes the tale's main obsession. The first of these is stated right in the first paragraph where the narrator tells us that his passions for Morella "were not of Eros, and bitter and tormenting to my spirit was the gradual conviction that I could in no manner define their unusual meaning, or regulate their vague intensity" (234). His first difficulty, then, is to establish the meaning of his "relation" to Morella which is supposed to be defined by their marriage, but which is really an "irrelation" with an "unusual meaning" and a "vague intensity." The second duality is the narrator's dual feeling towards Morella's profound erudition and mystical studies which both attract and horrify him. This leads to his recognition of Morella's own unearthliness. Her voice is at first like music to him "until, at length, its melody was tainted with terror, – and I grew pale, and shuddered inwardly at those too unearthly tones" (235).

Morella horrifies the narrator precisely because she does not fit Mr. Locke's definition that he considers as "true," and in which personal identity consists "in the sameness of a rational being" (235). Rather, Morella embodies "the *principium individuationis* – the notion of that identity which at death is or is not lost forever" (235). This is indeed what happens to Morella at the end of the story. It is this idea that makes the narrator long "with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of

Morella's decease" (236). He wishes so because for him, as we have seen in *Eureka* and elsewhere in Poe, death is the moment of ultimate *oneness* with the origin while Morella represents a duality. Indeed, Morella herself equates death with heaven when she says of and on her dying day that "it is a day of days, ... a day of all days either to live or die. It is a fair day for the sons of earth and life – ah, more fair for the daughters of heaven and death" (236). This is also why Morella tells the narrator that he will love her in death more than he loved her alive. Because Morella's physical absence makes room for his conception of ideal presence, death marks the repression of her otherness; it represents the *idea* of oneness: "the days have never been when though couldst love me – but her whom in life thou didst abhor, in death thou shalt adore" (236). This prophecy, indeed, comes true for "as she foretold, her child – to which in dying she had given birth, and which breathed not until the mother breathed no more – her child, a daughter, lived" (237). The death of the abhorred Mother-Morella produces the birth of the adored Daughter-Morella. Mother-daughter, life-death, dualities that are all – Morella. The game of relation-irrelation is afoot again.

The dual Morella leaves her double behind and the legacy of the narrator's longing for oneness continues to its culmination. The child grows "strangely in stature and intellect" to become the "perfect resemblance of her who had departed" (237). The narrator loves the second Morella endlessly, but gloom and horror and grief cloud over his life again when he notices the growing similarity between her and his deceased wife in every aspect. Nevertheless, what horrifies him is not her physical resemblance to her mother. "For," he says, "that her smile was like her mother's I could bear ... that her eyes were like Morella's I could endure." What

terrifies him is her identity that grows to become exactly like her mother's: "I shuddered at its too perfect *identity*" (238). Why is he so horrified by the resemblance in her identity one might ask? It is because the *identity* of Morella, as we saw above, is not that of an individual which consists of "the sameness of a rational being." Hers is an identity that represents, as we shall see below, duality, the moment of separation from the condition of "ONE." It is this in which the narrator finds "food for consuming thought and horror – for a worm that *would* not die" (238). The worm that *would* not die is the continuing cycle of an *identity* that represents duality and separation. Nonetheless, the daughter remains nameless because the narrator does not dare repeat the name that this identity wears, the inevitable name that he escapes – Morella. Precisely for this reason, when it comes to naming his daughter he has no choice but to yield to the irresistible and inevitable "fiend" who "spoke from the recesses of my soul, when ... I whispered within the ears of the holy man the syllables – Morella" (238). But the second Morella dies too and the narrator takes her to the tomb. He laughs with a long and bitter laugh when, he says, "I found no traces of the first, in the charnel where I laid the second – Morella" (239).

One might wonder why the story ends in this way; why the second Morella does not live her full youth and why the narrator does not find any traces of the first Morella; more importantly, why the narrator cannot resist calling his daughter Morella; why he buries his daughter exactly in the same spot where his wife lies. One may find the answers to these questions by noticing that everything repeats itself in this story. The name Morella consists of an excess of surplus. The combination of "More" and the feminine article "la" may be said to point to the repetition of the

woman, or the idea she embodies. The double occurrence of the letter "l" can also be seen as the doubling of woman/idea. The story "Morella" builds itself on a web of repetitions, a repetition that, as I showed above, represents itself in the notion of duality. This duality begins when Morella, or the emblem of *oneness* with the origin, separates from the divine source and starts a life of endless repetitions. That she represents both oneness with the origin and separation from it, I will show in what follows.

From the very beginning to the end, both the story and the narrator associate her with an unearthly state. The narrator is "thrown by accident into her society many years ago" (234). This vague and unknown past in Poe, as we saw before, symbolizes unknown origins. His passions for her are not of Eros but of something he cannot determine. The happiness of being with her "is a happiness to dream" (234). Her erudition is no earthly knowledge and "her talents were of no common order – her powers of mind were gigantic" (234). She is associated with mystical writings and the music of her voice conveys "unearthly tones" (235). She is "conscious of a cause," a "Fate," that is "unknown" to the narrator. And finally she is capable of prophesying the future. That she represents separation from that idea "ONE," is shown in two respects: she has descended into the physical body, and she has bound herself to earthly materiality by an earthly marriage to the narrator. Therefore, Morella does not represent *oneness* any more, but duality, separation, repetition, life. She has become the life principle at the mercy of which all things repeat themselves and are destined to repeat themselves until all life ends. That is why he is horrified by her: because she represents the repetitious cycle of life. That is why, too, he cannot

name her daughter anything but Morella. He tells us that he remembers "man, many fair titles of the gentle, and the happy, and the good" from his "own and foreign lands" (238). But as long as the cycle initiated by Morella's separation from the ONE continues, he has no choice but to call his daughter Morella, even if he vaguely remembers the gentle titles from the distant foreign lands.

After this separation, then, all that happens is a double, an imperfect repetition, of the original "ONE" – just what Poe tells us in his cosmic philosophy, *Eureka*. After the primal *"Diffusion"* from the primal particle, all the world, all material atoms, are doomed to everlastingly doubling and redoubling themselves, weaving a complex web of relations and irrelations until the apocalyptic moment arrives and all things returns to their unity in a terrible embrace. That is why the narrator is doomed to call his daughter Morella, destined to bury her in the same spot, cursed to repeat life. *Oneness* is not achieved again. The cycle of Life and Death continues.

*Ligeia*

Of the "women" tales, "Ligeia" (1838) is the most sophisticated treatment of Poe's governing motif theorized in *Eureka*. The governing principles of the universe in *Eureka*, "the two Principles Proper, … the Material and the Spiritual – accompany each other, in the strictest fellowship, forever. Thus *The Body and The Soul walk hand in hand*" (*Tales* 1306). These two "Principles Proper" are translated, in "Ligeia," into two corresponding principles: "remembrance" and "revivification." Although these repeat themselves in many of Poe's tales, perhaps in no other story is

so much emphasis placed upon remembrance and revivification, *"The Body and The Soul."* I will show how these equate with each other.

The narrator of "Ligeia" emphasizes that he cannot remember things from the past precisely because he cannot re-*member* them. The plight of the narrator in this story, in much the same monomaniac fashion as in "Berenice," is that he wishes to find a material object, a body, a *member* where he can lodge his obsession with an "idea," in this case the idea of the "Divine Will." He tells us so himself when he describes his attempt to capture the *"expression"* of Ligeia's divine features: "I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression" (*Tales* 265). But not to be diverted from the importance of the notion of "remembrance" in this tale, I want to draw attention to the fact that the narrator emphasizes three times during the course of events that he does not remember. In fact, he opens the narrative with it: "I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia" (262). The only thing he does remember, he tells us, "is the *person* of Ligeia" (263). His emphasizing the word *"person"* shows that the only thing the narrator remembers is the physical body of Ligeia.

This physical body, we notice however, as the narrator goes on to describe it, is not a body as a whole, but a combination of body parts. He describes Ligeia's "marble hand"; her "lofty and pale forehead"; her "skin rivalling the purest ivory"; "the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses"; "the delicate outlines of the nose"; "the sweet mouth"; "the teeth"; and finally and most importantly, "the large eyes of Ligeia" (263-4). In his description of each body part,

there is at least one adjective that associates that part with something unearthly, something divine. About the general beauty of Ligeia "there was much of 'strangeness'"; her forehead is "a majesty so divine"; her skin rivals ivory; her tresses have "the full force of the Homeric epithet, 'hyacinthine!'"; the features of her nose can only be found on "the graceful medallions of the Hebrew"; her sweet mouth is "the triumph of all things heavenly"; her teeth glance "back ... every ray of the holy light which fell upon them"; and her eyes are "far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race" (263-4). The adjectives that the narrator uses to describe Ligeia's body convey a quality of being exotic and ancient since they are mostly taken from ancient legends and myths. Ancient legends and myths, in turn, represent lost worlds of the past. The body of Ligeia, therefore, is the site of the long-lost ideas of a mythical past. In Poe's *Eureka*, all the particles that are diffused from their original *oneness* during "the First Act" have attributes of the divine origin, which is the very attractive force that will eventually draw them back into *oneness*. The narrator of "Ligeia" dramatizes this. All of Ligeia's body parts have attributes of the divine as I showed above. By remembering/re-membering Ligeia, the narrator wishes to put the fragments together in order to attain one wholeness that is god's will. I shall return to this again.

But if the notion of "remembrance" equates *Eureka*'s *"The Body,"* the second major principle of the tale corresponds to *"The Soul."* This principle is the idea of "revivification." Revivification in "Ligeia" is, as we have seen in "Morella," closely related to the idea of repetition. Each time this repetition displaces revivification just before the moment of absolute *oneness*. Every time the soul is revivified in the body

of a new person, the narrator feels closest to the ultimate oneness of body and soul

only to be devastated to discover that this process is doomed to repeat itself again,

perhaps till eternity:

> There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek and throat; a perceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart. The lady *lived*; and with redoubled ardor I betook myself to the task of restoration. In chafed and bathed the temples and the hands, and used every exertion which experience, and no little medical reading, could suggest. But in vain. Suddenly, the color fled, the pulsation ceased, the lips resumed the expression of the dead, and, in an instant afterward, the whole body took upon itself the icy chilliness, the livid, hue, the intense rigidity, the sunken outline, and all the loathsome peculiarities of that which has been, for many days, a tenant of the tomb. (266-7)

This is why the narrators of "Ligeia" and "Morella" are both attracted to and horrified

by the bodies that are the site of "this hideous drama of revivification" (276).

Because Ligeia is associated with the "Divine Will" in this tale, she represents "the

First Act" whereby the primal particle was separated from the divine origin and was

doomed ever after to repeat this drama of multiplication, of repetition – a repetition

that means to Poe's narrators getting ever farther from the original *oneness*.

The process of repetition and revivification is prophesied by Ligeia because

she is associated with the will that wills this drama. It is embodied in "certain verses

composed by herself not many days before" (268). The first stanza of the poem

describes the process of the first creation in the "gala night" when angels "bewinged,

bedight / In veils, and drowned in tears, / Sit in a theatre, to see / A play of hopes and

fears, / While the orchestra breathes fitfully / The music of the spheres" (268). The

doom of humanity starts from then because it marks the beginning of the cycle of

endless multiplication, because

> That motley drama! – oh, be sure

It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased forevermore,
By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the self-same spot.

It is this terrifying drama of being everlastingly repeated, revivified, that makes Ligeia leap to her feet and shriek "O God! O Divine Father! – shall these things be undeviatingly so? – shall this Conqueror be not once conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who – who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigor? Man doth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly*, save only through the weakness of his feeble will" (269). The very fact that Ligeia asks the narrator to "repeat" the verses shows that she is making him aware of the repetition to come. Thus, Ligeia prophesies and reflects the fears that the narrator will go through. She dies and this takes us along with the narrator to the second epoch of his drama.

As Michael J. S. Williams mentions, there are several different views on the narrator's emphasis in this second epoch on the internal décor of the abbey. Williams himself believes that "the extended description of the décor of this chamber occupies a position structurally parallel to that of 'the person' of Ligeia" (100). In her article "Wild Semantics: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Feminization of Edgar Allan Poe's Arabesque Aesthetics," Gabriele Rippl sounds more in keeping with the overall structure of "Ligeia" when she notices that the "serpent vitality" of the arabesque décor "performs many conspicuous repetitions (e.g., on the phonetic level and on the level of idioms and character) and therefore resembles the infinite repetition of an arabesque, taking on the qualities of a continuous incantation" (126). As Ligeia had

prophesied, the narrator is destined to repeat this repetition. It is "in the draping of the apartment [that] lay, alas! the chief phantasy of all" (271), says the narrator.

The chief characteristic of the arabesque décor of the abbey is indeed the chief characteristic of *Eureka*'s Universe: "contingency" (*Tales* 1313). The arabesque in Poe consists of abstract designs or motifs of no particular meaning that can be infinitely repeated. [9] According to Poe in his "The Philosophy of Furniture," the arabesque consists of "distinct grounds, and vivid circular or cycloid figures, *of no meaning*" (*Usher and Other Writings* 416). The arabesque designs on the upholstery in the tales, therefore, parallel the contingency of the universe in *Eureka* since from every individual angle of sight they reflect a different kind of movement and illusion. Movement, illusion, contingency, relativity are the characteristics of the material universe. Poe's arabesque aesthetic is the microcosmic representation of such a universe. The emphasis on the internal décor and its arabesque qualities parallel not the person of Ligeia, as Williams argues, but the very philosophy of creation, of the tale itself, and of Ligeia's prophecy. Therefore, through the arabesque drapery "the hideous drama of revivification was repeated" (*Tales* 276). The arabesque décor, then, is a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic repetition because when one pays attention to it by getting closer, one is "surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms" (271).

The surrounding reflects, embodies, and is therefore ready for the final stage of the repetition. The "Will" will this time inhabit Lady Rowena's body. She is terrified by sounds and motions "about the chamber of the turret, which," the narrator concludes, "had no origin save in the distemper of her fancy, or perhaps in the

phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself" (272). It is as if Lady Rowena sees her doom in "the endless succession of the ghastly forms" in the chamber. Whereas the ideal state of life with Ligeia and her association with the "Divine Will" represents preexistence, the chamber with its repetitious arabesque gloom becomes the material world inhabited by the earthly Rowena and her husband. In this world she is destined to literally embody the "hideous drama of revivification. She is frightened by the effects of the figures on the wall and faints "with feelings of half anxiety, half of a vague terror" (273). Rowena dies and the narrator gradually hears sounds coming from the ebony bed where she lies, and to which, he says, "I listened – in extremity of horror" (275). Three times the narrator notices vague sounds and shadows until he, sunk in visions of Ligeia, loses track of the number and "time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revivification repeated itself." Finally, the "Will" fully inhabits Rowena's corpse and the narrator shrieks aloud, "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!" (277).

Repetition is so central to "Ligeia" that it shows itself everywhere in the fabric of the story. Once Ligeia starts the moment of separation from the divine "Will," repetition and revivification are inevitable. In this sense, Ligeia becomes the embodiment of "the First Act" of which *Eureka* talks and by which the primal particle, from the moment of being willed into existence by god, repeats itself endlessly in pulsations of life and death, diffusion and unity. Near her death, she wants the narrator to "repeat" the verses. The verses themselves prophesy the endless

repetition of the "circle." The narrator repeats Ligeia's prophecy in the décor of his abbey. He also becomes one of the "crowd" in Ligeia's verse that will forevermore chase "that motley drama." The process of Ligeia's revivification repeats itself several times. Ligeia, too, repeats herself by taking over Rowena's body. And finally, the story repeats itself. It starts with the title "Ligeia" and ends with the word "LIGEIA." In this way, the story, like the fate of the universe, has become "a circle that ever returneth in / To the self-same spot." Realizing the ultimate failure of the attempt to remember/re-member the original *oneness*, it is no wonder that the narrator of "Ligeia" notices "that, 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" (264-5). The implications of the failure to remember original unity is also reflected in the narrator's failure to recall historical elements, Legeia's parental name, her family, and the ancient, decaying city where they first met. The story of "Ligeia" is the drama of ever being *upon the very verge*.

"The assumption of absolute Unity in the Primordial particle," says Poe in *Eureka*, "includes that of infinite divisibility" (*Tales* 1278). Once absolute unity ceases to exist by being willed into the primal particle – Ligeia's body – it is condemned to divide itself infinitely. Once again, the narrator's desire for unity is simultaneously a desire and a fear. He, like the author of *Eureka*, longs for the final unity of body and spirit symbolized by the woman's death. However, he is horrified to discover that each death is the revivification of life in another body. His desire for final unity, then, is never satisfied because the physical world, like the atomic particles in *Eureka*, is predestined to repeat itself eternally at ever pulse of "the Heart

Divine." Ligeia's everlasting revivification then is the parallel of *Eureka*'s never-ending diffusion. There is, again, no closure.

*Eleonora*

Poe's closing stories are usually triumphs. By "closing stories" I mean stories that close the cycle of "women," "detective," and "uncanny" tales. By "triumphs" I mean failures compromised. I will explain. The story that closes the "detective" cycle is "The Purloined Letter." Here we have Poe and Dupin at the peak of their skills as analytical geniuses. The closing story of the "uncanny" tales is "Hop-Frog," Poe's last jest, in which a repressed and maltreated genius perfectly shows the king and his ministers what a real "practical" joke is. Likewise, "Eleonora" (1841) is the story that closes the "women" tales cycle. It is the only tale of the four in which the second woman does not die at the end and there is at least an earthly union between the narrator and his second wife. In all his other tales, Poe has been desperately and unsuccessfully trying to *unify*. In the closing stories at least temporarily *oneness* is achieved: in "Hop-Frog," a practical joke becomes one with what it signifies, it really becomes "practical"; in the "Purloined Letter," the letter is finally restored to, one with, its true owner, no Ourang-Outangs or newspaper clips; in "Eleonora," the narrator finally gets to stay with a woman, no second dead wives or daughters. But these "triumphs" are really failures compromised in that they are imperfect and only temporary images of the absolute *oneness*. *Eureka* is the last of Poe's triumphs in seriously and cosmically defining and philosophizing absolute *oneness*. It is a triumph, however, that points to its own failure: "*Oneness*, then, is all that I predicate of the originally created Matter; but I propose to show that this *Oneness is a principle*

*abundantly sufficient to account for the constitution, the existing phenomena and the plainly inevitable annihilation of at least the material Universe"* (*Tales* 1277).

Looked at in this light, it becomes clear why, compared to the other "women" tales, the movement in "Eleonora" is backwards. That is, the narrator and Eleonora *begin* in the ideal state towards which other narrators strive. They begin from "the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass" (*Tales* 468) that seems to represent the primal state before being created into "the outer and every-day world" (471). The condition of Eleonora and the narrator is akin to the condition of Adam and Eve. The fall of Adam and Eve comes when they forget and are separated from their divine origin. The narrator of "Eleonora" repeats the myth by forgetting the promise he had made in that perfect heavenly state to Eleonora. His transgression is different, however, from his biblical counterpart in that he, the embodiment of Poe's sexual obsession with incest and children, adds a sinister aspect to their Eden. After this, no matter who he will live with, he will always be doomed to wander after the original Eleonora, an origin that can only be achieved in the ideal state of the "Valley of the Many-Colored Grass," that is, not in this physical world of "terrible temptations." "Eleonora" comes last in the line of the "women" tales presumably to complete the other tales' lack of closure and their endless cycle of life and death, incarnation and reincarnation. But after years of longing for the perfect and lost Eleonora, the narrator can only achieve unity with "some maiden of the outer and every-day world" (471), but not the heavenly Eleonora of "the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass."

The narrator tells us at the beginning that he is "of a race noted for vigor of fancy and ardor of passion" so much so that other men have called him mad. He

gives us two versions of himself symbolized by vision at night and day. One version is associated with "they who dream by day" and the other with "those who dream only by night" (468). The version that dreams by day can see all in light and is "cognizant" of "the great secret." The version that dreams by night, however, is always in the dark and can only "in ... grey visions ... obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in awaking, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret" (468). He himself is now a night dreamer because the story is being related after the fall from "the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass." He tells us this in the second paragraph of the story: "there are two distinct conditions of my mental existence – the condition of a lucid reason ... 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" (468). Therefore, he is back with his earthly fellow men desiring to go back again to the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass. Madness and sanity, night and day, first epoch and second epoch, Eleonora and Ermengarde, all suggest the extremely dual mentality of this tale, a duality that as in the other tales implies separation and lack of *oneness*. The narrator's wedding with his new love refers to unity and absolution. But it is an earthly substitution for the heavenly absolution in the valley of many-colored grass, as Ermengarde is an earthly surrogate for the otherworldly Eleonora.

What description follows the narrator's introduction is a detailed picture of a lush and ideal landscape that is not unlike the biblical land of milk and honey. He lives in perfect happiness until one day Eleonora tells him, "in tears, of the last sad change which must befall Humanity" (471). Immediately after this, the Valley of

Many-Colored Grass changes into a land that will accommodate the fallen man: "the star-shaped flowers shrank into the stems of the trees, and appeared no more. The tints of the green carpet faded; and one by one, the ruby-red asphodels withered away; and there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten, dark eye-like violets that writhed uneasily and were ever encumbered with dew. And Life departed from our paths" (472). After, and before, the death of Eleonora, we are given every possible hint that she is the embodiment of "the love and glory of God" (469). Four times in the story she is placed above even the glory and beauty of the Valley/Heaven. The "River of Silence" is "brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora" (469). The bark of the trees "was smoother than all save the cheeks of Eleonora" (469). The lulling melody more divine than "harp of Æolus" is "sweeter than all save the voice of Eleonora" (470), and once again "more divine than all save the voice of Eleonora" (472). The last hint that defies any doubt as to Eleonora's association with god is that, the narrator tells us, like God "she would ... give me frequent indications of her presence" (471). However, once he is separated from that ideal unity with Eleonora, the closest he can get to its unity is through "the ethereal Ermengarde" (473). Consequently, He marries Ermengarde.

Finally: a Poe narrator that gets to stay with his ethereal woman. He finally triumphs but not in achieving the ideal unity with Eleonora in the heavenly valley. Instead, he leaves the valley "forever for the vanities and the turbulent triumphs of the world" (473). At the awkward end of the story, Eleonora forgives him and blesses his earthly union with whispers that remind him of his heavenly unison: "thou art

absolved, for reasons which shall be made known to thee in Heaven, of thy vows unto

Eleonora" (473).

**Chapter Two:** *"Such Blundering Ratiocination"*

> The fact is, that upon the enunciation of any one of that class of terms to which "Infinity" belongs — the class representing *thoughts of thought* — he who has a right to say that he thinks *at all*, feels himself called on, *not* to entertain a conception, but simply to direct his mental vision toward some given point, in the intellectual firmament, where lies a nebula never to be solved. To solve it, indeed, he makes no effort; for with a rapid instinct he comprehends, not only the impossibility, but, as regards all human purposes, the *inessentiality*, of its solution. He perceives that the Deity has not *designed* it to be solved.
>
> *Eureka*

Tales of ratiocination are Poe's triumphs of method and analytic power, but also failures of solution, as the epigraph states, because "the Deity has not *designed* it to be solved" (*Tales* 1275). Tales of ratiocination are attempts to trace the clues of a mystery infinitely backwards in order to reach their "Infinity." Well, "Infinity" was not *designed* to be solved. We should, then, as *Eureka* tells us, appreciate it in its effect. And yet, we find the most obvious treatment of the Poesque desire for ultimate unity (and its failure) in these tales. In almost all other tales, the ultimate moment of the collapse into oneness is wrapped up in the most shadowy and vague of atmospheres. This is, as argued by numerous scholars, Poe's strategy. Obviously, Poe decided to try his hands on a different "method" — ratiocination. In detective stories the movement towards the sense of unity and oneness is embodied in the progress from a primal clarity to a mystery and from there to a solution that solves the mystery and returns the world to its primal condition of clarity again. At the beginning of a tale of ratiocination, order and unity reigns in the universe. Everything is clear and consistent. A horrible "First Act" (sound familiar?) fragments the world, which the detective unifies again by finding the solution. There are, then, two

versions of the world in these tales, a primal world of predictability and order which *preexists* "the First Act" (the crime), and a world of fragmentation, and disorder that is the *result* of "the First Act." By finding the solution to the mystery of the crime, the detective in fact returns the world to its primal state of order, thus symbolically making the fallen world one with the preexistent ideal one. In other words, by tracing a number of "clews" or causes that brought about the crime/"First Act," the detective takes the world back to where it started from, hence creating an *effect* of unity and closure. That this process is the parallel of the movement in *Eureka* is slightly less than self-explanatory. Finding the source of disorder becomes the poet/mathematician's main task, and finding the solution and restoration of the world to order equates the *oneness* of the world with its primal ideal state. Poe is the Dupin of the universe in *Eureka*. The detective figure, then, becomes the world's sole hope of returning to that primal sense of order and *oneness* which preexisted the crime. However, ultimate unity, as we shall see below and as Poe tells us in *Eureka*, cannot be attained "by any such blundering ratiocination as that which is ordinarily employed" (1274). Here is the failure again. The tales of ratiocination create only the illusion of an ultimate "solution." They are where Poe creates the *effect* of a solution in the very process of solution. That is to say, the process of solution is so perfectly mapped out that the detective cannot help but arrive at a final solution, even though it may not be possible in the real world.

*Murders in the Rue Morgue*

"Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) is Poe's first attempt to find the solution to a "preternatural" phenomenon. All evidence in the incidents, Dupin tells us,

suggests the presence of a "*very extraordinary*" (*Tales* 420) force. Dupin wants to

take us to its *source*. But more on this point later. Let us begin with what Poe

himself thinks of this tale and of Dupin's success. In a much-quoted letter to Philip

Pendelton Cooke (9 August, 1846), Poe says:

> You are right about the hair-splitting of my French friend: – that is all done
> for effect. These tales of ratiocination owe most of their popularity to being
> something of a new key. I do not mean to say they are not ingenious – but
> people think them more ingenious than they are – on account of their method
> and *air* of method. In the "Murders in the Rue Morgue," for instance, where
> is the ingenuity of unravelling a web which you (the author) have woven for
> the express purpose of unravelling? The reader is made to confound the
> ingenuity of the suppositious Dupin with that of the writer of the story. (*Poe's
> Works* 265)

Apparently Poe himself knew that his tales of ratiocination were not his triumphs in

finding the ultimate solution, but only intellectual exercises in perfecting its methods

– methods which he will use in *Eureka* in a more serious attempt at finding the

mystery of creation. Tales of ratiocination are triumphs of effect. They successfully

create the effect of a final solution.

"*Mon Dieu!*," says Dupin, "upon these two words, therefore, I have mainly

built my hopes of a full solution of the riddle" (*Tales* 424). Not accidentally, Dupin's

hopes of a full solution are based on these two words. He is trying to tell us

something else. If the sailor's "*mon Dieu!*" and the ape's crime ("the First Act") were

simultaneously performed, then Dupin's attempt is to take us back to that primal state

of order when these pairs – the sailor and his ape, *mon Dieu* and "the First Act" – had

not been separated. However, it is not possible to reverse the time and take the world

back to the ideal condition before the crime. Dupin can only find who has done it. It

is not ultimately possible to restore the ideal state before the world was fragmented by

a splitting "First Act"/crime. From the moment the world's condition of unified order is fractured by a crime, the world is characterized by a bi-polar yet interrelated duality represented by the states of good-evil, order-disorder, crime-solution. The detective's attempt to trace a mystery back to its source is a symbolic gesture of the desire to unify the world with its divine source and to take it back to the condition of ideal unity prior to separation from that source.

Analysis that forms the essence of Dupin's disentangling is, he tells us, "the faculty of re-solution" (397). This implies a primary solution which then the analyst tries to re-solve. His analogy of the games of chess and draughts is helpful here. Dupin asserts that "the higher powers of the reflective intellect are more decidedly and more usefully tasked by the unostentatious game of draughts than by all the elaborate frivolity of chess" (397). This is because, he says, in chess "the pieces have different and *bizarre* motions, with various and variable values" (397), whereas in draughts "the moves are *unique* and have but little variation" (398). It is only in the *unique*, draught-like world of the tale that Dupin is capable of "unravelling" what has been designed "for the express purpose of unravelling." Lawrence Frank calls the story "Poe's Evolutionary Reverie" for this same reason (168-89). The world of the tale is not a real one. It is a reverie in which contingencies do not exist. Like the game of chess, in the real world with its "various and variable values," Dupin's methods simply would not work. This is what we will see more obviously in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." But even in the unique world of Rue Morgue Dupin is not ultimately capable of achieving Poe's cosmic wish. In this respect, it is not surprising

that Dupin shares many behavioral characteristics with Roderick Usher and the narrator of "Ligeia."

He roams in an "obscure library"; has a "vivid ... imagination"; lives in "a time-eaten and grotesque mansion" (400); is regarded as a madman and lives in a perfect "seclusion"; is "enamored of the Night for her own sake"; and shuts the daylight out of his lodging only "lighting a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays" (401). But the narrator tells us that Dupin has a "Bi-Part Soul ... – the creative and the resolvent" (402). And it is with the hope for such ability that we enter the world of the tale. Criticizing the police for their acumen without depth, Dupin notices their lack of attention to the theory of probabilities. He says, "coincidences, in general, are great stumbling-blocks in the way of that class of thinkers who have been educated to know nothing of the theory of probabilities" (421). Yet the first display of his analytical and thinking power shows little attention to probabilities. In reality, Dupin reasons, like the police, inductively[10]. I shall come to this point again in my discussion of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" and "The Gold-Bug."

Here is how Dupin fathoms the narrator's soul and finds out whom he has just been thinking of (which we know is Chantilly). The narrator is pushed against a pile of paving-stones collected for repair. The narrator steps on one of the loose fragments, slips, and slightly strains his ankle, gets sulky, turns and looks at the stones, and walks on in silence. From this and from the fact that he is looking on the ground as he walks, Dupin knows that he is thinking of the stones. They reach an alley called Lamartine which is paved and which brings a smile upon the narrator's

lips and he murmurs the world 'stereotomy.' From this Dupin concludes that the narrator must be thinking of "atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus." Because Dupin had already told the narrator how "the vague guesses of that noble Greek had met with confirmation in the late nebular cosmogony," he reaches the conclusion that the narrator will undoubtedly look up to "the great *nebula* in Orion." Now because in the previous day the satirist of *Musée* daily had made an allusion to Chantilly the cobbler's change of name by quoting the Latin line that translates "The first letter has lost its original sound," and because this line is "in reference to Orion, formerly written Urion," Dupin draws the conclusion that the narrator could not have failed "to combine the two ideas of Orion and Chantilly" (404).

How Dupin knows that the smile on the narrator's face was not because of some old joke he might have remembered as they enter Lamartine alley; how he assumes that after uttering the word 'stereotomy' the narrator must have invariably thought about "atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus"; how he knows that the narrator's looking up could not possibly have been a gesture of thinking, about anything, rather than for the purpose of looking at the "great *nebula*" are probabilities that do exist but which Dupin simply ignores. In order for Dupin to succeed, contingency does not, cannot, exist in his world. Granted, Dupin's world is fictional. Poe is more interested and successful in creating the *effect* of rationality in these tales, which is one of the reasons we read and reread them. But when the Dupin-like ratiocination re-emerges in *Eureka*, where effect is abandoned for a serious attempt to find the solution to the great mystery of creation, the result is different. Not losing sight of this lack of contingency necessary for fictional purposes, we can still see that

Dupin's finding of the source of disorder and restoration of order meets with the same failure that *Eureka*'s contingent world describes. This takes us to the second and main display of Dupin's genius, the murders in the Rue Morgue.

A major source of mystery in the murders in Rue Morgue (indeed the most important one after the murder itself) that leads Dupin to his final "solution" is the incident of languages. After investigating the testimonies of several eyewitnesses, Dupin comes to the conclusion that the source of the voices is not a human being. The only human words that have been heard are *"mon Dieu!"* One almost gets the impression that in the presence of the ferocious unearthly force, Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter Mademoiselle Camille L'Espanaye must have lost consciousness and life altogether. The presence of this superhuman force becomes apparent by the only audible words *"mon Dieu!"*

Dupin's full hopes of a solution are built, according to himself, upon these two words, *"mon Dieu!"* But this is not the only place where he alludes to the godly qualities of the great secret he is after. Critics usually know beforehand who the criminal is. But if we imagine ourselves as readers who have never read this tale before, we will notice the effect that the superhuman qualities of the mystery leaves on us. It leaves a similar effect on the narrator. Dupin refers to the incidents as *"very extraordinary," "very unusual"* (420), *"excessively outré,"* something *"of the great force…of the prodigious power"* (422), "a strength superhuman, … a *grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification" (423). The uninformed reader will, no doubt, be wondering at this point what it is that is so

superhuman, what mystery it is that has its only hope of solution in the two words "*mon Dieu!*" She will soon discover, perhaps in disappointment, that the solution to the great mystery is indeed itself two words: "Ourang-Outang"! Whether or not this is another of Poe's grotesque hoaxes is arguable. But what is undeniable is that finding the source of *mon Dieu* associated with an Ourang-Outang mockingly undermines Dupin's serious and long search for a singular and superhuman mystery. It finds its parallel elsewhere in "The Man that was Used Up" where the narrator's eager search for a great and almost mythical personality leads him to a grotesque and unshapely pile that becomes the *perfect one* only when his screw-on pieces are installed properly. As far as creating the effect of a solution and closure is concerned, Dupin is intriguingly successful. He draws satisfaction from the *game* and from the exercise of his skill. Yet, as we shall see in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" and as is apparent from Poe's letter to Philip Cooke, once these effects and skills are applied to the non-fictional and contingent world of *Eureka*, the result is not quite the same. Poe might have had this in mind when he created the almost satirical effect of the "Ourang-Outang" as solution. The great Dupin's search for the superhuman mystery has only led to an Ourang-Outang, [11] which by the way fades in the background at the end and even brings its master "a very large sum" (431). Thus, there is no sense of justice at the end, at least as far as due punishment for the criminal is concerned. Also, as far as the general desire for the true unity of mystery and solution is concerned, Dupin's solution is as good as nothing. He has perfected the game but its practical result is nothing. The quest for unity has failed again. *Eureka* says it in this

way: "In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all finite perception, Unity must be" (*Tales* 1355).

*The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*

The lack of contingency I mentioned above in discussing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" does not exist in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842). [12] In other words, the ideal world of the former in which events seem to have only one invariable outcome which is then arrested by "the *tact* of Dupin" (*Tales* 511) changes into the real world in the latter where events have infinite possible causes and effects. Poe makes us aware of that himself at the beginning of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" when he quotes Novalis: "There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect. Thus with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism came Lutheranism" (506). From the beginning we know that the "consequences" of Dupin's chase will be "imperfect." In this "real" test of Dupin's ingenuity, the outcome is inevitable: failure.

At the beginning the narrative informs us of the existence of "the Calculus of Probabilities" in the real world. This is a "doctrine of chance, or, ... a series of scarcely intelligible *coincidences*" (507). Hardly past the second page of the narrative and repetitive of his epigram, the narrator states, apologetically, that "when, in an article entitled 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' I endeavored, about a year ago, to depict some very remarkable features in the mental character of my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, it did not occur to me that I should ever resume the subject." He further confesses that it was in the peculiar "train of circumstances

[that] brought to instance Dupin's idiosyncrasy" (507). He goes on to say that what he is about to narrate carries with it "the air of extorted confession" (507). Everything, then, from Poe's epigraph at the beginning to his "confession" prepares the reader for a failure or at least disappointment. The great detective, as we shall see, will fail in his attempt to unify the world from its fragmented chaos, impeded by the very web of infinite probabilities and coincidences that surround the real world. In the real world of infinite contingencies, he simply cannot know everything.

The great detective of the universe in *Eureka* sounds much like Dupin when he accuses other shallow thinkers of ignoring the principle of contingency: "what idea *can* we have of *any* possible contingency, except that it is at once a result and a manifestation of his [God's] laws?" (*Tales* 1313). Both detectives are telling us not to set our expectations too high because ultimately there is no escape from the infinite web of contingencies, and any attempt at bringing the world back to its primal state of *oneness* and order will inevitably fail. This is precisely what happens at the end of both texts. *Oneness* signifies wholeness, predictability, simplicity, consistency, order. Lack of unity signifies fragmentation, unpredictability, complexity, inconsistency, disorder. Both detectives are incapable of taking the world back to its primal *oneness*. Dupin with all his analytic power is absolutely helpless in facing this contingency of the events, "this mass of information" (*Tales* 511), which is here represented by the newspaper clips. Dupin's entire analytic expertise can only go as far as rebutting the hypotheses and conjectures of the newspaper clips, which are in turn coincidences of coincidences. But even when finally he raises his analytic powers above rebuking others' theories and actually tries to come up with his own

"solution," Dupin seems to clear his throat, fidget in his seat a bit, and forcing an air of profundity on his countenance, finally assert the great truth that "corroboration will rise upon corroboration, and the murderer will be traced" (552), never mind that he has already said "each successive one is multiple evidence – proof not *added* to proof, but multiplied by hundreds or thousands" (529); at which point, the kindly and professional editors of the magazine where this account is published rush to his aid and save him a considerable amount of embarrassment by cutting him off, informing us that they "have taken the liberty of here omitting ... such portion as details the *following up* of the apparently slight clew obtained by Dupin" (553). At this point, it is not hard to imagine any attentive reader shouting out: "That's it?! What about the solution of the mystery?" But be patient because the great Dupin goes on to explain.

"I need scarcely tell you," explains Dupin, "that this is a far more intricate case than that of the Rue Morgue; from which it differs in one important respect. This is an *ordinary*, although an atrocious instance of crime. There is nothing *outré* about it. You will observe that, for this reason, the mystery has been considered easy, when, for this reason, it should have been considered difficult, of solution" (519). This is why, as I mentioned above, he cannot trace the solution back to its origin. The mystery is "*ordinary*" and of the everyday world. It is not an "*outré*" situation peculiarly designed "for the express purpose of unravelling." Dupin draws an interesting analogy between ratiocination and fiction which, I believe, reflects the difference between his own ratiocination in the fictional world of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and the real world of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." He says, "in ratiocination, not less than in literature, it is the *epigram* which is the most

immediately and the most universally appreciated. In both, it is of the lowest order of merit" (521). His masterpieces of ratiocination, then, in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," are fictional *epigrams* that have no function in the real world. In the real world of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" such epigrams, according to Dupin himself, are melodramatic ideas merely to create sensation and to get favorable reception from the public. L'Etoile is one of those journals that create epigrammatic melodrama that is rejected and proven wrong by Dupin. But again, beyond rejecting the newspaper clips, Dupin cannot find any other "clew" that would lead to his extraordinary solutions simply because there is none, or even if there is, it is lost in the complex and arbitrary web of coincidences that constitute the universe of *Eureka* as well.

"The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" as well as *Eureka* base themselves on the Platonic philosophy of the parallel worlds, an ideal one and a material one, the union of which is impossible, according to Poe, unless in the total destruction of the material world since the material world is only an image of the ideal world. The quotation from Novalis at the beginning of the tale clearly points to this fact. In Eureka, too, the two parallel worlds are explained in terms of body and spirit: "the two Principles Proper, ... the Material and the Spiritual – accompany each other, in the strictest fellowship, forever. Thus *The Body and The Soul walk hand in hand*" (*Tales* 1306). That is, they walk hand in hand, but never become "*One.*" Dupin places emphasis on this fact by saying, "I repeat that it is no more than fact, that the larger portion of all truth has sprung from the collateral" (534). The oneness of the two worlds, then, is never possible. The ideal world (as in "The Murders in the Rue

Morgue") where finding the mystery of the origin is possible and *oneness* is achieved, and the real world (as in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt") where contingency and fragmentation are the order of the day, can only be parallel. Always parallel, never *"One."* This is the ultimate outcome of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" and *Eureka.* This is the unavoidable conclusion in all of Poe.

To use the analogy of language for this tale, if according to *Eureka* the universe is a text in which every word and line is a signifier that contributes to the general and original meaning of the text, to the signified, then by putting the words and lines together and studying them, we should be able recover the great mystery and find the solution to the original meaning. This is what the great detectives of both *Eureka* and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" hope to achieve. Its failure, they both come to realize. Dupin says, "it is material that we go behind the mere words, for an idea which these words have obviously intended, and failed to convey" (522). The oneness between signifier and signified, then, is ultimately doomed to fail. Language takes us to the next and final similarity between *Eureka* and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt."

Compare the almost verbatim similarity between the following two extracts from "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" and *Eureka* respectively: "That Nature and its God are two, no man who thinks, will deny .... It is not that the Deity *cannot* modify his laws, but that we insult him in imagining a possible necessity for modification. In their origin these laws were fashioned to embrace *all* contingencies which *could* lie in the Future. With God all is *Now*" (553). In the other extract we read: "That Nature and the God of Nature are distinct, no thinking being can long doubt. By the former

we imply merely the laws of the latter ... With Him there being neither Past nor Future – with Him all being *Now* – do we not insult him in supposing his laws so contrived as not to provide for every possible contingency?" (1313). Ultimately, making "Nature and the God of Nature," ideal world and real world, signified and signifier, *one* is impossible. Thus, like all the other tales, in "tracing to its *dénouement* the mystery" (553), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" fails.

*The Gold-Bug*

So far, we have seen Poe attempt to solve the mystery of the origins in two different ways. In "The Gold-Bug" (1843), however, he tries a new "method." Although it might not seem so on the surface, the point at which "The Gold-Bug" differs from the other two is in its "method." But before getting involved with this argument, let us see how the author of *Eureka* views different methods of analysis and truth seeking. In *Eureka* Poe sharply attacks the practitioners of the two *à priori* and *à posteriori* methods of investigation. There he describes "*de*ductive or *à priori*" philosophers as those who start from what they maintain "to be axioms, or self-evident truths" and from those axioms "proceeded to logical results." Poe criticizes this method for failing to take into account that "*no* truths are *self*-evident" (*Tales* 1263). On the other hand, "the *à posteriori* or inductive" thinkers were those who "proceeded by observing, analyzing, and classifying facts – *instantiae Naturae* – as they were somewhat affectedly called – and arranging them into general laws" (1264). Their fault is, says Poe, too much blind attention to "*detail*" (1265).

The practitioners of "the two narrow and crooked paths – the one of creeping and the other of crawling" (1268) are equally distant from truth because "they have

dared to confine the Soul – the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of '*path*'" (1269). But we have all seen the *paths* Dupin has taken in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." We observed in the first tale that it is by using an *à priori* method that Dupin is able to arrive at the conclusion that his friend has been thinking of "Chantilly." Dupin observes his friend's looking at the pavement stones and concludes that it is "*self*-evident" that he is thinking of the stones. This becomes his first "*self*-evident truth" based on which he progresses to reach the series of his logical conclusions. In his second trial, after discovering that the murderer has been an Ourang-Outang and it is owned by a sailor because of the "*self*-evident" truth that a ribbon – tied "in one of those long *queues* of which sailors are so fond" (*Tales* 425) – was found at the foot of the lightning-rod, Dupin goes on to place an ad in "Le Monde" based on the "*self*-evident" truth that the owner, being a sailor, will invariably read the "Le Monde" and, even more surely, see the advertisement.

In "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," Dupin makes use of an *à posteriori* method by collecting facts from the "mass of information" offered by the newspaper clips and by paying attention to the most minute *details* which help him come to the conclusions he does although as we have seen, at the end there *is* no conclusion. Both tales use a combination of both methods with an obvious leaning toward one. Nevertheless, what makes Dupin's method outstanding and different compared to the blunders of the police, even if he uses their inductive and deductive methods, is that he is endowed with a gift of imagination which enables him to see beyond logic or induction, to see the big picture. In another attempt at unifying mystery and solution,

Poe endows a new detective, William Legrand, with this imaginative gift, but with a different method from Dupin's. *Eureka* tells us about it: "I have often thought, my friend, that it must have puzzled these dogmaticians of a thousand years ago, to determine, even, by which of their two boasted roads it is that the cryptographist attains the solution of the more complicate cyphers" (*Tales* 1269). Aha! Cryptography. That takes us to "The Gold-Bug." This tale is where the great detective decides to take a middle path and use a combination of "the two narrow and crooked paths." His methods are different from both Dupins, and so it is perhaps that he is named differently from them. He is William Legrand.

The central motif of "The Gold-Bug" is the duality of meaning that cryptography suggests, the conflict between depth and surface, meaning and speech. The central engine of the tale is the desire to unify the opposing sides of this duality. As the deciphering of the cryptograms represents the making one of cipher and the meaning behind it, the movement in the rest of the tale too is the desire to progress from surface cipher to hidden meaning. Duality of meaning, however, dominates the tale. We see this duality, for instance, in the double significance of Gold (as material wealth and as finding meaning); in the speech words; in the dual layers of surface and depth (Legrand has to penetrate the depth of the earth to find the gold as he has to penetrate the deeper layer of meaning in the map in order to find where the gold lays); in cryptography; in double potentials of interpretation; in the irreconcilability of the signified and the signifier; and in the utility of the dual deductive and inductive methods, to name but a few. The story's central struggle is to create a condition in which these dual aspects can be unified.

The confusingly double nature of speech shows itself in several dialogues.

One of these is between Legrand and the narrator in reference to the gold bug:

> Legrand: ... I lent him the bug; so it will be impossible for you to see
> it until the morning. Stay here to-night, and I will send Jup down for it
> at sunrise. It is the loveliest thing in creation!
> Narrator: What? – Sunrise?
> Legrand: Nonsense! No! – the bug.
> (*Tales* 562)

The second instance occurs between the narrator and Jupiter. This is when the

narrator and Jupiter are conversing about Legrand's apparent illness:

> Jupiter: De bug – I'm berry sartain dat Massa Will bin bit somewhere
> about de head by dat goole-bug.
> Narrator: And what cause have you, Jupiter, for such a supposition?
> Jupiter: Claws enough, massa, and mouff too.
> (565)

The conversation continues to its conclusion where yet another instance of the

arbitrary nature of signified and signifier in language is encountered:

> Narrator: Well, Jup, perhaps you are right; but to what fortunate
> circumstance am I to attribute the honor of a visit from you to-day?
> Jupiter: What de matter, massa?
> Narrator: Did you bring a message from Mr. Legrand?
> Jupiter: No, massa, I bring dis here pissel. (566)

The search for gold starts and Jupiter is made to climb a tree and to find a skull where

he will have to pass the gold-bug through its left eyehole. Jupiter does not want to go

on the old branch of the tree fearing it will break. Legrand insists that he go saying,

"Well! now listen! – if you will venture out on the limb ... I'll make you a present"

(573). Jupiter does indeed *go out on a limb* because he both risks falling down and

provoking Legrand's anger (which he eventually does). While he is up in the tree,

Legrand gives him further instructions: "Pay attention, then! – find the left eye of the

skull." To which Jupiter responds, "Hum! hoo! dat's good! why dar aint no eye lef at all." (573). And later, "Is de lef eye of de skull pon de same side as de lef hand of de skull, too? – cause de skull aint got not a bit ob a hand at all – neber mind!" (574). In these instances, we can see the surplus of meaning in language. In other words, the relationship between signified and signifier in language is contingent. Therefore, there is a lack of a truly meaningful relationship between crypt and meaning. The contingent nature of language in this tale reflects the duality and contingency of the events in the external world since we define and understand them through language. Consequently, in both cases the attempt to unify sign and signifier (external world as the signifier of its creator, words as the signifiers of their meaning) is bound to fail. Therefore, for any success the medium of communication must change which is why the map is on a scrap of parchment and not on paper.

"The scrap of paper, you mean," says the narrator. "No," responds Legrand, "a piece of very thin parchment." The parchment is the appropriate medium because, like the ideal language where deep and surface structures are one, the hidden impression of the "skull, not only in outline, but in size, should so closely resemble" (581) Legrand's drawing. That is why the parchment becomes the ideal medium upon which Legrand's desire for the oneness of sign and meaning can be inscribed and reached at. But even so, he tells us that this is caused by a "singular coincidence and involved in the fact," and goes on to say that "the singularity of this coincidence absolutely stupified me" (581). Once again, we are in the world of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" and *Eureka* where, even if the unity of surface and depth is possible, it is so through absolute coincidence. "But," asserts the narrator, "the skull ... must

have been designed (God knows how or by whom) at some period subsequent to your sketching the *scarabaeus*" (583). To which Legrand responds, "*You* ... did not design the skull, and no one else was present to do it. Then it was not done by human agency. And nevertheless it was done" (583-4). The parchment represents for Legrand the ideal slate on which the mysterious and original meaning has, even if by coincidence, become one with the material surface: "oh rare and happy accident!" exclaims Legrand.

Legrand gets to the point of deciphering the secret of the cipher he has found on the parchment. Here, we enter another phase of the desire and struggle to unify surface code and hidden meaning. He well knows the nature of the secret language he is about to decipher, for "in the present case — indeed in all cases of secret writing — ... the principles of solution ... depend upon, and are varied by, the genius of the particular idiom" (587). In other words, contingency is the nature of all secret languages. Yet, he ventures out on a limb to decipher the secret. Here is where his combination of *à priori* and *à posteriori*, purely based on coincidence, comes into play. He begins by counting the most number of times a code is repeated. Based on the assumption that the language of the cryptographer must have been English and many other "*self*-evident" assumptions, he comes to the conclusion that ";48" represents the word "the" in English. On the basis of this "fact," he goes on to collect more facts, *deductively* mind you, in order to "decipher" the rest of the code. He does, however, decipher it, but in a way much similar to the fashion Dupin reaches his solutions in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." One left-out contingency, of the infinite number of contingencies there are, will easily cause the collapse of "the

*rationale* of [his] development" (591). In this case, for instance, what if the cryptographer did not use articles for reasons of space and complexity? Again, as in the case of Dupin, we can see that in the infinite web of chance and contingency, the ultimate unity of any code with its original meaning is doomed to failure.

There are many other examples of the unavoidable discrepancy between emblem and meaning in this narrative which for lack of space I have to exclude. But generally speaking, everything in this story is an emblem of something else and only by finding the "*connexion*" between the sign and the hidden meaning behind it can Legrand unify them and arrive at his solutions. However, we know that these connections are only possible through mere coincidences, coincidences that are designed and provided by the text of "The Gold-Bug." As Legrand himself says, "these series of accidents and coincidences" were "so *very* extraordinary. Do you observe how mere an accident it was that these events should have occurred on the *sole* day of all the year in which it has been, or may be, sufficiently cool for fire, and that without the fire, or without the intervention of the dog at the precise moment in which he appeared, I should never have become aware of the death's-head, and so never the possessor of the treasure?" (585). The Gold that he has found, then, the ideal condition that will restore him to his primal wealth and happiness, is but the result of a series of fictional coincidences, coincidences that, if not provided by the text of "The Gold Bug," will lead Legrand to say, "I was sorely put out by the absence of all else – of the body to my imagined instrument – of the text for my context" (585).

*The Purloined Letter*

In Chapter two I argued that the closing stories of each of Poe's cycles are failures compromised. In other words, in these closing tales, of which "The Purloined Letter" (1844) is one, Poe gives up the struggle to *unify* source and the manifestation of source, the cause and its effect. In "The Purloined Letter," the simplistic and obsessive emphasis on a final solution apparent in the other tales of ratiocination is abandoned in favor of *process*. In this respect, the content of the letter, whose secret meaning has evoked so much argument, is a secret that we simply were not meant to know. The closest we can get to the letter's secret content is to purloin the process of its purloining. Back to *Eureka*: "We shall find, *wrapped up in the process of solution*, the key to the secret at which we aim" (*Tales* 1294). "The Purloined Letter," then, becomes the narrative of infinite purloinings of purloinings, repetitions of repetitions, without ever discovering the secret contents that originated "the First Act" of purloining in the first place. Dupin himself confesses that "the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt" was but "something of a coincidence" (*Tales* 680). Not surprisingly then, the present case will be one of the purloining of processes. Indeed, the entire story is woven around this *process*. This is apparent even in the most *in*significant details of the story, in Dupin's joke on the Prefect of Police for instance. There was once a rich miser, Dupin relates, who sought medical advice from a certain Abernethy without intending to pay for it. He took his case to the physician as that of an imaginary third-person patient. " 'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what

would *you* have directed him to take?' 'Take!' said Abernethy, 'why, take *advice*, to be sure' " (687-8).

In "The Frame of Reference," Barbara Johnson notices that "the story's beginning is thus an infinitely regressing reference to previous writings" (233). She is referring to the "little back library, or book-closet" which has been the scene of the narrator and Dupin's initial acquaintance while searching for the same rare book. In this way, "The Purloined Letter" is already repeating its predecessors. A look at the story will clarify the point. We will first establish the secret content of the letter which is beyond all human reach. The closest the story takes us to the letter's original content is that "it is clearly inferred ... from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber's possession" (681). This secret content shall always remain hidden and we are only able to know in whose possession it is by the *effects* it yields. This is quite similar to the way one would know the presence of god from certain effects or "the non-appearance of certain results." That the letter belongs to "a personage of most exalted station" adds more credibility to the idea that it is above the reaches of everyday world. Besides, the letter's content is only really at home in the hands of that "personage of most exalted station"; it is meant to be in the hands of the origin. Not surprisingly, the identity of that personage as well as the content of the letter are secrets that remain ever above our reach. Therefore, the letter is obviously associated with a secret origin. We already know, along with Poe, that this original meaning will never be revealed or known, and thus in his last compromised failure, Poe emerges triumphant in perfecting the process of purloining the origin.

This takes us to the idea, also explored in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," that there are two series of events, one ideal and one real, which will always run parallel but never coincide. Dupin's attempt in "The Purloined Letter" is to make these two phases coincide as much as possible, though not completely, so that the outcome of this coincidence, the letter, can travel back to its origin *through* the process, "*through* identification" (689) as Dupin says. This is why process finds such significance in this tale. In the words of Dupin, "the material world ... abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description" (694). The closer the second version can repeat the original one, the closer it is to the ideal. "The Purloined Letter" is the reservoir of such repetitions. This is first pointed out by Dupin when he relates his story about a schoolboy of "about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration" (689). The boy's method is to assume a "*thorough* identification" with his opponent. The schoolboy's own description of his method runs thus: "when I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression" (690). In other words, since the boy can never exactly know the original thought of his opponent, he tries to mimic the *process* of the opponent's facial expressions. He does this in the hope of getting as close as possible to the *origin* of his guess, but never completely *one* with it. We know from

before that in the real world due to its infinite contingency, there can never be a guarantee for the success of this method. Besides, as mentioned before, the ultimate failure of the unity between source and its double has in this tale been compromised by an emphasis on the perfection of purloining the *process*.

This takes us to the main battle of the story where in an attempt to return the letter to its rightful origin, Dupin repeats his double Minister D's ingenious *process* of purloining the letter so closely that the Minister falls victim to his own method. This is precisely why the Prefect has not been able to find the letter, because, Dupin tells us, "had the purloined letter been within the limits of the Prefect's examination – in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended with the principles of the Prefect – its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question" (691). Thus the Prefect fails because he cannot repeat, and therefore reverse, the minister's process of purloining of the original purloining by that "personage of most exalted station." After all, this is what the Minister has done himself. Not only the original process of purloining, but also the letter itself, has "been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed and re-sealed" (969). Thus, symbolically, the minister has become the unrightful owner of the process of origination. It is Dupin who can, by thoroughly identifying with the minister, know "the *true* methodical habits of D ____" (696) and add another link to the chain of purloinings that started from the original one. But since the original owner is of the letter and must be reunited with it, if the repetition of the process of purloining is perfectly done, the purloined letter must and will return to its original owner. And

this is all Dupin is concerned with, returning the purloined letter to its origin by repeating and perfecting its process of origination.

Lacan and Derrida also talk about the repetitive structure in "The Purloined Letter." Lacan's main point is that each time the purloining is repeated, a new signifier has symbolically displaced the old one in an attempt to possess the signified. However, Lacan's argument tends to ignore the problematic nature of origin and origination in the story. Derrida seems to be much closer to this central struggle in the tale when he argues that each purloining is of an origin whose origin is another purloining whose origin is not locatable. And so on until eternity. We are back to the Poesque desire for unity with an origin, which as Poe himself has shown in a sophisticated way in this tale, is ultimately impossible.

It is important to discuss the notion of "method" in a tale that focuses so much on process. Here is the method by which, as *Eureka* states, god created the material world: "With this understanding, I now assert – that an intuition altogether irresistible, although inexpressible, forces me to the conclusion that what God originally created – that that Matter which, by dint of his Volition, he first made from his Spirit, or from Nihility, *could* have been nothing but Matter in its utmost conceivable state of – what? – of *Simplicity*" (*Tales* 1277). Let us see now the method to which the Minister resorts. Dupin says, "I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity*" (*Tales* 693). Given that the method of the original owner of the letter (as well as of the universe in *Eureka*) is characterized by *simplicity*, it is not hard to see what Poe means by saying that "We shall find, *wrapped up in the process of solution*, the key to the secret at which we aim." Just

for the same reason that in *Eureka* philosophers fail to find the secret of the origin because they ignore the *simplicity* of god's method, the Prefect fails to find the secret of the letter's location because he fails to realize the *simplicity* of the Minister's method. Just for that same reason, Dupin manages to find the letter because he does see the simplicity of the Minister's method, who in turn saw the simplicity of the original owner's method, and so on. But reaching and becoming the origin itself is impossible because every individual purloining is but an image of another origin whose origin we do not know. As Poe tells us, we may find our secret by imitating the process of the origin's act.

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that in repeating the process of the Minister's purloining, Dupin finds himself "imitating the D ___ cipher" (697). Given the perhaps not accidental similarity between the first letter of the names of the two men, we can see the movement backwards. By "imitating the D ___ cipher," Dupin has really become identical with D ___ who has become identical with the original owner because, remembering back, the Minister's addressing of the letter is "in a diminutive female hand" (695). In this way, every purloining becomes closely identical with its previous version but never one with it because none can fathom the secret contents of the letter. The endless chain of repetitions continues without ever reaching the origin, a repetition that started from the moment of separation from the state of *"One"* and shall continue until the last moment of reunion. This is perfectly shown in the inclusion of the signature by Dupin in the *fac-simile* that he leaves for D ___. As Barbara Johnson points out, the quotation in the signature is from a story that is about purloining. In this way, "'The Purloined Letter,' a story of repetition, is itself

a repetition of the story from which it purloins its last words ... what it repeats is nothing less than a previous story of repetition" (236). Or, as Joseph N. Riddel argues in "The 'Crypt' of Edgar Poe," the quotation consists of purloined letters themselves from "a myth about origins the origin of which is unlocatable" (140).

With all that has been said above, there is yet another side to the argument. It may be said that the endless recurrence of the desire for unity, the very predictability of this repetition, its lack of contingency is Poe's ironic twist on the motif of oneness since the predictability of the repeated desire creates an *effect* of oneness. In other words, Poe's tales create an effect of oneness by reflecting, in one way or another, a single desire. In this way, although they do not achieve oneness, they succeed in mirroring its effect. Poe stages the tales' failure of achieving unity which may mean that he is himself on the side of failure, a failure which is an ironic success in that it finds its meaning in the method, the process of mastering the desire for unity. The tales, especially tales of ratiocination, might not achieve mastery of unity but they do achieve mastery of display. However perverse (or intuitive) his methods in the detective tales, Poe's overall effect is mastery and resolution – although temporary. Perhaps Poe's and Dupin's ironic successes merely highlight the chaos of the world in which Dupin is a sparkle of light surrounded by darkness (as he always is in his dark and poorly lit library), a lone prophet of order in a universe of chaos and disorder.

**Chapter Three:** *"The Plainly Inevitable Annihilation"*

Then, indeed, amid unfathomable abysses, will be glaring unimaginable suns. But all this will be merely a climactic magnificence foreboding the great End. Of this End the new genesis described can be but a very partial postponement. While undergoing consolidation, the clusters themselves, with a speed prodigiously accumulative, have been rushing towards their own general centre – and now, with a million-fold electric velocity, commensurate only with their material grandeur and with their spiritual passion for oneness, the majestic remnants of the tribe of Stars flash, at length, into a common embrace. The inevitable catastrophe is at hand.

*Eureka*

"The inevitable catastrophe" is indeed at hand. For in the rest of the tales there is no vain hope for a prophet-detective who can take the world back to its original state of bliss; there are no beautiful women whose death and reincarnation can, at least momentarily, bring one *"upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember" *(Tales* 264-5). So far we have seen how the desire for oneness has been embodied in beautiful women or in creating a fictional world where coincidences can be overcome and controlled by the detective. From this point on all is loss, anguish, and inevitable catastrophe. The tales of the uncanny group manifest this desire in other ways: they involve their narrators in journeys, murders, dreams, mesmerism, and madness all of which is the result of an obsession with unity. The journeys are tales such as "MS. Found in a Bottle" and "A Descent into the Maelstrom" where an excursion to an unknown and often sublime space, usually outside worldly temporality and spatiality, enacts the sense of awe of a narrator who experiences that last moment of common embrace. Tales belonging to the category of murder and death are those, such as "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Cask of Amontillado," and "The Black Cat" that display the existential anguish of a person,

often a madman, who, in the absence of a benevolent transcendence, takes the law in his hands, commits atrocities, and at times falls victim to his own imp of the perverse. [13] The third group composes of tales that sketch the horrible doom of being in a fragmented state, of having a double image that haunts, and of the inevitable ultimate collapse into a oneness that is death. "William Wilson" is the outstanding example. Finally, the tales in the fourth group are the ones that explore the psychological horrors of the moment of apocalypse. Chief among those is, of course, "The Fall of the House of Usher." These last tales all, in one way or another, deal with the coming of "the inevitable catastrophe," which is the unavoidable plunging back of all material particles into a horrible embrace of destruction as *Eureka* describes.

*The Fall of the House of Usher*

"The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) displays, perhaps in the most sophisticated way among other tales, the notion of duality and the desire for unity. The notion of duality manifests itself on several layers in this story, for instance, between Madeline and Usher or the House and Usher among others. Whether the underlying conflict of the story is seen as the opposition between consciousness and the unconscious, natural and supernatural, dream and reality, id and superego, or any other such conflict, it is always the same desire to move from duality to unity that characterizes each reading. My reading in this study accounts for the over-arching motif of duality, seen in any light, and the ultimate desire for unity. The story is peppered throughout with double layers that move towards an ultimate collapse into oneness. That, for instance, Madeline's tomb is at great depth directly beneath Usher/House, shows the narrative's overall desire to bring depth to surface, beneath

to beyond, spiritual to physical. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is Poe's masterpiece because it brings to light, in the most intricate way, his life-long anxiety over a lost origin and his horrible realization that the final unity so pined for will be but an "inevitable catastrophe."

The first time the narrator looks at the house and the scenery enveloping it, "upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees," his soul grows gloomy and sick with a depression that he "can compare to no earthly sensation" (*Tales* 317). The source of this gloom and depression is "a mystery all insoluble" (317). Grappling with the mystery of this feeling, the narrator discovers that its ultimate comprehension is beyond his understanding. He has to "fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth" (317). From these feelings of the narrator, we know immediately that the source of the depression is unearthly. The narrator then decides to change his perspective, in order "perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression" (318). Three more times he examines the house from different angles only to find "a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of individual stones" (319-20). The narrator has thus scrutinized the house four times and upon the closest examination has found that while the house as a whole looks intact, its parts are inconsistent and crumbling. The crumbling condition of the House of Usher is revisited in *Eureka* where seemingly consistent particles continuously show a tendency to collapse into their original unity.

In *Eureka* Poe talks about the universe as a consistent entity but with its parts and particles governed by "the two Principles Proper, *Attraction* and *Repulsion*" (*Tales* 1306), and characterized by an individual inconsistency which shall eventually lead to their common embrace at the centre whence they came. The same principle rules the House of Usher and no wonder that it goes down in a final embrace to the pool that reflects its image. The results of such a future Roderick prophesies and dreads: "'I shall perish,' said he, 'I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results" (322). Roderick's self-consuming fear is the result of his knowledge of such a future[14].

The fissure that extends "from the roof of the building in front" and makes "its way down the wall in zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn" (320) is indeed the microcosmic parallel of the first macrocosmic split at the moment of creation. This is the doom to which Usher and his House, man and his world, are bound – "an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence" (323). As the quotation shows, the "*morale*" of Usher's existence, his obsession and anxiety, is an effect that is produced by the relation between physical objects and the centre whence their image issues forth, in this case the tarn. Since the house ultimately does join its image in the tarn, it reinforces the movement from duality and division to unity and oneness. The implication is, then, that Usher's universe is well on its way to an ultimate and "inevitable catastrophe." What follows in the story is further evidence, a kind of prophecy, for the final

collapse. In looking at Roderick's face, for instance, the narrator cannot "even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity" (321). The arabesque is characterized by patterns that enforce the idea of repetition. As we saw in the case of "Ligeia," these repetitive patterns are a microcosmic representation of the repetitive cycle of life and death, division and unity, in the external universe. Therefore, the arabesque quality of Usher's face and his furniture underlines the nature of the incidents that are about to happen in the external world. This we see in Usher's painting as well.

Usher's paintings are characterized by a "vagueness" and "simplicity" (324) which as we have already seen in *Eureka* characterize the author of the universe's work as well. The narrator notices a vagueness in Roderick's paintings "at which I shuddered the more thrillingly" and through which "by the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and overawed attention." By repeating the process of creation (simplicity and vagueness), Usher shows both his otherworldly connections and the desire for oneness with the otherworldly origin. The other artwork is also associated with an unearthly tone which prophesies the end. This is Usher's poem "The Haunted Palace," which as we saw in the case of Ligeia's verses, presents a picture of the creation from its heavenly unity with the ruler of the universe to its bitter separation and its final collapse back into nothingness. The first four stanzas of the poem portray a condition "that was in the olden / Time long ago" and when "The ruler of the realm was seen" (326). But near the end of the poem, "the glory / That blushed and bloomed / Is but a dim-remembered story / Of the old time entombed" (327). [15] "The Haunted Palace" reflects the condition of the House of

Usher, which in turn mirrors the condition of the material world: these are all separated from an origin and they will all go back to it.

The "sentience of all vegetable things" that Usher believes in will figure itself in *Eureka* too where material atoms have a tendency, by instinct, to draw towards the centre of their issuance. Usher's belief points to this fact: "the conditions of the sentience had been here ... fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones – in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many *fungi* which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around – above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn" (327). I want to emphasize the words "undisturbed endurance" and "reduplication." The former points to the age-old system of collocation in the universe while the latter refers to the process of duplication from a source, in this case the tarn. The material things around the house, the stones, trees, fungi, suffer from the same "deficiency" that the House of Usher itself does – "collateral issue" (319). As we saw in *Eureka*, the material particles, once willed into existence from their original state of oneness, are doomed to eternally duplicate and reduplicate themselves despite their general desire for the primal condition of oneness. This is the destiny of all material things, according to *Eureka*, until they are unified with their source at the end of time in "the awful Future." Therefore, the House of Usher and its surroundings become, again, the model for the cosmic destiny in *Eureka*.

We have seen above how the House of Usher and its surroundings mirror the universe and its unavoidable destiny. "The 'House of Usher'," the narrator tells us, is "an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who use it,

both the family and the family mansion" (319). This ties the destiny of the Usher family to the destiny of the House of Usher which is in turn tied to the destiny of its surroundings. And therefore the last layer of Poe's masterpiece plays itself out. Usher lives his life hoping to escape but in sheer terror of his "collateral issue." He knows that unity with his collateral issue will inevitably lead to destruction and nothingness. He sees it in the vegetables; he sees it in the house; he sees it in the outside world. Roderick leads his deteriorating life in the shadow of this fear while Madeline grows more and more ill. Thus, the tale in its richness, using multiple levels of meaning and symbolism, gives meaning to the rather simplistically straightforward categories of *Eureka*.

Usher enters her still-living body into a tomb at great depth under the house, sealing it in the remotest possible area. He imagines that by doing so, by burying the fear of the final moment, the final unity, he shall be relieved of his fear and of his destiny. But in vain. His fear grows, his agitation increases and the narrator reads him the famous narrative of the "Mad Trist" in an attempt to alleviate his condition. Like "The Haunted Palace," the "Mad Trist" is a parallel narrative that reflects what will happen in the main narrative. This intricate web of intertextual parallels plays itself out in the most sophisticated way, as we have seen, while all texts refer to the metatext of the universe and share its destiny. Thus the "Mad Trist" heralds the unveiling of the last moment and the arrival of the much feared moment.

Madeline mysteriously emerges from the tomb that shall not keep her forever, from the depths of Usher's house and being, to meet him in the final and inevitable embrace. Madeline might also be seen representing multiplicity, flesh and blood

reappearing from containment; the body, the repressed, the female violently resisting and shattering deathly ideals. She might be seen bringing multiplicity to bear on unity – she smashes her tomb, shatters the House of Usher, brings "the voice of a thousand waters." Yet, although she controls and brings about Roderick's final destiny, her own fate is entangled with the larger fate of the house. Her otherness is as overwhelming to Usher as her embrace of unity and destruction because in both conditions she represents the final moment. Roderick is well aware that he cannot entomb and avoid the final moment; he has always heard, always seen its coming: "yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long – long – long – many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it – yet I dared not – oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! – I dared not – I *dared* not speak*! We have put her living in the tomb!*" (334). The inevitable moment, "the inevitable catastrophe," emerges, bears Roderick "to floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (335). The sense of duality along with the inevitable moment of unity work themselves out in many sophisticated ways. Fragmentation and the tendency to collapse are present almost everywhere in the tale: the house and its image; Madeline and Roderick; the reduplication of the surroundings in the tarn; the duplication of the final moment of the story by layers of intertext among others. The tale is Poe's masterpiece of the notions of duality and unity. Yet, he is to explore the motif in yet another story of the doubles.

*William Wilson*

The double is a dominant motif in Poe's tales manifesting itself on many different levels. Yet, *the* double story of all the tales in Poe is "William Wilson" (1840). But one might ask how a story about doubles can fall back on the dominant

motif of oneness and unity in Poe. Well, the very condition of 'twoness' connotes not being one. It also refers to a state of separation from an identical *"One."* With this comes the simultaneous conflict and attraction between the two halves. I have already talked about *Eureka*'s "two Principles Proper, *Attraction* and *Repulsion*" that characterize material phenomena. The model is taken up in "William Wilson." The story opens with Wilson's mention of his school and his description of it as a state in which he was unaware of the curse of having a double. This state is, therefore, appropriately associated with childhood, a state in which knowledge of one's inevitable divisibility does not yet exist. This condition can roughly be seen as the parallel of *Eureka*'s primal moment before the first act of division. The moment, however, is inescapable and Wilson finally becomes aware of his double image. Like all other protagonists in Poe, Wilson's feeling toward the notion of duality is mixed.

Wilson both despises and respects his other half, both frightens and fears him: "It is difficult, indeed, to define, or even to describe, my real feelings towards him. They formed a motley and heterogeneous admixture; – some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity ... in addition, that Wilson and myself were the most inseparable of companions" (*Tales* 343). Once again, Wilson's simultaneous attraction to and fear of his double reflects the twofold principle – attraction and repulsion – that governs the divided particles in the universe of *Eureka*.

Besides William Wilson the story "William Wilson" also has two halves: a primal state of heavenly childhood and union followed by a hellish world of daily events, adulthood, and duality. The first part of the story dramatizes the ideal state of

unity and closeness to origin that precedes the moment of separation. Not surprisingly and not unlike many other narrators in Poe, Wilson gives us his fictitious earthly name. He either does not remember or fears to speak his real name. His present name is "one of those every-day appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob" (341). Immediately a differentiation is established between his "every-day" appellation and his "real" name, which is "not very dissimilar to" his earthly name. The separation between earthly and real appellations prefigures the separation between the two worlds themselves. His earthly name, then, symbolizes "a cloud, dense, dismal, and limitless" that nags "eternally between ... [his] hopes and heaven" (337). Furthermore, Wilson speaks of his earthly life as an "epoch — these later years — [which] took unto themselves a sudden elevation in turpitude, whose *origin* alone it is my present purpose to assign" (337, my emphasis). He goes on to describe this origin in the following pages.

The school and its surroundings where he used to live were "a dream-like and spirit-soothing place." As is usually the case in Poe, the setting here is described as one of primal ignorance and mystery, something beyond the "real" physical world. As Nancy Berkowitz Bate has also noticed, "Wilson has a vague inkling that his world and even his 'self' are not 'real'" (27). Wilson can still feel "the refreshing chilliness of its deeply-shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight, at the deep hollow note of the church-bell" (338). His fall and separation, not surprisingly, are connected with this heavenly state, "with a period and a locality when and where I recognize the first ambiguous

monitions of the destiny which afterwards so fully overshadowed me. Let me then remember" (338-9). But besides its heavenly attributes, the school is also described as gothic, vast, filled with stairs and secret rooms, irregular, mysterious, rambling, surrounded by innumerable recesses. The implication here again is of the condition of mysterious origins.

Wilson goes on to describe his school principal in terms that are not unlike those used to describe a deity. This deity, too, like the deity of the universe, is a combination of benevolence and malevolence. Wilson describes him in these terms: "With how deep a spirit of wonder and perplexity was I wont to regard him from our remote pew in the gallery, as, with step solemn and slow, he ascended the pulpit! This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, ... so rigid and so vast, – could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy? Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!" (339). The metaphors that accompany the schoolmaster – principal, school, church – are all associated with a mysterious and double-sided power whose secret and grand dealings are beyond one's limited perception. The paradox Wilson cannot solve is the dual nature of universe and its god. What he cannot reconcile is how the benevolent creator of the universe, if there is one, could have caused so painful a separation and imposed such Draconian laws on His creation. The fact that Wilson describes the school as the place "through ... [whose] sacred division we passed only upon rare occasions indeed – such as first advent to school or final departure thence" (339), may refer to the state with which the school is associated: the original point of

primal advent and final departure. "Encompassed by the massy walls of this venerable academy," says Wilson, "I passed, yet not in tedium or disgust, the years of the third lustrum of my life" (340). The moment of the inevitable fragmentation is at hand and from now on all connection with that blissful past is lost: *"Oh, le bon temps, que ce siecle de fer!"* (341).

*"Le bon temps"* come to an end when Wilson becomes aware of a divided self, duality, division. His double, the second Wilson, is the image of his own preexistence. That this image is of a higher origin is supported by the narrative in different ways. Wilson's double has a "singular *affectionateness"* (342) that irritates Wilson. He is morally superior to Wilson and is of a greater wisdom: "let me do him the simple justice to acknowledge ... that his moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and worldly wisdom, was far keener than my own" (345). His voice is of an unearthly quality hardly *"above a very low whisper."* And Wilson notices that "above all, it was the character, the tone, the key, of those few, simple, and familiar, yet whispered syllables, which came with a thousand memories of by-gone days, and struck upon my soul with the shock of a galvanic battery" (349). We will see later how this whisper haunts Wilson from within and from without and has a grip over his earthly life. Furthermore, Wilson's image, because of bearing the same name, reminds him of his miserable earthly appellation and is "the cause of its twofold repetition" (344). Nothing summarizes Wilson's double's unearthly associations better than Wilson's own comment: "I discovered, in his accent, his air, and general appearance, a something which first startled, and then, deeply interested me, by bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy – wild, confused and thronging

memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn. I cannot better describe the sensation which oppressed me than by saying that I could with difficulty shake off the belief of my having been acquainted with the being who stood before me, at some epoch very long ago – some point of the past even infinitely remote" (346).

Not unlike Roderick Usher, Wilson tries his best to suppress the terrific influence of this unearthly whisper and thus he leaves school and takes refuge in worldly pleasures and vice. With perverse spirit that will figure again in later tales, he commits acts of depravity "for the very enormity ... against all manly and honourable sentiment" (350). Wilson leaves the school, enters the external world, and pursues his acts of depravity until one night while cheating Lord Glendinning of a large sum of money at a game of "*écarté,*" the same "distinct, and never-to-be forgotten *whisper* which thrilled to the very marrow of my bones," reappears and shames him. Wilson tries to flee the influence of this presence "and its mysterious dominion," but "*I fled in vain*" (353). Wherever he goes, to Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, Egypt, it haunts him: "to the very ends of the earth *I fled in vain*" (354). Anywhere he turns, "the elevated character, the majestic wisdom, the apparent omnipresence and omnipotence" does not leave him and he hears "that ever-remembered, low, damnable *whisper* within my ear" (355). Wilson grows fearful and agitated under its absolute dominance and tries to escape it but since escape is impossible, the inevitable catastrophe approaches again, the final moment of total annihilation, of unity with the mysterious and long-lost origin. It happens at a ball where Wilson finds the *whisper* attired exactly like him and in a moment of wrath stabs him over and over again. The whisper and Wilson's voice finally merge into

one that spells these syllables: "*You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforth 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*" (356-7). Again, death is figured in the unity of body and spirit. Death becomes the moment of the unification of the diffused particles just as life has marked the moment of their diffusion. The issue of moral and guilty selves also seems crucial to the story but what underlies this issue as well is the struggle of each self to utterly possess, and therefore annihilate, the other. Complete unity, then, is again (as is the case in *Eureka*) associated with the total annihilation of the divided self.

## The Masque of the Red Death

Whether or not Poe is a symbolist, his "The Mask of the Red Death" (1842) is one of those tales in which a complex and high degree of symbolism is at work. In line with other tales, Life and Death — as the points of diffusion from and return into unity — form the core of this symbolism. If birth marks the beginning of an inevitable journey towards death and nothingness, then the movement from birth to death is really from nothingness to nothingness. Here it is then: the movement in "The Masque of the Red Death." It is a movement from death and nothingness to death and nothingness. As in the tales we have seen so far, and as in *Eureka*, all the material world starts from nothingness and to its centre of nothingness it shall return. It is not coincidental, then, that the story starts with the dominance of the Red Death over all (a dominance that will restore itself again at the end): "THE 'RED DEATH' had long devastated the country" (*Tales* 485). Everything has submitted to its

omnipresence except Prince Prospero who, in an attempt to escape the influence of the Red Death, retires "to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys" (485). This is an extensive and magnificent castle with iron gates and strong and lofty walls that are hoped to shut the influence of the fatal disease out. We can see the emergence of two parallel worlds again, one which reigns and devastates the external world and one that has been made within lofty walls to create a sense of ideality and security. On the cosmic level again, this could refer to a similar parallel between the external universe and the earth, on which lofty structures seem to make humanity forget that it is ultimately at the mercy of the great force that drives all in the same direction. Yet, the absolute seclusion with his select courtiers within lofty walls is Prince Prospero's way of creating an ideal condition of security and bliss for himself and his subjects: "There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the 'Red Death'" (485).

As has been the case in several other tales, the time is approaching the *seventh* day/month. It is "close to the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion" that Prince Prospero throws his magnificent masquerade: the fifth or sixth month, which means we are approaching the seventh and last. The number seven here is closely related to the number of rooms in Prince Prospero's castle abbey which is also seven: "let me tell of the rooms ... There were seven- an imperial suite" (485). As we saw before, if creation took place in six days, then the seventh is its end. A look at the description of the seventh room supportss this idea: "The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls ... But in

this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet – a deep blood color" (486). The colors black and red both are referents to nothingness and death. Besides, the room encircles the space where the Red Death will appear and where all life will vanish. That it coincides with the seventh month, then, is perfectly in accordance with the symbolism of the number and the colors. Furthermore, blood can be an emblem of both life and death. The flowing blood that pumps life and the shed blood that signifies death merge in the seventh to bring about the final darkness and death. Likewise, life and death will meet on the seventh day of creation to bring all to their ultimate destiny.

Because of this particular symbolic significance of the seventh room, the gigantic clock of ebony, itself an emblem of Time with the swing of its dull, heavy, and monotonous pendulum, is situated in that room. The clock notifies all of the unstoppable passage of time, its inevitable movement towards the final moment, the seventh day, in the seventh room. Each hour the sound "from the brazen lungs of the clock" (487) so disturbs the gaiety and forgetfulness of the residents because it reminds them of the final moment, of "the inevitable catastrophe."

The final hour, the hour of Death, however, comes when both the hands of the clock and the days of creation have gone through a complete cycle. The last hour of the day, the seventh month of life in the castle, the seventh room, herald the coming of the unavoidable moment. The moment arrives and the figure of the Red Death, "dabbled in *blood*" (489) emerges. The Prince gets agitated by the presence of such an unwanted guest and rushes through all six rooms, in a symbolic gesture that shows his passage through life, and reaches the seventh chamber where all time and space,

all life, shall come together in a final and inescapable unity: "And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night" (490). The biblical allusion to the second coming of Christ like a thief in the night (Van Leer 332) completes the cosmic symbolism of the tale. Time runs out and all things embrace nothingness: "the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all" (490). Death embraces life in a final unity that is destruction.

## The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar

In tales such as "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" or "Mesmeric Revelation," we see mesmerism at work as the connecting link between the two ideal and real worlds. In "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845), mesmerism reemerges to function as the medium which is hoped to arrest the moment of death[16]. It is an attempt to transcend physical boundaries and to get in touch with one's metaphysical source[17]. But whereas, generally speaking, the moment of death in earlier tales displays at least faint hopes of reunion with a transcendence, here, and in many other later tales as I mentioned above, the final moment of death and supposed union results in a hideous liquid pile of a slimy appearance. The existential disgust with the human body, therefore, may be considered as a new way of looking at existence in this tale. If there is no divine source from which bodies issue and to which bodies will return, then all that is left is a disgusting pile of liquid with a "highly offensive odor" (*Tales* 841) that is humanity's origin and end. This disgust, seen elsewhere in

Poe as well, shows his unhealthy attitude toward the body, or at least towards body that is devoid of a transcendental link.

The central anxiety of this tale is "*clairvoyance*" (834). The story's obsession is with the future. Its underlying desire is to explore the future of life *after* death, that is after the identity transcends the physical *presence* in both its temporal and spatial aspects and travels toward a futurity that is the meeting point of all matter. Accordingly, everyone in the story is constantly on the look out for what happens *next*. This constant state of expectancy for an unknown future (part of Poe's desire to escape body in some future moment) ties the tale to its cosmic antecedent *Eureka*. There, "the awful Present" is followed by "the still more awful Future" (*Tales* 1353). Here, too, "the awful Present" of a physical world that is bound to agony and death is followed by "the still more awful Future" that ends in "a liquid mass of loathsome — of detestable putridity" (842). The movement from the awful present to the more awful future in this tale is dramatized by descriptions of a gradually decaying body until it perishes and ends in its loathsome liquid future. The physical body, therefore, becomes the sole site of the hideous and inevitable game of present and future.

Thus, the body, its presence, and its future are the focal points of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." The minute medical description of physical conditions, particularly during its decay, adds to the overall disgust with the physical in this story. A look at the description of Valdemar's decaying condition proves this point: "The left lung had been for eighteen months in a semi-osseous or cartilaginous state, and was, of course, entirely useless for all purposes of vitality. The right ... was also partially ... ossified while the lower region was merely a mass of purulent tubercles,

running one into another. Several extensive perforations existed; and, at one point, permanent adhesion to the ribs had taken place" (835). Such descriptions are peppered throughout the story and invariably arouse a feeling of nausea with the body. The hatred of the physical body in the story becomes more understandable when one takes into account its source. The source of such disgust with physicality is physicality itself. In other words, in the absence of a spirit all that is left is a disgusting pile which is subject to the most hideous drama of decay. And since the "Divine Will" of the earlier stories has ceased to exist here, we are left only with the physical in and of itself.

Despite dramatizing a disgust with the body, the story does not differ from the rest of Poe's stories in its emphasis on a certain connection between the body and a mysterious region beyond its physical domain. This connection is here placed in the unearthly quality of Valdemar's voice. It conveys "some idea of its unearthly peculiarity" and seems "to reach our ears ... from a vast distance, or from some deep cavern within the earth" (839). But no matter how unearthly the voice is, it is still "the same hideous voice" (841). Therefore, the source of the body, even if it is unearthly, is still a hideous one, one that could speak such repulsive drama into the physical world. In the absolute absence of a benevolent transcendence, all that is physical starts in a detestable liquid mass and ends in it. Finally and in its most misanthropic, nauseously sexual, and sullen metaphor, the story describes the beginning and end of all physicality in "ejaculations" of a "liquid mass of loathsome – of detestable putridity" (842).

*The Cask of Amontillado*

Some critics trace the origin of "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) to cultural and historical contexts[18]. But the tale also lends itself to the tales of the "imp of the perverse," where in the absence of a "Divine Will," the narrator takes the power into his own hands and exerts his will on the world[19]. The narrator of "The Cask of Amontillado" is like the narrators of the other tales of the imp of the perverse in that he is the sole arbitrator of morality and justice. He has his own version of morality and justice and carries it out skillfully and coolly without any fear of a divine punishment. He is unlike them in that at the end he feels the presence of no mysterious force that can override his will and drive him to self-destruction[20]. All that matters is his own will. In this Montresor becomes the embodiment of the worldview in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," because the presence of no transcendence haunts him. He commits his crime carefully and perfectly and is able to coolly reflect back on it fifty years later. For in a world devoid of any transcendental purpose, morality is but a vacant sound and the will of the individual is all that there is. *Eureka* summarizes Montresor in a few lines: "In this view, and in this view alone, we comprehend the riddles of Divine Injustice – of Inexorable Fate. In this view alone the existence of Evil becomes intelligible; but in this view it becomes more – it becomes endurable. Our souls no longer rebel at a *Sorrow* which we ourselves have imposed upon ourselves, in furtherance of our own purposes – with a view – if even with a futile view – to the extension of our own *Joy*" (*Tales* 1357).

In such a view, the individual becomes a god-figure for all those that he can exert his power on. Consequently, Montresor wishes to make his presence felt: "I

must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong" (*Tales* 848). Right from the beginning, then, Montresor has become the sole arbitrator of the world, and as we will see he imposes his will on every movement of Fortunato, from his decisions to his speech to his death.

In amazing syntactic twists, language in the narrative functions at Montresor's will, who can use it to speak his will, like god, even in the presence of his victim. For instance, from the first moment he mentions his concern about a pipe of Amontillado, Fortunato simply cannot escape its grip:

> Montresor: I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain.
> Fortunato: Amontillado!
> Montresor: I have my doubts.
> Fortunato: Amontillado!
> Montresor: And I must satisfy them.
> Fortunato: Amontillado! (849)

In another remarkable instance, with Montresor's verbalization of "cough," Fortunato acts it out, just as god speaks light into being in the bible, for instance:

> Montresor: How long have you had that cough?
> Fortunato: Ugh! ugh! ugh! – ugh! ugh! ugh! – ugh! ugh! ugh! – ugh! ugh! ugh! – ugh! ugh! ugh! (850)

Apparently, Fortunato has had the cough for long! Later, in the damp and labyrinthine corridors of the catacomb Fortunato takes Montresor's arm for support while asking about his family arms, which is "a huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel"

(851). Therefore, the arm that helps Fortunato is the same as the family arms that prophesies his death. Both the arm and the family arms enact their omnipresence over Fortunato's fate. Montresor's power displays itself in several other instances where he has Fortunato speak his own fate. Montresor does all this with the coolness and cunning of a conscience that is majestic and self-righteous. Any other omniscience is absolutely absent.

At the end of the story, Montresor's will is so dominant that Fortunato, even in his cries of agony and help simply repeats Montresor's will:

> Fortunato: Let us be gone.
> Montresor: Yes, let us be gone.
> Fortunato: For the love of God, Montresor!
> Montresor: Yes, for the love of God! (854)

Montresor in this sense has replaced god. Because of the absence of a transcendence, the earlier desire for unity with god gives way, in these later tales, to the desire to become god. The protagonists of the later tales seem to have realized and accepted the absence of a transcendence will that can lead all the universe to His totality. Therefore, these narrators assume a god-like gesture that allows them to unify other people/objects with their own will and feel whole. With the disappearance of the divine will in the early tales and in a bitter struggle for unity and purpose, individuals in the later tales redefine all that is socially and religiously moral and just according to their own will. We shall see this motif repeat itself also in the last tale – "Hop-Frog."

*Hop-Frog*

"Hop-Frog" (1849), presumably Poe's *"last jest,"* in a way both summarizes and embodies all the different perspectives that Poe has had in his previous tales

about the idea of unity. On the one hand, we see the Ourang-Outang of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" here. On the other, we see the control of a revenging will over others, the counterpart of which we saw in the tales of the imp of perverse. We also see the disgust with the human body, introduced in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," in the form of a loathsome lump of corpses that hang burning from a chain. And yet from a different angle, we see the story as a summarizing statement in the futility and mockery of unifying sign and meaning. The overall desire of the text is to make a "practical" joke really practical, hence unifying "practical" with the idea it signifies. However, by including the desire for the ideal sign (here the perfect practical joke) in a story that Poe himself calls his "*last jest*," he again problematizes the possibility of such a desire. When the idea of a "practical joke" is dramatized, hence the unification of signified and signifier, the result is the burning lump of a group of Ourang-Outangs. True, it is a perfect revenge that allows Hop-Frog to exert his will on the king and enables him to escape the king's court. Yet, Hop-Frog's burning apes, very much reminiscent of Dupin's Ourang-Outang, points to the final impossibility of equating one's will with the totality of a divine will, as if exercising total will, akin to that of a transcendence, were only possible in a joke. I have already mentioned the satirical undertones of Dupin's great solution being an Ourang-Outang. In order for both Dupin and Hop-Frog to exert their powers on an object of contempt, it has to be turned into an "other," as if the dwarfish Hop-Frog and the prophet-like Dupin felt equally paralyzed in asserting their will on the world unless it were made into an inferior other. In fact, the object of contempt always is. The Ourang-Outang; the old man of the "Tell-Tale Heart" (who is weak and helpless); the cat or the wife in

"The Black Cat" (who are equally muted and powerless); Fortunato (whose weakness Montresor uses to revenge himself); and finally the king and his ministers in "Hop-Frog" (who are fact, ape-like, and ignorant) all reflect this point. Therefore, the protagonist's assertion of an all-encompassing will is incomplete.

The king in "Hop-Frog" seems "to live only for joking ... and, upon the whole, practical jokes suited his taste far better than verbal ones" (*Tales* 899). From the beginning we know that emphasis is placed upon the difference between the practical and the verbal aspects of a joke. The jester takes us beyond the verbal level of the idea of unity and presents a situation where the verbal and the actual become one. Hence, the movement is again toward unifying the two parallel worlds of verbal signs and actual events[21]. The king maintains that he wants a practical joke not knowing that, ironically, when Hop-Frog's joke is really made practical, the result will be his own death. Thus again, the unity of sign and meaning will lead to annihilation. The attempt here is to break down the arbitrary relationship between signified and signifier in language, as a result of which the ideal sign, whereby source and its representation are one, becomes possible. Whenever this union does become possible in Poe, the result is destruction – a moment that the author of *Eureka* calls the "*Inevitable Annihilation.*" This leads us, in Michael S. Williams's words, to "the surplus of meaning in language" (71). "Hop-Frog" uses this surplus, as did "The Cask of Amontillado," to show that the ultimate unity of signified and signifier is impossible although it might be used to bring about an actuality. There is always an existent fragmentation between the arbitrator of an idea and its perceiver. The king asks for "*characters*" and the dwarf gives him "*characters.*" He asks for "something

novel" (901) and he gets "something *novel*" (902). He desires a "practical joke" and he receives a "practical joke." The king complains of being "wearied with this everlasting *sameness*" (901 my emphasis), but it is the very lack of *sameness* in language and perception that brings him and his ministers to their hideous deaths. It is the knowledge of the existing duality in sign and meaning that allows Hop-Frog to bring his vengeance upon the king. Similarly, it is the king's lack of such knowledge that leads him to the death trap. Regardless of a person's knowledge or lack of knowledge, however, the unification of meaning and its physical presentation yields destruction. Thus surplus of meaning in language refers to the surplus of existence, fragmentation from its sameness, and any attempt at its unification results in the last of all jests. Surplus of meaning in language is paralleled by relativity and fragmentation of experience in the actual world, by contingency.

Since in these late tales there is no divine transcendence to give a sense of wholeness to this fragmentation and surplus, the protagonist assumes that role. The absence of a divine will is apparent here too for the Hop-Frog will take matters into his own hands. Notice the emphasis on the subjectivity of the jester: "'Leave them to *me*!' now screamed Hop-Frog, his shrill voice making itself easily heard through all the din. 'Leave them to *me*. I fancy *I* know them. If I can only get a good look at them, *I* can soon tell who they are" (906). Hop-Frog says this as he takes the torch close to the flax-coated figures of the eight hanging men/ourang-outangs as "the eight corpses swung in their chains, a fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass" (908). Hence the interplay of the different perspectives on the motif of unity creates the almost unique experience of this tale. It is the experience of an individual

who has abandoned any hope of divine justice and whose act of subjective will undermines divine will, proves its absence. As for Poe, "I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester – and *this is my last jest*" (908).

Conclusion: *From Multiplicity Back to Unity*

> Thus the tendency of the atoms to the general centre *is*, to all practical intents and for all logical purposes, the tendency each to each; and the tendency each to each *is* the tendency to the centre; and the one tendency may be assumed *as* the other; whatever will apply to the one must be thoroughly applicable to the other; and, in conclusion, whatever principle will satisfactorily explain the one, cannot be questioned as an explanation of the other.
>
> *Eureka*

For the author of *Eureka*, this is what characterizes the particles of the universe; this is the way the text of the universe should be read, as though its sacred plot springs into being from *"One"* all-inclusive controlling-idea. "The universe is a plot of God" (*Tales* 1342), he says. But this is also – after the fashion he proposes for reading the plot of god – how Poe's own text should be read. The individual particles of Poe's fiction, its individual texts, seem to stand each in relation to each while each having a separate identity. Each story, like each particle in the universe, shows an attribute of the common origin. It follows, therefore, that "whatever principle will satisfactorily explain the one, cannot be questioned as an explanation of the other" (1299). It has been the aim of the present study to determine that metatext from which Poe's subtexts spring forth, and to trace their course from there to the final reunion with their issuing centre. Regarded from this perspective, Poe's metatext is indeed fashioned after the model of the universe as the metatext of god. It functions in the same way and it reads in the same way. As Michael J. S. Williams argues, the analogy that can be made between the universe of god and the universe of Poe is that both universes can be seen "as corpus, or as library, in which the infinite complexity of intertextual relationships makes up the single plot of their putative author" (148).

Poe's metatext is *Eureka*. It comes at the end of his other texts but it is an end with the qualities of a beginning. This end, like the god of the universe, *is* also the beginning, an "end – where all works of art should begin" (*Usher and Other Writings*, 487). This is, therefore, the way the author of *Eureka* reads the text of universe and the way he wants us to read his own: "For my present purpose ... it is clear that a descent to small from great – to the outskirts from the centre (if we could establish a centre) – to the end from the beginning (if we could establish a beginning) would be the preferable course" (*Tales* 1271).

Paradoxically though, Poe's unified scheme in *Eureka* is not neatly resolved in the narrative structure of his tales. Although the movement of the tales seems to be toward a unified scheme, there are several significant deviations. I have pointed some of these out above. But we can find the most outstanding of such instances in the tales of ratiocination where, at least as far as the reader is concerned, there is a sense of closure and resolution. Similarly, whereas in the earlier tales of revenge and murder (such as "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Imp of the Perverse") the sense of the narrator's god-like will is disturbed by his irresistible drive toward self-destruction, in the later tales of the same category (such as "The Cask of Amontillado" and "Hop-Frog") the protagonists are in perfect and cool control of the power of their wills. Consequently, Poe's unified scheme does not always resolve itself and is often characterized by ambiguity toward self and god, confusion, aporia, difference, otherness.

Poe himself confesses to this confusion and impossibility of a unified scheme. At the beginning of *Eureka*, Poe tells us that any attempt to express the idea of

"Infinity," "God," or "Spirit" is impossible. Such an effort "stands for the possible attempt at an impossible conception" (1272). These possible attempts at an impossible conception we have seen at play in all of Poe's tales no matter from what angle they approach the conception of "Infinity." They are merely "the *thought of a thought*" (1272). The struggle of these thoughts of a thought we saw throughout Poe to be a desire for the possession of a "First Cause." "And what is a First Cause?" asks the author of *Eureka*, "An ultimate termination of causes. And what is an ultimate termination of causes? Finity – the Finite" (1273-4). Therefore, determining a "First Cause" is impossible. It is impossible because in endeavoring to fulfill the idea and conception of "Infinity," the tales overthrow the very concept "by resting upon some one ultimate and therefore definite point" (1274). This deficiency works itself out, as we saw, in many different ways. The "women tales" place the idea in the body of a dead woman which cannot, would not, take on the full *identity* of "Infinity." In the tales of ratiocination the deficiency manifested itself in the idea of a solution for a secret. The solution to the overwhelming secret is found only when it is based on a finite number of clues, without allowing the contingency which is infinity's real characteristic to play itself out. We also saw that, in the one tale that contingency is indeed included ("The Mystery of Marie Rogêt"), an ultimate conception of the solution became absolutely impossible. In tales of the uncanny, the placement of the idea of infinity in many different concepts and/or objects is revisited again. It shows itself in journeys into the heart of a vast and sublime nature as in "MS. Found in a Bottle" and "A Descent into the Maelstrom," for instance. We can also see it in tales of double where a double image haunts the protagonist to his final

unification and inevitable destruction. We saw this at work in many tales chiefly among which are "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson." Tales of mesmerism such as "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" re-examine the idea in a different way. The idea is also tried by narrators of the imp of the perverse stories who assumed the role of "Infinity"/god itself and who equated their will with that of god (as is the case with "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Cask of Amontillado"). Failure, however, is the predetermined fate of each attempt because, according to *Eureka*'s unifying statement, the idea of "Infinity" is inconceivable for the very fact that we hope to reach it through some *finite* means. The idea always forms a "nebula never to be solved" (1275). It does not seem that Poe actively stages failure in his tales. He tries in many different ways to realize his obsession with unity, and at times he is successful, even though only on the fictional level. Yet, as if not satisfied with the success, he tries another direction, seeming to be aware of the result beforehand. In other words, his failures actually become successful renditions of the inevitability of failure.

In *Eureka*, unity is the source and origin of all matter, but having diffused from unity, matter is necessarily characterized by "*difference from Unity*" (1278). In other words, about all matter there is a continual difference from the uniqueness, from the oneness of the origin. This is the design of the universe, Poe continues, "such design as that which I have suggested – the design of multiplicity out of unity – diversity out of sameness – heterogeneity out of homogeneity – complexity out of simplicity – in a word, the utmost possible multiplicity of *relation* out of the

emphatically irrelative *One*" (1278). While this is dramatized as we saw in the tales, the tales themselves stand in an identical *"relation"* to *Eureka*. Akin to the parallel worlds in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," the universes of *Eureka*'s subtexts imitate and become a parallel of the universe of god's particles.

The "vital truth" in *Eureka* is *"Unity* as the *source* of the phenomenon" (1285). This source, however, is situated "at some remote epoch of time" (1287). That the source of the origin is at some remote epoch of time means, at least in *Eureka*, that we are incapable of tracking its time and location. The impossibility of tracing the time and location of the *source* is at work in almost every tale Poe ever wrote. While, say, Dupin does achieve closure and mastery, ultimately his very success and his method – on a deeper level – point out the loss of origin, the inability to grasp the one. Another way, as we saw, for the dramatization of the idea of the remote epoch of time and the impossibility of tracking it in most of the tales was the introduction of a narrator who did not remember his family name, or roots, or country. If he did at times remember, he did not give it to us because it was unmentionable and thus he preferred to use an "earthly appellation" as in "William Wilson." Family roots in the tales are a by-gone memory; unity in *Eureka* is a "by-gone *Fact*" (1289). Because the source of this unity is not locatable in any specific time or direction, there is always a noticeable lack of temporality and spatiality in these tales. They seem to be outside of all earthly time and space, moving in all directions and across all time in order to chance upon the much sought for origin. This origin is usually vague and mysterious. It might show itself in the image reflected from a tarn; it might be embodied in objects such as teeth or eyes; it might

manifest itself in abstract ideas such as "*Identity*" or "Will"; it might be sought in grand natural phenomena that inspire the narrator with a sense of awe and the sublime. Since the source of unity is not a geographical point, it is sought in all directions and at all times. Although talking about the atoms in the universe, the author of *Eureka* seems to be describing the fashion in which his tales move: "it is not to any *point* ... not any *locality* ... to which I suppose them bound. Nothing like *location* was conceived as their origin. Their source lies in the principle, *unity*. *This* is their lost parent. *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" (1287).

The satisfaction at the end, though, is nothing less horrible than a final collapse into destruction and nothingness. This is the fear that accompanies the desire for *oneness* in all of the tales. The fear is seen in the burning desire of the narrator of "Ligeia" who wishes with all his heart for reunification with lady Ligeia, but who is overwhelmed with terror and awe at her moment of reincarnation. Her reincarnation, as I mentioned before, does not represent a final unity of body and spirit but the hideous drama of eternal repetition. It is seen in Roderick Usher's knowledge of an inevitable unity with Madeline – a knowledge which is throughout the tale accompanied by a crippling fear that finally ends in the madness and collapse of Roderick. We see it in the simultaneous attraction and fear that William Wilson feels towards his other half. The fear figures itself again in the irresistible yet dreaded drive in the narrators of "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Imp or the

Perverse" to give themselves up to the police and thus meet their final unity with death. And these are but a few examples among many other instances. This haunting terror is the fear of complete destruction and non-being of matter at the moment of its unity with spirit, what *Eureka* terms as "*Matter no more.*" For the moment of unity with the origin equals losing all the qualities of matter: "In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into 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" (1355). It is a fearful end but Poe's protagonists are irresistibly attracted to and overawed by it.

Thus, we can notice the similarity between the particles of god's universe and the narrators of Poe's. They all seek after a *source* whose origins are lost or forgotten "at some remote epoch of time." They all live in an awful present in which the primal act of diffusion and multiplicity repeats itself forever and ever. They all move toward a still more awful future when all shall come together in a horrible common embrace, a collapse into nothingness. I have already given examples of the struggle to locate the source of the origin in time and space as played out in the tales. Let us see how *Eureka* puts it: "We walk about, amid the destinies of our world-existence, encompassed by dim but ever present *Memories* of a Destiny more vast – very distant in the by-gone time, and infinitely awful" (1356). The never-ending process of repetition, too, is an anxiety of both the tales and *Eureka.* We especially saw this anxiety in the tales of ratiocination where a primal horrible act, or crime, can yield infinite results that may have come from infinite causes. It is this intricate web of duplication and reduplication at the moment of any act that even Dupin's genius

cannot overcome, as was the case in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." In the other tales of ratiocination a solution was possible only if this eternal splitting of effects from any single cause could be limited to a *single* train of effects (as we saw in that episode of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" where Dupin correctly guesses the origin of his friend's thoughts). In *Eureka* "the processes we have here ventured to contemplate will be renewed forever, and forever, and forever; a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine" (1356). Finally, "the awful Future" too marks the same course in the tales that it does in *Eureka*. The moment of unity ends in nothingness and nothing beyond.

Life is doomed to repeat itself until that last moment of final unity, the big bang. But beyond that moment is no benevolent origin waiting to embrace us, as *Eureka* takes pains to inform us. There is no god beyond the last moment, as there is no god here in the physical universe. The individual, then, takes the remnants of justice he can conceive of into his own hands, for, of the divine justice whatever there is, is "Divine Injustice" (1357). This realization, as we saw, turns in the later tales into either disgust with the physical body (for it is devoid of any "Spirit") or a determination to become a god-figure oneself. From the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" to Montresor and Hop-Frog, the existential conclusion of *Eureka* finds its embodiments. The painful realization that, after having gone through the agony of physical life, at the final moment of unity with the "Spirit Divine" we must also suffer loss of identity and destruction is what drives the individual to take *matters* into his own hands and create his own system of justice. Perhaps the note appended to the

end of *Eureka* determines the course of Poe's last tales. It reads thus: "The pain of the consideration that we shall lose our individual identity, cease at once when we further reflect that the process, as above described, is, neither more nor less than that of the absorption, by each individual intelligence, of all other intelligences (that is, of the Universe) into its own. That God may be all in all, *each* must become God" (1359). Poe has created his own universe of texts. He has become the god of his own universe.

# Notes

[1] See also Ruth Mayer's "Neither Life Nor Death: Poe's Aesthetic Transfiguration of Popular Notions of Death." *Poe Studies* 29.1 (1996): 1-9.

[2] For a discussion of the implications of a Gothic reading of "The Fall of the House of Usher," for instance, see Harriet Hustis's "'Reading Encrypted But Persistent': The Gothic Reading and Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher.'" *Studies in American Fiction* 27.1 (1999): 3-21.

[3] For a full discussion of the psychoanalytical overtones of the tale see Marie Bonaparte's *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*, trans. John Rodker, 1949.

[4] In his *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales*, G. R. Thompson also comments on the ratiocinative powers of the narrators of "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "A Descent into the Maelstrom" (p. 171).

[5] Lacan's analysis of "The Purloined Letter" in "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" led to Derrida's analyzing of Lacan's seminar in "The Purveyor of Truth," which in turn led to Barbara Johnson's analysis of both essays in "The Frame of Reference." For a full discussion of these essays see *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*. Eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988.

[6] On the implications of universe as text in *Eureka* see Michael J. S. Williams's *A World of Words: Language and Displacement in the Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*. 146-52.

[7] On Poe and feminism see Joan Dayan's "Poe's Women: A Feminist Poe?" *Poe Studies*. 26.1-2 (1993): 1-13.

[8] On the significance of dismembering in this tale see also Jacqueline Doyle's "(Dis)Figuring Woman: Edgar Allan Poe's 'Berenice.'" *Poe Studies*. 26.1-2 (1993): 13-22.

[9] For further discussion on the significance of arabesque and grotesque designs in Poe see Gabriele Rippl's "Wild Semantics: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Feminization of Edgar Allan Poe's Arabesque Aesthetics," 123-140.

[10] For a full discussion of Dupin's inductive reasoning see Loisa Nygaard's "Winning the Game: Inductive Reasoning in Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue.'" *Studies in Romanticism*. 33.2 (1994): 223-55.

[11] Also see Robert W. Mitchell's "The Natural History of Poe's Orangutan." *Poe Studies*. 31.1-2 (1998): 32-5.

[12] For further discussion see Martin Roth's "Mysteries of 'The Mystery of Maria Rogêt.'" *Poe Studies*. 22.2 (1989): 27-35.

[13] These narrators are at the height of a crippling sense of fragmentation. Possession of anything that can give them the slightest sense of self-will and control over even one aspect of this universe becomes their utter obsession. The desire for union with a Divine Origin, the slight hope of an Infinite Presence that will bring all things together in its embrace, is completely abandoned in these tales. Instead, the desire turns into an existential anguish under the influence of which these narrators take all morality and justice into their own hands.

[14] See also Ronald Bieganowski's "The Self-Consuming Narrator in Poe's 'Ligeia' and 'Usher.'" *American Literature*. 60.2 (1988): 175-88.

[15] In his essay "The House of Poe," Richard Wilbur also refers to the double structue of "The Haunted Palace" but asserts that "the two states of the palace – before and after – are, as we can see, two states of mind" (91).

[16] On Poe and mesmerism see Sidney Lind's "Poe and Mesmerism." *PMLA* 62 (1947): 1077-94.

[17] This function of mesmerism figures itself in other tales such as "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844), and "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1845) as well.

[18] See for example David S. Reylonds's "Poe's Art of Transformation: 'The Cask of Amontillado'" in *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*, ed. Kenneth Silverman (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 93-112, and Richard P. Benton's "Poe's 'The Cask of Amontillado': Its Cultural and Historical Backgrounds." *Poe Studies*. 29.1 (1996): 19-27.

[19] Other tales belonging to this group are "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Imp of the Perverse."

[20] Edward H. Davidson has argued that this imp of the perverse points to what is common among many Poe narrators: death wish, at the end of which "the tripartite self is able to realize its total selfhood" (203). While agreeing with this point, I want to add to it the fact that the yielding to the irresistible

imp of the perverse also refers to a common doom among Poe protagonists. It is the simultaneous desire and horror of the moment of unity and totality. Unity, as we have seen, signifies something both desirous and fearful for Poe narrators.

[21] This is more clearly seen in tales such as "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" where the narrator notices that the events leading to the death of a certain "Mr. Augustus Bedloe" are an exact of a mirror reflection of the events leading to the death of a certain "Oldeb." In other words, not only the events of Bedloe's life have their counterpart on a second level in a remote past, they repeat those incidents under a different disguise. On the verbal level, too, Bedloe is the mirror reflection of Oldeb with the addition of an 'e.' Thus, the attempt to find the parallel and unifying the actual and verbal worlds plays itself more obviously and more simplistically in this tale as well.

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