Editor's Note

While the present editor has enjoyed editing the PSA Newsletter over the past five years, he has decided to step down from the editorship after the Spring 1991 issue in order to concentrate on Poe research and writing. He is pleased to announce that beginning in the Fall of 1991, the Newsletter will be edited by Kent P. Ljungquist, Professor of English at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, former President of the Poe Studies Association, and former co-editor of the Newsletter. The Executive Committee of the PSA has unanimously approved Vice President Liliane Weissberg's nomination of Professor Ljungquist. Next summer, the retiring editor will pass on the PSA Newsletter with pride in its growth and confidence in its future.

Nominations for Officers

Nominations for PSA officers for the term January 1992 through December 1994 have been made by the nominating committee: Al Omans (Temple Univ.), Joan Dayan (Queens College and The Graduate Center, CUNY), John Irwin (The Johns Hopkins Univ.), and Kent Ljungquist (Worcester Polytechnic Inst.). Those nominated are, for President, Liliane Weissberg (Univ. of Pennsylvania); for Vice-President and Program Chair, J. Gerald Kennedy (Louisiana State Univ.); and for two At-Large positions, Maurice Bennett (Univ. of Maryland, College Park); Joan Dayan; Kenneth Alan Hovey, (Univ. of Texas at San Antonio); and Richard Kopley, (Penn State, DuBois Campus). Any other nominations for these positions should be sent to the Secretary-Treasurer, Dennis Eddings, Humanities, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, Oregon 97361. The election of officers will be conducted by mail ballot during the Spring of 1991. Results will be published in the Fall 1991 Newsletter.


Pollin's bibliography lists all the discoverable books, magazines, portfolios, and separately published prints or paintings which illustrate or interpret Poe's works, as well as the films based on them. The book demonstrates the affinity between Poe's works and graphic illustration, and it testifies to the scope and vitality of Poe's influence on the graphic arts; the tales and poems have inspired famous painters and artists such as Manet, Doré, Redon, Ensor, Rossetti, Beardsley, Magritte, and more than seven hundred other artists and illustrators. Poe is one of the most widely and diversely illustrated authors, and Pollin's catalogue even establishes him as the most popular modern author for visual representation.

In his twenty-six-page introduction, Pollin undertakes to account for Poe's popularity with painters and illustrators; the reason for it, he claims, is to be found in the "graphicality" of Poe's work (a word used by Poe himself in connection with Margaret Fuller). He also expounds the writer's views about the illustration of a literary work, especially his condemnation of "Flemish painting." Furthermore, Pollin studies Poe's use of illustrations for his own work; they number thirteen in all. The greater part of the introduction is devoted to a historical survey of Poe illustration, with seventeen pictures included. Oddly enough, the first illustrations of Poe's works were British, owing to the copyright of the Griswold edition, which precluded reprinting of the works in the U. S. until 1884; Pollin stresses the "perhaps lasting effect of this initial British orientation upon themes, materials, styles, and even interpretations" (6). He also points out that Poe's own country is the least original and ingenious, although the most prolific in illustrated editions, whereas France has made the most important contribution to the field, with the German-language interpretations vying with the French for originality and variety.

Poe Studies Association Newsletter

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Portrait of Poe by Berta R. Golahn

The PSA Newsletter is published and distributed by the Penn State, DuBois Campus and is supported by the PSA and Penn State, DuBois. Copies of the PSA Newsletter are provided to all PSA members.
Pollin’s catalogue contains 1,617 main entries listed by countries, covering 33 countries, 20 languages, and 150 years of output. Besides the publication data, descriptions of each work are provided, as well as the names of the translators, editors, and artists, the medium or special format with the aim or level of the book, the works illustrated, the total number of pictures, and, for rarities, the location of copies in libraries or collections. Pollin’s discussion of the illustrations is of particular interest. The catalogue is not restricted to the illustrations of Poe’s works, as implied by the title and as claimed in the introductory note, but also includes items dealing with Poe’s life, and even critical studies. Likewise listed are sculptures, such as Moses Ezekiel’s statue of Poe in Wyman Park, Baltimore and the portrait bust made for the Hall of Fame in New York. The extensive four-part index section comprises: 1) a list of the illustrators with the entry numbers plus an appendix of 200 outstanding artists; 2) the publication years for all the entry numbers, arranged chronologically; 3) a list of the media or formats, such as “limited editions,” “juvenile,” “magazine” and “picture-magazine”; 4) the 135 titles of Poe’s works illustrated, listed with the location numbers in the text. The abbreviations used throughout are listed in an appendix.

A secondary aim of the book is to provide a comprehensive bibliography; Pollin rightly points out that many existing books resemble each other, so that anything casting light on bibliographic problems could serve varied purposes.

The book opens with the caveat that the author is entering a territory scarcely charted in its contents and in its methods, so that the weaknesses or drawbacks should not be too severely judged. Apart from occasional misprints, inaccuracies or inconsistencies in the cross-references, the only thing one can find fault with are the inclusion of books which do not contain illustrations or of paintings on which Poe’s influence is far from proved (e.g. Gauguin’s famous painting Nevermore) and the listing of a few items under the wrong country (two books published in Salzburg and in Neuchâtel are, for instance, listed under Germany and France, instead of Austria and Switzerland). Pollin’s bibliography cannot lay claim to absolute comprehensiveness, but the existence of gaps is inevitable in an enterprise of this kind. These shortcomings are trifles, however, in comparison to the whole and in view of the amount of work entailed by the compilation of the catalogue (collecting the materials took about eighteen years!) The first attempt of its kind ever made, Pollin’s bibliography is really an impressive achievement.

A separate filmography lists and describes the films based on Poe’s work. Pollin has aimed to make “the broadest sweep possible of filmed images or graphic interpretations of Poe’s works”; hence, he does not confine himself to moving films or pictures, but also includes shorts, educational productions, animated film strips, cartoons, parodies, etc. Pollin’s list comprises 276 items and confirms the claim that “next to Shakespeare unquestionably the most prolific source for films of many types has been the work of Edgar Allan Poe” (323). The arrangement is under the Poe work, with an appendix listing films based on miscellaneous materials, life and works, together with a list of alternate titles. A few things are open to criticism, such as the absence of the original title of the epochemical picture “Histoires Extraordinaires” (1969), comprising films by Vadim, Fellini and Malle—which are listed separately under the English title “Spirits of the Dead”—and the inclusion of several films having no connection (or at best a very remote connection) with Poe’s work. Pollin’s list is by no means the only filmography of Poe in existence, but it is certainly the most extensive; unlike previous attempts, it can claim to be comprehensive and contains very few factual errors or omissions.

On the whole, Pollin’s book deserves highest praise; it is an invaluable reference tool not only for Poe scholars, but for a broader audience as well. It is easy to consult, and, with its detailed indexes, it serves a variety of readers, such as scholars, graphic historians, and even teachers on all levels in need of illustrated material.

Roger Forclaz
Berne, Switzerland


David Lehman’s The Perfect Murder is a critically savvy, lively exploration of the aesthetics of murder. Canvassing writers from Sophocles and De Quincey to Borges and Eco, Lehman views the murderer as artist, the detective as critic, and the policeman as philistine. He provides three chapters on Poe’s legacy, examining the ancient origins of his plot devices and their deconstruction by contemporary detective fiction. Unfortunately, Lehman neglects women’s contributions to the mystery. He slights Christie, Sayers, James, and countless women writers of undisputed stature in favor of male practitioners of the “hard-boiled romance.” Dorothy Sayers’ exploration of feminine psychology, Gaudy Night, is boringly “vegetarian” because no blood is spilled. Sara Paretsky’s feminist typecasting is “irritating”; Raymond Chandler’s signature misogyny romantic. This masculine bias would be forgivable if The Perfect Murder did not advertise itself as a “guide to the best mysteries ever written.” Nevertheless, anyone pursuing serious work on the genre should read this provocative book.

T. J. Binyon’s “Murder Will Out” is essentially a descriptive catalogue covering dozens of authors, British and American. With so many mysteries clamoring for attention, no one writer’s oeuvre receives significant coverage. Josephine Tey merits one paragraph, Robert Parker a few sentences. Poe receives a munificent three pages noting the obvious: Dupin is the prototypical amateur detective, and Poe’s plot devices (the locked-room mystery, the deductive method, concealment by display, the least likely character) have served successive generations of mystery writers well. “Murder Will Out” contains little critical wisdom, but Binyon’s brief descriptions do provide the mystery buff with suggestions for further reading.

Susan F. Beegel
Nantucket, Massachusetts
Scholarly Poe Events

Burton Pollin (CUNY, Emeritus) has donated to the Print Room of The New York Public Library the archive of visual materials he collected for his 1989 volume, Images of Poe’s Works: A Comprehensive Descriptive Catalogue of Illustrations (Greenwood). Scholars interested in consulting this new resource should write to Roberta Waddell, Curator of Prints, The New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, NY 10018, or call her at (212) 930-0818.

Christopher G. Eckard, ranger and researcher at the Edgar Allan Poe National Historical Site in Philadelphia, has concluded in his report “Did Poe Just Say No?” that no definitive evidence exists to indicate that Poe had a drug habit.


The PSA sessions of the forthcoming MLA Convention will be held in the Hyatt Regency in Chicago and will be chaired by Lillian Weissberg (Univ. of Pennsylvania). “Fictional Voyages I” will take place on Friday, December 28, in Columbus Hall G; speakers will include Jorgen Holmgard (Univ. of Aalborg), “Space and Time in Poe’s Fictional Voyages”; Arkady Plotniksky (Univ. of Pennsylvania), “Out of Space—Out of Time”; and R.C. De Prospo (Washington College), “Pym, Prometheus, and the Mariner.” “Fictional Voyages II” will take place on Saturday, December 29, in Columbus Hall A; speakers will be Hans-Ulrich Mohr (Univ. Bielefeld), “Poe’s Aesthetic Voyages Into Organic Matter”; Nancy Bentley (Boston Univ.), “Poe and the Disfiguring of Travel Writing”; Paige Matthey Bynum (Univ. of North Carolina), “Racial Anthropology and The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym”; and David Kadlec (Univ. of Chicago), “The Flowering of Miss Jack Tar.” The topic for the PSA sessions of the 1991 MLA Convention in San Francisco will be “Text and Intertext”; please send proposals, abstracts, and papers by February 15, 1991, to Lillian Weissberg, Dept. of German, 745 Williams Hall, Univ. of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305.

Shawn Rosenheim (Williams College) and Steven Rachman (Yale Univ.) will be editing Genius and Fudge: Edgar Allan Poe and American Culture; they invite inquiries, abstracts, and essays by January 30, 1991. Interested scholars should write to Prof. Rosenheim at the Department of English, Williams College, Williamstown, MA 01267.

The NEMLA Convention, to be held in Hartford, CT, April 5-7, 1991, will feature a Poe Studies section focusing on “The Logic and Rhetoric of Science in Poe’s Storytelling.” The chair will be Susan Welsh (Rutgers Univ.); the secretary will be Carol Hovanec (Ramapo College). Speakers will include Tracy Ware (Bishop’s University), “A Descent into the Maelström: The Status of Scientific Rhetoric in a Perverse Romance”; Kay Redfield-Jamison (The Johns Hopkins Univ. School of Medicine), “Moods and Madness in the Life of Edgar Allan Poe”; and Doris Helbig (Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), “Poe’s Narrators: Experimenters in Mesmerism and Space Travel.”

Other Poe Events

The lost bronze plaque honoring Poe’s October 1833 visit to the Latrobe House in Baltimore has been recovered by Stephan Loewenthal, owner of The 19th Century Shop. The plaque will be loaned to The Poe House of Baltimore.

The annual meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Poe Foundation, Inc. was held at the Poe Museum in Richmond on Monday, October 8. Topics included handicapped access at the museum, the current fund-raising drive, and the Poe exhibit to open at the Virginia State Library on Monday, December 10—“The World Shall Be My Theatre: Poe’s Richmond and Beyond.” On Sunday, January 20, 1991, Dr. Bruce V. English will lecture at the Virginia State Library on “Poe and the Poe Museum.”

On October 12 and 13, The Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston offered the world premiere of Heiner Goebbels’ “Shadow—Landscape with Argonauts,” “a new work for radio” based on texts by Poe and Heiner Müller.

On Thursday, October 25, the Halloween installment of the popular television show “The Simpsons” featured a presentation of “The Raven”; the raven itself bore a more-than-passing resemblance to son Bart.

From October 27 through November 19, the Lyric Opera of Chicago offered at the Civic Theater a new production of Dominick Argento’s opera “The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe.” This opera was previously performed in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1976, in Baltimore in 1977, and in Gotteborg, Sweden, in 1986.

On October 31 and November 1, the program “Ideas,” of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, offered a consideration of the death of Edgar Allan Poe. Prominently featured was Poe actor Norman George; several Poe scholars also contributed to the broadcast.

Regarding the ALA Poe Session

The Executive Committee of the Poe Studies Association is considering a modification to the PSA by-laws to make the chair of the American Literature Association Poe session an elected official of the PSA and a member of the Executive Committee. Responses to this proposal, as well as alternative proposals regarding the ALA Poe session chair, are invited. Please write to Lillian Weissberg, Department of German, 745 Williams Hall, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305.

In the prologue and first chapter of his book, Watkins surveys the historical, social, and biographical circumstances surrounding Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1838) and Twain's Great Dark (1898), two fictional sea voyages separated by sixty years. The climate is unchanging and general—marked by "technological progress run rampant"; a capitulation of morals and religion to the prerogatives of science, commerce, conquest, and "progress"; and divisions in America between knowledge and understanding, body and soul, the material and the spiritual. If one evil pervades this quickly drawn scenario, it is "the great white light of reason." The solution is the redemptive paradigm that Watkins traces in Poe and Twain, which derives from Rousseau's "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts" (1750) and "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men" (1754).

In Poe's and Twain's sea tales, Watkins traces a plot that returns the major characters to Rousseau's second state of nature, delivering them from corrupting inequalities and confusing divisions between matter and spirit, body and soul, reality and dream. The heart of the book is the discussion, in Chapter Four, of Pym (62 pages). Following J. V. Ridgely's four stages of composition, the author finds in these stages a clear thematic progression. The "order of composition" suggests a redemptive scheme for salvation from "unmitigated" technological and social progress. Phases of sleep, dream, or delirium carry the values of the subconscious into the resisting medium of science, progress, and reason. Augustus, Pym's "dream weaver," initiates the passage through the contending values of the material and the spiritual. He accompanies Pym through the "pagan rite" of cannibalism on the drifting Grampus, and, in his Christ-like death, he foreshadows a resolution to the decay of the "body social" that confronts Pym later, on the Jane Guy and among the cunningly rational Tsalalians. At Tsalal, Pym and Peters become Rousseau's primal men, struggling "not to think," and to avoid the traps of reason. In the final whiteness, Pym floats in a new world of mind—a world of mind and reason as transformed by dream. The final editorial "Note" contains a covert redemptive message: that "shadiness"—the South, the white, the subconscious—is the ending readers must seek, but must seek for themselves. Pym is thus an allegory of Christian and social enlightenment, held out by Poe to those "adrift in a rationalist nightmare."

This book attempts to uncomplicate a very resistant, structurally problematic, and multi-voiced narrative. The social, historical, and biographical context of Pym is very broadly drawn in seventeen photo-offset pages, and the Rousseauean paradigm, though workable, whitewashes what Walter Bezan-stock has called "the troubled sleep" of Pym. Granted, one of the author's stated purposes is to counter the prevailing "doom-filled" and "pessimistic" readings of Pym, but can we accept that early in the narrative Augustus is "commerce" and "reason personified," that in the hold Pym goes "deep into his soul" for understanding (and later enacts Poe's values), that Tsalal is only the "Hell on earth" of debased reason, or that in the final whiteness and in the rational philological inquiry of the appended "Note," Poe puts all divisiveness to rest? I do not find Pym as prescriptive as Watkins finds it. Its Christian allusions resist the contexts they derive from, and its prose seems the experiment of a writer trying out, but also running out of, resources for interpreting the world of the mid-nineteenth century.

In discussing the social and historical context of Pym, Watkins does not demonstrate his points but asserts and reiterates them. We do not get a sense of Pym as emerging from a context but as allegorically sermonizing on that context. There are, moreover, basic errors—substantive, syntactic, and typographical, the sort that Spell Check never detects but that careful copy editors do.

Susan Welsh
Rutgers University

Letter To The Editor
Dear Sir,

In the Spring 1990 PSA Newsletter, John Dolls writes that "[in Poe: The Rationale of the Uncanny] Wuletich-Brinberg short-circuits Freud to incorporate Otto Rank's explication of the 'double' as a structural principle." But, as I explain in my book, it is Freud himself, paraphrasing Rank's reflections on the double, who traces the uncanny to the earliest experience of infancy. My theoretical orientation, announced clearly in the introduction, is existential psychoanalysis because of the importance it places on individual self-awareness in the study of psychopathology and art. Poe's understanding of the structure of the unconscious—absent in Marie Bonaparte's impressive study of Poe conducted along classical Freudian lines—is introduced in psychoanalytical readings of Poe's work by Lacan and, later, Derrida. Perhaps because of their exclusive concern with Poe's detective tales, they attribute to Poe a sounder mind than he would have allowed. My chief goal, therefore, is, through close readings of his poetry, fiction, and non-fiction, to explain the baffling connections between Poe's psychopathology and his own meticulously premeditated reworkings of his obsessions. Not a single reference to any of my readings appears in the review by Professor Dolls, who promotes his understanding of Freud and Lacan instead of attempting to understand and assess my contribution to Poe studies.

Sincerely yours,
Sybil Wuletich-Brinberg
Associate Professor of English
Hunter College

Recent Dissertations: March 1990 - July 1990


Kenneth Alan Hovey
University of Texas at San Antonio

In 1941, Bradford A. Booth and Claude E. Jones published *A Concordance of the Poetical Works of Edgar Allan Poe* through the Johns Hopkins Press. Since 1967, this neat, useful, and meticulous volume has been available through Peter Smith, of Gloucester, at a price still under twenty dollars. Now we have Elizabeth Wiley’s *Concordance*, a ponderous book of five pounds, its 745 pages almost four times the number of those in the truly neat and “handy” Booth volume (211 pages), and costing over four times as much. Surely we should expect it to contain new textual treasures, furnishing more insights and information than the earlier work. Quite the contrary! The Booth book used the text of Killis Campbell and the solicitous care, advice, and data of Professor Thomas Ollive Mabbott, so that all important additions were entered into the 1941 volume through his adding them from articles published, largely by him. Hence the Wiley Concordance adds only the 1845 poem of sixteen lines “To [Violet Vane]” (that is, Frances Osgood)—now in the canon of Mabbott’s 1969 text of the Harvard edition of *Poems*, which she sedulously follows. In addition, a few of the variants for lines, added by Mabbott, were omitted from the Booth book, as well as the stage directions in *Poetsian* (of minor importance, in any event, and playing a misleading role in the format of Wiley’s volume, q.v., below). Also, Mabbott had dropped two short poems (“To Sarah” and “Lines to Louisa”) previously tentatively assigned to Poe and included by Booth.

In matters of mere book making, page arrangement, readability of type fonts, this new volume leaves very much to be desired. Its pages are spread across an expanse too difficult for the eye to jump over rapidly, with space wasted because of failure to use set-backs or hanging indentation, owing to the lack of control over the computer. Only upper and lower, sans serif type font is used; underlinings take the place of italics; and the whole text disregards the “state of the art” that could easily furnish programs that adapt every output file to refined laser jet printing. Here, then, we find no micro- or proportional-spacing to reduce the size of the overall text or of the individual columns. Indeed, with an eight inch line length on a nine-inch wide page, the tiny margins are inadequate for reading the poetry title-rubric at the right (on the left hand page)—a half inch from the seam. And the rubrics require constant reference to the fifteen pages of listing at the very back, constant “flipping back” through up to one and one half inches of cumbersome pages. The book can be consulted only by reserving two feet or more of desk space for its use while the Booth concordance needs less than one foot. The latter has used meaningful whole-word poem-title rubrics at the end of each two and a quarter inch entry (two columns of them to a page). Booth’s is a compact and efficient system. Arbitrarily, Wiley has cut off three to five letters of the selected title and then directly appended the letters for the version being concorded on that line without an intervening space or a difference of type (nowhere used in any case). Moreover, the form on which the rubric is based is sometimes bewilderingly far from the common title known. Here are samples, with the rubric after the slash: “Visit of the Dead” (for “Spirits of the Dead” A (i.e. version A) / SPIRA; “Sonnet—Silence” / SILE; “Bridal Ballad” / BRIDAF (meaning versions A and F); “The Bells” / BELLSEG (versions E and G); “Irene” and “The Sleeper” / MIDA and MIDJ (presumably representing the word “midnight,” common to both, and near, but not at, the beginning).

Another inattention shown to a potential use of a concordance is the total non-concording of all words in the poetry titles as given by Poe. He successively revised many of them and often inserted meaningful subtitles: e.g., “The Doomed City” was a form of “The City in the Sea”; “Annabel Lee” (with a rubric of “LEE”) twice had the subtitle of “A Ballad”; “To lanthe in Heaven” stands for versions D and F of “To One in Paradise” (with the rubric of “PARA”). Consider the quandary of a user looking for the Byronic name of “lanthe” and finding it only for its use within the text of “Al Aaraaf.” How can one justly drop anything that resembles a title even when it is inserted into the text; e.g., lines 82-101 of “Al Aaraaf” (p. 102 of *Poems*) in version F have a special title “SPIRITS INVOCATION” which is ignored. Matters of this sort seem of no importance to Wiley, who sedulously copies “the bibliographical information” from the *Poems* (1969), but omits in her listing (729-45) all variant titles and alternate forms after the one in the first printing (with a few exceptions where the later version is used by Mabbott as one of the primary texts). Much needed also is a reverse list of simple titles, before the rubrics, which are frequently remote from the commonly known titles. This bibliographical section, by the way, is the only one that is printed by type-setting.

The physical difficulty of quickly finding information from so ungainly a page is compounded by the wide swatches of totally useless space between columns. For the rubric word at the start of the page, plus the block of lines under it with that word, sixty spaces are devoted to the first column, chiefly because the stage directions of *Poetsian*, in prose, could best be presented in long lines of quoted context, but most of the lines of poetry are much shorter; hence, much white space. Then comes a column of figure “1” (for vol. 1, this being the first of the intended series). Next comes the page-number column, followed by white space and a column for the line-number on Mabbott’s page, occasionally but rarely needing up to four spaces for added letters to designate variant forms for given lines. After a blank space averaging one and one-quarter inches, we have the title column, near the edge of the page (or the seam on the verso).

Now, let us examine the system used for determining the words to be concorded. This question is always of primary importance in the making of concordances. Booth gives a sensible list (p. xiii) of 137 exclusions: many prepositions, all articles, most conjunctions, demonstrative and personal pronouns, auxiliary verbs. Of these exclusions, Wiley uses only 35. The result is the presence of pages of useless entries for such words as “at” (156x), “all” (307x), “as” (252x), “on” (267x), “or” (109x), “so” (232x), “than” (74x), “to” (675x), and “where” (99x). Why not indicate the existence of a full print-out for all omit-words, as they are often termed, at designated nation-wide libraries or at the university-publisher and save many pages of “filler-space”? 
Among the recent scholarly Poe-related books not reviewed in this issue are The Idea of Authorship in America: Democratic Poetics from Franklin to Melville, Kenneth Dauber (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 268 pp., Cloth, $45.00; Paper, $14.95; Poe and His Times: The Artist and His Milieu, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore: Poe Society, 1990), 290 pp., Cloth, $25.00; The Place of Fiction In the Time of Science: A Disciplinary History of American Writing, John Limon (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 216 pp., Cloth, $29.95; and The Puritan-Provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century, Susan Manning (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 270 pp., Cloth, $42.50.


Forstoming in 1991 is John Henry Ingram’s Poe Collection at the University of Virginia, 2nd ed., ed. John E. Reilly (Charlottesville, VA: Univ. of Virginia Library), 192 pp., Paper. To inquire about purchasing this book, write to the Special Collections Department, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903-2498. Also to be published next year is Edgar Allan Poe and The Philadelphia Saturday News, Richard Kopely (Baltimore: The Enoch Pratt Free Library and The Edgar Allan Poe Society).

Gordian Discount

Gordian Press, Inc. is offering members of the Poe Studies Association a 25% discount on four of its Poe volumes. The Breuttes, Volume 2 of the Pollin edition, Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, is available for $37.50; Writings in The Broadway Journal, Volumes 3 and 4 of the edition, may be purchased for $56.25; and Pollin’s Word Index to Poe’s Fiction is offered for $30.00. Shipping is free. Orders should be sent to The Gordian Press, P.O. Box 304, Staten Island, NY 10304. Please mention this PSA discount offer.


Drawing upon “narrative theory,” Professor Auerbach (Univ. of Maryland) examines the relationship of author to first-person narrator, and secondarily, their relation to narrative and audience. Analyzing a dozen Poe tales, Auerbach finds that the romance quest for identity both fails by subversion or disillusionment, thus “disfiguring the perfect plot,” and yet affirms “the personal pronoun’s potential to confer life.” “Possibility is actualized by its failure,” he writes. The chapter on The Blithedale Romance illustrates the disenchantment of the individual and the failure of community. In Chapter 3, “The Jamesian Critical Romance,” on The Sacred Fount, the plotter falls in his drive to construct a perfectly symmetrical plot, thus illustrating “the increasingly deliberate ironizing of first-person American romance during the nineteenth century.” This statement is qualified by Kenneth Burke’s definition of “true irony” as “based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him within...,” which is not unlike the affirming function of the failed “I” noted above. The “New Critics” (Auerbach’s term) have mistakenly stabilized the relation between author and narrator, whereas Poe fails to maintain absolute control over his “I,” whom Auerbach regards as typically a figure of “exasperating obtuseness” and “paralyzing subjectivity.” Here again, Auerbach qualifies: Poe “simultaneously relies on, participates in, and tries to remove himself from” the narrator. According to Auerbach, the double permits the narrator to construct a plot mirroring the confusing interplay of author and narrator, often ending in a mock self-destruction as the “I” tries to regain its original integrity. “The logic of confession and failure, not mastery and control, drives Poe’s fiction, as its narrators struggle to gain some identity for themselves,” Auerbach asserts.

The “paradigmatic moment” for this “certain kind of romance” comes in “A Predicament” when “I the head” contends with “myself, the body” for “proper identity,” as Psyche, the first-person narrator, splits into these warring selves, simultaneously the anguished heroine and the dispassionate observer or historian. Thus Blackwood and Psyche double for Poe in a satire of literary pretensions. Or, according to the poststructuralism of Todorov and Foucault, the dismantling of Psyche can be read as Poe’s deconstruction of the notion of the “author.” Insofar as Poe’s point of view is found in Psyche’s voice, “the first person is continually trying to define a self in language but also over and against language.” Discourse and subjectivity “mutually constitute” each other while remaining at odds in the problematic relation between language and identity—another manifestation of “the belief in a unified, essential, sovereign self at the heart of all human endeavor.” Auerbach, however, sets out to show that the very notion of the “self” becomes so threatened that it can only be defined strictly by the first person’s utter failure to achieve coherence, integrity, or authenticity.” As this overstates the problem, all things considered, Auerbach might take a look at another “certain kind of romance” among Poe’s tales that does not result in utter failure of achieved identity.
Auerbach also finds that an impulse "to discover some explanatory first cause or primal self dominated Poe's thinking from his earliest writings to Eureka (1848)." In "The Man of the Crowd," "MS.," and "Descent," the protagonist "moves toward some primal reunion with God prior to self-consciousness." In the discussion that follows (34-38) of the terms "tendency," "Infinity," and "God" (as used in Eureka), such do not stand for ideas but are "metatems that enable us to think about the 'direction' of our thoughts methodically" in a way that enables the primal unity or origin to develop by a process of intention and tendency. But here Auerbach mistakenly equates transcendental oneness with the "death" of "selfless abstraction," thus overlooking the climactic theme of "Life within Life" in the final paragraphs of Eureka.

Despite occasional overreading, as of the doubling in "The Man of the Crowd" (33) and the notion that "The Man That Was Used Up" reflects Poe's fear of self-loss and his ambivalence toward his profession (56-58), Auerbach's analyses are keen and consistent within his presuppositions. For Auerbach, Poe's universe lacks a stable first cause and purposeful design; as a result, paranoia becomes the prime mover of arabesque plots, of alienating mental dramas in which "the subject splits in two . . . The double is killed and buried; the universe becomes the true source of alien malevolence." In "Usher," considered to be the best example of paranoia, the inside narrative depends on a number of arabesque details, especially the mysterious "sentience," and on "the symbolic power of the artist [Usher] to turn the world into an emblem of his mind." The narrator remains "twice removed from Roderick's madness." When everything is on the verge of plunging into "a series of inwardly spiraling doublings—from author to narrator to Usher to ghostly twin—Poe suddenly pulls back . . ." returning this "absurd fiction" to the audience that is really out there. Finally, Auerbach holds that Poe achieved a clearer recognition of his audience from 1839 to 1849. The shift in Poe's rhetoric is illustrated by the difference between the early hoaxes, relying on verisimilitude of scientific fact, and the later hoaxes, notably "Von Kempelen" (1849), his last and greatest hoax, with its simulation of popular, plausible styles and its hoaxing "published enigma" of details that allude to Poe's life and work, as decoded by Burton R. Pollin.

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It can be argued that the decisive step in achieving cultural hegemony occurs when the oppressing culture imposes a set of linguistic norms upon those it intends to dominate. Once the oppressors exert linguistic authority over the oppressed underclass, they can further dictate the philosophical, political, and literary terms of perception within that society, artfully excluding all competing versions of reality which the subjected minority might wish to articulate. Second Stories: The Politics of Language, Form, and Gender in Early American Fictions, by Cynthia S. Jordan, attempts to expose precisely the way in which such male-authored language strategies have been employed to stifle feminine voices from the inception of our culture so as to establish "a new variant of patriarchy and patriarchal authority" in place of colonial rule. Thus, American language evolves from an eighteenth-century political revolution which, rather than striving to perfect an enlightened model of human rights within a political system offering hitherto unprecedented personal liberties, sought instead to overthrow an "unnatural father," George III, only to "lapse" into "naming" its staunchest male leader, George Washington, "Father of His Country." All of this may sound contrived; indeed, Jordan's book is a strained attempt to recast American political and literary history as primarily a narrative of gender conflict. According to Jordan, the earliest major writers in the canon (she discusses Franklin, Brackenridge, and Brown) exhibit an oft-cited tendency to suppress or defuse the "second story" (a story of female and ethnic minority "otherness"), and the next generation of authors (Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville) in turn criticizes "the patriarchal linguistic politics that tried to silence other views."

Perhaps it is a question of emphasis, but I really cannot see the fiction of Edgar Allan Poe as polemically committed to righting the wrongs which patriarchal American linguistic politics had done to women and minorities. Based in large measure on her 1987 Foerster Prize-winning article, "Poe's Re-Vision: The Recovery of the Second Story," Jordan's chapter on "Detecting the Second Story: Poe's Tales" demonstrates the weaknesses of her approach. Poe's masculine narrators, "directly descended from the 'confidential guardians' of the Early National literature," strive to manipulate language in such a way as to "suppress any disruptive second story that threatens the narrative proper." In other words, Poe's narrators simply forget to tell their readers that they are repressing a deeper, gender-focused tale, and such "acts of forgetting are willful, self-interested acts of aggression." Aggressive forgetting? There is a great deal of this kind of oxymoronic reasoning throughout a chapter which strives to depict Poe fulfilling a feminist (or, at the very least, androgynous) agenda in fiction which is really not about gender at all. To say that Poe's tales involving prominent female characters are "about" women in any polemical sense is, in some measure, to misrepresent authorial intention, no matter how old-fashioned that term has become. Granted, within Poe's best-known tales are some fascinating depictions of women, such as Ligeta, Rowena, and Madeline Usher, to name a few, but Poe's interest in these female characters lies much more securely in an aesthetic rather than a political realm. They are various manifestations of the poet's muse; it seems, not victims of "misogynist strategies of textual control."

To argue that Poe himself takes the side of these female characters against his male narrators who try to suppress their stories may score high points for originality, but what kind of meaningful wedge does it offer us into the texts? Any writer who shows women being victimized, no matter to what end, can be read as a feminist author, according to this kind of logic. Jordan is clearly acquainted with many of the terms currently fashionable in literary criticism, however, and she develops a few of her own in the process of her exposition. The verb "to valorize" begins to appear with ominous regularity in
Jordan’s introduction, as in “the experience of the Revolution valorized the act of renaming while limiting the temporal power of the ‘names’ themselves, and the prime example of this politically time-conscious language is the Constitution itself.” This assertion is followed by her reference a few pages later to an emerging American “paternalistic elite heavily invested in valorizing the art of political interpretation.” And later she sees this same “male elite heavily invested in valorizing . . . verbal proficiency.” In her chapter on Poe, masculine artists produce “male-authored compositions” (this in reference to Poe’s erroneous citation of the last waltz by Von Weber!). Thus it follows that the androgynous Roderick’s “unusual interpretation of this musical score suggests his desire to deviate from male-authored compositions.” And when the mad narrator of “Ligeia” describes the “unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression,” the reader is instructed: “Rather than the language of mortality, say the language of masculine texts, for it soon becomes clear that the narrator intends to fight for his authority, to end his tale rather than allow Ligeia’s verbal ‘revivification.’” But to what extent can we say with any accuracy that Poe would sanction our substitution of Jordan’s “masculine texts” for his own “mortality”? Even allowing for some acceptable degree of verbal freplay—inserting a paraphrase of Poe’s unconscious meaning for his surface meaning—we are constrained by the language of the text from making this passage into a specific reference to gender.

We can see in similar excerpts the limits of Jordan’s tolerance for otherness in spite of Philip Gura’s assertion on the book jacket that her argument is “never strident or strained.” For instance, when discussing Poe’s well-known reference to his narrator’s nightmare vision of “an incubus” in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Jordan points out that the incubus, being a male spirit, implies the narrator’s “homoerotic attraction to Roderick [which] has caused him to see himself in some way feminized.” She then goes on to assert cryptically: “If this is the case, then the nightmare status of this identification with female sexuality is no less proof of the narrator’s misogyny—of his fear and hatred of the female sexuality incarnate in Madeleine Usher.” In other words, any male who has nightmares (read anxieties) about identifying with female sexuality is a covert woman-hater. Jordan then allows that even the androgynous Roderick himself indulges in suppressing “the second story” of Madeleine’s victimization since his poem “The Haunted Palace,” in failing to describe his intended crime explicitly, “tells its tale in symbolism, metonymy, and allegory—all misnomers sanctioned historically by a male-dominant literary tradition.” Is this to say that feminine writers do not engage in such surreptitious troping strategies? Do women writers not use symbolism, metonymy, and allegory—or do they just not sanction them?

As though recognizing the impasse in logic to which her argument has led her, Jordan raises an obvious question seventeen pages into an eighteen-page chapter: “Am I arguing, then, that Poe should be considered a feminist author?” But this is a “re-vision” too daunting for Jordan; indeed, a poet who felt that the death of a beautiful woman is “the most poetic topic in the world” becomes a feminist only through the “most unusual screaming or grating sound,” to steal what seems an appropriate phrase from “The Fall of the House of Usher.” However, Jordan reminds us of the other half of Poe’s poetic dictum, that “lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.” In saying this, Poe achieves an absolving conceptual wholeness by depicting the male suffering which is so justly the result of his exploitation of female characters.

Perhaps it would better to explain why Poe, like the more conspicuously androgynous Whitman after him, finds beauty lying at the fringes of death. Adrienne Rich seems to have framed the problem of gender in literature more accurately during a recent PBS radio interview when she observed that male poets in America always tend to sentimentalize women in their works—that is, they present women either in bed or dead. If we could discover why this is so, we might be much closer to understanding some crucial distinctions between the ways male and female authors understand the role of language in conveying aspiration, idealism, and beauty.

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A Reminder

Scholars are invited to send books or copies of parts of books or journal publications to Benjamin Fisher (English Department, The University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677) for review in the Poe chapter of American Literary Scholarship.