Sixteenth Annual Meeting
Poe Studies Association

The annual meeting of the PSA at the Modern Language Association Convention included two sessions at the New Orleans Hilton, the first on December 27th at 9:00 p.m., the second on December 28th at 7:15 p.m. Both meetings opened with the treasurer's report that indicated a membership of 190. Income for 1988 (to Dec. 10) was $1116.79, expenses $1661.11, leaving a cash-on-hand balance of $1283.59. Interest from the Prime Reserve fund was $121.25, bringing the fund to $1840.00. Total assets were $3123.59.

Citations naming PSA's two newest Honorary Members—G. Richard Thompson (Purdue) and J. Lasley Dameron (Memphis State)--were then read (see “Citations”). The nominating committee's slate of officers, to be voted on in 1989, was also presented (see “Nomination of PSA Officers”).

Speakers at the first session, chaired by Al Omans (Temple), were John T. Irwin (Johns Hopkins), “Handedness and the Self in 'Maelzel's Chess Player'”; John Michael (University of Rochester), “Reflection and Alterity in Poe's Doubles”; and J. Lasley Dameron (Memphis State), “Poe's Concept of Truth.” Speakers at the second session, chaired by Liliane Weissberg (Johns Hopkins), were Clayton T. Koelb (University of Chicago), “Poe and the Rhetoric of Terror”; Susan Bernstein (Johns Hopkins), “The Poe Effect”; and J. Gerald Kennedy (Louisiana State), “Poe, Foucault, and Madness.” Attendance at each session was approximately fifty people. The topic for the 1989 meeting, to be held at the MLA Convention in Washington D.C., will be “Poe Reading, Reading Poe.” All submissions should be sent by February 1989 to Professor Liliane Weissberg, German Department, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218.

CITATIONS
G. R. Thompson

Like Poe himself, Dick—short for Gary Richard—Thompson long ago constituted a group whose chief purpose was to instruct and amuse. Sans the “Dunderheadism” of Poe’s Folio Club members, these folks launched onto the waters of academe the Poe Newsletter in 1968; after twenty years, and several title changes, that journal has, like many of Poe’s writings themselves, revealed myriad, shifting perspectives. A kindred effort—relocating of the old Emerson Society Quarterly, retitled ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance—linked east coast with west coast, as the mantle of Kenneth W. Cameron, another PSA Honorary Member, descended onto Dick Thompson’s capable shoulders. Much of outstanding value has come forth in the pages of these periodicals. For such undertakings, and more, we salute Dick today. During those same years and while the journals were accruing renown, the late 1960’s on into the 1980’s, Dick’s own publications on Poe’s ironies and hoaxing, which culminated in Poe’s Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (1973), with that sturdy outgrowth on “Usher” in Ruined Eden of the Present (1981), spurred revaluations of Poe’s comic impulses that continue to attract attention and to bring forth additional work on such aspects of Poe’s multi-faceted genius. Along with those of Richard P. Benton, Thompson’s approaches to Poe have furnished topics for many a discussion. They have, to quote Dick’s own prefatory comments in Poe’s Fiction, “seriously interfered with” currents in Poe studies, infusing them with compelling vitality. No diminishing of such viewpoints looms on the horizon. More recently, Dick has shed colorful light on The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and his chapter on Poe and other Southern writers in the new Columbia Literary History of the United States offers a considered, balanced overview. Dick’s helpfulness to young scholars is unstinted, and he contributes generously, as well, in promoting causes of recognized veterans. To the person who has undoubtedly done more for Poe studies than any other during this last quarter of a century, our award of Honorary Member status is a small, but heartfelt, return of gratitude.

J. Lasley Dameron

We may for present purposes dub Lasley Dameron “Father of the Poe Studies Association.” This brainchild of his was proposed long ago in a Chicago restaurant, amidst raging winter weather. He later served a term as President and co-editor for the Association’s Newsletter. Lasley’s devotion has benefited not just the PSA, but the “big picture” of Poe studies. One trained by the late Richard Beale Davis, to be sure, would work at maintaining nothing but the highest academic standards. As a respected bibliographer, critic, and general advocate of Poe and his causes, Lasley Dameron has consistently achieved such high peaks. Seldom does one pursue the pathways of Edgar Allan Poe without running across the name of Dameron, and seldom does one make an entry into those windings without consulting the bibliography he produced in tandem with Irby B. Cauthen. Poe’s critical vocabulary has been Lasley’s special interest, and we hope to hear more from him on this topic in the near future. Studies of
Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV  
University of Mississippi

Nomination of PSA Officers

The nominating committee for election of new officers (Dennis Eddings, Western Oregon; Richard P. Benton, Trinity Coll., Emeritus; Mary De Jong, Penn State, Shenango Valley; Kenneth Alan Hovey, Univ. of Texas at San Antonio; James W. Gargano, Washington and Jefferson, Emeritus) has nominated the following to take office January, 1990: President—Al Omans (Temple Univ.); Vice President—Liliane Weissberg (Johns Hopkins Univ.); Secretary/Treasurer—Dennis Eddings (Western Oregon State College); At-large—Joan Dayan (Queens College and The Graduate Center, CUNY) and J. Gerald Kennedy (LSU). Any further nominations must reach the Secretary/Treasurer, Dennis Eddings, no later than March 15th. Election of officers will be by mail ballot in the Spring of 1989.

Scholarly Poe Events

On Sunday, October 2, 1988, Richard Kopley (Penn State, DuBois) presented The Sixty-Sixth Annual Edgar Allan Poe Lecture at The Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore; the title of the talk was "Edgar Allan Poe and The Philadelphia Saturday News." He will offer this talk again at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, on Thursday, March 30, 1989, at 12 noon. The Sixty-Seventh Annual Edgar Allan Poe Lecture, titled "Poe's Love Poems," will be presented in October 1989 by Joan Dayan (Queens College and The Graduate Center, CUNY) and J. Gerald Kennedy (LSU). Any further nominations must reach the Secretary/Treasurer, Dennis Eddings, no later than March 15th. Election of officers will be by mail ballot in the Spring of 1989.

Recent Dissertations: June 1988 - October 1988


Kenneth Alan Hovey  
University of Texas at San Antonio

Poe on Computer

The texts of the two Library of America volumes of Poe's works are among those preindexed in a computer program called WORDCRUNCHER. For further information, write to Electronic Text Corporation, 5600 North University Avenue, Provo, Utah 84604, or call 1-801-226-0616.

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“Outis”: A Gordian Knot Still Beckons

A well-known nobody in American literary history is a certain “Outis,” whose long letter criticizing Poe’s free-and-easy accusations of plagiarism appeared in the New York Evening Mirror on March 1, 1845. Poe reprinted the pseudonymous letter in the Broadway Journal for March 8, and in that issue and four succeeding ones, replied to it most voluminously. Who was Outis? Poe’s early biographers—Ingram, Woodberry, Harrison—did not hazard an identification; in 1926, Mary Phillips rushed in where these gentlemen had feared to tread, and pronounced Outis to be—Poe himself! Miss Phillips argued that Poe was capable of fabricating an attack on himself to gain publicity; she pointed to “A Reviewer Reviewed, By Walter G. Bowen,” a fragmentary pseudonymous manuscript in which he did precisely that. In 1928, her identification of Outis was challenged by Killis Campbell, who proposed instead Cornelius C. Felton, professor of Greek at Harvard and friend of Longfellow. In the six decades since Phillips and Campbell offered their different attributions, informed opinion on this issue has remained sharply divided. Thomas Ollive Mabbott inclined toward Poe’s authorship, but Arthur Hobson Quinn judged the Outis letter simply “a clever imitation of Poe’s manner,” and Sidney P. Moss found that Poe was “thoroughly embarrassed” by it.

The year 1988 should long be remembered by Outis partisans because of the publication of two full-fledged, well-documented, and altogether contradictory studies attempting to establish his identity. The first, by Burton R. Pollin, appeared in Poe Studies for June 1987 (issued in early 1988); the second, by Kent Ljungquist and Buford Jones, appeared in the October American Literature. Professor Pollin elaborates on the Poe attribution; Professors Ljungquist and Jones nominate a previously unmentioned candidate—Lawrence Labree, editor of a minor New York City weekly, The Rover. Who’s right? Has anybody finally nabbed the elusive Mr. Outis?

Given the evidence presented in these two articles, the safest answer would still be—nobody. A deficiency common to both studies is a lack of specificity. That is to say, while Pollin can cite Poe--esque devices in the Outis letter, and while Ljungquist and Jones can find similarities with editorials in The Rover, nobody has discovered a single element of style or substance which is uniquely and indisputably indicative of Poe, Lawrence Labree, or anybody else. The most individualistic element in the letter would seem to be the pun on Edgar A. Poe: “Write it rather EDGAR, a Poet, and then it is right to a T.” Pollin correctly states that this is Poe’s own pun and that he made it in Alexander’s Weekly Messenger on December 18, 1839. Of course, quite a few other people might also have been cognizant of it. The Philadelphia newspaper in question claimed “Over 30,000 Subscribers”; moreover, for all we know, the pun may have been making the rounds, either in print or in conversation. Thomas Dunn English, Poe’s early admirer and subsequent nemesis, could have easily read this little joke in 1839, but in any event, was certainly privy to it by 1848, when he reported the “ranks of the Poe-ts” infested with “JOHN-DONKEYS.”

Ljungquist and Jones deserve credit for their attention to the small details of the Outis letter. They are able, for example, to trace a line quoted by Outis—“The trees, like crystal chandeliers”—to a poem by Joseph H. Nichols. Pollin wrongly assigns the verse to Poe. More significantly, Ljungquist and Jones demonstrate what would seem to be a telltale discrepancy between Outis’ letter and Poe’s reply to it. Outis refers, correctly, to The Rover Rewarded as a poem by Richard Henry Dana, Sr. Poe refers to it as a poem by William Cullen Bryant. While this bit of evidence may not exactly disprove the Poe attribution, it certainly poses a stumbling block. If the letter were a carefully crafted hoax by Poe, how could he commit such a blooper in his reply? What could he hope to gain from a mistake which would suggest ignorance of the works of two major poets?

After these successful annotations of Outis’ letter, Ljungquist and Jones falter on the point of specificity when making an attribution. For example, they observe that Outis quoted Longfellow’s poem “Sea-Weed” and alluded to the popular English author Thomas Haynes Bayly; they then cite their appearance of “Sea-Weed” and several Bayly items in The Rover, conveying the impression that these parallels are signposts pointing to Lawrence Labree. In fact, reprints of Longfellow and Bayly tended to be standard fare for all literary periodicals of the 1840’s which relied mainly on editorial scissors for their contents. The influential Graham’s Magazine published “Sea-Weed” in December 1844 (“January” number); the poem was no doubt circulating freely from Maine to Mississippi by the time The Rover reprinted it in early January 1845.

One inherent difficulty with the Labree attribution lies in the man’s obscurity. The enigmatic Outis would seem to have been a New Englander. Labree’s contributions to The Rover contain references to his boyhood in Maine, but was he—as Outis claimed to be—an acquaintance of Longfellow? Ljungquist and Jones don’t tell us, nor do they even provide an approximate date of birth for their author. Outis was an attentive reader of John Neal’s The Yankee. Was Labree old enough to have been interested in the accusations of plagiarism Neal had made in this short-lived magazine in 1828 and 1829? In The Rover for April 19, 1845, Labree recalled that—“about sixteen years ago”—he had suffered a sprained ankle when ice-skating with a “big, tall boy,” who had sent him “whirling round and round.”

Ljungquist and Jones naturally list the consistencies between Labree’s columns and Outis’ letter, but there are discrepancies as well. Outis presented himself as a mild-mannered gentleman who really wouldn’t accuse anyone of plagiarism, being “disgusted with this wholesale mangling of victims.” Labree apparently relished these accusations as much as other contemporary literati. Indeed, he first became involved with the 1845 controversies by reprinting from the Western Literary Messenger an erroneous report that Longfellow had plagiarized “The Good George Campbell” from Motherwell. In The Rover for March 1, 1845, Labree excoriated Longfellow, but only two issues later he ran a paragraph headed “A VILE THIEF,” exposing the editor of a New Hampshire newspaper. Outis said he would not “charge Mr. Poe with plagiarism.” On two occasions—in The Rover for March 1 and June 28, 1845—Labree gratuitously alluded to the shopworn accusation that Poe had plagiarized “The Gold-Bug” from “Imaginie, or the Pirate’s Treasure,” a story written by a schoolgirl.

The Labree attribution may merit further research, but it is far from being a fait accompli. In their current article, Ljungquist and Jones sometimes stretch the facts to fit their case. The Rover is thus said to follow the 1845 controversies “in punctilious detail”; its coverage might be better described as sporadic. There is no mention of the Outis letter or the extended reply. If Labree had written the letter, would he not have enjoyed a few chuckles over Poe’s discomfort? In an attempt to demonstrate that Labree was (like Outis) familiar with John Neal’s old writings, Ljungquist and Jones attribute to him two editorials praising this Portland author in the second volume (late 1843—early 1844) of The Rover. The principal editor for the first three volumes was Neal’s fellow Portlander Seba Smith (1792–1868), Labree being at best only an assistant to this far better known figure. Both Smith and his wife Elizabeth Oakes Smith were close to Neal; either one could have written the editorials in question. The second volume also presents a small obstacle to the Labree attribution which Ljungquist and Jones conveniently overlook. Outis stated that he had never seen Thomas Hood’s “The Death-Bed” before Poe quoted it in the Evening Mirror of January 14, 1845. This poem appeared, reprinted, in the second volume of The Rover, and Labree almost certainly saw it. On March 1, 1845, he referred his readers to the precise location (“volume
Given the eclectic and nonspecific text of Outis' letter, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to prove an attribution solely on the basis of stylistic parallels and other internal evidence. The most convincing proof would be an external document, be it a letter, reminiscence, or diary entry, which unveiled the author. In his article, Professor Pollin reproduces the following line from Poe's notes made a year or two later: "Add to Plagiarism in Reply to Outis from Yankee p. 32-72. 378." This document surely illustrates how much Poe remained preoccupied with the Outis letter, even checking its allusions to John Neal's The Yankee. Pollin is stretching things, however, when he interprets the line as evidence for Poe's authorship. After all, the work cited was not the letter of, but rather the "Reply to Outis." Kent has ever doubted that Poe wrote this letter composition.

The prosecutions brought against Outis in 1988 should result in a verdict of "not proven." Barring further evidence, an impartial juror could hardly indict either Labree or Poe as the probable culprit. This is not to say that Outis' studies have not benefited. Professor Pollin has given us a lucid exposition of the Poe attribution, hitherto known through the incoherent arguments of Phillips and the incomplete ones of Mabbott. Professors Ljungquist and Jones have explicated some of the most puzzling passages in the letter. Notwithstanding these accomplishments, the Gordian knot Outis tied is still intact, and lasting fame awaits any scholarly Alexander who can cut it.

Dwight Thomas
Savannah, Georgia


As the title of Michael Williams monograph suggests, the subject of Poe's oeuvre is language itself. According to Williams, Poe's texts constitute a continuing meditation on their own signifying practices. A pronounced skepticism on the origins of language, Poe was keenly aware of the uneasy relationship between signifier and signified. His preoccupation with this instability, Williams contends, led him to explore three related issues in a range of tales: the uncertain nature of the relationship between signifier and signified. His preoccupation with this instability, Williams contends, led him to explore three related issues in a range of tales: the uncertain nature of personal identity, the indeterminacy of literary texts as reinterpreted by diverse readers, and the attendant loss of control endured by individual authors.

The degree to which these topics, so generally stated, may strike some as poststructuralist cliches is one measure of the way literary theory has permeated current critical discourse. What Williams brings uniquely to bear in his study, beyond a grounding in French theory, is a thorough knowledge of previous Poe scholarship, a willingness to deal seriously with neglected tales, and a flexible prose style that addresses abstract issues with a minimum of jargon. His analyses of several "minor" tales, notably "Loss of Breath," "Shadow--A Parable," and "Some Words With a Mummy," will challenge those eager to find fixed meanings when confronted by multiple or equivocal "voices." When Williams turns to major tales, however, his discussion sometimes devolves into repetition of previous claims or refutation of alternative perspectives. Once presented, Williams's theoretical framework becomes predictable, and his discussion lacks the rigorous argumentation that builds on a broad base of evidentiary support.

Williams's study might have been strengthened by greater attention to nineteenth-century theories of language and Poe's unique position on contemporaneous linguistic controversies. Such a focus, while diminishing Williams' reliance on contemporary critical theory, might have alerted him to the kinds of issues addressed by David Simpson in The Politics of American English or Philip Gura in The Wisdom of Words.

Kent Ljungquist
Worcester Polytechnic Institute


The illustrative dust-jacket of the Columbia Literary History of the United States points to one of that book's unstated assumptions. Its rough indication of the United States flag, while showing thirteen stripes (seven red and six white), presents us with a patch of blue in the upper corner with no indication of the stars we expect to see. Get it? In this collectivized look at what we call literature in these United States, there are many writers but no stars. Yet this notion cannot really be honored, beyond repeated assertion and token gesture by scholar, editor, or publisher. The very table of contents betrays the efforts at such leveling by listing chapters devoted in their entirety to such salient writers in the nineteenth century as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman. The treatment of Poe, however, becomes part of a chapter entitled "Edgar Allan Poe and the Writers of the Old South." It's a demotion of sorts, especially when we compare this treatment of Poe with the attention given him in the Literary History of the United States (1948) where F. O. Matthiessen treats Poe at length and by himself.

Surely G. R. Thompson, who wrote the Columbia chapter, might well have been instructed as to what he was expected to cover, but it is clear that he is somewhat impatient with the assignment until he gets to Poe. "Other than Poe only two Southern poets are much remembered, Paul Hamilton Hayne and Henry Timrod" (264-65), writes Thompson, forgetting, apparently, about Sidney Lanier (whose name does not even appear in the volume's index). In the sixteen pages allotted to him, Thompson devotes some nine to Poe. (Matthiessen's chapter runs to twenty-two pages.) He manages to say a good deal, subordinating biography and matters of literary reputation and influence to the exposition of Poe's themes and ideas. On the latter he is about fifty-fifty for soundness and/or provocativeness. "The speaker of 'Sonnet--to Science' laments the passing of ancient poetic myths before the encroachments of science; but he reembodies their poetic legacy by invoking Diana, the Hamadryad, and the Naiad" (270)--sound. In "The Cask of Amontillado," "the Catholic Montresor is telling the story as his deathbed confession to a priest. He has not escaped with impunity; he has carried his guilt buried in his heart for fifty years" (272)--provocative. "Once regarded as an unfinished or a hastily finished mistake, the arabesque romance of Arthur Gordon Pym exemplifies Poe's method of resonant indeterminateness and his affinities both with modernism and with postmodernism" (274)--pay your money and take your pick. There is in Thompson's account precious little about Poe's enormous literary reputation abroad (or in the United States--suggested by his influence on Stevens, Frost, Crane, and Eliot). For a beginning on that topic, the student is still advised to go back to Matthiessen, whose learned and informed essay, for all the good (and not-so-good) scholarship on Poe in the last forty years, is still not superseded.

Poe is one of fourteen authors covered in the first volume of Short Story Criticism. An anonymous survey of Poe's life and work and an excerpt from Poe's review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales precede thirteen chronologically arranged excerpts from Poe's critics (1923-1983): D. H. Lawrence, H. P. Lovecraft, Darrel Abel, Allen Tate, Robert Daniel, Wolfgang Kayser, Patrick Quinn, James Gargano, Donald Stauffer,
Discount on New Poe Iconography

The University Press of Virginia is offering to PSA members a 20% discount on Michael Deas' new book, The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe. The list price of the book is $60.00 (cloth) and $29.95 (paper); the price for PSA members will be $48.00 (cloth) and $23.96 (paper), plus $2.00 postage and handling for the first book ordered. Virginia residents add 4½% sales tax ($2.16 per cloth copy, and $1.08 per paper copy). Checks should be made payable to "The Poe Studies Association," and sent to Dennis W. Eddings, Secretary/Treasurer, Poe Studies Association, Department of English, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, Oregon 97361. Please allow four to six weeks for delivery.


David S. Reynolds’ ponderous tome on the American Renaissance and Shirley Marchalonis’ relatively lightweight gathering of essays on male-female literary relationships have this in common: their authors have sloughed through literary byways most readers, regrettably, have little taste for exploring themselves.

Mary G. De Jong contributes: "Lines from a Partly Published Drama: The Romance of Frances Sargent Osgood and Edgar Allan Poe" to Patrons and Protégés. In Poe's romantic entanglements there was, I am convinced, almost always less than met the eye. De Jong deserves credit for resisting the temptation to believe what Poe and Osgood, for what perverse reasons we can only speculate, appear to have wanted their audience to believe about them. Yet here and there this essay comes close to falling into the errors that characterize John Evangelist Walsh’s Plumes in the Dust: The Love Affair of Edgar Allan Poe and Fanny Osgood (1980). Osgood’s brother, De Jong reminds us, claimed that, not long after Virginia’s death, Poe tried to persuade his sister to elope with him. De Jong supplies a note at this point which seems to reject the brother’s claim, yet she follows it with this: "Upon [Osgood’s] refusal they parted, never to see each other again.”

The strength of the essay lies precisely in its emphasis on the public aspect of the “romance,” which was surely its most important and may have been its sole aspect. Particularly illuminating is De Jong’s attention to Poe’s placement of Osgood’s poems in the pages of the Broadway Journal. "A Shipwreck" is a romantic poem addressed to a nameless "you," but by placing it two inches under his own name at the end of "The Oblong Box," Poe invited his readers to assume that he was the "pilot" of Osgood’s "bark." De Jong’s essay is slight but provocative.

There is nothing slight about David S. Reynolds’ book: he has addressed a large, a significant, a daunting subject, and he has acquitted himself with high distinction. He announces that his intention is to complement F. O. Matthiessen’s treatment of the “American Renaissance” and the kind of treatment that Harold Bloom’s notion of the “anxiety of influence” prompts. Poe enthusiasts may find this initial announcement of the project disquieting; however uncomfortable we may be with what Bloom has written about Poe, we can hardly deny that no clearer case of an author preoccupied with the “anxiety of influence” is to be found in our literature. Reynolds, however, is to be taken at his word: he is not contradicting the insights of Matthiessen and Bloom; he is not arguing that the reactions of the major figures of mid-nineteenth-century America to their canonical forerunners are to be dismissed; rather, he is complementing their insights by examining the popular sources which engaged Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, and two figures Matthiessen did not count among the worthies of his American Renaissance, Dickinson and Poe. If Bloom invites us to look back, Reynolds invites us to look down to discover the sources of our authors’ anxieties.

Reynolds situates the “imaginative texts” of his seven major writers in the world of what he calls “popular social texts.” The four divisions of the book sort our kinds of popular texts: the religious and reformist, the sentimental, the feminist, and the humorous. Poe receives extended treatment in all of these contexts except the third. (I trust that we shall soon be provided a study of Poe as feminist, for surely he was a feminist.) In the first context, Reynolds sees Poe’s visionary works as adopting and transforming the otherworldly ramblings of such popular poets as Osgood by divesting them
of their didacticism and dogma. It is to be regretted that J. Gerald Kennedy’s remarkable Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing appeared too recently for Reynolds to have profited from its contributions to this topic. Donald B. Stauffer’s analysis of the poems to which he reaches independently are admirable and illuminating. Even more illuminating are his observations on the ways in which Poe transformed the sensational. By comparison with the writers of the stock-in-trade of the popular press, Poe was hardly a grisly, hardly a morbid writer. By two devices, exaggeration and analysis, he distanced himself from the sensational while still making the most of its appeal. The argument of Reynolds’s final section is similar: Poe “deconstructs popular humor by exaggerating its weirdness,” a point often missed by critics who have neglected to read extensively in the journalism of the day.

Occasionally Reynolds strives too hard to make his evidence square with his thesis. He suggests that “Hans Phaali” was “directly influenced” by Richard Adams Locke’s “Great Astronomical Discoveries.” Poe, I believe, beat Locke to the punch by two months. Occasionally his aesthetic judgments are open to challenge. Is “The Conqueror Worm,” like “The Haunted Palace,” “an interpolated text that represents the graceful treatment of gory themes”? Reynolds is not the first to see it as such, but I can detect nothing graceful in the poem: Poe made it a monstrously bad poem, and since we know that Poe was a great poet, we can only conclude that he meant it to be monstrously bad. Readers will find many passages on Poe and other writers to which they may raise similar objections, but Reynolds’s solid accomplishment will remain. I called his book ponderous. Given its subject and given the prevailing fashions of critical discourse, it could hardly escape being ponderous. But it is by the same token weighty.

Beneath the American Renaissance is a major contribution to our literary history.

Robert Regan
University of Pennsylvania

Recent and Forthcoming Poe-Related Books


This anthology of thirty essays selected for historical influence or critical importance is aptly presented as “a companion to, rather than a revised edition of,” Eric W. Carlson’s The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism Since 1829 (1966). The section called “Poe’s Contemporaries” contains valuable commentary by Margaret Fuller on the poetry and tales, and excerpts from Sarah Helen Whitman’s 1866 defense of Poe, as well as Rufus Griswold’s notorious “Memoir” of 1850. “Creative Writers on Poe,” the second section, includes statements by Baudelaire (Poe reacted against an impoverished culture), Fyodor Dostoevski (Poe’s imagination “betrays the true American”), and Walt Whitman (Poe’s life and writings are “lurid dreams,” but the later poet has come to “appreciate” his genius). Of special interest for its analysis of spiritual vampirism is D. H. Lawrence’s “Edgar Allan Poe” (1919), which was curtailed for inclusion in Studies in Classic American Literature (1923).

None of the twelve essays in the third section, “Modern Criticism,” appeared in Carlson’s earlier collection. Several classic and still provocative essays are reprinted here: Edmund Wilson on Poe’s literary criticism (“There is no other such critical survey in our literature”). Donald L. DiMarco’s analysis of style in “Ligeia” and “William Wilson,” Clark Griffith’s “Poe and the Gothic,” and David Halliburton’s phenomenological view of the tales. Patrick F. Quinn disputes G. R. Thompson’s argument in Poe’s Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (1973) that “The Fall of the House of Usher” “may be the fabrication of the completely deranged mind of the narrator.” Students of Poe’s philosophy and poetic language will be pleased at the inclusion of Joan Dayan’s “The Analytic of the Dash: Poe’s Eureka,” an explication of Poe’s techniques for leading readers to realize Truth. Three essays are published for the first time in this volume: Roger Kamenetz’s “Psychoanalysis and Edgar Allan Poe: A Critique of the Bonaparte Thesis”; Claude Richard’s “The Heart of Poe and the Rhythms of the Poems”; and Carlson’s own “Frames of Reference for Poe’s Symbolic Language.”

The editor’s twenty-seven-page “Introduction” surveying over 170 critical statements on Poe from 1829 to 1985 will benefit scholars for years to come. Most of the items are objectively abstracted or summarized; some are evaluated. Carlson points out “pioneering” and “landmark” essays as he identifies major issues and trends in more than fifteen decades of critical Poe. In “Frames of Reference,” an exploration of Poe’s philosophical and aesthetic views, he lists various twentieth-century approaches—Romantic, Freudian, neogothic, phenomenological, structuralist, and deconstructionist, to name only a few—and observes that “the sheer proliferation of such incompatible approaches and contradictory findings has become a matter of special concern to some Poe critics.” Still, every “serious” scholar eventually recognizes the need to examine the artist’s intellectual and aesthetic views. Despite the “confusion of rival and conflicting interpretations,” Carlson affirms that “mainstream” scholars since Baudelaire’s day have preferred a “transcendental-symbolic” or “visionary” reading of Poe’s work “in the context of his philosophic and artistic perspectives.” He suggests that this consensus—“tested by time and only slightly qualified by the few legitimate claims of irony, hoaxing, parody, and ‘undecidability’”—should be recognized as the basis for continuing research and interpretation.

Critical Essays on Edgar Allan Poe captures both the diversity and the liveliness of Poe scholarship. This volume, along with The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe, merits a place in the Poe scholar’s library.

Mary G. De Jong
The Pennsylvania State University,
Shenango Valley

Journal, taunted about his "belief" in the factuality' of and in the dialogues of heavenly spirits. R. C. Fuller's "Valdemar." I. L. Greenway's "'Nervous Disease' and helps to explain Poe's interest in "The Poughkeepsie Sc:er Technology of the Soul," ~resents a detailed treatment of apopular phrenomagnetist ' whom Poe, in The Broad:way Spiritualism" (the return of spirits to inform or aid mortals) Electric Medicine" reminds us of Poe's extensive use ofgal-vanism in his tales. R. W. Delp's "Andrew I ackson Davis and in the popular media. fourteen illustrations, mostly drawn from contemporary prints of works of the leading cults or movements or the names of the our intellectual history .Onlya few excessively parade the titles thereby illuminating an important and oft-neglected pha..~ of dream." Most of these essayists adhere to a social orientation, and hence society beneficially, ended with the rejection of such "systems" to the needs of burgeoning democracy for improved health conditions and a better level of happiness. The "new views" here presented sought to explain man's faults and guide him to the envisioned "new world."}

Various of the essays help us, as involved readers of Poe, to understand how the initial promises of Combe and Spurzheim (see seven references by Poe) to shape human education and hence society beneficially, ended with the rejection of such "science" by numerous individuals, including Poe. Wrobcl, in "Phrenology as Political Science," aptly shows that this "study" (properly linked to "faculty psychology") has broad and varied implications for the progress of the "American dream." Most of these essayists adhere to a social orientation, thereby illuminating an important and oft-neglected phase of our intellectual history. Only a few excessively parade the titles of works of the leading cults or movements or the names of the practitioners. The line of historical and chronological development is usually well marked. Helpful and also amusing are the fourteen illustrations, mostly drawn from contemporary prints in the popular media. Poe aficionados will find their author's particular inclinations handled in most of the articles. T. Stoehr, in "Collyer's Technology of the Soul," presents a detailed treatment of a popular "phrenomagnetist" whom Poe, in The Broadway Journal, taunted about his "belief" in the factuality of "Valdemar." J. L. Greenway's "'Nervous Disease' and Electric Medicine" reminds us of Poe's extensive use of galvanism in his tales. R. W. Delp's "Andrew Jackson Davis and Spiritualism" (the return of spirits to inform or aid mortals) helps to explain Poe's interest in "The Poughkeepsie Seer" and in the dialogues of heavenly spirits. R. C. Fuller's "Mesmerism and the Birth of Psychology" indirectly recalls Poe's coinages of "psychal" and "vitalic" from Vitalism (an affiliated pseudo-science) and his "near-coinage" of "Mesmeric" as in "Mesmeric Revelation." Would it be relevant to suggest that a few articles borrow too much of the language and even thought of the original sales-talk and "treatises" of the pseudo-scientists—presenting passages of elevated jargon and obfuscation? Speaking positively, however—this volume should not be left off the shelves of anyone concerned with the modes of thought and the works of literature of the early nineteenth century. The facts and perceptions cannot readily be found elsewhere.

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This volume contains the proceedings of a colloquium held in April 1987 at the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines by the Centre d'etude de la Metaphore of the Université de Nice. The topic chosen for this conference was "Poe and Visionary Reason." Many of the speakers forgot or ignored the announced topic, however, making for some welcome variety.

Thus, many of the papers are concerned with more or less traditional questions of literary influence, such as Cristina Benussi's study of Poe and Italo Calvino, and Jorge Bonell's of Poe's presence in the writings of Borges and Cortazar. A broader aspect of influence (or intertextuality?) is studied by Jean-Baptiste Baronian in "Edgar Poe et la littérature française de l'imagination au XIXe siècle."

Two speakers deal with J utes Sphinx des glaces" as a sequel to Arthur Gordon Pym, while Joseph Suchy seems to contradict, declaring that "Le Sphinx des glaces n'est pas une suite des Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym." The debate between the two, if it took place, is not recorded.

Eight papers in English were clustered around the morning and afternoon sessions of the first day. Patrick Parrinder, in one of the rare papers on Poe's verse, has a wide-ranging view of "The Raven" and "The Philosophy of Composition," which he attaches somehow to the theme of the color-blue, science fiction. Brian Stableford examines Eureka as one of the manifestations of "cosmic perspectives in nineteenth-century literature." John Dunham points Poe's relation to the popular culture of his time: a meaty and wellresearched paper which will appeal to persons interested in literary history. David Ketterer explores the "sexual abyss" in "The Assignation" and questions the critics who have seen in it a lampoon or a hoax. Mark Rich looks at Poe as a precursor of
the “speculative poets.” Brian Aldiss sees in Poe another victim of what he calls “a fatal break,” who managed to survive it by resorting to his writing. Angela Carter proposes a new approach to our understanding of “The Fall of the House of Usher.” It consists simply of reading it backward, as if a film were reversed in a projector. There is no doubt that some movies would benefit from that procedure, but it is less certain that it would work as well with Poe’s tale.

Some speakers seem to have made an attempt to adhere faithfully to the topic of the conference, science fiction and visionary reason. Fernando Porta, for example, studies the “angelic” tales (“The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion,” “The Colloquy of Monos and Una,” and “The Power of Words”) as signs of a “deliberate attack by Poe on the scientism and rationalism of his time.” Cwennhael Ponnau, in a well-documented essay on Poe’s tales of animal magnetism, and André Justin, in “Vortex et Vérité,” in which he explicates “A Descent into the Maelström,” are two excellent examples of this approach. (An unfortunate but rather amusing misprint occurs in the latter paper. In a reference to the “big-bang” theory of creation, the printed text gives “big band.” Throughout the volume, misprints abound, suggesting that authors were not given an opportunity to correct the proof.)

The recently heightened interest in Arthur Gordon Pym has inspired, in addition to the papers already mentioned, one by Annette Goizet on a novel method of applying the tool of “lying versus truth” to aid in the interpretation of the work. Various other themes in Poe’s writing are examined by other speakers. Claude Richard probes Poe’s conception of the atom, invoking Lucretius, Karl Marx, and the French Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Lacan and Derrida. Henri Diament looks at Poe’s use of cryptography as a scientific element of the imaginary; Ion Hobana questions the part that mystification played in the tales while Bernard Terramorsi finds in the balloon tales a much deeper significance than the one usually attached to them. An interesting paper by Gianfranca Balestra briefly but deftly explores Poe’s method of presenting oral peculiarities of speech in his characters.

Roger Bozzetto finds that Poe was reduced to writing prose, rather than verse, in order to meet his material needs, but, paradoxically, his works in prose may be more poetic than his verse, or, at least, more modern. Alain Chareyre-Mélan, in a short paper, attacks the problem faced by Poe in depicting cadavers, and, especially, that of bestowing on them powers of speech. And Joseph Suchy offers a new translation into French of Dostoevski’s introduction to three of Poe’s tales which he published in his review, Vremia, in 1861. This, incidentally, is the same document that Vladimir Astrov published, in English, in his article on Poe and Dostoevski in American Literature as early as March 1942.

Two papers adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the posthumous repercussion of Poe’s tales. René Prédal reviews some of the innumerable films based on them, with particular emphasis on those by Jean Epstein. A paper by Jacques Tramson, which is profusely illustrated and is by far the longest at the colloquium, offers an exhaustive survey of the comic strips inspired by Poe’s stories. I must confess that this is the only study in the volume that I found impossible to read in its entirety.

The general impression left on this reviewer is that, while the colloquium may have marked a leap forward in the investigation of science fiction, its contribution to Poe studies is, at best, marginal.

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Request Regarding the ALS Poe Chapter

Seeking to ease difficulties created by library cutbacks that may hinder good surveys of annual scholarship, Ben Fisher, author of the ALS Poe chapter, requests that scholars send or have sent to him books or copies of parts of books or journal publications for inclusion in the ALS Poe chapter. Please send the work to Professor Fisher at the English Department, The University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677.

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