ANNUAL MEETING: POE STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Chicago, 30 December 1985,
Columbus A and B, East Tower, Hyatt Regency, 10:15 A.M.

Presiding:
Kent P. Ljungquist, Worcester Polytechnic Institute,
and David H. Hirsch, Brown University

Agenda for Business Meeting:
1) Report from Nominating Committee: David E. E. Sloane, chair; members include Frederick S. Frank, Burton R. Pollin, Liliane Weissberg, and J. Gerald Kennedy.
2) Election of New Officers.
4) Treasurer's Report: Dennis Eddings.
5) Presentation of Honorary Member.

Papers:
1) Alan Golding, University of Mississippi, "Poe, Long-fellow, and the Heresy of the Didactic"
2) Stanton Garner, University of Texas at Arlington, "Symbolism in 'A Descent into the Maelström''
3) E. Kate Stewart, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, "The Supreme Madness: Revenge in 'The Cask of Amontillado'"

Reviews

Printed in the same format as Volume 1, this sturdy and attractive edition of The Brevities, "a title he makes it clear that Poe himself," contains over 600 items, ranging from one sentence to 15 paragraphs in length. Many have not before been collected accurately or completely, nor annotated. Every entry is followed by an editorial and critical note. In addition, each of the seven main sections has an introduction, also conveniently placed at the beginning of the volume, giving the essential data and background for the section. The general introduction also presents Sources, Typographical Variants and Errors, Manuscripts, Digraphs and Diereses, and lists of topics to be found in the Marginalia, in Fifty Suggestions, and in the Supplementary Marginalia (these topical lists are patterned after my own lists for the Marginalia included in Prescott's Selections from the Critical Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, reprint edition, Gordian Press, 1981). The detailed index, of course, includes topics as well as names and titles.

The Marginalia number 291 entries, Fifty Suggestions 50, Supplementary Marginalia 25, Pinakidia 172, A Chapter of Suggestions 11, Supplementary Pinakidia 46, and Literary Small Talk 7. The span of time is 1835-1850. This edition seems as complete in its primary and secondary matter as humanly possible, given the materials and the assistance from individuals, from libraries, and from the Mabbot collection. Professor Pollin can be justifiably proud of this achievement, the product of years of intensive research. Students of Poe at every level will find this work most reliable and definitive, with all the apparatus needed for scholarly investigation in the notes and the introductions.

For the first time, in a special section on pp. xxxvi-xl, Pollin has presented a report on Poe's unconventional use of the digraph and the dieresis, which he placed over the first vowel, as in coëxist, naïve, réaction, zoology. In Pollin's view, "They have a greater importance: to signalize Poe's independence in matters of pointing and his keen desire to underscore the correct sounding of the syllables of the words being read... his intentions are commendable and his finely tuned ear, as in his essays on prosody and his poems, is in charge." Also presented for the first time are the 25 Supplementary Marginalia, apparently misplaced beyond Griswold's reach and knowledge. Pollin finds ample evidence of their being selected and edited by Poe, not Griswold, who claimed and has received credit he did not deserve. The 1850 edition was hastily assembled and very carelessly printed. "The canon of the 226 articles as a whole (the Marginalia) is regarded as Poe-determined; therefore the 25 additions of SM) are considered to be Poe's 'supplements' to the main text of the Marginalia. The same instalments took form as a farrago (Poe's term) of excerpts from reviews, bons mots, puns, and comments on events, persons, literature, and the arts in general. Many are said to be "highly exhilarating and unconventional... humorous and whimsical." In the context of that statement and the guidance of the editor's Notes, we can look forward to some interesting as well as obligatory reading. Who knows what nuggets of wisdom and revelations of Poe's perspective are hidden away in these little-read essay-notes?

Eric W. Carlson,
Professor Emeritus
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This special Poe issue of The Sphinx is not unlike the figure it would illuminate—a fair amount of flummery surrounding some very solid substance.

Part of the flummery is provided by the issue's special editor, Frederick S. Frank. Professor Frank's introduction suggests that the essays "extend" and "apply" Richard Wilbur's comment about "Poe as a thinker"—that is, that Poe's "great subjects" are "the war between the poetic soul and the external world." What is missing is the "psychological self" that is bound to the external self. The essays do so, according to Frank, by explicating "Poe's achievement as a product of his conscious artistry and concern for form as an expression of the artistic will operating in harmony with and drawing upon a literary tradition," specifically the Gothic. Frank's remarks, however, do not adequately fit either Wilbur's statement or all the essays in the issue. Poe worked in other traditions than the Gothic, at least two of the essays make clear. Furthermore, to assert that Poe's art is conscious is to indulge in the commonplace. Even though a good introduction may not necessarily be profound, it must be precise in preparing the reader for what is to come. Frank's introduction is, in these respects, misleading. Much of what Frank says is generic, capable of covering a multitude of issues in one plain wrapper.

I somewhat belabor the point because the precision lacking in Frank's introduction is even more of a problem in the issue's concluding piece, "Poe's Gothicism: An Analytic Bibliography." Intended as "a tabulation of scholarship... about the origins and nature of Poe's Gothic vision," Frank's analytic comments are rudimentary and his principle of selection a mystery. He cites G.R. Thompson's "Poe and the Paradox of Terror" in Ruined Eden of the Present, but ignores Patrick Quinn's remarks, in the same book, about Thompson's particular reading. He points to B.P. Fisher's "Fugitive Poe References" in Poe Studies—hardly a milestone in Gothic readings of Poe—while ignoring Fisher's important study, in The Library Chronicle, of how Poe's revisions intensified his Gothic effects. Finally, Frank cites only one article by James W. Gargano, ignoring Gargano's other pertinent studies of Poe's narrators. For the Poe scholar, the "Analytic Bibliography" is of little use. For the beginning student, it is downright misleading.

Matters do not improve with the issue's first two essays. Kenneth W. Graham's examination of William Beckford's influence on Poe is full of qualified speculation that finally leaves the reader wondering what all the noise is about. Graham finds commonplaces of Romantic fiction in Beckford's work, extrapolates their affinity with commonplaces in Poe, and then suggests there "may" be a connection. While some of the influences Graham postulates are potentially interesting, they are not pursued effectively. Edward W. R. Pitcher's "Cosmorama" study of Poe's symbolism sets forth the intriguing idea that the "interrelated symbols of sea, lake, and river... intimate what [Poe] believed the artist could and could not accomplish, might and might not know, and what man may and may not experience, feel, intuit, or believe." But Pitcher's evidence is of the cut-and-paste variety—fragmented observations on and snippets from various works. He manages, for instance, to refer to six works in a fifteen-line paragraph that treats a myriad of topics, including bereaved lovers, despairing visionaries, awakened visionaries, artistic creation, the quest for the ideal, and the passage of time. The reader is finally overwhelmed by the volume of references, but not by the argument. Significantly, Pitcher ignores many fine explanations of Poe's cosmography.

The next three articles, fortunately, redeem the issue. Kent Ljungquist's "Speculative Mythology and the Titan Myth in Poe's Pym and Melville's Pierre" shows both the pervasive ness of the Titan myth in Pym and the currency of that myth during Poe's time. More importantly, Ljungquist does not merely identify the myth in Poe's narrative; he demonstrates how it gives unexpected meaning to the white figure at the end of the work and to the mysterious hieroglyphics Pym and Peters find at Taalal.

Martin Roth's study of "Three Sundays in a Week" demonstrates that Poe's most frivolous tales assume importance when approached intelligently. Roth shows that this work is a "coded version" of Poe's cosmological vision by pointing to the tale's "structural presence of pairs of opposites" existing both within and between characters. He concludes that the occurrence of three Sundays in one week is an example of the merging which Poe discusses in Eureka. While his argument is sometimes a bit forced, and while he is wrong in identifying Poe as the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse," Roth presents an intriguing reading of this often overlooked story.

The final piece in the issue is Nicholas Ruddick's "The Hoax of the Red Death: Poe as Allegorist." Ruddick's basic contention is that Poe, while including details that demand an allegorical reading, presents in "The Mask of the Red Death" an allegory that resists interpretation because the essential element of the code is omitted—that which the allegory signifies. The tale then becomes "a trap for would-be exegetes..." Ruddick's argument is convincing, especially when paired with that of Robert Regan in "Hawthorne's "Plagiary": Poe's Duplicity."

In sum, the merits of the last three articles override the flummery elsewhere and make this special Poe issue of The Sphinx worthwhile. Copies may be ordered from the Editor of The Sphinx, c/o English Department, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada S4S OA2.
thus maintains an “arch, ironical” perspective on the “picturesque complexity” of his narrators’ imaginative projections which undercuts the illusions of their “unbridled imagination.”

Throughout the book, Ljungquist freely pursues divergent lines of development suggested by his fresh perspectives. If this freedom strains the central focus of the work, it nevertheless rewards the reader with surprising capsule studies of such topics as Titanism in Poe and the Romantics; the relevance of the Autography series to Poe’s use of the picturesque; Poe and the daemonic tradition, which leads to a new reading of “Al Aaraaf”; and Poe and the literature of ruin, which adds new significance to “The Coliseum.” With these near-digressions, Ljungquist endows his work with richness and depth and avoids the narrow uniformity that might have resulted from a relentless adherence to a central focus. Collected here, these studies, which lend importance to frequently ignored pieces, also provide a compendium of information on some of Poe’s most often studied works.

In addition to the suggestiveness of the text, the notes offer an impressive bibliography relevant not only to Poe’s works but also to his literary relationships with Hawthorne, Melville, and the English Romantics, especially Coleridge and Shelley. Its abundant thematic and bibliographical material makes this book a significant addition to any collection of Poe studies.


Eveline Pinto gives us the French Poe with a différence. Baudelaire and Mallarmé catapulted their splenetic symbolist Poe “anywhere out of this world.” But in this long-deferred critique of that long-suffering figure, Poe’s French face turns back to his historical context.

More precisely, Pinto negotiates a compromise between Poe and the scientific America of his day: a Poe whose “art of invention,” like the _ars inveniendi_ of Leibniz, does not so much revolt against rationality as “substitute for a deter-

minist conception of science a mode of intelligibility which takes account of the indeterminate” (232). The author has no difficulty reconciling this “poetic rationality, half reason and half chance” (264) with the tales of ratiocination. But the key does not fit every lock. To conclude a reading of “MS. Found in a Bottle” with the decisive fact that Mercator, mentioned by Poe in a footnote, was “the brilliant founder of scientific geography” (36), or to insist, apropos of “Descent into the Maelstrom,” that the hero is saved only “thanks to scientific invention and technique” (85) is not to bring enlightenment to an understanding of the relationship between Poe’s artistry and his science.

The author’s will to reconcile Poe with science belongs to the larger intention of replacing the image of a wild _poète maudit_, in full regression toward death and his mother, with that of a misunderstood humanist, intent on criticizing nineteenth-century America “in the name of human arrangements forgotten by civilization and progress” (273). Pinto brings to this task an impressive amount of historical research on poverty, epidemics, and the problem of criminal responsibility. Yet her case, rarely amounting to more than a pious wish to explain Poe in terms of historical context, goes astray. Poe’s suffering in the world of the periodicals does not suffice to make him a defender of the People. And while a high mortality rate may be aligned with Poe’s cherished image of a dying young woman, the two parallels do not meet as cause and effect.

The book’s most animated polemic is against the notion of Poe as the extraordinary precursor of Freud’s discoveries. Yet the author herself cannot seem to do without Freudian explanations. She abandons the Poe who was too faithful to his mother’s memory, but only in order to champion the Poe who revolted against his adoptive father. And when she transforms his revolt against the Father into a revolt against the capitalistic system simply by reminding us that John Allan was an entrepreneur, the crossing from individual psychology to collective history is not successfully negotiated. To call Poe a man of his century will remain a mere tautology as long as we have not managed to reformulate his relations to history in terms that are not merely deferred, but different.

Bruce Robbins

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NEW MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL FOR 1986

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Emphasizing that he goes beyond Dan J. McNutt's "fragmentary" bibliography entitled The Eighteenth Century Gothic Novel, Frederick S. Frank remarks that his Guide "attempts to be comprehensive and as compendious as possible." With its 2,500 annotated references, this bibliography fulfills the author's intentions.

Frank begins with a section on previous Gothic guides, particularly helpful since he comments on the strength and limitations of each. From there he effectively organizes his Guide according to country of origin, with sections on English, Canadian, American, French, and German treatments of the Gothic tradition. He also includes a section called "Special Subject Areas," which covers such topics as Graveyard verse, the Doppelgänger, the vampire, the werewolf, and Gothic films. The author-oriented format within each section leads the researcher quickly to his specific area of investigation. The Poe scholar, for example, finds easy access to 122 well-chosen entries arranged chronologically to indicate both early and late research. The Poe section is particularly helpful for its inclusion of material on the relationship of Poe to E.T.A. Hoffmann, H.P. Lovecraft, Charles Brockden Brown, and others. Always focusing on Gothicism, Frank presents some of the most useful material available on the subject.

With the exception of a very few thin annotations, Frank's Guide is uniformly excellent, especially since it provides cross-references and cites reviews for many entries. Its preface and its generally chronological arrangement offer the user a good sense of the literary history of Gothicism. This bibliography is an invaluable asset to scholars of Poe and the Gothic.

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Recent Dissertations: June 1983 - June 1984


Poe Elected to Poet's Corner

A memorial stone to Edgar Allan Poe was unveiled on May 12, 1985, at a service in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. Poe, along with Herman Melville, thus joins the original three honored in the new American version of Poet's Corner—Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Washington Irving. Established in 1984 in the arts bay on the north side of the nave in the cathedral, Poet's Corner will honor each year two additional deceased American authors chosen by a panel of thirteen electors who are themselves distinguished American writers and critics. Poe's competition for this year's honor included such celebrated writers as Emerson, Hawthorne, Frost, and Eliot. The inscription on Poe's memorial stone reads, "Out of Space—Out of Time," from his poem "Dream-Land."

The editors call your attention to the newly-designed seal printed below and invite your comments.