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A survey of the critical opinion concerning the effect of Edgar Allan Poe's life upon his literary work

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A SURVEY OF THE CRITICAL OPINION CONCERNING THE EFFECT OF EDGAR ALLAN POE'S LIFE UPON HIS LITERARY WORK

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I. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I hope to present a picture of the effect the life of Edgar Allan Poe had upon his writing. Poe was and still is a controversial figure. Many of his biographers and critics agree that the illnesses and deaths of those dearest to him and the constant pressure of outer tragic circumstances played a great part in what he put down upon paper. Others feel his drinking and dope-taking colored his outpourings. There is much emphasis placed upon his childhood days in England. Some attention is paid to his life in Richmond as a boy. There are a few on the other side who think he wrote purely from imagination -- without heart -- though these latter critics are in the minority.

In this thesis I am endeavoring to present each of these viewpoints and to draw from them a composite picture of just how much a great American poet and short story writer was affected by the tragedy of his own existence. To do this I am utilizing the criticisms of biographers according to the periods when they wrote.

Analysts of Poe seem, upon study, to fall into three different groupings — those who wrote shortly after his death, those in the early twentieth century, and the ones in the present day. I have selected these three periods because the biographers and critics in each seem to bear a definite kinship to one another.

From the beginning there is an attempt at a psychological explanation of the relationship between Poe's life and his writings. In general, the critics and biographers of the early period dwell upon his inner life but give only a few concrete evidences upon which to base their opinions. More attention is paid to hearsay or their own views than to genuine research on the poet's life. The analysts in the first part of the twentieth century are growing toward a psychological interpretation but have not quite reached it — they are often lively and bitter but present more sound and fury than actual statements which one can grasp.

But when one comes up to the present, one finds Poe being explored and dissected inside and out, more subjectively and more realistically. It is this present period which gives the firmest foundation for belief in how Poe, the man, affected Poe, the poet and the teller of tales.

II. EARLY CRITICS (1850-1899)

Out of the mists of time appears once more the slight figure of a man whose life was one sombre repetition of tragedy and whose writings are no less fraught with horror and gloom. How much of the life of Edgar Allan Poe had an effect upon the masterly tales of horror and the mournful poetry he composed? Most of the earlier biographers and critics of this controversial figure dwell in generalities rather than in specific incidents in explaining the relationship between the man's life and his writings. Concrete reasons for connecting reality with fiction in regard to his tales and poems are given in only a few instances. Definite evidence is sketchy, and it remains to later biographers to fill the many gaps in the parts pure imagination and actual events may have played.

Threaded through these earliest attempts to explain why Poe wrote as he did is the theme that to the poet, his life was a dream and his dreams realities.

This seems to me a very good attempt along psychological lines to provide a partial explanation for Poe's weird stories and poetry. It seems a probability that in the latter part of his life the haggard, fear-ridden man did indeed escape into his dreams as often as possible. These dreams, put on paper, were so frightful at times that it is a miracle the man was not mad long before his brain trembled on the verge of collapse. Even as a young man, escape from reality was vital to his sensitive soul, in my estimation.

His early critics express this earnestly and variously. The way he thought and felt seems to these writers to have been one reason for Poe's flights into fancy.

> His graver narratives and fantasies are often related with an earnest simplicity, solemnity and apparent fidelity, attributable, not so much to a deliberate artistic purpose as to that power of vivid and intense conception that made his dreams realities and his life a dream. [1]

The earliest published poems of Poe bring forth the remark: "The dominant idea is that of a waking thought — from the dreams of youth. The dream was so bright, the reality so dull and disappointing."[2]

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1. Sarah Helen Whitman, Edgar Poe and His Critics, pp. 40-41.

2. John Phelps Fruit, The Mind and Art of Poe's Poetry, p. 16.

Mrs. Whitman firmly states that Poe "often spoke of the imageries and incidents of his inner life as more vivid and veritable than those of his outer experience." [3]

Cutting bluntly across these kindlier thoughts is one which follows the same line of reasoning but unsheathes the surgeon's knife of harsher criticism:

> He was a dreamer, and his life was, warp and woof, mood and sentiment instead of act and thought. When he came to poetic expression which must needs be the genuine manifestation of the soul's secret, he had no wisdom and no romance to disclose, of any earthly reality, and he was forced to bring out his meagre store of visionary facts, to which his random and morbid feelings alone gave credibility...The purely imaginative character of his landscape...is indicative of the obvious fact that he never regarded nature as anything but the crucible of his fancies. [4]

Still another critic declares:

> In the case of Poe there seems to have been a real consistency between the tone of his writings and that of his usual feeling and thought. The dreary, ghastly and appalling fancies of which his tales are for the most part made up seem to have been a faithful reflection of his own dreary, ghastly and appalling thoughts. [5]

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3. Whitman, op. cit., p. 70.

4. George E. Woodberry, Edgar Allan Poe, pp. 250-251.

5. Andrew Boyd, "Edgar Allan Poe," Critical Essays of a Country Parson, pp. 225-226.

It may be well at this point to look at the testimony of a gentleman who knew Poe during the last few years of the poet's life. Thomas Holley Chivers was also a writer. Among his papers were found several pages entitled "New Life of Edgar Allan Poe." These have been recently edited and published. In them Chivers remarks: "Mr. Poe wrote some seventy tales — all of which appear to me to be the faithful records of some peculiar phase of his own being or mental rapture, at the time of their composition." [6]

The first concrete incident to base some of the poet's writings upon comes in the almost universal declaration that his stay in England as a boy and his attendance at school at Stoke-Newington left such a lasting impression on him that it carried over into his works.

> It is not presuming too much upon the probabilities to suggest that much of the gloom and glamor which pervade Poe's writings originated in the strangeness and isolation of his position...The dreamy walks...and mouldering dwellings that then abounded... could not fail to exercise a marked influence upon a mind as morbidly sensitive to impressions as was Poe's. [7]

A slightly different idea of the influence of Stoke-Newington crops up in the mind of one of the biographers of this early period:

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6. Thomas Holley Chivers, Life of Poe, pp. 78-79.

7. John H. Ingram, Edgar Allan Poe — His Life, Letters and Opinions, I, p. 14.

> His residence there seems to have left deep marks of remembrance upon his mind, nor is it unlikely that the delight in the ancient, which afterwards characterized him, sprang partly from this early familiarity with a memorable past not yet vanished from the eye and hand.[8]

"William Wilson" is definitely declared to be autobiographical, and it is pointed out how much like Stoke-Newington the description is. One writer comments that in this tale "Poe gives from the mouth of his hero a bitter and truthful picture of his own young manhood."[9]

A more thorough pronouncement states:

> The ardour, the enthusiasm and the imperiousness which are declared to have rendered the William Wilson of the story a marked character among his schoolmates, so that by slow and natural gradations he obtained an ascendency over all not greatly older than himself, may safely be assumed to represent Poe's own idiosyncrasies, even at this early epoch of his life. A consistency of passion and thought, however diverted or thwarted by occasional circumstance runs through Poe's whole career and what was truly represented of him at the first is found a faithful portraiture at the last.[10]

Travelling on to a particular set of Poe's tales, one finds two of his earlier biographers in firm agreement on the group about "Berenice," "Ligeia" and "Morella." Concerning "Ligeia", "we look into the haunted chambers of the poet's own mind and

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8. Woodberry, op. cit., p. 16.

9. Sarah K. Bolton, "Edgar Allan Poe," Famous American Authors, p. 164.

10. Ingram, op. cit., p. 19.

see, as through a veil, the strange experiences of his inner life." [11]

And, declares Ingram,

> No writer of repute has more thoroughly unbosomed the secrets of his imagination and more clearly disclosed the workings of his brain than has Poe and in none of his writings have these autobiographic glimpses been more abundantly vouchsafed than in ..."Berenice" — indeed it may be better described as an essay on its author's idiosyncracies than as a tale.[12]

Much credence is given to the stories of the young Poe weeping over Mrs. Stanard's grave. There is a definite belief expressed that these lonely vigils formed the basis for many of Poe's thoughts in later life and that they were in the back of his mind when he wrote many of his poems. [13]

One biographer believes that when he haunted Mrs. Stanard's tomb

> His young heart caught the first faint notes of that paean of passionate regret and self-sprung terror which afterward, struck on his lyre, became the Io Triumphe of despair. The fascination of this lady did not cease with her life but grew with his years; the direct experience of death in her loss was the ground on which his imagination long worked and determined the early bent of his mind toward a sombre super-naturalism...through all the unconscious transformations of time and genius, the

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11. Whitman, op. cit., p. 46.

12. Ingram, op. cit., p. 115.

13. Whitman, op. cit., p. 54; Ingram, op. cit., p. 33.

> individuality of Poe is plainly discernible in two of its marked traits -- his tendency to idealize a woman's memory, and the kinship of his emotional beliefs with superstition.[14]

There is an attempt to relate "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" to Poe's reported visits to the tomb of Mrs. Stanard.[15]

Both Mrs. Whitman and John Phelps Fruit make reference to Poe's mind as being a "haunted palace." It is stated that Poe's poem "The Haunted Palace" "is significant in view of the fact that it is designedly a piece of self-portraiture."[16]

These earlier biographers express the first belief that Poe could write purely from his mind and not his heart. Mrs. Whitman refers to this idea as expressed by others and thinks, with some reluctance, that this may, in part at least, be true.[17]

One writer declares emphatically: "He leaves his heart in climes of his own imagining, apart with beings of his own thought."[18]

To another critic it seems that "the imperfections of his life have set their stamp upon his work. "Poe wrote nothing that exacted continuous thought or labor, nothing that demanded a

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14. Woodberry, op. cit., pp. 23-24.
15. Ingram, op. cit., p. 35.
16. Fruit, op. cit., p. 51.
17. Whitman, op. cit., p. 44.
18. Fruit, op. cit., p. 83.

prolonged effort of thought or reasoning."[19]

Painting a rather cold word picture of the poet, one biographer remarks:

> An artist primarily, whose skill, helped by the first sensitive and perceptive powers in himself, was developed by thought, patience and endless self-correction into a subtle deftness of hand unsurpassed in its own work, he belonged to the men of culture instead of those of originally perfect power; but being gifted with the dreaming instinct, the myth-making faculty, the allegorizing power, and with no other poetic element of high genius, he exercised his art in a region of vague feeling, symbolic ideas and fantastic imagery and wrought his spell largely through sensuous effects of color, sound and gloom, heightened by lurking but unshaped suggestions of mysterious meanings... In imagination, as in action, his was an evil genius; and in its realms of revery he dwelt alone.[20]

Chivers comments "His art was nothing but Art, without a particle of Nature to enliven it."[21]

In "Berenice" and "The Domain of Arnheim" are seen allusions to the poet's dream of ancestral splendor, and of "Berenice," it is said:

> Perhaps the most representative — the almost prophetic — record of its author's idiosyncracies, the trait which through after life would have most faithfully portrayed him, is contained in these words of the tale: "In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings with me had never been of the heart and my passions always were of the mind."[22]

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19. W. H. Davenport Adams, "Edgar Allan Poe," Wrecked Lives or Men Who Have Failed, p. 310.

20. Woodberry, op. cit., p. 349.

21. Chivers, op. cit., p. 87.

22. Ingram, op. cit., p. 116.

Poe's preoccupation with death is viewed as a part of his own philosophy that the dead are not truly dead but that they are still conscious of the living.[23] The statement is made that "Morella" "alludes to the notion that the consciousness of our identity is not lost at death and that sentience survives the entombment."[24]

There is fairly universal agreement among all the biographers that "Annabel Lee" was Virginia. But there appears remarkably little reference to Mrs. Poe's influence on Edgar's authorship among this first group of critics.

Worthy of note in this respect is the testimony of a gentleman who knew Poe well, a certain Mr. John R. Thompson. His impressions of Poe, written after the poet's death and edited much later by James H. Whitty and James H. Rindfleisch, declare concerning Virginia that:

> The Lenores and Helens of Poe had no counterparts on this earth of ours; they were not sketched from the fair young woman who gladdened with her presence his cottage at Fordham -- they existed only in that airy world which his imagination lighted up so vividly; ...from that sphere they look down upon us with their calm, violet eyes, the most beauteous apparitions ever conjured up by the spells of enchantment.[25]

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23. Ibid., p. 77.

24. Ibid., p. 117.

25. John R. Thompson, The Genius and Character of Edgar Allan Poe, p. 30.

However, Poe's contemporary, Chivers, says of "Eleonora" that it "is a most beautiful unique as well as graphically true — although highly idealized — record of his early love for his wife." [26]

Ingram gives a more thorough discussion of Poe than any of the other early biographers. There are many of Poe's stories and poems he believes to have been related straight from the poet's life. Ingram also makes reference to "Eleonora" as being written about Poe, his wife and his mother-in-law. [27]

Ingram's is the first reference to "Arthur Gordon Pym" as being a description of Edgar himself.

> Dreams of the day and of the night are plentiful in Poe's narrative and are rather more typical of the psychological introspection of the poet than of the healthy animalism and muscular energy of the sailor. [28]

This same biographer comments that Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is the sort of person Poe wished to believe he resembled. [29]

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26. Chivers, op. cit., p. 79.

27. Ingram, op. cit., p. 137.

28. Ibid., p. 150.

29. Ibid., p. 161.

Ingram speaks of Poe's youthful attachment to Elmira Royster as playing a large part in his earlier poetry, saying that this was woven "like a misty autobiographic reminiscence through the initial version of his 'Tamerlane'," [30]

This author believes that Poe's walks in the mountains around Charlottesville suggested some of his stories, in particular "The Tale of the Ragged Mountains." [31]

Ingram dives into the terrible story of "The Black Cat" and emerges triumphant with the declaration that Poe truly loved animals and was writing realistically of that love. He explains:

> Throughout life, a morbid sensitiveness to affection was one of Poe's most distinguishing traits, and it was the want of this which drove him frequently to seek in the society of dumb creatures the love denied him or which he sometimes <u>believed</u> denied him by human beings. [32]

Ingram also touches upon Poe's mystery stories and comments that the subject in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" "was peculiarly suited to the mind of Poe, a mind in which mathematical accuracy was balanced by lofty imagination tinged by superstition." [33]

Another of Poe's biographers expresses his view of the disputed <u>Ulalume</u>:

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30. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 41.
31. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 255.
32. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 26.
33. <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 235-236.

> The criticism that finds in the ballad he thus wrote merely a whimsical experiment in words has little to go on. It is more likely that, taking into consideration, too, the lack of finish in conjunction with the justness of touch in its essential structure we have in this poem the most spontaneous, the most unmistakably genuine utterance of Poe, the most clearly self-portraying work of his hand. That, to most readers, it is unintelligible and is suggestive of humor rather than of pathos, only shows how far Poe was now removed, through one and another influence, from normal humanity. [34]

Altogether, the main emphasis of Poe's earlier biographers is upon his inner thoughts and fancies, with some reference to how his outer life affected that inner life and in that way entered his stories. It remains for his later biographers to cover painstakingly many more of his tales and poems and to connect them with incidents in his life.

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34. Woodberry, op. cit., pp. 282-283.

III. CRITICS FROM 1900 TO 1925

A greater wealth of material on which to base the conclusion that Edgar Allan Poe wrote often in an autobiographic vein strikes the eye as soon as one crosses the threshold of the twentieth century. In the first quarter of the 1900's, several of Poe's critics sum up their beliefs of the effect his life had on his writing in a much more decided way than did his earliest biographers.

> Rarely has an artist stood so little outside of that which he created, never did one so live within his works. [35]

> Poe achieved such complete success in forcibly presenting his concepts and in minutely and realistically detailing the ideas and sentiments which characterize his stories, that it is difficult to dissociate the Work from the Man. [36]

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35. Hanns Heinz Ewers, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 38.

36. John W. Robertson, M.D., Edgar A. Poe, A Psychopathic Study, p. 2.

> The quality of the unnatural beauty in Poe's poetry springs from Poe's self. It is the secret of his own soul, the color of his own spirit. It is the projection of his own experience and Poe had great power in projecting experience beyond the actual. [37]

One of the first things to strike the researcher in this "middle period" is the influence attached to Poe's supposed visitations to the grave of Mrs. Stanard, about whom he wrote the immortal "To Helen." This point, brought out by the earlier biographers, is carried still further by this group.

> It was during these lonesome vigils that he became fascinated by the unfathomable mysteries of the other world, which impressed his whole life and much of his life work. To his mind and heart the dead, although unseen, were ever present, seeing, knowing, hearing him. Those midnight churchyard vigils with their unforgotten memories furnish a key to some of the strange, mysterious circumstances of his extraordinary life. In those silent, solitary communions with the beloved dead, questions arose in the sombre chambers of his imagination which were long afterward remembered in the musical cadences of his stately verse.[38]

It is also brought out that his solitary visits to Mrs. Stanard's tomb "developed that belief in a painful survival of sense in the decomposing corpse." [39]

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37. Jeannette Marks, Genius and Disaster, p. 51.

38. Eugene L. Didier, The Poe Cult and Other Poe Papers, pp. 103-104.

39. Robert Armistead Stewart, Case of Edgar Allan Poe, p. 9.

And yet, in connection with his constant writing and re-writing of tales that dealt with death, it is declared that:

> Poe did not love death; he did not celebrate the charms of doubt or of darkness or of separation. He abhorred them. The desolate lover in "The Raven" does not acquiesce in "Nevermore." It flouts and belies every instinct and intuition of his heart. And in every poem and story of Poe's over which darkness seems to brood, there is the unmistakable note of spiritual protest; there is the evidence of a nature so attuned to love and light, to beauty and harmony that denial or separation from them is a veritable death-in-life. Poe fathomed darkness but climbed to the light; he became the world's spokesman for those dwelling within the shadow but his feet were already upon the upward slope. Out of it all he emerged victor, not victim. [40]

A different theory on Poe's devotion to the theme of death is given by one critic who says:

> He had the ego-mania of the degenerate, a fact which shows itself strikingly in his art through his preoccupation with death. In his poetry and prose alike the fear of death as numbing the precious core of personality is an obsession with him.[41]

Now at last we come to the being I feel had one of the greatest influences upon Poe — Virginia, his wife.

> He loved, in this pale childish figure, of such sickly grace, perishing through invisible causes—this gradual death of the carnal nature—the incarnation of his own morbid ideal formed

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40. C. Alphonso Smith, Edgar Allan Poe — How to Know Him, pp. 71-72.

41. Lewis E. Gates, "Edgar Allan Poe," Studies and Appreciations, p. 122.

> of beauty and death. The poor consumptive, like the Helen of his childhood devoted to a premature end, was the living prototype of his Ligeias, his Morellas and his Eleonoras, as later of his Leonores and Ulalumes, all impalpable heroines, consumed by a mysterious malady.[42]

Not quite so coldly analytical are the words of another biographer who speaks of Virginia as having been the inspiration for "Annabel Lee" and declares that "The poem ought to lay forever the absurd contention that Poe never really loved her." [43]

Sherwin Cody, Hanns Heinz Ewers, and Eugene Didier all pay tribute to Poe's having immortalized his dying wife in his stories and poems. That some of his works were brought forth in torture over the thought of her illness is here first mentioned. [44]

"In 'Lenore', in 'Annabel Lee', in 'Eulalie' ... Poe embalmed the memory of his wife in immortal dirges." [45]

Now comes the role alcohol and dope are believed to have played in the poet's outpourings. One critic declares emphatically: "He...moulded works of imperishable beauty out of alcohol and laudanum." [46]

In a sort of envying ecstasy, this same admirer of Poe proclaims:

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42. Stewart, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

43. Smith, op. cit., p. 234.

44. Ewers, op. cit., p. 20.

45. Didier, op. cit., p. 209.

46. Ewers, op. cit., p. 3.

> He got drunk purposely, he did it in order to get the drunkard's understanding from which he later on, perhaps years later, could create new art values. Such intoxication is no delight, it is an unbearable torture, consciously desired only by him on whose brow the living mark of art is branded. [47]

A large part of one critic's survey of Poe's works is devoted to a minute dissection by stories in an attempt to show how opium and laudanum had a share in the composition of each.

> Every paragraph in "The Fall of the House of Usher" writes itself as drug work...Take for example the somatic distress due to opium, tortured sensitiveness to light, to odors, to sounds. All this preoccupation with disease is characteristic of the narcotized mind.[48]

"Eleonora" is also cited, with its riot of colors and sounds and smells and lights, as having come from drug-dreams. [49]

"Ulalume" is attributed to opium and alcohol, "The Pit and the Pendulum" to opium. [50]

> That he made use of opium we find suggested in his earlier works—in the reveries of "Morella," of "Berenice" and later in "The Assignation," as also in certain passages in "Loss of Breath" and "The Oval Portrait," both of which were eliminated in later revised forms of these tales. [51]

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47. Ibid., p. 13.

48. Marks, op. cit., p. 21.

49. Ibid., p. 22.

50. Ibid., p. 167.

51. Stewart, op. cit., p. 15.

It is at one point declared that alcohol undoubtedly was the cause of the deterioration of Poe's literary productions—as well as of the disintegration of his life. [52]

Yet another writer thinks it "probable that some of his best writings are the direct result of alcohol." He cites "The Assignation" as one which "reeks of alcohol" and remarks that "it displays alike the power and the weakness of the delirious imagination which flows from the bottle." [53]

Stewart seems to believe that the obsession with madness in Poe's writing came partly from his drinking. He declaims that fear is a prominent feature of Poe's works and reports:

> Poe, alcoholic, was condemned to physical fear—he was condemned to horror. We know from his biography that he was a victim of frightful visions...Is it then surprising that his genius should begin to exploit this fantastic legacy of alcoholic terrors inherited from his ancestors and actively enlarged through his own acquisitions? To this was added the influence of opium which lends to spontaneous visions of terror attributes of eternity and immensity. His genius worked on the wild tissue of delirium and gossamer fabric of dreams. [54]

Again we step into the field of the believers in the Poe without a heart, the Poe whose mind could build magnificent cold mansions without truly human inmates and create tales and poems completely devoid of feeling.

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52. W. C. Brownell, "Poe", American Prose Masters, p. 231.

53. Norman Douglas, "Edgar Allan Poe," Experiments, p. 113.

54. Stewart, op. cit., p. 22.

One of these critics declares:

> In all his work there is an absence of the man behind the artist or, if he reveals himself at all, his personality is not pleasant. It is the literary artist, not the man, who interests the reader in all Poe's work, whether in poetry or prose. [55]

This writer seems to believe Poe totally unreal and inhuman. He comments judiciously that in the poems, there can be discovered no thought.

> They are merely variations on life and its lost illusions in which Poe uses words instead of musical notes. Supreme melody atones for lack of thought or any real emotion. [56]

Fitch declares: "Poe's poetical genius delighted in pictures of woe. It moved with the greatest freedom when depicting blighted love and ruined lives." [57]

Poe the artist with a command for words and a superb technique apart from any connection with reality is portrayed.

> Whether the tale deal professedly with abnormal life or with rational life, its seemliness and beauty and persuasive power come simply from Poe's immense cleverness as a constructive artist, as a technician, from his ability to play tunes on temperaments, not from his honest command of human life and character. [58]

The same critic believes that:

> In all that he does, in the material that he uses, in the characters that he conjures up to carry on the

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55. George Hamlin Fitch, "Art of Edgar Allan Poe," Great Spiritual Writers of America, p. 30.

56. Ibid., p. 31.

57. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

58. Gates, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

> action of his stories, in his methods of weaving together incident and description and situation and action, Poe is radically artificial, a calculator of effects, a reckless scorner of fact and of literal truth.[59]

In a grand summation of what he feels about the poet, Gates declares:

> His intellect was real; everything else about him was exquisite feigning. His passion, his human sympathy, his love of nature, all the emotions that go into his fiction, have a counterfeit unreality about them. Not that they are actually hypocritical, but that they seem unsubstantial, mimetic, not the expression of a genuine nature.[60]

Another critic comments that Poe

> felt that he was alone; he had no sense of fellowship that could be called either mental or emotional...Where he analyzes suffering, the interest is intellectual. Where he describes love, the experience described is abnormal for two reasons: because it is outside the usual and the interest is analytical or intellectual rather than sympathetic.[61]

One of the poet's more severe judges thinks:

> Not whatsoever things are lovely and of good report but whatsoever things are effective were his preoccupation. Intensity of effect was accordingly his end and artifice his means.[62]

It is declared:

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59. Ibid., p. 118.

60. Ibid., pp. 127-128.

61. Marks, op. cit., p. 52.

62. Brownell, op. cit., p. 221.

> In instinctive recalcitrancy to the general constitution of things he passed his life in kicking against its pricks and produced his literature in the process. Inevitably the false, the ugly and the wrong attracted him since the established standard is of the good, the beautiful and the true. [63]

The part Poe's conscience played in his outpourings works its way to the fore with this group of writers. It is stated: "If we are to credit his quasi-biography 'William Wilson', he experienced here the first awakening of a morbid conscience." [64]

Ewers with his customary raptures over the master exclaims exultingly:

> Has there ever been a criminal whose deeds created a martyrdom for him such as the Poet felt for crimes which he had never committed? For Poe in his dreams, which were his only actual life, is not only the murderer but also the victim. He immures his enemy while still alive in a cellar. And it is he himself who is walled in. ("Cask of Amontillado") He murders, because he must, the man with the eagle eye — he buries him under the planks and the heart which is beating below this and which at last discloses the deed, is again his own. ("The Tell-Tale Heart") We find the double of "William Wilson" everywhere. [65]

In dealing step by step with some of his writings, we find "Eureka" described as containing "more of Poe's matured personality, more of his spiritual autobiography, than any other product of his pen." [66]

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63. Ibid., p. 225.
64. Stewart, op. cit., p. 9.
65. Ewers, op. cit., pp. 37-38.
66. Smith, op. cit., p. 66.

And yet, of this same work:

> After the brain fever caused by the death of his beloved Virginia...Poe brought forth from the chaotic depths of his thoughts the bold though tottering edifice of "Eureka." Poe pontifex, Poe reveler, Poe founder of a sect, such is the last evolution of the intuitive philosopher carried away by ecstatic madness. [67]

Inventiveness coupled with idealism in the train of personal feeling is set forth:

> One who casts an eye over his work is at once struck by the richness of invention. The most personal of his tales, such as "Berenice", "Morella", "Ligeia", "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "Eleonora" on the one hand, "The Assignation", "Silence", "Shadow" and "The Red Death" on the other, as well as "William Wilson", "The Black Cat", "The Tell-Tale Heart", and "The Imp of the Perverse" seem to have issued spontaneously from the dark depths of his being...One may say that he is realist as well as idealist for when he wishes he imitates reality so well that apparently he himself believes it. [68]

In "Ulalume", one critic gives his belief that Poe is writing of wandering, forgetful, and for once at peace, on the anniversary of Virginia's death. But Psyche, his inner self, keeps warning him that something is wrong. He pushes the foreboding away — and suddenly comes upon the tomb. "Memory returns with an added pang because of the interim of forgetfulness." [69]

Of "The Purloined Letter": "There is an unmistakable note of autobiography in Poe's masterly defense of the poetical and mathematical faculties conjoined." [70]

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67. Stewart, op. cit., p. 26.
68. Ibid., p. 24.
69. Smith, op. cit., p. 225.
70. Ibid., p. 226.

"For Annie" was written "for Mrs. Annie Richmond of Lowell, Mass., who, with her husband was a devoted and helpful friend of the Poe family. It is a tribute to love." [71]

An altogether different approach to "William Wilson" greets the reader in one instance:

> Poe, in writing "William Wilson" did exhibit consummate psychological acumen. It is a story dreadful in its keen psycho-analysis but it was not necessarily a personal experience, though he wrote in the first person. [72]

Thus this second group of biographers carry along the thesis of the influence of Poe's life upon his writing. They are delving further into psychological explanations, but their outlines are rough-hewn. They see the light but cannot quite make it bear fully upon the poet, giving only glimmerings that shine brightly and then fade into shadow. It remains to present-day writers to exchange the lantern for a powerful electric light to search out the recesses of Poe's innermost being and outermost living.

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71. Ibid., p. 231.

72. Robertson, op. cit., p. 147.

IV. PRESENT-DAY CRITICS (1926 to Now)

The effect of arriving in one's research at the threshold of modern critics is as though one had been beating one's way through tangled woodland and at last had seen a clear road ahead. Here finally are facts to dig into, clear thinking, and a much, much broader insight into all of Poe's life and the influence it exerted on his livelihood.

Curiously enough, references to Poe's days as a soldier appear first in the works of these most recent biographers. Perhaps the reason his earlier critics do not point to his life in the army as having laid the groundwork for some of his tales is that he tried to cast such mystery over this period himself, and let it appear that he had been abroad. Most pronounced of all the stories gained from it is "The Gold-Bug." Here descriptive scenes from Poe's long sojourn on Sullivan's Island off the South Carolina coast are vividly displayed. One of his more prominent biographers notes that in both "'The Gold-Bug' and 'The Balloon Hoax,' Poe introduces reminiscences

of his stay at Sullivan's Island and in Charleston while a soldier in the United States Army, and in 'The Oblong Box', he makes use of information obtained during the same period concerning points along the coast of the Carolinas." [73]

Another author comments:

> That his army service was not unprofitable was shown by the amount of information accumulated of pirates' treasure, gold bugs and the sights and sounds of the ocean which became his background for later manuscripts... On Sullivan's Island was a magnificent beach, with the Gulf Stream on one side and low sandhills on the island. There were palmetto trees, strange birds, sea turtles and beetles. In this environment, Poe spent his spare time storing away memories that were to come to light in "The Gold-Bug" and other stories, a few years later. [74]

Another writer believes that from his time in the army

> came directly much of his material for "The Gold-Bug", "The Oblong Box", "The Man that was Used Up", "The Balloon Hoax", and bits of the melancholy scenery, and sea and light effects which, from the time of his sojourn in Carolina, haunt so much of his poetry. [75]

Allen adds that Poe describes Sullivan's Island at the start of his tale. He comments that:

> In other stories and poems there are to be found distinct traces of his (Poe's) visits to Charleston and the hinterland. The House of Usher, itself, may well be some old, crumbling and cracked-walled colonial mansion found moldering in the

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73. Killis Campbell, The Mind of Poe and Other Studies, p. 136.

74. William Baumer, Jr., "Edgar Allan Poe, Author and Poet," Not All Warriors, p. 162.

75. Hervey Allen, Israfel, p. 171.

> Carolina woods, as it was left desolate by the hands of the marauding British, surrounded by its swamps and gloomy woods, cypress-stained tarns and its snake-haunted Indian moats. To see these is instantly to be reminded of descriptions by Poe. The whole country about, in fact, was one peculiarly in sympathy with his more lonely and melancholy moods. The vault described at the end of "The Sleeper," a poem written in its first form about 1831, recalls almost literally some of the great family tombs on the plantations about Charleston, with the semi-feudal pomp that surrounds them. [76]

Still another biographer states "The region...surrounding Charleston made a lasting impression upon Poe. Most definite, of course, was the inspiration which led later to the writing of 'The Gold-Bug'... To his hero, Legrand, Poe attributes, as usual, some of his own traits and habits." [77]

Another new point remarked in studying Poe's present-day biographers is that the influence of his life in Richmond is made quite evident. Heretofore, the effect of any one place upon Poe (except for Stoke-Newington) has not been mentioned. And surely, if anything is to have an effect upon a writer, the spot where he was reared must! It is stated that:

> In two of the stories that deal with voyages on board ship — "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" and "The Premature Burial," Poe undoubtedly referred to his former Richmond surroundings. In the first story he attempted to conceal this

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76. Ibid., p. 179.

77. Arthur Hobson Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe, pp. 129-130.

> reference, but it is generally conceded that Richmond furnished both characters and background. The long "Narrative" involves incidents that reveal Poe's knowledge of a ship from the keel to the maintopsail and from the bow to the stern, not to mention the skills employed in sailing. In the second story Poe stated that his adventure occurred near Richmond, in Virginia, on board a small sloop...Poe's voyage to England was not necessary to teach him the parts of ships and the ways of sailors. He could have learned these as a barefoot boy climbing aboard the sloops and schooners chartered by Ellis and Allan and other merchants of Richmond. [78]

One of Poe's friends in Richmond days was Ebenezer Burling, and Miss Bondurant points out that

> most scholars agree that Burling furnished the prototype for the character of Augustus Barnard in "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" and that one of Poe's and Burling's adventures with this boat on the James gave Poe the idea for the preliminary voyage in "The Narrative." [79]

Further evidence toward this thesis notes that "with Burling, Poe...had a boat on the James which seems to have been the genesis of the little pleasure yacht mentioned at the beginning of 'Arthur Gordon Pym.'" [80]

It seems a probability that some of the stories Poe wrote indicated his viewing the business world in which his foster father worked, but only one author gives any report of this when he describes a tale which certainly bears the unmistakable stamp

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78. Agnes M. Bondurant, Poe's Richmond, pp. 202-203.

79. Ibid., pp. 220-221.

80. Allen, op. cit., p. 79.

of Poe's relations with Allan.

> Of the interviews with John Allan and of his life about the warehouse of Ellis and Allan together with the provincial and mercantile clap-trap of the conversation enjoyed there, Poe has left us a neat but sardonic picture in the thinly disguised autobiographical satire of "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq." -- nor does he forget in an amused way to hint at his own naive literary aspirations. [81]

Let us take a slightly different view of our old friend "Arthur Gordon Pym", who certainly was the nemesis in the tragic life of a poet who "in his last delirium...imagined himself to be, like Pym, dying of thirst and called repeatedly on Pym's friend to deliver him." [82]

One writer completely explores the story in his belief that the tale was based on Poe's life. This critic thinks that it held some obscure meaning for Poe that the poet himself was scarcely aware of, notes the "syllabic parallelism between the names 'Edgar Allan Poe' and 'Arthur Gordon Pym'" and remarks that

> Unquestionably, too, the suggested relations between Pym and his grandfather present us with a version of the relations between Poe and John Allan and contain a renewed hint that Allan had promised to make his adopted son also his heir. [83]

The biographer comments that Arthur's

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81. Ibid., pp. 112-113.

82. Edward Shanks, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 112.

83. Ibid., passim, pp. 112-113.

> running away to sea as a stowaway, with Augustus's connivance...may have some remote relation with Poe's flight from Allan's house -- though in that there was no need to elude Allan's vigilance. It was more probably a reflection of earlier moods when he had thought of thus escaping from an intolerable position and had flattered himself that he might be regretted.[84]

A new avenue of reasoning opens up when Shanks states it appears to him

> that the surprising vividness and dramatic force of this narrative have been overlooked, or too much taken for granted, by most of Poe's critics. It seems to me also that they can be explained if we suppose that its events are, as it were, transmutations, on different levels, of events in his own life.[85]

This same critic goes on to explain that

> where, at the end of the story, the symbolism changes its nature, it does so, as I guess, because the author had recorded a mental voyage which had brought him to the edge of the unknown and to a point where he must find a new set of terms for what he tremblingly descried beyond that edge.[86]

Another reference to Richmond days states:

"His works, from 'The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym' to the sounds of the sea carried like the tide into 'Annabel Lee' and 'The City in the Sea', paid tribute to life near the waterfront" and to the Atlantic voyages taken as a boy.[87]

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84. Ibid., pp. 114-115.

85. Ibid., p. 117.

86. Ibid., p. 118.

87. Baumer, op. cit., p. 153.

Let us for a moment veer sharply away from these more factual descriptions of Poe's childhood in Richmond to one not so easy to pin down as a fact but which seems logical. In slave quarters he must have listened

> while many a tale of Brer Rabbit and his ilk went around, while the ghosts and "hants" and spooks of an ignorant but imaginative and superstitious people walked with hair-raising effect, and songs with melancholy harmonies and strange rhythms beat themselves into his consciousness with that peculiar ecstasy and abandon which only children and the still half-savage individuals of a childish race can experience. Here it was then, rather than upon some mythical journey to France or Russia, that he first laid the foundation for his weird imaginings and the strange new "cadences" which he was to succeed later on in grafting upon the main tree of English poetry. Here, too, may have arisen his flair for the bizarre, and the concept that birds and animals were speaking characters, and that fear of graves and corpses and the paraphernalia of the charnel, so peculiarly a characteristic of the negro, which haunted him through the rest of his life.[88]

Our old friend "William Wilson" once more is cited as an excellent illustration of Poe's tendency to write in an autobiographic style.

> The most tangible piece of self-revelation that appears in his stories is to be found in his "William Wilson" in which he describes under the guise of fiction and not without fictitious detail and other bits of legitimate mystification, his school life at Stoke-Newington.[89]

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88. Allen, op. cit., p. 50.

89. Campbell, op. cit., p. 135.

Another biographer agrees that Poe describes Stoke-Newington "with a mixture of truth and fancy" in"William Wilson," but states:

> When it comes to "the chilly avenue", "the thousand shrubberies", "the dusky autumnal atmosphere", "the boom of the bell", we recognize his own direct impressions. Gigantic gnarled trees, old houses holding each its secret, misty village streets, all stamped themselves on Poe's mind as scenes from childhood will. [90]

An altogether new conception concerning "William Wilson" appears in this present-day group of biographers.

> From Poe's own lips in the strange autobiographical and tragic story of "William Wilson" we have the poet's confession that in the old school of Stoke-Newington began one of those spiritual struggles in the personality of a genius the results of which have become significant to literature. Both the school itself and its haunted surroundings were well calculated to stir his imaginings, and despite his extreme youth, the capacity of the boy to be moved by it cannot be doubted...It does not seem to be straining things too far to say that from this ancient place steeped in the memories of a millennium, where objective reminders of the past still lingered so romantically, some of the foreign coloring, the minute descriptions of ancient buildings, and the love for the "Gothic" and medieval atmosphere, in which he so often reveled later, may have originated.[91]

Allen drolly adds that Poe did not describe Dr. Bransby, headmaster of Stoke-Newington, true to life in his tale which

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90. Una Pope-Hennessy, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 21.

91. Allen, op. cit., p. 67.

later nettled the good man. [92]

Another author places a slightly different emphasis upon "William Wilson" and the general influence Poe's stay in England had on his writing.

> The precise importance of Poe's sojourn in England is difficult to estimate. It was long enough, at that age, to make him think of England as his home and to make the return, when he was eleven, a more serious uprooting than the journey thither, when he was only six. But whether it provided him with any great store of definite impressions is another matter. The description of school-life in "William Wilson" may be referred without much hesitation to his memories of "Dr." Branby's school at Stoke-Newington but the scene is not very accurately produced. He writes of
>
> > "the deep, hollow note of the church-bell, breaking, each hour, with sudden and sullen roar, upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep."
>
> Now the parish church of Stoke-Newington had a cupola, not a steeple, until several years after Poe had left England. This is, to be sure, on the face of it a very trivial point but it has its significance. Precise recollection of the thing seen had but little place in Poe's method. The settings of his stories, good or bad, vivid or vague, were but so much dramatic decor for the action and the emotions, and the alien colour which he introduced so richly into his work came from reading and dreaming, not from his experience. His story "The Assignation" gives as good a picture of Venice as "William Wilson" does of a village outside London. The actual effects of the English years probably lay deeper, in a general unsettlement of the mind: they cannot be traced in the details of his work. [93]

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92. Ibid.

93. Shanks, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

Another biographer declares that "it is important to note that his method of creating mystery by the denial of the ordinary and normal has its roots in these school days in the atmosphere of a town long established and fairly rich with tradition."[94]

The influence of Poe's stay in England on his poetry is set forth by one critic.

> In reading Poe, the childhood visit to England with its sight of Gothic towers and its glimpse of the sea's terrors during the long Atlantic voyage should not be ignored; here one restores fragments of Poe's shorter poems. One sees them in his "ultimate dim thule", his "bottomless vales and boundless floods", his "time-eaten towers that tremble not", his "O'er the Past (Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering," and brilliantly his "one bright island smile." If these memories were brought to consciousness through his readings in the poetry of his day, or reinspired through his experiments in taking drugs, their actual sources and their "sepulchre by the sea" are definitely circumscribed by the first fourteen years of his life.[95]

Perhaps here a glimpse into Poe's innermost being which this author vouchsafes is not out of place.

> No poet...has expressed the scenes of terror within childhood's fears with more enduring vividness than Poe...Poe holds his own by associating a lack of security (which is so often felt and realized by the sensitive and unhappy child) with the conviction of being prematurely doomed, of being predestined for madness or for Hell.[96]

The biographer later carries this further with the remark that

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94. Quinn, op. cit., p. 76.

95. Horace Gregory, "On Edgar Poe: A Belated Epitaph," The Shield of Achilles, pp. 70-71.

96. Ibid, p. 71.

> "To Helen" and "The City in the Sea" ... are of a quality that one discovers in an imagination that glances the roots of human evil and super-human joy, and reveals their existance among the fears and desires of childhood origin. [97]

To return to Poe's life abroad:

> The wild Scottish moors and the romantic antiquity of his surroundings in London seemed very wonderful to the little American schoolboy. They are reflected in many of his later stories and poems — wild, dark heaths and ivy-covered ruins, romantic, melancholy, still colored by the haze of homesickness through which he saw them as a lonely child. [98]

In England, the travelling family

> saw the strange effect of the long northern twilight and the eery red shadows of the sunsets long after the hour of a Virginia night-fall. Even in England in July the twilight does not end until about 10 p.m. and Poe reveled in just such light effects afterward and strange valleys —
>
> "In the midst of which all day
> the red sunlight lazily lay." [99]

Allen also comments that the coasts of Great Britain must have affected the boy — "it is certain that much of the poetry of Poe deals with a craggy and mist-veiled region." [100]

This same author states that "'The Man of the Crowd' reveals impressions of the visit to London with the Allans, as

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97. Ibid., p. 75.

98. Ted Malone, "Edgar Allan Poe," American Pilgrimage, p. 219.

99. Allen, op. cit., p. 57.

100. Ibid., p. 59.

does 'Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling.'" [101]

At this point it seems worthwhile to touch upon an aspect of "William Wilson" which has not been previously mentioned. One biographer declares "There can be little doubt that in 'William Wilson' Poe drew a picture of the gambling and other dissipation at the University" (of Virginia). [102]

Perhaps it would be well to turn aside here for a few words concerning Elmira Royster, Edgar's first love, who after a lapse of years became also his last love. She has been mentioned casually only once before, yet surely the form of Elmira is seen through much of his early poetry.

Some of the poems

> that appear to shadow forth in some degree his own life are "Bridal Ballad," in which we seem to have a reference to Miss Royster's rejection of the poet in favor of a wealthier suitor; "Tamerlane" which may plausibly be held to refer to his disappointment as a claimant for the hand of Miss Royster. [103]

Hervey Allen remarks that at the University of Virginia "first began to take shape 'Tamerlane', through which moved the ghost of Elmira as he imagined her and longed for her walking with him through the wild glens of the Ragged Mountains." [104]

He also comments that the "Song" starting "I saw thee on thy bridal day" is undoubtedly about Elmira. [105]

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101. Ibid., p. 43.
102. Quinn, op. cit., p. 106.
103. Campbell, op. cit., p. 134.
104. Allen, op. cit., p. 141.
105. Ibid., p. 151.

Ted Malone states that Elmira is the lost Lenore of "The Raven," [106] and Allen seems to clinch this with his categorical declaration: "Poe told Mrs. Shelton that she was his 'Lost Lenore.'" [107]

At this time, it may be well to bring in two other women not previously mentioned. First, one biographer refers to Poe's mother and says

> It is perhaps in some degree because of her that a whole series of his heroines -- Ligeia, Berenice, Madeline and Morella -- were wasting away with an inexorable disease. It may have been, also, in part the memory of his mother which made him see in sickness one of the necessary elements of the highest beauty. [108]

To my mind, one of the oddest things is that the influence Frances Allan had upon Poe's writings is mentioned by only one biographer. Hervey Allen refers to the "yearning and mourned for heroine, a compound of Mrs. Stanard and Frances Allan," as having been "duly celebrated in paeans and lyrics." [109]

Yet here was someone he knew well long before Virginia came upon the scene. Poe's beloved foster-mother, Frances Allan, died young and from tuberculosis. She was a beautiful woman.

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106. Malone, op. cit., p. 223.

107. Allen, op. cit., p. 657.

108. Joseph Krutch, Edgar Allan Poe, A Study in Genius, p. 24.

109. Allen, op. cit., p. 358.

Surely, her death must have preyed upon Poe's mind and cast its shadow over his thoughts as he wrote!

We go now to the gentle Virginia, about whom so little is really known. Among Poe's more recent critics, a storm of controversy here arises as to how much of a part and exactly what kind of a role the child-bride played in furnishing a heroine for Poe's tales and poems.

First, there are those who would have his wife his constant inspiration —

> The dear and ever present spouse probably became for the eternal half-hallucinated dreamer, better than the mad Helena of his fifteen years, also carried off by a premature death, the living prototype of his Berenice, his Ligeia, his Morella, his Eleanora, as she would be later of his Leonora, his Eulalie, his Ulalume, his Annabel Lee, all impalpable heroines who were ravaged by a secret evil which destroyed them. [110]

Lauvrière then asks:

> In short, was not Virginia, in her real presence, as for the opium smoker paralyzed in his physical pleasures — the case with Poe — the suggestive image which he contemplated with facinated eyes, transfigured in divine ecstasy, and gave scope to the radiant projection of his imagination exalted to an inaccessible empyrean. [111]

Carrying his theme further, this biographer decides that when Virginia dies, so will die Poe's ideals — henceforth there will survive only his most unhappy characters:

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110. Emile Lauvrière, The Strange Life and Strange Loves of Edgar Allan Poe, pp. 142-143.

111. Ibid., p. 143.

> In her turn would disappear the living prototype of his Ligeias and Morellas and there would survive only the funereal Leonoras and macabre Ulalumes, all mournful heroines whom a wasting evil cruelly destroyed, but which transfigured them ideally in more or less opium-created ecstasies.[112]

Joseph Krutch thinks in slightly different terms:

> The heroines with the unearthly beauty and the unhealthy purity which seem to set them apart from the women of flesh and blood are not exactly Virginia, but they are the phantoms to whom she, with her morbid fragility and child-like mind, seemed better to correspond than any other woman whom Poe had ever seen.[113]

One of his biographers is careful to remind us of an interesting fact:

> Much has been made of his inclination towards wasted and sickly types of beauty, but his wife at the time of their marriage and for several years afterwards did not correspond to this standard. When, for example, he wrote "The Fall of the House of Usher" and described the wan emaciated Lady Madeline, Virginia was still not far removed from the "little girl with a round, ever-smiling face" who accompanied Mrs. Clemm on her shopping expeditions and carried the basket and was rather astonishingly addressed as Mrs. Poe. By a singular fatality she rather imitated than suggested his heroines.[114]

But then, this biographer goes on to remark:

> When we come to describe the effect that her decline produced on her husband, we find ourselves on the edge of very dark places in his soul. It unquestionably set up in him a

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112. Ibid., p. 196.

113. Krutch, op. cit., p. 85.

114. Shanks, op. cit., p. 60.

> new, extraordinary and shattering excitement. His strange nature, with its ever-ready capacity for self-dramatization, was secretly thrilled to see truth in his own household thus modelling itself upon poetry, and Virginia's calamity threw its shadow both before and after. He once declared that "the death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world," and though this was the culmination of a perfect insanity of psuedo-logical argument, yet for him it was something like the statement of a self-evident truth. [115]

Killis Campbell comments that "Annabel Lee" is "a lament for the death of Virginia" and adds that there is in "Ulalume" an allusion "to the poet's grief in consequence of her death." [116]

Later, this same biographer remarks the possibility

> that his mention of the cousin relationship existing between the hero and heroine in "Berenice," "Eleonora" and "Three Sundays in a Week" is of autobiographical import, though the first of those stories must have been written in the early stages of his courtship of his cousin. [117]

Allen brings into the open what Campbell has hinted at:

> The relations with Virginia lie very close to the core of his inner mystery; they explain many of his heroines. It was not the charming and simple affair that those in love with convention would have us believe. About it was the haunted gray twilight of near incest that troubled his deepest dreams. [118]

Later, Allen, in a kindlier vein becomes more specific than any other critic about how he thinks Virginia affected

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115. Ibid., p. 61.

116. Campbell, op. cit., p. 132.

117. Ibid., p. 143.

118. Allen, op. cit., pp. 291-292.

Poe's writings.

> The affliction, the appearance, and some of the more ethereal and abnormal characteristics of the little child-wife have been transferred into literature.
>
> For Poe the "delicacy" which the advancing stages of the...disease conferred on his wife — the strange, chalky pallor tinged with a faint febrile rouge, the large haunted liquid eyes — gradually acquired a peculiar fascination. From the wide and later on terror-stricken depths of those eyes looked forth the spirit of one who had been robbed of life, a mind which had outgrown its body, simple, and yet wise enough to sense its own tragedy. Her whole being slowly became morbidly ethereal...to the man who was irretrievably linked to her, she became part and parcel of his own tragedy. His capacity for love, perhaps even his potentiality for sensuousness was metamorphosed into a patient and tragic sympathy — the truly magnificent and loyal sorrow of one who beheld in his bed, in his garden, and at his table a constant and pathetic reminder of the omnipotence of the conqueror worm. On the whole, aside from his great art, his abiding tenderness for Virginia must remain as his greatest claim for a hold on the average human heart. She was the key that completely unlocked for him the house of shadows. She is the prototype of his heroines.
>
> Virginia became his Ligeia, his Eulalie, Eleonora, the sister in the House of Usher, perhaps even his Annabel Lee, Berenice for instance ...
>
> So they all were, always subtly different from Virginia and yet always the same; dying, corpse-like ladies usually related to their lovers, with the pale suggestion of incest just around the corner of the family tomb. It was a page, many pages, from his own experience ...
>
> Poe...had married a little girl who, as time passed approximated the fashionable ideal of the romantic Victorian heroine more nearly than any

> other whom he might have chosen. The real story of her tragedy is like an excerpt from a novel of the day. That Poe etherealized and enormously improved it, there can be no doubt. His particular etherealizations were not sentimental mockeries, because behind them lay the grim spiritual reality of a human tragedy that was horribly, pitiably true.[119]

Allen later remarks concerning "Annabel Lee" and the various female claimants to having inspired the poem:

> In so far as any of Poe's vague heroines can be traced to any definite personality of the world of reality, it may be said, in passing, that his wife Virginia is more closely shadowed forth in the poem than anyone else. "I was a child and she was a child" and "our love — it was stronger by far than the love of those who were older than we — of many far wiser than we" — seems to refer beyond cavil to the strange incidents of his marriage to a child and the opposition of relatives. In this poem is the long dirge of waves on Sullivan's Island during the years he walked its beaches alone, and the death of Virginia at Fordham. In the summer of 1846 all of this was in his past, or in the near future by inevitable implication. It was a magnificent and lyrical rendering, a dirgelike expression of his own and Virginia's tragedy.[120]

Another of Poe's biographers discusses Virginia's influence at some variance with other critics:

> Poe's life-long devotion to Virginia is beyond question, and his own answer to the criticisms which his marriage created in Richmond and elsewhere is given in "Eleonora" and "Annabel Lee"..."Eleonora" is, of course, an

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119. Ibid., pp. 312-313.

120. Ibid., pp. 559-560.

> ideal picture, but its description of the passing of cousinship into passion has more verity than the testimony of feminine friends whose emphasis upon Virginia's mental immaturity was perhaps based upon a wish rather than a fact...But of one thing we can be sure. If Virginia was the prototype of Eleonora she was not the model for Morella or Berenice or Ligeia. They were of a different breed. [121]

Quinn discusses "The Raven," saying of the poem that "Poe's dread of the loss of Virginia, born of her recurring danger and nurtured by his devotion, had become a spiritual offspring... In one sense, therefore, the poet was describing an emotional creation which had become objective to him, and the vivid reality of the poem is a consequence." [122]

A new meaning is attached to "Ulalume" also as Quinn remarks

> if "Ulalume" is to have a meaning in terms of Poe's emotional conflicts, that meaning is clear. Virginia had fulfilled both sides of his nature, the spiritual and the physical. She died and he was adrift. He turned to others for that support he needed in the endless struggle and was about to delude himself with the love that is merely passion when the memory of Virginia came to his rescue. If there were any need to refute the theories which deny to Poe the normal experiences of a man, and to Virginia, those of a woman, "Ulalume" would be an answer. [123]

I believe that Edgar adored his little Virginia and that her illness, following on the illnesses of so many of the women important to him — his mother, his foster-mother, his Helen —

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121. Quinn, op. cit., p. 255.

122. Ibid., pp. 442-443.

123. Ibid.,p. 533.

crystallized in his mind the heroine for his writings. His works seem to me to have become more wildly powerful after this last great tragedy befell him. Who could help being addicted to morbidity when never, never was the chance given to escape it? With Virginia's illness Poe's last hope was gone. Henceforth he abandoned himself to writing out his agonized heart, using "Sissy" as the prototype of all the beautiful but doomed women who trailed sadly across the pages he wrote.

Surely "Helen" is worthy of mention at this point. However, to these present-day writers, the thought of Poe weeping over Mrs. Stanard's tomb holds little appeal. The lady who inspired the immortal "To Helen" receives very little attention, in marked contrast to the importance assigned her by the critics previously reviewed. The greatest space is given by Shanks, who comments regarding Mrs. Jane Stith Stanard: "It is known that he mourned her immoderately when...she died, and that for the rest of his life, under the name of 'Helen', she took a sort of legendary place in his imagination." [124]

Allen observes that "'Helen' is probably a combination and imaginative synthesis of Jane Stith Stanard and Frances Allan with the abstract longing for the perfect Beloved common to all young men." [125] In such casual fashion is Helen now dismissed!

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124. Shanks, op. cit., p. 9.
125. Allen, op. cit., p. 249.

The effect drink and narcotics had upon the poet is again dealt with, though not so laboriously as in the middle period of writers.

Campbell pays little attention to it, merely remarking reflectively that it is possible that Poe's "references in several of his stories to morphine and laudanum and their effects grew out of his own experience with narcotics." [126]

However, one critic intimates that we are indebted to alcohol for the fact that Poe's writing was no worse. "The more we learn about Poe, the more grateful we are for his alcoholism. It was apparently the one thing that could restrain Poe from himself: the idea of a sober Poe is intolerable."[127]

One of Poe's biographers comments that "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" would make us believe he started taking drugs in Charlottesville. "In the morning, we read here, after taking his dose of morphine in his coffee, the solitary walker goes in quest of artificial emotions and exalting impressions in the transfigured country." [128]

Regarding the typical hero of Poe's tales, Lauvrière explains:

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126. Campbell, op. cit., p. 144.

127. Laura Riding, "The Facts in the Case of Monsieur Poe," Contemporaries and Snobs, p. 232.

128. Lauvrière, op. cit., p. 117.

> the hero, wan, emaciated, wayward, whose brilliant black eyes give out a strange, haggard look, whose abundant wavy hair frames a forehead of unusual breadth, whose eccentric manners hide badly the habits of intense thought, whose fits of hysterical laughter clash with the habitual tone of solemn gravity, finds himself manifestly a prey to odd obsessions, to odious impulses, fatal passions for the deadly drugs alcohol, opium and morphine. But this neurasthenic hero is the projection on the literary plane of the real Poe. [129]

Lauvrierebelieves "Loss of Breath" and "The Oval Portrait" to have been written under the influence of opium. [130]

Now come more definite affirmations of how Poe was affected by the stimulants which he took:

> Out of the mental state evolved from ill health and one of the stimulants he resorted to, flowed much of the creative work of the artist which insured his literary success...Opium removed him completely from the world of reality which he largely disliked; it enormously increased the bounds of his imagination; and it coincidentally vastly stimulated his creative faculty while soothing his nerves. [131]

To present a definite relationship between certain of Poe's works and his drug-taking, this critic says:

> During the stay in Baltimore from 1831 to 1835, there can be no moral doubt that Poe was using opium, at least from time to time. The indubitable evidence of the fact lies in the work which he produced. The Tales of the Folio Club are replete with opium dreams, and when they fell into the hands of Baudelaire, some

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129. Ibid., p. 118.

130. Ibid., p. 220.

131. Allen, op. cit., p. 298.

> years later, caused him to shed tears of joy as he recognized the very features of his own reveries as it were endowed with life. Such stories as "Ligeia" and "Berenice" illustrate this directly, especially the latter. They provide not only direct references to the drug, but the imagery, the irrational associations, and the very use of words are characteristic. [132]

Allen further comments that:

> Certain passages in "The Fall of the House of Usher," chiefly those dealing with ... "a flood of intense rays rolled throughout and bathed the whole in a ghostly and inappropriate splendour," and "the morbid condition of the auditory nerve," suggest unmistakably that previous to this time Poe was at least familiar with the effects of opium, as indeed "Ligeia" also strongly implies. [133]

Still later, there is the remark that "the distinct trace of opium in the confusion of the senses (taste and smell) meets us startlingly in 'Monos and Una.'" [134]

We find conflicting ideas expressed when we explore the question of whether Poe wrote from his imagination, apart from what he really thought, or whether he was revealing the inner man.

One critic declares: "Paranoia...was not an unconscious element of Poe's poetic genius but a wilfully created fiction of persecution and a publicity method." [135]

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132. Ibid., pp. 298-299.

133. Ibid., p. 358.

134. Ibid., p. 413.

135. Riding, op. cit., p. 225.

Later she comments: "to Poe the essence of composition was fictitiousness designed to create an effect." [136]

The lady's opinion of the poet seems summed up in her remark that "His morbid preoccupation with autobiographical melodrama prevented Poe from enjoying a serene success even in the minor literary fields for which he was perhaps fitted." [137]

Another biographer states that

> no more completely personal writer than Poe ever existed...No native characters, no observed incidents, no contemporary problems appear; into himself he drew nothing, but he poured out, on the contrary, scenes, characters and emotions which had no source but his own imagination, no relation to any except the visionary world of which he was the only inhabitant. [138]

This same critic declares that "others might shudder with the delight of a purely literary horror at the tales which he wrote but he was compelled to suffer the tortures from which they sprang." [139]

Krutch goes on to say that Poe "wrote as he did not because he wanted to but because he could write in no other way...he was not playing with morbid horrors but mastered by them." [140]

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136. Ibid., p. 251.

137. Ibid., p. 222.

138. Krutch, op. cit., p. 17.

139. Ibid., p. 46.

140. Ibid., p. 64.

The critic later adds that "the strange world of his imagination was the only one in which Poe could dwell, and he never left it once it had been found." [141]

He remarks: "The typical hero, oppressed with a strange melancholy and seeking relief in fantastic studies and speculations is plainly Poe himself..." [142]

He continues:

> Thus, if we compare the most striking action of Poe's life with his most characteristic stories, the two seem to spring from the same impulse, the one representing his attempt to adjust himself to actuality and the other his attempt to create, after the manner of neurotics, an imaginary world to fit the needs of his mind. [143]

In the course of his explorations into the recesses of Poe's soul, Krutch says:

> When it is remembered that...Poe's works are replete with...obsessions, perversions and manias which he could have learned only from himself and that he gave in the mysterious wreck of his own life proof of the intimate relationship to the characters which he created, it is impossible not to see that instead of being deliberately invented his stories and poems invented themselves. [144]

The biographer carries this theme still further, declaring that "in giving such vividly intimate pictures of temporary

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141. Ibid., p. 68.

142. Ibid., p. 85.

143. Ibid.

144. Ibid., p. 114.

insanity in 'Berenice,' of sadism in 'The Black Cat' or of mad obsession in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' he was confessing to himself and others the giddy instability of his own mind." [145]

Krutch adds: "His cry, sometimes so harsh and sometimes so musical, comes from the depth of his own lonely soul... The voice is unmistakably terrible." [146]

Perhaps the most poetic, yet one of the truest and most compact, descriptions given by latter day critics is this one: "The life of Edgar Allan Poe is like a lonely graveyard in which the monuments are the somber, musical poems he wrote to express the tragedies which make his story one of the saddest ever told." [147]

Another of Poe's biographers says that

> from childhood to the grave he oscillated between extreme phases of ecstasy and melancholia, the double alternate source of his poetical inspirations and his fantastical creations, of his literary dogmas and his metaphysical synthesis. The results of this in his prose and verse were those sudden transitions from deep despair to the most palpitating exaltations; that fervent mystical worship which forced him to unite Beauty and Death until he ended by confounding them. [148]

Killis Campbell comments

> Enough evidence of a positive nature has already been brought forward to demonstrate beyond any question

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145. Ibid., p. 117.

146. Ibid., p. 201.

147. Malone, op. cit., p. 216.

148. Lauvrière, op. cit., p. 413.

> that the poet, however objective he may appear to be in his imaginative writings, drew extensively on his own life for the materials underlying his art. In the case of the poems the body of self-revelatory material, though small in compass, is, in reality, comparatively large: it involves in some way virtually half of Poe's poems; and though it is, for the most part, vague and cloudlike, this was entirely in keeping with the poet's theory that the lyric should hide its meaning under a cloak of "indefinitiveness" and in the stories, the revelation of self is both abundant and, much of the way, readily evident. [149]

Campbell remarks that "a lot of Poe's writing catered to his way of living because he had to eat—and short stories paid better than poetry." [150]

This critic adds later that

> Poe catered to the demands of his day in treating in his stories a number of specific subjects popular with contributors to the current periodicals—as the pestilence and its terrors, exploration by land and sea, premature burial, and mesmerism. [151]

One biographer makes a very interesting point when he comments that

> the poet of Poe's sort depends for the medium in which he works on other poetry. The colours with which he paints are a distillation of the work of other writers. He has emotions of his own to express but the images through which he expresses them are not drawn direct from nature. The words he uses are so used as to make the most of the traces left on them by their having been used by others. [152]

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149. Campbell, op. cit., p. 146.

150. Ibid., p. 161.

151. Ibid., p. 164.

152. Shanks, op. cit., p. 100.

This critic hastens to add that "there is nothing derogatory to Poe's poetry in this description of it." [153]

He explains that: "There was a world of strange landscapes in Poe's mind. He had little time or peace for painting it and when he tried to do so the pigments he used were often faulty. But he did enough to show us its strangeness, to prove it his own, and to entice others to enter it." [154]

Concerning Poe's short stories, Shanks remarks

> We may say, perhaps, that talent, opportunity and necessity conspired to make him a master. He was obliged to write what the magazines would print...but it is not to be supposed that only poverty made him a writer of prose. The mind capable of conceiving "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The MS Found in a Bottle" could hardly have abstained from writing them, and it is difficult to think that he could have written them otherwise than he did. [155]

The biographer further observes

> The tales which were written without any genuine desire to write them for their own sake are not many. Poe may have turned into this channel a certain amount of creative force which he would have preferred to expend on the writing of verse. It is impossible, however, to believe that no matter what leisure he might have enjoyed, he could have abjured the writing of prose. [156]

Shanks comments

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153. Ibid., p. 101.

154. Ibid., p. 103.

155. Ibid., p. 106.

156. Ibid., pp. 110-111.

> The almost insanely logical side of Poe's mind has worked on the material supplied to it by the side which was, not to be too fine, as near insane as makes no matter. There are in him traces both of the sadist and the masochist, but there is no trace of any mental vagueness. Every horror is imagined with precision and described with economy. [157]

Shanks feels that Poe

> could reach his greatest intensity...where the persons and events of the story are symbols, not human beings or worldly occurrences, and where the whole is not a narrative but the presentation of a mood. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is nothing else. [158]

The critic declares

> The special power of his imagination is best revealed when it is least connected with any conscious or semi-conscious thought about himself and his own life, and here we return to "The Fall of the House of Usher"...the whole story is a picture in purely symbolic terms of the malady from which Poe felt himself to be suffering. What happens in The House of Usher is of less importance than what the reader is made to feel during his brief sojourn there... The House of Usher is an image of Poe's own soul, and we can find in it something like an epitome of his ultimate contributions to the literature of the world. It is a story of weakness and yet in its very abandonment to weakness, it has its own strength. [159]

Now we turn to a different view of whether Poe wrote from life or imagination, and in so doing go back to the period he spent in the army:

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157. Ibid., p. 129.

158. Ibid., p. 131.

159. Ibid., pp. 136-137.

> The whole interlude of Poe's life in the army, taken in connection with the places he visited, affords a remarkable example of the method the man sometimes followed in working directly from his environment. The story of it might almost be called How Poe Gathered His Material for a Short Story. Contrary to the fond and oft repeated opinion of many critics, Poe often found his material in the life and the place about him, and then worked only in a secondary and indirect way from literary sources. He visualized even imaginary localities strongly, and his scenery, although often a synthesis of the hills of one place and the lowlands of another, nevertheless sprang directly from the vistas which he had seen. Out of the strange and impressive environment into which he was about to be plunged for a year, free from the problems of sustenance and with the opportunity for considerable leisure, came directly much of his material for "The Gold-Bug," "The Oblong Box," "The Man that Was Used Up;" "The Balloon Hoax," and bits of the melancholy scenery, and sea and light effects which, from the time of his sojourn in Carolina, haunt so much of his poetry...A familiarity with the peculiar nature of the landscape and the section where Poe was about to tarry during 1827-28 will explain the "exotic" sources from which many of his descriptions in prose and poetry are derived. [160]

Allen refers to Poe's "poetry, which was at once the expression of the troubles of his inner life and a confession of his almost total withdrawal from any vital contact with the objective world." [161]

He also comments that

> Poe's own mysticism was purely personal, and the sublimal landscapes which he created in his poetry,

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160. Allen, op. cit., pp. 170-171.

161. Ibid., p. 473.

> prose and landscape sketches were the refuges and spiritual lands of his own darkened soul. It was for this reason that his poetry was more original than that of any other American poet of the age. It employed a symbolism which was personally unique, but which yet finds an echo, and provides a refuge for those who can glimpse within themselves, or through experience, the islands of spiritual exile, and the scenery along the highways and byways of despair. [162]

Allen's summation seems to conclude that

> All the realities of life lay, for Poe, in the realm of imagination. It was only there that he could, in any way, integrate the world. He longed for a logical and a complete consistency never found in the realm of the physical, and the world which he constructed for himself was a refuge that suited the peculiarities of his nature...Love, like everything else, could be perfect for him only imaginatively. Only in the imagination could he find an ideal satisfaction. Every woman whom he loved was exalted into the dream angel whom he could worship imaginatively, rather than physically enjoy. [163]

To touch with one biographer a few points hitherto unexplored among the modern critics, I plan now to quote at some length from Hervey Allen.

Allen tells us that in 1839

> "The Haunted Palace," which was introduced into "The House of Usher," appeared in the Baltimore Museum. This poem is an allegory depicting the progress of madness, and is the first thoroughgoing intimation from Poe that he could detect, in himself at least, the possibility of the final denouement of the hero of the poem and of "The House of Usher."

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162. Ibid., pp. 604-605.

163. Ibid., pp. 631-632.

That he, himself, and the strange conditions of his marriage are in part the subjects of the story and the poem, there can remain no doubt. The description of Roderick Usher is the most perfect pen-portrait of Poe himself which is known. It might be labeled "Self-Portrait of the Artist at the Age of Thirty."

> "The character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion, an eye large, liquid and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity — these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten." 164

Allen notes that "Tale of the Ragged Mountains" "harked back to schooldays at the University of Virginia. In the beautiful mountains where he had walked in 1826, dreaming of Elmira Royster, he now took refuge again in vivid imagination from a sea of troubles." 165

The biographer states that "To My Mother" was written to Poe's beloved mother-in-law, Mrs. Clemm, the faithful Muddie. 166

Allen reveals different aspects of Poe in these last three passages I have selected. First he remarks that in "Hop-Frog" Poe has an allegory in which "sovereign Reality makes cripple

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164. Ibid., p. 357.

165. Ibid., p. 463.

166. Ibid., p. 599.

Imagination, whom he keeps as a jester, hop as directed." Allen reports that it is Poe's imagination and the revenge he takes in his writing which are used here. [167]

The biographer says the excitement of the gold rush was much on Poe's mind during the last of his life. "He felt that his own richest vein of ore lay within. It is almost certain that the poem, 'Eldorado,' dates from about this time." [168]

Allen comments on Poe's "poetry, which was at once the expression of the troubles of his inner life and a confession of his almost total withdrawal from any vital contact with the objective world." [169]

Perhaps the briefest and best description of why Poe wrote as he did lies in his own words as reported by one biographer: "'The terror of which I write is not of Germany but of the soul.'" [170]

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167. Ibid., p. 513.

168. Ibid., p. 638.

169. Ibid., p. 473.

170. Gregory, op. cit., p. 75.

V. SUMMATION

The consensus of those who have studied Poe's life and writings is most definitely in the affirmative that the former affected the latter greatly. The manner in which it is believed to have done so varies according to the biographer. In my research I have uncovered several main points upon which the critics seem basically to agree.

The childhood days spent in England head the list as having been of tremendous value to Poe as a later source for both stories and poems. That he drew heavily upon Stoke-Newington for "William Wilson" there can be no doubt. The tremendous uprooting from one continent to another and then back again made a great impression upon him. Childhood and its fears and hopes always carry over into manhood, most especially for one who lives within himself, as Poe surely did.

He wrote of Stoke-Newington in a nostalgia that became dreadful rather than wistful. He put into "William Wilson" his thoughts and actions at the school to show how his terrible sensitivity preyed upon his mind and helped to wreck his later life.

The critics also show how Poe gained other things from England — his love for the ancient, for ruins and "Gothic" atmospheres, for misty landscapes and fabulous settings.

A second great influence was that of his wife. Only the early biographers slight this period of his career. Among the other critics there is some disagreement over Virginia's role, especially when it is mentioned that she could not have set the pattern for his heroines when he first married her. But it is agreed that one so dear to him served most definitely as the prototype for his later heroines.

For the earlier ones, Mrs. Stanard, Frances Allen, and Poe's mother are all cited as having served as models — with excellent justification for such belief. While I do not believe Poe lingered long hours over Mrs. Stanard's grave, I certainly do think her death came when he was at an impressionable age and exerted a tremendous influence over him which was carried into his writing.

Another woman who had a share in moulding his early poetry receives small mention — Elmira Royster. Again, since he loved her when he was young and full of visions and ideals, it is impossible <u>not</u> to think she was in "Tamerlane" and his first ballads.

Narcotics and liquor are given a prominent role by many of his biographers — a more important one than they really deserve, to my way of thinking. There can be no doubt that they helped to

enrich the already vivid imagination which he poured out in his writings — but here one meets those who think it was all imagination and no heart. My belief is that part of the blame for this impression gained from his tales by some critics lies with the drink and narcotics which helped him to write in a highly exalted state of mind without having to think.

Yet I believe he was mainly trying to write to forget the truly overpowering tragedies of his life, putting down on paper even more overwhelming ones with a sigh of relief that they were worse than his own — and then discovering with a thrill of fear that his own had not vanished simply because he had been writing as he felt.

Another important period of his life was the time he spent in the army. I agree with Allen, who thinks that Poe absorbed his surroundings and later wrote a synthesis of many places he had seen and thoughts he had had.

"The Gold-Bug" was without doubt a product of his sojourn on Sullivan's Island; so were "The Oblong Box" and "The Man That Was Used Up."

"The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" is convincingly presented as a remembrance of Richmond days, with John Allan in the role of grandfather. In this tale, the memories of Richmond had become a frightful nightmare to Edgar's mind and were so presented as he re-lived them in agony.

I must admit I do think with Killis Campbell that Poe sometimes wrote what would sell — and yet I cannot see how he could have avoided morbidity when his life was composed of stark disaster upon stark disaster.

Poe did withdraw from reality as completely as possible after a time. Life was too much for him. The life he was compelled to lead would have been too much for almost anyone — but for a man with his highly-strung nerves and senses, it must have been exquisite torture. He opened the door to the realm of imagination and employed that realm to try to forget. His real life would not let him forget and he became buried in horror from which he could never escape, into which he only sank deeper as he wrote each poem or tale. In the end neither imagination nor reality could save him from himself.

To cite a few other stories which are definitely proven autobiographical — "The Fall of the House of Usher," one of Poe's best, certainly is a characterization of its author; "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" harks back to Charlottesville days and reveals his preoccupation with drugs; "Berenice" plumbs the depths of his fear of his relationship with his cousin-wife; and "Eleonora" is the mystical, beautiful story of Poe, Virginia, and Mrs. Clemm.

Poe was greatly misunderstood and always will be. He was a genius; genius is rarely understood; he enjoyed being misunderstood.

He had a great mind - but stooped to pettiness, was ashamed, and had no way to pull himself from shame and hurt - except by putting it into writing, and by presenting a more terrible story than his own, assuaging his own grief. He helped himself by picturing those in worse case.

His vast but somewhat sketchy readings aided him in many of his stories. He was best at portraying himself in his writings as the sort of person he wanted to be. In "The Cask of Amontillado" he took dire and literary revenge upon some of the hurts the world had dealt him -- and no doubt put more than one critic into the crypt to his great mental satisfaction.

He wrote brilliant and biting criticism, gained many enemies, then wrote those enemies out of existence in his stories. Fearing that he was going mad, he portrayed some of his symptoms in the heroes of his stories. There is no pity in the tales of Poe -- he did not want to be thought pitiful. There is much pride, as he was proud.

Poe's love of neatness and of presenting a good appearance was an indication of the careful craftsmanship of his tales. He wrote and re-wrote, compressed, polished, edited and re-edited -- he was essentially an excellent artist and creator who did not wish to let his brain children live without being as beautiful as he could make them.

Naturally enough, the deaths of several of the women he loved while he was still no more than a youth made a great and terrible impression on his too-imaginative mind. In my view, he spent much of his life trying to perfect the poetic vision he first gained from the deep-felt tragedies of Mrs. Stanard's and Mrs. Allan's deaths.

Indeed, in some instances, I have come to believe that he hated and feared death to such an extent that he was trying to write it away!

In my own estimation, Poe was a victim of environment, and like most great writers, projected much of his physical surroundings into his writing. Many of his sadistic tales, such as "The Cask of Amontillado" and "Hop-Frog," were written with a desire to "get back" at his critics and those who had injured his abnormally sensitive feelings. It did not matter if they could not understand the allegory — he did — and it delighted his ego to feel that he was so far above his critics that he understood where they did not.

He was an unhappy man with a sense of being constantly wronged. He loved his wife and used her delicate health and the dreadful possibility of her death as a recurring theme in many of his tales. He kept hoping that he had written away the possibility of her death, each time discovered his hope to be false, and wrote and wrote again to alleviate the pain.

He took opium to forget, and it aroused in him impressions of such lushness that it was essential that he put them on paper. He was constantly writing his life and his bitterest thoughts and feelings, nicely disguised, upon paper. He would have loved leisure in which to write, with a private and substantial income of his own. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a good description of how he would have liked to live. "The Tale of the Ragged Mountains" looks also to the gentleman of leisure and to me expresses wistfulness for bygone days when responsibilities weighed not so heavily upon him.

He was a lonely man. His stories were his comfort and his company. In them he could lose himself and forget the exigencies of his real life.

Finally, the dreadful horror and texture of his dreams became so interwoven in his life that he knew not which was which and wrote in an agonized nightmare until he did not know whether what he had written was real or fancied -- as in his deathbed dreams of "Arthur Gordon Pym."

Edgar Allan Poe was an author of tragedy who lived a life of tragedy and wrote it for the world to read. Yet the worst part of all his horror tales, of all his mournful poems is -- they were real, they <u>were</u> his life.

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VII. VITA

Alice Mary Griffith was born in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and still maintains her permanent residence there. She was graduated from Gaithersburg High School in 1938. In 1942, she received her B.A. degree from Madison College, Harrisonburg, Virginia. After teaching for a year, Miss Griffith joined the U. S. Navy in 1943. She was released to inactive duty in 1946 and continues her association with the Navy as a lieutenant in a volunteer WAVE unit. Miss Griffith is presently employed in Washington, D. C., by the Department of State, where she is an information officer in the press division.