"It was open—wide, wide open":

Optics and Visual Perception in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

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Abstract

Reception of Edgar Allan Poe’s work in the past few decades has been either overtly critical or grudgingly appreciative, mainly due to the author’s peculiarly dark, unfathomable, and unreal world view. This reception has been guided primarily by readings of Poe’s famous tales and poems, such as “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Black Cat,” “The Raven,” and “Ulalume, ” works that have been frequently read, taught, critiqued, serialized, and even filmed around the world. Recent scholarly efforts have also ventured to position Poe’s socio-political, philosophical, and psychological preoccupations with regard to the marketplace of contemporary periodicals and journals in which he struggled to fashion a career. This re-contextualization of Poe in nineteenth-century American literary history has been quite informative and insightful, but has done little to reveal the full potential of those lesser-known tales in Poe’s armory that share a common denominator with his more popular works.

This dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach interpreting various works of Edgar Allan Poe against the backdrop of other cognitive and aesthetic discourses dealing with the *topoi* of sight and perception. Both in and out of his time, Poe produced works that locate him in his immediate environs as well as transcend nineteenth-century sensibilities to embrace and anticipate visual mechanisms of a later era. This project aims to fill a two-fold gap in Poe scholarship; it focuses on those tales that have been accorded little attention in the past fifteen years, and presents a book-length study on elements of ocularity and perception in Poe’s *oeuvre* that have been explored only in isolated articles and not through a holistic treatment spanning the

author's works. Through application of the working principles of the microscope, panorama, phenakitoscope, panopticon, surveillance cameras and other visual disciplines to Poe's works, this study reveals Poe as a timeless cultural signifier, an author who explored diverse nuances of vision and perception in ways that transcend immediate historical and geographical limitations to apprehend certain universal conditions of human existence.

"It was open—wide, wide open":

Optics and Visual Perception in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

Satwik Dasgupta

Approved
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Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite:
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart, and write."

-- Sir Phillip Sidney, "Loving in Truth"

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Salil Dasgupta and Bithika Dasgupta, and my brother, Sagnik Dasgupta; their continued moral support helped me to complete this project on time. I cannot thank enough my committee members, Dr. Tom Strawman, Dr. Carl Ostrowski, and Dr. Philip Phillips, for their unqualified support and guidance throughout the period of formulating and writing this dissertation. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Allen Hibbard and Dr. Marion Hollings for their encouragement and support during the initial years of my Ph.D. program. Finally, I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Kevin J. Hayes for graciously answering my queries pertaining to various topics central to this dissertation.

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Introduction: Re-envisioning Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe—what's in this name? What does it bring to our minds? For a moment, if one withdraws from the platform of academia and re-adjusts one's viewing lens to look through the eyes of a layman not cognizant with the majority of Poe's works, it can be argued that his themes problematize his reputation as a serious literary artist. His tales have the most gruesome visions of violence, terror, and cruelty that have made horror movie franchises proud, but are disturbing to most due to their graphic content and lurid images; his world view is devoid of morality and character judgments; his Machiavellian figures proudly flaunt their evil designs and get away with criminal perpetrations; there is no consistency or control in his protagonists' actions or the way his plots unfold; his hoaxes are over the top, and the comedy is loaded with fierce irony; his poetry is monotonous and arguably labored in design and purpose; and his most popular theory of poetic composition is widely considered to be ludicrous. These probably constitute the major reasons for Poe's reputation as a stringer of sensational ideas rather than a respectable writer. Despite scores of books and articles being published on Poe every year and despite the fact that average Americans will have studied Edgar Allan Poe at some point in their high school years, Poe is primarily perceived as a sensational author along the lines of Stephen King rather than a writer of notable repute. The problem here is not that an average person ought to know more about Poe, but that the author has somehow been set up as an icon and his larger-than-life persona has gained precedence over his works. Poe equals alcoholism, mania, depression, and even dementia, and this

partly has to do with the limited perspective of critical studies focusing only on those tales and poems that are popular and consistent with the current tide of academic fashion.

Poe is one of the most popular literary artists America has ever produced and, at the same time, arguably the least understood of her men of letters. He continues to be popular,[1] and major book-length studies published (specifically in the past ten years) have successfully demonstrated how Poe was connected to his contemporary literary marketplace and actively involved in tapping extensive resources of American culture and drawing them into his works. *En route*, these works also have pointed out how Poe was not a crazed alcoholic out of his time and should be considered as a serious artist responsibly and crucially engaged in the critical discourses of his era. Whalen's *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (1999) started the trend of contextualizing Poe within the economics of printing and publishing of the early-nineteenth century, and so did Kevin J. Hayes' *Edgar Allan Poe and the Printed Word* (2000), which traced Poe's involvement with the books and print culture of his era. Gerald Kennedy's *Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe* (2001) brought fresh perspectives on the socio-historical conditions prevailing during Poe's time through a collection of essays, and, in the same year, *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race* brought together nine essays on race and slavery issues, prompted by Toni Morrison's observation that "no early American writer is more important to the concept of African Americanism than Poe" (Morrison 79). Among others, this volume included Joan

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[1] According to a source on the IMDB (Internet Movie Database), the latest news on Poe is that Sylvester Stallone is set to write and direct a movie titled *Poe* (2009) with Viggo Mortensen in the lead.

Dayan's "Poe, Persons, and Property," which has since become a landmark essay on issues of slavery and race manifest in the author's works. Another notable work related to race is Teresa Goddu's *Gothic America* (1997). One of her chapters entitled "The Ghost of Race: Edgar Allan Poe and the Southern Gothic" takes a look at how *Pym* provides a new socio-historical context to Gothicism and issues of race during Poe's time. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe* (2002) similarly brought forth a collection of essays that both contextualized the author within the contemporary culture through essays on race, detection, and Gothicism, and placed him as an influential anticipator of latter-day artistic movements and popular culture. Meredith McGill's *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting* (2003) turned the debate of print culture on its head by arguing that there were political and ideological incentives for authors to encourage reprinting of their works without recourse to copyright protection. Eliza Richard's *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (2004) took a different path of contextualizing Poe by framing his works with respect to those of his female contemporaries (Sarah Helen Whitman, Francis Osgood, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith), demonstrating how he exploited these writers aesthetically and adopted a feminine aesthetic to outdo (t)his competition.

Evidently then, these major book-length critical works have contextualized Poe within his antebellum culture and restored him to the pride of place he deserves in American literary history; however, such studies on Poe have primarily made the "rich" works richer (in terms of accorded attention), while the minor works have continued to languish with significantly less attention. One might even say that we have been smothered with critical studies of Poe's Dupin tales, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon*

Pym, *Eureka*, "The Black Cat," "Ligeia," "The Gold Bug," "Ulalume," "The Raven," "The Bells," etc. Even in our popular culture, these oft-criticized tales/poems of Poe have been televised, advertised, videoed, cassetted, DVDed, CDed more than the other lesser known works. Poe entered into the mainstream media in the 1940s, and in the early 1960s, Vincent Price produced cinematic adaptations of five of Poe's works—"The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Masque of Red Death," "The Raven," "The Pit and the Pendulum," and "Ligeia," taking visual adaptations of Poe's tales to new heights. In more recent times, "The Raven" has been taught in many schools and colleges, variously adapted to suit different artistic purposes, and the popular television series *The Simpsons* did "a good turn" (as Mark Twain would have put it) to Edgar Allan Poe by parodying "The Raven," an episode that has currently attained something of a cult status. For example, in this cartoon series, while the "Treehouse of Horror" contained a rendition of "The Raven," "Lisa's Rival" featured recreation of a scene from "The Tell-Tale Heart." In another instance of pop-culture influence, the DVD edition of *Hellboy* (2004) contains a special 10-minute adaptation of "The Tell-Tale Heart" in its special features.

Such prolific interest in Poe's works both in the academia and mainstream popular culture is both heartening and encouraging, but many more have remained largely unexplored. For instance, when compared to these major works of Poe, how many articles have been written on "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade," "The Sphinx," or "Duc D'Omlette"? Not many, despite the fact that such works equally lend themselves to effective exploration of their contemporary relevance to the literary marketplace. Proliferation of interest in Poe's socio-cultural milieu in the last twenty

years or so has vented itself in approaches that border on race, gender, class differences, the print culture, the contemporary penny press magazine and periodical culture, and the major works just mentioned have logically yielded the most potent examinations of such concerns that would have affected Poe and his psycho-social promptings as an author. But an interesting question arises here: what if an exploration of a cultural trope in "The Fall of the House of Usher" would or could lead us to "The Spectacles"? Or, what if Poe's "The Raven" could be compared and contrasted side by side with "To ____" and "The Conqueror Worm"? Again, how would a televised version of "Bon Bon" compare with the film version of "The Tell-Tale Heart?" In other words, what status can be accorded to some of Poe's other works that have been considerably ignored and do not usually come to mind, but a deeper understanding of which would inarguably enhance his reputation as an author? The lesser-known works ought to be brought into a sharper relief not only for their own sake, but also for the common denominator that they share with the more popular members of their family tree. The author's socio-cultural background, his print culture, and the contemporary publishing industry can be as effectively understood through examining "Why The Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" or "Epimanes" as much as through "The Purloined Letter" or "The Gold Bug." Cultural semiotics are fluid and timeless and can be traced to their sources in any given text by whoever is interested in different modes of perception and ways of "seeing." Whether Poe's tales occur in alien settings or in domestic environments, his themes unfold through multiple ways of seeing and perceiving.[2] That Poe had a common theme

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[2] Stephen Rachman and Shawn Rosenheim observe in their introduction to *The American*

across all his works might sound preposterous, but the ways in which various elements of sight, vision, perception, self-analysis, ocular tools, and points-of-view abound in his works suggest that exploration of any particular aspect of Poe's work has to have perception and/or sight as its starting point. Above all, Poe was constantly concerned (fortunately or unfortunately) with how his literary and cultural milieu should not pander to foreign tastes and instead should forge an independent aesthetic credo. In the "Letter to B –," written as a Preface to his 1831 *Poems,* Poe laments:

> You are aware of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. He is read, if at all, in preference to the combined and established wit of the world. I say established: for it is with literature as with law or empire—an established name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession. Besides, one might suppose that books, like their authors, improve by travel—their having crossed the sea is, with us, so great a distinction. Our antiquaries abandon time for distance; our very fops glance from the binding to the bottom of the title-page, where the mystic characters which spell London, Paris, or Genoa, are precisely so many letters of recommendation....

As can be surmised from the above extract, Poe's career as a writer, poet, and critic can be read as one holistic (and persistent) quest of envisioning what is ideal for an American artist to be successful in the literary marketplace. In a way then, the element of visuality spread throughout Poe's works is arguably an extension of the author's preoccupation with envisioning what works best for survival in the literary marketplace.

Face of Edgar Allan Poe that "[a]nyone who would locate Poe's writing within a cultural context must confront the way his work tends to advertise itself as ethereal and otherworldly, or avowedly timeless, or preoccupied with aesthetic, cognitive, and linguistic categories or psychopathological conditions" (xii). Be it the Psychoanalytic, the Marxist, the Feminist, or the Modernist or any other "school of thought" that contextualizes a particular text, every reading/interpretation depends on how a text is perceived, visualized, and employed in socio-historical contexts that have certain timelessness about them.

Jana L. Argersinger in her essay, "From an Editor's Easy Chair: A Partial View of Prospects in Poe Studies," observed that "there are early signs that the study of Poe may be enriched by (and, in turn, enrich) the new study of literary transnationalism and its theoretical grappling with ideas of global consciousness—ideas currently circulating with particular energy," and that "[a] compelling variant [of the globalizing theory of literature] is the concept of hybridity, which understands a text with global and enduring reach, not as universal and timeless in the time-honored sense, but as endlessly translatable, in any place or era, into new, denationalized, and irreproducible hybrids born out of every union between author and receptive reader or translator" (44, 48). This study intends to achieve such hybridity by examining some of Poe's lesser-known tales alongside those that have recently attained considerable recognition to highlight how the author's deployment of various modes of perception can be seamlessly "translated" to our own era when examined in the context of various cognitive and aesthetic semiotics familiar to us. The study that follows is meant to be an interdisciplinary approach involving various works of Edgar Allan Poe and other cognitive and aesthetic discourses that involve the topoi of sight and perception. Neither entirely in nor out of his time, Poe produced works that locate him in his immediate environs as well as transcend nineteenth-century sensibilities to embrace and anticipate visual semiotics of a later era. In fact, Poe's systematic attention to sight and visual sensation goes a long way in explaining his iconic status in contemporary popular culture where visual literacy now supersedes that supremacy long held by print. To date, several articles have examined Poe's tales in the context of optical apparatus or visual culture. The current study draws

on these articles not only to contextualize Poe within his mainstream visual culture, but also has a further ambition to leap beyond the nineteenth century and see how some of his tales facilitate interdisciplinary studies of visuality in our own era by anticipating those principles and methods manifest in modern surveillance methods, art forms, and other human sciences. This project aims to fill a two-fold gap in Poe scholarship; it focuses on those tales that have been accorded little or no attention in the past fifteen years, and attempts to bring together a book-length study on elements of ocularity and perception in Poe's *oeuvre* that have only been explored in isolated articles and not through a holistic treatment spanning across the author's works. This study compares and contrasts the author's well-known works with some of the lesser-known ones to show how Poe could be *the* potent, timeless cultural signifier, who exercised diverse nuances of vision and perception in ways that transcended limitations of immediate geographical time and place to appropriate universal conditions of human existence.

Many scholarly articles and books have been written on Poe's visual culture that contextualize the author within his socio-historical and literary scene, and the following section provides a brief overview of the criticism that expressly addresses Poe's engagement with the fundamentals of sight and optics related to the agenda of this research work. Since this current research traces the anticipatory nature of Poe's visual culture, what follows is an account of those articles that have proven useful in exploring the interdisciplinary aspect of vision and the actual literary text.

One of the earliest and most comprehensive articles treating the issue of optics and sight across the spectrum of Poe's works is Judith Saunders' "'If This I Saw:' Optic Dilemmas in Poe's Writings." She explores "A Descent into the Maelstrom," "The Purloined Letter," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "Sonnet-To Science," "The Gold Bug," "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" and other minor works to demonstrate how "in addition to an obsessive concern with eyes themselves, we find in Poe's work a consuming interest in the processes of sight: his characters experiment with various modes of observation, struggle to see in the dark or to find concealed objects, and grapple with the problem of assigning meaning to what they see" (67). Though this article is considerably dated (1986), it nevertheless provides an excellent overview of visual culture spread across Poe's works and is an ideal starting point for any scholar interested in the author's visual topoi .

Kevin J. Hayes has written several articles on Poe and his ocular culture. His essay on the relationship between the operating principles of the camera and "The Spectacles" reveals the scope for further research in the ocular dynamics of Poe. On the other hand, "Poe, The Daguerreotype, and the Autobiographical Act" and "Visual Culture and the Written Word in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd'" focus on how the print culture—illustrations, engravings, portraits, the written word, signs and symbols—thoroughly determined how Poe perceived his contemporary literary marketplace and also how he "implicitly challenge[d] all readers to broaden their definition of reading to recognize its relationship to seeing" ("Visual Culture" 446).

In "The Magnifying Glass: Spectacular Distance in Poe's 'Man of the Crowd' and Beyond," Susan Sweeney takes up the issue of how Poe's detectives employ a kind of figurative glass or optical tool to decipher the actual goings-on around them and how "in subsequent tales of ratiocination...Poe increase[s] the number and manner of filters separating his protagonist from the action" (4).[3] Rae Beth Gordon in "Poe: Optics, Hysteria, and Aesthetic Theory" focuses on various optical illusions and delusions manifest in Poe's tales in the context of various nineteenth-century optical devices that included "parhelia, circular rings, lunar haloes, inversion of views (for example, along the Firth of Forth), the *aurora borealis*..., the 'Fata Morgana,' coronas and glories...." (49). Gordon posits how these optical illusions and mirages (in the light of Poe's knowledge of the inventor of optical devices, David Brewster) lend a unique significance to the perceived reality in the author's works where his protagonists' mental stability is in question.

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[3] Sweeney attributes such a shift in the protagonists' mode of perception to the dichotomy of public and private spheres—interest and physical involvement in the public life (akin to a *flaneur*) is transformed in the latter tales into arm-chair peering and reading into lives of men. Akin to Hayes' idea of the visual culture and its connection with the written word, Sweeney finds evidence that "in the later stories,...as textual representations of the crime become more important, Poe's detectives actually try to peer through a piece of paper...as if it were translucent, permeable film or a sheet of glass" (12). Another article similar in scope and method to Sweeney's premise is Laura Saltz's "'Eyes Which Behold:' Poe's 'Domain of Arnheim' and the Science of Vision" that explores Poe's aesthetic theory and idea of "supernal" beauty in comparison with Thomas Ellison's sense of beauty and materialism. As Saltz argues, "Ellison's emphatic interest in 'the eyes which behold' the landscape on earth seems to challenge Poe's metaphysical notion of the poetic sentiment" (4). Through such an exploration, Saltz demonstrates how "through his scientific understanding of vision, Poe simulates in 'Arnheim' a set of optical effects that parallel the out-of-body states in which the poetic sentiment, in Poe's view, is apprehended" (6).

Other interesting aspects of Poe's visual culture have not gone unnoticed. The theme of *flanerie*, popularized by Walter Benjamin, curiously fits in with the visual topoi of Edgar Allan Poe and is applicable to some of his tales. Accordingly, the connections between Poe and the *flaneur* have merited considerable attention.[4] The cinematic aspect

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[4] James Werner makes the subject of gazing and detection his primary focus in "The Detective Gaze: Edgar Allan Poe, the *Flaneur*, and the Physiognomy of Crime," demonstrating how Walter Benjamin's idea of the *flaneur* finds its clearest manifestation in the character of C. Auguste Dupin. Werner explores the link between how societal pressures in 1830s Paris made *flaneurs* into "unwilling...detectives" who were able to provide information, roughly around the same time that marked Poe's rise as a literary artist. The article provides an interesting connection between the role played by social factors that turned an ordinary *flaneur* into a detective and the friction between the private and the public sphere that resulted from such a transformation. According to Werner, Poe's stay at various Eastern seaboards (Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York) helped him understand and appreciate the importance of *flanerie*, something that he put to good use in the Dupin tales and "The Man of the Crowd." This article formed a section of a larger book project called *American Flaneur: The Cosmic Physignomy of Edgar Allan Poe* published in 2004. The book deals with the study of the *flaneur* not just in "The Man of the Crowd," but explores a vital common strand among Poe's works that explore the functionality of the *flaneur*, his gaze, and his social control: "the *flaneur* exerted a greater influence on Benjamin than even he himself recognized; furthermore, the *flaneur* registered a profound impact on Poe...throughout much of his fiction, Dupin tales, as well as *Eureka* (his cosmogony and "prose poem")" (ix). Another article by Kevin J. Hayes (and probably his best) on Poe's visual culture, "The *Flaneur* in the Parlor: Poe's "Philosophy of Furniture" takes a look at nineteenth-century *flanerie* in terms of staying indoors and scrutinizing the furniture of a room in order to arrive at an understanding of the inhabitant's traits and features. Framing his essay against the backdrop of Moving Day (celebrated on May 1 in New York during Poe's time)—a day when people moved out on to the streets with their wares and belongings to find a place and tenant it—Hayes shows how the moving *flaneur* could be transformed into a "stationery *flaneur*" by using this jostling urban space to gratify his peeping-tom instincts from the comforts of an arm chair. According to Hayes, we find this process replicated in "The Philosophy of Furniture" when the narrator anticipates and comments on the inhabitants' tastes and preferences by studying his furniture and simultaneously comments on the depraved aesthetics of American people. Along similar lines, C. T. Walters' "'The Philosophy of Furniture' and Poe's Aesthetics of Design" takes a unique look at the socio-cultural conditions during Poe's time through the paraphernalia of furniture that adorn some of Poe's tales in the context of the author's theory of furniture as expounded in the essay, which, according to Walters, "presents a logical response to the social conditions that

of Poe's tales has been excellently captured by Dana Brand and Wheeler Dixon in their respective articles; they also provide excellent accounts of the connection between Poe and Alfred Hitchcock. [5] Thomas Inge focuses on the history and evolution of Poe in the graphic culture of our age and provides an interesting reading of Poe's presence in comic books, including some where the author himself is a character.[6] James Kirkland provides

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emerged during the decades prefacing the Civil War" and is characterized by a wonderful sense of "aesthetic sarcasm" (59). Poe visualizes the depravity that has beset Americans through aping of French and other foreign tastes in his essay and that, Walters contends, is the crux and the driving force of this justly famous essay.

[5] Dana Brand' s "Rear-View Mirror: Hitchcock, Poe, and the *Flaneur* in America" also traces the connection between our modern visual culture and Poe by tracing the influence of our author on Hitchcock's cinematography and particularly how "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Man of the Crowd" influenced *Rear Window*. Brand states that "[b]y considering Hitchcock's film in relation to these Poe stories and the urban cultural context in which they were produced, I hope to offer a new perspective on *Rear Window*, a perspective that may help to identify the place of the film within the culture of modern cities and within Hitchcock's own implicit analysis of American civilization" (124). Another notable article exploring the celluloid connection is Wheeler Dixon's "The Site of the Body in Torture/ The Sight of the Tortured Body: Contemporary Incarnations of Graphic Violence in the Cinema and the *Vision of Edgar Allan Poe*."

[6] M. Thomas Inge's "Poe and the Comics Connection" provides an interesting insight into the graphic culture of our era *vis-a-vis* Poe's tales and poems. Dividing his article into two sections, Inge treats Poe as both the author of tales adapted for various comics series and also as a character who featured in various adaptations of his own tales. Inge begins with *Funnies on Parade* and *Famous Funnies* (1933), the very first comic books that appeared in the United States, and goes on to include many other comic strips in his inquiry into the history of comic books, but with a specific eye on comic adaptations of Poe's works. For example, "[t]he very first appearances of Poe in the pages of comic books were in the *Classic Comic* series (called *Classic Illustrated* after 1947 in an effort to escape an association with the general superhero variety)" (4), and "[t]he first adaptation of a story by Poe was in July 1944 in number 21, an anthology called *3 Famous Mysteries*" (5). At the end of the article, Inge also provides a detailed and exhaustive chronological account of the comic adaptations of Poe's tales (beginning in 1944) and ends with *The Dreaming* (56, Jan. 2001), bearing the title, "The First Adventure of Miss Catterina Poe," which fuses the author's biographical elements with "The Conqueror Worm."

an excellent account of the connections between the folk tradition and the literary text in "'The Tell-Tale Heart' as Evil Eye Event." Kirkland demonstrates how the eye itself was the engine of wrath and destruction in some cultures and how the narrator's obsession with the old man's eye takes an entirely new significance in the context of those folk beliefs and practices. Obsession with body parts and mutilation forms the thesis of William Etter's "'Tawdry Physical Affrightments': The Performance of Normalizing Visions of the Body in Allan Poe's 'Loss of Breath,'" which explores the visions of horrific bodily torture and dismemberment in Poe's fiction in the context of antebellum culture where "sensationalistic suspensions of physical reality and hyperbolically physical performances abounded" (5). These visions that Poe explored, according to Etter, are eventually based on "a core vision of bodily normality that forms the ground for his critiques of antebellum popular culture," and "Loss of Breath" focuses on such normality, the "transgression of which results in collapse into aesthetic, social, and political absurdity" (6).

All these articles and the preceding book-length studies demonstrate how the nineteenth century comprised a blistering *mélange* of newspapers, pamphlets, journals, penny magazines, and how all these media helped in bombarding people everywhere with paintings, drawings, sketches, illustrations, and graphic advertisements. Such expressive forms assumed greater significance for an author like Poe striving for recognition in the

literary marketplace, and he could not but incorporate the cultural invasion of visuality in his works.

The five chapters that comprise this study are interconnected through a progressive scale of vision—beginning with erroneous perception, moving through panorama to surveillance and anthropocentrism, and ending with Surrealism. The first chapter—"(T)ERROR of the Soul: Optical Illusion 'with what foresight' in 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' 'The Sphinx,' and 'The Spectacles'"—introduces an analysis of how Poe's characters in these three tales become obsessed with their own viewpoint and perception to such a degree that they refuse to see and think logically. Driven by their vision, literal and metaphorical, the narrators confuse actuality with their own merely perceived notion of what they think reality is. The study begins with an exploration of erroneous perception because it is the essential principle of Poe's most self-deceptive narrators. Placing the issue of perception right at the beginning opens up the theme of ocularity/vision for the rest of the study, as the second chapter demonstrates. " Poe, Panorama, and the Panoptic Sublime: Sovereign View in 'The Domain of Arnheim,' 'Morning on the Wissahiccon,' and 'The Island of the Fay,'" brings together three relatively lesser-known works of Poe that heavily rely on point-of-view and perspectives to show how sight becomes the vehicle of encompassing and embracing both hidden and apparent truths perceivable in nature. However, in combining discussions of the panorama and the panopticon with these three works of Poe, this chapter demonstrates how Poe situated his motifs and themes of aestheticism in close contiguity to the scientific and aesthetic apparatuses of the period. Both panorama and the panopticon

yielded an all-comprehensive vision of the immediate vista, and the narrators, with their all-embracing perceptions, try to voice the truth about nature and humanity, even though they seem to share the element of *hubris* and short-sightedness with the narrators of the earlier chapter. The possible consequence of an abuse of power resulting from such a control over one's cultural environment provides the link to the third chapter, "SCPs and Discontent: Anonymous Role Playing in 'The Man of the Crowd.'" The chapter explores the principle of reciprocity (evidently the fulcrum on which the panorama and the panopticon balances) to see how a modern-day surveillance camera replicates the functioning principle of Poe's voyeuristic narrator in "The Man of the Crowd." This chapter explores the panopticon's essential functionality in a more detailed way to comprehend its applicability in the field of surveillance and social control and examines how a particular tale in Poe's oeuvre demonstrably reflects the core surveillance principles of CCTVs (Closed Circuit Televisions) and the panopticon. It also demonstrates how the narrator's voyeuristic pleasure in "The Man of the Crowd" is arguably equivalent to the psycho-social ecstasy derived by the controllers of these devices, who have illimitable control over their social surroundings and, as a consequence, the whole world under such electronic hegemony turns into a cluster of men in the crowd.[7]

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[7] The narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" projects himself as the authoritative *flaneur* figure in control of his social environment and imputes significance to his immediate surroundings in a manner similar to the modern surveillance systems installed in such major cities around the world as Berlin, New York, and London. Other notable readings of "The Man of the Crowd" and the visual culture are Robert H. Bryer's "Mysteries of the City: A Reading of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd"; Dana Brand's essay in *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*; Tom Gunning's

The next chapter continues with the problem of exercising such unqualified control over one's environs through an anthropocentric discussion of subjection and a resultant revolt from such tyranny. "The Anthropocentric Vision: Aesthetics of Effect and Terror in Poe's 'Hop-Frog'" develops the possible psycho-social results of emotional hegemony through a semi-anthropoid figure who avenges himself on a king desperate to assert and sustain supremacy over his subjects. This chapter juxtaposes modern anthropological study and Poe's fiction; it demonstrates that an anthropocentric study of the author's aesthetics of terror in "Hop Frog" reveals that what we see and perceive as essential to the titular character's poetics of revenge and hatred are nothing but a reflection of our (the readers') own anthropocentrism. This anthropocentric study provides a glimpse into how humans perceive, adapt, and conquer adversarial forces within the society. However, the collapse of the apparent rational order, effected by Hop Frog at the end, also provides a glimpse into the nether side of human consciousness and its illimitable capacity to defy comprehension, something that also constitutes the focus of the fifth and final chapter. Focusing on the anthropocentric nature of the laws that govern the functioning of the human mind, the final chapter dwells on the connection between Poe and Surrealism and effectively rounds up the study of visual culture by highlighting the absurd and the grotesque elements in human lives that seemingly have no apparent *raison d'être* and yet that frequently dictate our thoughts and actions. "Poe and the *Pointe* Sublime: Surrealistic Meditations in 'Berenice,' 'The Angel of the Odd,'

"From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and *Traffic in Souls* (1913)"; and Stephen Rachman's "Reading Cities: Devotional Seeing in the Nineteenth Century."

and 'Three Sundays in a Week'" envisions the author as an anticipator of an international modernist movement known as Surrealism. Since some of Poe's tales are patently absurd and ridiculous, this chapter explores two relatively obscure tales of Poe and pits them against "Berenice" to examine the Surrealist impulses that undergird these tales. Importantly, the chapter focuses more on the principles of Surrealism rather than actual Surrealist paintings to reveal how Poe's written texts create a collage in the reader's mind that is equivalent to any Surrealist painting—philosophically and aesthetically profound and yet apparently incomprehensible. The movement of Surrealism was most successful as an art form that did not require any apparent control over its subject matter; Poe's narrators in this chapter seem to exhibit a similar principle and give free reign to their unconscious. Using Breton's *Manifestos* and Max Ernst's fascination with Poe, this chapter frames Surrealist features in juxtaposition with the philosophical thought processes of the tales that can be understood to resemble the Surrealist concept of absurdity.

Early nineteenth-century America stood at the cusp of building a national identity partially embedded in a cultural heritage that evolved through periods of intense socio-political strife. Her people could come to terms with these colossal changes through the print media and pictorial culture that bombarded the market. Since Edgar Allan Poe came of age in this literary and socio-political juncture in the history of United States and absorbed chameleon-like all these complexities, this study demonstrates how Poe's visual world anticipates and explores various concepts related to optics both in the nineteenth century and beyond; it is Poe's quality as *the* cultural signifier that has prompted this

study to examine transnational and global connections among his works and visual devices invented around the world. Through application of diverse theories to socio-historical contexts of the past and the present, these chapters demonstrate newer methods of appreciating Poe's vision and of understanding our vision of his works.

Chapter 1--(T)ERROR of the Soul:

Optical Illusion "with what foresight" in "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Sphinx," and "The Spectacles"

The intellectual or logical man, rather than the understanding or observant man, set himself to imagine designs—to dictate purposes to God. Having thus fathomed to his satisfaction the intentions of Jehovah, out of these intentions he built the innumerable systems of mind.

--Edgar Allan Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse"

According to Nicholas J. Wade in *A Natural History of Vision*, a particular condition affects most human beings and determines how we perceive objects around us. Labeled as "binocular disparity," this condition involves the degree of difference between perception of each eye (when beholding any given object). This phenomena has engendered interest since the times of Ptolemy and Galen, and of the 180 sections devoted to problems of vision in Books II and III of Ptolemy's *Optics*, 58 are related to binocularity (Wade 237). Binocular disparity results from the actual distance between our two eyes, and "the pathway from the two eyes to the brain has obvious implications for the ways in which signals from the eyes will be combined..." (238). While this optical condition is but a part of our natural way of looking at things, there is a larger implication of such difference in perception. This condition finds its metaphorical counterpart in our quotidan existence, in our warped insight and understanding of the goings-on in life. Our perception of the world sometimes is illusory because we fail to arrive at a rational comprehension of things and attribute our failure onto factors not germane to our

knowledge. According to R. Gregory, the modern definition of "illusion" applies to differences between the perception of figures and their physical characteristics (503). What Gregory observes about optical perception—optical illusion with regards to physical objects—is arguably translatable into mental perception because even as we literally see objects around us, our brain signals might prompt us to "see" those things differently. Even though our perceptions of figures and objects can be occasionally erroneous, we convince ourselves of their rectitude because we see what we *want* to see and not what we *ought* to. Quite a few tales of Edgar Allan Poe entertain such paradoxical discussions of seeing and perceiving, eyesight and illusion, because Poe's narrators exercise a strikingly similar pattern of sight and perception: a misinformed awareness of the state of affairs and a shortsightedness resulting from insistence on things they either don't know or are arguably not aware of. Readers can feel that Poe's narrators have a narrow vision and are driven by a jaundiced vision of rectitude and moral uprightness. Quite a few of Poe's narrators commit various crimes or bungle up their own fate by persisting with these prejudiced viewpoints (the narrators of "The Black Cat," "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Cask of Amontillado" are cases in point), but three specific tales of Poe present a modified version of this principle.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), "The Spectacles" (1844) and "The Sphinx" (1846) combine the lack of moral vision to comprehend affairs rationally with a literal problem of sight and perception. While the narrator of the first tale abominates an old man for his defective eye, the narrators of the other two have defective eyesight that convolutes their viewpoints. Though these three tales deal with terrifying consequences resulting from the

problems of sight and vision, the function of terror in "The Tell-Tale Heart" is quite different from the function of terror in "The Spectacles" and "The Sphinx" because Poe frequently uses the word "terror" to suggest varying degrees of intensity throughout his tales. The terror is these tales is concomitant with the narrator's erroneous perceptions, and this chapter explores connections between their fallacious judgments and their problematic vision: through an awry exercise of common human faculties, these narrators highlight Poe's persistent interest in human failings, his belief that man has a compulsive and inevitable predilection to let his point of view determine what he *sees*.

"Terror" in layman's terms means something that is scary and horrific. Again, "terror" in a Poesque context means an unusual and incomprehensible disturbance in the soul that carries more significance than its usual negative connotation in the context of a given tale. In "The Premature Burial" (1844), we come across "sheer terror," "evident terror," "mortal terror," "an electric shock of terror," and "sepulchral" terror (674, 677, 679) ; in "The Black Cat" (1845), we encounter "extreme terror," "my wonder and my terror were extreme," "the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me," "extremity of terror and awe" (602, 604, 607); in "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), there is "excessive terror" (392); in "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842), it is "shuddering terror" and "King of Terrors" (493, 505); in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), it is "an anomalous species of terror" (322). Seen in the light of these tales, and more specifically, of "The Tell-Tale Heart," what we know as "terror" in Poe is absent in both "The Sphinx" and "The Spectacles." Yet, the narrators of the latter two tales do experience some kind of terror. The terror in "The Tell-Tale Heart" is a direct result of

unprecedented derailment of common sensibilities in man that results in terrifying and fatal consequences, whereas in "The Spectacles" and "The Sphinx," the terror springs from curious conditions specific to the narrators' psyche, owing to faulty exercises of seeing and hearing that result in erroneous judgments. As James Gargano declares in his seminal essay on Poe's narrators, Poe often designs his tales to show his narrators' limited comprehensibility of their own problems and states of mind, and his artistically ordered events establish a vision of life and character which the narrator's very inadequacies help to "prove" (178).

Nineteenth-century visual culture

In nineteenth-century America, new developments in ocular science were overwhelming the common man. Novel ways of looking at and perceiving things were the order of the day; whether these inventions and discoveries catered to the popular culture or the scientific community, the public beheld these new innovations as instances of "awful" phenomena. Optical fallacies and illusions were subtle modifications on the problems that preoccupied psychologists, parapsychologists, psychiatrists, and pathologists throughout the nineteenth century: the problem of differentiation between actuality and the illusion of the senses. Interest in scientific advancement was at its peak from the 1820s to the 1840s, and important advancements in optics were being made. According to Gisele Freund, "[w]hile the invention of photography in 1839 offered the period a defining image of rationalized and objective vision, its emergence dovetailed with a host of different entertainment media in which vision was industrialized,

commoditized, and otherwise modernized" (79). To add to this observation, even before the invention of photography in 1839, there was a persistent interest in representing the natural world in its most essential form, and various attempts were made to that end. Devices invented for these purposes could sometimes be used by an average individual not cognizant of the intricacies involved. For example, various graphic representations were made possible by Camera Obscura—portable optical devices that employed mirrors to reflect light onto darkened, enclosed spaces like rooms, small cubicles, or even boxes. Light entering through a small hole on one side of the device would illuminate the wall/surface on the other side with inverted images of the object(s) in question.[1]

Various enquiries into the nature of visuality and visibility added to this surge of interest in optics, and the emergence of photography into the domain of the middle class owed its significance to the continued vogue of the portrait. One particular variation was significantly well known. Johann Caspar Lavater's essays on physiognomy were enormously popular in late eighteenth-century America, and his "Physiognomische Fragmente," between its original publication in 1770 and 1810, went through "no fewer than sixteen German, fifteen French, two American, two Russian, one Dutch, and twenty English editions" (Shookman 3). The popularity of physiognotrace—tracing a subject's physiognomy and capturing it in graphic form—suggested to what extent visual representation was significant to nineteenth-century people. According to Wendy Bellion, a Frenchman named Gilles-Louis Chrétien in 1783-84 devised the physionotrace (in

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[1] See Wendy Bellion. She cites additional information in her footnotes on the usage of Camera Obscura and its evolution in the American milieu.

English, "physiognotrace") and his partner, Edme Quenedey, recorded the structure of the physiognotrace in a drawing of 1788 ("Mechanization"). Ellen Miles notes that the first record of a physignotrace in the United States came in 1796 through J.J. Boudier, an artist originally working in Maryland, but who set up his machine at 275 Front Street, Philadelphia and publicized his contraption through newspapers (120). These physiognotraces were relatively inexpensive and quite affordable for the common people, and as Bellion notes, "[i]nstead of paying fifty dollars or more for a single oil portrait that required many tiresome sittings to complete, one could now obtain four paper silhouettes inexpensively and in a matter of minutes" ("Mechanization"). Giselle Freund almost echoes Bellion's sentiments when he declares that "[t]here will always be a sector in the art world which is more concerned with speed and quantity than with art; the physiognotracist of 1790 is not far removed from the passport photographer of the twentieth century" (81). Polaroids, coin-operated portraits, and even modern day SLRs and DSLRs are but charming residues of these nineteenth-century inventions.

The stereoscope was one of the most popular inventions of the nineteenth century dovetailing with the rising interest in subjective vision and more generally with the field of physiology. Charles Wheatstone and Sir David Brewster were two popular figures associated with its invention who also published treatises on optical illusions, color theory, and other visual phenomena. Jonathan Crary points out that "Wheatstone was in fact the translator of Purkinje's major 1823 dissertation on afterimages and subjective vision, published in English in 1830," and "[a] few years later Brewster summarized available research on optical devices and subjective vision" (82). The fact that each eye

sees a slightly different image—binocular disparity—was not something new for contemporary people, but it is only in the 1830s that the physiological basis for disparity and difference in the degrees of optical axis became significant for scientists. While scientists were interested in the anatomical evidence as to why such disparity in vision occurred (they conducted a detailed analysis of nerve fibers and their intricate network that connected to the brain), in 1833, Wheatstone conducted a successful study of the "binocular parallax," the degree to which the angle of the axis of each eye differed when focused on the same point. He came to the conclusion that

> When an object is viewed at so great a distance that the optic axes of both eyes are sensibly parallel when directed towards it, the perspective projections of it, seen by each eye separately, change; and the appearance to the two eyes is precisely the same as when the object is seen by one eye only. (65)

According to Crary, "Its [the stereoscope's] 'realism' presupposes perceptual experience to be essentially an apprehension of differences. The relation of the observer to the object is not one of identity but an experience of disjunct or divergent images... [and] Helmholtz' influential epistemology…was based on such a 'differential hypothesis'" (83). Helmholtz's epistemology that Crary mentions here was based on perception and reception of optical signals in which Helmholtz declared that "[o]ur acquaintance with the visual field can be acquired by observation of the images during the movements of our eye, provided only that there exists, between otherwise qualitatively alike retinal sensations, some or other perceptible difference corresponding to the difference between distinct places on the retina" (*Epistemological Writings* 91). This striving for actual

representation of things was a reaction to the strictured painting technique of the Diorama that depended for its illusory effects on the depiction of distant objects. The stereoscope, on the other hand, provided a "vividness" of effect that increased with the apparent proximity of the object to the viewer and hence, immediate, apparent *tangibility* was central to the stereoscope's success and popularity.

Georges Canguilhem, a French philosopher and physicist specializing in epistemology, made an important distinction between eighteenth-century utilitarianism, which derived its idea of utility from the definition of man as toolmaker, and the instrumentalism of the human sciences in the nineteenth century, which is based on "one implicit postulate: that the nature of man is to be a tool, that is vocation is to be set in his place and to be set to work" (Crary 88). Nineteenth-century man was indeed nothing but a prism of scientific and cultural innovations because the observers of these stereoscope and other gadgets turned into producers of various forms of reality due to their various physiological capabilities—generating and re-generating meaning according to their own perceptions and viewpoints. An interesting aspect of this interest in ocular science was how the different types of optical instruments seamlessly merged into the semiotics of popular culture. For example, the phenakistoscope, invented in 1831 by Joseph Plateau and Simon von Stampfer, was an animation device that functioned on the stroboscopic principle of motion—illustrations set on a mounted vertical disc and set in a circular path were spun rapidly so as to produce one continuous sequence of images with the appearance of a motion picture. Plateau explained it as follows: "the apparatus...essentially consists of a cardboard disc pierced along its circumference with a

certain number of small openings and carrying painted figures on one of its sides. When the disc is rotated about its centre facing a mirror, and looking with one eye opposite the openings....the figures are animated and execute movements" (Wade 208). Evidently, though these types devices bore testimony of the advancements made in visual science, they also facilitated various forms of entertainment for the common mass. As Tom Gunning in "Animated Pictures" points out, "[o]ptics became increasingly popular as a form of entertainment during the early 1800s, and by 1833, David Brewster in his *Letters on Natural Magic* had abandoned any reference to celestial influence or magical images and explained optical illusions and the wonders of natural magic from a purely scientific viewpoint" (103). As mentioned earlier, Brewster and Wheatstone led the interest in stereoscopy and other optical research, and devices like the phenakistoscope were an extension of such interest in optics.

Other devices like magic lanterns were quite popular during the early nineteenth century because they fed on the people's fascination with Gothicism and supernaturalism and projected images of the spirits of the dead in stylized, elaborate stage settings while simultaneously obeying Kircher's dictum on demystification.[2] Another instrument called the zoetrope, invented in 1834 by William Horner, was similar to the phenakistoscope in its function, i.e., it produced an illusive action from a rapid succession of stationery images. Though it was not popular until the 1860s when it was patented in both England

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[2] Kircher in his *Ars Magna* (1646) demonstrated and demystified for the public that the "catoptric lamp" he used to "project" images onto a wall in a darkened room was real and not a magical one (Musser 17). For an excellent description of the phantasmagoria, see Theodore Barber.

and America, William F. Lincoln introduced Horner's instrument in the United States, and its modern day example would be the linear zoetrope found in subways of Washington DC and New York.

Two other optical tools that deserve a mention in the context of nineteenth-century visual culture are the Daguerreotype and the 'phantasmagoria' produced by the magic lantern. The former was invented by Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre, born near Paris in 1787, and "[Daguerre's] method consisted of treating silver-plated copper sheets with iodine to make them sensitive to light, then exposing them in a camera and 'developing' the images with warm mercury vapor" (Nelson). The Daguerreotype made portraitures particularly possible in a short span of time and though quite expensive, costing around two dollars, a person's profile could be captured, framed, and fitted into an embroidered leather case. The most fascinating visual contrivance was the phantasmagoria that projected multiple mobile images on a screen due to the switching of images that was possible due to a mobile projector. Though invented in France in the eighteenth century, it soon gained popularity in England and America. As Gunning notes, the phantasmagoria of Philidor and Robertson in the United States were quite popular, and "Robertson repeatedly stressed that his phantoms were merely applications of the laws of optics and perspective. He portrayed himself as one of the '*physicien-philosophes'* of the Enlightenment, dedicated to destroying the enchanted world of superstition" (103). In addition, in 1811 in Cincinnati, Ohio, a show involving phantasmagoria emphasized this dichotomy between the real and the unreal by advertising Robertson's spectacle as "scientific, rational and astounding" (Barber 82).

Mainly concerned with various physiologies of vision, these devices lend a new dimension to ways of seeing and perceiving received thoughts and conventions. As Gunning points out, "a series of visual toys since the 1830s—phenakistiscope, the zoetrope and Reynauld's praxinoscope—had taken advantage of discoveries in the physiology of vision (and especially in the possibility of tricking the eye into seeing something that did not exist) to produce illusions of motion. However, these devices had previously depended on drawings for their images, since photography had not been able to capture the stages of motion" (107-108).

It is interesting to note how these optical devices and visual phenomena surfaced around the same time that print culture was proliferating in America. Gordon points out that C. J. Wright successfully contended that the very incertitude surrounding some of the laws of optics as well as the advances in the field was responsible for this avid interest during the nineteenth century (49). She adds that Poe's familiarity with Sir David Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832) and *A Treatise on Optics* (1835) as well as his inventions of the kaleidoscope and the stereoscope has been well documented.[3] Poe successfully exploited these materials for his tales because these treatises explored that element of visual incertitude which could seamlessly work into his Gothic themes and mysteries of mind and perception; even in general, tropes and images of optical illusion were fit subjects of literary interest.

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[3] Gordon points out that W.K.Wimsatt early in his career demonstrated how much of Poe's 1836 article on "Maelzel's Chess Player" was taken from Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic.* In addition, Gordon refers to an article by Walter Shear that explores Poe's interest in tricks of indirect perception and magnification of farther objects *vis-a-vis* his knowledge of David Brewster.

Poe was, however, not the first to use optical motifs in his writings. "Fata Morgana," a well-known optical illusion and mirage during Poe's time, formed the title of one of the poems composed by Poe's literary antagonist, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In addition, Marjorie Nicholson demonstrates how the microscope was tremendously popular with writers leading up to eighteenth century because it held up "wonders of divinity" for the human eye (158). In Ernst Theodor Hoffmann's *Meister Floh* of which Poe must have been cognizant, scientists Leuwenhoek and Swammerdam experiment with various optical gadgets which have grotesque effects and, at one point, Leuwenhoek causes panic among a crowd of people by projecting the blown-up image of an insect upon the wall (Gruener 6). Also, indefinite concepts like "airy phantoms" and "shadowy figures" took hold of the common man's psyche and these "specters," according to Brewster's *Letters of Natural Magic*, were simply the magnified projections of one's own body. In addition, during Poe's time, the public flocked to spectacles that used the magic lantern and back projection onto gauze such as Philipstal's *Phantasmagoria* in early nineteenth-century London.[4] In the nineteenth-century invention called steroscope, switching the right and the left eye during viewing pictures caused convex images to become concave and vice-versa; the viewer *assumed* that the light was coming from a different direction and that is what caused the optical trick: a clear case of the mental process distorting the sensation/perception. Owing to a change of scale, so to

[4] According to Gordon, the Phantasmagoria opened in 1802 and was an exhibition of submerged views and optical illusions resulting from a magic lantern. The word signified a series of phantasms or illusions that appeared to a mind affected by nightmares or frenzy (17).

speak, this kind of illusion affected the nature of seeing itself. These illusory experiences were being questioned both by the most advanced art criticism/books and by ophthalmology. John Ruskin in 1843 denounced the old masters for having represented "that as seen at once which can only be seen by two separate acts of seeing" (321). On the other hand, according to Helmholtz, ophthalmologists like Albrecht von Graefe (1856) and Franciscus Cornelis Donders (1864) made problems of ocular motility and anomalies of accommodation their central issues of enquiry (471).[5]

Poe's exploitation of these illusions and delusions resulting from these discoveries of optical properties must not have appeared as out of place to his contemporary readers, for he used the ambivalence towards optical properties for serious and comic effects. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), Usher's sensory perceptions fabricate a deformation whereby the familiar becomes the unfamiliar and consequently results in his hysteria. In "Berenice" (1835), the subjective forcefulness of Berenice's teeth, made plausible only by the intial deformations of vision or optical tricks, overwhelm the narrator, casting doubts on his perceptive powers. As will be revealed in the discussion of the three tales in this chapter, early nineteenth-century visual culture revealed an anxiety over the loss of possible concrete experiences of reality and hence, numerous optical devices were—scientifically and otherwise—explored, popularized, and exploited for commercial and non-commercial purposes. Parallax error, binocular disparity, optical axes and retina complications—all these ocular issues coupled with the surge in interest

[5] Both these authors and their works are also mentioned in Elmar Schenkel's article on "The Sphinx."

of *how* our eyes actually functioned germinated the explosion of visual apparatus. Pointing to an important connection between Edgar Allan Poe and this proliferation of visual apparatus in the nineteenth-century, Gunning notes:

> Could it be that the nineteenth century became obsessed with the task of an ever-progressive and always elusive total and complex illusion precisely from an anxiety about the loss of concrete experience? Edgar Allan Poe offered in his story "The Oval Portrait" (written in 1842, three years after the first public discussions of the daguerreotype—and two years after Poe himself wrote several brief articles on this new invention) a fable of the pursuit of realist representation that serves as a cautionary tale. (109)

That Poe was always interested in the interplay of empirical science and popular culture is well known, and some of his tales reveal the dynamics of popular optical apparatus through contests between (mis)perceptions of reality and the actual conditions of existence. According to Rae Beth Gordon, "in strangeness or deformity, one apprehends the vague and the unknown, as Poe approaches the complexities and abstractions of aesthetics and of the spiritual realm" (56). As these three tales demonstrate then, Poe played over and under these subtle intricacies involving sight and perception to provide his readers with a grotesque variation of the contemporary preoccupation with ocular marvels.

Madness or Misperception? Poe's bungling narrators

Early in "The Tell-Tale Heart," Poe juxtaposes the idea of seeing and hearing with acute nervousness that conveys tell-tale signs of the narrator's mental imbalance. He declares

> True! – nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous I have been and am, but why will you say that I am mad! The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken!! And observe, how healthily—how calmly can I tell you the whole story. (555)[6]

The narrator's agitated harangue outlines three important features of his persona: an acute sense of hearing, dreadful nervousness, and a self-declared emphasis on sanity. Addressing the readers or someone specific ("why will you say that I am mad!"), the narrator uses imperatives to preclude any grounds of suspicion about his possible insanity: he cannot be mad because he hears things from everywhere around him. It is important to note that the narrator says, "I heard many things *in* hell" (my italics) because the "disease" has sharpened his senses. Very "healthily" and "calmly," in a curious process of meta-narration, the narrator's impassioned expressions show us what *he* sees as logical, but reveal something that *we* perceive as the unmistakable signs of his insanity. He declares, "It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain...but once conceived it haunted me day and night" (555). His decision to kill the old man is sudden and impulsive ("I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled

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[6] This and all further textual references are from *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales.*

that of a vulture..."), and the narrator's problems of sight and perception become doubly acute when the old man's "vulture" eye becomes the main reason and focus for killing him.

In the context of human civilization, the old man's vulture eye is purportedly laden with cultural potency, and thus, according to James Kirkland, the crux of "The Tell-Tale Heart" is the baneful influence of the old man's "Evil's Eye" on the narrator (140). Kirkland argues that the eye is not simply a physical feature of the kind that obsesses the narrator of "Berenice," but a signifier of folk beliefs and practices based on the assumption that certain people have the power to harm or even kill others by simply glancing or staring at them. John Roberts points out at least some evidence of beliefs and practices associated with the Evil Eye in sixty-seven cultures scattered over a vast geographical area including all of Europe and the British Isles, India, North and South America, and much of Africa (234). While these readings no doubt hold firm given the wide-ranging cultural history of such beliefs in human civilization, they simplify the tale to an extent by pinpointing the Evil Eye as a definite source for the narrator's heinous act. Such readings arguably do not take into account the narrator's warped sense of vision and perspective. The question of the narrator's insanity or the Evil Eye is less urgent in the tale than his botched viewpoint. James Gargano demonstrates that Poe's technique here is not aimed at enabling us to lose ourselves in strange or outrageous emotions, but to perceive these emotions and those obsessed by them from a thoughtful perspective (178). Following this lead then, we can see that the narrator *eyes* the old man's "eye" as a threat to his peace and is ready to kill him for it makes his blood run cold. From this point on,

the tale unfurls like a visual *mis en scene* where each word and step recounts the narrator's actual act of perpetrating the crime.

Many readings of "The Tell-Tale Heart" have revolved around the Gothic influences, the mind-body dichotomy and psychoanalysis, repressed sexuality, sadomasochism and even phenomenological and entomological underpinnings,[7] but Poe here simultaneously upholds and is critical of the most rudimentary aspect of our lives: a fiendish desire to see and perceive things by molding them according to our own preferences often leading to fatal results. Convinced of his intention, the narrator proceeds to declare to the reader: "You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what dissimulation I went to work!!" (555). Poe's repeated emphasis on the narrator's sight highlights a crucial epistemological issue: the self and the world come together in an inflexible nexus of reciprocity, but each threatens to subsume the other through misappropriation of their respective powers. When we see the world, we see it in respect of ourselves, what we think or feel about it, and hence interpret accordingly; conversely, when we are seen, beheld or perceived, we are measured against the standard or the norm of the society. However, it is only when we see unto ourselves, that is, manage to take a peek inside us, that the realm of the ordinary becomes terrifying. Having glanced into our own psyche, we can either have delusions of grandeur, a sense of perfect moral rectitude, or we can be overcome with a terrible sense of vacuum or

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[7] For study of Poe's sources for the tale and other readings, see Senelick; for sadomasochism, see Pritchard; for psychoanalytic readings, see Bonaparte, Witherington, and Hoffman; for schizophrenia and paranoia, see Kennedy and Thompson; for entomological readings, see Halliburton and Gargano.

depravity. Even here, the way the world sees us is changed, not because we are perceived any differently than before, but because our *hubris* dictates to our mind that the world perceives us differently.

When the narrator, armed with his dark lantern, peeks into the old man's bedroom for the first time, he exhibits the same behavioral principles discussed above. The narrator makes an overt attempt to demonstrate how intelligently he can carry out his plan, and hence, he declares, "Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in!" (555). It doesn't matter whether his audience (be it the readers or some entity whom he is addressing) thinks he is right or wrong; what matters is that we have to participate in the narrator's adventure *per se* because his viewpoint is not only correct and justifiable, but also calculatingly rational and objective. The narrator's cavalier comment helps us see what he envisions: he is cunningly prudent and manipulative. He thrusts his lantern very slowly inside the door so that "[he] might not disturb the old man's sleep" (555), and waits for almost an hour to place his head through the door so far that he can see the old man lying upon his bed. The narrator claims, "Ha!-- would a madman have been so wise as this?" (555). The narrator's obsession with constant justification of his actions and a consequent self-puffery effectively highlight Poe's lifelong preoccupation with the workings of the subconscious that he thought as having more potency than our conscious being would allow. Poe's "Imp of the Perverse" (1827) also points to the same direction where he says that "I am not more certain that I breathe, than that the assurance of the wrong or error of any action is often the one unconquerable *force* which impels us, and alone impels us to its persecution" (827).

The idea of hoodwinking one's consciousness in "The Tell-Tale Heart" also points to Poe's awareness of the tendency in man to believe and force his viewpoint on everything around him even though he is aware of its illegitimacy. The narrator cannot kill the old man so long as the latter's eyes are closed, "for it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye." Literally, the old man's ocular deformity arguably is nothing more than a malady in keeping with the description of his deformity and senility. But to the narrator, the eye's unusual appearance is another mark of the over looker, someone who can cause injury by the glance of his eye. As mentioned before, the Evil Eye for the narrator has supernatural connotations—the Eye that completely takes one in control and hence has to be gotten rid of to save oneself from it. But, interestingly, it is the narrator who has the Evil Eye and not the old man. He adds, "So you see he would have been a profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept" (556). It is the narrator (and not vice versa) who casts an evil aura around the old man in the mornings and physically directs his evil eye unseen on the old man every night.

The narrator's entire gamut of "seeing," "opening the door," "thick darkness," "secret deeds" is put into perspective if we see "The Tell-Tale Heart" as a tall tale emanating from the narrator's heart even when he tries to produce an eyewitness account of the heinous crime. When the narrator finally gets into the old man's room for the eighth time, he doesn't hear his supposed victim lie down, for "[h]e was still sitting up in the bed listening" (557). Even when the narrator cannot literally see the victim, he envisages his victim through hearing. The narrator hears "the groan of mortal terror"

(557) from the old man, a low stifled sound overcharged with awe. This whole movement of seeing and hearing can be read as a fanciful yet deliberate creation of the narrator's brain. Since the beginning of the tale, we know that the narrator wants to kill the old man in a certain way, that is, inside the old man's room and on his own bed, and now that he sees exactly how he had intended to see ("I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise" [558]), the narrator's fierce desire to kill the old man is increased ten-fold; the word "knew" in this context becomes supremely important because through his apparently superior vantage point, the narrator interprets action even when there is no action ("for a whole hour I did not move a muscle…and I did not hear him lie down" [558]). It is not that the narrator literally sees anything; he envisions, imagines, and fabricates. He *knows*. This is crucial to our understanding of how Poe tries to fathom the collapse of conscious order in "The Tell-Tale Heart." The narrator's point-of-view becomes the readers' point-of-view because we witness the goings-on inside his mind and are encouraged to see from that viewpoint. However, Poe makes his narrator's viewpoint differ from his own primarily by subjecting us to the narrator's demented state—Poe's point-of-view seems to suggest that if human beings (like the narrator) try to exert control over natural order (here, the old man's "vulture" eye which, as mentioned before, might have resulted from a cataract or some birth-induced deformity) just because they know they are right or feel they are in complete control over state of affairs, a collapse of rational order is inevitable. This collapse is evident in the narrator's imagining himself as Death incarnate and the "black shadow" that would engulf the old man.

Again, the narrator doubles this idea of seeing and imagining when he declares, "And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to *feel* the presence of my head within the room" (556). Poe explores this element of uncertainty amidst acute sensory perceptions in "Shadow-A Parable" where the tale's narrator contends that "no distinct account" can be rendered of "that terrible state of existence which the nervous experience when the senses are keenly living and awake, and meanwhile the powers of thought lie dormant" (218-19). However, the narrator's thoughts in "The Tell-Tale Heart" are not dormant, but most active since not only does the narrator imagine things, but also, more importantly, he has begun to think on behalf of his victim. Here, the objective world has been reduced to the microcosm of the narrator's individual experience of seeing and misperception: his visionary and auditory senses fade under the pressure of emotional and physical paralysis.

The final sections of the tale point to this same collapse of rational order owing to a compulsive predilection to let one's ideas determine what he/she sees. When the narrator finally succeeds in beholding the vulture eye "open—wide, wide open," he now sees nothing else of the old man, "for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot" (557). Having succeeded in killing the old man, the narrator reflects, "his eye would trouble me no more" (557). Just as the narrator was bent upon getting rid of the Eye, he doesn't see how he has allowed his own eye—his vision—to be completely taken over by his monomania; his own psyche and that of the old man have unconsciously come to be intertwined. Towards the end, the "low, dull, quick sound" that

the narrator hears as the beating of the old man's heart is actually the beating of his own heart, something that excites the narrator to uncontrollable terror. This terror leads him to hand himself over to the policemen because he imagines things, i.e. he visualizes the state of affairs using his mind's potency and not his literal vision. Though the narrator employs literal perception to gauge his victim, the root of experiences, sane or insane, is firmly entrenched in the deepest recess of his mind. Just as it is easy for the narrator to believe that the heartbeat actually belongs to the old man's heart after the policeman arrive, it is equally hard for the narrator to fathom that the heart beat actually belongs to his own heart and not the old man. His botched viewpoint has finally brought him to his end, a self-destruction through extreme subjectivity of vision marked by hypersensitivity and temporal solipsism.

In "The Spectacles," we have a literal failure of vision that is also metaphorical of the actual conditions of our existence. While in "The Tell-Tale Heart," Poe successfully portrays the narrator's insane fixation with an eye and the crime resulting from it, in "The Spectacles," we see a "crime" resulting from an insane fixation with an object of desire that the narrator's eye beholds—a myopia besets the narrator making him pursue his ladylove with great gusto, but for all the wrong reasons. The narrator declares at the beginning,

> Modern discoveries, indeed, in what may be termed ethical magnetism or magnetoesthetics, render it probable that the most natural, and, consequently, the truest and the most intense of the human affections, are those which arise in the

> heart as if by electric sympathy—in a word, that the brightest and most enduring of the psychal fetters are those which are riveted by a glance. (618)

Unlike "The Balloon Hoax," in which Poe creates a hoax of quasi-scientific discovery and sustains it throughout, Poe here raises the idea of scientific discovery only to burlesque it by association with "heart" and "affections." In other words, the narrator, in a tone of self-mockery, presumes that the contemporary discoveries should be taken at face value and be the yardstick to measure true love—that is, matters of the heart are to be judged by "electric sympathy."

Akin to the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator here puts everything in relation to what he knows and takes for a fact. For once, there is no doubt whatsoever about his perception of things. This is proven by another declaration: "The confession I am about to make will add another to the already almost innumerable instances of the truth of the position" (618). Most of Poe's confessionary narrators ("The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "Ligeia") share a common denominator—a clear perception of the state of affairs, a thorough conviction of the self's reliability, and a recounting of past incidents backed up by factual details. In this tale, the narrator places emphasis on the "already innumerable instances of the truth" without actually enumerating them for his audience; for example, he assumes his readers *know* the "innumerable instances," and either we take his declaration for a fact or disbelieve him and not participate in his narration. This subtle machination employed by Poe's narrator is meant to be taken seriously even though we know that his recounting of experience is a comic one; Poe often showed how a failure of human beings to live up to the ideal state of existence

resulted from taking a subjective viewpoint of things. The more his narrator goes into details of his history, the less reliable he becomes. The narrator states, "My story requires that I should be somewhat minute" and then he dwells on his familial history (618). Without any apparent reason, the narrator refuses to append himself to the "singular coincidence of sound attending the names of some of my immediate predecessors" and comes upon the name "Simpson" by act of Legislature (619). In the context of the whole tale, appellation plays a major role in the discovery of true identities and Poe, by having his narrator confused about his own roots and identity at the beginning of the tale and mocking his own personal lineage— "Here, however, are Moissart, Voissart, Croissart, and Froissart, all in the direct line of descent" (619) --, sets up his character as possessing a lack of "vision," that is, a lack of appreciation of what is inherently one's own.

According to Susan and Harry Levin, there is an interesting play on appellations here, which has been discovered by Donna E. Schafer. The first sentence of the story speaks of seeing ("love at first sight"), thinking and feeling deeply. The names involved in this passage are Moissart, Voissart, and Croissart. If one removes the last syllable, which the three have in common, three French meanings are suggested: *moi*, meaning me or I; *vois*, from the verb *voir*, to see; and *crois*, to believe, or "feel deeply" (Levin 348). Since the tale is about appearance and reality, Schafer's postulation of a hidden motto—seeing is believing only if you see clearly—makes good sense. In addition, the narrator's name, Froissart, could relate to the verb *frossier*: "to crumple, to bruise, to ruffle," which suggests why the narrator speaks of being in "the direct line of descent."

In "The Spectacles," optical illusion plays a major role in the chastening

experience of the narrator, but Poe seems to be more overtly concerned with his narrator's moral vision. In "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator's opprobrium emanating from the depths of psychic consciousness brings about a fatal self-revelation of his crime. In "The Spectacles," a similar opprobrium in the narrator surfaces from an Oedipus-like discovery of his attachment to his great-great-grandmother. The tale reveals a man's incapacity to acknowledge his drawbacks, thereby bringing about his downfall. Despite admitting a deficiency of vision, the narrator believes in love "at first sight" (repeated five times). In other words, the narrator's overconfidence about his own capabilities of judgment and seeing things in a clear light bespeaks of his own spiritual myopia that proves more fatal than his poor eyesight. Though he is aware that his eyes are "weak to a very inconvenient degree," he declares, "I have resorted to every remedy—short of glasses" (618). Thus, love will be evidently dictated by an optical illusion and, in fact, in gazing at his object of desire, he perceives only a blur. Curiously, a simple external addendum to the narrator's person is not preferable because "I know nothing indeed that disfigures the countenance of a young person..." (619). The narrator doesn't realize that his view is already disfigured, and by playing on the time-worn belief that people wearing glasses look demure and serious, this refusal of the narrator's underscores an important aspect of the story: his judgment and vision depend on and will be determined by outward appearances. Self-confessedly, the narrator's temperament is "sanguine, rash, ardent, and enthusiastic" (619), and so these qualities in him prepare us for a willful negligence of careful, rational perception of things around him.

Akin to the "Tell-Tale Heart," the dynamics of seeing, beholding, gazing, and subterranean reciprocity of awareness play a significant role in "The Spectacles." Poe's preoccupation with the shortsightedness of Man and the resultant failure, his overwhelming desire to color everything with his own jaundiced vision even though circumstances might point otherwise, is nowhere better demonstrated than the narrator's exaggerated belief that "I knew...I was deeply madly, irrevocably in love" just after having gawped at one of the "figures in one of the private boxes" in the theatre (625). Poe's interest in cramped spaces, small rooms, and private dominions has always demonstrated a preoccupation with the deepest recesses of consciousness, and beholding the lady of his dreams in the private box— "which had escaped my observation" (620)—signals the narrator's journey into a fiercely private world of introspection and inquisition, a world where reality and fantasy vie for dominance. The narrator remarks that "the face was so far turned towards the stage...I could not obtain a view of it," and yet he immediately adds that "the form was *divine*..." (620). Scott Peeples observes that Simpson praises Madame Lalande's nearly "majestic" figure—although she is sitting and has her back to him—and the outline of her head and thus, without spectacles, he sees what he wants to see (92). Hence, the narrator is apparently consumed and "struck" by what is not clearly visible (as mentioned before, she is a "blur" to him), and this tendency forcibly to determine and judge even without forming a proper visual impression of his object of desire brings about his own downfall.

Another example occurs when the narrator, after gazing at Madame Lalande for quite some time, "felt the full force and truth of all that has been said or sung concerning

'love at first sight'" (621). It is really ironic that the narrator indeed *is* feeling the full force of *truth* about love at first sight. He undergoes what is universally believed to be a mere infatuation that lacks any sustained emotional involvement, an experience proper to an adolescent of seeing and liking someone at first sight. He later describes his own action in similar terms: "I was just in that condition of mind which prepares a young and susceptible man for any act of extravagance" (621). Just like the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" who sees no real motive for hating the old man and is driven by pure instinct, here also the narrator is purely driven by instinct and so "even without seeing the face of the person beloved...I knew that I was deeply, madly, irrevocably in love" (621). As in "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Tell-Tale Heart, and "Ligeia," an inexplicable sensation "thrill[s] every nerve of [his] frame." As Gordon suggests in her essay, the narrator's sensations are accompanied by decorative detail, here, a diamond ring, a rich lace, a jeweled bracelet, and "the immense force of this deformation of vision focused on the object of desire is such that the transit between the sense organ, sensation, and mind admits of no gap. The hero is certain of his perception; that is what makes this tale a parody" (51). According to David Ketterer in *The Rationale of Deception in Poe*, the fact that the narrator is drawn towards the diamond ring and self-confessedly has already changed his name to inherit money testify to the fact that greed might be altering his vision as well (8).

In "The Spectacles," the narrator's problematic viewpoint completely eclipses any possibility of him understanding reality and Poe highlights as much through the brief word play between the narrator and his friend, Talbot. In a classic case of mistaken

identities, the narrator doesn't realize that his friend is not talking about the same woman as he (the narrator) is. The narrator forces his own ideas and opinion about the woman *he* sees and makes himself believe that his friend also is looking at the same woman:

"I wonder who she can be!"

"Why, in the name of all that is angelic, don't you know who she is?....She is the celebrated Madame Lalande…"

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, I have the honor"

"Will you introduce me?"

"Assuredly…." (622)

The narrator doesn't bother to clarify which woman they are exactly talking about because he is perfectly assured of his supreme knowledge about beauteous women and hence doesn't find the need to realize that his idea of beauty might not match with others. This small case of mistaken identity points to the larger concerns in Poe's tales in general: his narrators are driven by an egotistical self-projection and hence color their experiences and perceptions with a prejudiced brush and in doing so remain oblivious to the reality of the outside world. In addition, the curious interplay between literal seeing and its figurative counterpart—perception—plays a unique role in the narrator's assumption about Lalande's character. When she stares back at him in the theater, at first the narrator is dumbstruck by her behavior, but then rationalizes that "the whole thing was done with so much quietude—so much *nonchalance*—so much repose—with so evidence an air of the highest breeding—that nothing of mere effrontery was perceptible"

(623). In the Victorian period, the idea of women's chastity and propriety was determined not only by the standards of society's judgment, but, more specifically, by how men perceived their behavior as "proper" or "improper." Evidently, staring at a man would have been considered improper in social circles ,[8] and the narrator in justifying Madame Lalande's curious disposition reveals his own bent of mind. The narrator's viewpoint reveals a lack of insight and compulsive refusal to see things in a clear light because he doesn't actually endorse the action itself (he declares that this particular "action...would have been likely to offend or disgust" if it had been from any ordinary woman [623]). By trying to justify and color the actuality with his own warped viewpoint, the narrator reveals those drawbacks that Poe thought were universally responsible for the failure of man to comprehend things rationally. Again, the narrator interprets Madame Lalande's nodding of her head not just as an acknowledgement but as a proof of his love that "had been appreciated—and *returned*" (625). He goes on to justify and explain why and how he should interpret her particular action in this regard and why he was right about "the enthusiasm of my love" (625). It is an interesting thing to note that "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Spectacles" are not only written in a self-confessionary mode, but also in a self-congratulatory mode. This mode of self-congratulation reveals, to some extent, problems with sight in both tales: while in the former tale, the narrator squirms about what he thinks is a defective eye and feels justified in killing its owner quite rationally and

[8] See Kasson. The etiquette books that flooded the American market in early 1830s and 1840s primarily advised women not to draw men's attention by wearing flashy clothes and returning "stray ogles" with a stare or even a glance. Doing so would, according to these books, would forfeit all claims of being a feminine ideal and justify charges of lacking virtue and modesty.

calmly, the narrator in the latter tale has a defective eyesight but won't do anything to remedy it because he is much better off without an "external apparatus" for seeing things in a clear light.

According to Scott Peeples, "The Spectacles" depends upon comic absurdity for its effect and hence, there is little point in trying to rationalize Simpson's confusion because Poe clearly directs his satire not only at the vain romantic male, but at the "artificial" woman (93). Peeples also notes that Madame Lalande's artificial beauty recalls an earlier story of Poe, "The Man That Was Used Up" (1839) in which Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith requires far more than false teeth, hair and *tournure,* having been cut to pieces by the Indians. The admirers of Madame Lalande and General Smith are bumbling detectives who believe that they have found the perfect woman or man and their images of perfection reflect self-images that can "come to life" only through artificial means (93). It is certainly true that women's vanity is also held up to ridicule in this tale, but the absurdity of the situation can only be understood in relation to Simpson's attempts at rationalizing his myopia. In other words, we have to examine rationally Simpson's warped rationality to understand the tale. Another instance of the narrator's cavalier negligence of facts occurs when the carriage carrying Madame Lalande and her companion passes the narrator and his friends. When the friend remarks, "Upon my word, she looks better than she did at five years ago. A beautiful woman, still—don't you think so, Froissart?—Simpson, I mean," the narrator replies, "*Still!*...and why shouldn't she be? But compared with her friend she is as a rush light to the evening star—a glowworm to Antares" (626-27). The narrator again doesn't find a reason to inquire why is his friend

commenting upon Madame Lalande's age, and instead of paying attention to his comment, he curiously brings in a comparison of a glowworm and a bright star, suggesting that he is obsessed with outward brilliance and appearances. The narrator's single-minded focus on Madame Lalande's beauty, almost bordering on an Ahabesque monomania, robs him of common sense, and though the series of incidents that culminate in the discovery of Madame Lalande's true identity are heart-warmingly funny, it should be realized that Poe is pointing to more serious and larger concerns of refusal to acknowledge one's own irrational impulses. One incident that points to such an impulse occurs when the narrator rejects his friend's advice not to be impatient, but rather "to moderate my transports—to read soothing books—to drink nothing stronger than Hock—and to bring the consolation of philosophy to my aid" (629). Instead he wonders why, "in the name of everything *rational*," (my italics) his friend did not enclose him a letter of presentation for Madame Lalande. The narrator again presumes that his own viewpoint of things is "rational" and suggests that "in the name of everything rational" (629), his friend is irrational for not sending a letter of introduction; consequently, he forces himself not only to interpret things around him in an illogical, unthoughtful manner, but also precludes any possibility of others being correct in their suggestions and advice. Having this basis for a character's ultimate failure, Poe also subjects his narrator to moments of unconscious self-mockery. When the narrator comes in for a clandestine meeting with Madame Lalande at her mansion, he stumbles upon her valet, and "the better to deceive the servant in attendance, I did this [introduction] with the assured air of an old and familiar acquaintance" (629). The narrator doesn't realize that he is self-

deceived at this particular instant because he is indeed a familiar acquaintance of Madame Lalande—her great grandchild—a fact that he comes to realize only towards the end of the tale.

The trinket episode and the piano playing episode bring the narrator's lack of perception to its climax. When Madame Lalande drops the miniature, the narrator picks it up and returns it; however, Madame Lalande asks him to keep it, for "you may discover, perhaps, the very information you seem to desire" (631). This particular incident encapsulates and highlights both the literal and metaphorical darkness of the tale's state of affairs. Since we know by the end of the tale that the lady had been planning this hoax to teach a lesson to the narrator, this comment seems especially significant in retrospect. Again, since this discussion between Madame Lalande and the narrator takes place in the evening twilight just outside her mansion, she comments, "it is now to, be sure, growing rather dark—but you can examine [it] at your leisure in the morning" (631). But seen in the light of what has transpired between the two till now, "growing rather dark" insinuates that the affairs have now taken a sinister turn and hence the narrator needs to examine his stance more clearly vis-à-vis Madame Lalande's with respect to their "relationship." Indeed, the next morning, in the light of clear day, assisted by an eyeglass, the narrator does examine Madame Lalande only to realize that his ladylove is a "villainous old hag" (638). The piano episode also enfolds a similar irony: the narrator doesn't get up from his seat to accompany Madame Lalande to the piano room and hence was "deprived of the pleasure of seeing, although not of hearing her, sing" (641). Since the narrator's overwhelming predilection has been to behold Madame Lalande in an

ideal, exalted sense and not as a normal, ordinary human being, he conveniently thinks it is prudent not to go after her to the piano room, a kind of conveniently hypocritical approach given his previous brazen candor in accosting Madame Lalande outside her mansion without any prior notice.

The climax of accusations and counter-accusations, with the discovery of true identities ("...and if I hav n't married my great, great, grandmother, I wish I may be everlastingly confounded" [640]), makes the narrator decide that he is not to be found ever again without his glasses. The promise that the narrator makes to Madame Lalande is significant in the context of Poe's actual aim in the story. The narrator declares, "To-night I wear this dear eye-glass *as* an eye-glass, and upon my heart; but with the earliest dawn of that morning which gives me the privilege of calling you my wife, I will place it upon my—upon my nose—and there wear it, ever afterwards...." (635). The "little ocular assistant" is a "magnificent toy, richly chased and filigreed, and gleaming with jewels" and sometime later, it is referred to as a "toy" (635-36) : these qualifications lead one to consider other ocular toys in the period like the kaleidoscope and the stereoscope. Only when the narrator decides to wear the eyeglass, not only upon his nose, but also upon his heart, is he ready both to face and come to terms with reality. He finally is prepared to cull his compulsive and inevitable predilection to let his point of view determine what he *sees* and instead gain an objective viewpoint of his gross error. When Madame Lalande makes the narrator recall his promise by repeating his words, as readers we sense an apocalyptic revelation of sorts, an authorial chastisement that signals Poe's larger preoccupation with man's deliberate denial of his inherent capability to perceive and

judge things without any bias. No wonder then that after the marriage, illusion based on sensory distortion metamorphoses into horror as the Real punctures the Ideal in the narrator's consciousness when he beholds his "newly wedded wife" for the first time with his spectacles:

> "What in the name of everything hideous, did this mean? Could I believe my eyes?—could I?—*that was the question…were those wrinkles*? ....*And* ...*what—what—what*—what had become of her teeth?...I leapt to my feet...grinning and foaming…. (638)

Poe's obsession with man's failure to perceive things clearly, literally and metaphorically, is an overarching theme in most of his tales. However, it is demonstrable that lighter pieces like "The Spectacles" can be seen to have a "tragic vision" that mirrors and augments the concerns of darker tales (like "The Tell-Tale Heart") through their significant socio-personal commentary along with the problems of sight and perception. According to Rae Beth Gordon, the doubt cast on the reality of what is perceived is present in all Poe stories, and is especially prominent in those where the subject's mental equilibrium is in question. This is to be expected since the more difficult it is to distinguish illusions of the senses from hallucination, the more one may hesitate between different readings/perceptions of the text (supernatural, the scientific, and the psychological) (57). Always disdainful of the masses, Poe in his lighter creations parodies the hypocrisies of society, and by an extended contrast, affirms the superiority of the solitary man in quest of a private destiny. Hence, as in "The Tell-Tale Heart," even if the pursuit is sometimes nightmarish, its potency and purpose outweigh the results.

Poe's "The Sphinx" is a unique extension of the literal and spiritual myopia that have so far been discussed. It is remarkable to note that since this tale's narrator speaks about his own visual folly and is apparently chastened by his experience, the narrator's literal short-sightedness owing from his heightened consciousness is an obvious butt of ridicule for Poe in the story; yet, Poe's main comic thrust is elsewhere—the smug, self-complacent Northerners, the elite coterie of Yankees for whom Poe always had a curious distaste. As William Marks observes, "Poe's biography, and especially its New York phase, thus appears curiously at odds with his general aesthetic, in which the image of the swarming Yankee metropolis seems to have no place" (47). Poe's satire in the tale is directed at multiple targets. In "The Sphinx," we see the narrator, akin to that of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Spectacles," convince himself of his viewpoint in a carefully reasoned manner. Yet, unlike the narrators of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Spectacles," who figuratively stand alone in their short-sightedness, their own hallucinations and fabrications, the myopia of the hallucinatory narrator in "The Sphinx" doubles up on itself—by a simplified and rational explanation by the host of what actually transpires with the narrator, something that is even more "short-sighted" than the narrator's weird imaginings.

Poe locates his tale during "the dreaded reign of the Cholera in New York" (843), and he did not fabricate either the cholera or the terror it produced in New York and other major European seaports during his lifetime. Poe had a vivid encounter with a cholera plague during 1831 in Baltimore (Crary 78); in America, cholera was specifically associated in 1832 with "the most miserable and degraded of our population—white,

black, and colored"—and it was said to "arise entirely from their habits of life."[9] The terror of cholera was so widespread that *The Cholera Bulletin* formed a part of New Yorkers' daily lives (Briggs 84). There were two theories concerning the cause of contagious epidemics in early America: one stressed the miasma, or poisonous influences in the air, and the other stressed microbes, or "animalculae," which were thought to infect people by traveling through the air to find their next victim. Briggs adds that both theories are in early medical books, and the latter is given some emphasis in Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond*, which Poe knew (85). As another scholar observes, a mass exodus could be effected from towns and cities simply by the rumor of epidemic outbreak (Duffy 177). Hence, the narrator acts according to popular belief and escapes to his friend's cottage house on the banks of the Hudson to get away from this disease. However, the narrator's hypochondria makes him envisage that "the very air from the South seemed to us redolent with death" and not a day passed that "did not bring us news of the disease of some acquaintance...we learned to expect daily the loss of some friend" (843). The word "learned" becomes crucial to our understanding of the narrator's viewpoint of things and what happens later. Since he learns to fear on a regular basis, his vision unconsciously becomes trained to look on things with a predisposition of fear and apprehension. Though the pathogenic circumstances are given more weight by the fact that the event "occurs near the close of an exceedingly warm day," (hot and humid conditions were considered a prime agent for outbreak of cholera), it is the "palsying

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[9] According to Briggs, "there is a fascinating account of the cholera outbreak in New York State in the *New Yorker*, 18 October 1947 by S.H. Adams, "That was Up-State New York: My Grandfather and the Plague" (78).

thought" (843) of death that takes possession of the narrator's soul and makes him susceptible to later hallucinations. According to Schenkel, as in "The Fall of the House of Usher," this terror and gloom, like Foucault's "fantastique de bibliothéque," (97) unfolds between a reader and his books when the narrator declares that "these were of a character to force into germination whatever seeds of hereditary superstition lay latent in my bosom" (843). It is interesting to note that the narrator makes the reading of such volumes cause for his "condition of abnormal gloom" and "the forcible impression which had been made upon my fancy" (843); that is, whatever he absorbs with his eyes—materials that deal with seeds of hereditary superstition—is transferred to the soul, and since, in the nineteenth century, books were considered to exhale unknown horrors which impinge upon reality, the narrator involuntarily subjects himself to a chaotic perception of the real and the unreal, the rational and the irrational.

The narrator's friend is said to be "of less excitable temperament" (843) and sustains the narrator during this crisis. More importantly, the friend's "rich philosophical intellect" is "unaffected by unrealities" like the narrator's condition, and more importantly, "to the substance of terror he was sufficiently alive, but of its shadows he had no apprehension" (843). The situation in "The Sphinx" is recognizably reversed from "The Fall of the House of Usher," for in the latter tale, it is the stoic narrator who is strangely immune to the shadowy terrors that obsess his poetical and hypersensitive host. Poe very early in the story gives us two visions of reality: the narrator can be seen as the quintessential passionate and sentient being and hence can perceive the "shadows" of terror; his friend, on the other hand, only sees the "substances of the terror" and not its

shadows. This dual method of looking at things by these two characters provides an early and interesting insight into Poe's aim in the tale: he juxtaposes irrationality (the narrator) and rationality (his friend) to reveal how they are not mutually exclusive of each other and are frequently interchangeable depending on the particular individual's viewpoint.

In "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator doesn't find anything unusual in the way he perceives his intentions of murdering the old man; in "The Spectacles," the narrator never suspects his perception of Madame Lalande is fiercely prejudiced and based on mere appearance. In "The Sphinx," however, Poe gives us a narrator who *does* see that his own problematic belief system stands in contrast to the larger society (embodied by his friend) and yet insists on it: "I contending that a popular sentiment arising with absolute spontaneity—that is to say, without apparent traces of suggestions--had in itself the unmistakable elements of truth, and was entitled to much respect" (843). The problem here is not as much going against what the society thinks as correct, but that the issues dealt with by Poe in the earlier two tales get magnified here in the narrator's obstinacy—people do have different viewpoints of things, but being conscious of one's own erroneous disposition and yet persisting with it is dangerous. In "The Spectacles," the motif of a distorted view metamorphoses into a hoax; in "The Sphinx," this distorted view is used to make grotesquerie acceptable, something that denotes a disruption of reality: the narrator insists that "without apparent traces of suggestion," omens and similar beliefs, "had in [them] the unmistakable elements of truth, and [were] entitled to much respect." By extension, the narrator lets his faith in omens take hold of his psyche so much that he even entertains the possibility of seeing an actual incident as having the

trappings of an omen and hence, something "occurred to [him]...so entirely inexplicable, and which had in it so much of the portentous character, that [he] might have as well been excused for regarding it as an omen" (844).

In all three tales, ocular potency/impotency plays a significant role in the narrators' failure to comprehend reality, but in "The Sphinx," the problem becomes more serious due to the narrator's awareness that he might not be envisioning things in a clear light. The hidden subject of "The Sphinx" is the mind, and in Poe's fiction the mind cannot be treated apart from the subject of terror, a concept that encapsulates the fundamental aspect of the world at large and the variety of passive/active responses that the universe calls forth. This fact is borne out by the narrator's reaction to the initial sightings of the bug. In a form of self-defeating meta-narrative, the narrator embarks on an explanation of his experience with the "monster," not before adding a comment that undermines his whole supposition: the incident makes him so stressed that he says he might well have been excused for regarding it as portentous. He professes that he might need to be excused for his vision as a manifestation of his beliefs in omen and yet literally makes himself believe that he does see something real and terrible: "when I describe the monster, *which I distinctly saw, and calmly surveyed through the whole period of its progress*, my readers, I fear, will feel more difficulty in being convinced of these points than even I did myself" (845; my italics). A few lines before this, the narrator observes how he had been preoccupied with thoughts of the epidemic—"the gloom and desolation of the neighboring city" (844)—before he lifted his eyes from the book in front of him and saw the monster for the first time. The narrator is consciously

preoccupied with his own susceptibility to and fears of omens and yet cannot and does not see a connection between his mood of dejection and the hideous apparition of some fantastic monster. The colossal size of the monster (its shape was "the hull of one of our seventy-fours" [844]) and other imaginations of its physical attributes defy logic, but still the narrator refuses to see that he is imagining things. He believes that "the representation of a *Death's Head*" on the monster's breast arouses "a sentiment of forthcoming evil, which I found impossible to quell by any effort of the reason" (845). He also hears a "sound so loud" (845) emanating from the monster's proboscis that he faints in despair.

The narrator's terrifying experience with his monster, the appearance of something completely abnormal and beyond the conventional parameters of the society, can be seen as related to the experience of vortices and whirlpools in Poe's "MS Found in a Bottle" or "A Descent into the Maelstrom" in that such experience applies both to physical changes in the surroundings and to the vision that temporarily affects the whole arrangement of the material world (Schenkel 99). In addition, what comes through these small incidents in "The Sphinx" is the absurdity *not* of the situation, but of the narrator's willful indulgence in his own paroxysms of fear. Akin to the narrator of "The "Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator of "The Sphinx" carefully interplays and juxtaposes improbable occurrences with the semantics of sanity. Poe in a review of William Newnham's *Human Magnetism* seems to be advocating for a purely positivistic or demystified version of the story's central phenomenon: "A man," Poe writes, "can feign to himself a sphinx or griffin, but it would never do to regard as thus demonstrated the actual existence of griffins or *sphinxes*" (qtd. in Thompson 63). It would not equally do, as he suggests in

"The Premature Burial" or "Hop Frog," to dismiss the real power such images have to grow within the mind and to become indeed the determinants of human society.

In Poe's tales, how the mind assumes dominance over the body needs no documentation, and here in "The Sphinx," the literal and the metaphorical vision come together *not* to clarify reality but blur it. When the narrator has the second vision of the bug, Poe makes it quite clear that what we are seeing is the capacity of optical tricks to transform matter into idea and vice-versa: the narrator thinks that his vision is a testament of his impending mania or an omen of his death. William Marks provides an interesting reading of the titular sphinx which perfectly supports my view that this tale should be seen as engaging specifically with problems of sight and perception. According to William Marks, traditionally, the moth or butterfly is Psyche, or more specifically—as with Spenser— the soul of the poet, and what has terrified Poe's narrator is a glimpse into his own soul because the moth's textbook description nicely matches that of a certain bug which has "occasioned much terror among the vulgar, at times, by the melancholy kind of cry which it utters, and the insignia of death which it wears on its corslet" (48). Thompson adds that while such a reading convincingly argues for the sphinx to be seen as an emblem of the authorial self and extends the analysis to include the narrator and host as opposed fragments of this self (Poe's emotional and imaginative side versus the coldly intellectual and analytical side of his complex nature), it ignores the value systems on which this tale is built—the narrator's heightened awareness of his own sensibilities resulting from reading too much into his own symptoms and beliefs in omens (50). But seeing the narrator and the host as fragmented selves of the author limits Poe's artistic vision and

ignores his tale's more important intentions. For example, once the narrator regains consciousness, he is averse to the idea of explaining to his friend what he has seen and heard. It is puzzling to see why he feels repugnance when he thinks of telling it all. Is he conscious of his self-indulgent warped vision? Is the narrator scared of reproach and ridicule since his friend already knows of his propensity to believe in omens? Or, is it too fantastic to recount for any rational pair of ears? Whichever way we might want to see it, this feeling of repugnance on the narrator's part holds the key to the story (not his friend's harangue on Democracy, as most critics generally believe).

Otherwise, why would the narrator see the same "apparition" again? When the narrator, some three or four days later, is sitting in the same room, but this time with his friend, he sees the monster again and points it out to him. His friend doesn't see anything, although he "designated minutely the course of the creature, as it made its way down the naked face of the hill" (846). His earlier "repugnance" and now the term "designated" point to the narrator's awareness of his own irrationality and a willful, deliberate act of envisioning things. If we for a brief moment jump to the story's end, we come to know that through the help of his friend, the narrator discovers that the monster is actually an insect and a "sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my [his friend's] eye." (847). If it is really that tiny as perceived, the odds are almost zero that the narrator sits exactly again at the same position and sees everything exactly as he does earlier. And, even if he does so, how is it possible for him to have "designated" the path of the monster without realizing its true proportions? Literally, "designate" in this context means to specify, and if the narrator is trying to specify the path of the monster to his friend, then he has to use

hand motions to accomplish this and no sooner than he had done that, inevitably he would have discovered his error. The point of my quasi-deconstructive approach to the narrator's second vision of the monster is to show how Poe is trying to present a serio-comic outlook on the universal tendency of man to have a compulsive and inevitable predilection to let his point of view determine what he *sees*, that is, forcibly adopt a viewpoint whether justifiable or not. While in the "The Tell-Tale Heart," this tendency amounts to apparent insanity, in "The Sphinx," it amounts to a deliberate self-mockery. No wonder, then, that the narrator declares that he saw the second vision as, among other things, "the forerunner of an attack of mania" (846).

The oft-debated section in the story—-the passage about "various points of speculative philosophy" and "diffusion of democracy"[10]—, though fascinating in itself, is a Poesque red herring that misleads readers from the real focus of "The Sphinx." Poe's political ideas are seldom found to be overtly expressed in his works. For example, Count Allamistakeo in "Some Words with a Mummy" labels the federation of American states as a "most odious and insupportable despotism" run by that "usurping tyrant" named M*ob* (820). Also, Poe wrote to James Russell Lowell in 1844: "I cannot agree to lose sight of man the individual, in man the mass," and in *Marginalia*, he chides even Congress with the jibe "rabble" and aphorizes, "Your reformist demi-gods are merely devils turned inside out" (XIV). To Poe, "democracy was the tool of the dollar conformists who extended over society their paralytic sway, rather than encouraging the

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[10] Katrina Bachinger in her article provides a detailed account of the possible political ramifications of the passage, particularly as seen and contested by Thomas Mabbott and Arthur Quinn Hobson with different emphases.

tasteful, talented individual" (Bachinger 218). Given these examples and such an attitude towards Democracy, though the passage in "The Sphinx" smacks of political witticism, is it the story's real aim? Mabbott suggests that in this passage at least, Poe warns us "not to judge the democratic experiment too hastily" (348), that however badly it functions now, it may, given time, become less of a horror. Mabbott's reading would suggest that the narrator errs in thinking that he is face to face with a monster when in fact he is merely viewing a tiny Death's-headed Sphinx. Mabbott believes that the passage on democracy—which appears in the text just before the riddle of the Sphinx monster is solved—should be interpreted in analogous fashion; that is, democracy's monstrous appearance will, the fullness of time, turn out to be a chimera. Conversely, Arthur Hobson Quinn contends that the passage is not an expression of confidence in the future of democracy but a warning that the good opinion that some have of democracy is an error in judgment made "by those who set it too near them" (94-95). Quinn's proposition, converse to the optical illusion of the story, is equivalent to thinking one sees a harmless insect when, in fact, one is viewing a monster.

If we for a brief moment put ourselves in the narrator's position and Quinn and Mabbott in the host's position, we can get a clear idea of what the passage on democracy is doing within the tale. We are confused by the passage and don't know what to do with it. Quinn and Mabbott raise questions about the issue of democracy in their own ways and provide their interpretation of the story based on their reading of that particular passage. In short, readings of Mabbott and Quinn are contextually similar to what the host does in the tale at the end—extensive focus on a single aspect (the actual insect) of

the total referential framework (the narrator's other symptoms and obsessions in the tale) that overly simplifies the problem. If the tale is indeed about Poe's attitude toward democracy, then what are we to make of the narrator's preoccupation with omens, his literal shortsightedness, the host's condescending superiority, and even the Sphinx itself? In this passage, the narrator recalls his friend's advice that the principal source of error in all human investigations lay in the liability of the understanding to underrate or to overvalue the importance of an object through a misreading of the distance between the perceiver and the perceived—the host argues that the effect of the spread of democracy, he claims, is invariably over—or underrated by the historian "through the mere misadmeasurement of its propinquity" (846). This fact is indeed borne, according to the host, by the narrator's envisioning the actual bug as a monster. But the analogy that the narrator's friend draws between the above inference and the possibility of "diffusion of democracy" in the future is not only inapplicable in this context, but also thoroughly satirical of the friend's philosophical nature. In turn, we can better understand Poe's operative irony here if we take a look at one of his other tales.

In "Mystification," Von Baron, on being insulted by Hermann, sends him an epistle in which Baron requests Hermann to read a passage in a certain book purportedly on dueling. Hermann replies in a letter saying that he is "satisfied" with Von Baron's answer and thinks highly of the latter. It turns out that in actuality, the passage was mere gibberish, a red herring that had nothing to do with dueling. In a somewhat similar way, since the beginning of "The Sphinx," we encounter various comments on the host's intellectual capabilities that can be read as ironic, and given the fact that he is projected

as well-read and much more knowledgeable than the narrator, this sudden harangue on Democracy is meant to be read as a futile show of superiority on the host's part. The host already has shown in the tale that he is not too fond of the narrator's superstitious mentality (in other words, regressiveness). For example, the narrator complains that after "He [the host] heard me to the end—at first laughed heartily—and then lapsed into excessively grave demeanor, as if my insanity was a thing beyond suspicion" (845). Poe works his tale through several levels of seeing and perceiving. Through the host's taut knowledge of science, Poe seems to be mocking the contemporary fascination with progressiveness (as evidenced through various discoveries in science and technology) and advancement in intellectual and political thinking. Here, once again, Poe transposes the roles of the sighted and the blind, the clear-headed friend in the story and the deluded narrator: as quoted earlier, "[t]o the substances of terror he was sufficiently alive, but of its shadows he had no apprehension" (843). The host is blind to the reflection of the text proper; the hypochondriac, however, recognizes the shadow of Death, the King of Terrors, when he sees it. The one who explains away the illusion is the one deluded; the one who experiences the delusion sees the reality. So, by condescending to explain the narrator's well-bred malaise, the host uses a misplaced and faulty analogy with Democracy that further complicates the issue of the terrifying sphinx and moves farther from reality.

The conclusive evidence of Poe's satirical thrust comes at the very end of the tale. Taking out a book of natural history, the friend reads out to the narrator everything

related to the insect (the "monster") that the latter has been seeing and, as a final *coupe de grace*, he points out the narrator's fallacy:

> "Ah, here it is!" he presently exclaimed –"it is reascending the face of the hill, and a very remarkable looking creature, I admit it to be. Still it is by no means so large or so distant as you imagined it; for the fact is that, as it wriggles its way up this thread, which some spider has wrought along the window sash, I find it to be about sixteenth of an inch in its extreme length, and also about the sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my eye." (847)

Interestingly, at the beginning, when the narrator takes his eyes off his book for the first time, he beholds the monstrous vision and now, with a serendipitous gesture, the host lifts an entomological tome from the shelf (a strategic move back to the world of the printed page from which the narrator's thoughts have been distracted by the specter of the abandoned necropolis) and starts explaining away things in a rational manner. If we consider Schenkel's observation about the ambivalence towards books in the nineteenth century to be correct, reading and interpreting facts contained in books doesn't always amount to a rational or clear-headed explanation of affairs. This fact is borne out by the practical inference of seeing the bug from a distance of a sixteenth of an inch from the eye. As Susan and Harry Levin correctly point out, this ending is unusually implausible for Poe because two factors will bother any reader: depth-of-field (the eye cannot simultaneously keep in focus extremely close and distant objects, and can't focus on an object a sixteenth of an inch away) and the spider's strand of thread. If an insect could

crawl up it without getting entangled, a thread one sixteenth of an inch from one's pupil would touch one's face and be fouled in one's eyelashes (348).

In Poe's tales, only dreamers and madmen see reality. Thus, in "The Sphinx," despite appearances to the contrary, Poe's apparently deluded narrator, who fears for his sanity, must surely see the true import of the Death's-headed Sphinx, for while it is only a sixteenth of an inch from the eye of the man with normal vision, it is that close to the *soul* of the hypochondriac, the eye being the soul in Poe's epistemology and the soul being the site of his terrors. Here, then, Poe provides us with multiple connections between sight, perception, and terror. The narrator experiences terror in the soul because, as in "The Tell-Tale Heart," he has seen the monster with his mind's eye. But again, as in "The Spectacles," he has seen it from a distance too close for comfort—the real becomes the surreal. It is interesting to note that Poe is satirical on a dual level in "The Sphinx": just as a superstitious man is or can be held up to ridicule because he cannot see things objectively and forces himself to be guided by portents, similarly, an extremely objective person can also be at fault because he sees his objects perhaps too closely and minutely for any actual grasp on reality. By holding the Sphinx "about the sixteenth of an inch from the pupil" of his eye, the host has committed the philosophical blunder Poe criticizes in *Eureka* where, clearing the way for his own magnificently impressionistic view of the cosmos, he asserts that "the errors of our progenitors were quite analogous to the wiseacre who fancies he must necessarily see an object the more distinctly, the more closely he holds it to his eyes" (1266). Poe's allusion to the legend of Oedipus should remind us that the original solution to the riddle of the Sphinx was not the end of the

story but rather a prelude to the hero's tragic realization that the mysterious problems which plague human life often disguise themselves as happy solutions. Poe's ironic vision is perfectly calculated to address this paradox on its own terms.

In the *Marginalia*, Part V that appeared in *Graham's Magazine* in 1846, Poe observes:

> There is...a class of fancies, of exquisite delicacy, which are *not* thoughts, and to which, *as yet*, I have found absolutely impossible to adapt language. In these fancies—let me now term them psychal impressions—there is really nothing even approximate in character to impressions ordinarily received. It is as if the five senses were supplanted by five myriad others alien to mortality. (1383)

"The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Spectacles," and "The Sphinx" use different forms of optical phenomena—-gazing, perception, vision, and sight—-to represent what Poe calls "psychal impressions." Since the narrators of these tales preoccupy themselves with eyes and perception, their visual fascination with and the appalling distortion of the objects perceived are reflective of their own distorted minds, a place where "the five senses were supplanted by five myriad others alien to mortality." Apart from the problem of literal perception, it is these narrators' perception of an inherently strange world, not in tune with what they *see*, that yields (t)error of the soul and in the soul. The Evil Eye, the pallid skin of Madame Lalande, and the titular Sphinx are all somehow strange and appear deformed to the narrators' vision of perfection. According to Gordon, in strangeness or deformity, one apprehends the vague or the unknown; it is Poe's one way of approaching the abstractions of aesthetics and the spiritual realm (56). If so, then these narrators'

flawed perceptions of their respective objects yield an interesting lesson on the psychodynamics of their author: when faced with the strange or the unknown, Poe suggests that it is man's inherent nature to perceive things irrationally because he has a compulsive predilection to let his viewpoint determine what he sees—in other words, what is literally seen doesn't matter as much in these tales as what ought to be seen because the mind's eye (the eye within) dictates the actual vision (the eye without), thereby producing a warped viewpoint of the world.

Chapter 2--Poe, Panorama, and the Panoptic Sublime: Sovereign View in "Morning on the Wissahiccon" and "The Island of the Fay"

In examining two preparatory drawings for Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow* (1836), Alan Wallach, in his essay "Making a Picture of the View from Mount Holyoke," probes the historical processes leading up to the crystallization of the panoptic or panoramic mode that characterizes the painting. Exploring these drawings "in terms of the dynamics of a complex set of interrelated, and mutually reinforcing, cultural practices" (81), Wallach demonstrates how the panoramic apparatus, as a structure for representing landscape, conditioned Cole's own composition: "[t]he Panorama might thus be thought of as a machine or engine of sight in which the visible world was reproduced in a way that hid or disguised the fact that vision required an apparatus of production" (83). Galvanizing this convention onto landscape issued in the "panoptic sublime," a moment in which vision and power converged in the "sovereign gaze." In appropriating this convention for landscape perception, Thomas Cole not only effectively tackled the challenging view from Mount Holyoke but also encoded "new forms of middle-class hegemony" (84). Wallach thus reads the ascent of Mount Holyoke as a "stunning metaphor for social aspiration and social dominance" (84). While Thomas Cole's influence on Edgar Allan Poe in his landscape fiction has been well documented,[1] Poe's "The Island of the Fay" (1841) and "Morning on the Wissahiccon" (1843) reveal unique adaptations of the landscape dynamic through the written word to reveal Poe's social aspirations and desire for social dominance through the figure of a poet-seer-philosopher

[1] See Jeffrey A. Haes.

figure. Applying Wallach's findings (based on Cole's paintings) to Poe's landscape *oeuvre* shows how some of his tales reveal a curious functional admixture of the panopticon and the panorama. Such application illuminates the essence of Poe's aesthetic response in molding a normative national self.

Assisted by the above mentioned sketches that engage in examining the American aesthetic credo during various nineteenth-century discoveries of vision, Poe, through his panoptic view, positioned himself as the overseer of meaning and offered aesthetic composition as a tool for soldering the social landscape and the viewer's subjectivity. The panopticon was a late eighteenth-century innovative prison house built to keep a closer watch on the inmates, while the panorama was invented in 1788 by the Irishman Robert Barker as a visual contrivance lending a semi-real quality to vistas painted on a canvas. Revealing the combined functionalities of these late eighteenth-century inventions in "The Island of the Fay" and "Morning on the Wissahiccon," Poe's narrators, both literally and metaphorically on various occasions, project themselves as overseeing, all-embracive, sovereign figures beholding the wide natural vistas from an intellectually superior vantage point and simultaneously fulfill the functions of a panoramic painter by gradually unfurling the natural scenery to provide the audience with a slow, piecemeal and yet forceful impression of its magnificence and grandeur.

In early nineteenth-century America, a time of nation-building and creation of a unique national identity, artists, poets, and other practitioners of art were concerned about

upholding and appreciating what was quintessentially "American."[2] Since the urge to distinguish America as a nation independent of England was of paramount importance, arguably most discussions of comparative evaluations of the two countries were geared towards a broader debate of what was pure and pristine—unspoiled and untainted—in America versus the industrialized and mechanized Europe as a whole. Compared to its counterpart across the Atlantic, America was slow in catching up with new inventions and innovations, but her people were quick to find a more convenient barometer of their own "progress"—America's wilderness and natural treasures. Preservation of and exultation in ecological vistas and their pristine purity were sometimes considered as progressive: Nature supposedly brought Americans towards a transcendental unity with God, and historians tried to reconcile the pastoral America with Man and God. While Perry Miller suggested that for American people, "Nature in general means the wilderness" (211), Henry Nash Smith interpreted the American agrarian expanse in Christian terms, according it the status of the Garden of the World (3). Similarly, R.W.B. Lewis saw the American wilderness as the original paradise and its inhabitants as God's chosen people. According to Barbara Novak, "as with any shared overriding concept whose terms are not strictly defined, each man could interpret it according to his needs, and Nature's text, like the Bible, could be interpreted with Protestant independence" (5). So, apart from sustaining the comparison between the Old and the New World that was involved in exercising such independence, comparing the relation between man and

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[2] A classic study of such "Americanism" is Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth.*

Nature also provided an opportunity for the artist to express his/her sense of indignation towards the marauders of natural climes.

Reviewing two landscapes by J.F. Cropsey (Thomas Cole's Hudson River colleague), *The Literary World* in 1847, commenting on the artist's role in preserving the last evidences of the golden age of wilderness, observed that "the axe of civilization is busy with our old forests, and artisan ingenuity is fast sweeping away the relics of our national infancy....What were once the wild and picturesque haunts of the Red Man, and where the wild deer roamed in freedom, are becoming the abodes of commerce and seats of manufactures…Yankee enterprise has little sympathy with the picturesque..." (qtd. in Novak 6). Contemporary culture not only extolled and exalted in the natural treasures, but it also focused on an artist's greater responsibility to generate awareness about the importance of American climes—a combination of the artist's prophetic role with his sense of being expressly chosen for such a revelatory purpose. Asher B. Durand suggested starting with a humble naturalism, for the "humblest scenes of your successful labors will become hallowed ground to which, in memory at least, you will make many a joyous pilgrimage, and, like Rousseau, in the fullness of your emotions, kiss the very earth that bore the print of your oft-repeated footsteps" ("Letter II"). This humble naturalism eventually transformed into a nationalistic enterprise where artists vied for penning superlative landscape sketches in honor of American wilderness.

In response to such appreciation of Nature in the country, landscape art and architecture emerged as an important development in nineteenth-century America. Just as the Classical Revival in American architecture of the 1820s had its precedent in the 1790s

wave of similar interest in England, Andrew Jackson Downing's *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1841) triggered a wave of interest in landscape gardening that had swept England half a century before. This interest in transforming the landscape along artistic principles also coincided with an interest in the tradition of the "picturesque" that emerged in America during the 1840s. Popular enthusiasm for landscape art climaxed in Britain between the years 1750 and 1800, and according to Martin Price, this period saw the "picturesque" emerge as a distinct aesthetic category (261). This picturesque category was explicated by theorists such as William Hogarth, Humphrey Repton, William Gilpin, Richard Payne Knight, William Kent, and others (Rainwater 31, 32).

When this "Picturesque" movement arrived in America, literary figures such as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, and Edgar Allan Poe revealed a pronounced interest in contemporary notions about landscape art.[3] Though America had not yet managed to shake off its European roots as far as literary and artistic borrowings were concerned, there was a desperate urgency to voice a nationalistic fervor, to express an independent, individual appreciation of what was one's own. In this enterprise, landscape art arguably facilitated a greater sense of freedom than any other form of expression, for it allowed Americans to distinguish between what was naturally existent or "god-gifted" and Thomas Allison's notion that human creativity improves nature by rearranging it and makes God's design perceptible to mankind. In his

[3] These and other writers' preoccupation with landscape art are elaborately discussed by Sharon Furrow, Nina Baym ("Poe's Pictorialism"), and Jeffrey A. Haes.

discussion of *The Pioneers* (1830), John Myers shows how James Fenimore Cooper was one of the earlier artists of the early nineteenth century who contrasted Natty's natural ability to appreciate and interpret the landscape with the learning of Elizabeth Temple, which depended on the history of landscape appreciation (62). Durand's famous *Letters on Landscape Painting* (1855) advocated that landscape painting is "great in proportion as it declares the glory of God, by representation of his works, and not of the works of man...[E]very *truthful* study of near and simple objects will qualify you for the more difficult and complex; it is only thus you can learn to read the great book of Nature, to comprehend it, and eventually transcribe from its pages, and attach to the transcript your own commentaries" (Letter 2). Various artistic mediums during this period fleshed out similar themes as Thomas Cole's paintings of the Catskills in the 1820's illustrate; his visual representations of that region supersede stereotyped readings of it as a tourist spot and reflect a self-consciousness about the cultivation necessary to respond to wilderness and the artist-prophet's relation to it in mythic terms. Thus, formulation of landscape art offered the emotional outlet for an artist to shape America's purportedly blessed tryst with both God and Nature.

Edgar Allan Poe's idea of conveying this peculiar union was charged with his conception of an artist as a prophet figure. In "The Poetic Principle," Poe posits that the highest aim of the poetic sentiment is to elevate the soul by revealing to it the supernal loveliness of eternity. Also, he argues that supernal beauty is best apprehended in the transcendence of the physical senses rather than directly through them; thus, the human pursuit of beauty is "ecstatic" (77). However, instead of limiting himself to just a

descriptive or prescriptive role by eschewing the self and focusing on the grandeur of Nature, Poe in his landscape sketches projects a fiercely subjective identity. He encapsulates in his role the Miltonic burden of conveying to mankind the secret truths accessible only to the select few and the more general and less cumbersome role of the sensitive artist conveying his impressions of the natural world to an audience at large. Poe filters subjectivity not only through his narrative art but also through his narrators' disposition in these sketches. Poe's engagement with the aesthetics of the sublime and the picturesque has been addressed by various scholars,[4] but his narrators' subjective consciousness, as revealed in the landscape tales and partially akin to what Keats labels as the "egotistical sublime" in William Wordsworth, has generated little attention.

Emerson declares in his "Nature" (1836) that "Standing on the bare ground, --my head bathed by the air, and uplifted into the infinite space, --all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all" (488). Here he signals a particularly critical credo integral to the development of the concept of self in the nineteenth century. This Emersonian notion of the self is Janus-faced because such transparency also entails an unsettling isolation from the world. Simultaneously, it is sublime, for our imaginative powers allow us to replace fears of separation with a sense of awe that we are part of something larger (10). Though Poe had little faith in Transcendentalism (he blatantly caricatured the Transcendentalists in his tale, "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" [1841]), he nevertheless follows the Emersonian way in his landscape sketches—promoting not merely a staid individualism or the neglect of society,

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[4] See Laura Saltz, Catherine Rainwater, and Kent Ljungquist.

but an ideal self as a part of an integral whole, named by Emerson as "The Over Soul" or the universal spirit. The all-seeing, all-embracive aspect of Poe's landscape sketches under discussion here filters through his narrators' subjective consciousness couched in metaphors of condescension. The Emersonian subjectivity of the "transparent eye-ball," while encapsulating in itself various transcendental ramifications, arguably depends on its literal meaning for effectiveness of purpose. In other words, an understanding of nature is dependent on how we perceive the natural world through our eyes—whether we consider ourselves a part of it or, as in Emerson's case, a visionary exaltation through submergence of the self so that we become one with nature.

Art historian Jonathan Crary in his *Techniques of the Observer* notes the convergence of aesthetic and scientific discourses of vision in a new visual paradigm in the 1820s (9). Since the Renaissance, visual phenomena had been comprehended in the geometrical and classical valency, but the new paradigm by contrast, which Crary labels "subjective vision" (9), understood vision as an effect of the body's physiology and its subjective response to stimuli.[5] In the landscape sketches, Poe sees himself posited at a higher elevation of understanding of Nature; his didactic impulses in conveying what he attempts to accomplish can be better understood if we take a look at two of the more important inventions of the late eighteenth century that combined both exercise of literal

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[5] For example, Johannes Muller in the 1840s showed that applying electricity to the optic nerve generated the experience of light, as did a concussion or blow, certain chemicals when they are absorbed into the bloodstream, and illness that alters the blood. As a result of such experiments, scientists believed that visual phenomena had no independent existence apart from the physiological processes that produced them; with this shift to physiological optics, the eye became increasingly isolated as an object of study (Sultz 10).

vision and desire for dominance through a privileged point-of-view—the panopticon and the panorama.

In his "Panopticon; or, The Inspection House" (1791), Jeremy Bentham outlined his theory for building an ideal prison system based on an architectural structure built by his brother, Samuel Bentham. Visiting St. Petersburg in 1787, Jeremy found his brother in charge of manufacturing using imported foreign artisans and modern methods. At this time, Sir Samuel had designed and was beginning to construct a circular two-story textile mill, and based on it, Bentham envisioned the panopticon as consisting of a central watch tower girded by a circular row of cells scrutinizable by an unseen warden in his *lodge*. Bentham's scheme places the warden at the literal center of the panopticon; invisible and apparently omniscient, all power is vested in him without any formal regulatory authority reserved to the government. The prison would operate on the principle of the fear of being watched, a sensation that would lead the inmates not only to abide by the rules but to regulate their own behavior as well—"real presence" combined with "apparent omnipresence" (196). The panopticon displays, according to Bentham, "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example" (197). Accorded total control over the environment, the warden would then apply manipulative associationist psychology.

Bentham did not restrict his ideal only to penitentiary structures and buildings, but he extended the principle to include any institution that had a similar purpose, "whether it be that of *punishing the incorrigible, guarding the insane, reforming the vicious, confining the suspected, employing the idle, maintaining the helpless...*" (198). Nor did he

limit his plans to a carceral structure or correctional facility either, but went even further by formulating a utopian vision of a *panopticon town* as a self-sustaining unit of production that would include factories, schools, churches and hospitals. Following Utilitarian principles, Bentham sought to conflate a moral purpose with notions of productivity in a model whose final aims were "punishment, reformation and pecuniary economy" (196). The panopticon was primarily popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (it was officially formulated in 1785) because in addition to having a semblance of economic viability, it toyed with the idea of *gaze* or surveillance, an overseeing, wide sweeping vision of an inspector that could control the subjects' movements and actions in question. This inspection principle has "its great excellence...in the great strength it is capable of giving to *any* institution" (196). While Bentham's idea was revolutionary (not in conception but in execution), it was hardly saleable.[6] However, the most important aspect of the panopticon for our current purpose is Bentham's idea of his invention being applicable to any "institution" that involved power and desire for social dominance. Michel Foucault declared that "panopticism must be understood as a general model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men...[I]t is polyvalent in its applications" (55). Hence, the aesthetic of surveillance, gaze, and social control, while literally effective for any physically constructed structure, can also be seen to extend beyond the confines of mere physical manifestation. According to Mulvey, the panopticon became a useful model for the gaze

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[6] Czarina Catherine the Great immediately discarded Bentham's panoptic prison as impractical and overly complex; its economizing effects were lost on her Majesty (Kane).

of a cultural elite (whether English or American) interested in a perspective "from which the diverse and unruly growths of nineteenth-century representative democracies could be integrated into a non-coerced but controlled composition, a composition that was perceived – i.e. 'owned'— by the elite spectator, the carrier of the social gaze" (16).

The panopticon then must not be simply understood as a dream building: it is a diagram of mechanical power reduced to its ideal form and can be seamlessly applied to any situation where watching/monitoring multiple individuals is concerned. Joshua Kane adds that the panopticon accommodates an exercise of power "not appended on from the outside, like a rigid heavy constraint, to the function it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact" (206). So, the dynamic of elevation as evidenced in the panopticon could also be seen as extending to other aspects of life that involved perspectives of vision; a state of being and awareness, panopticism is a dimension that reality can assume.

According to Allan Wallach, in nineteenth-century travel literature and the writings of Cooper, Irving, and Hawthorne, passages repeatedly appear bearing a writer-tourist or fictional protagonist (Natty Bumppo in *The Pioneers*, the sculptor Kenyon in *The Marble Faun*) who climbs to the top of a mountain hill, or tower, confronts a "panoramic" landscape, is initially overawed by feelings of sublimity and then, as the excitement wears down, alternates between modes of vision: between recalling myriad details that fall within his/her gaze and observing the scene's extraordinary breadth (82). This narrative convention, Wallach adds, can be labeled as panoramic because it takes the circular panorama as its controlling metaphor. What Wallach calls the "machine or

engine of sight" with respect to panoramic painting was a group of instruments invented in the period including the Claude mirror and the Claude glass. According to Warner, optical devices for unifying landscapes by enhancing perspectives and regularizing tone included the panopticon and also Robert Barker's Panorama (1788), a stationary 360-degree painting of a historically or aesthetically significant site which spectators viewed from a central platform (158-59). It is important to note here that the panopticon and the panorama had one thing in common—elevation. So, in order to understand better the idea of elevation at work in panorama and how it is connected to the panopticon, and finally, how both of these visual tools connect to Poe's landscape tales, the grafting of panoramic convention onto landscape has to be understood through a discussion of the panorama as a historical phenomenon.

In 1788, Robert Barker, an Irish painter of portraits and miniatures, created the first fully realized panorama. Combining the Greek *pan*, all, and *horama*, a view (from *horan*, to see), the typical panoramic paintings were exhibited in specially designed rotundas. Wallach explains the experience of panorama as follows:

> To see the painting, spectators had to climb a tower, located at the center of the rotunda, onto a viewing platform, which was situated in a way that the painting's horizon-line roughly coincided with the spectator's eye level, consequently providing a feeling of looking downwards at the scene. Illuminated by hidden skylights while the rotunda and its contents (the tower, the viewing platform) remained shrouded in darkness, the painting produced a resultant contrast between darkness and light that resulted in a powerful trompe-l'oeil effect,

making the painting the only visible reality. (83-85)

The gradual unfolding of a panorama spanned over several hours, generally affording the audience only a glimpse of each of the many sites and objects depicted. As an experience, it was cumulative and extended in time, and its totality could not be apprehended instantaneously.[7] According to Allan Wallach, Stephan Oettermann's *Das Panorama* has argued for the historical specificity of panoramic vision: that the panorama's invention coincided with emergence of new forms of middle-class hegemony and that the panorama itself encoded these forms (83). The panorama's mimetic aspect was affected both by verisimilitude and by the construction of a space where the spectator was separated from the outside world. Oettermann added that spectators were attracted to the panorama because during this period people "sought...a tinge of excitement in situations that were easy to control. The experience of pushing something to the limit was another reason for climbing the towers and mountain peaks and visiting their surrogate, the Panorama" (12). Oettermann identified the discovery of the horizon as a key experience of the late eighteenth century and compared the panorama to carousels which were popular around the same time, both providing a symbolic tour along the horizon. Oettermann, along with Foucault, links panorama to Jeremy Bentham's invention of the panopticon.

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[7] Commentators and *pianoforte* music complemented the experience of panorama, a practice that, according to Barbara Novak, transferred smoothly to the silent film (65). In addition, she points out that the panorama's experience could be simultaneously intimate and distant—the kind of communal intimacy that is a commonplace of the film and the theater experience (20). Ansel Adams in his study of photography observes that "though not a public theatre, the panorama arguably was comprised of a unique public space likewise set in a place a series of interconnected spaces through which the viewer was made to pass before finding herself or himself surrounded on all sides by a spectacular, three-dimensional painting lit by natural light" (154).

Allan Wallach sees in the panorama a similar aspiration as in the panopticon, for the world in panorama is presented as a form of totality where nothing seems hidden, and the spectator, looking down upon a vast scene from its center, appears to preside over all visibility. In connection with Thomas Cole's painting "View from Mount Hollyoake," Wallach uses the term *panoptic* for two reasons. First, it highlights the connections between vision and power (the ascent of a panorama tower provided the visitor with an opportunity to identify briefly with a dominant view—Foucault's "eye of power"). The second reason has to do with the mode of vision itself, for it was both extensive and intensive—extensive in the sense of covering the entire lateral circuit of visibility and intensive or telescopic because it aspired to control every element within the visual field. As mentioned earlier, Poe's familiarity with Thomas Cole's works has been adequately documented; in addition, Allan Wallach's discussion of panopticism and panorama above with respect to Cole's painting of the ascent of Mount Holyoke can be seen as significantly applicable to landscape art and architecture and, more specifically, to the two Poe works under discussion—"The Island of the Fay" and "Morning on the Wissahiccon." What Wallach sees as the connections between vision and power in Cole's paintings are expressly demonstrable in the two works, while the extensive-intensive dynamic of the panoramic painting and the panopticon can also be seen at work in Poe's narrative art. Though one important aspect of the panopticon—physical elevation—is notably absent from the works under discussion, Poe's panopticism is not of literal elevation, but of the elevated mind through which his narrators behold the natural world:

a powerful sovereign gaze lends Poe's narrators the authoritative status of an overseer, looking down from the topmost point in an optical hierarchy.

"The Island of the Fay," first published in *Graham's Magazine* (XVIII, June 1841, 253-55), is a plate article that accompanied an engraving by John Sartain and is quite unlike any of Poe's tales because, apart from being an obvious written accompaniment to someone else's work of art, it records, as Miller points out, Poe's own ideas of art superimposing themselves on the original artist's creative intentions (139). From the beginning, Poe's narrator adopts a critical approach that is aimed at ratifying one's own position *vis-à-vis* some other artist's ideas. Critiquing the *Contes Moraux* of Jean-Francois Marmontel (1723-1799) that appeared from 1755 to 1761, the narrator proposes his own ideas about the exultation resulting from listening to music. According to Marmontel, music is only one of the talents which is enjoyable for itself; all the others desire witnesses. Poe's narrator disputes this observation, however, by claiming that the author of *Contes Moraux* "confounds the pleasure derivable from sweet sounds with the capacity for creating them" and adds that the "*raconteur*" (here, Marmontel) has failed to grasp the true significance of the idea that "the higher order of music is the most thoroughly estimated when we are the most exclusively alone" (933). The narrator uses this discussion--of happiness resulting from enjoyment of music in seclusion--as a framework to move on to his idea of the natural scenery as affording "more than does music to the accessory sentiment of seclusion" (933). Couple of things is observable about Poe's narrator: his condescending language and his apparent superior knowledge of the arts. He curiously does not reject Marmontel's idea as much as carefully *qualifies* it

against his own "correct" conception of the possible functionality of music. In doing so, Poe's narrator prepares the ground for introducing his subject matter—the contemplation of natural scenery. This attempt to correlate music with natural scenery has a brilliant façade of scholasticism, though arguably ineffective in purpose because, in the rest of the article, the narrator never again raises discussion of music in connection with the natural scenery.

The narrator arbitrarily commences, "But there is one pleasure still within the reach of fallen mortality…" (933). By framing the introduction of his essay on natural scenery against another artist's idea about music, the narrator tries to achieve a level of sophistication and an air of superior perception that might be needed in his recounting an apparently fantastic/supernatural experience. Poe's narrator seems to suggest that even if art and society share a complex, tenuous connection, art is but a reflection of the social life. By mentioning "fallen mortality," Poe's narrator hints at the tenuous ties that link art to its culture on the one hand, and the deeply paradigmatic quality of those forms in both expressing and resisting the inner *telos* of society on the other: to see natural scenery in an intimate connection with the soul of Man, the narrator claims that "the man who would behold aright the glory of God upon earth must in solitude behold that glory" (934). The narrator here arguably envisions himself as a barometer of social change because he exhorts his audience to enjoy nature in "solitude," and yet it is a paradoxical address to the society at large.

Louis Renza points out that Poe here ironically frames his narrator as a "Romantic true believer," his desire to regard nature utterly alone indicating his solipsistic

tendencies, and his "intention to recover the lost land of Fays" in a "world of mundane concerns" clearly "fated for destruction" (309). Before the narrator accounts for his supernatural experience with the titular Fay, in the manner of a Romantic aesthete, he provides a cue to the miniature project of his article. Referring to the natural world and all its concomitant components, the narrator declares: "I love to regard these as themselves but the colossal members of one vast animate and sentient whole—a whole whose form (that of the sphere) is the most perfect and the most inclusive of all..." (934). Read carefully, the narrator's attempt to see the world as a totality suggests a mind capable of panoramic sweep over the elemental universe—"the sentient whole"—in such a way that the self becomes a prophet-seer figure. Here, the narrator's responsibility is to provide a voice, a saga for those unstated and often unconscious structures that seem finally determinative of the whole. The aesthetic sensibility of Poe's narrator focuses steadily on the various aspects of this "whole...whose life is eternity; whose intelligence is that of a God; whose enjoyment is knowledge; whose destinies are lost in immensity...." (934). For the narrator, the knowledge of this sentient whole can lead to a transcendental, even spiritual experience, but worth noticing here is his sudden shift from the first-person to the first person plural ("*I* love to regard" changes to "*our* cognizance of the animalcule" in a space of eight lines), a dramatic shift that suggests a presupposition of his audience's participation in his precepts of truth, his knowledge of the universe. Unattended by the life force that graces Milton's all-seeing Muse, Poe's narrator here enacts the role not of knower but observer, privy to no knowledge profounder than that which passes before the horizon of his own experience. The narrator does not see himself

as a spokesperson for humanity, yet he employs metaphors of both condescension and a genuine solicitude to include us in his superior knowledge of this universe's mechanism. He describes the cosmos as "a being which we, in consequence, regard as purely inanimate and material, much in the same manner as these animalcule must regard us" (934), suggesting that we consider ourselves as insignificant in order to understand the greater "bulk" of this universe.

The narrator, in an extensive discussion of the "bulk" (the stars, the planetary bodies, and the galaxy itself), curiously intertwines what he calls "matter" and "soul." The narrator wonders why Matter—"the *leading* principle in the operations of Deity" (934)— cannot be seen as manifested in the realm of the august instead of just in the regions of the minute. Since we with our telescopes and mathematical instruments have made bulk "an important consideration in the eyes of the almighty" (934), the narrator also wonders why we cannot see Matter as manifested in the spiritual universe as well. He asks:

> As we find cycle within cycle without end—yet all revolving around one far-distant centre which is the Godhead, may we not analogically suppose, in the same manner, life within life, the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine?...we are madly erring, through self-esteem, in believing man, in either his temporal or future destinies to be of more moment than that vast "clod of the valley" which he tills and contemns, and to which he denies a soul for no more profound reason than that he does not behold its operation. (935)

This quasi-philosophical argument of the narrator, while smacking of a privileged intelligence, points to a crucial piece of information in the context of the whole essay. Arguing for an express manifestation of soul in the inanimate beings of this universe, the narrator prepares us for a belief system, a faith in the hidden yet surcharged animated life existing in the natural world though unseen by the naked eye. Such a belief system will crucially assist the narrator later on in envisaging the titular Fay in all her glory and resplendence and more importantly set the platform for the extensive natural vignette that he carves out in the rest of the article. Bryan Jay Wolf points out that Poe, through his narrator, captures the peculiar modernity of American Romantic painting: its sense of loss and dispossession, its conservative fear of the artist's visionary powers, and its recurrent self-consciousness and self-referentiality (xiv).

In an act of interrogation and self-questioning, the narrator mentions the "Spirit Divine" that encapsulates immense epistemological and ontological burdens and something that provides an explanation for his later fantastic experience and his belief in the wide-ranging, pantheistic spirit of this universe. It is interesting to note how the narrator conveys this all-pervasive quality of the "Spirit Divine" by unraveling piecemeal the island's wide vista so that the readers can comprehend each of its components as steeped in the transcendent spirit: in order to "behold its operation," the narrator wants us to eschew our sense of the self as possessing momentous significance. However, the narrator's paradoxical attitude toward the self's significance is revealed when he declares that "the interest with which I have strayed through many a dim deep valley, or gazed into the reflected Heaven of many a bright lake, has been an interest greatly deepened by

the thought that I have strayed and gazed *alone*" (935). An individual traveling alone, this narrator seems to suggest, can see, hear, and dream more than the common lot, and these truths are the products of man's mythopoeic mind in active commerce with the world. The narrator's emphasis on "alone" bespeaks a solipsistic self-reflection as well as a muted ownership over the landscape, twin dynamics of a self-centered exultation over natural surroundings. Bentham's panopticon afforded a visually authoritative control to the watch-guards: by simply playing upon the fear of possibly being watched, the inmates could be controlled. In a curious parallel of watching and overseeing, the narrator in "The Island of the Fay" sees himself as the privileged one, "*alone*" in beholding the eminence of nature and soaking up its superbity, thereby envisioning himself as the privileged individual to convey to general mankind what he has seen or learnt from his higher seat of perception. As readers, however, we are positioned below his spiritual dais of insight and revelation and hence cannot but be controlled by and participate in the narrator's visionary experience. The narrator suggests as much, for he uses Zimmerman[8] as his guiding force:

> What flippant Frenchman was it who said, in allusion to the well-known work of Zimmerman, that "*la solitude est une belle chose; mais il faut quelqu' un pour vous que la solitude est une belle chose?*" The epigram cannot be gainsayed, but the necessity is a thing that does not exist. (938)

[8] Johan Georg, Ritter Von Zimmerman (1728-1795) was a Swiss philosophical writer and physician who wrote "On Solitude" in 1756 and came out with its amended version in 1785, coincidentally the same year that Jeremy Bantham invented his panopticon.

Translated in English, the lines read as "Solitude is a beautiful thing, but is it necessary for someone to tell you that solitude is a beautiful thing" (Levin 37). Having worked towards developing his authority, the narrator is now prepared to be that "someone" to convey the "*belle chose*" he found in the natural world resulting from his solitary wanderings.

One way in which the narrator exercises authority over the surrounding sublimity is his geographical compartmentalization of natural ambience. He frequently refers to various "sides" and nooks that suggest a physical exclusivity of his natural surroundings: "On all sides—save to the west, where the sun was about sinking...," "in the opposite quarter...," "midway in the short vista...," "eastern and western extremities of the inlet...," "eastern end," "flakes...in the multiform positions upon the water...." (935-37). In opting for such mathematical and scientific ascriptions, the narrator provides us with a panoramic experience that gradually illuminates various aspects of the "sentient whole" instead of merely detailing the descriptive features. In addition, the narrator doesn't change his position physically (that is, literally travel around it) on the island, but through his ocular and mental facility has the island revolved in his mind so that he can contemplate its various parts. The narrator observes, "my position enabled me to include in a single view both the eastern and western extremities of the islet" (936). The narrator's perspective here greatly defines his panoptic, wide-ranging vision, and as Adams points out, perspective theory involved the imposition of various distances between the viewer and the picture; "the distance of the picture" is the mathematical

length that the spectator must stand in front of the picture plane so that the perspective image can be viewed correctly (155).

Couched under the "branches of an unknown odorous shrub," the narrator extensively describes the verdant forest walls, the little river with the sharp turns, the "deep green foliage" of the east, and the "rich gold crimson waterfall from the sunset-fountains of the sky" (935, 936). These natural elements, while strewn throughout the island and its vicinity, provide the narrator with a "dreamy vision" tinged with a "character of phantasm" and "so mirror-like was the glossy water" of the stream "that it was scarcely possible to say at what point upon the slope of the emerald turf its crystal dominions began" (936). Through a visual synecdoche, the activity of literal reflection in the water comes to summarize the transformation of raw nature—its cultivation and refinement—into finished products of civilization, i.e. the art of narration itself.

The contrasts that the narrator envisions between the islet's eastern and western sides and the appearance of the Fay with her vanishing act are intricately related to each other and can be seen as examples of an artistic sleight-of-hand. The western side, according to the narrator, "glowed and blushed beneath the eye of the slant sun-light," and the grass ("short, springy, sweet-scented") and the trees ("lithe," mirthful," "erect") seem to be imbued with a sense of life and joy; the eastern side on the contrary is beset by "sad, solemn, and spectral shapes," while the grass wore "the deep tint of the cypress" (937). The narrator even sees the shade of the trees on the eastern side as impregnating the depths of the water with darkness. The scene relies for its effects upon an unstated, but implicit, play of contraries: the vivacity and naked brutality of nature in the western

side contrasts with its apparent passivity in the eastern hemisphere. While this stark contrast can exemplify the narrator's reverential wonder for the goings-on in the natural world, in simpler terms, this contrast is an obvious result of the sun's position with respect to the earth. Since, from the beginning of the article, the narrator sees the natural world as imbued with a soul of its own and wants to behold it alone, his visions simultaneously extol the landscape's lustrous treasure while providing cues to how his vision is generated.

Numerous words and phrases in "The Island of the Fay" repeatedly suggest that the narrator's experience will be a fantastic one, and yet they are connected to his panoramic vision. The Fay makes her appearance immediately after the narrator has beheld the darker (aka eastern) side of the islet: having seen the shadows "impregnate" the water with darkness, the narrator declares, "This idea, having once seized upon my *fancy*, greatly excited it, and I lost myself forthwith in a *reverie.* 'If ever an island were enchanted,'—said I to myself,--'this is it....'" (937). In the process of beholding nature in a single sweep of view, somewhere down the line the narrator has blurred the distinction between the real and the unreal, thereby preparing himself to envision the Fay. The nineteenth-century panorama was sometimes labeled as an instrument of illusion because, to the audience, it gave the sense of being alive, life-like, and animated. Contemplating nature as imbued with life after the narrator beholds its darker side is when the Fay appears:

> What the wasting tree is to the water that imbibes its shade, growing thus blacker by what it preys upon, may not the life of the Fay be to the Death which engulfs

> it?—but what fairy-like form is this which glides so solemnly along the water? (935)

Akin to the illusory impressions created by the panorama, the narrator has created an illusion out of the real natural world, for the Fay is seen as circling around the island signifying passage of time and mortality as "she...floated through her winter and through her summer" and "is a year nearer to Death" (937). Since the narrator had declared a few lines earlier that "a quick imagination might have converted [the flakes] into anything it pleased" (937), the Fay is not only a manifestation of such belief, but also of the animated "sentient whole" that the narrator wants to dissect and explore at the beginning. The storyteller works with an "artisan" form of communication and uses language that is communal and founded on shared perceptions of reality, a respect for wisdom born of the accrued experience of generations, and a sense of life still organized around the cycles of nature (Wolf 128). Seen in this light, the visual vista that Poe creates through his narrator in "The Island of the Fay," while not without its preternatural quality, testifies to the potency of an omnipassant vision that Poe always believed to be possessed by the artist.

In "Morning on the Wissahiccon," the artist's all-embracive vision is slightly modified, for it is lent an expressly nationalistic fervor coupled with exaltation of the natural scene. The essay was first published in *The Opal* in 1844, and this plate article accompanied an engraving by John G. Chapman that depicted an elk in an idyllic natural setting (Renza 309). If "The Island of the Fay" projects a solipsistic vision of exultation in the *super*-natural world (a private world beyond this natural world), the project in "Morning on the Wissahiccon" is patently domestic while retaining the panoptic

sublimity of the artist's vision. Drawing on an oft-debated topic of nineteenth-century America—the Old World vs. the New World—the narrator emerges as a votary of the American natural scene with a fit and convincing argument of how "the most conspicuous of the British tourists" regard only "the northern and eastern seaboard" of the United States as worthy of any consideration while neglecting the "gorgeous interior scenery of some of our western and southern districts—of the vast valley of Louisiana, for example,—a realization of the wildest dreams of paradise" (939). In addition, the narrator remarks that most European tourists "content themselves with a hasty inspection of the natural *lions* of the land" like "the Hudson, Niagara, the Catskills, Harper's Ferry, the lakes of New York, the Ohio, the prairies, and the Mississippi" and asserts that there are "scarcely explored nooks" in the country that "will be preferred to...the chronicled and better accredited scenes" (mentioned above) if one is a "true artist, or cultivated lover of the grand and the beautiful" (939). As Robinson notes, the aesthetic of the picturesque or the beautiful was, in a sense, the naturalization of a liberal ideology that conceived of national unity as a composition of "contending forces" (87). Landscape tourism became the ritualized internalization of this same ideology. Derived from the aesthetics of propertied gentry, the picturesque developed into a mercantile perspective as well; detached from literal landownership, this pictorial habit awarded the picturesque tourist a metaphorical, visual ownership.[9] The opposition between Europe's antiquity and America's own wilderness had provided Poe's America an alternative past, for though

[9] See Brigitte Bailey. Her article, "Protected Witness," provides various sources for her specific ideas in this particular context, most notably, Carole Fabricant's essay on aesthetics and politics of the eighteenth century.

Poe and his contemporaries couldn't look back on a long, hoary tradition of great martial feats and momentous historical truths as could other cultures (although such cultures were often bloody and despotic), America in the 1800s could relate to an antiquity still unspoiled by man—purer and by implication closer to God. Tocqueville notes that "honest citizens" commented to him that "[t]his world here belongs to us....God, in refusing the first inhabitants the capacity to become civilized, has destined them in advance to inevitable destruction...The true owners of this continent are those who know how to take advantage of its riches" (73). Natural treasures beckoned the American wanderer-hero across compelling spiritual as well as physical frontiers. These treasures sometimes drew simultaneously on the tradition of cultivated antiquity, and the language used by travelers and artists alike to describe the fresh new lands at times was couched in terms of European associations, as evidenced here through Poe's narrator when he observes that "Wissahiccon is of so remarkable loveliness that, were it floating in England, it would be the theme of every bard, and the common topic of every tongue, if, indeed, its banks were not parceled off in lots, at exorbitant price, as building-sites for villas of the opulent" (942).

The narrator's authority over nature and natural setting can be seen here as working through multiple levels of meaning. Apart from advocating for a broader outlook to appreciate the natural beauty of the United States as a whole, the narrator also effectively highlights the dual aspects of his panoptic sublime: on the literal level, his current purported project will chart a journey through a "paradise" of the "wildest dreams," thereby unfolding visions of grandeur for his audience's perusal; on the

metaphorical level, the narrator again assumes the pose of an exalted self by exoticizing the unseen, uncharted landscape with hitherto unheralded charm and attraction:

> In fact, the real Edens of the land lie far away from the track of our most deliberate tourists—how very far, then, beyond the reach of the foreigner, who, having made with his publisher at home arrangements for a certain amount of comment upon America, to be furnished in a stipulated period, can hope to fulfil his agreement in no other manner than by steaming it, memorandum-book in hand, through only the most beaten thoroughfares of the country! (939)

According the status of Holy Grail to the unexplored natural world, the narrator literally mocks those tourists and travelers for depriving themselves of the highest wonders of the uncharted regions in America. In doing so, the narrator combines the role of nationalist advocate with that of privileged artist and adventurer who has been to such regions and condescends to provide a tantalizing account of his journey. In addition, the narrator observes that the area "just above, the valley of Louisiana" is the loveliest, and "no fiction has approached it" (941). The narrator, in claiming that no fiction hitherto has been able to do justice to the beauty of Louisiana, enhances the importance and significance of his own semi-fictive account of his journey to that particular spot; he tries to claim superiority for bringing to the audience in written form what no one has ever done before.

Interestingly, the narrator claims that the region (Wissahiccon) "has little, or rather nothing, of the sublime" (941). Sublime in the nineteenth century meant something

that incited a sense of awe and fearful reverence. "We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term *Revelation*," wrote Emerson in "The Oversoul" (1841), and "these are always attended by the emotion of the sublime" (249). By the time Emerson was writing, the sublime had been largely transformed from an aesthetic to a Christianized token of the Deity resident in nature, and the gradual fusion of aesthetic and religious terms is an index of the appropriation of the landscape for religious and, ultimately, nationalist purposes (Novak 8). According to James Jackson Jarvis, a critic of nineteenth-century culture, landscape was "the creation of the one God—his sensuous image and revelation, through the investigation of which by science or its representation by art men's hearts are lifted towards him" (86). It was hoped that art's interpretive capacities would reconcile the contradictions that science was forcing on the nineteenth-century mind. Originally, the late eighteenth-century sublime was associated with fear, gloom, and majesty; its import was primarily aesthetic, and to experience it was to have an aesthetic reaction. Though silence, too, was an integral part of the older sublime, it was usually suspenseful, attended by terror and dread, and often interrupted by the uproar of cataracts, earthquakes, fires, storms, thunder and volcanoes. There came a change in the concept of sublime, however, as signaled by Tuckerman, who noted that one must scale the heights, risk "life and limb," and suffer "great cost of fatigue and exposure" to experience it (383). The older sublime could be absorbed by calm souls, while the Christianized sublime was more quotidian and bourgeois; its social effect was thus far wider. Offering another cue to the shifting meaning of the sublime, Thomas Cole in his "Essay on American Scenery" (1835) introduces the traditional idea

of sublime when he finds in the mountains of New Hampshire "a union of the picturesque, sublime and the magnificent," and in the Sandwich range, especially, a mixture of "grandness and loveliness...the sublime melting into the beautiful, the savage tempered by the magnificent" (8). However, Cole cautions the reader to "learn the laws by which the Eternal sublime doth work and sanctify his works, that we may see the hidden glory veiled from regular eyes" (12). The wide vistas, the expansive sprawling jungles, and the majestic landscape of the West were still "sublime," but silence and solitude were and are the natural companions of that type of sublimity perhaps closest to the Creator.

"Morning of the Wissahiccon" displays a mixture of the Emersonian and the Colean sublimes: a reflection of eternal glory couched in a transcendental perception of the natural world. By employing homely, subdued adjectival phrases such as "*gentle* undulations," "*flowery* slopes," "*sparkling* with *gay* birds," and "*burthened* with perfume" (943), the narrator lends a different kind of beauty, almost a feminine charm, to the whole landscape, thereby subconsciously connecting it to "the wildest dreams of paradise" that he talks about in the beginning. It is interesting to note that in "Morning on the Wissahiccon," as the narrative progresses, the tone gradually assumes a veneer of fierce castigation. It is almost as if Poe's narrator is trying to assume a greater control over his subjects and subject matter than what he attempted in "The Island of the Fay." Here, the narrator not only pleads with his audience to envision what he imagines, but he also offers prescriptive tokens for the correct way to enjoy the natural surroundings: "...even of this delicious region, the sweeter portions are reached only by bypaths..., not

by the railroad…stage-coach…private carriage...not even on horseback—but on foot. He must *walk*" (941). Alternatively threatening and placating, the narrator's role seems here to be less of an artist trying to uphold a particular landscape's beauty and more of a salesman pushing through his product. Poe was notorious for his self-conviction as the overseer of current critical tastes in contemporary literature and magazines, and here he has his narrator assume a greater seat of knowledge simply by dint of having visited a relatively unknown place. The narrator's utterances here then fully flesh out the dynamics of panopticon as discussed before; he sees himself as both literal and metaphorical palatine (or feudal lord exercising sovereign power over his lands) who has to guide the ignorant tourists and make them conversant with true artistic delights: "he must leap ravines, he must risk his neck among the precipices, or he must leave unseen the truest, the riches, and the most unspeakable glories of the land" (940).

Poe's narrator introduces the debate of the Old World vs. the New in order to accentuate the new world's hidden treasures, but by being repetitive about it ("the entire loveliness of the former is collated with only the most noted, and with by no means the eminent items in the general loveliness of the latter" [941]), he makes his project more politically surcharged than he arguably would have liked it to be. "Morning on the Wissahiccon" is expressly more political than the other two works, and the authorial subjectivity seems to have more socio-historical significance than any of his other "landscape" sketches. Coincidentally, Poe's career coincided with the emergence of American landscape as an effective substitute for a missing national tradition. Poe's contemporary America was simultaneously old and new. It was new in that its

unchartered and unsettled territories were the proper habitat for that radical innocent, the American Indian noble savage as celebrated by Rousseau and the Lake Poets. Yet it was old in that these same forests and mountains spoke of America's most significant antiquity—one that registered more purely in its uncultivated state (Novak 20). Once such landscape had become a repository of national pride, the cultivation of and experiencing landscape art became a key preoccupation of the age. Poe's narrator plays upon politicization of the natural world before coming to Wissahiccon "as an object of picturesque interest" (941) because, in keeping with the contemporary marketplace, Poe couldn't have a simple black-and-white contrast between the two worlds. The panoptic sublimity that he strove for in his plate article could not be sustained if Poe did not employ an all-encompassing vision, not only for his unravaged natural landscape, but also for this socio-political and philosophical landscape of the nineteenth century. A decade or so before Poe's essay was written, Cooper's Billy Kirby of *The Pioneers* was in the vanguard of the so-called march of civilization, with history and progress as cohorts. An artist's purpose was to get there first and document a doomed nature, and facing nature's inevitable decline, this task teemed with ironies. Only when the colonist had cleared the forest and made it fit for "man's abode" could he apprehend the luxury of loving it. Roderick Nash has observed that "appreciation of wilderness began in the cities," and "in the early nineteenth century American nationalists began to understand that it was in the *wildness* of its nature that their country was unmatched" (44, 69). So Poe was not only treading through a thoroughly beaten track of nationalistic fervor, but as Renza observes, "one could even regard the narrator as a 'pious nationalist,' his article a

parody of what by Poe's time had become a 'hackneyed' nationalist question about the relative merits of the old world and the new world scenery" (311).

In a single sweep of thought and view, the narrator places the "beauty of the stream" far above the "*route* of the Philadelphian picturesque hunters" (again, a dig at contemporary tourists preferring to travel in carriages) and follows it up, akin to the geographical compartmentalization of natural surroundings in "The Island of the Fay," with specific directions of how to reach the stream:

> ...take the Ridge Road, running westwardly from the city, and, having reached the second lane beyond the sixth mile-stone,...follow the lane to its termination. [One] will thus strike the Wissahiccon, at one of its best reaches, and, in a skiff, or by clambering along its banks, [one] can go up or down the stream, as best suits his fancy, and in either direction will meet his reward. (942)

It is interesting to note that in both "The Island of the Fay" and "Morning on the Wissahiccon," the narrator first betrays a tutelary spirit in outlining the virtues of natural scenery from the vantage point of the self's superior perceptive powers and then goes on to provide a detailed picturesque and panoramic view of the surroundings. In other words, we see a curious mode of reversal: authority doesn't emanate from a fruitful description of the majestic natural surroundings, but the natural settings derive their significance from the authorial voice which cares to enumerate her virtues for the world. The narrator's panoramic description is quite impressionistic: high hills "clothed with natural shrubbery," shores "of granite, sharply defined or moss-covered," "*plateau* of richly herbaged land" all form an integral whole of the wide vista that he beholds, and in

addition, the narrator paints a panorama-within-a-panorama when he declares that when "the windings of the streams are many and abrupt...the impression conveyed to the voyager's eye, as he proceeds, is that of an endless succession of infinitely varied small lakes, or more properly speaking, tarns" (943). The word "proceeds" is important in the narrator's panoramic context because the illusion of lakes within a lake can only be possible if the tourist is literally on the move and seemingly beholds a vast stretch of landscape painting. Poe's narrator manages to combine landscape art and the popular panorama that assumed a tantalizing aspect and somewhat paradoxical cast.[10] Unlike flat perspective views that specify one position for the viewing subject, the panorama placed the spectator at the centre of multiple vanishing points that he/she could not grasp all at once. As Novak points out, the panorama, with its geologic and scientific certitudes and overtones of documentary edification, was a careful visual encyclopedia of travel fact, and "it made little pretense at being anything but a kind of theatricalized *National Geographic*" (18).

The narrator seemingly plays upon the illusion created by the panorama through the interplay of darkness and light when he advises that the Wissahiccon should be visited "not by moonlight...or cloudy weather," but in "the brightest glare of a noonday sun" because the foliage's density coupled with other things "conspire to produce a gloominess, if not an absolute dreariness of *effect*" (my italics) which detracts from the beauty of the scene, "unless relieved by a bright general light" (943). Just as detail and

[10] Perspective views (views that depended upon the beholder's position) would have been adjusted to the cylindrical form of the panorama, thereby according the viewer a central mobile position within its representation.

effect composed the panoramas' fundamental dialectic, Poe's narrator emphasizes the chiaroscuro of light and darkness to heighten the effectiveness of his narration. As with the nineteenth-century panorama, experiencing the narrator's vantage point involves a gradual revelation, segment by segment, further isolating detail through a stereoscopic intimacy. The public and critics who admired the panoramas made a special point of emphasizing, as did a letter to the *Missouri Republican* in 1849 about Lewis' *Panorama of the Lower Mississippi*, that "the artist had succeeded in imposing on the senses of the beholder and inducing him to believe that he is gazing not on canvas, but on scenes of actual and sensible nature" (Brigette 9). The panoptic sublimity that Poe's narrator here strives for is similar to the letter's import in function and nature—a conveyance of immediate sensations with a sweeping view of the effects of close experience with nature.

Again, sheer physical sensation is metamorphosed into something more potent when the narrator "not long ago...visited the stream by the route described" (943). In "The Sphinx," on a hot sultry day, the narrator suffers from myopia and misperceives a bug for a huge monster; here, the heat coupled with the "influence of the scenes and the weather" cajoles the narrator into reveling in "visions of the Wissahiccon of the ancient days" (943). In this section, we find a particular emphasis on imaginative fervor and historic scope that seem to issue in the narrator's panoramic vision, linking both past and the present: he not only snatches a sweeping view of the present landscape, but also imaginatively provides a historical perspective of what the Wissahiccon valley was—a land of promise "when the Demon of the Engine was not, when pic-nics were undreamed of, when 'water privileges' were neither bought nor sold, and when the red man trod

alone, with the elk, upon the ridges that now towered above" (943). This scopic, panoptic vision is lent more substance when the narrator literally beholds his landscape like a painting unfolding on a panoramic canvas in front of him: "while gradually these conceits took possession of my mind, the lazy brook had borne me, inch by inch, around one promontory and within full view of another that bounded the prospect at the distance of forty or fifty yards" (943). The viewers' perception and judgment of *what* was seen in the panoramic apparatus is dependent on *how* it was seen; the panorama's dual nature encapsulated in itself a two-fold structure of representation, which depended on whether a viewer was static—taking in one perspective view, or mobile—confronted with a series of perspectival vistas (Adams 154). In the manner of a canvas painting then, the narrator's description here suggests that the foreground promontory stands in dialectical tension with the jutting peak behind it, the former's rocky massiveness belied by the height and power of the latter: "[i]t was a steep rocky cliff, abutting far into the stream and presenting much more of the Salvator character than any portion of the shore hitherto passed" (942). Here, very effectively, the sense of ascent in the mountain peak contrasts vividly with a vertiginal feeling of depth created by the "stream" and "floating in a skiff upon its bosom" (943). The fact that he imagines seeing one "of those identical elks which had coupled with the red man of my vision" testifies to the narrator's partially conscious desire to restore the pristine purity of *his* landscape (or "paradise") through his all-embracive vision to what existed before "pic-nics" and the intervention of Western civilization. I see his vision as partial because the red man actually turns out to be a Negro, which rings in sundry socio-political ramifications to the narrator's panoptic

vision as pointed out by Louis Renza. But at the same time, as Laura Sultz argues, Poe in particular had working knowledge of Scottish physicist Sir David Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic* (1831), in which Brewster describes dozens of optical illusions. He debunks these illusions, which were formerly attributed to the supernatural, by explaining how reflection, refraction, and the physiology of the eye work together to produce otherworldly effects. Sultz points out that a number of scholars have demonstrated how Poe often turned to *Natural Magic* for inspiration in the representation of uncanny phenomena (10).

Though racist underpinnings are arguably discernible in the Negro-Elk episode (Poe's inherent racism and pro-slavery sentiment evidently manifest the narrator's vision of the tethered elk and the Negro at the end), the incident has numerous hints to suggest that the narrator might also be envisioning the whole episode through the lens of imaginative slumber and drooping spirits. Through this particular incident, Poe has his narrator speak indirectly of unwanted and unnecessary intrusions of the human element on the landscape. Dynamics of the apparently obvious signs of racism and slavery can be seen as unsustainable if we carefully read what Poe is trying to do here and elsewhere.[11] For Poe, exploring Nature as a solitary wanderer is the key to unlocking her secrets for personal gratification. We find proof of such a mentality in "The Island of the Fay"; seen in that light, the comment "thus ended my romance of the elk" makes considerable sense. Since the beginning, the narrator has been critical of the Old World's discriminatory

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[11] The conventional idea of slavery and underpinnings of racism are evident when the "negro" barges into the narrator's dreamy vista with a tethered elk, just as the negroes of the nineteenth century were metaphorically tethered by the whites.

attitude towards American scenery and the sophisticated mode of traveling adopted by British tourists to sightsee American landscapes, and even now "an English family occupying a villa in the vicinity" (944) is instrumental in rupturing his solitary bliss. The Negro is just an extension of this Englishness and human intrusion into Nature's domains; implied here is the fact that the Negro is a household slave, but the narrator is neither critical nor demeaning of him. Instead, the narrator even appreciates the Negro's sympathy towards nature: "...a negro emerged from the thicket, putting aside the bushes with care...." (944). Seen in this light, Poe's narrator is not critical of the Negro for who he is, but for what he stands for: a chattel of an *English* household (my italics), and simultaneously, a representative of the Old World and intrusive human element onto nature. As Louis Renza points out, akin to Poe's strong views on American critics being influenced by English criticism, the narrator's discovery of a domesticated elk belonging to an English family "punctuates his failure to deny the pervasive influence of European cultural codes on perceptions of American scenery" (311). No wonder, then, that the narrator also carefully qualifies the character of the visionary elk that accompanies the Negro: "it was a *pet* of great age and very domestic habits..." (944). In his ecumenical vision of the landscape, anything domesticated is injurious to Nature because it is in opposition to the wide vista of untamed terrains, the "wild paradise of dreams," and without an overseeing, sovereign spirit to formulate such a terrestrial paradise, the narrator suggests that the luxurious visions of opulence that Nature affords in this untouched riparian retreat would be lost in close contact with civilization and crass humanity in general.

Both inventions of the late eighteenth century—the panopticon and the panorama—were objects of fantastic contrivance that lent a distinct control to the warden and the painter respectively over their subjects/audience. The fact that the dynamics of these two contrivances could spill over to embrace and lend significance to other disciplines such as literature testifies to the conceptual potency behind the two inventions. Applying the principles of panopticism and the panorama to Poe's landscape *oeuvre* not only provides us with new insights into the inventions' varied applicability, but also shows how Poe operated through shibboleths that consisted of conventional aesthetic principles and yet maintained ties with important scientific inventions and discoveries of his time. G. W. Sherman observes that Poe was satiric of Jeremy Bentham and his panopticon and used him to such ends in "The Philosophy of Furniture" (31). However, given the fact that Poe tried to keep abreast of the goings-on in his socio-literary and scientific circle, it can also be argued that Poe, even though he satirized Bentham, also grudgingly acknowledged Jeremy Bentham's significance in his day. In his relatively lesser-known tale, "Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences" (1843), the narrator declares

> SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN there have been two Jeremys. The one wrote a Jeremiad about usury, and was called Jeremy Bentham. He has been much admired by Mr. John Neal, and was a great man in a small way. The other gave name to the most important of the Exact Sciences, and was a great man in a *great* way—I may say, indeed, in the very greatest of ways. (607)

The "other" that Poe talks about can arguably be interpreted as the Jeremy Bentham of the panopticon fame, not only because he is obviously a man of the "Exact Sciences" that the narrator in "Diddling" talks about, but also because "The Philosophy of Furniture" and "Diddling" came out in the same year in the *Broadway Journal* within a space of four months,[12] and it is highly probable that Poe sustained his interest Jeremy Bentham for a while. Also, earlier, in a review of Fredrick Von Raumer's travel book, *England in 1835*, in the July 1836 issue of *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe casually mentions "Bentham's penitentiary" (Sherman 13). Thus, it is extremely important to see here that Poe in these two works employs subaltern themes that are not easily discernible because, as already demonstrated, they effectively employ the dynamics of both panorama and the panopticon. Both "The Island of the Fay" and "Morning on the Wissahiccon" reveal a panoptic sublimity of vision and engage in a panoramic mode of expression to highlight the connection between the science of vision and aesthetics. In doing so, Poe's narrators participate intensely in the tradition of the natural sublime while enjoining their readers to partake in their kind of mental expansiveness and take in an active and more comprehensive view of their inherited world.

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[12] The Poe chronology in the notes provided by Quinn in *Poetry and Tales* mentions that "The Philosophy of Furniture" appeared in the first number of *Broadway Journal* on May 3, 1845, while "Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences" appeared in the second number of *Broadway Journal* on Sept. 13, 1845.

Chapter 3--Surveillance Camera Players and Discontent: Anonymous Role Playing in "The Man of the Crowd"

Visibility is a trap.

--Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1977)

Only someone completely distrustful of all government would be opposed to what we are doing with surveillance cameras.

--New York City Police Commissioner Howard Safir, July 27, 1999

As pointed out in the previous chapter, Jeremy Bentham's panopticon was originally intended and built as a disciplinary tool for prisoners and other "anti-social" elements. In addition, we examined the panopticon's rudimentary principles and how they could be applied to Poe's *oeuvre* (especially to his landscape tales) to appreciate the authorial and authoritative voice presiding over the aesthetic tastes of mid nineteenth-century America. However, it was not until Michael Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975; translated into English in 1977) that Bentham's panopticon came into a sharper relief in the eye of public scrutiny, and it was Foucault who initiated the importance of panopticism as embracing other forms of social control.[1] This chapter explores the panopticon in a more detailed way to comprehend its applicability in the field of surveillance and social control using CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) and examines how a particular tale in Poe's *oeuvre*—"The Man of the Crowd" (1840)—

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[1] See Yar, 254-60. According to Yar, Foucault's conceptualization of the panopticon has exercised considerable sway over the treatment of the themes of social control and surveillance in recent years, but its application has been subjected to a range of criticisms.

demonstrably reflects the core surveillance principles of CCTV and its philosophical forerunner in the panopticon. The narrator of the story, akin to a post-modern SCP (Surveillance Camera Player), becomes a conveyor of various emotional nuances as they unfurl through his subjects of surveillance, and he responds to their reactions to certain situations and scenarios by becoming one with the crowd. Such examination demonstrates how akin to a modern CCTV that exercises a unique social control through its ever-present gaze and element of uncertainty, Poe's tale effectively captured, in the mid-nineteenth century, the essence of helplessness and vulnerability of the masses, their alienation and psycho-social unrest, through a voyeuristic narrator who metaphorically preys upon unsuspecting people through his constant, scrutinizing gaze. Also, by juxtaposing the SCPs' resistance to surveillance with the narrator's perusal of his crowd, we see how panopticism plays off against the principles of CCTV to highlight the Foucauldian thesis of power structure and mutual "knowledge" implicit in the dynamics of gazing and surveillance in "The Man of the Crowd."

Foucault, Panopticism and Surveillance

According to Michael Foucault in *The Eye of Power* (1980), Jeremy Bentham invented the panopticon as "a technology of power designed to solve the problems of surveillance" (148). Modern-day surveillance cameras or CCTVs resemble the panopticon in their exercise of anonymous yet perceptive power over the subjects in view, and as Hille Koskela points outs in his comparative study of the panopticon and cameras, "the idea of video surveillance is almost literally the same [as the panopticon]: a

technological solution designed to solve the problems of surveillance in urban space" (293). Recent studies of the surveillance cameras have shown that the panoptic technology of power has been electronically extended through surveillance cameras to the point that "our cities have become like enormous Panopticons" (Koskela 293). Another scholar, Stephen Herbert, points out that the idea involving surveillance connects and overlaps knowledge, power, and space (47). These scholars' ideas suggest that surveillance systems in urban spaces/cities employ power almost instinctively in the sense that people are regulated, controlled and normalized without any particular limit. Interestingly, "modern ideas" of surveillance (and its associated power, control, and order) seem more dispersed and flexible in comparison to the panopticon as a traditional disciplinary observation centre (which was more localized). As Norris and Armstrong put it, "the notion that surveillance is based on visual observation and centralized monitoring as per the Panopticon should not lead to the automatic assumption that in its operation and effects, it is identical" (91).

Several factors underscore the subtle differences between the two systems. One important aspect is space (the physical dimension of a place as we know it; that is, while the urban, post-modern space is lucid and elastic, the panoptic space is arguably limited in the sense of its sheer ocular range and physicality). If we consider the modern urban world as social space where people encounter each other and interact on a daily basis engaging in conscious or unconscious reciprocity of power and knowledge, the ethos of that social space assumes primary importance as far as surveillance is concerned. Thus, as Koskela argues, though Foucault's analysis was based on "clearly defined, segregated

institutional spaces" such as prisons, hospitals, and schools, the diversity or changes in the nature of space were apparently not pivotal to his critical thought (296). Surveillance systems not only focus on the social space and the crowd therein, but also depend on the idea of "visibility" for their effectiveness.[2] The rudimentary principle of disciplinary power involves regulation and normalization through visibility and both in the panopticon and in the space of surveillance, social contact is most often reduced to what can be visualized. As will be revealed in discussion of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," there is an important tripartite relation between visibility, power, and surveillance as far as urban space is concerned.

When Foucault posited that the panopticon exemplified "the power of the Visual" (148), he meant it to be a particular architectural space creating and disseminating control, but in a holistic, comprehensive fashion without any scope for classifying the subjects (based on rank or other criteria). So, transferring the dynamics of the panopticon to surveillance systems in the urban space requires an explicit qualification of how the power structure will or might work because urban space is far more complex than the concept of space in Foucault's interpretations of the prison. Though just as in the panopticon, where inmates are constantly under surveillance of the unseen eye, people are under constant scrutiny by the electronic eye in the urban space, there is an essential

[2] To be visible is possibly to be under control; at the same time, to visualize is to keep things under control. Hence, in comparing the systems of the panopticon and the CCTV of contemporary cities, it is important to realize the spatial difference between the two. As Koskela demonstrates, while in the latter, people can be metaphorically imprisoned, they are not isolated as in a penitentiary, and "whereas a prison is an extremely homogenous space, a city is full of diversity" (Koskela 297).

difference: the flexible social nature of the latter has more potential for concealment than the homogenous verifiability of the former. In other words, control generated inside Foucault's panopticon is one-sided and more disciplinary in nature, while the control generated by social surveillance systems might/might not generate the intended sense of control because if the party being surveyed doesn't care much for the surveillance system, the dynamic of control loses its significance.[3] The common denominators then between the panopticon and surveillance systems in an urban space—power, control, and knowledge—become increasingly fragile the more they move towards the social and the interactive.

The implications of such polyvalent watching are varied because not only are the aspects of visibility and visualizing enhanced, but the element of uncertainty is also multiplied manifold. While in the panopticon, the authority plays upon the certain knowledge that his/her subjects are either criminals or certain incarcerated beings grouped together due to whatever reasons and can regulate them accordingly, surveillance systems in an urban space have to cope with the element of incertitude and often engage in a power struggle within the existing social hierarchy. A crucial variation of the panopticon is how surveillance systems employ the concept of discipline. Foucault describes imprisonment as "operation of correction" (148), but surveillance aims to "normalize" urban space and is used to regulate those groups whose visual appearance is interpreted as somehow deviant, producing a particular type of what Graham labels as

[3] Mike Allen points out that in the urban spaces, "the gazes and their directions are multiplied, [and] the Panopticon is replaced by 'polyopticon' where anybody may watch anybody, anytime, anywhere" (90).

"normative space-time ecology" (486). So, classification and ranking among the people being observed during surveillance also constitutes an important role in the exercise of power and control in an urban space. Interestingly, social control and the reasons for such control in a society are intertwined, and it would be impossible to separate the analysis of control from questions of domination and stratification. As Michael Lianos points out, "the analysis of control was for Foucault yet another axis of a clear cross-cutting theme in his research on the constitution of the human being as a subject" (413).[4] Importantly, Foucault's account, his rendition of the panopticon and its associative principles, highlights the tripartite link between visibility, power, and subjectivity as exercised through modern surveillance systems. But within the panoptic power inherent in such surveillance systems, vision is coeval with domination and as Majid Yar points out, "this economy of vision becomes synonymous with modern life" (260). It can be pointed out then that Foucault's concept of panopticism, as evinced in *Discipline and Punish*, is useful in understanding the normative principles of control in a closed environment, but to understand it in terms of an unbounded circuit of power and subjectivity existing in an urban space, multiplicity of perspectives are and can be possible. In a panoptic space, control is always hegemonic, but in a social space, control can witness friction and resistance because surveillance not only imposes, but also can be imposed upon. As Yar points out, the "functioning of panoptic power rests in its essence not just upon

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[4] For Foucault, the human subject constitutes the central agent of the exercise and reception of social control, and institutions in society in turn exercise such control according to the various socio-ethnographical spectrums ranging amongst the subjects in the society.

visibility...but upon the *visibility of visibility*, i.e., *conscious registration* of being observed on the part of the subject," and "the centrality of the consciousness of the subject runs counter to all of Foucault's avowed intentions" because "if the subject is not conscious of or resists his visibility, then the relation between visibility and discipline collapses" (261).

The Surveillance Camera Players and Surveillance Control

In the current world of paranoia about security and surveillance—the bevy of startling gizmos such as face-recognition software, fingerprint readers, red-light runners, Global Positioning Systems, and infrared imaging that have literally taken over our society—the glaring thing absent from our social compass is the human element, that necessary yet elusive component responsible for compassion and fellow feeling amongst our brethren in society. That we live in a post-modern society hasn't made it easy for us humans to interact without technology in a plethora of new forms. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we are either using technology or technology is using us for its own dissemination. Even as one reads what is in print here, technology is responsible for it. In other words, technology is an all-seeing, all-embracing agency that has assumed omnipotence in our consummately mechanized society.[5] Always keeping an eye on what we do, where we go, and how we lead our lives, CCTVs placed in malls, shops, factories, cinema halls, and even on intersections/street lights constantly scrutinize our day-to-day

[5] W.E. Bijker states that "science and technology do play key roles in keeping society together, and [...] they are equally central in all events that threaten its stability" (444).

activities and we, whether we like it or not, are consciously /subconsciously aware of its existence. The CCTV can be considered as a safe technical solution to potential security problems around the world; through such systems, we purportedly can detect, prevent, and even prosecute crimes like vandalism, shoplifting, terrorism and other anti-social activities, and both public and private spaces can be made more secure. But how do we make a sense of all this? How are we supposed to cope with such electronic hegemony when we are hounded into psycho-social submission by these gadgets? While the purpose of such surveillance is understandable within the framework of a legal discourse, it is undeniable that a fundamental sense of privacy is lost in this technological hegemony. The vast array of surveillance gadgets in cities and towns can be helpful on most occasions, but the constant scrutiny under which we lead our lives can sometimes be overwhelming, as the recent example of Google Earth has pointed out.[6] Federal government can intervene and stop internet giants from going overboard with their technical wizardry, but what about the ordinary citizens? How do they counter an equally disturbing impingement upon their privacy?

Since urban places betray a dense social network, bustling activities amongst people, and chance encounters, surveillance can sometimes be turned on its head and subject to indignation. Ashille Koskela points out that "urban space will always remain less knowable and, thus, less controllable than restricted panoptic space," and "as Surveillance Camera Players…show, it is possible to 'play' with surveillance cameras…"

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[6] See "Pentagon Bans Google." Recently, Pentagon banned Google map makers from "filming inside and making detailed studies of US military bases" because close-up, ground-level imagery of US military sites posed a "potential threat" to security.

(306). In 1996, a group of individuals in New York came together to "create a scenario and act it out using surveillance cameras as if they were their own, as if they were producing their own program, and as if the audience consisted of security personnel, police, school principals, residents of upper-class high security neighborhoods, and the producers and salespeople of the security systems themselves" ("Surveillance Camera Players"). Their first play was *Ubu Roi* on the occasion of its 100th anniversary of its first performance (November 10, 1996). Initially engaged as the self-titled *Guerilla Programming of Video Surveillance Equipment*, they announced their objective as follows:

> Surveillance society, which is an imminent reality, must be critiqued and attacked concurrently. Guerilla programming is direct: it is a simultaneous exposure of the oppressive system and subversion of that system to inform the oppressors (and anyone else who may be watching us) of their own ridiculousness and complicity. As theory and practice must occur simultaneously, so must critique and subversion. Guerilla programming is go! ("Surveillance Camera Players").

This group underwent various mutations and had run-ins with the establishment from time to time since its inception, including taking on the might of Rudolph Guiliani, the "self avowed" mayor of New York ("Reign of Guliani"). This exclusive coterie of disenchanted people, "in the tradition of the Situationist Internationale and urban agitprop activists, [...] are a New York City-based theater troupe, who have gained legendary status by performing scenes from books, documentaries, films, and plays through a unique medium: the neon glare of security camera video monitors" (Burns). The SCPs

have adapted various modern plays and other literary works to suit their agenda—voicing social protest against dominance of certain institutional practices—that include George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. As one commentator on these SCPs point out, "savvier than a busload of autodidactic 'Ivory Tower' post modern theorists who have memorized Michael Foucault's lectures on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, the Surveillance Camera Players find captive audiences consisting of everyday people, police, security guards, sales people, school administrators. An audience is forced to watch performances through the very device that has become the symbol of their daily oppression" (Burns 2).

One particular aspect of SCPs is how they cope with social control and the gaze of some unseen power. By staging their custom-scripted plays on the streets (now not just limited to New York, but Germany, France, and the Netherlands have their own SCPs), these players engage in a dual form of protest. Not only do they effectively draw the attention of authorities in charge beyond the lens, but they also engage public attention on the outside. Without venturing into the debate whether such activity can be interpreted as anti-social or not, we can show that surveillance systems possess an inherent circularity whereby they can be rendered useless—surveyor becomes the surveyed if the power-wielding authority is instead powered down by active resistance to surveillance. Foucault's idea of panopticism can be carefully qualified as applicable to the surveillance mission in urban space, but the variation has to take the degree of participation into account. The most obvious link that connects Foucault, SCPs, and surveillance is the

power generated by visibility. Though Burns' comment about the SCPs being "savier" than the postmodern theorists might be viable, one cannot deny the connection between Bentham's (and by extension, Foucault's) contribution to the agenda of these SCPs in an indirect manner. Control is generated sometimes through institutional codes or organizations and at other times through individualized, homogenous exercise of power and normalization. Filtering Foucault's idea of panopticism, however, can lead us to an exploration of how power and control surface not through any particular school of thought, but through the conditions that shape such cultures of hegemony.

As far as the concepts of power, structure, and control are concerned, what is true of the post-modern era is universal in nature and existed even earlier than we began to explore them: an organization exercising power over its subject(s), apart from using practices of constraint or oppressive behavior, also focuses on the organization and contextualization of what is often intended or even desired by a sovereign subject. As Lianos points out, "the most useful characteristic of such a framework should be to acknowledge that the criterion for deciding what belongs or not to the sphere of control is neither the consciousness of the subject or the group involved, nor the will of those who produce the 'controlling' effect in question, but mainly the conditions that shape the interaction between those two parties" (414). To impute specific motives or intentions to various mechanisms of control without considering the complex social and ethnographical factors that cause their birth, survival and proliferation would be a fallacy. If CCTV encourages higher social interactivity in public spaces by offering an increased sense of security, then surveillance might actually facilitate social cohesion. But this same

cohesion can be also dissolved when these "secure" people feel their privacy has been violated, and it is this sense or lack of privacy in CCTV surveillance that has been regulated against.[7]

The emergence of SCPs as a revisionist group to surveillance systems like CCTV is little known in our mainstream society because the "players" themselves don't have any active body or organization that functions in a cohesive fashion. According to Schienke, information about their performances' date, time and place are generally kept secret, yet the performers choose different plays or improvised skits that have something to do with vision or cameras (359). Interestingly, the SCPs self-confessedly don't impute as much importance to the plays or the thematic correlations as to their primary intent: provide diversion to the people behind the cameras with something apparently decipherable just out of sheer fun. According to Bill Brown, one of the co-founders of the SCPs, "a group that had no future, *that was just a prank to amuse jaded intellectuals*, suddenly had a context which was the police (re)installing surveillance cameras" ("Interview"). The subject matter of these pranks moved from something cryptic to something significant in the context of the social situation, an open secret that can be simple to decipher and yet apparently cocooned within the bosom of these players' objectives. For example, according to Bill Brown, the signboards held up to the camera by the SCPs always show an icon of a surveillance camera so that people are never in doubt whatsoever about what they are up to ("Interview"). It is significant that the SCPs'

[7] For instance, according to Saetnan, in Norway CCTV regulations are incorporated within the Personal Data Act, an act specifically directed towards the preservation of privacy of personal data (404).

textual apparatus is simple, visually uncomplicated and yet mysterious because the text on their signboards hold up a sign (of a surveillance camera) to the camera itself, creating a self-reflexive nexus of knowledge and control; the SCPs intellectually engage in a tussle of control over their social environment through their messages aimed at CCTV operators by flashing signs and symbols aimed at stripping off the element of secrecy in these surveillance systems. As stated by one of the players, "the one thing security culture thrives upon is its secrecy. Secrecy is its oxygen. If you talk about it you're introducing carbon monoxide into its oxygen and hopefully we can have it choke on being talked about" ("Interview"). Interestingly then, the SCPs *openly* try to strip off the *secret* of surveillance systems to reveal the watcher beyond through a mutual recognition of a potential power struggle in a public/urban space.

Poe's Man and Surveillance

The immediate question that arises within this contemporary ethical debate is how are SCPs contextually related to Poe's "The Man of the Crowd"? How can the SCPs' socio-philosophical principles exhibited be equated to those exhibited by Poe's *flaneur* in the nineteenth century? Moreover, how does the panoptic principle of CCTV and surveillance tie in with the playful perusal of the crowd by Poe's narrator? This chapter attempts to answer these questions by examining the principles of CCTV and surveillance as exhibited in and applicable to "The Man of the Crowd" and also by establishing a connection between the incidents in the tale that exhibit these principles and the SCP's behavioral principles and dynamics. These various connections reveal how Poe engages

himself and his narrator in a reciprocal game of power and knowledge on multiple levels: akin to the SCPs that engage themselves in a power struggle with the CCTVs and the higher authority beyond, the narrator in "The Man of the Crowd" engages in a power struggle with his own socio-psychological anxieties in a way that makes him project those fears onto an external subject, thereby denying his own privacy and that of his subject in this public spectacle. Poe's narrator becomes both the surveyor and the surveyed in his ethnographic exploration of the crowd. While he uses his supposedly superior knowledge and perception to study and engage in surveillance of a man in the crowd, like the modern day SCPs, he plays out his innermost anxieties in an endless tussle of power and knowledge with the ever-changing world and himself becomes the man of the crowd. The fact that the pursued old man in "The Man of the Crowd" is also a muted manifestation of the SCPs through his passive resistance to surveillance provides the tale with a reciprocal dialectic of anonymous exercise of power and control, a dynamic that is also discernible in Foucault's structural analysis of the panopticon.

The following advertisement appears on the website of the SCPs, and the images pasted below correspond to the information:

> Times Square "webcam," Manhattan, 17 November 2001, The SCP-New York presents Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death." Setting: an exclusive party during the disaster. There's an ominous knock at the door. The US Constitution says, I will protect us.

Fig.1: Times Square CCTV

As can be inferred from the photographs, the surveillance camera players chose Poe's "The Masque of Red Death" as one of their "plays" for staging indignation towards the institutionalized system of surveillance and conveying their higher message of "Down with Big Brother!" Interestingly, the fourth image has a clear political message that is aimed at the government's supposed overbearing presence everywhere through surveillance cameras, especially in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks in New York. Poe's "The Masque of Red Death" is a tale about a plague afflicting the land of Prince Prospero, and even the prince and his subordinates cannot avert the Red Death despite their best attempts to shut themselves from the affected world outside. While the choice of "The Masque of Red Death" is arguably appropriate to convey the message of "Big

Brother attitude" exercised by the government (since Prospero thinks he is in control of affairs and can stop the Red Death from getting inside his palace), the tale cannot be effectively adapted to convey the sense of indignation against surveillance systems (the original agenda of these SCPs) because the story lacks the idea of scrutiny or persistent gaze that is integral to surveillance systems. The SCPs could have chosen "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) for staging because not only does the tale revolve around the idea of surveillance, spying, and reconnaissance (integral to security systems and CCTVs installed world wide), but, as mentioned earlier, it effectively highlights the socio-ethical and ethnographical issues of privacy and control that are intertwined in surveillance of any kind.

According to Kevin J. Hayes, "'The Man of the Crowd' indicates the importance of observing the urban landscape and reading its signs" and, "just as reading written language is a matter of recognizing what words they signify, so also reading someone's character is a matter of interpreting a set of personal and cultural signs akin to language—signs such as clothing, facial expression, gesture, demeanor, and voice" (445). If we look at "The Man of the Crowd," the tale begins with an analysis of a particular character type, of criminals or wrongdoers who have "secret[s]," but whose secrets go into the grave with the guilty beings who withhold "hideousness of mysteries" after looking "piteously in the eyes" of their ghostly confessors. The narrator more importantly conceptualizes the "secret[s]" as subjects "...which do not *permit themselves* to be revealed" and "will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed" (388). In doing so, he suggests that secrets have a life of their own—pulsating, throbbing entities that live inside human

beings. A usual Poesque exercise, especially in tales like “The Black Cat,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and “The Cask of Amontillado” that deal with secrets and the “hideousness of mysteries” in the heart, is to provide a quick insight into the netherworld of the protagonist’s consciousness or his innermost psyche that might/will prompt him into actions of unspeakable horror.[8] In “The Man of the Crowd,” the ideological implication doubles up because the narrator states that the “the conscience of the man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that can be thrown down only into the grave” (388)—a doubled-up secret because it is twice removed in the tale: as readers, we are not sure whose secret or “burthen” is more significant—the narrator’s or the old man’s. By stamping a sense of finality into his observation about the “essence of crime” that remains “undivulged” (388), the narrator shields himself from any obligation of explaining his actions in the following paragraphs and, by extension, implicitly suggests that his impending narration will unfold an incident (crime?) that cannot be interpreted with any finality.

The narrator betrays working principles of modern surveillance systems in his furtive pursuit of the old man, and if we take a look at what the narrator does in the tale, then the connection between him, the modern SCPs, and secrets becomes clear. The old man in the tale is an open and yet unreadable text/secret for the narrator, something that is “openly” held up as a sign/symbol to be deciphered amidst the crowd; we can see that the

[8] In this context, Félix Guitérezz correctly points out that “when some of his [Poe’s] narrators ingeniously verbalize psychological self-deceptions, deriving, for example, pleasure from pain…or defiantly questioning…their mental disease, we may wonder about the creative and ideological implications of those narrative acts of confession” (160).

narrator's surveillance of the "decrepit" old man rests upon secrecy—oxygen—for its success, but the old man unconsciously poses problems for the narrator through his own "illegibility"—carbon monoxide—and chokes up the subterranean flow of power and control that emanates from the coffee shop's window. The tale's actual subject of interest—the old man—importantly surfaces exactly halfway through the narrative. Given his lifelong propensity for puns and jokes about the literati and the "humbug" of his day, it can be argued that Poe meant his narrator to be seen as the man *of* the crowd in the first half (he is engulfed by people both within and without the coffee house in his minute descriptions of people according to their "rank") and, in the latter half, as the man *in* the crowd in his pursuit of the old man. Gerald Kennedy points out that the narrator's pursuit of the old man is inevitable because he has to abandon "a detached, analytical perspective for a more visceral involvement in the world of human striving" (188). The narrator has to abandon his arm-chair detection because while he is physically distant from his subjects of interest in the first half and scrutinizes them from afar, in the latter half, he has to jump into the crowd due to some possible impending crime—in this case, the bosom of "the genius of deep crime" (396).

Through this dynamism of dual presence then—the narrator being metaphorically (first) and literally (second) inside and outside, both within and without the crowd—, Poe interestingly anticipates the modern-day principles of surveillance as exercised by the CCTVs that constantly and minutely scrutinize their subjects while maintaining a physical distance from them, but can zoom in for a closer look if a "crime" or potential misdeed is suspected in a given subject's bosom. As Felix Gutiérezz points out, "the

intertextual enigmas opened up in the introductory paragraph [of this tale] suggest a kind of deciphering of essential depravity and criminality through acts of self-reflexive detection" (159). Just as the SCPs do not permit themselves to be read in their immediate actions (even though one can have a rough estimate of their actual intentions through their self-reflexive acts of holding up signboards), the "crime[s]" refuse to be divulged in the hearts of men in "The Man of the Crowd" where violation of secrecy "whether visual, textual, biographical, or social, will perpetrate a self-destructive crime, since it is in the essence of the sign ('it does not permit,' 'will not suffer themselves') and not on any external agency to unveil their nature" (Gutíérezz 159).

Jeffrey Weinstock points out that "a peculiar modern aspect of Poe's fiction is the way in which, through its persistent thematization of the impossibility of being alone, it anticipates contemporary discussions of the constitution of subjectivity" (50). He adds that Poe demonstrates the manner in which one's sense of self is the product of social and historical context, especially in "The Imp of the Perverse" and in "Alone" (1829) and "To M---"(1828). In "The Man of the Crowd," a similar theme is fleshed out, as the narrator is "alone" inside the coffee shop and exercises an acute subjectivity of consciousness that later helps him generate power and control over his environment: "I gave up, at length, all care of things…and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without" (389). This correlation between an exploration of subjectivity and the dread of being isolated is identical to the correlation that exists between the surveillance systems and SCPs because the small group of players exercises a unique power over surveillance authorities through internalization of control, and as mentioned earlier in this essay, their mere presence

makes the authorities nervous. According to Foucault, internalization of control means "easy and effective exercise of power" (148). Surveillance systems operate on the knowledge of implicit power, and the architecture of surveillance is ensuring anonymity. Once this anonymity is lost, the dialectic of control and power is ruptured because, while CCTV exercises vigilance over the subjects on the street, no one is vigilant of the forces behind such systems. The SCPs try to expose the anonymity of such vigilance by subjectification of their agenda, for they are the mediators of power—simultaneously exercising and suffering power.

The narrator in the tale exercises vigilance over his crowd and is simultaneously in its power because "part of Poe's brilliance is his fundamental recognition that there is something uncanny, inscrutable, and frustratingly resistant about crowds themselves," for "while it reduces the elements to cogs in a social machine, the crowd itself is oddly alive and threatening" (Weinstock 55). The "crowd" so to speak forms right inside the coffee house whereby the narrator doesn't wish to socialize even though he feels an "inquisitive" interest in everything and enjoys voyeuristic pleasure by intruding into the private lives of "promiscuous" people (388). By developing condescension towards his immediate social ambience, he subconsciously assumes a fiercely subjective self, who "derived positive pleasure even from many of the legitimate sources of pain," and for whom "merely to breathe was enjoyment" (388). The narrator has turned his loneliness within into a potentially enriched social life without by partaking in the bustling life of an urban milieu, "peering through the smoky panes into the street" (388). The window was a powerful nineteenth-century trope for the relationship between spectator and spectacle,

especially with regard to new conceptions of subjectivity and vision (Sweeney 6). So, observing different sorts of people on the street from the window yields him power because he can literally exercise unseen command/control over his environment and metaphorically lose himself in the crowd so as to project his inner angst--"the legitimate sources of pain"—onto external objects/subjects without any detection.

According to Foucault, subjectivity can be spoken of only in the sense of that which is itself constituted by and through different forces and hence, it is prudent to speak of the individual that emerges in a power-knowledge matrix. As discussed previously, the concepts of power and knowledge are intertwined. In "The Man of the Crowd," the narrator exhibits exactly the type of consciousness of knowledge that emanates in an urban space. The narrator exploits the world without the coffee house to alleviate the anxieties within: his panoptic vision of the streets below can afford him the specificity of power but only through knowledge of the "principal thoroughfares of the city" (388). The narrator assumes a unique social control through his panoptic vision, for without any hindrance, he can leisurely scan the crowd according to its social rank (even this stratification is invented by the narrator) and peer into its private world of miseries, happiness, or confusions. As Paul Downes notes, "[f]or Poe, the terror generated by post-feudal and egalitarian forms of social belonging takes the form of monstrous singularity that is both the promise and the threat of democracy's egalitarian liberation" (31). This singularity later comes in the form of the old man with "the worst heart of the world" (396).

While there is an apparent difference between the lenses of CCTV and the

narrator's ocular powers (the latter is employed just out of mere curiosity), the elements of unconscious control and domination are common in both cases. While employed for the public good, a surveillance system can hound its subjects of interest into unconscious compliance even though they might not be aware of it every moment; similarly, the narrator's long, scrutinizing gaze controls the unconscious crowd in ways that he thinks is delightful. The scrutiny almost borders on self-indulgence when the narrator declares, "I had been amusing myself for the greater part of the afternoon, now in poring over advertisements, now in observing the promiscuous company in the room, and now in peering through the smoky panes into the street" (388). Hayes observes that "by placing him inside a London coffeehouse, Poe further emphasizes the narrator's role as both a reader and an information seeker."[9] The narrator reads and seeks information through his anonymity and voyeurism, for the narrator's almost periscopic vision betrays both literal panopticism and its concomitant control: his voyeurism not only affords him recreational pleasure ("I felt a calm but inquisitive nature in everything"), but also provides him with the power to objectify his fellow beings (the narrator is careful enough to emphasize the "tumultous sea of human heads" that gave him "a delicious novelty of emotion" [389]). In our modern era, this kind of objectification and exposure to anonymous (and possibly abusive) scrutinizing authority forms the basis of resentment against surveillance cameras, and some surveys reveal that some spaces that are publicly owned or to which

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[9] Hayes adds that the Baltic Coffee House on Threadneedle Street, a London coffeehouse that flourished during Poe's lifetime, subscribed to all of the prominent London dailies as well as to papers from Amsterdam, Hamburg, Liverpool, New York, and Paris. In addition, the Baltic offered its patrons a shelf of reference works useful for conducting commercial business (449).

the public has access are nevertheless seen as intimate spaces where CCTV is regarded as an invasion of privacy (Saetnan 397).

In his interview on the surveillance camera players, Bill Brown, responding to the query about how performances are codified to convey essential content to the intended audience, states that

> The plays that we started out doing were opaque. The relationship to Jarre or Beckett or Poe, to the surveillance cameras was not clear. So, we jettisoned any play that wasn't specifically referring to the cameras because it took up valuable time in explaining it, so that ultimately it meant that once we scripted George Orwell's *1984* the only place to go there after was scripting our own plays.

In light of the statement above, Bill Brown could have found a clearer connection between cameras and SCPs if he had been aware of other tales in Poe's corpus. Not only does "The Man of the Crowd" expressly unfold through the operative principles of a camera, but the tale revolves around the principles of surveillance. According to Walter Shear, "any exercise of observation serves to fire Poe's fictional creativity" and "as early as in 'Hans Pfaal' (1835), he begins to speculate about the kinds of truth available to the amateur" where the narrator arrogantly claims that the very crudeness of his ideas and their vague nature may "in effect, possess all the force, the reality, and other inherent properties of instinct and intuition" (134). In "The Man of the Crowd," the same instinct and intuition is put to task, for the narrator's vision is both literal and imagined.[10] That

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[10] Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, in an interesting article on the tale, shows how the narrator employs a "*figurative* magnifying glass" in his surveillance of the crowd and the purportedly titular old man. She also demonstrates how Poe anticipates "subsequent

Poe was in the "avant garde" concerning theories of scientific advancements needs no renewed documentation, and the operative principles of CCTV become clearer with the progression of the narrative.

When the SCPs took to the streets, they were not yet named or motivated by the agenda they currently possess: *the guerilla programming of video surveillance equipment*. The indignation they betray in their theatrical machinations on the streets stems from the loss of what they consider to be the social and private rights lost to these surveillance gadgets (social in the sense of constrictive urban space like city streets and other public places of accommodation and private in the sense of a threat to individual sensibilities). In a remarkable parallel, Poe's narrator in the tale moves from the panoramic sweep of the crowd to the minutiae of his vista:

> I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and the expression of countenance. (389)

Interesting to note here are the dynamics of gazing and seeing. In our society, when someone stares at another person, it might be considered socially awkward or even

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advances in visual culture as well as their psychological, epistemological, and social effects, which would be later explored by theorists from Walter Benjamin to Jean Baudrillard," who pondered the "implications of a variety of optical devices: the camera and the daguerreotype; telescopes and microscopes; corrective lenses (including monocles, lorgnettes, spectacles, tinted lenses, and double eye glasses); the panorama and the kaleidoscope" (3). Exploring the same topic, Jonathan Auerbach suggests that the mysterious old man—the narrator's double—is "call[ed] forth" from the glass that serves as both "window and mirror, and instrument of self-reflection and vision" (30).

aggressive. But when someone takes up binoculars or some similar object and does the same thing behind closed doors, the socio-ethical implications are much graver and almost border on visual abuse. From the viewpoint of Poe's story, not only does the narrator indulge in a muted form of visual abuse (since he is deriving visual pleasures unseen behind the "smoky window panes"), but he also commits social abuse as evident in his language of classification of the ranks of people he witnesses—while "the *tribe* of clerks" have "supercilious lips" and "wore the cast off graces of the gentry," the other clerks, "the upper clerks of staunch firms" had "bald heads, from which the right ears [...] had an odd habit of standing off on end," and "theirs was the affectation of respectability..." (389,390). Also, the narrator watches the "passengers" not in the sense of a general interest he seemed to project in the initial part of his perusal; he scrutinizes them and forms knowledge of their characters based on mere appearances. The distance between the coffee house and the crowd is never specified by the narrator, but he can discern the Jew Pedlars "with hawk eyes flashing from countenances whose every other feature wore only an expression of *abject humility*," and the "modest young girls" shrinking "*more tearfully than indignantly* from the glances of ruffians, whose direct contact, even, could not be avoided" (391) (my italics). If we see the principles of CCTV as being applicable here, then the details resulting from close observation make sense because modern day technology can literally "zoom in," if necessary, on any particular subject of interest for a closer inspection. Also, as Susan Elizabeth Sweeney points out, "the narrator's examination of the crowd thus mimics the process of optical magnification, which makes the image of an object appear bigger and sharper, as if it

were closer to the eye, although it remains far away as ever" (6). David Brewster's influence on Poe has been documented in the previous chapter and here, Brewster's illustration of this point anticipates the narrator's close scrutiny of the "tumultuous heads":

> If one looks at a man from a distance…his general outline only will be seen, and neither his age, nor his features, nor his dress will be recognized. When he is brought gradually near to us, we discover the separate parts of his dress, till at the distance of a few feet we perceive his features; and when brought still nearer we can count his very eye-lashes, and observe the minutest lines upon his skin. (48)

Even without going into any delineation of the laws of optics involved here, the coffee house in "The Man of the Crowd" is arguably situated far enough from the crowd to protect those inside it, and any London street during Poe's time would have been flanked by pavements that could fit four to five people side by side. We are never told in the story that the narrator has any ocular object like a pair of binoculars[11] for a closer inspection of his crowd.[12] He seems to peer more and more closely at passersby even while he remains inside, keeping his distance from them. So, his close-up analysis of the facial expressions and corresponding inner emotions of the crowd have arguably more to do with a projection of his imaginative and perhaps superior understanding of the human race than

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[11] Binoculars/Telescopes were invented more than a century before Poe was born and would have been easily accessible to the nineteenth-century American people.

[12] Ray Mazurek points out that he repeatedly describes "the crowd in terms of eyes, gazes, glances," and chooses words that connote "jarring, discord, sudden juxtapositions which shock one into insight, into a new and vivid state of perception" (26).

any real visual perception.

Related to vision and/or perception, an important aspect of the tale that has arguably gone unnoticed is whether the narrator drinks "coffee" or some other "dyspeptic *truffe*" (753)[13] inside the coffee house. Nineteenth-century coffee-houses were not only places for socializing and intellectual exchange of ideas over a cup of coffee, but they also sold cheap forms of alcoholic beverages.[14] The narrator is never explicitly mentioned as drinking coffee, but hints exist in the narrative that suggest intoxication. Ample textual evidence shows that the narrator might be hallucinating and physically unwell. For example, when he is pursuing the old man through a slight drizzle, the narrator observes, "For my own part, I did not much regard the rain—the lurking of an old fever in my system rendering the moisture somewhat too dangerously pleasant" (393). Weinstock observes that "both these elements—the presence of illness and the enjoyment of danger (which recalls Poe's discussion of perversity in 'The Imp of the Perverse') qualify the objectivity and enhanced powers of perception that the narrator claims to possess" (58). In other instances, the narrator betrays a more than acute sense of perception, something that is ludicrous and far-fetched. From the inside of the coffee house, behind the bow window with glass panes, the narrator is able to hear the "passengers" and "their guarded lowness of tone in their conversations" (390). In addition, as Kevin J. Hayes observes,

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[13] This is a phrase from Poe's "Angel of the Odd," a curious tale of encounter with an angel that arguably results from drinking too much.

[14] Just like the tavern, the coffee stall also served as a "labour exchange" and meeting-place for both the working and the jobless men of the industrial proletariat; not only was weak, chicory-based coffee available, but cheap schnapps also enabled customers to drown their sorrows and forget the deplorable conditions of their everyday lives.

"given the physical condition of the coffeehouse window, it seems remarkable that Poe's narrator is able to discern the identities of the various types of people outside…; since he describes the coffeehouse window as an assembly of 'smoky panes,' the narrator has apparently exchanged an internal mist for an external one" (451). Given such circumstances under which the narrator functions, it is hardly plausible that the narrator is in complete control of his senses.

According to Erich Schienke, "drawing from Foucault in his description of the Greek *parrhesiastes* ('person possessing free speech') provides us with insight into the role the surveillance camera players…are playing in the open criticism of public surveillance" (356). Schienke elaborates on the concept and tells us that "*parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to the truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people" (358). He finds the SCPs as exponents of *parrhesia* because they are "frank truth-sayers who gently and humorously remind us that the rampant growth of public surveillance, as a socio-technical cybernetic feedback loop gone awry, is something we *should* be uneasy with and feel nauseated about" (356, 357). Interestingly, what Schienke sees as the connection between SCPs and *parrhesia* can be indirectly applied to "The Man of the Crowd." If the narrator is seen as the embodiment of public surveillance, he is also the *parrhesiastes* because the tale starts with the narrator's viewpoints on secrets and crime, and his narrative comes to a full circle when it ends with the repetition of the idea of the book that refuses itself to be read. The narrative is fashioned in a motion of circularity; whether his narrative is true or not cannot be answered, but his intent to warn

his readers of the impending crimes cocooned within men's bosoms cannot be missed. It is easy to agree with Weinstock's interpretation that "the enigmatic man the narrator pursues presumably desires crowds because he finds solitude unbearable" and "rather than desiring to be alone, the man seeks crowds to lose the sense of himself as isolated through merging with the other" (54). However, the *narrator* himself is arguably *the man of the crowd*; while pursuing the "strange" man, he loses himself in this maze of urban surging until he is ready to give up because the old man "is the type and genius of deep crime" (396). As Paul Downes puts it, "the narrator is in fact cocooned by the public: the public coffee house and its customers surround him on the inside, the crowd of the London street surround him from the outside, and a newspaper keeps him company," so "what this man enjoys, perhaps, is the illusion of absolute solitude that only a public space and democratic culture can offer" (33). He is baffled because he cannot fathom the old man's complexity; we as readers can see that he is just as complex and confused as the old man in the tale because if the narrator can come to the conclusion that "he [the old man] refuses to be alone" (396), the same is applicable to him as well. Why does the narrator follow him in the first place? Why does he read so many traits in the man's face in such a short span of time? Why does the narrator persist with the old man through the day without any particular reason? Interestingly then, the narrator's *parrhesia* is one of self-folding ironies just as CCTVs purportedly keep a regular tab on the possible impending crimes by scanning everything and everybody that comes within the visual range of their lenses.

Inherent in such security systems is also the principle of spying and

reconnaissance. Meant for the public good, the device is aimed at reducing the crime rate and improving the overall security of the public at large, and the obvious way to do it is to scan the immediate vicinity and pinpoint any suspicious activity. In a parallel dynamism of spying and reconnaissance, when the narrator sees the old man for the first time, a crowded mélange of impressions storm his mind. He experiences mostly negative vibes that associate the old man with crime and vice, "the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of extreme despair" (389). If we see the narrator as a personified CCTV from here on (since he follows the old man into the crowd), then his interest in the crowd and the old man becomes fraught with a unique socio-psychological complexity: the narrator is projecting his innermost desires and qualities onto the old man, while retaining his self-control and panopticism in judging the old man as a paradoxical character loaded with contradictions. Arguably, we can see a self-projection here because some of the characteristics attributed to the old man have already been exhibited by the narrator till this point in the tale—-vast mental power (the narrator thinks he has it), caution (he exercises it throughout his narrative), coolness (the narrator thoroughly soaks in the "delicious novelty of emotions"), and merriment (for him, "merely to breathe was enjoyment"). From here on, the narrative takes the form of a quest for knowledge, a search of something intangible, undecided, and undefined. The narrator is singularly "aroused, startled, fascinated" by the old man and exclaims, "[h]ow wild a history...is written within that bosom!"(391). The narrator presumes that the old man has a "history" and wants to be privy to its secrets; the desire for control has shifted

from something general (the crowd) to a specific individual (the old man) so that the narrator can journey into the old man's "heart of darkness" and become his "secret sharer"; the old man's face "at once arrest[ed] and absorb[ed]" the narrator's "whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasies of its expression" (392).

Pertaining to his desire for dominance and control of his crowd/environment, the narrator comments that "the wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in the brief interval of a glance, the history of long years" (392). Interestingly, the narrator here, as other narrators of Poe, finds it necessary to justify his acute sense of perception just before he is about to embark on this career of pursuing the man of the crowd. The narrator engages in interplay of knowledge and perception: he knows that his extensive scrutiny of the crowd till now might be interpreted as far-fetched because of the "rapidity" with which "the world of light flitted before the window," yet he has the confidence in his "then peculiar mental state" to be able to discern "the history of long years" in the faces that pass by him (392). Through this dual interplay, he gains control not only over the crowd, which is his object of interest; the narrator gains ascendancy over his audience on the textual level about the possible authenticity of his narrative. He precludes any reason to justify those powers with which "I could frequently read" the inner lives of the crowd and with which he scans the history of "the decrepit old man" (392). According to Susan Sweeney Elizabeth, "in 'The Purloined Letter' and 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue,' we

have a suggestion to solve the paradoxical problem of how seeing the obvious requires the willed postponing of perception and conceptualizing, the avoidance of direct, immediate conclusions" (6). We can see then that "The Man of the Crowd" works exactly the opposite way because "...like Poe's later detectives—especially Dupin, whose deductions lead to a single nail in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' and a single card rack in 'The Purloined Letter—he [the narrator here] progresses from a broad overview of 'aggregate relations' to a narrow focus on significant details" (7).

The narrator's role is akin to an institutionalized system of surveillance because he frames his narrative in a language of crime and detection before moving on to his visual and literal pursuit of the crowd and the old man respectively. He regulates and manages his perception of human activity in whichever way he finds suitable: he discerns "women of the town of all kinds" and some with "thick sensual lips, and hearty-looking rubicund faces"; men with "eyes hideously wild and red, and who clutched with quivering fingers, as they strode through the crowd, at every object which came within their reach"; and "exhausted laborers of every description, and all full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear, and gave an aching sensation to the eye" (391, 392). As Yar points out, "it is necessary to examine the question of social control in relation to the institution, that is to say, the instrument for the conscious and planned management of socialized human activity" (256). Whether the narrator exercises control in a "neutral" way is a matter of conjecture, but in terms of its production or its reception, he replicates the dialectic of the power struggle that exists between the SCPs and the surveillance authorities. The surveillance camera players

believe that "[w]e use our visibility—our public appearances, our interviews with the media, and our website—to explode the cynical myth that only those who are 'guilty of something' are opposed to being surveyed by unknown eyes" ("Streets into Stages"). The repressed tension that exists between the society's controlling authorities and the players is similar to the subterranean flow of reciprocal power and control generated between the old man and the narrator. While the surveillance camera players try to resist being "mythologized" as anti-establishment elements through their visibility, the surveyors fear that visibility because it epitomizes the potentiality of mishap or an uncertain threat.

Interestingly, the narrator unconsciously embarks in a game of reciprocity, but one that doesn't involve the old man in a direct way—the latter represents an intangible discomfort that counters the narrator's confidence and cocksureness. As mentioned earlier, the element of control and power emanating from a surveillance system is negated if the subject in question resists such control. Here, the old man, arguably like the SCPs and yet unknowingly, holds the mirror (signs and symbols) up to the narrator, whereby the latter finds himself increasingly fascinated to pursue the former. From the outside, we as readers can safely infer that if by the end of the story, we haven't been able to learn anything about the old man, we don't know any more of the narrator's "history" either. It is equally important to realize "how wild a history" is also pent up inside the narrator's heart, and in this game of cat-and-mouse split three ways—the narrator, the old man, and the readers—there is no clear-cut winner because the whole narration is an endless cycle of initiation and re-initiation into the heart of a mystery that "inspires a craving desire to keep the man in view" (392). The "man in view," from the viewpoint of textual narrative,

is the old man; from a reader's viewpoint, it is the narrator and, through him, back to the old man again. As Jeffrey Weinstock points out, the tale "is structured around a double regressive movement initiated by the inscrutability of the phantasmagoric man of the crowd…the reader follows the narrator who simultaneously follows and confronts an inscrutable third person" (57). Labeling such movement of circularity as "hermeneutic circling," Weinstock observes that the narrator's actions and the narrative movement are fueled by the desire to know more of the man of the crowd and "similarly, the unknown at the core of the text that keeps the reader engaged is also the enigmatic nature of the man of the crowd" (57).

Schienke observes that the surveillance camera players pose "no physical threat, but make the authorities noticeably nervous. On the other hand, SCPs are themselves nervous because of what they perceive to be a failure in the public to openly recognize what is at stake in the growth of the surveillance society" (357). As discussed earlier, the Foucauldian concept that encapsulates power, knowledge, and control ties in with the idea of panopticism, but the urban space has multiple possibilities of encounters among individuals that are absent in constricted spaces like jails or mad houses. Hence, panopticon metamorphoses into "polyopticon" and in "The Man of the Crowd," the polyopticism is fleshed out in the narrator's pursuit of the old man because, unlike the crowd, the "decrepit" stranger refuses to be set into type. The narrator has to adopt polyvalent modes of seeing because anonymous spying and glass-filtered scrutiny do not fetch the narrator any solution to the "absolute idiosyncrasy of its [the man's face] expression" (392); arguably, the face appears more idiosyncratic due to its heightened

contrast with the surrounding crowd.[15] The old man is just an extension of the crowd and unconsciously protests surveillance by refusing to be read in a conclusive manner, confusing the narrator by possible tokens of mysteriousness: "my vision deceived me, or through a rent in a closely-buttoned and evidently second-handed *roquelaure* which enveloped him, I caught a glimpse both of a *diamond* and a *dagger*. These observations heightened my curiosity, and I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go" (393). From the viewpoint of surveillance strategies, the narrator's inability to leave the old man on his own has multiple connotations: stealthily surveying his subject without the latter's knowledge, the narrator replicates the urban space where the thin line dividing "security" and "violation of privacy" collapses. It is obvious that the narrator is not operating in a scenario similar to that of the surveillance systems, but the intentions are nonetheless comparable—any interesting or "suspicious" subject in the visual range should be scrutinized, even if this close scanning borders on the abusive.[16]

Anonymity is not sustained until the end, for the narrator finally confronts the old man flush in his face: "As the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face

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[15] As Sweeney points out, "the animated throng simply refuses to stay still and be looked at—or rather, in terms of Freud's notion of the uncanny, it keeps coming back to life despite the narrator's repeated efforts to fix it with his gaze" (9). In addition, according to Richard A. Berk, "it can be argued that crowds evolve through circular reaction, a type of interstimulation wherein the response of one individual reproduces the stimulation that has come from another individual and in being reflected back to this individual reinforces this stimulation" (355).

[16] Saetnan, et al. observe that sometimes security guards have been found to indulge in voyeurism through surveillance cameras fitted in public restrooms and ladies' changing rooms and even though these are non-confrontational, these practices are

(396). However, the old man doesn't notice him and resumes his walk. The old man's deportment in this particular instance squarely anticipates the SCPs' agenda. As Yar notes, the surveillance camera players "attempt to *reverse* the uni-directionality of the gaze, such that "'the guardians of the spectacle' are themselves turned into objects of moral judgment," and "by 'looking them in the eye,' the Players run an 'interpellative' gaze back along the line of visibility, and use this counter-specularity to effect a judgment that…mocks the seriousness of the surveillance endeavor (let *them* know how silly *we* think *they* are)…" (266). The narrator indeed is made to look silly because nothing is revealed by the end as the old man blankly stares in his face and walks off. The old man unconsciously subverts the economy of the narrator's visual power and inadvertently robs him of his voyeuristic pleasure.

According to Liainos, a "technological system is by definition a system of control of a certain environment… [and] when this environment has a direct link with socialized human behavior, the social universe is faced with new constraints" (416). It can be pointed out that in urban environments, control is regulated based on degrees of non-conformity, whether someone adheres to the societal norms or not. Occasionally, control is generated when it is not meant to produce a controlling effect. In Poe's tale, mere curiosity in the crowd becomes the narrator's controlling device of his environment as he is inadvertently drawn into a power struggle because the old man appears "suspicious" in relation to a norm. The narrator follows the old man through "the busy bazaar" where he entered "shop after shop, priced nothing, spoke no word," and this unexplained behavior

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abusive due to their uni-dimensional exercise of visual control and authority.

makes him firmly resolved that "we should not part until I had satisfied myself in some measure respecting him" (394). Jeffrey Weinstock observes that the narrator's actions prove that the crowd is an extension of the old man and that "in terms of the story's plot, of course, the crowd disperses so that the desperate old man must seek it again elsewhere, thus revealing his pathological solitude" (54). Still, it is curiously unsettling that the narrator is "desperate" to keep the old man in sight and, by extension, the crowd. Indeed, the narrator doesn't part with the old man until he passes a satisfactory comment on the latter's character: he "is the type and genius of deep crime" and "it will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds" (396). Interestingly, the observation holds true of the narrator as well because we don't know with what real intention he follows the old man and, as readers, we shall learn no more of the narrator, nor of his deeds. The tale's circularity is firmly entrenched in the psycho-social power struggle enacted in this urban space with no finality to the character of the man of the crowd. As Susan Sweeney remarks, "the story's unusual ending suggests, in fact, that Poe found himself unable to imagine any perspective—either distant or magnified, or close-up and unmediated—from which the masses could be satisfactorily explained, understood and controlled" and acknowledges Poe's own inability to master the crowd and the "perverse, messy, unruly social or political or cultural forces that it embodies" (10). That the tale ends unsatisfactorily (the tale begins and ends with the narrator "absorbed in contemplation") is testimonial to the powerful forces that this crowd embodies. The reader along with the narrator is left to contemplate the real significance of such surveillance. CCTVs exercise control in our daily lives without us having a conscious

realization of their existence everywhere, and Surveillance Camera Players try to evoke expressly that consciousness for the purpose of social enlightenment and awareness towards surveillance. What happens in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" is surveillance through anonymity that highlights the elements of control, anonymous power, and subjectivity integral to the contemporary tussle between CCTV authorities and the Surveillance Camera Players. As Weinstock states, "the paradoxical notion in 'The Man of the Crowd' is that the crowd simultaneously constructs and subsumes individual identity—that identity is both lost and found within the uncanny 'throng' that is itself alive, even as it seems to deaden its constituent members" (55). While applying Foucauldian notions of subjectivity and control to this tussle provides a newer understanding of Poe's fictional creativity, applicability of the laws of CCTV and SCPs to "The Man of the Crowd," even though limited, yields an interesting study of the titular man of the crowd and fleshes out a unique relationship between the surveyor and the surveyed in the tale.

Chapter 4--The Anthropocentric Vision:

Aesthetics of Effect and Terror in Poe's "Hop-Frog"

In 1996, Gabriele Rippl wrote a seminal essay on the connection between Edgar Allan Poe and anthropology, formulating an unusual approach to Poe's fiction and how we, as readers, are supposed to appreciate it. Re-examining Poe's aesthetics (specifically in those tales that deal with the body or the essential physicality of the characters), Rippl argues, would lead us to a realization that it is the readers who are indirectly the author of these tales. In other words, one can generate meaning from these texts provided one is able to discern Poe's vision as directed towards a reader-centric anthropology, whereby the author's aesthetics of terror are but a measure of his readers' responsiveness. As Rippl puts it, "[a] discussion of the anthropological impact of Poe's literary texts shows that his real interest is not so much in representing current conceptions of man, but rather the anthropology of the reader," and "it is not the examination of the body as such that interests Poe but the aesthetic effects to be achieved by this detailed presentation" (228, 231-32). In addition, Rippl observes that just as Poe's protagonists become victims of their self-generated terrors, the readers are "victims" of Poe's aesthetics of the unity of effect, something that has been termed "aesthetics" of terror.

That Poe wrote his fiction keeping a particular body of readers in mind and with the aim of generating a particular effect is not a hallowed secret. Most notably, Teresa Goddu and Terence Whalen in their book-length studies have successfully demonstrated how Poe was not only firmly grounded in the socio-cultural moorings of his own time, but also his aesthetics of effect were directly related to the penny-press magazines and

other journals that were being voraciously published and devoured in keeping with the contemporary literary culture. The current turn in Poe studies—and the wheels are not slowing down as yet—is to contextualize and contemporize Poe within the antebellum American culture. This method of contemporizing Poe then is nothing but an exercise in anthropology. As Herbert Grabes points out, "[t]he growing interest in culture, or rather cultures, speaks for…cultural anthropology," and "in this case, literature will be considered mainly as a cultural product providing evidence of the particular features of the culture within which it is produced" (17). What Grabes observes about "cultural anthropology" is traceable in Poe's fiction because he generally projects his narrators into extreme conditions/states of being in the context of their immediate socio-cultural surroundings. Even a cursory review of Poe's tales reveals that he was deeply and thoroughly concerned with the crises confronting Man, his existence, and his philosophical truths. It doesn't matter whether Poe hated what he called "the mob," revered the elite, or churned out tales of horror with an alarming ease. What matters is that he engaged in probing the essentials of mind-body dichotomy that point to larger concerns affecting the human psyche. Whether satires, hoaxes, "arabesques," or "grotesques," Poe envisioned and revealed the minds of men possessing various degrees of sanity, intelligence, physical characteristics, and the like to highlight Man's existential crisis. As readers, we can understand and appreciate Poe's anthropocentrism by re-evaluating his fiction with respect to his essential ideas of the human being, both as a social animal and a cultural trope.

Gabriele Rippl uses four tales from Poe's *oeuvre*—"Ligeia" (1838), "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842), and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845)—to demonstrate how Poe exploited his readers' anthropology to generate meaning and achieve his aesthetic of unity and terror. Graves' concept of the reader-centric anthropology is particularly suitable for Poe's fiction. "The anthropology of the reader" in Poe's fiction would mean that the readers' reactions and attitudes towards specific tropes of horror or cruelty are directly proportional to and built upon their inherent tolerance or repugnance towards such visions of atrocity. From a personal viewpoint, the concept is similar to the reader-response theory of criticism, but with more emphasis on the readers' emotional constitution; their preconceived and deep-seated reactions to terror and violence impute significance to the goings-on in a particular tale and accordingly render it terrifying/grotesque. In these tales, Rippl sees various dichotomies (ideal-real, mind-body, natural-supernatural) that work their way through the respective narratives to reveal, at every turn, disturbing images of potential violence, terror, and grotesquerie aimed to shock and surprise the readers. Most importantly, Rippl reads Poe's visions of bodily torture or physical "limitlessness" in these tales as examples of transcending idealism and embracing the crass physicality of human existence:

> "Poe…seems to revalorize matter and corporeality, while mind and spirituality lose their pre-eminence and priority," and "as a by-product of this revalorization—which is unintentional…Poe helped to transform one of the basic dualities of Western philosophy, mind and matter/body into a dialectical unit" (238-39).

This essay demonstrates how Poe's "Hop-Frog" (1849) not only fruitfully yields an anthropological examination of the aforesaid aspects of the author's fiction, but also fittingly generates a heightened texture of horror, violence, and aesthetics of terror by literally visualizing the psycho-social evolution of a semi-anthropoid figure, which encapsulates in itself the extremities of physical deformity and mental acuity, a combination that was both popular and feared in nineteenth-century America. Even though "Hop-Frog" is a relatively lesser known work in Poe's *oeuvre*, it has generated diverse critical responses. While James Harrison as early as 1902 interpreted the titular character's sensitivity to drink as an autobiographical reference to his author's low tolerance for alcohol, Harvey Allen observes that it is an allegorical tale where Imagination (Hop-Frog) and Fancy (Trippetta) are sought to be enslaved by Reality (the King) (357). Along similar lines, John Bryant observes that "[m]ore explicit in its satiric intent and symbolic use of the Ourang-Outan [than 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' and 'The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether'], 'Hop-Frog' is a[n] allegorization of Poe's relationship to his reader...as well his darkest comedic self-portrait" (44). While Marie Bonaparte's oedipal reading of the tale is (in)famous[1], James Gargano in 1976 saw it as exemplification of Poe's "masquerade vision," in which "mankind's *hubris* and insignificance" are exposed (12). More recently, a notable essay that damns Poe with faint praise is Ruth Clements's "On a Merry-Go-Round Named Denial: Critics, 'Hop-

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[1] See Bonaparte (510-14). In her study, Bonaparte sees Hop-Frog as Poe the child who was "carried off forcibly" by the King and his ministers (John Allan). Even Trippetta, according to Bonaparte, is Elizabeth Arnold; this dwarf suffers due to the King's tortures and "the relative proportions of mother and son are to some extent preserved, for *Trippetta* is less dwarfish than her friend, the jester" (511).

Frog,' and Poe." Clements argues that "Poe's genius cannot be explained by his alcoholism; but his alcoholism *is* inextricably linked to his life, to his fiction, and to his critical theories" (145). The revenge motif was highlighted and dealt with some considerable detail by J. Gerald Kennedy and Kenneth Silverman. While the former observes that "Poe effaced the psychic complications of violence to articulate a fantasy of revenge [accomplished] with impunity" (33), Silverman sees "Hop-Frog" as a briskly narrated tale of revenge," which dramatizes Poe's own grievances against "a small army of people by whom he had come to feel abused and misled...." (406-07). Two readings that contrast each other and pair off in a sense are provided by Stephen L. Mooney and Bruce Martin. While the former reads the tale as essentially funny, the latter observes that "[t]he ultimate effect of the story is horror, a moral recoil from the excesses of the dwarf's revenge and from the cruelty it reflects" (308).

In more recent times, slavery and racial readings of Poe's works have assumed greater significance and more than a few critics have commented on this aspect of the tale. Ronald Gottesman sees "Hop-Frog" as a story depicting slavery, but adds that Poe was "profoundly ambivalent about Blacks and the institution of slavery" and that "he [Poe] believed himself intellectually and morally superior to the mass of men—black and white—and had an aristocratic contempt for the world, but another part of this painfully divided man identified with the wretched of the earth out of anguish of his own experience as outsider and bottom-dog" (139). Similarly, Joan Dayan observes that "Poe uses his materials—outcasts, beasts, psychopaths—to reflect on the status of persons and property," and sees "Hop-Frog" as "a final joke on the gentry both North and South, who

with tortuous ingenuity defined property in women, workers, and slaves, fixing them and their progeny in their status and location, kept low down in the hierarchy of entitlements" (412).

Other readings focus on the role of the narrator in the tale. David Ketterer asserts that the narrator, "an outsider, as if to ensure objectivity," is telling a tale of Hop-Frog and his alter ego. Assigning the king, his ministers and Trippetta various facets of Hop-Frog's character, Ketterer suggests that the ascent of any to a higher state or descent to a lower state is in proportion to the social mobility of the others (112). He also adds that the connection between Hop-Frog and his king is so tenuous that the division appears to be complete and the immolation of the outcast a mere formality (114). Scott Bradfield asserts that "Poe's stories are always about power and the man who wields the most power in any Poe work is always Poe himself" (81). Katrina Bachinger suggests that Hop-Frog's fiery revenge in his "last jest" correlates with the experience of Poe, a "a near suicidal author who portrays himself departing his life victoriously after having appropriately reduced the tasteless critics who had attacked him to a 'a fetid.....indistinguishable mass' an emblem for the mob much despised by Poe" (392). A particularly noteworthy reading of the tale in the context of popular culture is by Mary Lucas who observes that Poe was attuned to the thespian works of his time and frequently incorporated them in his works, and "[n]ot only was he alert to many aspects of drama and theatre, but his interest in the overlapping and mixing of genres is clearly evident, as is his awareness of the technicalities involved in production" (29).

All these diverse readings provide effective insights into the possible sources and impressions that could have influenced the composition of "Hop-Frog"; however, *how* Poe exploited visual images of the physical body to elicit horror and *why* he combined four creatures—frog, dwarf, ape, and man—into a single identity could be further understood from the viewpoint of an anthropological reading of the tale. The interesting question that arises is how Poe combined the elements of anthropological inquisition and popular culture in "Hop-Frog" and to what ends. That Poe was exploiting the contemporary fascination with and popularity of exotic creatures will be eventually demonstrated in this essay, but he was simultaneously working on something else in "Hop-Frog": through exploration of the human(ist) element, Poe turns his anthropocentric enquiry on its head by generating sub-human terror that reflects his readers' anthropology. As the narrative progresses, through an escalating intensity of visual tropes, the emphasis shifts from the bodily limitations of characters to de-limiting the body whereby, paradoxically, the body controls the mind and not vice-versa. Gabriel Rippl points out that "referring to the human body and its language is indispensable exactly because it helps to increase the identification of the reader with the protagonist and therefore allows Poe to augment the effect of terror" (231). In other words, deformed, grotesque, and later, charred bodies control the readers' imagination in such a way that the author's aesthetics of terror becomes the readers' own.

Anthropology and the Literary Text

Anthropology as a discipline and field of study is quite extensive and subject to various interpretations and perceptions. While noted anthropologist Eric Wolf described anthropology as "the most scientific of the humanities, and the most humanistic of the sciences" (88), according to Jean-Jacques Lecercle, "[a]nthropology deals with the constitution of identity through the separation between the collective self and various others," and there is a "double otherness of anthropology, as its object is the conceptions other cultures have of themselves, but also of others, including us" (1). While discussing anthropology, Sir Edward Taylor in 1871 defined culture as "that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society" (Beattie 20). The fact that culture and anthropology can be considered as a dialectical unit seems redundant because anthropology as a field revolves around human beings and their essential existence on earth, and as Grabes points out, "this has to do with the fact that from the very beginning anthropologists have adhered to a holistic conception of culture" (18).[2] If we consider this "holistic" aspect of culture, most ethical and philosophical concepts come under its umbrellaic purview, according to which everything is held together by an overarching *ideology*. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, "the semiotic ideology, represented by

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[2] Herbert Grabes points out interesting connections among culture, aesthetics, and anthropology. He posits that culture itself is "an ensemble of texts," a smorgasbord of sign systems constructed over longer periods of time and shared by a collective, and "if we follow the early Roland Barthes in viewing the sign systems of a culture preeminently as value systems, the favorite stories of a culture can tell us a lot about what is treasured, accepted, rejected, or even fiercely hated within that culture" (18).

Barthes' notion of *myth*, Foucault's concept of *episteme*, and Clifford Geertz's 'ensemble of texts' become accessible in the form of shared code" (33). In other words, because these and other similar codes and concepts (devised by scholars engaged in epistemological and ontological truths) have come to define human existence and lend significance to its meaning, they derive their significance only from being a part of that cultural whole. Even the "four-field" theory of anthropology—physical anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, social/cultural anthropology—can be seen as subsumed in the concept of culture in the sense that human beings are social animals and their behavioral and living patterns assume significance only in the context of the immediate culture that they inhabit. Whether it is an exploration of humans' speech patterns or the physical remnants of their hoary ancestors, anthropological research reveals factual analysis of their type that is not independent of their culture. To cite a specific example, Clifford Geertz saw the tendency of anthropologists to neglect cultural particularities and "embrace bloodless universals" as symbolic of an "unhealthy fear of historicism" (52). According to him, humankind is to be defined neither by its inherent capabilities nor by its actual behaviors alone, but rather by the link between them, by the way in which the first is transformed into the second.

Cultural signs and codes are the immediate tools for defining culture itself, thereby reflecting its essential principles. A literary artist then has to embrace both the cultural whole and impute meaning to the "texts" within in ways that his/her readers can imagine, *idea*-lize, and interpret (my italics). In other words, the readers themselves become subjects of anthropology because in perusing and exploring these cultural

byproducts of the artist, the readers read about themselves—a cultural meta-narrative of sorts.[3] The ideal (the artist's text) becomes the real (the actual world outside) for the reader because the text reflects what the existent culture demands, and an anthropocentric enquiry of that text revolves around its aesthetic quality and the effect generated upon its readers. Herbert Grabes posits that "if there is an anthropological turn in literary studies, literary scholars can make up for it, provided they pay sufficient attention to the anthropological function of the aesthetic" (18). Considering the aesthetic effect as the core principle of a work of art, the effect generated by the work ideally reflects its culture's preferences. What we understand as common sense or practical might not have been applicable to the people of the previous century, and the same principle would apply to our progenitors. For example, a *Tom Jones* or a *Wuthering Heights* for obvious reasons would generate different responses than *Midnight's Children* or *Lord of the Rings*; however, the authors of these works did not leave any stone unturned in generating that aesthetic effect proper to the culture of that era. However, the fact that we as readers can appreciate and understand these varied works in a different era reflects *our* anthropocentrism that is proportional to the generated aesthetic effect, i.e. as readers, to

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[3] According to W.H. Murdy, "to be anthropocentric is to affirm that mankind is to be valued more highly than other things in nature—by man," and also "the recognition that an individual's well being depends on the well being of...its social group" (1168, 1169). This particular emphasis on Man and his primordial place in the socio-cultural ladder might seem overwrought with humanism, but a given literary text can always yield itself to an anthropological enquiry because of its general preoccupation with issues concerning mankind. Valentine Cunningham observes that "[w]ith certain variations of stress and subject to different degrees of emphasis, the activities of writing, of story-telling, the business of literature production, have sought, and still seek, endlessly to figure, imagine, to present the human—man, mankind, humankind—both in general and particular" (45).

what degree we impute significance to the tribulations of mankind in the "texts" and perceive the author's purpose and meaning.

Margaret Sutrop observes that "[c]ulture is a social construction established over time and sustained by consensus," and "[i]t is not just law, public morality, institutionalized codes of behavior or ethics that count, and beyond these is the 'normal' way people think, feel and experience 'reality'" (82). Experiencing reality is a matter of perception and, as mentioned earlier, what appears as conventional in a particular culture is indeed determined by *common* sense, and other forms of "reality" might seem bohemian and out of this world. Sutrop adds that we are able to envisage unfamiliar ideas because they come to us in art through *aesthesis* (sense perceptions), and in literature through the parallel sensory imagination triggered by vivid images; in addition, these images, causing amazement because we see them for the first time, resemble "*thaumazein* that is held to be the origin of philosophy" (22). What Sutrop mentions here as *thaumazein* appears in Plato's *Theatetus*, a dialogue revolving around the nature of knowledge between Socrates and Theatetus. *Thaumazein* comes from the word "Thaumus" (wonder), who is considered to be the child of Iris (the messenger of heaven). However, Iris is also a part of the human eye, and extending the analogy, we can see that *Thaumazein* occurs when we can imagine through our perceptive powers/mental eye. The aesthetic wonder that we derive from a work and our response to/visualization of it is similar to the task of an anthropologist, who assimilates disparate elements into a single, meaningful whole and imputes significance to it, i.e. the manner in which cultural elements (material objects, behaviors, ideas) "are integrated into a *functional* whole,

rather than to enumerate all the separate parts" (Angrosino 42). Anthropology by this definition is holistic and includes constructivist and homogenous elements in its method, and it is this constructive process that *re*creates a culture for an anthropologist, a process that is similar to what literary artists accomplish by coalescing different fictional and non-fictional elements in a written text. As Klaus Peter Muller points out, the creation (by writers) and responsive re-creation (by readers) of fictional as well as non-fictional texts is a comparable procedure (67).[4]

The anthropological process in literary studies is a two-way traffic whereby the author presents us with a cluster of cultural tropes/images (through the particular text) that engage in exploration of different aspects of the human, the sub-human, or the super-human. We as readers, on the other hand, engage in active re-construction of these tropes in our minds, and the aesthetic effect generated therein is but a reflection of our tastes and preferences. Daniel C. Dennett's definition of "The Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity" is perhaps the most concrete example of such quasi-philosophical inquiry.[5] According to Dennett, every human being is constantly involved in creating a narrative concerning his/her life, identity, role, function and meaning in society. In this concept of

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[4] See Iser (9). This dynamic of creation and re-creation is dependent upon our imagination and the images created, and Wolfgang Iser employs the term *Vorstellungsbildung* for imagination; it means that readers, even as they read, are engaged in the process of unconscious construction of images (*Bilder*). However, he differentiates between ideation *(Vorstellung)* as opposed to perception (*Wahrnehmung*) because in the former, we create something which is absent i.e. not real or not present, while in the latter, we perceive something which is already present. So, we think in images, and these images fill the lacunae created by the written word.

[5]Klaus Peter Muller (68). According to Muller, in Dennett's work, there is a strong link between science and the humanities as well as great emphasis on pragmatism.

human life, and of every individual's involvement in making his or her existence meaningful, "everyone is a novelist" (Muller 68). That everyman is a novelist would seem to suggest that for all anthropological ends, we the readers can become the detectives of our own puzzles and solve problems that riddle our lives through a close examination of the effects generated by a particular text (since it is but a reflection of culture). It is in our power as readers to imagine, visualize, and contextualize the aesthetic effects that the author is trying to generate.

Poe's Aesthetics, Morality and Anthropology

In the year before Edgar Allan Poe died, he came out with what he considered to be his best work, *Eureka* (1848). A smorgasbord of metaphysics, theology, and philosophical enquiry, *Eureka* propounded the author's unitary theory of art, nature and the human mind. This work made it seem that his aesthetic vision had reached its climax and that in all his previous tales he was struggling to come to terms with that *exact* theory (his ideation of the perfect aesthetic impulse) we find in *Eureka*. In addition, there is something else that Poe's vision always strove for and consistently so throughout his *oeuvre* and the following passage from "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) makes it clear:

> I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, "Of all the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the

> intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion select?" Having chosen a novel first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone...afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect. (13)

That Poe always strove for effect in his fiction and is (in)famous for it needs no renewed documentation. However, considering the fact that he tried to generate a particular desired effect, his chosen subject matter in fiction assumes a unique significance. A curious stumbling block that one can come across in considering Poe's *oeuvre* as that "*functional* whole" is the apparent compartmentalization of his tales. Tales of "ratiocination," "grotesque," or "arabesque" betray varying degrees of subtle effects that Poe liked to generate through his artistic vision. The single most prominent "effect" that Poe has been able to generate throughout the history of his tales' reception is that of horror/terror, and he achieved such distinction (notoriety?) through images of chopped-off heads, buried people coming to life, preplanned murders, death of the beloved, scheming and nefarious criminals, and other similar tropes. Even in tales of ratiocination and humor, we have decapitation and potential for violence.[6] In the previous section, what Herbert Grabes and other critics discuss about anthropocentric literature seems to be true about Poe's fiction; Poe's exploration of the contemporary cultural semiotics through his protagonists yields an interesting exercise in anthropocentrism because what is

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[6] Dupin runs into a murderer in the figure of an orangutan in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," while in "A Predicament," Zenobia has her head cut off by the scythe of Time.

essentially human (or depraved) in his tales comes through horrific (and sometimes ludicrous) visions of the mind-body dialectic. In addition, Herbert Grabes makes an interesting observation about the production of literature and its function in a culture that directly relates to what Poe's aesthetics had to offer:

> How is it possible that art and literature may indeed exert some changing influence within a culture when artists and writers produce it from "inside" and when viewers and readers approach it with the internalized values of that culture? If we are to attempt to answer this question at all, we must return to certain notions that have been anathematized in more recent theory: The "free" play of the artistic imagination and the professed functionlessness of artistic creations in terms of any particular cultural value system, their "uselessness" and at least relative "autonomy," which finds its subjective correlative in the Kantian notion of the "disinterested" stance of the beholder, listener, or reader. (21)

The fact that Poe's aesthetics was influenced partially by the German Transcendentalists and by Coleridge is well known, even though Poe most notably satirized the Transcendental idealism in "How to Write a Blackwood Article."[7] He also satirized Kant and the Boston "Frogpondians," but as Maurice Lee points out, Poe could be seen as sharing affinities with Romantic philosophy and Transcendentalism in part because he was influenced more by European Transcendentalism than that of Concord (758). Also, according to Thomas Hansen and Burton Pollin, a couple of ideas propounded by

[7] Psyche Zenobia is advised to "[p]ut in something about the Supernal Oneness. Don't say a syllable about the Infernal Twoness. Above all, study innuendo. Hint everything--assert nothing" ("How to Write" 283).

Coleridge were integral to Poe's aesthetic: unconscious production (the process through which the subjects create a phenomenological world of their own) and absolute identity (the concept of reality synthesizing object and subject) (80).[8] Poe even had affinities with Schelling because writing within the antebellum culture, Poe sought to discover dualism in life.[9] His anthropocentric inquiry into the workings of the human mind sought to interplay such dualism with the "free" play of his artistic imagination, and in doing so, assimilated various cultural motifs of early and mid-nineteenth America and demystified them for his reading public.

That Poe's aesthetics strove for the Unity of Being and his concept of absolute identity as revealed in *Eureka* is well known, and the fact that he praised *Biographia Literaria* as "an important service to the cause of psychological science" suggests that his aesthetics were determined by his sense of the human mind's potency (*Essays and Reviews* 188). Maurice Lee effectively sums up Poe's aesthetics:

Poe can be a stop on the road from Kant to Lacan. Influenced by unconscious

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[8] Burton and Pollin point out that by 1831, Poe was reading Coleridge and may have imbibed some versions of Transcendentalism from De Quincey, Carlyle, and de Stael. In addition, many of Poe's tales reflect the aesthetic that Coleridge expatiates in his *Biographia Literaria*: "All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject...During the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs" (*I* 255).

[9] Poe's "Loss of Breath" (1832) and "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838) refer to Schelling by name and thus arguably, Schelling had some influence Poe. Moreover, Schelling's ideas in *System of Transcendental Idealism* bear some kind of resemblance to Poe's idea of Unity of Being in *Eureka*. Schelling observes that just as natural science leads from realism to idealism, because it discovers laws of mind by investigating laws of nature, so transcendental philosophy leads from idealism to realism, because it discovers laws of nature by investigating laws of mind (228).

> production and intensely attentive to psychological states, Poe writes about the fraught relation between the hidden and recognized mind. Which is to say that Poe is less an uncanny predictor of psychoanalysis and more a thinker who participates in a history of subjectivity. (772)[10]

Curiously, what Poe tried to accomplish with the interplay of mind-body duality is apparent and yet not fully so. While his aesthetics did not arguably allow for morality or didactism to creep in, still Poe's readers cannot but feel that a particular tale had an inkling of some gigantic lesson to be learnt at the end. Poe apparently did not impart morals; we garner them through our reactions to his intended aesthetic effect.[11] We can almost listen to and imagine the walled-up Fortunato hollering long after we've read the tale; we can imagine what intemperance could do to us and wouldn't want to be in the shoes of the narrator of "The Black Cat;" "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" reveals what we should suppress—excessive discipline and rigidity of rule. Poe's

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[10] Maurice Lee points out that "by seeing art as an aid to freely willed reflection, Schelling and Coleridge conflate metaphysics, psychology, and aesthetics, for the creation and appreciation of beauty bring unconscious production to light, revealing absolute identity through what Coleridge calls art's 'synthetic and magical power'" in *Biographia I* (36) and *II* (16) (762). What Maurice Lee observes about Schelling and Coleridge is also true of Poe because in the process of striving for "Supernal Beauty," Poe coalesced aesthetics, psychology, and moral vision in *Eureka*.

[11] As Joseph Moldenhauer observes, "it will surely be pointed out that Poe banished 'the didactic' from the proper sphere of art [but] it might not be entirely whimsical to isolate one level of meaning on which Poe can be called a conventional moralist" (285). The much touted aesthetic "effect" that Poe apparently strives for in his tales depends on our morality—our anthropology is his and vice versa. Echoing similar sentiments to Moldenhauer, Rachel Polonsky correctly points out that "Poe's aesthetic theory is perhaps more remarkable for its effect that for its substance; more intriguing by virtue of its reception than for its content" (44).

morality is focused on and derives significance from the unity of effect, on the aspect of something beyond the tangible. In his review of Longfellow's *Ballads and Other Poems*, Poe's aesthetic theory makes it clear why he is so indifferent to moral issues. He argues that the "Moral sense," "Conscience," and "Duty" have, at best, "only collateral relations" with the primary concerns: for poetry it is "[t]*he Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*," and for prose fiction "*the unity or totality of interest*" (685). Since Poe mainly focused on creating the desired effect, his obsession with Man's potential for misdeeds and criminality finds its clearest exposition in the way *his characters* handled issues of morality (my italics) because they remain non-committal and yet cannot deny their involvement.[12] Poe strove for unity of effect and achieved it through his aesthetic vision of Man's struggle with issues that problematized universal moral principles.

Friedrich Von Schiller observes that while on most occasions, we are either victims of desire (through our sensibility and feeling) or victims of the moral law (through reason), we may find freedom in the experience of art because there "sensuousness and reason are active *at the same time*, but precisely for this reason they are mutually destructive of determining power" (33). This is exactly what Poe had in mind when he said that the artist should aim not for truthfulness—verisimilitude—as

[12] Edward Davidson, for example, observes, that "Poe removed all moral and religious considerations as far as possible from any social code or body of religious warrants" (192). In a universe in which there is "no other god but the self as god," each of the characters "in Poe's moral enquiries is his own moral arbiter, lodged in a total moral anarchy. Society has invented law and justice, but these are mere illusion and exact no true penalty" (194). Vincent Buranelli in his exploration of Poe's morality observes that the author "does not touch morality. Although his aesthetic theory admits that goodness may be a by-product of art, he himself does not look for it" and adds that the heinous crimes in his narratives stem from psychological probings and not from ethics (72).

much as for *ideality*; Reason and Taste vie for supremacy in the mind, but it is ultimately the holistic aesthetic effect generated that prevails and prevents any one particular faculty from dominating.[13] This view was revived by I.A. Richards in the twentieth century, when he spoke of the equilibrium of impulses, faculties and modes of awareness brought about by aesthetic experience in which opposing forces cancel each other out and leave the individual free (76). The aesthetic effect in Poe's fiction then derives its significance from the anthropocentric enquiry, its focus on the human body at war with the mind, the reciprocity between the objective and subjective consciousness. Stanley Cavell observes that Poe is perversely attuned to the skeptical potential of romantic philosophy, showing us "the recoil of a demonic reason, irrationally thinking to dominate earth…not to reject the world but rather to establish it" (138). Poe's images of the human body and "horrid laws" of the mind in his tales reveal then as much about the author's cultural moorings as his readers, and what Herbert Grabes mentions as "the professed functionlessness of artistic creations" (18) is true of Poe's anthropocentrism because it defies *common sense* and gives free reign to the imagination.

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[13] In "The Poetic Principle," Poe's "aesthetic" essay, he divides the human mind into three parts—the rational, the aesthetic, and the ethical faculties: "Dividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position which, in the mind, it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme…Nevertheless, we find the *offices* of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction" (76). He adds that mental faculties of human beings are threefold as well: "Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral sense is regardful of Duty" (76). The essay goes on to expatiate about these different facets of the human mind, but for our current purposes, it is important that Poe emphasized these mental faculties to *achieve the desired effect* in his fiction.

"I now see *distinctly:*" *De-limiting the Body in "Hop-Frog"*

Apes signify the primal stage of human evolution and intelligence, primates who blur the boundary between human beings and the animal kingdom. Klara O'Neill observes that "the ape figure itself has signaled a crisis in identity that questions the distinction between civilized and uncivilized animal and disputes the privileged characteristics of the human" (68). O'Neill adds that that the earliest Christian tradition considered the ape as the Devil incarnate due to its lack of prehensility and tendency for imitation. However, while its resemblance to mankind obviously stood out, mankind was less bothered by the ape's unclassifiable nature before the advent of Christianity. According to H.W. Janson, Christian zoology during the fourth or the fifth century established a connection between ape and devil based on physical attributes: he writes, "[the Devil] had a beginning, but he has no end; at the outset, he was one of the archangels, but his end is not in view. Now the ape, not having a tail, is without species, and his rear, without a tail, is vile; like the devil, he does not have a good end" (17). What the "ape" was considered (in a generalized sense) back then is what we now know as the chimpanzees, the orangutans, the baboons, and other tailless apes. Due to the conceptual fluidity of their physical identities, these creatures could be easily lumped together with other classic mythical beasts, and as O'Neill points out, "the lack of an early established hierarchy of creation allowed the ape to represent general human folly and sometimes criminality but never evil incarnate" (73). Janson in his historical enquiry of the ape provides a stimulating account of the relation between the earliest interest in the anthropoids and religion. He states that

> Graeco-Roman religion did not include an authoritative account of the creation of man…and nature abounded with hybrid creatures; satyrs, centaurs, hippocamps, etc. Little wonder that Pliny, Solinus, and other ancient polyhistorians did not doubt the existence of fabulous, semi-human races in the remote parts of the world such as India and Ethiopia; their accounts of these "Marvels of the East," dog-headed men, the skiapods, the pygmies, and a great many more, were to haunt the Christian era until the seventeenth century. (73-74)

The foremost concern then of the historical inquiry into the ape's evolution had been how the creature could imitate and closely anticipate its supposedly superior counterpart, Man. These anthropological inquisitions into the ape's characteristics yielded many ethical and philosophical debates about Man's purported privileges and superiority, and as O'Neill points out, "the uncanny status of the apes force a deeper questioning of the privileged position of man as the rational beast and points to the role of imitation as a means of constructing the self" (78).

When Edgar Allan Poe wrote "Hop-Frog" (1849), he was not coming to the figure of the ape for the first time in his *oeuvre*; most notably, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" (1844) explicitly made use of the ape figure to challenge the epistemological certitude that existed in society about the distinction between ape and man. In doing so, he was exploiting the classical fascination with the creature's capabilities. However, what makes "Hop-Frog" unique in his tales and fit for a study in anthropology is his combining the figures of the dwarf, man, frog, and ape in a single entity. In a letter to Nancy Richmond dated March

8, 1849, Poe wrote: "The 5 prose pages I finished yesterday are called - what do you think? - I am sure you will never guess - *Hop-Frog!* Only think of *your* Eddy writing a story with *such* a name as 'Hop-Frog'!" He explained that, though *The Flag of Our Union* was not a respectable journal "in a literary point of view," it paid very well (Quinn 594). The story was published in *The Flag of Our Union* on 17 March 1849 under the title "Hop-Frog: or the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs." Keeping the promise of the sub-title intact, the narrative features men dressed up as orangutans, and the titular character is revealed to us as a remarkably fluid entity, both physically and mentally, and exhibits the characteristics of the four creatures mentioned above in such a way that his identity is not stable in the narrative. Challenging the notion of a stable identity, Poe gives us a unique creature who is both psychologically complex and yet frightfully in control when he is least sane.

According to Bruce Martin, "[n]ineteenth-century psychology was interested in how the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal, which they compared to the border between the conscious, rational mind and the unconscious mind, could easily be dissolved…[t]hus, the unconscious mind, considered as an out-of-control beast that could 'come out' under the right circumstances, took on a sinister quality" (289). So, apart from being symbolic of the usual Poesque preoccupation with psychology and abnormality, Hop-Frog had both real and fictional precedents. In *Embodied Selves*: *An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, we can find an account of a nineteenth-century psychologist's recounting of a case that reveals the disturbing side of a boy named Louis

V.[14] The dwarf-jester figure employed by Poe in "Hop-Frog" is nowhere else to be found in Poe's corpus and thus assumes an added significance in the context of the author's anthropological enquiry. Poe's possible awareness of cross-cultural and trans-national cultural practices can be inferred through his role as editor of and contributor to popular journals of his era; these might have possibly provided him with the raw materials (of a similar kind to those mentioned above) required for writing "Hop-Frog."[15] In addition, in

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[14] See Gottesman (136). A normal, yet neglected boy, Louis was sent to a reformatory at an early age. When he was fourteen, he came across a viper and since then he had hallucinations and psychological turbulence that channeled into greediness, violence, and a quarrelsome nature. He became monkey-like and his unconscious self—darker bestial side—overtook his rational side. In addition, various scholars including Kenneth Silverman and Arthur Hobson Quinn consider that the idea for the story was arguably from two sources. The first came from the "Chronicles of Froissart" printed in the *Broadway Journal* for February 1, 1845 (shortly before Poe purchased one-third interest in that periodical and translated from the French by Lord Berner) (Quinn 596). It relates an incident that occurred at the court of Charles VI of France where a Norman squire suggested King Charles and five others dress as satyrs with pitch and flax covering their clothes. Accidentally set aflame, the King barely escaped with his life by leaping into a pool of water. The second source is thought to be a story titled "Frogere and the Emperor Paul" printed in the *New Monthly Magazine*, XXVIII in 1830 and signed "P". It is the story of a court jester exiled by the Emperor of Russia to Siberia. Tricked by a long ride in the countryside, the jester is ultimately returned to the Emperor's court and later becomes a participant in the death of the Emperor. The characters in these sources, while having some similarity, do not exhibit the cunning and ruthlessness of Hop-Frog.

[15] According to Beatrice Otto, nineteenth-century European high-society dwarfs enjoyed great popularity because of their diminutive size and gait, and the immense popularity of dwarfs among Russian nobles suggested that they were doted upon like pets (29). Most importantly, dwarfs were sent from a certain district as annual tribute to the court, and in Chinese culture, this district or country was probably referred to as Jiaoyao, and "the dwarfs were unquestionably foreigners" (here, Otto cites David Knechtges as her source for this information) (26). Otto also cites an example from a French Travelogue by Tournefort's *Voyage du Levant* that revealed Turkish jesters in all their glory:

> The dwarfs are real little monkeys pulling a thousand grimaces between them or together with the mutes to make the Sultan laugh, this prince often honouring them with a kick (26).

nineteenth-century America, the dwarf-jester figure was quite popular. According to Lucas, *Tom Thumb* was produced on several occasions during these years, performing apes were very popular, and so were clowns and magicians (Lucas 29).

Clowns were equally popular as performing apes. For example, the American circus clown Dan Rice (1823-1901) was very popular: he wore the red, white, and blue costume that later came to be associated with Uncle Sam and used sham tricks to make people see through fraud. Performing in Philadelphia and New York during the early 1840s, he mocked American politicians and American worship of European culture and was also the unofficial jester to President Lincoln (Towsen 134). The jesters not only enacted their usual roles, but also went beyond and embraced other figures of the popular culture. The figure of the Orangutan enjoyed a vogue among theater-goers of the 1840s and 1850's America, and one of the more popular "spectacles" of the New York stage was *Jocko! The Brazilian.* Joe Marzetti played the role of the ape so convincingly that he became identified with the role, and surely Poe knew of Marzetti's performance.[16]

Another scholar suggests that the dwarf's deformity may have been a reminder to the king of his own not so apparent shortcomings, and "the corporeal disfiguration provides the comic metaphor for spiritual deformity, intellectual disproportion, psychological rigidity, or emotional awkwardness" (Siegel 21). In Europe, jesters were occasionally sent by their masters to another court, either as a mark of friendship or if somebody was ill or sorrowful and needed cheering up. For example, a noble of Britain sent his favorite dwarf-jester from Paris to Lyons to delight a cousin of his who was ill (Otto 93).

[16] George Odell points out that Marzetti performed the play as early as 1836 when Poe was editing *The Boradway Journal* (240). Also, in the notes to her edition of *The Confidence-Man*, Elizabeth S. Foster records Marzetti's performance as Jocko in 1849, when Melville was residing in Manhattan (328). O'Neill on the other hand points out that the first picture of an anthropoid ape "appears in Gesner's *Historias Animalium* in 1587 and earliest known description of what were probably gorillas and chimpanzees, based on the testimony of one Andrew Battell after his 1607 return from a journey to West Africa,

Moreover, according to a popular version of *Buffon's Natural History (1749-88),* "modernized" for Poe's generation, the Ourang-Outang or "Jocko" is "exactly like that of a man in all his proportions" (Buffon 126). Thus, various American cultural tropes along with other oriental and European accounts of strange creatures and dwarfs could have filtered through the popular journals and British periodicals that did brisk business during Poe's time. Attuned as he was to what was "sensational," it is conceivable that Poe used these accounts in his work. As Mary Lucas points out, "[a]lthough Poe unlikely had seen them all, through his acquaintances, his reading, his responsibilities as an editor…, he must have been thoroughly aware of what was going on" and "Poe is using [in "Hop-Frog"] not only the tradition of the dwarf-fool, but also those of the masque and revenge tragedy, together with the melodrama and spectacle which were popular in the nineteenth century" (24). However, Poe does more than use stock conventions and traditional devices: an anthropocentric enquiry of "Hop-Frog" not only highlights various socio-cultural motifs encapsulated by such a figure, but by accentuating the essential humanism of a semi-anthropoid figure through pictorial word-play, Poe underscores the dualism inherent in human beings—only a thin line divides a rational man and an irrational beast and the crossover can be effected quite easily.

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appears in a 1625 collection of explorer's narratives assembled by Samuel Purchas" (84). Also, in Greece, four articles about apes appear in the *Apothiki ton Ophelimon Gnoseon* between November 1839 and August 1842, and in the article of July 1840, "The Chimpanzee and the Orangutan," it was reported that native African women were being abducted and kept by chimpanzees in Europe. The article goes on to contrast the apparent inferiority of the orangutan based on its relative melancholy and morose attitude in captivity when compared to the more attentive and amusing chimpanzee (O'Neill 85).

The Anthropological Hop

Poe's tale of the dwarf-jester begins with an uncanny observation on the relation between corpulence and enjoyment of a joke. The king and his ministers are "large, corpulent, oily men, as well as inimitable jokers" (899). Very early in the tale, Poe introduces a visual, physiognomic element that forms the narrative's core component. This emphasis on being "fat" is repeated throughout; in addition, a particular emphasis on the physicality (that includes the characters' unwieldiness) underscores and enhances the mind-body dichotomy later in the narrative. By drawing a comparison between corpulence and enjoyment of a "joke," the narrator reveals his inherent anthropological bent. In other words, by declaring that the king seemed to live only for jesting and pointing out that a lean joker is hard to find, the narrator dismisses his own ability to ascertain the king's real motives and instead bases his judgment on a self-generated knowledge of physiognomy, on only what can be seen. Again, we can also discern interplay between imagination and reality when the narrator imagines them to be funny because they are fat and "oily," but not because of other probable psycho-social factors affecting their personalities.

Curiously, the narrator states that "certain it is that a lean joker is a *rara avis in terris*" (899); cultural anthropology locates the crossroad between man and his surroundings as its epicenter and the signs and codes that form the crux of the society are directly related to the subjects that invent such codes. Interestingly, the narrator is anything *but* disinterested; he can be seen as distanced at best from the goings-on in the tale. Not only does he pass firm judgment on the king's propensity to appreciate

jocularity, but he couches his observations in language of physical stature: "He had an especial admiration for *breadth* in a jest, and would often put up with *length*, for the sake of it" (899). Poe through his narrator emphasizes the expressly bodily experience about to unfold in the tale, and since the tale is about a jester who depends on the interplay between the mind and body for his effectiveness, it is only suitable that the narrator adds that "practical jokes suited his [the king's] taste far better than verbal ones" (899). Interestingly, Thomas Pauly points out that "[r]ather than legitimate causes for laughter, the practical jokes that most delight this perverse ruler and his seven ministers are nothing more than occasions for beholding the misery and pain of others. To highlight the baseness of this type of humor (especially its physicality), Poe associates it directly with these courtiers' uniformly 'large, corpulent, oily' bodies" (308). The horrifying scenes of torture at the end mark the reversal of such perverse pleasures in others' miseries, both physical and mental.

Cultural anthropology again comes to the fore when the narrator comments, "at the date of my narrative, professing jesters had not altogether gone out of fashion at court" and that "several of the great continental 'powers' still retained their 'fools,' who wore motley, with caps and bells, and who were expected to be always ready with sharp witticisms…." (899). It is an important cultural token that the narrator offers us because, as mentioned earlier in this essay, the professional jesters *at court* were last reported around the mid-1830s, the same time that Poe was an editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger*. It is actually possible that Poe was drawing on the current tradition of dwarfs and fools for his tale. In addition, Mary Lucas observes that "[t]he deformed dwarfed fool

was prized in Rome and the tradition continued into the medieval period," and when "the narrator confirms a point made earlier concerning the popularity of dwarfed fools and their being the 'fashion at court,'...[he] attests [to] Poe's awareness of the tradition" (35). Through the figure of the dwarf-fool, the narrator satirically contrasts the idea of wisdom and folly through the ministers and Hop-Frog respectively and, in essence, points to the higher contrast between ideality and normative tendencies.

Looking at the history of contemporary dwarfs and jesters and comparing them with Poe's Hop-Frog, we come away with a clear understanding of how explorations of cultural icons can sometimes ring in sundry moral ramifications. As noted, jesters were popular during Poe's era (and even before that), but they were primarily employed for thralldom or entertainment. Their popularity often came at a price of a loss of individuality. Apparently different from an average person (with all their gaudy outfits, head gears, claptraps of spectacles, and perhaps, even with their disfigured bodies), the jesters formed objects of public amusement and entertainment. However, the human beneath this sub-human (or super-human) jocular figure was often ignored or overlooked because jesters were not supposed to know anything other than to provide entertainment. "Hop-Frog" satirizes such cultural mores and denial of humanity as far as a dwarf-jester figure is concerned. Poe provides a full-fledged anthropocentric text through an exploration of bestiality latent in human beings when pushed to the limit. Accordingly, Poe bridges the gap between man and beast in his tale: just as a zoo animal flares up without any warning because it can take only so much torture or incarceration, Poe's titular protagonist loses his humane side and bares his "fangs" owing to the constant

needling by the royalty (and the insult meted out to Trippetta). Both visually and metaphorically, Poe exploits the body of a dwarf to comment on and challenge the social significance of the prevalent normative/non-normative cultural ideologies.

Poe's Hop-Frog is thrice removed from the conventional idea of a human being: "his value was trebled in the eyes of the king by the fact of his being also a dwarf and a cripple" (899). Interestingly, the narrator uses the term "jester" to denote the king's ministers as well as Hop-Frog, thereby rendering a fluidity of conception to the idea of a human being. We are never told if Hop-Frog is non-human; at the same time, by suggesting the ministers as jesters (the monarch had to have both a jester to laugh *with* and a dwarf to laugh *at*), Poe equates them to Hop-Frog. He doesn't explicitly mention that the Hop-Frog is fat (we know that he is unwieldy), but we know that the ministers are fat. The narrator observes that "it was no small source of self-gratulation with our king that he possessed a triplicate treasure in one person" (899). This "treasure" of Hop-Frog is nothing but a more uncouth manifestation of the king and his ministers' physical oddities ; since Hop-Frog's gait and physical features stand in contrast to the purportedly able-bodied King and his ministers, the titular character provides "jest" through his physique as well as his antics, and as Thomas Pauly observes, "the motivating source for these vain ministers' laughter lies in the effect of contrast—especially those situations presenting a vivid inversion of their state of contentment. For this reason, the crippled Hop-Frog becomes the very incarnation of a joke…His 'wriggle' is a beastly incarnation of the normative human locomotion" (308). In addition, the uncertainty over Hop-Frog's origins or even his appellation points to the ontological complexity of the titular

character. He derives his identity in so far as the narrator is willing to provide him with one. By pointing out that Hop-Frog is from a far-off civilization, the narrator projects himself as someone privy to all types of possible information (in the narrative, it is undecipherable whether he is a courtier, minister, or even an outsider). But the narrator's knowledge of Hop-Frog's identity is of less importance here than Hop-Frog himself. Before providing us with the information that the dwarf and his associate came as gifts from some other place, the narrator informs us that the name "Hop-Frog" was not given "by his sponsors at baptism" (900), but by general consent of the seven ministers, on account of his inability to walk as other men do. This also implies that he is uncivilized because he is non-Christian—in the view of court and the king. Interestingly then, the dwarf literally has been living off "the crumb that fell from the royal table" (899) because his existence and appellation are couched in metaphors of commerce and salability.[17]

Through the uncertainty of origin and existence of Hop-Frog, Poe points to an essential aspect of humanity; in cultural anthropology, the human being is a product of his socio-cultural surroundings and derives his essential meaning and entity from the same. By denying Hop-Frog this essential element (he is neither in nor out of the human society), Poe points to a greater anthropological truth—Hop-Frog is partly human only to the extent that "other men" are willing to concede. In a society that functions on the

[17] Gottesman argues that the tale projects the fear of slave revolts that openly gripped Virginia and the rest of the South during the first half of the 1800s. Similar fears gripped the North in Poe's lifetime and continue to do so in our time, "though most Americans bring these anxieties to full consciousness mainly when they erupt as 'racial' tensions in the form of 'disturbances' and 'riots,' most specially when such 'disturbances' threaten to interfere with Superbowl games, or the building of the Chamber of Commerce building or inter-racial harmony in Los Angeles (and other American cities)" (142).

duality of normative/bohemian, man/beast, able/disabled, his elemental core of humanity will forever remain subject to his efficiency and commercial value. It is of little surprise then that Hop-Frog (and, indirectly, Trippetta) yields mixed reactions from Poe's readers, and this is precisely the effect that Poe wanted to create because initial stress upon the comic elements would later result in a maximum realization of horror.

In Poe's *oeuvre*, quite a few tales resonate with horrific images of contorted bodies, beheadings, chopped-off limbs, and headless men. It matters little whether they appear in his comic or serious tales. The rationale behind such images is to evince a degree of discomfort in his readers. Something of a shock value, these images transcend the limits of propriety. Some examples are gouging out of eyes in "The Black Cat," Zenobia's beheading in "The Predicament," and plucking out of the teeth in "Berenice." As Joseph Moldehhauer notes, even when Poe's perverse characters are not artists in language, paint, or music, they apply to murder or to suicide all the craftsmanship of the fine artist and "their impulse to destroy is as intuitive or unconsciously compulsive as a *furor poeticus:* they are 'inspired to kill' and practice a fine art of killing" (291-92). While these tales then involve severing of body parts, in "Hop-Frog," the grotesquerie results from images of an already deformed body that resembles no human being, but that of a toad.[18] By giving Hop-Frog the qualities of an amphibian and an anthropoid, Poe indirectly hints at the innate anthropological complexity of human beings. Poe's

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[18] Writing of another tale, "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," John Bryant observes that "[o]ur fascination with the Ourang-Outang is not that it exemplifies the fine line between man and beast or that it mimics humanity but that *we* can become *it*" (31).

implication is that deformity cannot be interpreted as evil and held up as object for ridicule, something that the royalty do in the narrative and fatally so.

Poe plays upon the duality of appearance and reality in his exercise of anthropocentrism here: his narrator comments that Hop-Frog's "interjectional gait" afforded immense pleasure to the ministers, but "consolation" to the king because of the latter's "protuberance...of stomach and a constitutional swelling of the head" (900). This physiognomic defect almost anticipates Hop-Frog's deformity, and the narrator in a subtle way equates the king with Hop-Frog because both are in a sense "capital figure[s]" (901) to the ministers and other people in the court. Poe's concept of Hop-Frog reminds one of those classical goblins with elongated faces, long pointed aquiline noses, crooked teeth, wicked grins, and green hooded caps to go along with them.[19] By invoking such images of dwarfs and goblins popular during this period, Poe underscores his anthropocentric motif. For example, when Arthur Rackham set out to illustrate Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, he was self-confessedly scared because they "were so horrible I was beginning to frighten myself" (qtd. in Hamilton 153). Rackham was understandably frightened by images portraying behavior so cruel as to be unimaginable—even for a dwarf since Victorian dwarfs, real and supernatural, were

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[19] Leslie Atzmon, 67. Here, the author observes that Herbert Spencer, the nineteenth-century psychologist, in his essay "Personal Beauty" compared ugly people to "inferior races," and correlated extremely sharp-angled features with low intelligence:
"If the recession of the forehead, protuberance of the jaws, and largeness of the cheekbones, three leading elements of ugliness, are demonstrably indicative of mental inferiority…is it not a fair inference that all such faulty trials of feature signify deficiencies of mind?" (356).

considered brutish and crude.[20] We recognize Hop-Frog's violent behavior because he is acting human. Premeditated cruelty for cruelty's sake, the sort humans are capable of, verifies that people behave worse than either supernatural dwarfs or animals do. The beast then that lurks within the subconscious demands a combination of bestial savagery and the human ability to conceptualize.

This interest in the dichotomy of civility and savagery, normativity and exclusivity (as we find in "Hop-Frog") was also fueled by an avid interest in phrenology in nineteenth-century America. Founded by Franz Joseph Gall in the early part of the nineteenth century, phrenology was widely popular, although it got mixed support from the scientific community.[21] Phrenology was considered to reflect the landscape of the human mind and character as revealed by the outward physiology of the head. In *The Human Body and Its Connexion with Man,* phrenologist James John Garth Wilson describes such a landscape as "inhabited by human natures in a thousand tents, all dwelling according to passions, faculties, and powers" (22). Poe's beast fable is then as

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[20] See Atzmon, 75. He explains that one of Rackham's illustrations reveals Hop-Frog from various sharp angles that draw the viewer's eyes onto his face, which bore an expression of a wild beast. In addition, Atzmon provides an excerpt from Carole Silver's *Strange and Secret People* to highlight the Victorian belief of the connection between dwarfs and goblins: "Throughout the Victorian period, dwarfs…had been conflated with each other and equated with goblins (a generic name for small hostile unattractive, grotesque, and almost exclusively, pale supernatural creatures) and thus with malice and evil…they were voracious in their sexual appetites and bestial in their behavior" (Silver 117).

[21] Leslie Atzmon observes that phrenologists were interested in those faculties that animals shared with humans, like "Philoprogenitiveness—the love of offspring; concentrativeness—the ability to focus on one object; combativeness—the tendency to self-protection and courage; destructiveness—the desire to meet and overcome obstacles; and secretiveness—the instinct to conceal unbecoming behavior and thoughts" (65).

much directed towards the universal self as towards the tastes of contemporary readers. Through the man-beast figure, Poe tries to fathom the hidden depths of his readers and show them the real beast that lurks beneath the veneer of man. Also, the potential to commit evil with the help of supernatural powers resides in every man, as Hop-Frog demonstrates "the prodigious muscular power which nature seems to have bestowed upon his arms, by way of compensation for deficiency in the lower limbs, enabled him to perform many feats of wondrous dexterity…." (900). This wondrous dexterity by the end metamorphoses into unthinkable monstrosity.

Joan Dayan observes that "Poe's ability to complicate the issues of human servitude lies not in any narrow delineation of slavery, which was broad and variously applied in the nineteenth century, but in his portrayal of the slippage between degrees of color, gradations of personhood, and the bounds of civility and savagery" (407). The idea of slavery and ownership is writ large in the narrative and hence it can subsume most of the tale's critical receptions. Gottesman observes that "He [Poe] was able sympathetically, yet with a shock of horror, to project this nightmare inspired by Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner and other African-American leaders of slave rebellions, and this reflects the measure, in his last desperate year, both of Poe's endorsement of slavery *and* of his half-conscious sense of a fate shared with these slaves" (142). However, there are other more important anthropocentric issues at stake in this tale: the idea of what constitutes humanity, how to perceive "gradations of personhood," and how to explore the boundaries of being metaphorically "visible" and "invisible." Evidently, Hop-Frog's status is dubious because while he suffers from a physical

"defect" (in comparison with the King and his court's normative standards), he enjoys certain privileges by virtue of this very abnormality. Connotations of slavery and racism do not give rise to the "otherness" in the tale because they are too obvious in the context of antebellum America; rather, it is Hop-Frog's physignomic quirk that constitutes the Other in the tale. Leland Person correctly points out that "given Hop-Frog's ingenuous decision to dress the king and his ministers as orangutans and the common nineteenth-century association of orangutans with African Americans, the racial dimensions of this revenge plot becomes obvious. Hop-Frog himself need not be construed as a black man. His otherness resides in his dwarfism" (218-19). Although in the narrative Hop-Frog and Trippetta are from a distant place and sent as gifts, they still retain their dignity and prestige because it is the king who is dependent on them for diversion and pleasure. A pronounced difference between Hop-Frog and other traditional slaves is that while the latter were primarily meant to be owned and used in ways approved by the owner, Hop-Frog exercises a unique control over the king in the sense that "nothing could be done, it seems, without his assistance" (900). Poe builds up the narrative in "Hop-Frog," first by generating sympathy and affection for the grotesque figures and then distancing his narrator from Hop-Frog's actions so as to be relieved of any moral/ethical commentary on the ghoulish goings-on by the end of the tale. Whether we choose to side with Hop-Frog or condemn his actions depends on the intended aesthetic effect that Poe tries to generate and therein contains our, the readers,' anthropology. Burdened with mixed feelings of indignation and sympathy by the end, moral judgment on Hop-Frog's

character becomes impossible because we as readers are unsure of our own morality and to what extent we can empathize with Hop-Frog's invisibility in the king's eyes.

It is interesting to see how a reader's previous knowledge of apes as characters in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" might orient his/her knowledge of Poe's usage of the ape figure in "Hop-Frog." As readers, we might sense something diabolic in Hop-Frog owing to his substitution of strength in arms for his legs, but we can easily overlook the primacy of physiognomic law that governs human beings on earth. It is a cultural commonplace that any particular handicap in Man is usually offset by greater strength/felicity in some other parts of the human body. So is the case with Hop-Frog; however, because this story is written by Poe, we expect something out of the ordinary. The essential artistry and talent of Hop-Frog is further enhanced when the narrator declares that "Hop-Frog…was inventive in the way of getting up pageants, suggesting novel characters and arranging costumes, for masked balls…" (901). Since this is the last tale written by Poe, it is easily readable as a manifestation of Poe's creativity stifled by his mass audience and "the magazine prison-house." However, what we ignore in such readings is the subtle anthropocentric debate that Poe here engages in. Are human beings worse than animals? Do bestial instincts germinate out of psycho-social pressures or are they inherent and capable of bursting forth any moment when a person chooses to release them? This particular beast fable deals with the metamorphosis of mind and transposition of the roles of the normative and the exceptional. Hop-Frog is supposed to be visually grotesque and funny due to his structure; however, it is the king who is the butt of the narrator's ridicule. The narrator

reveals that an able mind is not always complemented with an able body and vice-versa. The king and his ministers are shown to be hesitant and delaying with their masquerade plans: "why *they* hesitated I never could tell, unless they did it by a way of joke" or more probably due to their obesity (902). On the other hand, despite being deformed, Hop-Frog is said to have come up with constructive ideas of diversion and entertainment on numerous occasions. The romantic notions of intoxication and artistic creativity go hand in hand in the tale as the king reiterates that belief by forcing Hop-Frog to drink wine despite knowing that "it excited the poor cripple almost to madness" (901). He insists that unless Hop-Frog drinks, he won't be able to generate "characters—*characters* man—something novel—out of the way" (902). In a way then, the crime perpetrated in the tale is indirectly generated by the king himself because the "novel" idea of Hop-Frog is too horrific for us to bear.

It is interesting how the narrator intersperses his own commentary on the goings on in the tale, but only at those points that deal with Hop-Frog's essential humanity. The information about the dwarf's birthday and missing friends points to his emotional make-up that is akin to any other human being, the quotidian aspect of our lives. But by having the king debunk and demystify Hop-Frog's emotional meltdown and his essential humanity —the dwarf's "shining" eyes are read by the king as effects of "a glass of good wine" (902)—, the narrator demonstrates how the king obfuscates human misery with material pleasures of life. The connections among wine, intoxication and creativity are furthered by the king when he flares up on hearing that Hop-Frog is "endeavouring to think of something *novel*" (903). Till this point in the narrative, it can be tentatively

argued that Hop-Frog indeed is trying to think of something novel for the masquerade, but not something as deadly as he churns out after the insult of Trippetta and, by extension, himself. Poe seemingly mingles socio-psychological factors with the inherent beastly urge within human beings in the figure of Hop-Frog. Everything in the first half of the tale is glossed over as a "joke" and hence even the harsh grating sound that emanates from Hop-Frog is interpreted as a "parrot at the window, whetting his bill upon his cage-wires" (903). These are inklings of a joke perhaps gone awry and a helpless creature's incarceration that is about to turn deadly. The physiognomic details of Hop-Frog's persona increasingly get threatening: the narrator declares that the creature "displayed a set of large, powerful, and very repulsive teeth" when he is charged with making that grating sound (903). The gradual metamorphosis of Hop-Frog's character from someone apparently benign and helpless to a bloodthirsty creature is couched in metaphors of transferred epithet. Though the dwarf prepares the ministers to be disguised as orangutans, it is Hop-Frog himself who exhibits the apes' behavioral properties. The notion of ideal vs. real is played out by the narrator in his observation that "as the imitations made by the dwarf were sufficiently beast-like and more than sufficiently hideous, their truthfulness to nature was thus thought to be secured" (904).

In "Hop Frog," we have not only a reversal of roles, but a role-playing in flux as the king and his councilors hover between the decent and the abject, while Hop-Frog shuttles between the animalistic and the cool, rational creature. From an anthropological perspective, there was a great surge of interest in nineteenth-century America about apes and ourang-outangs; with the advancement in geographical explorations, people came to

know of creatures and cultures not known hitherto. Hop-Frog plays upon his own anonymity to lure the king into his devious plans. By agreeing to stage a "country frolic" that "here…will be new altogether" (903), Hop-Frog trades upon the king's ignorance of his own nondescript past life and, in doing so, sets up him and his councilors for a "capital" diversion. As Pauly demonstrates, "the cruelty inherent in the courtier's sense of humor is turned upon them by Hop-Frog's wit ('novelty') [and] by way of complement, the imaginative plan he shapes from his madness exposes these heads of states for the beasts they are and transforms him from their fool to master of the court—'the contrast is inimitable'" (308). Again, like Fortunato of "The Cask of Amontillado" and even, to some extent, like the old man in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the courtiers are oblivious to their fate and indirectly bring upon themselves such a catastrophe by being unable to see through the purpose of such a masquerade.

About mid-way through the tale, complete reversal of roles takes place. It is the corpulent king and his ministers who love practical jokes and make Hop-Frog the butt of their transports. Now, it is Hop-Frog who becomes the king and will dictate the extent and direction of a joke that will be "an excellent sport if well enacted" (903). Hop-Frog's first explanation of his capital diversion seems to start from the point where "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" left off: the idea of eight chained orangutans bursting onto the scene, "imagined to be real ones by the most of the company," is exactly what happens in the other tale.[22] Poe here seems to be playing upon the notion of

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[22] According to Harrington, in describing the event in which the masquerade is held as "some grand state occasion—I forget what" (900), the narrator plays down the event's significance and simultaneously reveals his own shortcomings as a narrator (he cannot

interchangeability of the governing principles of humans and apes. Such an attempt is not surprising given the rise of interest in mankind's evolution and his social origins: Lamarck's heredity principle, the "inheritance of acquired traits" and Malthus' research on population growth raised questions about received notions of existence in the 1830s. The curiosity surrounding such ideas was rampant during the mid 1840s and reached its apex with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859. Dovetailing into this ontological curiosity is the idea of slavery, slaves and possible tyrannical revolt. However, such incidents also simultaneously point to the humanitarian concerns associated with imprisonment and torture. Extending the parallelism associated with the caged parrot, we can see that Hop-Frog is trying to surface the insecurity and helplessness associated with such forced incarceration.

Living beings in chains highlight the idea of primates under restriction, but also bring out the idea of potential revolt, not out of any particular social compulsion, but merely the instinct to survive. Hop-Frog's idea to enchain the king and his councilors is built more out of an urge to turn the tables because of how they have had deprived Trippetta and Hop-Frog the elemental right to live with dignity and freedom. John Carlos Rowe observes that "Hop-Frog's decision to invert power relationships by means of what appears to be a joke is a carnivalesque reversal of colonialism" (98-99). While Hop-Frog and Trippetta are captives whom the king gained by one of his generals' colonial conquests, Hop-Frog, John Carlos Rowe suggests, "has properly 'mimicked' in his

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remember and is forgetful). In addition, such restricted knowledge and information makes "the narrator's real place in this story…unclear" (94).

monkey-like fashion…just the 'hideous' moral 'blackness' and 'savagery' of the tyrannical king [,]…thus rendering the nominal ruler 'savage' in comparison with the artist and his delegates, Hop-Frog and Trippetta" (219). This "diversion" is meant not so much as a joke, but as a lesson to be taught. If read from the point of view of slavery and revolt, Hop-Frog resembles Babo of Melville's "Benito Cereno" in his cool, calculating rational method of overturning authority. However, what differentiates Hop-Frog and Babo is the former's immediate reason for revolt—Trippetta's insult. Hop-Frog apparently doesn't intend to revolt until he suffers from a vicarious torture: "but *just after* your majesty had struck the girl and thrown the wine in her face—*just after* your majesty had done this…" then Hop-Frog comes up with this idea of capital diversion (903).

The anthropological curiosity of the mid-1840s about the interchangeability between human beings and primates is clearly manifest in "Hop-Frog" because the titular character is shown to possess the only available knowledge about primates and passes on the same to the humans, supposedly beings of superior perception and knowledge. Accordingly, we see a tripartite dynamic of anthropocentric information: Hop-Frog (himself an anthropological anomaly) passes the knowledge of primates like orangutans (anthropological creatures of fascination) on to the king and his councilors (the supposedly highest form of intelligence). Hop-Frog's intelligence and creativity comes to the fore when he convinces the party involved that "the orangutan was much more efficiently represented by *flax*" than by "feathers" (904), and the mathematical precision with which he arranges for the chains to be passed around the king and his seven ministers. Thomas Pauly notes that "the tarring and feathering they undergo dramatizes

the unreal debasement attendant upon their abdication of authority, and the chains they wear symbolically define their consequent enslavement" and adds that the discrepancy between the courtiers' disguises and their nature reveals an "essential similarity in these costumes' ability to illustrate the beastly nature of their wearers, a point Hop-Frog underscores in putting the torch to them" (309). Along similar lines, Harrington observes that Hop Frog considers them as brute animals and "by outfitting them as such, he confused the masqueraders' perception of these men to the point that the only way they could identify the men was as 'ourang-outangs.'" (95) In addition, Harrington points out that "[t]he narrator, however, clearly knows that the creatures are the king and his seven friends: his decision to describe them as Hop-Frog sees them—and as Hop-Frog forces the king's subjects to view them—shows that the narrator identifies with the dwarf" (95). However, it cannot be said whether the narrator endorses Hop-Frog's actions or is critical of them because he seems to straddle a middle path. While his narration doesn't give us a clear indication as to whether he is a courtier or has heard it from somewhere else, he seems to damn Hop-Frog with faint praise: "the arrangements of the room had been left to Trippetta's superintendence;" but, in some particulars, it seems, she had been "guided by the *calmer judgment* of her friend the dwarf" (905; my italics). Evidently, a reversal of role takes place at the beginning of the masquerade as the eight orangutans "stumble" onto the scene, "or rather rolled in" (905), reminding us of Hop-Frog's stunted movement that was something between an interjectional gait and a wriggle. The potential for violence, chaos and unruly behavior is writ large in the narrative as the guests are locked

up inside the chamber in order to prevent them from escaping the "ferocious-looking creatures" and "at the dwarf's suggestion, the keys had been deposited with *him*" (906).

The tale's final paragraphs reveal the fullest extent of Hop-Frog's scheming perception of the state of affairs, but it should be remembered that he doesn't act, but reacts. To what extent he is justified and how much Poe's morality comes into play is hard to fathom. However, the overturning of authority and the flexibility of social hierarchy existent in any society are borne out by these paragraphs. Once the king and his men are drawn upwards with the chain and left suspended in the air, Hop-Frog declares, "I fancy *I* know them. If I can only get a good look at them, *I* can soon tell who they are" (907). It is important to note that Hop-Frog positions himself above the king and his men who are huddled together on the chain to take a good look at them. As Bruce Martin notes,

> a reversal of situation occurs in Hop-Frog's idea of ourang-outangs: animal-like dwarf places himself in command of the court through his superior intelligence, while the king and his ministers are forced to grovel in chains on all fours…Their intellectual and moral bestiality is given physical dimension by Hop-Frog and [his] 'fang like teeth' belies any comic intonations in the narrative and thus points out the governing idea of terror as primordial." (289)

Both literally and figuratively then, their positions have changed in the narrative. Hop-Frog not only "leapt, with the agility of a monkey, upon the king's head—and thence clambered a few feet up the chain," he also sets them on fire by pretending "to scrutinize the king more closely" (907). Even the narrator moves from a gradual identification of

the king and his councilors with apes to a thorough name calling: "the whole assembly (apes included) was convulsed with laughter…" (906). Images of burnt and charred bodies highlight Poe's aesthetics of terror, and this effect is generated by the narration of the masqueraders' reactions. After seeing the King and his ministers set on fire, their hearts sink and the same thing happens when Hop-Frog climbs a few notches up the chain. They again fall silent when Hop-Frog opens his mouth; interestingly, Hop-Frog's reason for doing this is that he is angry for with the ministers for "striking a defenceless girl" (908) and nothing more. It apparently doesn't have anything to do either with their personal treatment of him or his bondage. By declaring "—and *this is my last jest*" (908), Hop-Frog implies that he is done with catering to demands for "novelty" and he's had enough.

Poe shies away from projecting an ideality of the spirit in his last work; he hoaxes what Terence Whalen calls the "capital" reader with his gruesome vision of the burnt body; he devises something so horrific that his readers experience *thamuzein*. As Sutrop explains, "[w]e find within the aesthetic dimension 'codes' which, more often than not, are in disagreement with the common view and are therefore more likely to promote change and thus to have a destabilizing effect on a given cultural formation… this may well be considered the most important anthropological function of that dimension. It lies in the breaking up of the established distribution of functions via the seemingly functionless" (27). Through the grotesque vision of violence and treachery, Poe veers his artistic lens towards an examination of his readers' anthropocentrism because in his portrayal of Hop-Frog (and Trippetta), Poe challenges the contemporary readers to accept

his most radical, final aesthetic of terror that pushes the ontological limits of the mind-body dialectic. In doing so, Poe devises an anthropocentric text that derives significance both from the paradoxical treatment of the human-beast figure and an ancillary reaction of the readers to that figure's grotesquerie. From a reader's point of view, the beast that is the unconscious mind demands a combination of bestial savagery and the human ability to conceptualize.

It is interesting to note that critics have drawn parallels between "Hop-Frog" and other "ape" tales in Poe's *oeuvre* despite its not having anything explicitly to do with apes, except symbolically. It can be argued that the central character's movements and gesticulations resemble that of an ape and even, at one point in the tale, the narrator calls Hop-Frog a monkey, but the lack of any particular marker of anthropoid in Hop-Frog relegates him to the liminality of society, both within the text and without. He is "from far off land"; at the same time, he is a creature that corresponds to what anthropologists see as riding the cultural boundaries of imagination and reality—he is a man and yet not a human being due to the deformity of his body. The narrator repeatedly emphasizes various aspects of physiognomy in the tale: corpulence, sight, tears, eyes, and smell. The narrator's obsession with the body and torture seems to suggest a self-reflexive concern with violence and a muted endorsement of the masquerade's *terrific* outcome at the end of the tale.

According to Bruce Martin, "Irony and sarcasm disappear in the narrative towards the end: 'counterbalancing of wisdom,' 'tyrant,' 'monsters' are nowhere to be found later in the tale and so is the fatness or corpulence talk," and "[r]hetorical elements that

lambaste the king and his men are absent in the latter part," giving way to "straightforward reporting of the gruesome incident so that all sympathies are exhausted...Thus, punishment for such treatment of Hop-Frog becomes highly relative and dubious by the end" (290). Interestingly, the narrator vacillates between pathos and condemnation of Hop-Frog's actions. The tale's autobiographical elements have been recently highlighted by various critics, but the connection between this tale and Poe's aesthetic credo has hardly been pointed out. Apart from reading it as satirical manifestation of Poe's disillusionment with critics and powers-to-be of "the magazine prison-house," the tale can be seen as his anthropocentric riposte to his readers: through this most horrific and carefully planned murders in his *oeuvre*, Poe demonstrates how Hop-Frog is to be perceived as a cultural signifier, a token of noble humanity/abject reality gone awry in contact with evil artistry/rarefied idealism.

The idea of liminality in cultural anthropology is of profound significance. In the tale, liminality works on multiple levels of narration. Both Trippeta and Hop-Frog straddle the cultural divide between normative and non-normative; there is the social vacuum that exists between the two dwarfs and the King and his ministers; the masquerade itself works as a tool that simultaneously bridges and reinstates such social divide between the ruler and the ruled; and finally, the circle created by Hop-Frog by passing a chain around and through each of the eight royal figures anticipates the existing socio-ethnic divide in the kingdom that is also forcibly brought to a literal and metaphorical collapse by the final courtesy of Trippetta and Hop-Frog. As John Bryant points out, "[f]or Poe the irrational allows for a tentative spiritual connection to Beauty

and Ideality, but that same irrationality, when manifested artistically in the grotesque or the imp of the perverse, debases or even denies regenerative human faculties" and here in "Hop-Frog," "Poe replays the Ape image in order to clarify for himself, if not for his readers, the contradiction between personal ethos and cultural world view" (46). This contradiction constitutes the core essence of such an anthropocentric reading of the tale: whether Hop-Frog is a man or a beast cannot be simplified because of his *function* in this society, of what he does for living, and how he uses it to nefarious ends to survive in that complex culture. The apish connotations and Hop-Frog's struggle for survival surface through another trope in the tale: the orifice in the ceiling through which Hop-Frog escapes as a *coup de grace* signifies an escape from hell and the extension of the chandelier symbolizes that prehensile tail which redeems the two dwarfs from their miseries and out into the world of light, freedom, and a better life.

As an elaborate masque-like ritual, "Hop-Frog" plays out the anthropocentric complexities that confront any artist who engages himself in exploration of what is quintessentially human. Bryant points out that "[i]n 'Hop-Frog,' Poe plays a ritual of satire that rejects society's loathsome autocracy and embraces the higher universal values of broader and sentimentally unattainable transcendental community" (50). Poe's ritual of terror and horror derives its significance from the readers' recognition of mutually comprehensible symbols that bridge the author's worldview and his cultural ethos. In addition, the effect of terror is also generated by the readers' possible response to Hop-Frog's heinousness because Poe successfully sustains that effect in the reader due to the incertitude of the protagonist's identity as either man or beast. While resembling the king

and his ministers in his elemental identity as a man, Hop-Frog mimics the actions of apes and uses this mimicry to dehumanize his supposedly intellectual superiors. Anthropologically, at the end, the connection between Hop-Frog's self and his socio-cultural origin is ruptured by the necessity to survive and, in response to the heinous and unsympathetic surrounding world, Hop-Frog becomes heinous too until till there is nothing left of his "original" self.

Read anthropocentrically, Poe in this tale presents a different perception of humanity through Hop-Frog, forcing his readers to *see* how debasement of character is ancillary to suppressive conditions of existence. Hop Frog's liminality is sustained through his fluid existence and because of the lack of a definite visual image of him. Though Poe literally paints a picture of a dwarf in the text, it is hard to pin down Hop-Frog's essential identity. In a photograph or engraving, if he were so represented, a glance would reveal to what extent Hop-Frog is "really" human. In a culture obsessed and bombarded with visual *topoi*, Poe exploits the purely verbal/textual limitations of print to create and sustain a character that occupies a luminal territory, and in doing so, subverts his readers' confidence in visual identifications. It can be argued that Hop-Frog commits a heinous crime worthy of punishment, but in Poe's *oeuvre* morality and value judgments are often suspended, and as Bruce Martin points out, "[a]s a premeditated murder, the escape of the dwarf seems not a delightful comic conclusion, but an escape from the justice that the Hop-Frog now deserves" (29). Since the narrator's origins are as uncertain as that of Hop-Frog, the only thing certain is the narrator's non-committal

stance by the end. Indeed, While Maura Grace Harrington agrees with Bruce Martin that the complexity of the narrative in “Hop-Frog” creates ambivalence in the story’s shocking ending, “it is likely that the conclusion is jarring because by not condemning the dwarf, the narrator actually endorses his actions” (97). However, Poe’s tale transcends these possible ethico-moral pronouncements because the end purpose is to produce the aesthetic effect of horror and terror that results from the interchangeability of apish and human characteristics.

Chapter 5--Poe and the *Pointe* Sublime: Surrealistic Meditations in "Berenice," "The Angel of the Odd," and "Three Sundays in a Week"

Claude Richard in his article, "Arrant Bubbles: Poe's 'Angel of the Odd,'" observes that the tale was widely popular in France because André Breton, the father of Surrealism, included it in his famous *Anthologie de l'Humour Noir* and adds that Breton saw Poe as "a barbarian" and a rebel, whose exercises in automatic writing (as in "Angel of the Odd") revealed his impatience with rationality (46). Richard, however, links Surrealism (and its automotive aspect) to "The Angel of the Odd" to prove that it is *not* an example of Surrealist art or automotive writing. This chapter attempts to demonstrate how the tale is not only a sublime example of automation and Surrealist art in written language, but also how Poe's exploration of sublimity through the perversions of the mind in tales such as "Berenice" and "Three Sundays in a Week" anticipates the visual and conceptual experimentation of the Surrealist movement of the 1920's. "Berenice" (1835), "Three Sundays in a Week" (1841), and "Angel of the Odd" (1844) reveal what the Surrealists would advocate later—a rejection of the real world which can only end with this world. Through these tales, Poe demonstrates the existence of Man's psychological "ghetto," a borderline where the *point sublime* exists and from where the dichotomies of our lives will no longer be seen as contradictions, and indeed, will be seen as reconciliatory. Focusing on that "ghetto," this chapter demonstrates how Poe in these three tales successfully distorts conventional social, behavioral, and visual patterns through a surrealistic juxtaposition of the horrific and the marvelous. Poe ventured to the extremes of human consciousness and sensibility because his perspicacity made him

abhor conventional trappings and choose mind matter over matters of the world. His tales occur in such places as "the most noisome quarter of London," "at the edge of a dank tarn," in "an old, decaying city near the Rhine," and other chambers, cellars, mansions. Identifiable by every reader, these are places that attain universality by defying particulars of time and space. This penchant to free matter of limit, this refusal to submit artistic creation to the concept of limit, Guillarme Appoloniaire was the first to call "sur-real" in 1918 in his Preface to *Les Mamelles de Tiresias,* where he explained that this work represented his determination not to limit himself to any one aspect of nature and justified on the basis of this motive his refusal to pay heed to time and place (Balakian 104).

In the previous chapter, we discussed Poe's anthropocentrism and how he challenged the epistemological certitude surrounding the absolute boundaries that separate man and beast through an anthropo-amphibian figure. As has been repeatedly demonstrated, it was not unusual for Poe to be constantly engaged in pushing the mind-body dialectic to embrace newer ontological crises that confronted Man. Nineteenth-century America was constantly bombarded with advertisements, pamphlets, and billboards that overwhelmed the common man by inserting him within a larger visual hegemony geared towards maximum commercialization of individual identities. In this heyday of post-Enlightenment visual culture, absolute reality/identity became a joke and cohabitation of the rational and the irrational, the real and the unreal, the ordinary and the sublime was commonplace. Nineteenth-century "modernity" revealed itself through various scientific innovations, ethical and philosophical debates, and a proclivity to

challenge traditional mores and religious beliefs. In certain tales of Edgar Allan Poe, the author seems to have stepped out of his time to anticipate the modern and post-modern movements and reveal shibboleths that concern(ed) the universal Man.

The current tide in Poe studies is riding the wave of re-contextualizing the author within the antebellum culture, but this enterprise has been loaded with an apprehension, a strange insecurity among scholars of Poe with regards to his status as a prominent nineteenth-century writer. This "contextualizing" quest has generally culminated in cocooning Poe into his era's socio-cultural moorings without according the rightful importance to his futuristic and progressive vision. This tendency arose from the popular notion that Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Sarah Margaret Fuller (to name a few) can be distinctively labeled as nineteenth-century artists, while Edgar Allan Poe's status is dubious and cannot be grouped together with these stalwarts owing to his peculiar motifs and concepts.[1] Poe's contemporary, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow churned out exercises in national consciousness, patriotism, and regional fervor; similarly, Emerson and his disciple, Thoreau, thought out and lived the values of Transcendentalism in their works to lend meaning to a chaotic existence. In the latter part of the century, Hawthorne used puritanical and moral moorings to fathom reality and used themes that closely reflected the psyche of his contemporary audience; Melville dabbled with sea travelogues and curious figures capable of great passion and patience to arrive at an understanding of the

[1] F.O. Mathiessen initiated this prejudice by not including Poe in his 1941 *American Renaissance*).

current nineteenth-century socio-cultural crisis. However, Edgar Allan Poe shunned all those denominators that lend fiction a sense of veracity, and which his contemporaries and latter-day writers feared to forgo completely. Poe spent most of his time trying to "fit in," but never could do so successfully, and his critics continued to see him in a similar light and sometimes even damned him with faint praise. For example, William Carlos Williams in his *In the American Grain* (1925) observed that "What Hawthorne loses by his willing closeness to the life of his locality in its vague humors, his life-like copying of the New England melancholy...Poe gains by abhorring; flying to the ends of the earth for original material" (44). This is precisely what set Poe apart from his contemporaries and becomes the quintessential element of his writings: he ventured to the "ends of the earth" conjoining popular taste and personal creativity to explore the hidden aspects of our being. The attempt to re-historicize Poe within his contemporary literary scene has been laudatory and undoubtedly successful, but it is important to realize that he, arguably more than any other author in the nineteenth century, dabbled in the elements of modern and post-modern movements. Too little has been done in envisaging Poe as a possible precursor of certain modern movements,[2] and since this chapter deals with that aspect of Poe's *oeuvre* which draws on a visual culture that is distinctively modern, it behooves us

[2] *Eureka, The Quest of Arthur Gordon Pym,* and the "ratiocination" tales have enjoyed unprecedented success among contemporary scholars in highlighting the modernist qualities of Poe, but the anticipatory nature of Poe's modernistic visual culture has received little attention. Two notable articles in this respect are Kevin J. Hayes' "One Man Modernist" and Elvira Osipova's "Aesthetic Effects of "King Pest" and "The Masque of the Red Death."

to understand why Poe should be and might have been an anticipator of something like Surrealism and why we should see Poe as someone ahead of his time.

There is a distinctive schism between being "modern" and a modernist, and Poe's tendency towards the latter can by no means detract from his potency as a nineteenth-century antebellum writer. Shakespeare, Milton, Hardy, the Bronte Sisters—all have been considered from time to time as sharing affinities with elements of modernism. Numerous socio-cultural and literary studies deal with such artists' preoccupation with their respective cultures (what is an artist after all but a product of his culture?), but hardly with the express purpose of restoring them to their "rightful" throne of popular culture. One primary reason was that they all sounded those universal truths conducive to the era's sensibilities (and beyond), and secondly, they did not explore tropes or themes that were out of time or place. In *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), Eliot declares that "Human kind cannot bear very much reality" (69), and so long as an artist of a particular era is not hurting that hallowed and absolute concept of reality (that most people identify with), the issue of not being a cultural prism will never be raised. Poe's peculiar problem was that he was uncannily modern; his modernity was remarkably undecipherable despite his making a persistent (and sometimes unsuccessful) hustle to cater to the penny-press public of his age. He was *modern* at the same time that he was an antebellum writer; some of his almost neglected works (two of them will be discussed here) reveal unmistakable signs of Surrealism despite being firmly grounded within his contemporary culture. In modern literary parlance, the name "Edgar Allan Poe" is a potent cultural signifier that bespeaks alcoholism and someone out of time with his era, but

simultaneously it is his "modernity" that helps twenty-first century readers identify with him and his works. His *Eureka* is a prime example of this "neither-in-nor-out-of-it" principle; at the same time, his tales like "The Black Cat," "The Pit and the Pendulum," or "The Premature Burial," tales that Poe self-confessedly wrote for the contemporary mass, manage to evince shock even in a horror aficionado of the twenty-first century. The point of all this is that an appraisal of Poe's modernity (as revealed in some of his tales) need not be construed as back-tracking and de-"contextualization" of Poe from his mainstream culture; instead, it should successfully adduce how Poe fit into his culture, but not without with an eye on the possible future turn of *avant garde* art.

Poe's importance as a precursor of Surrealism or even as a Surrealist is not easy to demonstrate because he was surreal without being "a Surrealist." The term did not come into use until 1918 as mentioned; Poe died in 1849. Also, a few comments by Breton and others on Poe do not help establish the link either (Breton called Poe "a Surrealist in adventure" in his *Manifesto* in 1924). However, there exists an undeniable link between Poe and Breton and his fellow Surrealists—Baudelaire. Baudelaire's interest was particularly in Poe's tales, where he found vindication of the sense of evil that lies behind the carefully constructed facades of men and society. Using Poe's idea of evil, Baudelaire wrote works such as *The Artificial Paradise* where he considers two literal qualities as fundamental to existence—surnaturalism and irony.[3] Baudelaire believed that by perceiving objects in an independent way and interpreting them "through a satanic turn of mind" (qtd. in Balakian 46), a new type of reality might be created

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[3] See Anna Balakian, 45-61.

where comparisons and metaphors come to be considered by the artist as actual realities rather than literary representations of perceptions. According to Balakian, "[t]his evolution which Baudelaire appears to have analyzed as an essential transformation of the subject into the object is similar to the metamorphosis of poetry from Symbolism, with its emphasis on representation, to Surrealism which sacrifices the representation, if needs be, in its attempts to come to grips with the essence of reality" (60). Balakian adds that Baudelaire's artificial paradise was the initial step toward the world of the Surrealists in which *microcosm* was to become more significant than *macrocosm* by defying nature's forms and perspectives (58, 59). Poe then only not influenced the Surrealists through Baudelaire, but also explored newer forms of envisioning human existence and reality that were distinctly modern for his nineteenth-century audience.

According to the *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, Surrealism aimed to solder conscious and unconscious realms of experience so that the worlds of dream and fantasy would be joined to the everyday rational world in "an absolute reality, a surreality" (14). Influenced by Sigmund Freud, Breton saw the Unconscious as the key to imagination and defined genius in terms of accessibility to this normally untapped realm, which, he believed, could be attained by poets and painters alike. According to Breton, the incidents and occurrences they would record, "poetically speaking…[would be] distinguished chiefly by a very high degree of immediate absurdity, the peculiar quality of that absurdity being, on close examination, their yielding to whatever is most admissible and legitimate in the world: divulgation of a given number of facts and properties on the whole not less objectionable than the others" (24). Surrealism, Breton adds, rests in the

belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore: in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought. Various psychic mechanisms are replaced by Surrealism for solving some of the complexities and problems of life. Surrealism's primary aim was to reconcile dreams and imagination rather than an outright rejection of the material world. According to Harold Osborne, the Surrealists strove for "hallucinatory realism...[which is] a careful and precise delineation of detail, yet a realism which does not depict an external reality since the subjects realistically depicted belong to the realm of dream or fantasy" (529).

It might seem unlikely that Poe, who was renowned for his taut control over his narrative structure and flow of thought, would have affinities with the Surrealists who strove for automatic expressions of the artist. However, Poe's handling of the unconscious and the role it played in Man's hidden realities was surprisingly modern and close to what later Surrealists strove to accomplish. Poe's "Berenice" reveals a world of absurdity by combining elements of the horrific, dream sequences, and the nightmarish. Discussions of "Berenice" have traditionally focused on the narrator's insanity, his fantasy of the titular character, and his psychological complexity in light of the temperance movement. Its artistic dimension has been explored by modernists like Max Ernst, who was one of the important figures joining the Surrealist movement. He unabashedly hailed Poe as one of his favorite poets, and none of Poe's works significantly influenced Ernst more than "Berenice," whose influence appears in his collages, paintings, and critical writings. David Hopkins in his *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst*: *The Bride Shared* (1998) points out that in a collage entitled *Microgramme*

Arp I: 25,000 painted in 1921, Ernst took out six pieces from a geological wall-chart that had a written inscription consisting of six numbered phrases connected to each of the pieces. The last numbered phrase ends by mentioning "le cheveu de Berenice" (161). The tale's influence is evident, according to Kevin J. Hayes, in Ernst's 1933 essay, "Comment on the force L'Inspiration," later translated into English as part of *Beyond Painting*, a collection of essays edited by Robert Motherwell: "[a]s Breton had advocated automatic writing as central to Surrealist literature, Ernst set forth automatic methods for painting, which involved a kind of obsessional staring reminiscent of Egaeus's behavior in 'Berenice'" (236). As did Poe, Ernst explored the inner world devoid of any ethical or universal ideal that man ever tried to comprehend, and "[t]he result is the representation of purely biological reactions which register the prevalence of primary urges and offer on the psychological plane the broken fragments of an otherwise whole image with all the terror and confusion it involves" (75).

Nor was Ernst alone among Surrealists in his admiration of Poe. Robert Belton notes that Marie Bonaparte's *Edgar Poe, Etude Psychoanalytique* (1933), a premier study on Poe's psychoanalytic approach, generated much talk in Paris and greatly influenced the Surrealists, and Salvador Dali later mentioned that Bonaparte's work was discussed in Paris cafés quite some time after it was published (13). Italian painter/engraver Alberto Martini, who had already created over a hundred illustrations of Poe's works and whose illustrations anticipated Surrealism, lived in Paris from 1928, where he became well acquainted with Andre Breton (Hayes, "One Man Modernist" 236). According to Rachel Polonsky, "[w]hereas Poe's contemporaries would continue to insist on the necessity of

art to both instruct and delight, the forward-thinking Poe, synthesizing the thought of European philosophers before him, set down the idea of art for art's sake" (45). An example of unacknowledged influence of Poe on the French critical thinking can be found in the phrase, *l'art pour l'art,* which is given precedence over the English, yet Poe's use of the idea in his 1831 "Letter to Mr.____" antedates the earliest printed use of the French phrase in 1833 (Hayes, "One Man Modernist" 226). While these observations and examples arguably illustrate some indirect influence of Poe on the Surrealists and Ernst in particular, "Berenice" explores a deeper surrealist thought process through its word play, its phantasmagoric quality, and the uncanny exploration of the absurd that have a lot in common with the Surrealist movement.

The Surrealist movement germinated from a deep sense of rootlessness that succeeded the First World War and its main idea was to salvage what *should* be quintessentially human from the manifold misery that beset humanity. Poe's narrator begins with "Misery is Manifold…wretchedness of earth is multiform" and goes on to elaborate how happiness or the "memory" of it begets sorrow (225). This weird pessimism, while common to Poe's protagonists and the Surrealists later on, is strikingly nihilistic, but also simultaneously cathartic in effect because this emotional texture formed the essence of coping with the universal human crisis. Egaeus early in the narrative strikes a posture similar to the later Surrealists: armed with the knowledge that human existence is perpetually cursed with the blackness of soul, an individual can only envisage self-destructive urges that "derive a type of unloveliness" from "beauty" and revel in the fact that "out of joy is sorrow born" (225). The introductory part of

"Berenice" where the narrator provides his familial and personal background is steeped in surrealist visual prototypes. The narrator declares, "[e]ither the memory of past bliss is the anguish of today, or the agonies which *are*, have their origin in the ecstasies which *might have been*" (225). In trying to gauge the significance of what is *not*, the potential of probabilities, the Surrealists, like Poe, tried to envision reality through different forms of meaning and hence engaged in subversive thought processes. Imagining the past bliss, Surrealism as a movement and as practiced by Breton, Dali, Desnos and others focused on salvaging the lost potential in Man, whether it be social, psychological, or moral, by delving deeper into "the ecstasies *which might have been.*" The narrator's declaration about his own mental constitution perfectly fits the Surrealists' method of painting reality with concocted visions of dream and nostalgia: "—wonderful how total an inversion took place in the character of my commonest thought. The realities of the world affected me as visions, and visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn, not the material of my everyday existence, but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself" (225). Not only in this tale, but in his other works as well, Poe emphasized this interchangeable quality of dreams and material life manifest in Surrealism, most notably in "Morella," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "Dream Land." In addition, Poe presents his *Eureka* as an offering "to those who feel rather than those who think—to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as the only realities." (Harrison 183).

Surrealism arguably had its roots in Appolloniare's writings of the early 1900s, to which even Andre Bréton testifies (Balakian 124). Apolloniare's emphasis on the primacy of mind and imagination of the artist to envision new realities was nothing new,

but the Surrealists' major emphasis on art forms like painting and sculpture to bring out their ideas had its roots in Apollinaire's belief that novelty and beauty are closely related and that the artist's power was directly proportional to the creation of new expressive forms. Poe's narrator is a man of letters and the fact has direct influence on the way the narrative unfolds.[4] He has hoarded multifarious classics and points to the "library's contents" to testify to that fact. To substantiate the claim that he hails from "a race of visionaries" (225), the narrator cites family mansions, tapestries, and frescoes of the chief saloon as examples of artistic prowess. Early in the narrative then, the narrator's aesthetic sensibilities are underscored not through any personal cogent manifestation of artistic talent, but through physical manifestations of ancestral masonry. It is significant then that the building blocks of the narrator's mental life are deeply rooted in physical manifestations of loveliness that his ancestors have bequeathed for him because the images of pain, anguish, torture, and apparent murder unravel in one of these ancestral mansions. For the Surrealists, the walls that demarcate reality and surreality are to be brought down, not to envisage reality in a new light, but to enter into and sustain the dream world that encapsulates reality. Though not witnessing a physical collapse akin to "The Fall of the House of Usher," Egaeus' mansion witnesses a bizarre interplay of the

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[4] It is possible that Egaeus' extensive scholarship prompts him to perceive various, imaginary changes in Berenice. Since she is his Muse of Insanity and Depression, it is only fitting that he reads this text so thoroughly as to destroy its contents—too much knowledge leads to realization of an unbearable truth that his Muse manifests only as much as he is willing to impute it.

dream-like state and reality that collapses the rational and the irrational only to visualize the crisis of human existence in a new light.

Egaeus declares that "a remembrance of aerial forms—of spiritual and meaningful eyes...will not be excluded" from his mind, and "a memory like a shadow, vague, variable, indefinite" will suffer "the impossibility of my getting rid of it" (225). Mentally, Egaeus has retained visions of his former life, but only through a flimsy, vague apprehension of what could have been, and hence, in the present, "it is not singular that I gazed around me with a startled and ardent eye" (226). This emphasis on imagining a trance-like state was crucial to Surrealism, in addition to the "waking" state of consciousness that Egaeus finds himself in. The real world that Egaeus inhabits is beset by images of the world that was and his psycho-social interaction with Berenice is affected by such dialectic. Charles E. Gauss points out that "[t]he logic of Surrealism is the logic of Hegelianism; the two contradictory states are synthesized into a new conception which contains them both" and "the mental world of veridical data and the world of the imagination, of dreams and illusions, are both absorbed by a deeper mental realm named the Surreal" (38). That this "Surreal" aspect of human existence is evident in the Egaeus-Berenice dialectic (dual images are constantly at play in the tale: ill-health—grace and agility; studies—carefree life; affliction—free-spirit) is again pointed out by the types of their respective maladies. Berenice suffers from a species of epilepsy that nearly terminates "in *trance* itself—trance very nearly resembling positive dissolution, and from which her manner of recovery was, in most instances, startlingly abrupt" (227). Egaeus on the other hand suffers from a "morbid irritability" and what

"the metaphysical science termed the *attentive*" (227). In Surrealism, imagination of objects or entities, and more importantly, renewed understanding of the possible "unity in multiety" of these objects or entities formed the key element. In "Berenice," each character's condition is visualized as the result of the other's malady, for both have heightened physical senses that amount to different end results. In a curious condition of reciprocity, Egaeus' morbid sensitivity almost thrives on Berenice's condition, while Berenice's physical malady assumes significance because it lends a sweeping change to Egaeus' mental condition. To lose oneself completely, to be dictated by the subconscious and to straddle the borderline between volition and the unconscious is what Breton advocated in his *Manifesto*. That is exactly what Egaeus does in the tale, as he would "lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of absolute bodily quiescence long and obstinately persevered in" and in doing so, "certainly bidding defiance to anything like analysis or explanation" (227).

According to Andre Breton, there is much to be expected of certain methods of pure deception, "the application of which to art and life would have the effect of fixing attention neither on the real nor on the imaginary, but on the, so to speak, *hither side of the real*" (162). What Breton labels as the "hither side of the real" is a curious zone in Surrealist literature where every thought is in a state of abeyance, a free-floating signifier attributing more importance to things absent than things present. As readers, we never know whether Egaeus' "monomania" is real or imaginary, for when he describes his monomania in terms of a "morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the *attentive*," an attempt to cloak insanity with feigned

rational logic is discernible (227). Cappello observes that "[a]kin to Whitman's "Do I contradict myself?" and Emerson's "to be great is to be misunderstood," Poe's Egaeus will not be comprehended because of "his sense of preoccupation with the ordinary, or by extension, his preoccupation with his own importance" (83). Interestingly, this process is also found in Breton's best Surrealist work *Nadja*, where he questions the idea of madness in the context of love and relationships, and uses the central character to express the Surrealist ideals of juxtapositions and constantly dissolving and changing perspectives. According to Egaeus, musing idly for hours, watching the steady flame of a lamp, attention riveted to the margins of a book are some of the characteristics of his condition, but quickly adds that this condition can be found in "persons of ardent imagination" (227). Importantly then, sight/day-dreaming becomes the vehicle for entering the world of un-reality and obsession. Explaining an obsession with a particular object (as Egaeus exhibits here) and how Surrealists viewed such fixation, Marcel Jean and Arpad Mezei observe that:

> Surrealists....rediscovered the object: a new object containing a large admixture of subjectivity, in the shape of Desire. But desire also implies resistance, is a limited, defined tendency, and by its very nature presupposes a certain degree of restraint. So that an object, in the surrealist sense of the word, is a complex of fantasy and restraint, of desire and resistance, which possesses a material substance. (243)

Egaues is caught up in a similar conflict between fantasy and restraint, between desire and its sublimation because he stares at his cousin intermittently over longer periods of time.

Various descriptions in the narrative owe their significance to Berenice's existence in the narrator's life; Egaeus' deconstruction of his own cognitive psychology (he says that he is able to distinguish between the "*incitamentum*" [initial cause] of day dreams and other sub-layers of "the speculative" and "the attentive" [228]) reveals an overabundance of details that has little to do with the justification of his sanity/insanity and tells more about his attitude toward Berenice. This kind of unmasking mode employed by Poe can be seen as applicable to what José Ortega Gasset later labeled in *The Dehumanization of Art* (1925) as "infrarealism," an evasion of reality through the overemphasis of details that tend to distort familiar perceptions (Balakian 58). For instance, Berenice's "calamity" that the narrator visualizes amidst his "infirmity" causes pain and helps him to ponder "the wonder working means by which so strange a revolution had been so suddenly brought to pass" (229). This revolution in Berenice's constitution that the narrator tries to scrutinize is surrealistically described, for he envisions her through the gray of the early morning, among the shadow of the trees, in a library's silence, "not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream," not an earthy being, but as the abstraction of such a being (229). This very ethereal quality attributed to Berenice and the narrator's preoccupation with it through the story is akin to the preoccupation with images of dreams and insanity in Surrealist literature.

According to Henry Peyre in *The Significance of Surrealism*, the Surrealists respected in the dream what Reverdy called "a freer and more uninhibited form of thought," something that Breton's *Les Vases communicantes* explores successfully in its

splendid preoccupation with fantastic dreams (38). This dreamy vision is evident in the narrative when the figure of Berenice comes before Egaeus. He is unsure of what he sees—"Was it my own excited imagination—or the misty influence of the atmosphere……that caused it [Berenice's figure] so vacillating and indistinct an outline?" (230). Poe visualizes here, as the Surrealists would do later, a trance-like state where day-dreams are not idyllic reveries, but of deeper significance whereby the realms of night and day, sleep and wakefulness hold an unremitting, fruitful interchange. The narrator claims that feelings with him "*had never been* of the heart, and passions *always were of the mind*" (227). This crucial self-evaluation again provides an insight into why "Berenice" can be considered as an example of Surrealist literature. For the Surrealists and Poe before them, mind matter always preceded the matters of the heart and forging new realities without is directly proportional to the turbulence within, for the abnormalities of the new world can be dealt with only through a complete overhaul of viewpoint achieved via visions of the horrible and the grotesque.

The supreme example of surrealist vision in the tale is the narrator's obsession with Berenice's teeth. The narrator declares, "The teeth!—The teeth!—they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me;…" (230). Egaeus' single-minded focus on Berenice's teeth and his "frenzied desire" to obtain them for no apparent reason is akin to the Surrealists' penchant for fixating on a single object of interest and making everything else lose focus in the background, often resulting in a detachment from human personality and a subjective association of oneself with one's visions. As mentioned in the beginning, Egaeus is purportedly a well-learned scholar, but it is his

status as a scholar that problematizes his whole obsession with the teeth. A possible source for the narrator's fantasy is excellently pointed out by Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet, who see Egaeus' fixation with the teeth as rooted in classical mythology because "Poe used a 'favorite' source, Jacob Bryant's *Antient Mythology*," and "[b]ecause Bryant's work includes several references to Cadmus, Poe was doubtless aware of the myth" (64). Also, they add that "[w]e have a classic approach-avoidance conflict: the human side of Egaeus wants companionship; the philosopher side is afraid of Poe's 'Berenice'" (65). Blythe and Sweet argue that the fixation with teeth emanates from the narrator's "focusing subconsciously on the Cadmus myth and the superficial parallels it seems to offer to his situation" (65). However, it doesn't matter whether Egaeus has any knowledge of the Cadmus myth;[5] what matters is how his visual fixation is in close contiguity with his obsession because, as he declares, "all other matters and all different interests became absorbed in their single contemplation" (231). Swirling teeth in the air, "everywhere," suggests a mind completely consumed by its object of interest, while the monomania assumes a "*sur*-real" aspect: akin to the Surrealists, Egaeus behaves like a psychic automaton and puts himself in an extreme passive state, freed from any rational control:

> They—they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality, became the essence of my mental life. I held them in every light. I

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[5] See Leonard Shlain. Cadmus, the Phoenician prince and harbinger of civilization and literacy, slew the dragon that guarded the spring of Ares. Hence, he was directed by Athena to sow the dragon's teeth out of which fierce warriors, known as *spartoi*, arose.

> turned them in every attitude. I surveyed their characteristics. I dwelt upon their peculiarities. I pondered upon their conformation. I mused upon the alteration in their nature. I shuddered as I assigned to them in imagination a sensitive and sentient power, and even when unassisted by the lips, a capability of moral expression. (231)

Egaeus seems to conduct a careful analysis of the teeth, but instead, he is passively in the grip of his obsession. Later on, it brings about a complete breakdown of mental composure as the objective correlative (teeth) of the original subject of his obsession (Berenice) yields a horrific realization that his obsession cannot be sustained anymore.

The image of teeth suspended in the air and encroaching the subject is symbolic of a total breakdown of Egaeus' psychic processes and this is exactly what Surrealists strove for—an unspeakable horror that arose from a startling image was employed to delve into the *sur*-real in our lives. The final action of the box falling from Egaeus' hands and the "thrity-two white and ivory-looking substances" (233) revealing themselves to the perpetrator of the crime brings the incomprehensibility of the situation to a crashing stasis; apparently, Egaeus has murdered Berenice, but the coming together of rationality (other characters' presence in the narrative apparently suggest that the action did take place) and irrationality (the act of wrenching out the teeth and simultaneously being completely oblivious of it) negates any logical conclusion.

In "Berenice," Poe envisions a grotesque transfiguration of the woman's body, for Egaeus' quasi-Freudian complexities make him stare at his cousin Berenice even as "the spirit of change swept over her," while "the destroyer came and went!" (226). But the

matter doesn't end there because Berenice is Egaeus' object of Desire or Eros and is physically liberated towards the end of the story, brought about by the narrator's imaginative fervor—"the destroyer." Just as the Surrealists tried to free Man from a willing slavery to the mechanical forces of tyranny and war, Egaeus is a proto-Surrealist figure who tries to emancipate himself from the mechanical forces of desire—here, Berenice—by killing and plucking out her teeth. According to Henri Peyre, the surrealists' avowed aim to bring about a change in the mainsprings of literature was nowhere better manifested than in their treatment of love (44). For the Surrealists, "Desire, or Eros, the quaint Hesiodic appellation of the earliest of the gods, must be liberated and become the level which will achieve men's imaginative liberation from the mechanical forces which have made him a willing slave to tyranny and war" (45). Peyre cites Eluard's theme in *Une Longue Pensée Amoreuse* as an example, which is a continuous transfiguration of woman in her body and in her mysterious and dreamy charm. Here, in "Berenice," a similar thing happens as Egaeus eschews and transcends the forces of Eros by sacrificing the object that engendered the desire in the first place. As Breton declares in his *Manifesto*, "the horror of death, the pantomime of the beyond, the total breakdown of the most beautiful intellect in dream,...the insuperable silver splashed wall of the brain...are perhaps nothing but images after all," but in all this there exists "a certain spiritual plane on which life and death, the real and the imaginary, ...the high and the low are not conceived as opposites" (24). The fact that Poe could effectively reconcile fantasy and reality, life and death, desire and *betenoiré,* and formulate new

types of reality in "Berenice" signals an aestheticism that attempted to harmonize contradictions of human existence.

Two other little known tales of Edgar Allan Poe, "Three Sundays in a Week" and "Angel of the Odd," betray core elements of Surrealism, but of a completely different texture than "Berenice." While these three tales depend on the (mis)perception of reality to arrive at some understanding of the human situation, "Berenice" is more grotesque and spiritually bizarre owing to its sheer perversity of ideas. However, "Three Sundays in a Week" and "Angel of the Odd" are more patently absurd and ridiculous, something that can be related to Dadaism and Cubism along with the latter Surrealist movement. Addressing the social, philosophical, and ethical crises that confronted the early nineteenth-century Americans, Poe here plays upon the concept of human fallibility resulting from a fastidious adherence to rationality and logic. Carefully using the concept of metamorphosis rather than a crisis, these two tales reveal how the human mind is capable of envisaging those realities that are not evident to normal perception, provided that it is open to suspension of disbelief. The key aspect of Surrealism was its juxtaposition of new ideas, forms, and techniques that apart from having a shock value provided the movement with a point-of-view that would generate multifarious meaning depending on the perceiver.

J. P. Hodin points out that "no Surrealist theory can do justice to its artistic value, for it is above all the aesthetic quality, the inventiveness of new imaginative forms and techniques, the taste and sense of color which impress themselves on the beholder..." (478). The first thing that strikes a reader about "Three Sundays in a Week" is its

imaginative title: not only is the idea of three Sundays in a week preposterous, but also intriguingly mesmerizing to the mind. The tale is about the narrator and his beloved, Kate, who can't marry because of Kate's uncle. To make it even worse, he agrees to have them wed only if three Sundays come together in a week. With some punning and word play, the uncle is won over as three Sundays are proven to come together in a week.

Poe was not being original and borrowed his idea from other sources. According to Fannye N. Cherry, Poe found a direct and immediate source of inspiration in an article published in the *The Philadelphia Public Ledger* in October 1841. An unsigned article titled "Three Thursdays in Week" carried an account of how navigational quirks with respect to geographical locations around the world can land someone at three different places at the same time, and "[c]ircumnavigators, in their voyages round the world, have discovered the fact" (Cherry 233). In another excellent article, Taylor Archer shows how Poe might have had even classical European colloquialisms as a possible source for his tale, including "the Frisian 'Seven Sundays in a Week,' the Anglo-Irish 'Since the Week of Three Sundays,' and such colloquialisms as 'When we have a week of Sundays,' 'A Month of Sundays,' and 'A month of five Sundays'" (154). However, what makes Poe's usage of this idea (if he really was influenced) unique is its serio-comic usage in the tale. That Poe was an avid magazinist, journalist, and critic is well known, but the smorgasbord of the heightened ludicrousness of situation and the chaotic interchange of dialogue amidst a more serious occasion of asking someone's hand for marriage make "Three Sundays in a Week" surrealistic in nature. Apart from the literal collapse of time and place, the tale engages in absurd interchange of dialogue, asides, and mind games.

The tale functions on two levels of perception: reality and *sur*-reality emanating from chance. Akin to the Dadaists who revered the element of "hazard," the Surrealists believed that the mystical manifestation of disorder and chaos was significant for existence and would let chance occurence(s) control our lives. For the Surrealists, reality did not have to be construed in external, visible, perceptible forms; instead, they argued that *how* the reality was perceived assumed more significance. "Three Sundays in a Week" employs the dialectic of imagination-perception in a similar manner. At the beginning of the tale, we have a muted form of interplay between imagination and reality, as Bobby hurtles out a shower of expletives only later to acknowledge that it was all internal: he says, "YOU HARD-HEARTED, dunder-headed, obstinate, rusty, crusty, musty, fusty, old savage" to his uncle Rumgudgeon "[o]nly in imagination" (474). Bobby perceives the external reality as something different from what he has actually internalized and even his uncle later on is shown to exercise this dual pattern of thinking:

> He had made up his mind to this all along...But then we had been so imprudent as to broach the subject *ourselves*. Not to oppose it under such circumstances, I sincerely believe was not in his power. (477)

One major incentive for the Surrealist movement was to cultivate distrust for regulations and conventions. Also, the debates between science and religion, rationality and spirituality that erupted after World War I saw Man's existence being thrown into a more precarious condition, and the Surrealists sought to establish a mode of perception and visualization that would thrive on these insecurities and inconstancies to generate meaning out of life. Interestingly hidden in the word play and visualization of domestic

crises of "Three Sundays in a Week" are the dialectics of spiritualism and materialism, instinct and law, the private and the public. The word "plum" appears numerous times in the narrative, but mainly as an ancillary element to Kate's identity and state of being. Both Rumgudgeon and Bobby place emphasis on the monetary aspect of this arrangement on different occasions: while the uncle always adds the "plum" when he talks about Kate's engagement, Bobby cannot help but think that "she was barely fifteen, and without his consent, her little amount in the funds was not come-at-able until five immeasurable summers had 'dragged their slow length along'" (475, 476). Again, Rumdudgeon repeatedly comes up with the name of "Doctor Double L. Dee, the lecturer upon quack physics" (476) during his conversations with Kate and Bobby. Akin to the open purloined letter, the mention of "Double L. Dee" or L.L.D takes a dig at the universal Doctor of Law who tries to play everything by the letter of the law and refuses to acknowledge the role of chance/coincidence or simple things in human life. It is the perception of contrast between imagination and reality, received wisdom and creativity that forms the crux of "Three Sundays in a Week." As a reaction to conventional parameters of reason exercised by Rumdudgeon, through sheer chance ("It happened then—so the Fates ordered it" [476]), Smitherton and Capt. Pratt surface in the narrative and raise the issue of circumnavigating the globe through different routes—Cape of Good Horn and Cape of Good Hope—but reaching the same destination at the same time. And since Kate and Bobby represent imagination in the narrative (Bobby, being a man of letters, is not liked by Rumdudgeon), Kate manages to deflate the power of reasoning through her own imaginative visualization of the improbable situation.

Surrealism was a response to the clear-cut dichotomy between the real and the unreal, the rational faculties of Man that attempted to find reason and affirmation in things said and done in the society and the irrational "ideé" that sometimes confronted Man, but one that was brushed aside in favor of the former. The fact that this tale doesn't feature in most "Selected Works of Poe" is a testament to the lack of importance accorded to it. Even today, only smattering critical reviews of this particular story exist that unenthusiastically reject the story as an ineffectual attempt at comedy (Roth 260). But the story raises certain epistemological questions that we, as post-modern readers, can identify with and relate to the tenets of Surrealism. As human beings leading a quotidian existence, we always desire more than one Sunday in a week (if we can label Sunday as a universal holiday). If we can liberate out minds and think beyond what our rational faculties allow, we *can*, as Smitherton in the story reasons, have more than one Sunday in a week because the collapse of time, space, and matter in today's era is possible by traveling in concords and other jets from one corner of the world to the other. They say that the Sun rises in the East and sets in the West; the mathematical calculation that Smitherton cites to win over Kate's uncle is mind-boggling, and yet it implicitly testifies to that principle. The surrealist principle of merging and collapsing of consciousness is what makes Smitherton's argument so interesting in the story.

One group of Surrealists, namely the Verisitic Surrealists, interpreted Automatism as a part of the movement, whereby the images of the subconscious are allowed to surface undisturbed so that their meaning could then be deciphered through analysis (Sanchez, *The Surrealism*). They wanted to faithfully represent these images as a link

between the abstract spiritual realities and the real forms of the material world. To them, the object stood as a metaphor for an inner reality. Through metaphor the concrete world could be understood, not by looking at the objects, but by looking into them. Looking at the narrator's perplexity in the story, he is unable to fathom how to bring out three Sundays in a week until his naval friends turn up. Poe interestingly merges and melts science and myth, rationality and the irrational to fructify the Uncle's condition for uniting Kate and the narrator. The link between the possible abstract spiritual reality (three Sundays) and the real form of the material world (one definite Sunday) is brought forth in the story by the weird conversation among three people: Smitherton, Kate, and Mr. Rumgudgeon. Poe demonstrates through their conversation that the quotidian existence and our perception of the same can be subverted if we look *into* something deeply enough and endow it with a renewed significance. As Mr. Smitherton declares at the end of the story, "it is positively clear that we are *all* right; for there can be no philosophical reason assigned why the idea of one of us should have preference over that of the other" (480). The metaphor of "Sunday" is exploited in the story to look into the possibility of the impossible. This prospect is not real, but surreal because normally one cannot enjoy three Sundays in a week, yet if the person travels around the world quickly enough—being ubiquitous—it is a definite possibility.

Inarguably, one of the primary points of departure between Poe and the Surrealist movement is the emphasis on order and decorum. While Poe insisted on meticulously schematized sentence structures, the Surrealists opted for everything that was not rational and logical. But while Poe's language and syntax bordered on the ideal and perfect, his

thoughts, as reflected in stories like "Berenice" and "Three Sundays in a Week," bordered on the ludicrous, the fantastic, and the glaringly incongruous—similar criteria that buffer the Surrealist movement of the 1920s. Jarrett Leplin observes that "Surrealism makes no commitment as to the actual deep structure of the world...and declines to represent it" (521). The narrative of "Three Sundays in a Week" makes a similar case because both metaphorically and literally, it debunks the structure of the world and refuses to represent what we know and understand as reality. Turning to "The Angel of the Odd," a similar Surrealist mode is employed where reality and fantasy vie for dominance, the marvelous and the glaringly incongruous. When Claude Richard defends the story as being a carefully constructed tale and not one of chance, disorder, and coincidence, he misses the whole point of Breton's argument. Breton doesn't say it *is* a Surrealistic piece of writing, but is in the spirit of Surrealism (Richard 46). Among other things, Claude Richard lends a biographical significance to the story by deconstructing the names of the works read by the narrator. But Breton's argument and, more importantly, the story's surrealistic elements do not derive from any contemporary relevance of the story. "Angel of the Odd" is surrealistic because it is fantastically constructed along the lines of Surrealist principles and arguably prefigures Surrealism because it is more pictorially grotesque than Poe's other two tales. The story's surrealistic elements surface right at the beginning. The passage read by the narrator about the accidental death of a person from a "singular cause"—a serious issue—is juxtaposed with the talk of the trivial—the narrator has just consumed "dyspeptic truffe" and is feeling a "little stupid" because of reading some travel books and local gossip (756).

The narrator's association of the mundane with the higher concern of death owes to a disinterested play of thought: as readers, we are not sure whether the passage he reads out is to be taken seriously because he is self-confessedly drunk—reality has become *sur*-reality, a non- sequitur association of various conscious elements of thought. Again, the narrator's following rationalization of "the marvelous increase…of 'odd accidents'" (757) is odd in itself, and Poe here engages in a meta-narrative that corresponds to the complexity of a surrealist work of art: the narrator's comments about oddity in the increase of "improbable possibilities" is odd to the point of being ludicrous, and Poe's odd tale challenges our complacency about received conventions if we place ourselves in the narrator's role. We may have, as the narrator does, "a contemplative understanding" of the world's goings-on, but we cannot defy or deny their irrational quality because logic cannot explain the marvelous and the incongruous happenings in our lives. The narrator's declaration—"I intend to believe nothing henceforward that has anything of the 'singular' about it" (757)—is testimonial of that tentativeness in his mind about a possible encounter with anything singular.

In Donald Spoto's *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*, the author records a remark by Alfred Hitchcock in an essay treating Poe's influence on himself specifically and, more generally, on art, literature and film: "And Surrealism…wasn't it too born from the work of Poe as much from Lautremont? He could as well have mentioned Andre Breton rather than Lautremont, for the latter's Manifesto of 1924 acknowledged quite a few figures as prefiguring Surrealism, including Poe whom he labeled as 'a Surrealist in adventure'" (40). While Hitchcock's remark is

only one example among the smattering of comments made on Poe with regards to Surrealism, it is undeniably true that what Surrealists called "*Des Ideés*" and their emphasis on the role of accident in human lives is manifest in many of Poe's tales that deal with the nether side of consciousness, including "The Angel of the Odd." In this tale, the "adventure" that the narrator has with the Angel is consummately Surreal, both literally and figuratively. The angel never uses conventional dialect to communicate with the narrator: phrases like "Mein Gott," "Shicken," "goot veller" might be examples of Poe's dig at contemporary German folks and their accent, but they liberate the mind from conventional trappings of language just as surrealism did not merely strive after originality, but made a resolute attempt to explore a virgin expanse in or under man's mind. According to Gerald E. Gerber, the tale is Poe's response to the prevailing spirit of reform in the society (90). The tale, Gerber adds, sprung from an exchange between Poe and Thomas Holly Chivers where the latter (in his letter on May 15, 1844) insisted on man's perfectibility through knowledge and experience accumulated over time. Poe, in his reply on July 10, observed that Man was not getting better. Instead, he was only more active, neither wiser nor happier than he had been (*Letters* 259-60). Another source, according to Gerber, might have been "an anecdote in the chapter entitled 'Punning &c made Easy' in Cornelius Webbe's *The Man About Town*" (89). The anecdote concerns a German Transcendentalist who had his breeches repaired by a tailor in England. On asking how much did he owe, he was replied, "Eight and a *kick*." The German replied "Meine Gott! Dat is very ott of him!" (akin to the dialect of the Angel here) and mercilessly kicked the tailor not knowing that "kick" meant half a shilling in local

terminology. Gerbert points out many other interesting sources for Poe's tale (including Griwsold's *Curiosities* as one of the books read by the narrator after which he feels a "little stupid" [756]), but what is more important here is the repeated emphasis on dreams, trance, and the dream-like state that the narrator finds himself in. Akin to Egaeus, the narrator of "The Angel of the Odd" is perpetually in a trance/dream-like state where everything is in a state of abeyance, deriving significance from his method of perceiving things. Even when he is about to meet his second subject of love, he is withheld from an appointment owing to a "drop" in his eye. It can be speculated that the drop might have been alcohol, but the momentary blindness is significant in the context of the tale's preoccupation with hallucination and (mis)perception.

The subject of hallucination and (mis)perception comes to the fore when we realize that by creating an angel who doesn't speak as an angel should, Poe demonstrates artistically that "in efforts to soar above our nature, we invariably fall below it" (*Marginalia* XV). The exchange with the Angel leaves the narrator so vexed that he misses an appointment with his insurance company because, "singularly" (761), his clock stopped owing to a raisin-stem that he accidentally flipped around while pacing up and down his lodge and hence couldn't wake up in time. This is precisely what Surrealists would later label "the hasard"—chance incidents that thaw the crust of blunted perceptions and of deductive reasoning that separate us from our deepest life. Through incidents like these—couching the trivial clock incident in a material collapse of time and space— Poe perhaps paved the way for Surrealists (and other modernists) to explore inconsistencies, a capricious disregard of causality, and a renewal of perspective of our

quotidian existence. We as readers unconsciously transform our reading habits and perception to get into the mind of the Angel of the Odd. This is what Surrealists tried to accomplish: an exertion of the unconscious control of our minds on conscious external existence. When the Angel declares that "I zay, doo, you most pe pigger vool as de goose, vor to dispelief vat iz print in de print" (756), he challenges the human being's incapacity to envisage anything beyond conventional wisdom—the Angel's very appearance testifies to the fact that something "singular" can be encountered if one gives free reign to his/her imagination. The initial stress on not believing in something "singular from now on" stands subverted when the Angel's appearance registers upon the narrator's imagination. It matters little if the Angel is real or unreal: what matters is how conscious human beings can record unfiltered and untapped realms of *sur*-reality once the imagination is given free reign.

The narrator's sensations focus upon the object(s) around him in ways that multiple realities seem to exist. These are again so pictorially described, accentuated with other sundry objects, that external reality seems to be subject to doubt and despair because of the shifting meaning of the objects around him. Emphasizing such exercise of artistic imagination and comparing the Surrealists vs. the non-Surrealists in his *Manifesto* of 1924, Breton observes:

> They (Swift, Sade, Picasso, Flamel, Monk Lewis) were not always surrealist—in each of them a number of preconceived notions exist to which very naively they clung...because they had not heard the *surrealist* voice, the voice that exhorts in the eve of death and in the roaring storm, no more than orchestrating the score

> replete with marvelous things. We, on the contrary, who have not given ourselves to the process of filtering, who through the medium of our work have been content to be silent receptacles of so many echoes, modest *registering machines* that are not hypnotized by the pattern that they trace. (26)

Balakian notes that the Surrealists found the fairy tale as "the only form of art that reconciled contradictions which even the most imaginative adult found to exist between reality and the dream" (83). "The Angel of the Odd" almost borders on the fairy tale due to its illogicality and fantastical appearances that retain a sense of logic in the narrative context. The most important surreal elements of "The Angel of the Odd" arguably surface through the very appearance of the angel, an absurd cluster of encounters with different animals in weird places and circumstances, and the narrator's journey through air, fire, and dreams. According to Breton and the fellow surrealists, one of the main agendas of Surrealism was to concoct hitherto unexplored associations of mind and the external world to bring about "the future transmutation of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of surreality, so to speak" (25).

If we carve out a picture of the Angel based on Poe's descriptions, it would turn out to be something similar to a surreal painting of the twentieth century—wine pipe for body, kegs for legs, long bottles for hands, Hessian canteens for head, and a funnel that sat on it emitting strange sounds. This grotesque apology for an angel's figure might have been the reason why Breton claimed this story to be based on automotive writing. Poe's syntax and sentence structure are not surreal, and neither is his vernacular; however, his visual imagery is. Poe tried to filter the crisis of nineteenth-century America— owing to

bourgeoning industrialism and capitalism—through visions of the grotesque and the arabesque. His characters like the Angel of the odd tried to shake contemporary readers out of their complacency, readers who were not used to witnessing anything "singular" outside their bounds of reason and that was not in keeping with the dictates of the literary marketplace.

The narrator's encounters with the rat, the hog, and the crow; the ludicrous connection between singed hair, seriousness, and desire for a wife; the chance incident involving "the particle of some foreign matter (762);" the accidental hanging of the narrator onto a passing balloon—all these are narrated without any logic or control of thought and possess almost a dream-like quality that seems to convey a metaphysical perception of the tragic sense of human life and a desperate attempt to leap beyond the bounds usually assigned to human reason. No wonder then that the story ends with the Angel cutting off the rope of the hot-air balloon to have the narrator fall from above—a surreal liberation from the mind of its subjective counterpart, the conscious control exercised by reason and rationality.

According to Nancy M. West, "[p]ainters such as René Magritte, Salvador Dali, and Victor Brauner tempted the viewer into a feeling of familiarity engendered by recognition of forms while simultaneously usurping this familiarity by rendering their landscapes with a strangeness, sense of displacement, or fantastical quality" (44). Poe would have given an unqualified endorsement to what Breton lamented about in his first *Manifesto*:

> We still live under the reign of logic, but the methods of logic are applied nowadays only to the resolution of problems of secondary interest. Logical ends on the other hand escape us. Under color of civilization, under pretext of progress, all that rightly or wrongly may be regarded as fantasy or superstition has been banished from the mind, all uncustomary searching after truth has been proscribed. (9)

This is exactly what Poe does in these three tales: we can recognize the familiar, quotidian world that buttresses the narratives, but he transforms these narratives through subversion of common logic and interplay of fantasy and reality. Poe's "Berenice," "Three Sundays in a Week," and "the Angel of the Odd" bear the unmistakable stamp of the core ideals of Surrealism. It is hardly debatable that the Poesque method, which inspired the French symbolists like Baudelaire (who in turn influenced the Surrealists), betrays those surrealist impulses that are analogous to the impulses of all avant-garde movements: to subvert received conventions of art and expression in order to employ fresh approaches and techniques, to interplay and juxtapose unexpected images, to defy rational expectations, and to hail the element of unknown in our lives. In these three tales then, these techniques combine with their visual component to provide striking resemblances to the Surreal works of art: their interplay of dreams and reality, shadow and stillness, collapse of time and place, thought and action that doesn't try to negate human existence, but instead forge new forms of reality.

Conclusion: The Vision Beyond

If the latest issue of *Edgar Allan Poe Review* (Fall 2008), the current MLA international bibliography on Poe, and the recent Poe panels at the 2008 MLA convention are anything to go by, it can be surmised that the lens of current critical studies involving the tales and poems of Edgar Allan Poe is primarily focused on newer historical approaches, but the texts involved are the familiar ones that have adorned Poe scholarship for the past fifty years or so. The concern, however, is not so much about the recent approaches as the texts chosen to elucidate the various schools of thought; herein lies the impetus of this study. Studies of vision and/or visual culture as applicable to the works of Edgar Allan Poe can be particularly useful to fill this vacuum because such cultural study bridges both the famous and lesser-known works to yield a new understanding of our author. Studies involving visual culture are not just about objects/tropes of vision that constitute the yardstick to measure the culture of a particular era. More importantly, these studies highlight the *types* of visuality available to the reader for understanding his cultural ethos as well as that of his author.

My study has tried to fruitfully contribute to the current critical trend of historicizing Poe, but through the author's lesser known tales. Such an attempt is appropriate given the wide-ranging themes of the author spread throughout his *oeuvre*. Any avoidance of the author's famous tales is an example of neither a political nor an a-political stance, but a conscious and measured response to the neglect of *most* of Poe's tales in the contemporary critical circle. These five chapters are interconnected through multifarious possibilities of perception inherent in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe. While

these minor tales afford scope for studies in contemporary visual culture and beyond, they also facilitate an analysis of how Poe intertwined visual elements with other ontological and epistemological concerns. This process helps the reader to employ one's *own* cultural *methods* of perception to generate understanding. According to Vanessa Schwartz, visual culture studies is constituted less by its topical repertoire and more to the degree that it generates a discursive space where questions and materials that have been traditionally marginalized within the established disciplines become central ("History" 6). This project of visual culture doesn't take up marginalized materials within a particular discipline, but those within an *oeuvre* of an author. While the first three chapters engage in explorations of some aspect of photography or ocularity as the key medium of expression, the last two chapters explore the visual culture through the lens of perception and visualization, of the science of anthropology and the fantastic dashes of surrealism respectively. Through such attention to the *types* of visuality applicable to the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, this study opens up the avenue of understanding the author's culture in a newer light: to perceive how he carved out his materials for prose and poetry that both embraced and transcended nineteenth-century visual culture.

While the preceding chapters engage in various explorations of Poe's visual culture *vis-à-vis* the socio-cultural motifs and concepts of our own era, the author's poems offer a further scope of such exploration of visual culture. Mostly famous for "The Raven" and "The Bells," Poe wrote numerous poems that expressly address themes of vision/visionary belonging, sight and perception, dreams and reality (some specific examples are "The City in the Sea," "The Coliseum," "Alone," and "A Dream within a

Dream"). Interestingly, poe(tic) compositions can afford an extremely fertile and discursive exploration of nineteenth-century visual culture because of the fluidity of their subject matter. For example, "The City in the Sea" is as much apocalyptic in vision as it is aesthetically rife with forceful vignettes of life and death. In most cases, "the juxtaposition of the literary text with… a visual image has clarified the edges of both texts and images, thus illuminating the particularities of each form, while also revealing shared attributes across a culture in time" (qtd. In Schwartz 6). It should not come as a surprise then that the field of visual culture study is/can be most fruitful for a renewed understanding of Edgar Allan Poe and his works.

Visual culture underscores the potency of the visual to embrace those various cognitive and aesthetic schools of thought that facilitate readings of a given text in accordance with its historical specificity. Commenting on this relationship between historical specificity and the use of the visual, Schwartz observes that historical periods can be reorganized via "scopic regimes," periods that either celebrated or repressed uses of various technologies, objects, and ways of seeing (7). In addition, she points out that any visual culture is conditioned by a particular historical understanding of cognitive science, optics, and physiology.

The five chapters of this project explore Poe's tales through these "scopic regimes," where each chapter deals with some aspect of a cognitive science or technology that accentuates the visual elements in Poe's works. Any Poe scholar is generally aware that Poe tried to stitch the past, present, and the future in a single unitary thread through the form of his last work, *Eureka*. It can be argued that his perception of the world in this

work, the way he visualizes creation, the big bang theory, and the existence of the solar system accord him the rank of a visionary, and by transcending historical specificity, he visualized and anticipated certain later scientific advancements. However, this work was not an exception as far as the nature of Poe's anticipatory vision is concerned. Exploring different aspects of *why* Poe strove for such visual and perceptual unity can lead us to *how* he accomplished such unity not only through his "famous" works, but also through his lesser-known tales and poems. To understand Poe's vision, we have to rectify our vision of his works and see that the scope of any cultural study involving Poe revolves around perception/vision/objects of vision. According to W. J. Mitchell, literary studies have been unusually forthcoming in viewing vision as "a mode of cultural expression and human communication as fundamental and widespread as language" (543). This eagerness, if applied to the works of Edgar Allan Poe, yields interesting avenues to strategize attentive reading/visualization and deepens the possibilities for various interpretations of his texts.

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