

Poe's Hermetic Philosophy: An Interpretation of "The Island of the Fay"

For A. B., and to the spirit of J. B.

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"I am full of matter." – Job 32: 18.

Allen Tate rightly said in his "The Angelic Imagination": "Poe's symbols refer to a known tradition of thought, an intelligible order, apart from what he was as a man, and are not merely the index to a compulsive neurosis..." But the tradition Poe followed is not the "Christian philosophical tradition" as Tate seems to have thought, but rather the occult philosophical tradition, though the former was historically assimilated through the latter, and though it is doubtful whether the tradition has been "known" to the ordinary readers.¹

As Mario Praz writes, "the Gothic tales were a powerful underground current (not, however, so concealed) in nineteenth-century fiction."² Poe's Gothic tales are, if classified, not preromantic Gothic. They belong, to use the naming by Devendra Varma, to the "Gothic burlesque," or rather, it may be more fitting to say that they contain "Gothic fragments." Literary Gothicism in Poe's fiction, whether it is, and is taken, not serious but satiric or ironic, has been influencing on the interpretation of his works. Gothic faces of Poe usually urge moralistic approaches to, and attacks on him and his fiction. The Gothic romance, or the "novel of terror and wonder"³ did not contain any aesthetics or metaphysics as its indispensable theme. On the contrary, many of the Gothic tales, especially those innumerable ones in the so-called popular fiction, had no connection with philosophy. But Gothic tales really had a structure in which terror and wonder could be sublimated to aesthetics

(first of the sublime, and then of the picturesque) and in which they could be used to express metaphysical ideas and, sometimes, mysticism or occultism of the writer.

Poe's tales have under the design of Gothicism a consistent and growing stratum of the occult philosophy, in the meaning of the term defined by Frances Yates, i.e., Christian Cabala plus Hermeticism,⁴ and this is perhaps Poe's most serious aspect. We cannot believe that Poe's occultism derived entirely from popular tradition. Undoubtedly English Romantic writers had significant influences on Poe in this respect. But along with the literary tradition, the more learned occult philosophy in the orderly form seems to have been directly learned by Poe. There was a particular historical background contributive to the knowledge and the understanding of esoteric traditions in the epoch generally called American Renaissance. It was the prosperity of Egyptology – Egyptology that was not only scientific but retained the metaphysical and Hermetic-Kabbalist tradition which had been forming the main trend of the science since the fifteenth century till Champollion's discoveries in the 1820's when modern Egyptology started. It is a stimulating idea, I believe, that, as suggested by Patrick Quinn, French readers, symbolist poets above all, who themselves were well versed in esoteric gnosis, comprehended the occult philosophy in Poe's writings. This is an answer to the question what it was that the French poets found in Poe's *oeuvre* to admire, which Anglo-Saxon readers have not found.

I

The reading by the author of *L'Éau et les Rêves* of such a conscious writer as Poe is necessarily senseless, for Bachelard believes that he can use a writing which the poet wrote deliberately from beginning to end with his philosophy of composition as an evidence of some particular unconsciousness of him. The consistency of the text is ignored, and the symbols are attributed to the personal biography. At his treating of "The Island of the Fay," Bachelard depending on a Freudian psycho-analytic interpreter connects the water with death, and then talks about the

domination of *l'image* of death which derives from the memory of the dying mother, without considering what death was for Poe.⁵

The dark water is really the Waters of Death. Poe himself writes: "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 ingulfs it?"⁶ But the satisfaction with connection of the water with death is one-sided, or half-blind.

"The waters symbolize," writes Mircea Eliade,

the universal sum of virtualities; they are *fons et origo*, 'spring and origin,' the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence; they precede every form and *support* every creation. One of the paradigmatic images of creation is the island that suddenly manifests itself in the midst of the waves. On the other hand, immersion in water signifies regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence. Emersion repeats the cosmogonic act of formal manifestation; *immersion* is equivalent to a dissolution of forms. This is why the symbolism of the water always brings a regeneration—on the one hand because dissolution is followed by a new birth, on the other because immersion fertilizes and multiplies the potential of life.⁷

Poe's water is not exceptional, as will be confirmed in the course of this essay. The water encircling the island careers through not only "the region of the ebony flood" (p. 605) but also "the region of light" (p. 604), and the light is related to life in this valley as any reader of the sketch of the island can understand. The waters, and the island in the midst of it are divided or polarized between light and darkness, which respectively represents life and death (until the final moment when darkness falls over all). The ambivalent symbolism of the waters is polarized too. The Fay's boat revolves round between the watery regions of light and darkness. The little river is dark and black in the east and is increasing its blackness, but "while in the opposite quarter (so it

appeared to me as I lay at length and glanced upward) there poured down noiselessly and continuously into the valley, a rich golden and crimson water-fall from the sunset fountains of the sky" (p. 602).

My position enabled me to include in a single view both the eastern and western extremities of the islet; and I observed a singularly-marked difference in their aspects. The latter was all one radiant harem of garden beauties. It glowed and blushed beneath the eye of the slant sunlight, and fairly laughed with flowers. The grass was short, springy, sweet-scented, and Asphodel-interspersed. The trees were lithe, mirthful, erect—bright, slender and graceful—of eastern figure and foliage, with bark smooth, glossy, and parti-colored. There seemed a deep sense of life and joy about all; and although no airs blew from out the Heavens, yet every thing had motion through the gentle sweepings to and fro of innumerable butterflies, that might have been mistaken for tulips with wings.

The other or eastern end of the isle was whelmed in the blackest shade. A sombre, yet beautiful and peaceful gloom here pervaded all things. The trees were dark in color and mournful in form and attitude—wreathing themselves into sad, solemn, and spectral shapes, that conveyed ideas of mortal sorrow and untimely death. The grass wore the deep tint of the cypress, and the heads of its blades hung droopingly, and, hither and thither among it, were many small unsightly hillocks, low, and narrow, and not very long; that had the aspect of graves, but were not; although over and all about them the rue and the rosemary clambered. (p. 603)

The valley represents a Poe's typical garden, having several botanic elements in common with, for example, the Paradise of Arnheim in "The Landscape Garden" or the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass in "Eleonora." This island paradise is an "enclosed garden" enclosed by the "verdant walls of the forest" (p. 602) and golden and crimson water-fall of the sunlight.⁸ This is, however, not the heavenly but an earthly paradise: the place knows "mortal sorrow" and death; the inhabitants of this

island is not free from “fallen mortality” (p. 600).⁹ The Biblical garden myth or, as Poe daringly calls, the “mystic parable . . . tells of the tree of knowledge, and of its forbidden fruit, death-producing.”¹⁰ There stood in the midst of the garden the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2: 9). Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God forbade to eat of it. “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” God said (2: 17). The serpent seduced the man and the woman to eat the fruit of the tree persuading that: “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (3: 4–5). God said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest the put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” (3: 22): “Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (3: 23). Poe would read that immorality was not meet for man in the infant condition of his body as “knowledge was not meet for man in the infant condition of his soul.”¹¹ Thus man has fallen.

This valley has a truly paradisiac emblem: the Tree of Life.

[E]ddying currents careered round and round the island, bearing upon their bosom large, dazzling, white flakes of the bark of sycamore—flakes which, in their multiform positions upon the water, a quick imagination might have converted into any thing it pleased.... (p. 604)

Sycamore is the Tree of Life in Egypt, from which the dead receives eternal life. It stands in the East of the Egyptian Paradise like the garden eastward in Eden (Genesis 2: 8), connecting Heaven and Earth as the *axis mundi*, and on it is the throne of the Godhead. It is sacred to the Mother-goddess Hathor-Nut, epiphany of the Great Earth Mother, and she is represented as appearing from the fruit-laden tree, offering food to the dead, or pouring down the “water of the depths” which, drawn up from the hidden and mysterious depths of the earth, far and wide, as vital sap

of life, and ascending through the trunk to the crown of the Cosmic Tree, has become the heavenly elixir of immortality. "He who receives the food from the tree 'is like a god' (immortal because of resurrection) and 'knows god.'"¹²

The Tree of Life is the vertical axis around which the whole revolves. As *axis mundi* it stands at the center of the Universe and passes through the middle of the three cosmic zones, Heaven, Earth and Underworld. The cosmic tree reflects not only the endless regeneration of the cosmos but its undying center.¹³ The center is the point where the cosmogonic act, the Creation took place.

In the "one supreme and Universal *sphere*,"¹⁴ all is "revolving around one *far-distant* centre which is the Godhead..." (p. 601: italics mine). The narrator finds the enclosed space "amid a *far-distant* region of mountain locked *within* mountain, and sad rivers and melancholy tarns writhing or sleeping *within* all" (p. 602: italics mine). The repetition of *far-distant* and the centralizing preposition, *within*, recalls the reader to the preceding cosmological argument. (The part of the sketch proper covers less than three fifths of this tale or "sketch" of about 2,000 words.) Eddying currents, which are circularly enclosed, career round and round the circular island, bearing upon them dazzling, white flakes. The Fay makes the "revolution" (p. 604) and "circuit" (p. 605) round the island. Besides "so mirror-like" is "the glassy water" (p. 602), this encircled stream, as the "circular basin" in the domain of Arnheim, is sure to reflect the "inverted Heaven."¹⁵ ("[A]nd the interest with which I have . . . gazed into the reflected Heaven of many a bright lake, has been an interest greatly deepened by the thought that I have gazed *alone*" [p. 602].)

This little *locus*, a "rivulet" (p. 602) and "islet" (p. 603), is a cosmos in miniature, a reflection of the universe. It at once contains and represents the universe. Macrocosm is mirrored on microcosm. The dazzling flakes correspond to the stars, the verdant walls to the "walls of the universe"¹⁶; the eddying currents form the "rotation about an imaginary axis"¹⁷ which is the sycamore, or we may take the circular island to be a

“globe” which is the “central pivot of the whole.”¹⁹

Then we can understand why the circle round the island corresponds to the cycle of the year, for time is determined by the revolution of the celestial bodies. The narrator muses: “The revolution which has just been made by the Fay . . . is the cycle of the brief year of her life. She has floated through her winter and through her summer” (p. 604).

In the region of winter, the trees are dying by separating their shadows, which are buried and “entombed” in the water (p. 603). In winter trees die, but are reborn in spring to flourish to full maturity in summer. Their seasonal transformations, their annual cycle of death and rebirth, destruction and resurrection, were thought as an image of the endless regeneration of the cosmos by archaic men.¹⁹

Shadows “bury” themselves, but at the same time they are “impregnating” (p. 603). This apparently paradoxical union of death and conception is not oxymoronic; not for archaic men and religious men for whom death is regarded as the supreme initiation, as the beginning of a new existence. As Eliade writes: “In the scenarios of initiations the symbolism of birth is almost always found side by side with that of death.”²⁰

The narrator of “The Pit and the Pendulum” cries: “In death — no! even in the grave all *is not* lost. Else there is no immortality for man.”²¹ Man has his temporal and future destinies.²² “What we call ‘death,’ is but the painful metamorphosis.” Vankirk, the sleep-waker in “Mesmeric Revelation” tells Poe, who tells the same in his letters.²³ Poe writes in the letter to Lowell: “I really perceive that vanity about which most men merely prate—the vanity of the human or temporal life. I live continually in a reverie of the future.”²⁴

In “Mesmeric Revelation,” Vankirk says:

There are two bodies—the rudimental and the complete; corresponding with the two conditions of the worm and the butterfly. . . . Our present incarnation is progressive, preparatory, temporary. Our future is perfected, ultimate, immortal. The ultimate life is the full design.²⁵

The ultimate life means immortality. But in Poe, the "immortality" in question is not post mortem, *spiritual*, but *material*. Poe writes to Chivers:

There is no such thing as spirituality. God is material. All things are material; yet the matter of God has all the qualities which we attribute to spirit: thus the difference is scarcely more than of words. There is a matter without particles—of no atomic composition: this is God. It permeates and impels all things, and thus *is* all things in itself. Its agitation is the thought of God, and creates. Man and other beings (inhabitants of stars) are portions of this unparticled matter, individualized by being incorporated in the ordinary or particled matter. Thus they exist rudimentally. Death is the painful metamorphosis. The worm becomes the butterfly—but the butterfly is still material—of a matter, however, which cannot be recognized by our rudimental organs. But for the necessity of the rudimental life, there would have been no stars—no worlds—nothing which we term material. These spots are the residences of the rudimental things. At death, these, taking a n[e]w form, of a n[o]vel matter, pass every where, and act all things, by mere volition, and are cognizant of all secrets but *the one*—the nature of the volition of God—of the agitation of the unparticled matter.²⁶

Thoughts on life and death of man were entangled in Poe with thoughts on the original and present and future conditions of the universe: his cosmic myth. But when "what is termed materialism"²⁷ of Poe was enlarged beyond individuals to include cosmos in *Eureka*, it underwent critical modifications.

According to Poe's cosmogony in *Eureka*, God, existing as *Spirit*—as *not Matter*—first made from his Spirit, or from Nihility, Matter in its extreme of Simplicity, by dint of his Will, and thus became existence as matter. Poe explains this primal Matter:

Let us now endeavor to conceive what Matter must be, when, or if, in

its absolute extreme of *Simplicity*. Here the Reason flies at once to Imparticularity—to a particle—to *one* particle—a particle of *one* kind—of *one* character—of *one* nature—of *one* size—of one form—a particle, therefore, “*without* form and void”—a particle positively a particle at all points—a particle absolutely unique, individual, undivided, and not indivisible only because he who *created* it, by dint of his Will, can by an infinitely less energetic exercise of the same Will, as a matter of course, divide it.²⁸

One can understand that this Matter, one particle is, paradoxically, that “unparticled matter.” A great difference is that Oneness, the state of one particle exists only at the beginning (and at the end); this primordial Particle must be divided. Poe declares that “this *Oneness is a principle abundantly sufficient to account for the constitution, the existing phaenomena and the plainly inevitable annihilation of at least the material Universe*” (XVI, 207). The constitution of the Universe from the Particle “has been effected by *forcing* the originally and therefore normally *One* into the abnormal condition of *Many*” (XVI, 207). The primordial Particle is able to be divided almost infinitely owing to its absolute Unity. Then “a certain inexpressibly great yet limited number of unimaginably yet not infinitely minute atoms” are radiated spherically from the one Particle, as a center, “to immeasurable but still to definite distances in the previously vacant space” (XVI, 208). (As is clearly expressed in the quoted passages, Poe denies in *Eureka* the infinity of matter and therefore the unlimitedness of “the Universe of stars” [XVI, 186] though space is absolutely infinite.) This is the “act by which a God, self-existing and alone existing, became all things at once, through dint of his volition, while all things were thus constituted a portion of God” (XVI, 255).

The purpose of the diffusion is to bring about “heterogeneity out of homogeneity,” “the utmost possible multiplicity of *relation* out of the emphatically irrelative *One*” (XVI, 208). When the diffusive energy ceases to be exerted, the tendency of the atoms to return into One,

which can be understood as the principle of the Newtonian law of gravity, is permitted to act. Because multiplicity is the object, there must be a repulsion of limited capacity, which prevents the coalition of the atoms up to a certain epoch, until the Divine purposes are fulfilled; which, however, does not interfere with their coalescence. For, without such a force, the disunited atoms would be united at once and become One respectively at various spots before the ultimate design of "the utmost possible multiplicity of *relation*" is accomplished. Poe says that these two forces, Attraction and Repulsion, are respectively the material and the spiritual principle of the Universe.

On withdrawal of the diffusive force, or Divine Volition, "at innumerable points throughout the Universal sphere, innumerable agglomerations, characterized by innumerable specific differences of form, size, essential nature, and distance each from each," arise, "being subject to almost infinite variations of time, degree, and condition" (XVI, 244). The development of Repulsion commences with the beginning of coalescences of atoms, and proceeds "constantly in the ratio of coalescence—that is to say, *in that of Condensation*, or, again, of Heterogeneity" (XVI, 244). Now "heterogeneousness, brought about directly through condensation, is proportional with it forever" (XVI, 259), and "the important phenomena of vitality, consciousness, and thought" (XVI, 258), "not merely the *manifestation* of vitality, but its importance, consequences, and elevation of character" (XVI, 259) proceed in the ratio of heterogeneity.

Thus progress, or proceeding of multiplicity, leads to the return to the original Unity, in the result. For condensation arises from the tendency of the disunited atoms to return into the primordial impartiality. In short, hi-story is accepted in *Eureka* (and the Universe, the most sublime poem, is "a plot of God" [XVI, 292]). As for man, there is a possibility of the appearance of superior man in proportion as condensation proceeds. It means reversely that man can participate in and help the work of God, or, in other words, can contribute to the unification of the Universe, by exercising and cultivating his imaginative thought and the

“poetic intellect”²⁹ (because “the source of all motion is thought”).³⁰ Poe saw the Divine design of the Universe in the struggle to gain Unity and in “the august purposes for which the Deity had implanted the poetic sentiment in man.”³¹

The materialism of Poe, that is, the quest of matter or quest of spirit in matter, is overlapped with the quest of the primal origin in *Eureka*. All things proceeded from the one primordial Matter, and the return to the primal origin is the return to this primal matter.

Vankirk in “Mesmeric Revelation” talks about the “gradations of matter”:

But there are *gradations* of matter of which man knows nothing; the grosser impelling the finer, the finer pervading the grosser. . . . These gradations of matter increase in rarity or fineness, until we arrive at a matter *unparticled*—without particles—indivisible—one³²

All things, all the creatures are individualizations of God and therefore they are divine in themselves. But if the original and unparticled state of matter can be considered as more divine than the diffused state, we may apply the gradations of matter to the gradations of divinity or spirituality; that is to say, the more condensed atoms are, the more they increase the divinity, and the superior intelligences are endowed with the more divine matter.

II

With God embedded in matter, man shares in the substance of Deity. This idea is not christian—it is alchemic. That everything proceeds from the One, the *prima materia*, is a fundamental tenet of alchemy: “As all things proceed from the One . . . so all things are born of this one thing,” says the “Tabula smaragdina.”³³ The first “res” is the subject matter of alchemy and the matter in perfection is called variously. Yet, as Jung writes, it is true that “the alchemists came to project even the highest value—God—into matter,” though very few of the philosophers pressed

forward to this conclusion.³⁴

The attained *corpus glorifications* or perfected matter is matter yet spirit:

The body will become wholly transfigured [*glorificatum*], incorruptible, and almost unbelievably subtilized, and it will penetrate all solids. Its nature will be as much spiritual as corporeal.³⁵

One may be reminded of Poe's similar description of God or spirit as the "unparticled matter." In "Mesmeric Revelation" Vankirk explains that "the ultimate, or unparticled matter" has the nature of what we conceive of spirit. It "not only permeates all things but impels all things—and thus *is* all things within itself. This matter is God."³⁶ Then he says: "God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter."³⁷ He also says that the unparticled matter has "unity and omniprevalence."³⁸ The alchemists say the One, the *prima materia* has the quality of ubiquity; it is to be found always and everywhere.³⁹

The alchemical transformation is the realization of the state of ultimate perfection of matter, the perfecting of matter, or, in other words, the redemption of matter, of the deity lost and sleeping in matter. As Eliade writes: "[T]hey projected on to Matter the initiatory function of suffering. Thanks to the alchemical operations, corresponding to the tortures, death and resurrection of the initiate, the substance is transmuted, that is, attains a transcendental mode of being."⁴⁰ Ultimately the goal of the *opus* is Cosmic Salvation; therefore, as Eliade stresses, the alchemical process "presents at least two interdependent significations: cosmological and initiatory."⁴¹

The initiatory drama taking place in the fictional space of "The Island of the Fay," on this watery "O," presents the alchemical operation.

At the eastern end of the island whelmed in the blackest shade, each shadow of the trees seems to the narrator to separate itself from the trunk, bury itself and become absorbed in the water, "impregnating the depths of the element with darkness" (p. 603). The narrator fancies that

this is an enchanted island where the few survived Fays dwell, and he ponders on the death of them:

Are these green tombs theirs?—or do they yield up their sweet lives as mankind yield up their own? In dying, do they not rather waste away mournfully; rendering unto God little by little their existence, as these trees render up shadow after shadow, exhausting their substance unto dissolution? 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 ingulfs it? (p. 604)

Then the Fay appears urging an oar in a canoe which is maybe one of those “large, dazzling, white flakes of the bark of sycamore” floating on eddying currents. She makes her way “slowly into the darkness from out the light at the western end of the island” (p. 604), and at length rounds the island and re-enters the region of light. The narrator interpretes the journey of the Fay:

The revolution which has just been made by the Fay . . . is the cycle of the brief year of her life. She has floated through her winter and through her summer. She is a year nearer unto Death: for I did not fail to see that as she came into the shade, her shadow fell from her, and was swallowed up in the dark water, making its blackness more black. (p. 604)

The Fay makes the circuit of the island again and again, and “at each passage into the gloom, there fell from her a darker shade, which became whelmed in a shadow more black” (p. 605).

At the operational level, “death” corresponds usually to the black color (the *nigredo*). It is reduction of substances to the *materia prima*, the fluid, shapeless mass corresponding, on the cosmological plane, to the primordial chaos. Maier describes the *nigredo* as a “black blacker than black” (*nigrum nigrius nigro*).⁴² The stage of the *nigredo* (blackening; or

"this darkness darker than darkness, this 'black of blacks' ")⁴³ and *mortificatio* as the result of it is followed by the *albedo* (whitening); and the *albedo*, though highly prized by many alchemists as if it were the ultimate goal, must lead to the *rubedo* which, meaning the dawn, immediately precedes the completion of the work.⁴⁴

The ebony water growing blacker and blacker by absorbing black shadows that grow darker is the liquid *nigredo*. One of the alchemists' maxims is: "Perform no operation till all be made water."⁴⁵ Aquatic symbolism plays an important part in alchemy. A treatise attributed to "Alphonso, King of Portugal," states: "Our dissolution is no other thing but that the body be turned again to moistness The first result of this work is the body reduced to water, that is to Mercury, that is what the Philosophers call solution, which is the foundation of the work."⁴⁶ The alchemical regression to the fluid *nigredo* corresponds cosmologically to the primordial state of the One, and initiatory to the death of the initiate.

The Fay (and the tree)⁴⁷ is exhausting her "substance" unto "dissolution" (*olutio*), "rendering unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22: 21). Separation of each shadow is equivalent to a form of the *mortificatio*: the operation of *separatio*.

The water circulating round the island is identical with the *aqua divina* or *aqua permanens* in alchemy:

Besides the idea of the *prima materia*, that of water (*aqua permanens*) and that of fire (*ignis noster*) play an important part. Although these two elements are antagonistic and even constitute a typical pair of opposites, they are yet one and the same according to the testimony of the authors.⁴⁸

We know that the golden and crimson water-fall of the sunlight (fire) is pouring down continuously into the stream.⁴⁹ The *aqua divina* is at once the *prima materia* and its solvent. Besides, the alchemical water represents a cycle of life and death.⁵⁰

[T]he truly substantive vastness swallows up the star-shadows⁵¹

The Fay's journey is to be conceived as the *descensus ad inferos*, the journey to Hades. This valley is analogous to the "shadowy valley" through which Aeneas enters into the underworld with the golden bough. He "must break the golden bough that grows on the sacred tree in the midst of a close grove set in a shadowy valley."⁵² In "The Island of the Fay" sycamore plays the role of the golden bough. The notion that ancient myth as well as the Bible concealed occult wisdom was common during the European Renaissance as it was in the Hellenistic world, and, as de Rola comments, "All Graeco-Roman myths carry an alchemical interpretation. . . . Aeneas takes the Golden Bough which will enable him to pass unscathed through Hell (as the subject passes through the fire and lives). The tree is the alchemical Tree of Life"⁵³ Or we should remember the motto which Poe added in 1840 to "Shadow: A Parable": "Yea! though I walk through the valley of the *Shadow*:—*Psalms of David*."⁵⁴ This is Fay's own rite of "passage through the dark Valley and Shadow."⁵⁵ Fay's journey can be also compared to the night sea journey, in the "*mare tenebrarum*,"⁵⁶ that is, the 'Sea of Darkness' or the 'Sea of Shadows (of death),' her ship being the "bark" of sycamore, Tree of Life. The journey's end is the regeneration, and the triumph over death, to be "*born again*."⁵⁷

The epigraph to the tale runs: "Nullus enim locus sine genio est" (p. 599). First, it is concerning the gardening: the genius of the place, the *genius loci* is the earth spirit or the ruler of the place in which he dwells, and was worshipped by the landscape gardeners. Secondly, the genius is, like "the genius and the demon of the scene" in "Shadow," the guardian that will enable the initiate to pass through an ordeal successfully.

The alchemical vessel is a kind of matrix or uterus. The *nigredo*, the reduction to the *prima materia* is equated with a *regressus ad uterum*. John Pordage says that the *Bain Marie*, the vessel is "the place, the *matrix*, and the center whence the divine tincture flows from its source and origin"; in the verses published as an appendix to the *Opus Mago-*

Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum (1735) we may read: "For I cannot otherwise reach the Kingdom of Heaven unless I am born a second time. Therefore I desire to return to the mother's womb, that I may be regenerated."⁵⁸

The word "impregnating" with its sexual implication suggests that the water is the uterus of the earth, the *matrix mundi*. "Water, and particularly deep water," Jung writes, "usually has a maternal significance, roughly corresponding to 'womb.'"⁵⁹

I love, indeed, to regard the dark valleys, and the waters that silently smile, and the forests that sigh in uneasy slumbers, and the proud watchful mountains that look down upon all—I love to regard these as themselves but the colossal members of one vast and animate and sentient whole—a whole whose form (that of the sphere) is the most perfect and most inclusive of all; whose path is among associate planets; whose meek handmaiden is the moon; whose mediate sovereign is the sun; whose life is eternity; whose thought is that of a God; whose cognizance of ourselves is akin with our own cognizance of the *animalculae* which infest the brain—a being which we, in consequence, regard as purely inanimate and material, much in the same manner as these *animalculae* must thus regard us. (pp. 600–01)

The planet earth is an animate thing just as man and the *animalculae* are, though to it man "denies a soul for no more profound reason than that he does not behold it in operation" (p. 601). The mythological equivalent of this "vast animate and sentient whole," the "vast 'clod of the valley'" (p. 601) is the Great Mother, Terra Mater, the universal Genetrix. The water absorbing shadows is a member, the womb of the Mother Earth. Originally alchemy was strongly connected to the belief in the generation in the bosom of the Earth-Mother.⁶⁰ Therefore an alchemist writes: "And observe according to nature, through whom the substances regenerate themselves in the bowels of the earth."⁶¹ The Biblical motif of the creation of man from earth, "clod of the valley" ("for dust

thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" [Genesis 3: 19]) points back to the archaic belief in Mother Earth. In alchemy the *prima materia* is called among other things the "paradise earth" which Adam took with him on his expulsion from Paradise.⁶²

Fay's drama performed in a Theater of the World has a cosmological structure along with the initiatory one. I have shown earlier that this enclosed *locus* is a microcosm. The Hermetic vessel is itself a cosmos in miniature. It must be made round in imitation of the spherical Universe. The alchemical process is a microcosmic reconstitution of the process of creation and destruction; and "the alchemist, in his small way, competes with the Creator in so far as he strives to do work analogous to the work of creation, and therefore he likens his microcosmic opus to the work of the world creator."⁶³

This *locus* is the vessel in which the substances to be transformed are contained, and in which the operation proceeds. The *vas bene clausum*, well-sealed vessel, is a precautionary measure very frequently mentioned in alchemy, and is the equivalent of the magic circle.⁶⁴ The vessel must be hermetically shut up so as not let what is within escape. Enclosed by walls, the water has "no exist from its prison" (p. 602).

[T]he vessel seemed imprisoned within an enchanted circle, having inseparable and impenetrable walls . . .⁶⁵

The boat whirls dizzily, in concentric circles round and round the island. Eddying currents round the island represents a spiral whirlpool that draws floating objects towards its center.

That the stellar bodies would finally be merged in one—that, at last, all would be drawn into the substance of *one stupendous central orb already existing*—is an idea which, for some time past, seems, vaguely and indeterminately, to have held possession of the fancy of mankind. It is an idea, in fact, which belongs to the class of the *excessively obvious*. It springs, instantly, from a superficial observation of the cyclic

and seemingly *gyrating*, or *vorticial* movements of those individual portions of the Universe which come most immediately and most closely under our observation. There is not, perhaps, a human being, of ordinary education and of average reflective capacity, to whom, at some period, the fancy in question has not occurred, as if spontaneously, or intuitively, and wearing all the character of a very profound and very original conception. This conception, however, so commonly entertained, has never, within my knowledge, arisen out of any abstract considerations. Being, on the contrary, always suggested, as I say, by the vorticial movements about centres, a reason for it, also, — a *cause* for the ingathering of all the orbs into one, *imagined to be already existing*, was naturally sought in the same direction—among these cyclic movements themselves.

The quoted passage is from *Eureka* (XVI, 302–03). In fact the matters rush towards the center in *straight* lines. But most probably Poe included himself to “we” when he wrote: “It is simply by the blandishment of this symmetry that we have been beguiled into the general idea . . . of the vorticial indrawing of the orbs” (XVI, 306–07). The paragraph seems to me to be Poe’s own explanation of the conclusion of his tales: “*spiral* or *vortex*,” as Richard Wilbur says.⁶⁶ In alchemy:

Time and again the alchemists reiterate that the *opus* proceeds from the one and leads back to the one, that it is a sort of circle like a dragon biting its own tail. For this reason the *opus* was often called *circulare* (circular) or else *rota* (the wheel).⁶⁷

The idea of the circulatory *opus*, or rotating arcane substance, finds expression as early as Komarios, who speaks of the “mystery of the whirlwind in the manner of a wheel.” . . . The mystic logion of Zosimos probably has some bearing here: “And what meaneth this: ‘the nature that conquers the natures,’ and ‘it is perfected and becometh like a whirl’?”⁶⁸

In spite of his poetic insight, Wilbur seems too inclined to psychological reading of Poe stories.⁶⁹ It is true that in Poe’s tales physical descrip-

tions correspond to the states of a mind; but it must be noted such descriptions are not mere objective correlatives of psychic drama. Poe describes physical *and* psychological drama. It is well to emphasize here that the occultists assume a mysterious dimension to the world that has its source outside the psyche. Jung's concepts, for instance, have a strong affinity to the occultists', but generally psychologists reduce symbols and myths to products of the mind. For the occultists, the macrocosmic spirituality is the foundation of the microcosmic. That, I think, is the reason Poe had to write an essay on the macrocosm. He avoided to reduce symbolism only to psychology.

Matters are tending towards the "real and essential centre, *Unity*—the absolute and final Union of all"; it is the "universal subsidence into the inevitable, because original and therefore, normal, *One*." ⁷⁰

At the center (the place of creative change) of this microcosm stands the imaginary axis of sycamore, Tree of Life, the symbol of regeneration of the Universe, functioning as a concealed pole round which the whole revolves. The alchemists use the tree symbolism. For them the tree generally symbolizes the alchemical process itself in the form of the *arbor philosophica*, which the adept might well have "seen" as he gazed through the glass of his alchemical flask;⁷¹ this Poe used in his another alchemistic composition, "The Gold-Bug."⁷² But they also retain the more ancient symbolism of the tree, namely, the Tree of Life. For example, the "Aurelia occulta" says: "The philosophers have sought most eagerly for the center of the tree which stands in the midst of the earthly paradise."⁷³

Sycamore is the Tree of Life in Egypt where Western alchemy originated. The tree assures the completion of the work of regeneration. The white color ("dazzling, white flakes") of sycamore strongly contrasted with the blackness is perhaps the foreshadowing of the *albedo* which follows the *nigredo*; the "multiform" of the flakes signifies that the dissolution in the water "multiplies the potential of life," in Eliade's phrase.

The bird drawn at the left bottom of the plate which accompanied the

tale in *Graham's* is possibly the bird of Hermes (*avis Hermetis*), which is a synonym for the mercurial serpent. The engraving was produced with suggestions from Poe.

Let us survey the end of the drama. The sun having utterly departed, the Fay, who has rendered unto God little by little the divine substance in the form of the *dissolutio* through her circumnavigation, now being "the mere ghost of her former self," finally enters "the region of the ebony flood" (final allusion to the Great Flood, as the end of the world), "—and that she issued thence at all I cannot say,—for darkness fell over all things, and I beheld her magical figure no more" (p. 605).

"The darkness had materially increased,"⁷⁴ the "Night of Time"⁷⁵ fell: the Cosmic Night of this microcosm, or the return into original One and then to Nothingness.

But are we here to pause? Not so. On the Universal agglomeration and dissolution, we can readily conceive that a new and perhaps totally different series of conditions may ensue—another creation and radiation, returning into itself—another action and reaction of the Divine Will. Guiding our imaginations by that omniprevalent law of laws, the law of periodicity, are we not, indeed, more than justified in entertaining a belief—let us say, rather, in indulging a hope—that the processes we have here ventured to contemplate will be renewed forever, and forever, and forever; a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine?⁷⁶

Poe's is a myth of the eternal return, cycle without end, where destruction leads to creation, like Ouroboros.



The relationship between "*brain*" and "*Godhead*" brings us to an interesting analogy. In alchemy the human head is in some cases related to the alchemical vessel. As Jung writes:

The "*Liber Platonis quartorum*" . . . recommends the use of the

occiput as the vessel of transformation, because it is the container of thought and intellect. For we need the brain as the seat of the "divine part."⁷⁷

According to tradition the head or brain is the seat of the *anima intellectualis*. For this reason too the alchemical vessel must be round like the head⁷⁸

"The monarch Thought's dominion," "the greenest of our valleys" in a poem "The Haunted Palace" which is used in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a head of a man; and in this alchemistic tale the people and the dwelling are "identified" and the house is a head and microcosmic vessel. (Wilbur has pointed out Poe's use of the symbol of "house"; I would like to call attention to the traditional homology house-cosmos-human body.)

When we accept that this enclosed valley in "The Island of the Fay" is also a head of a man, that is, the head of the narrator Poe, it results that the Fay is the *animalculum* that infests the brain. Like other occultists or mystics the alchemists considered a man as a microcosm, a reflection of the Universe. Just as a man regards the earth in the Universe, so an *animalculum* regards the brain in a man. Thus an *animalculum* (minute animal) in a man (animal) in a whole ("a great animal" [p. 601]); cycle within cycle, life within life, the less within the greater. The Fay is within the brain, "a whole whose form (that of the sphere) is the most inclusive of all"; "whose thought is that of a God"; "whose enjoyment is knowledge" much as the man is within the sphere whose thought is God:

As we find cycle within cycle without end—yet all revolving around 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? (p. 601)⁷⁹

As the Godhead created the Universe and man with His Thought, so Poe's head ("Thought's dominion"), the "teeming brain"⁸⁰ of a poet created the microcosm and the Fay.

The sleep-waker in "Mesmeric Revelation" explains what thought is in the case of the rudimental life:

A luminous body imparts vibration to the luminiferous ether. The vibrations generate similar ones within the retina; these again communicate similar ones to the brain; the brain, also, similar ones to the unparticled matter which permeates it. The motion of this latter is thought⁸¹

By regarding the place as the head, another reading of the epigraph is possible. "Nullus enim locus sine genio est": Each place [head] has its own genius. There is order or grade of genius or spiritual capacity, and the highest order of genius surely belongs to the "host of the Angelic intelligences."⁸² Now "the Universe is a plot of God," and "but the most sublime of poems."⁸³ Therefore it is poets who share in most the divine matter on earth.

The drama taking place in this enclosed domain could be looked upon as wholly mental work. The "talent" argued at the opening of this tale is first about music in solitude and then the "contemplation of the natural scenery" (p. 600) in solitude. It is during one of his lonely journeyings that the narrator chances upon the rivulet and islet:

I came upon them suddenly in the leafy June, and threw myself upon the turf, beneath the branches of an unknown odorous shrub, *that I might doze as I contemplated the scene*. I felt that thus only should I look upon it—such was the character of phantasm which it wore. (p. 602: italics mine)

It is his "dreamy vision" (p. 602) which takes in the island. Then he fancies, loses himself in reverie, muses and muses, while the drama proceeds. This doze may be the sleep of incubation in a *temenos*, to get a revelation of the sacred in a dream, a *mandala* dream, as *somnia a Deo missa*. He beholds the Mother Earth in "operation," as a sleep-waker.

When the night comes and the darkness falls, he falls into unconsciousness. But the sun rises again. Then the Fay will be born again; the valley will reappear in this "circle of thought" as "that evergreen and radiant Paradise which the true poet knows . . . as the circumscribed Eden of his dreams."⁸⁴ The cycle of this microcosm responds to the cycle of the sun,⁸⁵ that is, to the cycle of the life of the poet.

Poe denies in his cosmology the repetition *ad infinitum* of all moments and situations of the Universe. His myth differs from the myth of the eternal return of the Greeks. Poe says that a novel Universe will be "totally different series of conditions." A novel Great Work, a new poem, continues to appear. Then what is Nothingness in which some critics read pessimism? It is a dumb blankness full of meaning, like the whiteness of the whale. Nothingness, blankness, the *albedo* is, on the microcosmic plane, nothing else but *carte blanche*, a white paper for new thought, for new creation, for a new poem. In *Eureka* Poe explains the primal matter as "that Matter which, by dint of his Volition he first made from his Spirit, or from Nihility" (XVI, 206); the regathering of the diffused matter is called as "the re-constitution of the *purely Spiritual* and Individual God" (XVI, 313). "In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all finite perception, Unity must be—into that Material Nihility from which alone we can conceive it to have been evoked—to have been *created* by the Volition of God" (XVI, 311). This Nothing from which everything has sprung is by no means a mere negation; only to us does it present no attributes because it is beyond the reach of intellectual knowledge.

The eternal creation of novel Universe concerns the problem of exhaustion of literature, not in the sense of John Stark's, but presumably in the sense of John Barth's.⁸⁶ Literature is written "by an author who imitates the role of Author."⁸⁷ If possibilities of the divine works are infinite, so are those of human literary arts. Gods and the artists of letters go on attempting to exhaust possibilities of literature, and of the world, designing "the utmost possible multiplicity of *relation*" or narration.

There was an orthodox tradition to see the world as a book, or a codex, and this conception, having theological origin, was remarkably expressed in imaginative literature, producing the vogue for emblem literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which was to influence Egyptology in America in the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ God's Book of Works as well as God's Book of Word was thought to be written in hieroglyphics, which were thought to have been instituted by that Hermes, the supposed Egyptian author of *Hermetica* and the teacher of Hermetism and guiding demi-god of the alchemists.⁸⁹

But the inversion of the topos was rarely made. I think it was avoided partly for the same reason why the alchemists generally avoided the identification of the *prima materia* with God and hesitated to declare they were playing the part of God; for the comparison of human art with divine art is liable to assert the deity of a man or, if not so, to claim he is a superman, or an "Angel." It was from the tradition of alchemy that Goethe wrought the figure of Faust, and this superman led Nietzsche's Zarathustra to declare the death of God and to proclaim the will to give birth to the superman.⁹⁰

Poe suggests a parallelism between plot structure and the universe as atomic composition. In *Eureka* he talks about the "original, atomic arrangements . . . which have been assumed as a part of the Divine plan in the constitution of the Universe" (XVI, 284). He stresses the idea of the atomic nature of the plot. For example, he says that a plot may be "appreciated in its atoms by all"; or says that Bulwer's workmanship shows an ability in "a perfect adaptation of the very numerous atoms" of his story.⁹¹ He also attempts to identify the mutual dependence of matter on matter or atom on atom with the mutual dependence in the structural formation of the plot.

In an essay on Willis, Poe develops an analogy between chemistry and literature, or "physical chemistry" and "chemistry of the intellect":

The pure Imagination chooses, *from either beauty or deformity*, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined;—the compound as

a general rule, partaking (in character) of sublimity or beauty, in the ratio of the respective sublimity or beauty of the things combined—which are themselves still to be considered as atomic—that is to say, as previous combinations. But, as often analogously happens in physical chemistry, so not unfrequently does it occur in this chemistry of the intellect, that the admixture of two elements will result in a something that shall have nothing of the quality of one of them—or even nothing of the qualities of either. The range of Imagination is, therefore, unlimited. Its materials extend throughout the Universe. Even out of deformities it fabricates that *Beauty* which is at once its sole object and its inevitable test. But, in general, the richness or force of the matters combined—the facility of discovering combinable novelties worth combining—and the absolute “chemical combination” and proportion of the completed mass—are the particulars to be regarded in our estimate of Imagination.⁹²

The essence of Poe’s “philosophy of composition” lies in the (al)-chemical combination and relation of materials. “Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle by multiform combinations among things and thoughts of Time to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements perhaps appertain to Eternity alone.”⁹³

“Imagination is, possibly in man, a lesser degree of the creative power of God,” Poe writes elsewhere.⁹⁴ The Universe is a poem made by God. The homology also applies in the reverse direction; a poem of a human poet is regarded as a universe. Poet as maker likens his microcosmic work to the work of God as Maker.⁹⁵ A “poet” cosmicizes himself and cosmicizes his “poem.” Rimbaud wrote *Alchimie du Verbe*. Mallarmé, with *vide papier*, dreamed of “*Grand OEuvre*,” a cosmic super-book, which was to express a close correlation between poetry and cosmos. Our contemporary Kabbalist Borges talked about “the unwieldy / Plan of ciphering the universe / in a book.”⁹⁶ It is a common dream of the alchemists of writing.

Notes

1. Allen Tate, "The Angelic Imagination: Poe and the Power of Words," the second of two essays read at Boston College during conference, 10–11 Feb. 1951; published in *Kenyon Review*, (Summer 1952), 455–75; rpt. "The Angelic Imagination: Poe as God," in *The Man of Letters in the Modern World: Selected Essays: 1928–1955* (New York: Meridian, 1955), pp. 116, 121.
2. Mario Praz, "Introductory Essay" in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. Peter Fairclough (Bungay, Suffolk: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 34.
3. Praz, p. 34.
4. See Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London; Boston: Routledge, 1979), pp. 1–6.
5. Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les Rêves: essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (Paris: Corti, 1942).
6. "The Island of the Fay," *Tales and Sketches*, Vols. II, III (1978) of *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas O. Mabbott (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969–), p. 604. All subsequent quotations from this work are cited in parentheses in the text by page number.
7. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York; London: Harcourt, 1959), p. 130.
8. "The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung" (*Paradise Lost* 4. 143). The word "paradise" is composed of *para*, 'around' and *dise*, 'wall.' In the Western conception paradise was an enclosed place.
9. "Marmontel," the name of the *raconteur* in the opening of the tale (p. 599), can be read anagrammatically 'mortal men'; and his work is "Moral Tales."
10. "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Mabbott, p. 609. It is the "poetic intellect" that could find in this parable a distinct intimation.
11. "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Mabbott, p. 609.
12. Ad de Vries, "fig," *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, 1976 ed. In Christianity sycamore is thought to be "the wood of Christ's Cross" (de Vries, "sycamore—sycamore"), and the Cross is identified with the Tree of Life which stood at the center of the garden of Eden at the beginning. For Poe's connection of sycamore with Egypt, see

- "Some Words with a Mummy," Mabbott, p. 1179.
13. In the Egyptian myth, the tree embodies the repetition of cosmogony by acting as the sun-generating tree; see Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, 2nd ed., trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 242. For Egyptian cosmogony in "The Gold-Bug," see Jean Ricardou, *Pour une theorie du nouveau roman* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), ch. 3.
 14. *Eureka: A Prose Poem, The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (1902; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1965), XVI, 273.
 15. "The Domain of Arnheim," Mabbott, p. 1280.
 16. "MS. Found in a Bottle," Mabbott, p. 145; "The Power of Words," Mabbott, p. 1212; "the boundary walls of the Universe of Stars" (*Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 274).
 17. *Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 246.
 18. *Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 293.
 19. See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Kansas: Sheed and Ward, 1958), ch. 8; *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 147–51.
 20. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 191.
 21. "The Pit and the Pendulum," Mabbott, p. 682.
 22. "[I]n either his temporal or future destinies . . ." (p. 601).
 23. "Mesmeric Revelation," Mabbott, p. 1037; letters of 2 July 1844 to James R. Lowell and 10 July to Thomas H. Chivers.
 24. John Ward Ostrom, ed., *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1968), p. 256.
 25. Mabbott, p. 1037.
 26. Ostrom, p. 260.
 27. "The Domain of Arnheim," Mabbott, p. 1271.
 28. *Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 206–07. Subsequent quotations from *Eureka* cited in the text parenthetically by volume and page number are taken from Harrison edition.
 29. "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Mabbott, p. 609.
 30. "The Power of Words," Mabbott, p. 1215.

31. "The Domain of Arnheim," Mabbott, p. 1272.
32. Mabbott, p. 1033.
33. C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 2nd ed., trans. R. F. C. Hull from 2nd German ed. (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 450; hereafter cited as *P&A*.
34. Jung, *P&A*, p. 323.
35. Jung, *P&A*, p. 374.
36. Mabbott, p. 1033.
37. Mabbott, pp. 1035–36.
38. Mabbott, p. 1034.
39. See Jung, *P&A*, pp. 313, 323–24.
40. Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, 2nd ed., trans. Stephen Corrin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 151; hereafter cited as *F&C*.
41. Eliade, *F&C*, p. 156.
42. Michael Maier, *Symbola aureae mensae duodecimnationum* (1616), pp. 379f., as quoted in Jung, *P&A*, p. 327.
43. Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, *Alchemy: The Secret Art* (New York: Avon Books, 1973), p. 11.
44. Jung, *P&A*, p. 232.
45. Eliade, *F&C*, p. 153.
46. Eliade, *F&C*, p. 154.
47. Note that the modifiers used to describe them are like each other. The dynamic and static forms of death correspond respectively to their forms of life.
48. Jung, *P&A*, p. 232.
49. Johann Daniel Mylius says that the "water comes from the rays of the sun and moon" in *Philosophia reformata* (1622), p. 313, as quoted in Jung, "The Visions of Zosimos" in the volume *Alchemical Studies*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 72. In alchemy "our gold" is "crystalline" [Mylius, p. 151]; the tincture of gold is "transparent as crystal, fragile as glass" [Helvetius, "Vitulus aureus," *Musaeum hermeticum*, p. 826] (Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, p. 449). Cf. Rev. 21: 21: "pure gold, as it were transparent glass." This "glassy," "crystal" (pp. 602, 603) water seems to echo the water of life in Revelation.

50. As Jung writes: "In the divine water, whose dyophysite nature . . . is constantly emphasized, two principles balance one another, active and passive, masculine and feminine, which constitute the essence of creative power in the eternal cycle of birth and death. This cycle was represented in ancient alchemy by the symbol of the uroboros, the dragon that bites its own tail" ("The Visions of Zosimos," p. 79).
51. "Mesmeric Revelation," Mabbott, pp. 1038–39.
52. Ernest Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 192.
53. de Rola's commentary on pl. 17 in *Alchemy*. The picture is Salomon Trismosin, "*Splendor solis*," 16th century, British Museum, London, Harley 3469.
54. Mabbott, p. 188. This parable which, as Levine has shown in *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Stuart and Susan Levine (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), pp. 109–10, like "Eiros and Charmion" and "Monos and Una," may be read as a myth of rebirth, has some points in common with our tale. In "Shadow" appears "the genius and the demon of the scene," as "the genius of the scene" and "genio" in our tale. The seven people "gazed continually into the depths of the mirror" "formed upon the round table of ebony"; the Fay seems to be gazing down her reflection (shadow) upon the "mirror-like," "glassy," yet "ebony" water circulating round. The city of Ptolemais, where the sun must cast no shadow at noon on the day of the summer solstice, is at the center of the universe, close to the miraculous tree (see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* or, *Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954], p. 14).
55. "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Mabbott, p. 608.
56. The term *Mare Tenebrarum* appears in "A Descent Into the Maelström," "Eleonora," "Mellonta Tauta," and *Eureka*; and in "Eleonora" circulation between the "ocean of the 'light ineffable'" and *mare tenebrarum* is implied.
57. "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Mabbott, p. 611. The phrase may echo the New Testament motif of baptism by "water and spirit": "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of

- God" (John 3: 3); "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (3: 5).
58. As quoted in Eliade, *F&C*, pp. 154–55.
 59. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia*, 2nd ed., trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 267.
 60. See Eliade, *F&C*, p. 49.
 61. As quoted in Jung, *P&A*, p. 167.
 62. Jung, *P&A*, p. 450.
 63. Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius" in *Alchemical Studies*, p. 197.
 64. Jung, *P&A*, p. 167.
 65. "The Domain of Arnheim," Mabbott, p. 1279.
 66. Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," Library of Congress Anniversary Lecture, 4 May 1959; rpt. in *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism Since 1829*, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 257; see also his profitable Introduction to the Laurel Poetry Series of *Poe* (New York: Dell, 1959), pp. 7–39.
 67. Jung, *P&A*, p. 293.
 68. Jung, *P&A*, p. 386.
 69. Wilbur says that in Poe's tales the scenes and events are projections of a concatenation of mental states, suggesting that all of Poe's narratives are treatments of one theme. He sums up in another essay: "The typical Poe story is, in its action, an allegory of dream-experience: it occurs within the mind of a poet; the characters are not distinct personalities, but principles or faculties of the poet's divided nature; the steps of the action correspond to the successive states of a mind moving into sleep; and the end of the action is the end of the dream" ("Edgar Allan Poe," Introduction to Poe selections in Perry Miller et al., ed., *Major Writers of America* (New York: Harcourt, 1962), p. 378; rpt. in Wilbur, *Responses: Prose Pieces, 1953–1976* [New York: Harcourt, 1976], p. 58).
 70. *Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 233, 211.
 71. Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos* (New York: Avon Books, 1974), p. 26.
 72. See Barton Levi St. Armand, "Poe's 'Sober Mystification': The Uses

- of Alchemy in "The Gold-Bug," *Poe Studies*, 4 (1971), 1-7. St. Armand discovered the metallic symbolism of alchemy also in "The Fall of the House of Usher"; see "Usher Unveiled: Poe and the Metaphysic of Gnosticism," *Poe Studies*, 5 (1972), 1-8.
73. *Theatrum chemicum*, IV, 500, as quoted in Jung, "The Spirit Mercurius" in *Alchemical Studies*, p. 196.
 74. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Harrison, III, 242.
 75. *Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 303.
 76. *Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 311.
 77. Jung, *P&A*, p. 267.
 78. Jung, *P&A*, p. 87.
 79. The paragraph may echo the vision of Ezekiel: "And their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the midst of a wheel . . . for the spirit of life was in the wheels" (Ezech. 1: 15 [D. V.]). The alchemists connected the wheels of Ezekiel with the *rota philosophica* or *opus circulatorium*.
 80. "The teeming brain of childhood requires no external world of incident to occupy or amuse it . . ." ("William Wilson," Mabbott, p. 430).
 81. "Mesmeric Revelation," Mabbott, p. 1038.
 82. "The Power of Words," Mabbott, p. 1215.
 83. *Eureka*, Harrison, XVI, 302.
 84. "If, indeed, there be any one circle of thought distinctly and palpably marked out from amid the jarring and tumultuous chaos of human intelligence, it is that evergreen and radiant Paradise which the true poet knows, and knows alone, as the limited realm of his authority—as the circumscribed Eden of his dreams" ("The Culpit Fay, and Other Poems, by Joseph Rodman Drake," Harrison, VIII, 281).
 85. It is the sun, "mediate sovereign," that directs the drama: "beneath the eye of the slant sunlight" (p. 603); "as the sun descended lower and lower" (p. 603); "while the sun sank rapidly to rest" (p. 604); "While within the influence of the lingering sunbeams" (p. 604); "while the sun rushed down to his slumbers" (p. 605); "when the sun had utterly departed" (p. 605).
 86. John Stark, *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nabokov, Barth*

- (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974); John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *Atlantic Monthly*, 220 (Aug. 1967), 29–34; rpt. in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 70–83.
87. Barth, p. 79.
 88. Curtius describes the evolution of the concept of divine writing in the famous chapter, "The Book as Symbol," in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 302–47. Also see Curtius, pp. 544–46, where the topos *Deus artifex* is reconstructed.
 89. See Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964; Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 163 *et passim*. For the hieroglyph fashion in the American Renaissance, see John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1980); Stephen J. Tapscott, "Leaves of Myself: Whitman's Egypt in 'Song of Myself,'" *American Literature*, 50 (1978), 49–73.
 90. Jung, "Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon" in *Alchemical Studies*, pp. 127–28.
 91. "Bulwer's Night and Morning," Harrison, X, 120, 117.
 92. Harrison, XII, 38–39.
 93. Harrison, XIV, 273. I can not fully discuss Poe's *ars combinandi* here. For an excellent (and not occultistic) analysis of Poe's art of combination and quotation, see Toshio Yagi, *Pô: Gurotesuku to Arabesuku [Poe: Grotesque and Arabesque]* (Tokyo: Tôjusha, 1978), esp. pp. 182–86, 197–200.
 94. "The Culprit Fay," Harrison, VIII, 283n.
 95. See "Poet as Maker" in S. K. Henninger, Jr., *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1974), pp. 287–324.
 96. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Moon," trans. Edwin Honig, in *A Personal Anthology* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 196.
(1980–81, 1982, 1986)

私的なあとがき、あるいは introduction

これは5年ほど前ぼくがはじめてアメリカ文学をこころざした頃にした論文を多少なりとも整えたものである。その後、神秘学について、またポーについて学ぶこと、考えることあったわけだが、現在の視点から書きあらためることは、しなかった。それは過去への愛着というのではなくて、おさまりがつかないことがわかったまでのことである。また、これは鉞脈をさがして出た土で、仮に凡庸ならざるものを含んでいるにせよ、そうでないにせよ、先へ掘り進むためには、白日のもとにさらす必要があると思った。

ポーが27歳の時に三分説の理解を示す文章を書いていることを最近知った。——「ヨセフスは、聖パウロなどと同様に、人間が体・魂・霊から構成されていると考えた。魂と霊との区別は、古代哲学において本質的な重大点である。」

ポーの錬金術的あるいはヘルメス学的materialismは人間の霊性をけって排除しない。三分説の重要性をシュタイナーと並んで主張したブラヴァツキーはまた、物質とは最も低次の段階にある霊であり、霊とは、逆に、最も高次の段階にある物質である、と言っている。19世紀の唯物論が、中世以来魂と体の所有者とされてきた人間存在を単なる肉体的存在に還元したのとは反対に、ポーのmaterialismとは、人間の、そして宇宙の、霊性あるいは神性を探求する試みであった。

5年前には St. Armand の論文の存在も知らず、ポーと錬金術の取り合わせに自信が持てないでいた。その後、ポーにおける錬金術が、単に例えば『モービー・ディック』にフリーメイソンの加入儀礼が織り込まれているといった以上の意味をもっていること、ポーの人間観、世界観、芸術観にわたって核心的なものになっているということを、ぼくはますます確信するようになった。宇宙の本質を言語的なものと観た点でポーはカバラ的であり、アグリッパ——ディー——パラケルススの線で成立した、ルネッサンス期オカルティズムのひとつの重要な統合、すなわちカバラ＝錬金術（イェイツ女史のいう「薔薇十字の錬金術」）の流れに立っているといえよう。ポーの *ars combinandi* は錬金術カバラ——ただしポー独自に文学的・美学的な——である。以上述べたことについて考究したポー論を発表する準備をしている。この論文はそのイントロダクションのようなものでもあるかもしれない。

白水社から出ている志村正雄編『アメリカ幻想文学』の新版（1985）に、「妖精の島」が新たに採られたことも刺激となった。一般には、そして研究者の間でも、「妖精の島」はいわゆるマイナーな作品と考えられている。「エレオノーラ」をポー作品の鍵であるといったのは詩人のウィルバーだが、その「エレオノーラ」とほとんど同時期に書かれた「妖精の島」は、私見では、「エレオノーラ」と対を成す作品であり、後者がウィルバーのいう「詩人の神話」について多くを語っているとすれば、前者は「宇宙神話」について相補的に語っているのである。そういう意味からも、「妖精の島」はもっと重要視されて然るべき作品だと思う。

（丙寅重陽）