

The Grotesque and Arabesque in Poe

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The importance of the grotesque in Poe is reflected in the title which Poe chose for the first collection of his stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. This collection of 1840 contains most of Poe's early tales, including many of his best ones, such as "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia," and "William Wilson." What is particularly noteworthy is that here Poe terms his tales both grotesque and arabesque. Poe was among the first to use the term and concept "arabesque," which hitherto had been limited to ornamental art, in referring to literary works.¹⁾ Poe was also among the first to use the term grotesque deliberately and positively in referring to his serious works: although grotesque tales were quite popular in his day and the term grotesque had already been used as critical terminology,²⁾ it was rare for an author to call wholeheartedly his own works grotesque tales.

Despite the significance which the grotesque and arabesque have in the entire work of Poe and the key role they play in the world of his imagination, critics of Poe have missed their full ramifications. They failed to grasp fully Poe's conscious attempt to extend the meaning of the grotesque and to explore the grotesque imagination as a paradoxically creative force. Although the seriousness of Poe's

intention in writing grotesque and arabesque tales could not be hidden, even under the disguise of the half-apologetic excuses which fill his preface to the collection, many critics have treated Poe's use of the grotesque as stemming from no more than his interest in Gothic literature and in the conventional concept of the grotesque associated with this genre.³⁾ Furthermore, some critics have considered Poe's use of the grotesque as the opportunism of a young and as yet unestablished artist in his new venture into story-writing, arguing that Poe was catering to the popular taste in literature.⁴⁾

These remarks are partially correct in that Poe certainly was eager to sell his tales and that he shares the Gothic writers' intention to arouse feelings of terror and horror. Further, that Poe was writing in the tradition of Gothic literature is undeniable. The critics who emphasize the satirical and comical elements of Poe's Gothic-grotesque tales are correct only in treating Poe as a regular, serious Gothic writer, for satire or comical intent is an intrinsic element in the Gothic-grotesque imagination.⁵⁾

In calling his stories grotesque and arabesque, Poe was certainly aware of the pejorative connotation attached to these terms and of the risk he was taking in doing so. Defining his own subject as the "terror of the soul," a legitimate human experience, Poe appears to be eager to dissociate his own tales from Gothic tales of terror. In the preface to the *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, Poe writes:

If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul,—that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results. . . . I think it best becomes me to say, therefore, that if I have sinned, I have deliberately sinned.⁶⁾

Yet elsewhere, Poe apparently asserts the legitimacy and worthiness of what Gothic writers are attempting and even says that some of his works are similar in nature to Gothic tales.⁷⁾ The ambiguous, half-apologetic statements of the preface reflect more than Poe's eagerness to justify his Gothic tales; they indicate as well the complexity and deviousness of his use of Gothic terror and the grotesque in his essentially Romantic quest.

The main point of the preface lies in Poe's defense of the collection as one in which he "deliberately sinned," deliberately exploited Gothic elements in his "serious" exploration of human experience, especially of the "terror of the soul." What is particularly important is that here Poe makes clear that his grotesque and terror are inseparable, and that his exploration of the grotesque is intended to facilitate his pursuit of the theme of "the terror of the soul." For this association of the grotesque and terror—especially psychological terror—which Poe uniquely pursued, opened the way for modern grotesque art.

Another devious self-defense of Poe's can be found in the letter to his publisher in which he admits that one of his tales, "Berenice," is indeed in "bad taste" and is "similar in nature" to popular Gothic tales of the day. He explains:

I say similar in nature. You ask me in what does this nature exist? In the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical. You may say all this is bad taste. I have my doubts about it. . . .⁸⁾

After dismissing the significance of whether or not his tales are in bad taste, Poe promises the publisher to present different tales every month, different in matter and manner, but all of which will preserve

the character which he had just elaborated. The four elements he specifies reveal much about the nature of his grotesque. Although here the grotesque is nothing but one of the four elements, it would be erroneous to assume, as some critics obviously do, that in addition to grotesque tales, there are horrible tales, burlesque tales and mystical tales, each forming a distinct category of his works.

Rather, Poe's grotesque tales incorporate all of these elements in composite form. Poe, in the preface to his collection, has made clear the inseparable nature of his grotesque and terror. While the letter makes clear that humor and strangeness as well as terror are essential ingredients of Poe's grotesque, just as they are in the traditional grotesque, it also clarifies the aesthetic and philosophic basis underlying Poe's use of this form.

According to Poe, the grotesque exists in the sudden metamorphosis of ordinary things and phenomena, a metamorphosis resulting in the creation of a reality that is at once horrible and absurd. When familiar things cross the border line to become strange and sinister, when what we consider merely singular, fearful, and/or ludicrous suddenly becomes grotesque, horrible and mystical, when what was merely funny becomes demoniacally absurd, ordinary reality becomes a grotesque one. The transformation is one of the "rational" world into an estranged one which cannot be grasped by human reason. In Poe, the world thus created is one inhabited by monsters, devils and madmen.

The grotesque here is intrinsically related to the observer's terror of estrangement before the disintegrated reality. The sudden transformation of ordinary reality into a strange, sinister and absurdly grotesque one can be the product of one's shifting of consciousness,

as in the case of the madman seeing a vision. The grotesque imagination, then, can be considered to be both visionary and capable of perceiving absurdity or abnormality in ordinary appearance. Destroying the order of appearance, the grotesque imagination reveals another dimension of reality hidden beneath it. Poe's grotesque is a dimensionally different world created by pushing ordinary sensibility to its extremity.

Poe's works are entertaining simply because of this total transformation of our familiar reality into an unfamiliar one, into a world of absurdity and horror. While laughing, we are deprived of all familiar footholds and thrown into a bizarre, estranged world where laughter becomes sinister and strangeness terrifying. Poe as a writer is a naughty joker, yet this joker is also a dreamer: as in the case of "Hop-Frog," the "jokers" are a demoniac means of fulfilling the dream, that is of transcending the phenomenal world. The ultimate summation of Poe's grotesque heroes—whose prototype is the poet in *Eureka*—is God, the greatest joker, the most grotesque dreamer and the creator of the universe.

Thus the uniqueness of Poe's Gothic tales can be summarized in the statement that he "deliberately sinned." The dual or ironic stances Poe takes as a Gothic writer are a direct product of the ironic and paradoxical perspective his grotesque presents. While parodying popular Gothic literature in his grotesque tales, at the same time Poe was converting the grotesque into a paradoxically positive, creative imagination. While using the grotesque as a form of demoniac humor which unveils the decadence in life, Poe also converts the grotesque into a symbol which points towards the transcendence of the decadent reality. By pushing the conventional Gothic elements to their extremity,

Poe created a new literary reality in which the comic becomes demoniac and madness sublime.

This becomes clear when we place both Poe and Gothic literature in the historic context of Romanticism. With Romantic writers placing increasing emphasis on "night" imagination, the grotesque became a significant element in their pursuit of transcendence. The transcendental functions given to the grotesque are not evident in Gothic literature in general, however. Poe is the first to use the grotesque as a dual symbol signifying both the decadent reality and transcendental aspiration.⁹⁾

The close relation between Romantic transcendental ideas and the grotesque can also be clarified by reading Poe's grotesque tales in light of the myth he creates in *Eureka*. Poe's *Eureka*, which is his cosmology and dream simultaneously, explains the origin and function of the grotesque. The Romantic and ironic conception of the grotesque which is hidden beneath his parodying grotesque imagination in the Folio Club gains its full expression in the demoniac yet transcendental, mythopoeic imagination of *Eureka*. It is not only that the style of the grotesque is fundamentally appropriate to Poe's myth of fragmentation and recovery, his basic concept of reality and nature requires placing the grotesque in the center of his heroes' drama of alienation and recovery.

Poe's grotesque can best be understood through the systematic analysis of the entire body of his works. What I would like to attempt here, however, is to show through the analysis of some of his grotesque tales, first, that the grotesque in Poe is the core of his unique Romantic and transcendental imagination and second, that the dual or ironic perspective of Poe's grotesque reflects not only the split between

reality and consciousness in his Romantic ideology, but also Poe's awareness of the absolute incongruity between the critical intelligence and dreaming consciousness. Poe's grotesque contains the criticism of itself in itself. I would like also to argue that the arabesque, while complementing the grotesque, represents the same form of imagination, rather than an independent form that distinguishes Poe's arabesque tales from his grotesque ones.¹⁰⁾

Poe's grotesque is an innate part of his concept of nature. Throughout his poems and tales, and finally in the systematized myth of *Eureka*, Poe presents a story of cosmic fragmentation and human alienation from Original Unity. Not only man, but also nature, "fell" when the universe came into existence as the cosmic movement of the "self-diffusion" of God, who was the embodiment of the happy union of spirit and nature. When this fragmentation occurred, man's union with paradisiacal nature was broken and he lost the ideal woman he possessed there. This cosmic myth explains Poe's lack of attachment to nature. Since nature in Poe is fallen, it does not reveal God's will, beauty and magnificence, nor can it be the source of divine knowledge. Man cannot expect to find in nature a clue for philosophical unification, nor can he expect it to be a haven which contains healing power: he can not hope to find "organic unity" or the "Over-Soul" by delving into it. Far from evoking in the mind of the observer a "sense sublime/ Of something far more deeply interfused,"¹¹⁾ nature in Poe is grotesque, "Vast forms, that move fantastically to a discordant melody,"¹²⁾ filled with "eye-like violets"¹³⁾ and hideous laughter. Thus divine nature, the source of original, creative imagination is lost forever; it has been transformed into "grotesque" nature. In man's attempt to regain the lost state of totality, nature can take only a

passive role.

Poe's myth of the fall and the typical attitude of Poe's heroes towards nature are metaphorically presented by their physical journey away from nature to the city after the loss of paradise. Man's journey from valley to city corresponds to the transformation of nature. In Poe's myth this corresponds to man's loss of his ideal woman, and also to the child's loss of innocence as, awakened by the power of reason, he grows into adulthood. Poe's adult hero travels, after the fall, to the wasteland of the modern metropolis, where business and the machine rule under the guise of progress and reason. The modern city is the present reality—both in space and time—in which the poet lives. Nature in this reality has been transformed into the city and has lost its creative power. Throughout his works, Poe consistently treats the modern city as a spiritual wasteland,¹⁴⁾ "the grotesque habitation of man,"¹⁵⁾ symbolizing the condition of fallen nature. The city is thus one symbol for the grotesque in Poe. Viewed in this context, the grotesque expresses Poe's mythical and metaphysical concept of fallen nature and the present life of man.

Yet the grotesque in Poe signifies more than this fallen condition. The devastated condition of nature is the condition of man's life and is the only possible setting for man's drama of recovery. Since man cannot hope to regain original creative imagination (the ideal woman), which exists only in divine nature, he can only search for a new imagination capable of transcending the devastated human reality by delving into the depths of this reality. Poe's fallen man, therefore, instead of trying to return to nature, continues his journey from the divine valley to the "grotesque" city into the seclusion of a "grotesque" mansion (with arabesque interior decoration). Here, the hero engages in the

most "grotesque" activities of transcendence, of regaining the lost dream.¹⁶⁾ This last phase of man's journey is not only the inevitable consequence of his loss of the union with nature, but is consciously chosen as a means of overcoming the state of loss—of escaping from the city. Poe's hero's retirement into a Gothic mansion and his "grotesque" activities there comprise his journey of transcendence of the fallen reality. The grotesque in Poe refers not only to the fallen human and earthly condition, but also, paradoxically, to this recovery scheme.

Thus not only the city is grotesque in Poe, but also the Gothic house at the heart of it. Poe uses what were ordinarily regarded as Gothic elements (haunted houses, morbid and criminal actions, vampires, insane characters, and so forth) only to create the setting of the hero's drama of recovery. Poe does not feel that man can escape from his fallen condition by an innocent return to nature, as I have mentioned, or by a rational scheme of education. Rather, the recovery scheme of Poe's hero is itself grotesque: he tries to destroy the grotesque reality physically and imaginatively by extending its inner sterility radically. This scheme usually ends in his madness. Yet in his newly attained state of exalted consciousness, the world is transformed and the lost ideal woman returns to him. The grotesque Gothic mansion is therefore not only a metaphor for fallen reality in its extreme extension; but it is also a symbol of the hero's transcendental activities.

Thus Poe's grotesque is not only a style adopted to create a certain effect, but a form of imagination which explores his metaphysical and mythical concept of man and the universe. To consider Poe's grotesque merely as signifying a special feature and effect of the tales or to separate the grotesque tales from the "non-grotesque" tales is to

misread Poe's entire works and, moreover, to miss the significance of the grotesque in the entire realm of Romantic imagination. The grotesque is the central concept in Poe's world, and, in fact, all of Poe's tales are grotesque tales.

Poe's grotesque imagination and grotesque symbols fulfill two principal functions, paradoxical, but mutually complementary. His grotesque imagination is at once destructive, revealing irrevocably the sterile condition of human reality, and aesthetically creative; by unveiling the fallen reality and by envisioning the aesthetic world of transcendental consciousness, it brings fallen man to commit himself to his dream of recovery. It is in the latter stages of grotesque-dreaming that Poe's arabesque becomes a dominant image. The arabesque represents the aspiring, dreaming consciousness of Poe's hero. I will return to this point briefly later in the essay.

Poe's destructive grotesque imagination is best expressed in the form of humor and satire. While Poe's early humorous tales have often been treated merely as banter, burlesque or hoax, some critics regard them as deliberate satires on the grotesque literature fashionable in those days or on the American political situation.¹⁷⁾ Satire, together with caricature and burlesque, is an essential ingredient of grotesque literature and there is no doubt that satirical elements play an important part in Poe's writings.¹⁸⁾ Poe's grotesque humor, however, goes beyond the usual confines of the satirical form and intention. Entering into the realm of the bizarre, of "the terror of the soul," it becomes sinister: thus it becomes one of the devices of his grotesque imagination. In view of this, it is only natural that critics who regard Poe's grotesque tales as satire on some specific subject cannot agree on what that subject is.¹⁹⁾

The grotesque element in Poe's satirical work is carried to such an extreme as to deny, contrary to ordinary satire, any possibility of the reader drawing a moral lesson capable of enriching his common-sense daily life. Poe's humor, an intrinsic part of his grotesque imagination, is not directed to any specific subject, but to earthly reality itself. Its function is to break the superficial solidity of reality, revealing the underlying absurdity and emptiness. This can be seen most clearly through the analysis of some of his tales.

In "Four Beasts in One: The Homo-Cameleopard," a tale of ironic fantasy, it can readily be seen how Poe's destructive grotesque imagination and humor reveal the grotesque condition of human nature and of the earthly reality. Not only is Antioch, the city in this tale, the "most grotesque habitation of man," a "wilderness of buildings," filled with filth, odors and deafening noises, its inhabitants are a "mob of idiots and madmen" who support a blood-thirsty king. In fact, both leaders and citizens scarcely conceal their beastly nature: they are all animals. After describing a brief attempt at revolt conducted by some of the animals, a revolt which fails, Poe ends the tale by describing the city again as a "wilderness of people" of all ranks and ages, sects and nationalities, and a confusion of language, screaming beasts and the sound of instruments.

The structure of the tale illuminates Poe's grotesque, anti-utopian imagination. The story takes place in an ancient city, but the time of the event is the year 3830. Time in this tale proceeds backwards. It will eventually come to the nineteenth century and subsequently to the ancient time when Antioch actually flourished. By identifying the year 3830 (future time for the reader) with a primitive, savage era (in past human history), Poe seems not only to express an anti-utopian

image of man's future, but also to indicate that the development of civilization is not progressive but retrogressive. The chaotic condition will never be mended, but will steadily deteriorate. The narrator describes the reality of the city as the "darkness of Egypt in the time of her desolation" and, moreover, tells us that the present chaos will end in the total destruction of the earth by several earthquakes.

The grotesque city of Antioch, therefore, is at once a city in nineteenth century America, a city of the future and one of an ancient age. The year 3830, when chaos prevails and the earth verges on destruction, is not only a future year for the reader, but also the present and the past. Thus all human history is decadent, grotesque and fated for apocalyptic destruction. What is presented is, in fact, an extremely anti-utopian vision of human reality in all time.

Not only does this tale fail to present any positive political alternative, but there is no one who can mend the situation. The narrator, who placed himself in a detached, high position from which he could observe the situation as an outsider, as a visitor from a different time and space, can react only with bewilderment, disgust and helplessness. The situation is indeed hopeless; earthly reality has revealed its nature as grotesque and absurd, alienated from humanity, and man can only be lost in this estranged world.

It is true that this tale, like "King Pest" and other early works, is a farce. Its radical, obvious distortions and crude man-beast analogies are adopted to create farcical effects. Yet the farcical characters and effects are used to express man's underlying bestial nature and the savage life beneath the surface of civilization, where violence and moral and aesthetic corruption prevail. Above all, the effect is not to point towards the betterment or reform of the reality, but to emphasize the

irreparability of the confusion, to force the final exposure of this alien, inhuman world, and to evoke the terror of estranged man in it.

Among all the farcical, hoax-like elements of Poe's early grotesque tales, it is this anti-utopian idea of earthly life that reappears consistently in his later grotesque tales and that forms, indeed, a recurrent theme throughout his works.²⁰ Poe's grotesque in the form of destructive humor can also be seen clearly in the tale, "The Man That Was Used Up," a tale in which the inner emptiness of a social and political celebrity, Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, is cruelly unveiled. The most remarkable man of his time, he is also an American archetype and Everyman in the machine age. When the hoax-like absurdity of his true identity—a bundle of something—is discovered, therefore, the reader experiences the terror of self-discovery in bizarre confusion. The logic of Poe's grotesque humor denies rationalistic explanations of the world and its appearances. Poe's humor unveils the absurd reality in caricatured distortion, but his humor is not so much funny as it is grim, its atmosphere suggesting the terror of apocalyptic revelation.

Laughter, which helps reveal the disintegration of the order of appearance, becomes naturally sinister and even demoniac in Poe's tales. Poe's humor, like the laughter which fills the haunted palace in the poem of the same name, suggests the penetration of reality by an inhuman force. Earthly reality is revealed in its apocalyptic moment as a fantastic, nocturnal and repulsive world controlled by portentous animals (the black cat, the raven, the orang-outang, etc.), monsters, madmen, disease (the plague, cholera, the Red Death), death, devils and other supernatural creatures. In one of Poe's detective tales, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin exposes the ominous and terrifying

human reality which is controlled by a monstrous beast. The human reality is gradually transformed, in the process of Dupin's solving the mystery, from the familiar world into a bizarre one, where language is unintelligible and people are subject to brutal and motiveless murder by savage beasts. When the estranged world of human reality is exposed, Poe describes it as "*grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity."²¹⁾

In "The Devil in the Belfry," and "Hop-Frog," one an early and the other a later work, the inhuman force which upsets the order of daily life and values is presented in the form of sinister joker-devils. In the former tale, the perfectly well-ordered Dutch borough of Vondervotteimittiss, peopled by identical villagers, is invaded by a little devil who appears suddenly from over the hill. This "foreign-looking" devil upsets the villagers' ritual of counting the strokes of the historic clock of the village at twelve o'clock. He does so by beating up their belfry man and thus causing the clock to strike the inhuman time of thirteen o'clock. As the devil remains in possession of the belfry, the tale suggests that the villagers will be left in helpless confusion forever.

Here the devil is the greatest joker, and the humor of this tale lies in the caricature of the villagers' pettiness in their pursuit of material order and conventional appearance, as well as in the mockery of their tragic confusion when this order is slightly upset. The peaceful, seemingly utopian Dutch village is actually a grotesque community of unimaginative people faithfully keeping and obeying human time.

Yet the devil who turns the familiar world upside down is also grotesque. The devil, both as an archetypal joker and as a demoniac force, is an essential character in Poe's grotesque tales.²²⁾ The devil in the belfry not only represents an ominous, supernatural power which

suddenly breaks the well-ordered life and the solid, earthly reality of the villagers, but his appearance here also suggests the final, irremediable estrangement of the world. The striking of the non-human time of thirteen strokes by this inhuman, grotesque creature hints at the existence of a "foreign," deeper level of reality inhabited by an extra-human power.

The nature of the grotesque little devil in Poe's works is more clearly revealed in "Hop-Frog." Hop-Frog is a "fool" of the king's court, a male dwarf who was brought from a far-away "barbarous region." He is the king's much-valued professional joker, for his physical deformity and sharp wit qualify him as a most precious fool, both to "laugh with" and to "laugh at." Yet this dwarf-devil converts the king's grand joke at a masquerade, a joke which was intended to scare the guests of the court, into a sinister occasion for the exposure and destruction of the king. The king and his ministers, who appear disguised as orang-outangs, are chained and hung in mid-air inside the huge ballroom. There they are burned in their costumes until they become a blackened mass of indistinguishable objects. Leaving the horror-stricken masqueraders in the locked ballroom and the blackened objects hanging in the air, Hop-Frog, helped by his inhuman hopping and climbing ability, climbs up a chain and, disappearing "through the sky-light," returns to his own "homeland."

Dwarfs are traditional grotesque figures which represent the anti-natural and supernatural aspect of the grotesque. They are social outsiders and their physical deformity signifies a distortion and rejection of nature. Because of these anti-natural, anti-human qualities, however, dwarfs were believed to possess supernatural powers. They were valued by kings as special attendants able to keep evil

forces away from the court. Hop-Frog fits this traditional image and function of the grotesque dwarf, and the tale is conceived apparently with the Shakespearian joker-fool in mind. Hop-Frog, like Shakespearian fools and clowns, surpasses everyone in wit, perception and ability to joke. He is capable of revealing, through his jokes, the true bestiality hidden under human appearance. Yet unlike the traditional fools, who remain forever parasites of the grotesque court, he is also able to escape from it into his "homeland" by reducing the king and his ministers to their grotesque essence (first to orang-outangs and finally to a "blackened mass"). His final departure through the sky-light to his homeland suggests a departure to a higher level of reality, beyond the human, while on the earth the horror and terror of apocalypse prevail.

Thus the dwarf in this tale is a dreamer-demon as well as a satanic destroyer, one who longs for his "homeland" and dreams of escaping his grotesque life in the court. Although he is intrinsic to the grotesqueness of the court, he becomes, paradoxically, an existence alien to it by carrying the court's grotesqueness to its extremity. His physical deformity and unusual animal-like ability to climb to any height are symbols of his grotesque, transcendental imagination.

Poe's devils, therefore, the active agents of his satanic humor, represent the dual nature of his grotesque imagination. Like the devil in the belfry, Hop-Frog is an apocalyptic figure who not only reveals the void in earthly life, but who suggests as well the existence of a transcendental world from which material and rational human nature has been eliminated. The devil's way is the method by which one can move beyond the grotesque reality towards an extra-human realm. Here the grotesque is explicitly used by Poe both as a characteristic

of fallen reality as a whole and, paradoxically, as a specific power of transcendence.

It is significant that Poe clearly refers to the transcendental other-world as a primitive region. In contrast to the modern, civilized, industrial world in which alienated man lives, the devil's homeland is a "foreign," "barbarous" and "primitive" world. Poe's perception of the original split between man's consciousness and phenomenal reality is the basis of his myth of the fall (cosmic as well as psychological) and of his concept of reality as grotesque; it is also the basis of his vision of the transcendental world as one of Original Simplicity (Unity), of unified, transcendent consciousness. This transcendental realm which man can reach through a grotesque passage is the ultimate subject of exploration of Poe's much more well-known tales, such as "Ligeia," "The Black Cat," "William Wilson," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Berenice," and, in fact, of most of Poe's tales.

There is a consistent suggestion in Poe's tales that this nocturnal devil, coming from a primitive, "barbarous" realm to expose human grotesqueness, is an internal, subterranean force, set free from the realm of instinct by the heroes themselves. Even Hop-Frog's masquerade can be interpreted as an inner event. The locked room where the devil's grotesque masquerade takes place is a dark, "circular" one. It is a typical closed room of Poe's, where the heroes engage in day-dreaming. Thus it is possible to read the tales as an inner play, as an allegory of the imaginative transcendence of phenomenal reality. In this context, the devil becomes man's double, an ominous inner existence which lives in the primitive area of the mind.

This can be seen most readily in "The Raven" and "The Black Cat," in which the heroes are pursued by phantoms created by their psycho-

logical fear. The raven, the black cat, the orang-outang and other devils appear suddenly from the crack in rational consciousness. Breaking the surface of daily life, these ominous creatures emerge to lead Poe's heroes on a journey to a transcendental inner realm, a primitive realm buried beneath rational civilization. Poe's devil is the "imp of the perverse," an impersonal instinct that lives in man's subconscious. As the prototype of Poe's mad, criminal heroes, the devils are the heroes of Poe's grotesque.

Thus the absurd, irrational world explored by Poe's heroes is at once a transcendental other-world and the inner realm of consciousness hitherto hidden from their rational minds. Regarded from this perspective, "King Pest" and "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" (again one an early and the other a later tale) are stories of the heroes' transcendental inner journey into the depths of the subconscious. Their meeting with the devil or madman who dwells in the grotesque core of the territory they explore suggests a meeting with their double.

In "King Pest," two drunken sailors explore the grotesque city of medieval London, devastated by war and plague. The city gradually loses its external clarity as, following a narrow, dark passage, they proceed to the heart of the plague-region. The undertaker's cellar in the "forbidden building" where they finally meet King Pest, the agent of Death, suggests the bottom level of their consciousness; it is a grotesque realm, bordering death, a forbidden realm hitherto kept away by reason (the ban of the King of England). Usually suppressed by reason, disease represents the power of the grotesque imagination, a power which unveils the nocturnal side of the mind; but it also carries man to the brink of death, to the brink of a transcendental other-world. The sailors' venture into the banned pest-region is, then,

their escape from the grip of reason and is an imaginative exploration of the irrational realm of the mind.

In "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," the forbidden realm which the hero explores is a grotesque asylum, a symbol of the climactic phase of grotesque human life and of the hitherto buried realm of his subconscious mind. The narrator of the tale, an intellectual dilettante, decides to visit an asylum where the radical "soothing system," which gives complete freedom to lunatics, is practiced. "Turning from the main road," he takes a "grass-grown by-path" and enters into the depth of a "dense forest, clothing the base of a mountain." Following "dark and gloomy" passages, he finally arrives at a "private Mad-House." This "fantastic château," "scarcely tenable through age and neglect," is the private room of his subconscious; the superintendent of the house whom he meets there is his double, the keeper of the irrational realm of his mind.

While the tale is presented on the surface as a comedy of errors (the narrator is punished for his curiosity when he takes the actual lunatics for the keepers of the maison and joins their feast), its point lies in the narrator's gradual confusion of sanity and insanity, reality and unreality. Although he is at first perplexed by the grotesqueries presented by the inmates, he is captured by their mournful beauty and he gradually comes to accept their behavior as normal. The lunatics' feast is a celebration of the irrational mind's freedom and marks the climax of its struggle with the rational mind. At the height of the feast, the narrator's reason finally becomes numbed and control by his rational mind impossible. At this point he is almost one of the lunatics. The final revelation of the truth is doubly shocking for him, for the doctors and keepers of the house, the agents of reason and sanity,

appear in the form of blackened beasts which the narrator takes as orang-outangs of the Cape of Good Hope. The return of his rational mind is experienced as a violent event, the frightening aggression of the keepers; it is an agonizing awakening from a dream.

The humor in the tale is connected to its terror, especially to the psychological terror of estrangement. Because his humor is committed to the destruction of the order of daily life, it is sinister and inevitably evokes terror. The terror and humor, two essential elements in Poe's grotesque, are united by what Poe calls the "bizarre." The bizarre is an expression of the chaos of reality revealed by the destructive humor. It is also an expression of the observer's state of bewilderment and feeling of abandonment when he perceives this chaos, which is beyond the grasp of conventional reason. With the bizarre as its key expression, Poe's grotesque thus becomes not only descriptive of the chaos of reality, but also of "the terror of the soul," the psychic experience of estrangement in which the barrier between the real and the unreal, the conscious and the subconscious, is broken. Thus Poe's grotesque signifies the alienated reality both as an objective situation and as a subjective condition of being, an expression of the fear of the alienated self. His grotesque simultaneously expresses the terror of estrangement from the world and from the self, and it is in this fathoming of the psychological fear of alienation that Poe was unique among the early writers of the grotesque.

Yet's Poe's "terror of the soul" means also the terror of transcendence through destruction. Poe's heroes organize elaborate rituals of grotesque transcendence, all of which involve the creation of a dream, an illusory reality, by destroying their sanity, rational consciousness and bond with the outside world of everyday life. This grotesque tran-

scendence inevitably leads to self-destruction. The rituals are an attempt to convert the absolute negation of life, nothingness, into an arabesque dream. The bizarre rituals of transcendence and the terror which accompanies them can be seen with particular clarity in "Ligeia" and "The Assigination," but are most remarkably exemplified in the masquerade of Prince Prospero in "The Masque of the Red Death."

Prince Prospero tries to safeguard himself from the devastated outside world by isolating himself in an abbey and decorating it in arabesque fashion. At the bizarre masquerade he holds there, the climactic scene of his scheme of escape, the masked figure of the Red Death appears as the most bizarre masquerader to lead Prospero and his abbey into final annihilation. Prospero's voluptuously decorated abbey and grotesque masquerade provide the passage for his entry into "glorious death,"²³ a transcendental dream. The masked figure, for whose appearance he prepared by decorating his chamber of consciousness, is his double, the agent of his grotesque aspiration for death. Prospero's death, thus, is suicidal.

Poe's closed, grotesque space, such as an asylum, abbey, chateau or time-eaten house, symbolizes the inner reality of the dreaming hero. In attempting to transcend the rational, phenomenal world, the hero opens the way to the bizarre underworld of consciousness. The lunatics' feast and the masquerades of the dreaming dwarf and the Red Death, as well as the opium dream and distorted attempts of the heroes of "Ligeia," "Berenice" and "The Black Cat," are ritual means of entering a new realm of consciousness. The mask is the negation of the natural face and the masquerade is an attempt to create a reality dimensionally different from natural human reality. Its use, however, serves only to create a special state of the hero's consciousness; the new reality is

only a dream or illusion.

In this sense, Poe's grotesque goes beyond Wolfgang Kayser's definition of the grotesque; although Kayser sees the familiar world rendered suddenly alien and absurd, and the observer's fear of alienation (his fear of a demoniac force as well as of self-estrangement), as the essential feature and theme of the grotesque, he defines the attempts of the grotesque imagination as efforts to invoke and subdue the demoniac force.²⁴⁾ The dark force is brought to the surface (instead of being suppressed) so that it can be articulated and comprehended as a cunning yet ludicrous and trivial force. Poe's grotesque, while it is also absurd and demoniac, is all-consuming; his imagination explores the grotesque not to reduce it to the rational order of reality but to release it completely. Poe's grotesque imagination attempts, after revealing the nothingness of life, to transform it into a glorious, transcendental world of dream.

I have mentioned earlier that the hero's retirement into a closed room corresponds to the final phase of the journey on which he embarks after losing the paradisiacal valley. At this stage of his journey, the arabesque becomes the dominant symbol. The hero tries to rebuild a self-sufficient, dreaming consciousness by decorating the room in arabesque fashion. Thus the arabesque in Poe refers, first of all, to the interior of the Gothic mansion where his recovery scheme takes place. The arabesque interior decoration aims at creating a total effect, and its atmosphere influences the mental condition of the inhabitants. The bridal chamber of "Ligeia" is "spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black."²⁵⁾ These arabesque figures appear at first sight as nothing more than queer, but a person

standing in the room will find its whole atmosphere and his own mental condition as well dominated by the supernatural and "phantasmagoric" effect which the endless succession of them creates. Rowena, the "second" wife of the narrator of "Ligeia," gradually dies under the "phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself."

Thus, the arabesque in Poe refers also to the mental condition of the mansion's inhabitants and to the nature of the spiritual activities which take place there. Roderick Usher, who has long secluded himself in his Gothic mansion, is described as having an "arabesque expression" on his face. The narrator of "The Assignation," who lives in one of Poe's typical arabesque chambers (especially built for him as a place in which to daydream), explains that "like these arabesque censors, my spirit is writhing in fire, and the delirium of this scene is fashioning me for the wilder visions of that land of real dreams whither I am now rapidly departing."²⁶ He kills his mistress and himself, but to convert the world of death into the world of dream he had first to transform his consciousness into dreaming consciousness. In this the arabesque decoration of the chamber was paramount. Prince Prospero too prepares himself to enter the world of dreaming consciousness by immersing himself in the effects of arabesque chambers. When he is finally successful in summoning the agent of the arabesque dream-world, the phenomenal world is destroyed. This is the time when Poe's heroes die a "glorious death" or finally become completely mad, living in visions only. Yet they are successful in converting death and nothingness into an arabesque dream and in creating a self-sufficient world of ecstasy, an ecstasy in which the split between consciousness and reality is eliminated.

The arabesque as a symbol of dreaming consciousness is best

exemplified in such tales as "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Assignation," "Berenice," and "The Masque of the Red Death," while the arabesque as a symbol of the dream world itself is best illuminated in the artificial paradise in "The Domain of Arnheim." The bizarre and intoxicatingly beautiful and psychedelic paradise of Arnheim, existing between Coleridge's Xanadu and Yeats' Byzantium, is the epitome of Poe's arabesque, Romantic dream. Yet the ultimate world of dream, the world of the arabesque, is that of death. The paradise of Arnheim is Poe's only description of the world of glorious death he visualized. Otherwise, the arabesque refers to the dreaming mind that aspires for the world of death (complete nothingness) and proceeds steadily to the condition of death, sleep or silence. The dreaming consciousness reaches its climax (achieves self-metamorphosis) just prior to the complete submergence into death.

Poe's house itself, including its decoration and the activities for which it provides the setting, is the correlative of the inhabitant's mind.²⁷⁾ The arabesque room is what the grotesque mansion contains, and the arabesque and grotesque are mutually complementary in creating a symbol for the mental state of the hero who is absorbed in a transcendental dream. Thus the arabesque in Poe is, like his grotesque, a form of imagination as well as an aesthetic style.

The difference between them, as will be clear from the above analysis, lies in their relative importance at the different stages of Poe's hero's attempt at grotesque transcendence. While the grotesque refers to the decadent, chaotic condition of fallen nature and man, and is primarily a form of destructive imagination which actively breaks down the superficial order of ordinary reality, Poe's arabesque is a symbol of his hero's dreaming, self-sufficient consciousness as well as of the mind in

the process of self-metamorphosis. Through arabesque activities, the hero transforms his own consciousness and thereby imaginatively transforms nature. Thus the grotesque in Poe represents primarily the earlier stage of the hero's transcendence, in which the destructive and apocalyptic function of his imagination is paramount, while the arabesque represents the final stage, in which the power of the imagination to convert nothingness into a dazzling dream becomes dominant.

While this distinction between Poe's grotesque and arabesque can be discerned, both are major constituents of Poe's Romantic imagination which, based on the principle of the negation of reality, seeks escape from the decadent earthly condition and aspires for unity. This similarity between the grotesque and arabesque in Poe and their functional complementarity are what deserve emphasis. In fact, Poe uses grotesque and arabesque synonymously in the title of his collection.

Indeed the growth of interest in the grotesque and in arabesque Oriental culture among Western writers coincides with the entire Romantic movement in Europe and America. The meaning of the grotesque had been limited, in the pre-Romantic period, to a style of art produced by a fanciful imagination. A tendency to extend the meaning of the grotesque to subjects and ideas suited to that style became apparent in the Romantic age, when artists saw the grotesque as part of real life in objective reality. Thus the grotesque has come to be regarded as being closely related to the artist's reaction to and conception of reality, rather than as merely the product of a fanciful imagination irrelevant to actual life and nature.²⁸⁾ The grotesque became relevant in the Romantic period to man's life-experience as well as to the artistic imagination which tries to envision a higher reality

transcending decadent human life. Thus the term grotesque, which had been employed pejoratively, came to be descriptive of a positive artistic endeavor.²⁹⁾

Poe's grotesque is essentially an extension of the sublime, an aesthetic category which anticipates Romantic transcendentalism, one which points towards a spiritual realm that can be perceived through imagination but not through the physical senses. The distorted, irregular forms that characterize the grotesque style stem from the basic incongruity between rational reality and the non-phenomenal structure of transcendental consciousness which the grotesque strives to express. From the perspective of the history of the grotesque, Poe's grotesque stands at the transitional point when its meaning and function were shifting from the visual and fanciful imagination signifying a capricious spirit to the psychological and realistic imagination signifying the terrible. Poe's realistic grotesque, which unveils the estranged reality, is only a clarification of the emerging tendency among Romantic writers to regard the grotesque as a realistic symbol and form of imagination.

By placing the origin of the grotesque in his universal myth, Poe integrated the grotesque into his Romantic ideology, thus contributing to the clarification of the grotesque in the larger history of Romanticism. The underlying symbolic function of the grotesque was articulated by Hegel around the time of Poe as a form of primitive imagination which expresses primitive man's sense of the mystery of the universe, fear of space and distrust of the appearance of nature.³⁰⁾ The grotesque, in this view, explores primitive man's perception of the extra-human, supernatural reality. The monsters and beasts which freely dwelled in the world of fairy tales are the archetype of Poe's devils. As sinister

survivors of the fairyland monsters in the era of rationalistic civilization, Poe's devils remind men of the existence of the area of instinct suppressed by reason. Poe's adventurers (including A. Gordon Pym and Hans Pfaall), who follow the devils beyond the realm of reason, are the kin of the ancient mariner, explorers of the mystery of the universe. Poe's grotesque expresses, in essence, his criticism of modern civilization and his aspiration to restore primitive consciousness, the communal ego—expressed as God—in *Eureka*.

Behind Poe's interest in the grotesque lies a desire for emancipation from nature and human reality, both of which he perceives as hostile and sterile in the age of industrialization. In this sense, Poe's grotesque clarifies the link between Gothic terror and the Romantic aspiration for unity. Poe's terror of the soul is the terror of alienation and the terror which results from a demoniac commitment to overcoming the limitation of rationalistic consciousness.

Poe's arabesque, anticipating the later Symbolist writers, stems from his strong sense of cultural failure, the failure of Christian religion and of the rationalist tradition of Western civilization to supply vital life symbols.³¹⁾ Poe shared the nostalgic Orientalism—or exoticism—and sentimental interest in archeology (in Poe's case more specifically in ruins and in pagan and primitive cultures) which expressed the search of Romantic and Symbolist writers for new symbols and meaning to fortify themselves against the decay of meaning they perceived in their own rationalistic culture. Although Poe's journeys into *terra incognita*, such as Pym's voyage into the wide ocean to the end of the earth and Hans Pfaall's trip to the moon, are variations of Poe's inner journey from the rational to the irrational, they express Poe's unarticulated primitivism at the same time. In this sense Poe joins such

travellers of the nineteenth century as Melville, Conrad and Gauguin who stepped out of the realm of Western, civilized culture into primitive society and wild nature. Their search was for human nature which has not been stained by civilization and for a new and vital symbol of life. Poe too, preceding Melville and Twain, revealed the possibility of the adventure-story form as a means of describing the serious human search for meaning.³²⁾ Interest in arabesque, Oriental culture and in grotesque, pagan symbols forms a part of the emotional reaction of the Romantic writers against Western cultural failure, and Poe was among the first to use the grotesque and arabesque as a positive although paradoxical agent of transcendental imagination.

Poe's arabesque, containing little positive relevance to social reform, education or humanistic projections of the future, is essentially a product of escapist ideology and can at best be termed an aesthetics of "negative Romanticism," to use Morse Peckham's term.³³⁾ Poe's arabesque, a dream of transcending reality, is one extreme solution to the artist's isolation in the industrial order. Poe's artist, who retired into his closed, private world of consciousness, is also the prototype of modern underground man,³⁴⁾ whose ultimate artistic sterility has been unveiled in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Beckett's *Endgame*. While the offspring of Poe's withdrawn artist proved to be suicidal, Poe's artist's death, supported by his myth, was the glorious, although terrifying, pathway towards transcendental oneness. Poe was successful in showing the passage to death as an ecstatic and voluptuously tempting one.

Since the perpetual withdrawal of Poe's hero into himself is supported by his aspiration for unification with a larger, universal consciousness, Poe's Romantic self is not alien to that of Emerson and

Whitman. Compared to Emerson's and Whitman's expanding Romantic self, however, Poe's is contracting. (And self-contraction is the way to return to the original oneness in *Eureka*). Although all three sought to unify the self with the consciousness of the universe, Poe's mistrust of nature as having lost inner creativity distinguishes him from the other two. If Emerson and Whitman aim at the centrifugal expansion and absorption of the self into the universe, Poe aims at the centripetal concentration of the self until its ultimate annihilation in the primordial nothingness at the bottom of man's subconscious.

Although in Poe's world the Orient is composed of vague images and symbols without clear definition of ideas and forms, the psychological effect which these Oriental or arabesque symbols create is clear. Both the grotesque and the arabesque emerge in Poe's world from the abysmal crack in rational consciousness and lead man to a bizarre world of dream, a terrifying yet intoxicating other-world. The dream-world which marks the terminus of the inner journey of Poe's heroes is a border realm between life and death, between reality and super-reality. It is a fantastic world where grotesque distortions of all things occur, where distinctions between things become blurred, and where ugliness, beauty, the repulsive and the intoxicating are all mingled in a terrible yet sublime whole. It is a realm of bizarre, arabesque beauty and of daydreams; yet in it nocturnal dread and the fear of death overwhelm the psyche of the hero.

In all of Poe's tales the grotesque and arabesque function to evoke this world. I hope that it has become clear to the reader that stories such as "Ligeia" "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Black Cat," "William Wilson," "Berenice," and "The Tell-Tale Heart" are ultimate embodiments of all these qualities of Poe's grotesque which I have

analyzed above. The ultimate implications of Poe's grotesque (the nature of his apocalyptic and transcendental imagination and the dual function of his Gothic terror and laughter) are clearest in Poe's crime stories. In such stories as "The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "William Wilson," the grotesque transgresses into the realm of evil and the grotesque imagination is clearly identified as a diabolical, evil force.

In "Ligeia," which together with "The Fall of the House of Usher" exploits Gothic conventions most liberally, the hero murders his "second" wife in order to regain his dream of complete union of mind and senses. He had to destroy the phenomenal world, even though only in his imagination, in order to be able to submerge himself in dreaming consciousness. Usher, too, felt it necessary to kill his twin sister (his double, representing his desire for physical life) in order to bring himself and the house back to the original nothingness. In these stories, the heroes are murderers without obvious, conventional motives. Although Usher's house sinks into the silence of the tarn water and Ligeia does return to the hero, Usher's death is only terrible and Ligeia's return is nothing but an illusion caused by insanity. To complete the formula of Gothic tales, Usher's death is brought by vampiric Madeline from the grave and Rowena is killed by her husband in the spirit of revenging Ligeia.³⁵⁾

What is significant is that there is a complete incongruity between the rational world and the transcendental world for which the hero aspires, between the rational consciousness and the dreaming consciousness. This incongruity is the most crucial source of the grotesque in Poe. The initial cause of the heroes' downfall in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" is their becoming conscious of the ominous

and antagonistic eye of the other. Through the recognition of the impenetrable eye of the other, they become self-conscious and aware of their own alienation. They sense this as an inner split, an inner conflict between a moral and rational self on the one hand and an irrational and evil self, controlled by some irresistible force of perverseness, on the other. That the cat's eye and the Old Man's vulture-eye are actually inner forces is clarified in "William Wilson," where the same force appears as Wilson's double. What is common to the three stories is the heroes' growing awareness of their evil potentialities as the wholeness of consciousness fades: they feel "compelled" to kill, to eliminate the otherness from their consciousness. Compared to Poe's joker-devils, humorous yet sinister destroyers of the conventional world, Poe's criminal heroes are evil heroes who are fascinated by and irrationally drawn to their own evil potentialities. Their urge for evil is aroused by their awareness of alienation (the awareness of others' ominous eyes) and desire to regain their original, harmonious consciousness.

Poe's black cat, like the other ominous creatures and characters in his works, is a tempter. By recalling in the hero's mind the state of lost happiness and by suggesting that there is another realm of meaning beyond the phenomenal realm, the cat tempts him to step out of daily reality and to immerse himself in daydreaming. Although the terminus of their journey in pursuit of the black cat is self-annihilation, the ecstatic inebriation of the senses which the heroes experience through the terror brought by this self-destruction is, for them, the sense-experience of the original state, of attaining original nothingness. The black cat can be called the nothingness which exists both within oneself and in the outside world.

Thus Poe explicitly places the origin of evil in the split between consciousness and reality and in man's awareness of his alienation from himself. Poe's gratuitous evil is an attempt to eliminate the split, to regain the wholeness of consciousness. Here, he fully explores the implications of grotesque or destructive transcendence. Although these criminal tales are not, on the surface, arabesque tales, criminal actions are one form of grotesque activity in the transcendental journey into arabesque, dreaming consciousness.

This split between consciousness and reality is explained by Poe's myth, of which it forms part. The principal sets of polarities presented in *Eureka* are unity and fragmentation (oneness and many), original condition and human reality, reason and poetic instinct (imagination), and self-diffusion and self-concentration. *Eureka* does not present a dialectic (synthetic) solution to the conflicts, but an absolute one. The synthesis of the opposites exists only in the return to the original condition, through the total annihilation of phenomenal reality. This return is brought about by the artist's own self-concentration, that is, by his complete withdrawal into himself. When Poe's mad criminals, self-destructive voyagers, grotesque devils and night-loving detective are regarded from the perspective of the myth of *Eureka*, they emerge as variations of the myth's archetypal poet, the God of *Eureka*.

Although the poet, who takes everyone to the state of God himself, is the hero in the myth, Poe was aware of the incongruity between the rational world and the dream-world revealed by his poet. The grotesque hero is faithful to his dream and does arrive at the ecstasy of transcendence, but nevertheless he is mad and incomprehensible to the rational consciousness. The serious looks comical and absurd,

while the mad becomes sublime. Poe expresses this duality of the grotesque transcendence by setting the situation of the double and also by skillfully involving the narrator-hero (rational self) in the irrational act of the hero of the tale. The narrator and the actor-hero of the tales become almost doubles in many instances.

It is true that among the artists who perceived the incongruity between reality and consciousness, nature and the ideal, Poe, more than Coleridge, Hawthorne and Melville, was keenly aware of the fatal clash between critical intelligence and "grotesque," irrational imagination, between day consciousness and night consciousness. In many of Poe's tales, the rational mind and the dreaming consciousness seem, at a glance, to be harmoniously united to create a higher intellect. Detective Dupin and above all, *Eureka's* God are the best examples. Poe's tales are often described with mathematical and scientific precision: Poe's stories of adventure are written with conscious attention to scientific details and are based on accounts of actual exploration. *Eureka* assumes the form of a scientific treatise, so it can be read as a scientific interpretation of the universe, as well as as an imaginative speculation concerning man and nature. Scientific thinking and imaginative dreaming appear to be mutually complementary. Yet Poe's "science" or pseudo-science is instrumental only in bringing about the transcendental experience of his heroes. The scientifically-explained trip to the moon brings Hans Pfaall the ecstasy of the terror of crossing the boundary to the other-world, while the whirlpool, described with the precision of science, brings the hero an unimaginable ecstasy of horror and awe.

The world of numbers and mathematical precision through which the Gold Bug takes the hero leads to a world of madness, a realm

of consciousness beyond phenomenal consciousness and scientific facts of nature. It is a realm which the scientific facts can no longer explain. Here numbers are, like the gold bug and the black cat, tempters which lead man out of the rational world into the irrational realm of consciousness. Thus the accumulation of concrete, objective facts in nature reveals a supernatural, non-phenomenal realm. The revealed realm is an inner world of transcendental consciousness, a mad, insubstantial, non-phenomenal and non-scientific world. There is a gap between the objective, precisely described outer world and the inner state of consciousness at which Poe's grotesque adventurers arrive at the end of their journey.

Similarly, Dupin's analysis of concrete facts and ratiocination reveals an ominous and estranged world of human reality controlled by monsters. At the extremity of clear, analytical intelligence, there awaits a realm of fear, the primitive realm of instinct, and the heroes are thrown into this border realm between reason and fear, into this abyss of ambiguity.

Thus Poe's science and numbers are alchemy in new costume. They are another method to elevate excitement, to drive man's intellectual curiosity to a state of passion capable of controlling his life, to make him drunk with the ecstasy of intellectual and sensory excitement. Although Poe's alchemy was temporarily successful in cultivating a narcissistic mental ecstasy, capable of breaking down the barriers between the natural and the supernatural within man's closed world of consciousness, it did not produce a real golden bridge to span the fatal gap between existence and the ideal condition. *Eureka's* God presents only an alchemistic union of opposites, a union in which the conflicts remain unresolved.

Poe's protagonists are heroes of the irrational, night imagination. In the final judgment, Poe's philosophic and aesthetic system justifies their actions, their method of arriving at the truth. That is, Poe dismisses reason as unable to reveal the truth and approves the power of the irrational as the sole agent of transcendence. Yet Poe had to create a myth to do so.

Poe as a writer, however, persistently dramatizes his awareness of the clash between reason and grotesque imagination. Two opposing aspects of his tales—the apparent meaninglessness and irrelevance of the hero's grotesque activities to the rational reader and the real, vivid sense of life and of new awareness he experiences—are unified by a dual perspective, the ironic or tragicomic point of view of the author. The tragicomic point of view does not close the gap itself, but only grasps the two opposing points of view simultaneously. It presents the meaning of the seemingly absurd quest of the heroes within the context of the grotesque transcendence of the fallen human reality, while remaining aware of the criticism of rational intelligence, which sees the journey as destructive, narcissistic and irrelevant to social life.

The structure of Poe's tales is thus complex and sophisticated. Although the hero appears insane to the rational reader, he is, nevertheless, a transcendental hero. According to Poe's dual perspective, which presents the hero's attempt as serious and absurd simultaneously, his hero is a tragicomic figure. This point of view enables the reader to grasp the mad hero as a martyr and also as a fool, who, daring to make himself the object of laughter, expresses the essential ambiguity of human existence. Poe's simultaneous involvement and detachment enabled him to dramatize himself as the grotesque God of *Eureka* and

to dramatize his awareness of the ambiguity of human nature as the dual structure of the universe.

August, 1973

Notes

- 1) Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York, 1966), p. 78.
- 2) See chapters I and II in Arthur Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature* (Oxford, 1965). Poe was also familiar with Walter Scott's article, "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann" (*Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1827; *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fictions*, ed. Ian Williams, New York, 1968).
- 3) See, for example, Arthur H. Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe, A Critical Biography* (New York, 1941), p. 289; Thomas Mabbott, "On Poe's 'Tales of the Folio Club,'" *Sewanee Review*, XXXVI (1928), 171-176; James S. Wilson, "The Devil Was In It," *American Mercury*, XXIV (1931), 215-220.
- 4) See, for example, Napier Wilt, "Poe's Attitude Toward His Tales," *Modern Philology*, XXV (1927), 101-105; F. L. Pattee, *The Development of the American Short Story* (New York, 1923), chapter VI; Arthur H. Quinn, *American Fiction; An Historical and Critical Survey* (New York, 1936), 79-82.
- 5) For the critics who regard Poe's grotesque as satire, see, for example, Clark Griffith, "Poe's 'Ligeia' and the English Romantics," *Univ. of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXIV (1954), 8-24; Ruth L. Hudson, "Poe and Disraeli," *American Literature*, VIII (1937), 402-416; William Whipple, "Poe's Political Satire," *Univ. of Texas Studies in English*, XXXV (1956) 81-95; James S. Wilson, pp. 215-220. For the satirical element in the grotesque, see Clayborough, chapter I, and Kayser, chapters I-IV.
- 6) Poe's preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, (Philadelphia, 1840).
- 7) See Poe's letter to Thomas W. White, April 30, 1835. *Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. John Ostrom (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948, 57-58).

- 8) *Ibid.*
- 9) With regard to studies of the relationship between Gothic novels and English Romantic literature, see Robert Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel" (*PMLA*, 84, March, 1969, 282-290) and the subsequent disputes between Robert Hume and Robert Platzner (*PMLA*, 86, March, 1971, 268-274). See also, D. P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (London, 1961); Lowry Nelson, Jr., "Night Thoughts on Gothic Novels," *Yale Review* (Winter, 1963), 136-157; Clayborough, pp. 10-15.
- 10) For example, George E. Woodberry regards Poe's "humorous" tales as grotesque and his "imaginative" ones as arabesque. (*Edgar Allan Poe*, Boston, 1913, 80-83.) Arthur H. Quinn argues that the grotesque in Poe refers to a "burlesque or satiric quality," while the arabesque signifies "powerful imagination," and divides the tales accordingly. (*Edgar Allan Poe, A Critical Biography*, 289.) Stephen Mooney argues that the grotesque means the terrible and the rational, while the arabesque refers to the sportive and the supernatural. ("Poe's Gothic Waste Land," *Sewanee Review*, LXX, 1962, 261-283.) L. Moffitt Cecil argues that Poe's arabesque means "in the manner of Arabians" and is basically different from his grotesque. ("Poe's Arabesque," *Comparative Literature*, XVIII, 1966, 55-70.) On the other hand, G. R. Thompson considers Poe's arabesque to be an alternative term for grotesque and its psychological meaning in particular to be nearly the same as that of the grotesque. See G. R. Thompson, *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1973) pp. 105-106.
- 11) William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," ll. 96-97.
- 12) "The Haunted Palace," *Poe's Complete Works*, ed. James Harrison (New York, 1902)—hereafter cited as Works—VII, 84.
- 13) "Eleonora," *Works*, IV, 236.
- 14) See, for example, "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," and "The Man of the Crowd."
- 15) "Four Beasts in One: The Homo-Cameleopard," *Works*, II, 205.
- 16) See, for example, "Ligeia," "Berenice," and "The Masque of the Red Death."

- 17) Clark Griffith, "Poe's 'Ligeia' and the English Romantics," *Univ. of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXIV (1954), 8-24; Ruth L. Hudson, "Poe and Disraeli," *American Literature*, VIII (1937), 402-416; William Whipple, "Poe's Political Satire," *Univ. of Texas Studies in English*, XXXV (1956) 81-95; James S. Wilson, 215-220.
- 18) This is quite evident in "Tales of the Folio Club," Poe's first plan for a collection of his tales.
- 19) For example, William Whipple considers "King Pest" as a political satire on Andrew Jackson and his government, while Ruth Hudson considers the same tale as a satire on Gothic literature.
- 20) This vision of the total destruction of the earth is more systematically presented as the earth's return movement to the Original Unity in "The Power of Words," "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" and *Eureka*.
- 21) *Works*, IV, 180-181.
- 22) In fact, devils appear in some of Poe's earliest works, works which were supposed to have been collected in "The Tales of the Folio Club." The archetype of Poe's devil is the Raven.
- 23) "The Assniation," *Works*, II, 124.
- 24) Kayser, 80-81, 179-189.
- 25) *Works*, II, 260.
- 26) *Works*, II, 124.
- 27) For a brilliant analysis of Poe's house, see Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," *The Recognition of Poe*, ed. Eric Carlson (Ann Arbor, 1966).
- 28) Arthur Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature*, (Oxford, 1965), chapter I. See also Kayser, p. 76.
- 29) See Clayborough, chapter I and II.
- 30) *Ibid.*, pp. 27-31.
- 31) See, for example, James Baird, *Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism* (New York, 1956), pp. 1-50.
- 32) Melville seems to have been aware of the symbolic dimension of Poe's tales of sea-adventure. The influence Melville may have received from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* has been explored by Patrick Quinn (*The French Face of Edgar Poe*, ch. VI), Edward

- H. Davidson (*Poe; A Critical Study, ch. VI*), and Sidney Kaplan (*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, Introduction*).
- 33) Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1962).
- 34) A most comprehensive study of the theme of the modern underground artist is Frederick J. Hoffman's, *Samuel Beckett: the Language of Self* (New York, 1964).
- 35) See, for example, J. O. Bailey, "What Happens in 'The Fall of the House of Usher?'" *American Literature*, XXXV (1963-1964), 445-466, and Clark Griffith, "Poe's 'Ligeia' and the English Romantics," *Univ. of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXIV (1954), 8-24.

The Grotesque and Arabesque in Poe

Noriko Mizuta Lippit

Unlike many of his contemporaries, who sought escape from the devastated society man had created by returning to nature, Poe perceived nature as also devastated. There was, for him, no source of purity to facilitate recovery from the alienation man experiences in his life. The only means of recovery from the grotesque reality in which man finds himself, according to Poe, is by pushing the grotesqueness to its extremity. Thus the grotesque in Poe becomes, paradoxically, both an expression of the decadence of the world and sterility of nature and a symbol that points towards the transcendence of this

grotesque reality.

According to Poe's myth, which he presented in systematized form in *Eureka*, the wholeness of man's consciousness and the integrity of nature existed in the state of Original Unity. The universe was born in a state of cosmic fragmentation, when "the fall" of nature as well as that of man took place. In Poe's myth, the state of Original Unity appears as a lost ideal woman or the purity and wildness of imagination of childhood. Poe's adult hero, suffering from his estrangement in the grotesque world, undertakes a journey in search of self-recovery. This journey takes the form of moving to an ever-smaller space, with the grotesqueness of reality becoming intensified at each stage. Thus Poe's hero journeys from the valley to the grotesque city, and then to the closed room of his arabesquely decorated mansion, his inner world of consciousness. There he prepares himself for departure to the transcendental world of death and non-phenomenal consciousness.

Poe's hero's scheme of recovering from the grotesque reality, therefore, is itself grotesque; the grotesque imagination destroys the order of appearance, revealing the grotesque reality hidden by conventional life. Yet in this process the hero encounters ominous symbols which lead him into a transcendental inner realm buried under reason and rational civilization. Poe's criminal hero, led by this ominous devil, enters the realm of distorted psychology and gratuitous evil to eliminate his inner split and regain the unity of consciousness.

Poe's arabesque imagination, which complements the grotesque, points the way towards the transcendental reality. Poe's closed, arabesque room is an objectification of his hero's consciousness aspiring for his ideal reality. The entire transcendental effort can also be read as an inner play, one in which the dreaming, irrational consciousness

confronts rational, conventional intelligence. Poe's heroes organize elaborate rituals of grotesque transcendence, all of which involve the creation of a dream, an illusory reality, by destroying their sanity, rational consciousness and bond with the outside world of everyday life. The rituals are an attempt to convert the absolute negation of life into a dazzling, arabesque dream.

Poe's transcendental hero journeys into the irrational, instinctual realm of consciousness in search of oneness. In the exalted consciousness he gains in sensuous intoxication, the barrier between the outer and inner world is eliminated and the hero perceives himself as part of the general consciousness of the universe and as its creator. This awareness climaxes the hero's tragicomic drama of purgatorial terror and grotesque transcendence through self-destruction. His transcendence is a transformation of consciousness gained through the internalization of viewpoint and the infinite expansion of dreaming consciousness.