

"EUREKA": A TOUCHSTONE FOR THE
CHARACTERISTIC MOTIFS IN THE TALES
OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

by

CONNIE LE CLAWSON

B.A., Coe College, 1970
M.S., University of Oklahoma, 1972

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1977

Approved by:


Major Professor

LD
2668
R4
1977
C55
C.2

Document "Eureka": A Touchstone for the
Characteristic Motifs in the Tales
of Edgar Allan Poe

What I here propound is true:--therefore,
it cannot die:--or, if by any means it be
now trodden down so that it die, it will
'rise again to the Life Everlasting.'¹

Edgar Allan Poe presented "Eureka" as a lecture on February 3, 1848, in New York and published it as a separate piece in June, 1848. He prefaced this, his last prose publication, with a prophecy of its eternal importance. "Eureka" was of such importance to him that, in a letter to Maria Clemm, July 7, 1849, he said: "'I have no desire to live since I have done "Eureka." I could accomplish nothing more.'"² Representatives for two New York newspapers attended the February 3 lecture. On February 4, 1848, the New York Tribune praised the work, reporting that Poe's "'remarks on the subject were characterized by the strong analytical powers and intense capacity of imagination which distinguish him.'"³ The New York Courier and Enquirer, on February 11, 1848, also expressed a high opinion of the work. This paper referred to Poe's essay on the universe as "'a nobler effort than any other Mr. Poe has yet given to the world.'"⁴ Twentieth-

¹Edgar Allan Poe, "Eureka," in Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Prose, Poetry and "Eureka," ed. W. H. Auden (New York: Rinehart, 1950), p. 484. All references to "Eureka" are from this edition. Hereafter, references will be made parenthetically, citing page.

²John Ward Ostrom, ed., The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1948), p. 452.

³Quoted in Arthur Hobson Quinn, Poe: A Critical Biography (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1941), p. 541.

⁴Quoted in Quinn, Poe: A Critical Biography, p. 539.

**THIS BOOK CONTAINS
NUMEROUS PAGES
WITH THE PAGE
NUMBERS CUT OFF**

**THIS IS AS RECEIVED
FROM THE
CUSTOMER**

century opinion, summarized by W. H. Auden, also cites "Eureka" for its great accomplishment. In his introduction to the 1950 edition of Poe's work, Auden says that Poe did, for the nineteenth century, what Lucretius had done centuries before, offered an Weltanschauung for his age. In addition, Poe intuited what "subsequent scientific discoveries have confirmed."⁵ Auden sees "Eureka" as a synthesis of Poe's passions:

...it combines in one work nearly all of Poe's characteristic obsessions: the passion for merging in union with the one..., the passion for logic..., the passion for a final explanation and reconciliation...--all are brought together in this poem of which the prose is as lucid, as untheatrical, as the best of his critical prose.⁶

As a culmination of Poe's effort, "Eureka" is important because it serves as a touchstone for three characteristic motifs, developed in "Eureka," and found in the design in Poe's tales. These motifs are: 1) the power of the imagination, from which one may intuit truth and which may lead to a state of heightened sensibility, 2) the nature of the universe, which is diffused matter and spirit, and 3) the end of the universe, or the progress to original unity. Each of these motifs will be defined and specified according to its use and development in "Eureka." They will then be applied to individual tales. The first motif will be discussed as a design in "Berenice" (1835) and "The Gold Bug" (1843); the second, in "Ligeia" (1838) and "William Wilson" (1839); and the third, in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una (1841)."⁷ Finally, "The Fall of

⁵W. H. Auden, ed., Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Prose, Poetry, and "Eureka" (New York: Rinehart, 1950), p. xi.

⁶Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, p. xi.

⁷"The Colloquy of Monos and Una" is frequently referred to as one of the cosmic romances or discourses. Nevertheless, it is included in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Hervey Allen (New York: Modern Library, 1938). In addition, "tale" is an appropriate term for the "Colloquy" for the term denotes something which is told or discoursed.

of the House of Usher" (1839) will be discussed as the embodiment of all three motifs. In each, the motif or motifs are central to an understanding of the inherent reality operating as the thematic and conflictive design in the tale, and thus, each serves as an example of the touchstone quality of "Eureka."

To facilitate my discussion of "Eureka" and its motifs, I will briefly state the premises of the entire work. In a letter on February 29, 1848, to George W. Eveleth, Poe summarized the general proposition underlying "Eureka":

The General Proposition is this:--
Because Nothing was, therefore All Things are.

1--An inspection of the universality of Gravitation--i.e., of the fact that each particle tends, not to any one common point, but to every other particle--suggests perfect totality, or absolute unity, as the source of the phaenomenon.

2--Gravity is but the mode in which is manifested the tendency of all things to return into their original unity; is but the reaction of the first Divine Act.

3--The law regulating the return--i.e., the law of Gravitation--is but a necessary result of the necessary and sole possible mode of equable irradiation of matter through space:--this equable irradiation is necessary as a basis for the Nebular Theory of Laplace.

4--The Universe of Stars (contra distinguished from the Universe of Space) is limited.

5--Mind is cognizant of Matter only through its two properties, attraction and repulsion: therefore Matter is only attraction and repulsion: a finally consolidated globe of globes, being but one particle, would be without attraction, i.e., gravitation; the existence of such a globe presupposes the expulsion of the separative ether which we know to exist between the particles as at present diffused:--thus the final globe would be matter without attraction and repulsion:--but these are matter:--then the final globe would be matter without matter:--i.e., no matter at all:--it must disappear. Thus Unity is Nothingness.

6--Matter, springing from Unity, sprang from Nothingness:--i.e., was created.

7--All will return to Nothingness,
in returning to Unity.⁸

From Poe's summary, it is clear that the second and third motifs under consideration, the nature and end of the universe, are central to the premises of "Eureka." The process by which Poe arrives at his understanding of the universe is the power of the imagination, the first motif to be discussed in this study and the first to be introduced in Poe's philosophy.

In the "Preface" to Eureka," Poe dedicates the work:

To those few who love me and whom I
love--to those who feel rather than to
those who put faith in dreams as in the
only realities--I offer this Book of Truths,
not in its character of Truth-Teller, but
for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth;
constituting it true. To these I present
the composition as an Art-Product alone:--
let us say as a Romance; or, if I be not
urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem (p. 484).

Poe offers his "poem" to those readers who have faith in fancy or to those who have faith in imagination. To call the essay a poem is not too lofty a claim if one accepts Poe's basic critical and artistic assumptions. "The range of the Imagination is unlimited," Poe writes in "Marginalia"; "even out of deformities it fabricates that Beauty which is at once its sole object and its inevitable test."⁹ And Beauty, Poe asserts in "The Philosophy of Composition," is "the sole legitimate province of the poem."¹⁰ Thus, the imagination is that power which enables man to create beauty and to create beauty is to be poetic.

Poe held that beauty, an effect arising from the imagination, elevates

⁸Ostrom, The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, pp. 361-62.

⁹Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 435.

¹⁰Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 422.

the soul and further develops the imagination.¹¹ Man perceives supernal loveliness, or that which is spiritual, through imagination because it fosters a heightened sensibility which directs men to an apprehension of truth.

Following the "Preface," Poe states his intention for "Eureka": to speak of the universe in a manner which is imaginative. He uses the image of a man rapidly "whirling on his heel" (p. 485) at the top of Aetna in order to perceive the whole universe. Poe believes that no one has ever thought of this. It is not physically possible; it is an imaginative exercise. In short, Poe believes that imagination is necessary to perceive the whole universe, to reveal its oneness which is, for Poe, supernal loveliness. It is his truth to be demonstrated, arrived at through imagination.

The controversial letter portion of "Eureka" follows the statement of intent and is another demonstration of the power of imagination.¹² The letter serves as a vehicle to satirize reasoning, past and present. In a letter to Charles Hoffman, editor of The Literary World, Poe stated that his main intent in this portion of "Eureka" had been not to ridicule reason, but to defend intuition as a "'conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which

¹¹Poe writes in "The Philosophy of Composition" (Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 422):

That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect--they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul--not of intellect, or of heart--...which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful."

¹²The controversy centers on the satire of the letter portion ("Eureka," pp. 486-95). To some, its presence is evidence for satire in the whole of "Eureka." This is not a question in this discussion, though, without doubt, the letter itself is satire. For a discussion of the letter as satire and its relationship to the whole, see Harriet Holman, "Hog, Bacon, Ram and Other 'Savans' in Eureka," Poe Newsletter, 2 (1969), 49-55.

the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity for expression."¹³ The letter of "Eureka" echoes this defense:

...You can easily understand how restrictions so absurd on their very face must have operated, in those days, to retard the progress of true Science, which makes its most important advances--as all History will show--by seeming intuitive leaps... No man dared utter a truth for which he felt himself indebted to his soul alone (p. 488).

Reason is valued less than the imagination. Reason retards while the soul, elevated by the imagination, apprehends truth. The "Eureka" letter offers a truth, attained by imagination. The truth is gravitation.

Yes!--these vital laws Kepler guessed--that is to say, he imagined them. Had he been asked...[how he attained them, his reply might have been--...I grasped it [the machinery of the universe] with my soul--I reached it through mere dint of intuition (p. 494).

Poe demonstrates his belief in the power of the imagination by employing it to discover the truths of "Eureka." It is a power, however, which is aided by reason. The knowledge attained through reason is beneficial, although limited. To understand the nature of the universe, one must ultimately rely upon the imagination, for one cannot apprehend infinity, God, or oneness by reason alone. But reason is an aid and, as such, is affirmed.

The power of the imagination, then, is a pervading motif of "Eureka," central to its design of discovery. It is a power which elevates the soul, fosters heightened sensibility, and empowers man to apprehend the truth--the truth about the universe in which he lives.

¹³Robert D. Jacobs, Poe: Journalist and Critic (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969), p. 419. In Poe's usage, intuition is a synonym for imagination. See the "Kepler" excerpt from "Eureka" which is cited on this page.

The nature of the universe, its laws and properties, dominates the "Eureka" essay. Gravitation, a necessary result of equable irradiation, is the natural law which substantiates this vision. But to appreciate fully the nature of the universe as Poe perceived it, it will be necessary to summarize the entire cycle, creation to end.

E. H. Davidson organizes the philosophy of "Eureka" in terms of a three-part division or the resolution of three questions:

First, the concept of creation (or, how did matter become what it appears to be?); second, the nature of matter (or, what is matter and how is the observed physical universe energized?); and third, the prospect for the natural world (or, toward what end is the ever changing universe moving?).¹⁴

Poe's answers in "Eureka" to these three questions affirm the order and the purpose of the universe. The universe was created from nothing through divine volition, which diffused matter, in the form of atoms. A spiritual being created the principle of diffusion; thus, the creative idea as well as the creation of matter stems from a unified center. Matter and spirit, consequently, are unified in their origin. And both are diffused. This, then, is the resolution of the first question: the initial state of the universe was nothingness from which spirituality created the principle of diffusion.

The nature of matter is understood through the principles of attraction and repulsion, of equable irradiation, and of gravity. These principles account for the energy within a limited universe. If diffusion, accomplished by the principle of equable irradiation, were not limited, no worlds could exist; the dispersal of matter and spirit could then have no end. There is an end: infinite, temporal and eternal. Atoms attract and repulse one another, forming

¹⁴E. H. Davidson, Poe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), p. 244.

infinite patterns on earth. Yet, there is a desire to return to the original, eternal unity of the creation. Divine will repulses this desire, which is manifested in gravity, until a point in time when the desire may be satisfied. Therefore, the nature of the universe is dualistic and conflicting. Both matter and spirit are diffused. Unity attracts each. Yet, each is repulsed. Thus, the conflict of the universe is matter against spirit, the temporal against the eternal.

The nature of man is similar. Man, too, is one of the "infinite individualizations of God" (p. 590). He is diffused matter and spirit as well, attracted to unity which is nothingness. Critic Dennis W. Eddings summarizes Poe's views nicely:

...While the material world is an uncomfortable place in which to exist, it paradoxically offers man the means of transcending its confusing nature.

Such transcendence is possible because the duality of the universe is duplicated in the psyche of man. Man's counterpart to Spirit is the imagination, the perceptive ideal through which man becomes aware of the Ideal, the perfect Unity which lies both in and behind the physical world.¹⁵

We are now able to redefine the second and third motifs of "Eureka." The nature of the universe is one of conflict, created by the dual operation of material and spiritual essences or the principle of attraction and repulsion. In addition, both matter and spirit desire unity; all things progress toward ultimate nothingness for that is unity and the final end. As Eddings noted, each of these motifs is, of necessity, associated with the power of the imagination motif. Imagination elevates the soul so that man may apprehend the "Ideal,"

¹⁵Dennis W. Eddings, "Poe's 'Dream-Land:' Nightmare or Sublime Vision?", Poe Studies, 8 (1970), 6.

truth. So, the man of imagination has a heightened sensibility, one which transcends the material and surpasses reason.

To exemplify the development of the power of the imagination motif, we will now turn our attention to two tales, "Berenice" and "The Gold Bug." In contrasting ways, each story utilizes the power of the imagination.

The central figure and narrator of "Berenice" is Egaeus. It is necessary to determine his character in order to come to terms with his story: the desecration of a tomb and a living burial. Of his heritage, he says:

Our line has been called a race of visionaries; and in many striking particulars--in the character of the family mansion--in the frescoes of the chief saloon--in the tapestries of the dormitories--in the chiselling of some buttresses in the armory--but more especially in the gallery of antique paintings--in the fashion of the library chamber--and, lastly, in the very peculiar nature of the library's contents--there is more than sufficient evidence to warrant the belief.¹⁶

Egaeus' "race of visionaries" recalls the dreamers to whom "Eureka" is dedicated. Moreover, the evidence cited recalls the arts: architecture, painting, sculpture, and literature, with particular emphasis on literature. Though Poe devoted much attention to the poem and the tale as a means of apprehending the truth, he did not exclude other art forms.¹⁷ Egaeus' heritage is consistent with the power of imagination. Furthermore, Egaeus, by his own testimony, is born into imagination, bringing with him a dream of previous existence.

¹⁶Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 376. Hereafter, all references to "Berenice" are from this edition and will be noted parenthetically, citing page numbers.

¹⁷"The Domain of Arnheim" (1842) includes landscape gardening as an art form, superior from the landscape artist's point of view, which represents the whole, supernal loveliness of the world. In fact, the narrator of that tale says: "In the widest and noblest sense he [Ellison] was a poet" (Auden, p. 395).

Thus awakening from the long night [his birth] of what seemed, but was not, non-entity, at once into the very regions of fairy land-- [the library] into a palace of imagination--..., the realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn, not the material of my every-day existence, but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself (p. 377).

Egaeus does not operate within the material, reasoning world. His realm is that of the imagination completely.

Yet, his imagination is distinct. His is monomaniacal; it "consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the attentive" (p. 378). Egaeus is particularly sensible to frivolous objects: *marginal design, typography, shadow and light, scents, and motionlessness*. He attends to these ordinary objects and states of being with little result.

The undue, earnest, and morbid attention thus excited by objects in their own nature frivolous, must not be confounded in character with that ruminating propensity common to all mankind, and more especially indulged in by persons of ardent imagination. It was...primarily and essentially distinct and different...In my case, the primary object was invariably frivolous.... Few deductions, if any, were made; and those few pertinaciously returning in upon the original object as a centre.... In a word, the powers of mind more particularly exercised were, with me.... the attentive, and are, with the day-dreamer, the speculative (p. 379).

By his own admission, Egaeus apprehends no truth beyond the object of his attention, in and of itself. His distinct power of imagination, indeed, separates him from the material, but it does not elevate him.

Berenice, Egaeus' cousin and fiancée, serves as a contrast to Egaeus

and as an object for his monomania. In youth, she is an opposite. She is healthy and enjoys the material world, "with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven-winged hours" (p. 377), whereas Egaeus' world is solely spiritual. Yet, Berenice deteriorates physically.¹⁸ Egaeus could never love her; his feelings "had never been of the heart" (p. 380). She was, for him, an object and an abstraction whose deterioration attracts and repulses him more than her vigorous youth had. Egaeus becomes obsessed with her teeth; he feels "that their possession could alone restore...[him] to peace, in giving...[him] back to reason" (p. 383). His obsession leads to the desecration of Berenice's grave, the horror of which is enhanced by the revelation that she is still alive.¹⁹

It is significant that Egaeus longs for the teeth as if they were a talisman which will return his reason to him. We must recall that the imaginative powers of "Eureka" included the use of reason. Poe utilizes inductive and deductive reasoning processes in combination with imagination to apprehend truth. But Egaeus is, as shown by his self-characterization, divorced from this process. His power of imagination exorcises reason and apprehends nothing. It is self-destructive as such.²⁰ It is a power abused in the contemplation of frivolous and earthly objects with no transcendence. Egaeus apprehends no truths. In fact, his dream state inhibits an awareness of his horrible act. His heightened

¹⁸Her illness may be interpreted as an elaboration of the progress to nothingness motif. See Alice Chandler, "'The Visionary Race:' Poe's Attitude Toward His Dreamers," *ESQ*, 60 (1970), 76.

¹⁹Living burial is a recurring image in Poe's tales; "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" are familiar examples. Once again, it is an example of the progress to nothingness motif in its most frightening form for it is progress with inescapable awareness enforced upon the victim.

²⁰Egaeus is frequently seen as a study in abnormal psychology. See Vincent Buranelli, *Edgar Allan Poe* (New Haven: College and Univ. Press, 1961), p. 76.

sensibility is only a heightened sensitivity to objects, sounds and shadows. Egaeus represents an inversion of the true power of the imagination; the reader's awareness of this fact is central to an understanding of the tale's complexities and Egaeus' exceptional state of being.

In "The Gold Bug," a tale of ratiocination, the power of the imagination motif is much in evidence and probably is the story's chief appeal. Certainly, it is the strong suit of the story's central character, William Legrand, who, like his counterpart, C. Auguste Dupin,²¹ is considered odd or somewhat unbalanced by men of lesser intellect.

Legrand's story, which begins with the discovery of the gold bug, is told by a close friend. The narrator is a physician, a man of science, one who is most comfortable in the realm of empirical evidence and verifiable fact. As such, he serves as an opposite to Legrand, the man of imagination in this tale. Taken together, they represent the dualism of man.

The setting of the story also serves as a symbol of a dualistic world. On his visit to Legrand's isolated home, the narrator recalls that because Legrand lost his inheritance, he moved away from the city to an island characterized by contrast. On the western extremity of Sullivan's Island is a military post, Fort Moultrie, which is described as the barren exception on the island: "...the whole island, with the exception of the western point, and a line of hard, white beach on the seacoast, is covered with a dense undergrowth of the sweet myrtle so much prized by the horticulturists of England. The shrub here ...forms an almost impenetrable coppice, burthening the air with fragrance."²²

²¹Dupin is the central character of three tales of ratiocination: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844).

²²Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, pp. 337-38. Hereafter, all references to "The Gold Bug" are from this edition and will be noted parenthetically, citing page numbers.

The contrast is more specific between Legrand's small hut and the military fort than between the island and the city. Nevertheless, it is clear that the western extremity and the city represent places of discipline, order, and law as perceived by rational man. On the other hand, Legrand lives among wild growth, undisciplined and beautiful; such a setting suggests the realm of imagination by its beauty, in contrast to the barrenness and the "miserable frame dwellings" (p. 337) of the western tip. The island, then, is a sort of dualistic world, an imaginative setting in which to seek the truth of the gold bug.

From the narrator's point of view, Legrand's mental capability is as much a part of the story's mystery as the significance of the bug. The narrator says of Legrand: "I found him well educated, with unusual powers of mind, but infected with misanthropy, and subject to perverse moods of alternate enthusiasm and melancholy" (p. 338). He has no trouble believing Legrand unbalanced, and hopes to avoid provoking him by humoring him. In fact, the narrator answers Legrand's appeal to visit and follows him on his search for the treasure only because he is concerned for his friend's health and thinks it best to "humor his fancy" (p. 348). Of cooperation in digging for the "imaginary" treasure, the narrator says, "...I concluded to make a virtue of necessity--to dig with a good will, and thus the sooner to convince the visionary, by ocular demonstration, of the fallacy of the opinions he entertained" (p. 354). But he undergoes a change in mood as he labors:

I was dreadfully weary, but, scarcely understanding what had occasioned the change in my thoughts, I felt no longer any great aversion....I had become most unaccountably interested--nay, even excited. Perhaps there was something, amid all the extravagant demeanor of Legrand--some air of forethought, or of deliberation, which impressed me. I dug eagerly,....for the fancied treasure, the vision of which had demented my unfortunate companion (p. 356).

The narrator associates Legrand with "fancy," "vision," and "dementia," as if they were synonymous. Yet, the narrator himself moves from condescending patronage to an elevated state of excitement, the process of which is beyond his realm of understanding. It is unaccountable. Such language and change heighten the suspense, and the reader may well wonder about the ultimate outcome: will the narrator lead a demented visionary home, or will Legrand unearth a treasure?

Legrand, at this point in the narrator's understanding, is seen as a figure divorced from reality. Just as Legrand is separated from the ordinary operations and dwellings of other men, he is also distinguished by extraordinary behavior. But, significantly, it is the imaginative, fanciful Legrand who discovers the solution and the treasure. Not, however, without the aid of reason, the aid of logic and the rational narrator.

As Legrand explains the solution of the mystery to the narrator, it is clear that the process by which Legrand apprehends the truth is intuition, and, as we have seen, intuition is another name for the power of the imagination.

Legrand says:

Here was indeed a mystery which I felt it impossible to explain; but, even at that early moment, there seemed to glimmer, faintly, within the most remote and secret chambers of my intellect, a glow-worm-like conception of that truth which last night's adventure brought to so magnificent a demonstration (p. 361).

The description here calls to mind Poe's definition of intuition in "Eureka:"

It is but the conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression (p. 501).

Both Legrand and the narrator have experienced feelings that are, to a large

extent, unaccountable through the normal reasoning process and inexpressible in ordinary language.

Legrand's interest in entomology makes him value the gold bug. To carry it home, he wraps it in a piece of parchment, which he believes is a mere scrap of paper. Legrand's intuitive power enables him to imagine good fortune from the gold bug, sense significance in the parchment, and fancy a treasure. He guesses about the parchment, but he must exercise reason to decipher it. Its close proximity to a wrecked hull, when found, suggests pirates, who were thought to have buried treasure near his home. The picture of a goat and a death's-head on the parchment suggest a connection with the notorious pirate, Captain Kidd. Logically, then, the code on the parchment is in English for Legrand realizes, "The pun upon the word 'Kidd' is appreciable in no other language than the English" (p. 367). Thus, intuition or imagination, aided by reason, lead Legrand to the treasure. His truth is the solution to a puzzle less grand than that of the design of the universe, but its apprehension has required the keen perception of the power of the imagination.

The narrator has been of assistance. The man of reason is supportive to the man of imagination. In this tale, however, it is ironic that the help he brings is accidental or physical. He is a catalyst for an investigation of the parchment because he inadvertently holds the parchment near the fire, exposing the death's-head. Primarily, though, he carries equipment and provides the strength of his muscles, not his mind. Certainly, the narrator does not have the parchment from which Legrand works to solve the mystery. Nevertheless, it seems equally certain that had he possessed it, it would have remained a mere scrap of paper, rather than the means to truth. It is only after Legrand has explained, step-by-step and in great detail, that the narrator can say, "'Yes, I perceive'" (p. 375). Even then, he must wait on Legrand to explain the two

skeletons found buried with the treasure. The story concludes with Legrand's plausible guess that greed and desire for secrecy prompted Captain Kidd to dispose of his own helpmates. "The Gold Bug" dramatizes one of the key points of "Eureka": though reason is an aid to imagination, reason knows no elevation nor keen perception without the imagination.

The power of the imagination motif, as developed in "Eureka," is central to a more complete understanding of Poe's horror story, "Berenice," and of his tale of ratiocination, "The Gold Bug."²³ The central characters of these two tales intuit a truth. For Egaeus, it is the need for reason, though it is imperfectly known by him, and its lack is self-destructive. For Legrand, it is the existence of a treasure, a truth about the material world. Legrand is successful because he is finally revealed as a whole man, a man whose imagination is aided and tempered by his reason. Dualism of matter and spirit, however, does not always work to such a rewarding end. In many of Poe's tales, the nature of the universe, diffused matter and spirit, is represented by the conflict between an attraction to, and repulsion from, a desire for unity. It is this conflict, developed in "Eureka," which characterizes "Ligeia" and "William Wilson."

Before proceeding to a discussion of this second motif, we should recall that for Poe, as he makes clear in "Eureka," the spiritual essence is the higher and better aspect of the universe. Spirit created the universe as it is, and the creative idea stems from this spirit. It is ultimate and original. Spirit, in the form of the imagination, allows man to transcend the baser, material world. The nature of this world invites conflict. Not only are diffused matter and spirit attracted and repulsed, but also the spiritual essence is valued more.

²³ Imagination is also central to the stories in which Dupin is the central character.

An awareness of the nature of Poe's universe, with its opposing and unbalanced essences, is critical to an understanding of "Ligeia" and "William Wilson."

"Ligeia" is a complex tale, the complexity of which is due, in part, to its narrator, Ligeia's husband. He relates the story of Ligeia's nature, her death, and her resurrection, but his story is complicated by his emotion, his opium addiction, and his feeble memory. It is important, therefore, to analyze carefully the narrator's perceptions in order to see the development of the second motif. This analysis will also provide further evidence of the power of the imagination.

The narrator first tells the reader that he does not know how, when or where he first became acquainted with the Lady Ligeia. Some years have passed since that moment, years in which, it is later learned, the narrator has become addicted to opium. Moreover, he says that his knowledge of her came to him mysteriously, by way of shadowy processes, "unnoticed and unknown."²⁴ And his knowledge of her is indeed shadowy; at one point, he even refers to the "person of Ligeia" as "a shadow" (p. 23). He does not remember her heritage; only her beauty and character are clear, brought forth by fancy alone, when he is "buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outward world" (p. 22). Ligeia is exquisite and mysterious. Her voice is musical and harmonious. Her face is unequalled: "It was the radiance of an opium-dream--an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the phantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos" (p. 23). The description of her voice and face associates Ligeia with the arts, suggesting the elevation of the soul achieved through an effect of beauty. In fact, the narrator believes her to fulfill, in form and character, his definition

²⁴Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 22. Hereafter, all references to "Ligeia" are from this edition and will be noted parenthetically, citing page numbers.

of supernal loveliness. Her beauty was, for him, "the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth..." (p. 24).

The extraordinary, spiritual nature of Ligeia is further revealed when the narrator tries to capture the quality of her mind and intellectual power. Her eyes are the passage to, and symbol of, her mental nature. Their expression and power are analogous to the sentiment aroused by the contemplation of the beauty and wonder of the universe. She is, for the narrator, an individualization of God, perfect, spiritual, ideal.

The narrator endows Ligeia with a greater degree of the spiritual essence when he relates that she instructed him "through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation...that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden" (p. 27). She is beauty, of the universe and of the spirit. The narrator's knowledge of her inspires an elevation of soul; she is spiritual essence, supernal loveliness, and one who guides the narrator to an apprehension of truths above and beyond the material world.

The narrator's perceptions complicate his story, and, it is important to note, invite a multitude of interpretations. The ideal quality of Ligeia suggests that she is, in fact, the product of imagination, probably opium-induced, and has had no material existence at any time. Utilizing the touchstone quality of "Eureka" does not contradict this interpretation. Mr. Richard Wilbur, in an excellent analysis of "Ligeia," develops the relationship between Poe's vision of a dualistic universe and this tale as follows: Ligeia is an embodiment of supernal loveliness, yearned for by the man of imagination, whereas Rowena, the second wife, is a mere repetition of the baser, material essence; the narrator is the man of imagination who apprehends supernal loveliness; thus, "Ligeia," he concludes, is an allegory representing the conflict inherent

in a dualistic universe by the narrator's attraction to each essence.²⁵ Wilbur's interpretation is responsive to the narrator's personality and perceptions. The narrator, then, is a device used to emphasize the imaginative, ethereal realm "Ligeia" explores. And, as allegory, the characters have literal and figurative meaning.

In the narrator's passionate and glowing remembrance of Ligeia, she is affirmed and spirit is affirmed. No conflict between matter and spirit exists until the narrator relates the story of Ligeia's battle with death. She must die. Attracted to the spirit, indeed, one with spirit, Ligeia is destined to die. But she has, as an inversion of the matter to spirit process, merged with the material, symbolized by her husband, who is only an apprentice in matters of spirit. She has loved him, passionately. Moreover, contrary to what her husband knows of her, as one who aspires to the spiritual, she unexpectedly struggles against death. Of her love and of her struggle, the narrator says:

...In death only was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection....Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length recognized the principle of her longing with so wildly earnest a desire, for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away. It is this wild longing--it is this eager vehemence of desire for life--but for life--that I have no power to portray--no utterance capable of expressing (p. 28).

Ligeia, in dying, is matter and spirit in conflict, for the material world is life and her alliance with the narrator, a material bond. She cannot and will not submit to the progress to nothingness, even though, intellectually, she yearns for it. She says, before her death, that only the weakness of a feeble will en-

²⁵ Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," in The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 275.

ables man to yield to death, a statement which echoes the tale's epigraph.²⁶ Death is the triumph of the "Conqueror Worm" (p. 29), a catalyst for the deterioration of the bodily form and the union of decaying material forms. Death's triumph repulses Ligeia.

After Ligeia's death, the narrator is desolate and becomes a "bounden slave in the trammels of opium" (p. 31). In his despair, he moves to an isolated region of England, into a deserted abbey, which is, for him, a place where matter and spirit are one. The place "had much in unison with the feelings of utter abandonment which had driven...[him] into that remote and unsocial region of the country" (p. 30). In this place and in his emotional state, he is within the symbolic realm of the imagination, away from the ordinary affairs of men. He decorates the abbey, particularly the bridal chamber to which he soon brings his second wife, Lady Rowena, after the fashion of his opium dreams and with a design derived from fantasy alone. The bridal chamber achieves a "phantasmagoric effect" (p. 32), as do the events which will take place there. The environment is a product of the narrator's imagination. Here, the material world and its forms are deceptive, and the narrator repeatedly uses the word phantasmagoric to describe the scene and events. In the narrator's mind, at least, matter and spirit are concatenate.

The Lady Rowena, brought into this environment, is an intrusion and the narrator's second marriage is doomed from the very beginning. The narrator

²⁶The epigraph of the tale (p. 22) is as follows:

And the will therein lieth, which dieth not.
 Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with
 its vigor? For God is but a great will per-
 vading all things by nature of its intent-
 ness. Man doth not yield himself to the an-
 gels, nor unto death utterly, save only
 through the weakness of his feeble will.
 Joseph Glanvill

refers to the first month of his marriage as the "unhallowed hours" and reports that Rowena, who is described in terms of the baser, material essence, "shunned me and love me but little" (p. 32). On his part, he "loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man" (p. 32). Repulsed by the material essence, represented by Rowena, the narrator recalls Ligeia: "My memory flew back,.... to Ligeia,....her lofty, her ethereal nature....Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own" (p. 33).

Lady Rowena soon contracts an incurable and mysterious disease. She complains of a presence in the room; the narrator, who is obsessed by thoughts of Ligeia during this time, sees the "faint traces of a shadow" (p. 35). Yet, he is able to discount Rowena's illness and his own perception because of Rowena's terror, his own vivid imagination, and his opium habit. But the shadowy presence in the room is not the product of an opium-dream alone. The narrator, in fact, ceases to emphasize his opium state and more frequently refers to himself as a dreamer, with no reference to his visions being drug-induced. Later, after Rowena's death, he emphatically asserts that he "had heard a noise" (p. 35) which awakened his soul. What Rowena senses and the narrator perceives is Ligeia, who returns to struggle for life by ending Rowena's life and possessing her body. It is she who stirs within Rowena's corpse. The narrator believes Rowena still lives and tries to aid her. But when he forsakes his "passionate waking visions of Ligeia" (p. 36), the corpse returns to its appearance of death. Again, he sinks "into visions of Ligeia" (p. 37), and once again, he hears "a low sob from the region of the ebony bed" (p. 37). "...Time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revivification was repeated;..." (p. 37). At last, the narrator ceases to offer aid. Then, he witnesses Ligeia's merger with the corpse of Rowena.

This final drama of revivification is the drama of the conflict between the material and spiritual essences. It takes place within an imaginative realm.

The narrator, who has felt his soul awakening, is, with his whole being, now attuned to the spiritual essence, represented by Ligeia. By an act of volition or the transcendence of spirit possible through the power of the imagination, he brings Ligeia back from the dead. Her spiritual essence merges with the material once again. But the union cannot endure. The narrator, one recalls, says at the beginning of the tale that he is speaking "of her who is no more" (p. 22).²⁷

The conflict between matter and spirit has been developed in several ways in "Ligeia." The essences of matter and spirit are represented separately at the beginning within the narrator and Ligeia. Her progress to death, her fierce resistance, the narrator's yearning for her represent the conflict of those essences. After Ligeia's death, the narrator, who now assumes the spiritual role, is in conflict with material Rowena. They attract and repulse one another, and provide another variation of the motif. The conflict between matter and spirit usually is terminated by death, but not so in "Ligeia." Ligeia's climactic return attests to this.

"William Wilson" provides another treatment of the Ligeian conflict, and, as in "Ligeia," the narrator's perceptions are a device used to symbolize Poe's dualistic universe. G. R. Thompson believes that the tale invites a double reading because of the two William Wilsons. Thompson notes that it may be interpreted as a man's confrontation with his soul or as a guilt-ridden mind in conflict with itself.²⁸ I am in general agreement with Thompson, but applying the Eureka touchstone, I would employ a slightly different set of terms. Con-

²⁷"Eureka" suggests an end to the universe at which point it is logical to expect another creation and a repetition of the cycle. "Ligeia" is one fictional development of that cycle.

²⁸G. R. Thompson, Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 169.

frontation and conflict do occur in "William Wilson," but it is the confrontation and conflict of matter and spirit.

The way in which William Wilson perceives reality is central to an understanding of his character and the tale. His manner of perception is similar to that of Egaeus in "Berenice." Like Egaeus, Wilson is "the descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable."²⁹ Also, Wilson's inheritance of the family trait is compared to an illness which does "positive injury" to him (p. 40), which corresponds to Egaeus' monomania. Furthermore, Wilson narrates his own story of obsession as does Egaeus. From the details of this story, the reader learns that, as in the case of Egaeus, external objects affect Wilson, influencing his spirit and ultimately compelling him to act violently. Wilson's account of his progress to this ultimate act begins with Dr. Bransby's school.

Wilson's memory of his early school years not only characterizes his manner of perception, but also the conflict between matter and spirit. Of Dr. Bransby's, Wilson says:

These [details] ...utterly trivial, and even ridiculous in themselves, assume, to my fancy, adventitious importance, as connected with a period and a locality when and where I recognize the first ambiguous monitions of the destiny which afterward so fully overshadowed me (p. 41).

Wilson fancies that the details of his imaginative perception are significant to his story without clearly seeing the significance. Among these details, he remembers the refreshing sensation of cool, shaded streets; recreates the fragrance of shrubbery; and hears again the quietude dispelled by the church bell. These memories delight him anew as they did as a child. He says the location

²⁹Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 40. Hereafter, all references to "William Wilson" are from this edition, and will be noted parenthetically, citing page number.

of Dr. Bransby's was "a dream-like and spirit-soothing place" (p. 40), words which suggest the qualities of the spirit. On the other hand, the school ground, described in material details of brick, mortar and glass, is compared to a prison. The school itself conflicts with this material, external reality because it is, for Wilson, "a palace of enchantment" (p. 42). Here, he did not require external influences to excite him. The school is like a wilderness for Wilson. It turns in upon itself so that one can never ascertain precisely where he is. This school is a symbol for Wilson's spirit, for, within the school, he turns in upon himself to discover "a wilderness of sensation, a world of rich incident, an universe of varied emotion, of excitement the most passionate and spirit-stirring" (pp. 43-44). At this point in his memory, two realms have been suggested: the external world which affects Wilson's soul, and his internal world, symbolized by the school, which fancies and shapes the external world according to his passion. Another William Wilson, who will not submit to the narrator's passions, intrudes upon this internal realm when he becomes a student at Dr. Bransby's. Wilson the narrator is simultaneously attracted and repulsed by the other Wilson, and the second Wilson responds to the narrator in the same ambivalent manner.

Even though his counterpart will not submit, the narrator cannot bring himself to hate completely the intruder who bears his plebian name, mirrors his physical features, and claims the same birth date. But they are antagonists in every way, and in public encounters, the narrator is always the victor. The other Wilson, however, makes the narrator feel that his victories are unwarranted, and, in so doing, he seems superior. In private encounters, he is the victor. He seems to know the narrator's vulnerability and is able to thwart his designs. Nevertheless, the narrator cannot hate him completely, because, although the other Wilson opposes the narrator's passions, the narrator senses that his troublesome counterpart feels affection for him.

Wilson and his counterpart reveal that the conflict between matter and spirit exists within men as well as between men. The narrator perceives the other Wilson as separate from, and external to, himself; in truth, he is a compelling passion within the narrator. Thus, the conflict between the two Wilsons is symbolic of the diffused nature of the universe duplicated in the psyche of man.³⁰ The external world, as the narrator perceives it, especially his divorce from the other Wilson, is a symbol of his internal conflict.

This extension of himself, this alter ego, pursues the narrator wherever he goes. He thwarts the narrator's plans, and, in one instance, a crooked card game, foils the narrator's design and saves the intended victim. Although the narrator perceives him as a tormentor, he is, more accurately, a mentor. He is virtue, opposed to the narrator's vice. He is the better side of the narrator, the spirit that transcends the machinations of the material world.

The narrator's inability to perceive the truth indicates his limited power of imagination, which serves only, as Wilson himself says, to turn in upon itself and foster his dementia. For Wilson, as for Egaeus, this failure to apprehend the truth is self-destructive. Wilson tells his story in the shadow of death. His tone is confessional, focusing upon the reason for his fall rather than particular sins. He refers to himself as an "Outcast of all outcasts most abandoned!" (p. 39), a statement which foreshadows his spiritual suicide. Ultimately, Wilson turns against his mentor and slays him with a sword. But before he dies, the other Wilson, "with features all pale and dabbled in blood" (p. 60) speaks. The narrator hears his own voice say:

You have conquered, and I yield. Yet,
hence forward art thou also dead--dead
to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope!
In me didst thou exist--and, in my

³⁰James W. Gargano, "Art and Irony in 'William Wilson,'" ESQ 60 (1970), 22.

death, see by this image, which is
thine own, how utterly thou hast mur-
dered thyself (p. 60).

The baser essence, matter, has conquered Wilson. In denying his spirit, he has prevented wholeness within himself and transcendence.

Thus far, progress to nothingness has been briefly alluded to in "Berenice," "Ligeia," and "William Wilson." In each, the progress culminates in a climactic moment: horrible in Berenice's living burial, fearful in Ligeia's fierce resistance to death, and violent in Wilson's act of murder. In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," these psychological states are also represented, but they are extended to exemplify, more specifically, the progress to nothingness motif.

The setting for "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" is at a time after death and in a place beyond human experience. But, as David Halliburton has remarked, being there "does not presume discontinuity with that experience."³¹ (In a companion piece, "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" (1839), this place is called Aidenn.) Aidenn is an environment chiefly characterized by awareness and superior expression. In life, death is "the spectre which sate at all feasts,"³² making all human joy nothing more than temporal.

Monos and Una, spirits joined after death, were lovers in life. Their belief that their love would end derived from man's limited ability to perceive. From their new point of view in Aidenn, they have gained a degree of peace. There is no need to "define the indefinable" (p. 444). This new place is simply majestic and radiant; no further description is possible or necessary. Aidenn is that which mankind struggles to apprehend, but can achieve only in death, the

³¹David Halliburton, Edgar Allen Poe: A Phenomenological View (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 177.

³²Edgar Allan Poe, "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Hervey Allan (New York: Modern Library, 1938), p. 444. Hereafter, all references to the "Colloquy" are from this edition, and will be noted parenthetically, citing page number.

true resignation of the material realm. In death, the conflict between matter and spirit is finally put to an end, and unity achieved. As Monos details it, it is a gradual process.

The superiority of the spirit becomes explicit in Monos' account of his passage from life into Aidenn. He begins his story with the general condition of man when he died. Man's belief in his dominion over Nature had infected the world. In vain, through the powers of reason, man sought knowledge even while the poetic imagination warned him that such knowledge would not enable him to perceive the order and purpose of the universe. As civilization continued to decline into ruin, Monos, while still on earth, comes to understand that there can be "no regeneration save in death" (p. 447). Only through such a regeneration, which will result in the dominance of spirit, can mankind be purified. Monos' poetic prophecy is at last fulfilled. The end of the material world is what has propelled Una into Aidenn. It is she who has provoked Monos' remembrance of earth's state by asking him of his "passage through the dark Valley and Shadow" (p. 444).

Monos sees earth's illness as the cause of his own: "Wearied at heart with anxieties which had their origin in the general turmoil and decay, I succumbed to the fierce fever" (p. 447). In death the conflict between matter and spirit ends, and Monos senses the withdrawal of his own will to live. He is no longer repulsed. A desire for unity, satisfied only in death, allows Monos to sense eccentrically and more perfectly. The sensations of smell and taste, distinct in life, merge as Monos' body decays. Time unifies during his decay. He has no awareness of the passage of time; there is only one moment. He also senses pleasure and ecstasy. Death, which Monos feared and which barred his happiness, is largely painless. Death brings a "sole consciousness of entity" (p. 450), of body with time and place.

Tension, however, exists within this progress into nothingness. While Monos thrills at the consciousness of wholeness, he is also aware of decay, burial and his relationship with the worm.³³ This aspect of his earthly union, through decay, is graphic. This is the stage of the progress to nothingness which checks "human bliss" (p. 444). The body is violated. The living man feels fear and horror. Monos, however, decays painlessly and becomes one with the earth. Una, the flickering "light of enduring Love" (p. 450), briefly interrupts his dreamy sleep. She rejoins Monos. She, too, has died, and, now, they are wholly spirit. Of this moment, Monos says:

And now again all was void. That nebulous light had been extinguished. That feeble thrill had vibrated itself into quiescence. Many lustra had supervened. Dust had returned to dust. The worm had food no more. The sense of being had at length utterly departed, and there reigned in its stead--instead of all things--dominant and perpetual--the autocrats Place and Time. For that which was not--for that which had no form--for that which had no thought--for that which had no sentience--for that which was soulless, yet of which matter formed no portion--for all this nothingness, yet for all this immortality, the grave was still a home, and the corrosive hours, co-mates (pp. 450-51).

This is the end of Monos' account. Only silence is heard. He and Una have progressed fully and finally into nothingness.³⁴

In summary, the "Colloquy" exemplifies the progress into nothingness motif and its interconnectedness with the power of the imagination and the nature

³³Thompson, Poe's Fiction, pp. 184-87. Thompson holds that this tension and the graphic detail are clues to the irony of this tale and concludes that, as a result, the concept of oneness is ironic. Indeed, by definition and in example, oneness is nothing, an unexpected result.

³⁴In Monos' closing speech, nothingness is synonymous with immortality. It is possible that oneness as nothingness is only man's limited ability to perceive of a state in which nothing exists separately or distinctly.

of the universe motifs. On earth, Monos transcends the material, baser perceptions of others. However, he does not perfectly perceive oneness until his death, when he begins to merge gradually with the earth. Now, he is at one with the earth, the worm, the darkness, and the grave. Death decays, but it also allows him to perceive his relationship with the whole more perfectly. Still, he is not whole until Una dies. Love joins him. This spiritual attachment to earth, brought to the grave, is the endpoint of his progress. Monos has achieved eternal unity and it is nothingness. Nevertheless, the spiritual essence is affirmed. In death, Monos enjoys keen perception and transcends all the material concerns. He is separate, distinct, and yet one with spirit, finally.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is the "fictional embodiment of the philosophical theory adumbrated in 'Eureka.'"³⁵ All three motifs operate as a design in this tale, and, thus, it demonstrates well the touchstone function of "Eureka."

Roderick Usher is the man of imagination in this tale. "...His very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art,...."³⁶ The narrator's account of Roderick and the events of his story reveal that Roderick has inherited the "peculiar sensibility of temperament." His only pastimes are music, painting and literature into which he guides the narrator with "an excited and highly distempered ideality" (p. 9). These shared diversions and Roderick's attitude toward them cause the narrator to fancy that he perceives "the tottering of his [Usher's] lofty reason upon her throne" (p. 10).

³⁵Stuart Levine, Edgar Poe: Seer and Craftsman (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, 1972), p. 38.

³⁶Auden, Edgar Allan Poe, pp. 2-3. Hereafter, all references to "The Fall of the House of Usher" are from this edition, and will be noted parenthetically, citing page number.

In addition, Roderick is a man of heightened sensibility in that he suffers from a "morbid acuteness of the senses" (p. 7). Roderick's environment also suggests the realm of the imagination. He had, "for many years,...never ventured forth" (p. 7) from his house into the ordinary world of men. The narrator cannot explain this, for Roderick has conveyed, "in terms too shadowy... to be re-stated," his reasons for remaining inside "the gray walls" (p. 7).

The narrator's account also suggests Poe's vision of a dualistic universe in conflict. The narrator's initial view of the house of Usher affects his spirits. As he looks upon the gloomy mansion, he feels "an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation...an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart--an unredeemed dreariness of thought..." (p. 1). He feels that the power of objects to affect the soul is a power beyond the depth of men. The narrator shudders once again when he sees the gloomy house reflected in the "black and lurid tarn" (p. 2). His reaction suggests a mysterious universe, whose truths are imperfectly known, and an interconnectedness of the external and internal, of matter and spirit, extended to the whole of the universe, a suggestion given particular credence by the reflection of the house in a natural void.³⁷

Usher's identification with the house is another aspect of interconnectedness. The narrator remarks that the "House of Usher" is "an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion" (p. 3). In addition, the narrator attributes Roderick's peculiar "sensibility of temperament" to the same union of house and family. Once again, the separation of matter and spirit or of the external and internal is indistinct.

³⁷Thompson, in Poe's Fiction, pp. 87-98, uses these textual materials similarly, though to a different end. His point is that the psychological impact of fear, which disintegrates Usher and the house, also affects the narrator.

Usher's physical characteristics and personality also suggest relationship between matter and spirit. Within his environment of a fragile and decaying house, Roderick is isolated and separated from the ordinary existence of men. The narrator is struck by his friend's unearthly presence: "The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me...I was at once struck with an incoherence--an inconsistency..." (p. 6). The association of Roderick with things beyond this material existence is further extended by his close identification with his twin sister, Madeleine. Both brother and sister are ill. Roderick suffers from a strange aversion to sounds, odors and materials that would be of little consequence to other men. His sister, though in another form, suffers a malady of withdrawal from the living. Each is physically frail and decaying as a result of illness.

From this description of Roderick and the house of Usher, it is clear that the three characters and their relationships to other people and objects represent the interconnectedness of matter and spirit, of external and internal, and of body and spirit. The narrator's observations have linked the house with a mysterious universe. He has also identified Roderick with the house. More important however, Roderick, to a greater degree than other men, is identified with matters of the soul. His decaying material existence is symbolized by the reflection of the crumbling mansion in the void of the tarn. In addition, he tends toward a state of being which is separate and transcends the material world and the understanding of mankind. The essences of matter and spirit are within all things, but, ultimately, the essence of spirit dominates as is evidenced by the outcome of Roderick's struggle, which also dramatizes the inherent conflict existing in a diffused and dualistic world. The nature of the conflict becomes more evident as the progress to nothingness motif is traced through "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Three elements of this tale symbolize the ultimate nothingness of the universe: the tarn, Usher's painting, and the collapse of the house of Usher. Mortal man, represented by the narrator, shudders at the sight of the black and silent tarn, which simultaneously mirrors the decaying house of Usher and the declining family. Yet, to an ordinary man, more attuned to matters of external reality than to spiritual essence, the tarn provides no understanding. He cannot see into its depths, and thus it provokes in him an awareness of his own imperfection and an emotional response of fear.

Although the narrator is more repelled than attracted by this physical embodiment of the void, Roderick is simultaneously attracted and repelled. His repulsion exists as a "'struggle with the grim phantasm, Fear'" (p. 7). Yet, Roderick senses the necessity of his resignation; "'I must abandon life and reason together,'" he tells the narrator (p. 7). Beyond an awareness of the inevitability of his path, Roderick's attraction to the void is evidenced by his painting of an "excavation [that] lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth" in which there was "no outlet" and no man-made "source of light...; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendour" (p. 9). The narrator is awe-struck by the "phantasmagoric" conception. "If ever mortal painted an idea," he declares, "that mortal was Roderick Usher" (p. 9).³⁸

The third element of nothingness begins with Madeleine's burial. Still alive, she struggles unrelentingly against her entombment. Her struggle is as much against her fate as against her imprisonment; her fate is the fate of all mankind, death and the mysterious unknown. Roderick's acute senses have informed him of her struggle, but he does and says nothing. "'I now tell you,'" he informs the narrator days after Madeleine's burial, "'that I heard her first

³⁸The earth, light and powerful feeling correspond to the details of Monos' existence after death.

feeble movements in the hollow coffin'" (p. 20). And as the tale reaches its climax, the "enshrouded figure of the lady Madeleine" (p. 20) stands at the door of their chamber.

There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold, then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated (pp. 20-21).

She and Roderick are unified in their deaths. All, except the terrified narrator, who flees aghast from the mansion, fall into void: "...There was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters, the deep and dank tarn...closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher'" (p. 21). The void still affords no understanding. It merely closes and retains its mystery.

Poe's tales are informed by the philosophy of "Eureka." Matter and spirit are diffused into all forms. The power of the imagination allows man to transcend the material and apprehend the truth, though imperfectly. This transcendence, this perception of the ultimate dominance of the spiritual essence, is a stage in the progress toward nothingness. Such progress, however, is accompanied by conflict, for man is both attracted and repelled by the mysterious unity of nothing. The psychological impact of glimpsing the wholeness of nothing, imperfectly understood, is the Gothic element of horror in so many of Poe's tales. It is only with "Eureka" that "order and purpose" is affirmed. The universe of "Eureka" is Poe's necessary conclusion, his reality, arrived at through the poetic and imaginative process. This reality is inherent in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and the other tales discussed in this report. "Eureka" informs the reader of the reality of Poe's tales and contributes to the reader's under-

standing of their design. In short, "Eureka" serves as a touchstone for the characteristic motifs of the tales of Edgar Allan Poe.

A Selected Bibliography

- Adams, Robert M. NIL: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void during the Nineteenth Century. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966.
- Allen, Hervey, ed. The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe. New York: Modern Library, 1938.
- Auden, W. H., ed. Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Prose, Poetry, and 'Eureka.' New York: Holt, 1950.
- Buranelli, Vincent. Edgar Allan Poe. New Haven: College and Univ. Press, 1961.
- Davidson, E. H. Poe: A Critical Study. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957.
- Eddings, Dennis W. "Poe's 'Dream-Land': Nightmare or Sublime Vision?" Poe Studies, 8 (1975), 5-8.
- Gargano, James W. "Art and Irony in 'William Wilson'." Emerson Society Quarterly, 60 (1970), 18-22.
- Garrett, Walter. "The 'Moral' of 'Ligeia'." Poe Studies, 4, No. 1 (1971), 19-20.
- Halliburton, David. Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973.
- Hoffman, Daniel. Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe. Garden City: Doubleday, 1972.
- Holman, Harriet. "Hog, Bacon, Ram and Other 'Savans' in 'Eureka': Notes Toward Decoding Poe's Encyclopedic Satire." Poe Newsletter, 2 (1969), 49-55.
- Jacobs, Robert D. Poe: Journalist and Critic. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1969.
- Levine, Stuart. Edgar Poe: Seer and Craftsman. Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, 1972.
- Ostrom, John Ward, ed. The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1948.
- Quinn, Arthur H. Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography. New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1941.

Thompson, G. R. Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973.

Thompson, G. R. "Unity, Death, and Nothingness--Poe's Romantic Skepticism." PMLA, 85 (1970), 297-300.

Wilbur, Richard. "The House of Poe." The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1966. Pp. 255-77.

"EUREKA": A TOUCHSTONE FOR THE
CHARACTERISTIC MOTIFS IN THE TALES
OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

by

CONNIE LE CLAWSON

B.A., Coe College, 1970
M.S., University of Oklahoma, 1972

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1977

"Eureka": A Touchstone for the
Characteristic Motifs in the Tales
of Edgar Allan Poe

The last prose publication of Edgar Allan Poe, "Eureka" (1848), is a touchstone for the characteristic motifs of his tales. These motifs, which constitute Poe's vision of the design of the universe in "Eureka," also underline the thematic and conflictive designs within his works of short fiction. The motifs are central to a complete understanding of the inherent reality operating within the tales. The first of the three motifs of "Eureka" is the power of the imagination, a manifestation of the spiritual aspect of man. Keen perception and a heightened sensibility are characteristic of imagination with which men are able to apprehend truth. Imagination, aided by reason, enables men to apprehend the nature of the universe, the second motif. The universe of "Eureka" is dualistic, composed of matter and spirit in conflict, each simultaneously attracted and repulsed by the other. When the principle of attraction and repulsion is withdrawn, the conflict is resolved and original unity returns. This return to unity, defined as nothingness, is the third motif. The power of the imagination motif is the design within "Berenice" (1835) and "The Gold Bug" (1843), though used to different ends. Egaeus, of "Berenice," has imagination which, without the benefit of reason, distorts his ability to perceive. Legrand of "The Gold Bug," on the other hand, uses imagination, abetted by reason, to discover a truth. The conflict created by the nature of the universe is the design of "Ligeia" (1838) and "William Wilson" (1839). In each tale, there is a desire for, and appreciation of, the spiritual essence at war with the limitations of the material essence. The progress to nothingness motif, exempli-

fied in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" (1841), is repeated in the design of "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1830), a paradigm of the "Eureka" philosophy. The collapse at the end of "Usher" is symbolic of a return to original unity.