

A View of Poe's Poetry

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Abstract:

The present paper is an attempt to have a view of Poe's poetry with a particular reference to his recurrent topics and how they are presented. It also stresses that his poetry represents a totally different realm when compared to his short stories.

In contrast to the dark aspects of human experience in his fiction such as revenge, madness, perversity, violence and psychological aberration, his poems bring the reader to other worlds where love, beauty, grace and perfection come to the fore.

The poems show the other side that has remained mainly concealed in his fiction.

المُلخَص:

البحث الحالي محاولة لإلقاء نظرة على شعر بوسع إشارة خاصة إلى موضوعاته المتكررة وكيفية طرحها، كذلك يشدد البحث على كون شعره يمثل ناحية مختلفة كلياً عند المقارنة مع قصصه القصيرة، وبخلاف الجوانب المظلمة من التجربة الإنسانية في قصصه مثل الثأر والجنون والانحراف والعنف والاضطرابات النفسية، فإن قصائده تنقل القارئ إلى عوالم أخرى من الحب والجدل السمو والكمال التي تبرز إلى الواجهة. وإن قصائده تكشف عن الجانب الآخر الذي بقي مخفياً بدرجة كبيرة في عالمه القصصي.

The artistic achievement of the American Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is definitely a good and resourceful field for speculation and scholarly investigation. Very few writers in world literature could have aroused the heated debate and polar opposition in their final analysis of this writer, his career, its twists and turns, and the literary manifestations of these in his works. Moreover, Poe the man and artist, constitutes a point of interest that is inseparable from what has been achieved. Indeed in Poe's case, it is impossible to concentrate exclusively on the textual without taking into account the contextual or circumstantial aspects. As such, the following arguments pay attention to the curious phenomenon of Poe's poetic writings and the conscious and unconscious motives that eventually imbue his work with its characteristic touch.

No doubt his short stories such as 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The Cask of Amontillado', 'The Pendulum and the Pit', 'The Purloined Letter', 'The Tale-Tell Heart' and others have functioned as the spring-board for all types of speculations and critical judgments revealing the critic's own stand about this extremely flexible work. Such views actually do not give final and conclusive interpretations of the story and what it could mean. The present paper does not claim to settle this issue. Rather it aims to give a bird's eye view of Poe's verse, its particularity, topics and recurrent imagery. In other words the subject matter of the current paper is less controversial. It concentrates on his poems which are, as in Shakespeare's sonnets, highly personal and outspoken. They, as will be shown in due course, reveal the writer's apprehensions, nightmares, anxieties, deep agonies and misgivings. The approach followed throughout is thematic in that the emphasis is laid on the various topics, conscious and unconscious, emanating from these poems and the underlying psychological and social assumptions.

Poe was a poet, short story writer, journalist, and publisher. Throughout his relatively short career, Poe devoted all his time and energy to writing, and refining it as much as he could. Therefore it is not surprising to come across two different dates before all his poems. The other point to be raised beforehand is the fact that he lived all his life unrecognized and misconceived, especially in own country (U.S.A.). Poe, in fact, remained all his life, "an overworked and undervalued toiler" (Pollin 1981:7). Being like that, his case is a glaring example of the alienated artist whose writing represents the

imaginative life as a kind of sublimation or compensation for the losses of daily reality. Actually his case reminds us of Schopenhauer's view of art as a contemplative refuge from the world of daily strife and will. His family background has not provided him with a firm foundation to which he could adhere in his strained times. His father left his mother when Edgar was an infant and the mother herself died when Poe was less than three years old. It is true that his step mother has compensated for this traumatic experience. However, Poe will be always pining to this much-desired motherly affection. This is evident in most of his poems as will be shown in the rest of this paper. Many of his poems will be stressing this topic. His visions and speculations testify to the validity of the view that Poe is psychologically and emotionally far from normal. To be more precise, this is the secret of the endless fascination of his work and its beauty as he deals with topics rarely raised by others. Accordingly the main corpus of his poetry and the various reactions it has aroused among critics and fellow-writers or rather, ought to be seen from this angle if a proper assessment of his verse is to be attained. That the artist can not bring himself /herself to smooth and easygoing relationship with his/her circumscribing environment or its dictates and proscriptions is a common and expected phenomenon in world literature. It is predictable and indeed very common. The list of the alienated artists is long. It covers the major names in western literature such as Marlowe, Pope, Bunyan, Milton, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Mrs. Woolf, Wilde, Plath, Shaw, Joyce, Brecht, Hemingway...etc. Poe's situation combines the cultural and social malaise of his age and the discontent of a demonic disposition and domestic miseries. Indeed this point informs nearly all his poetic writings and the course they have taken as well as their striking emphasis on certain themes.

Poe's reputation has been drastically affected by both parties: those who have undertaken to defend him and praise his work lavishly or those who have been intent on subverting his work. The detractors " saw him as a prime example of diseased intellect" while those devotees who have pictured him as an exotic, trapped and finally destroyed by what Baudelaire described " a great barbarous realm"(Galloway 1976 :13). If one could make use of the Freudian paradigm about the ineradicable impact on the social and intellectual challenges posed by an indifferent milieu as felt in his influential treatise, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), it becomes

predictable that Poe's morbid mind and unstable psychological build are the inevitable outcome of the social and domestic dimensions. In one of the unfavorable descriptions of the man he appears to be "edgy, suspicious and arrogant" (Walker 1986 :109) or even a misanthrope. Some of the hostile reactions of his fellow writers have become almost catchphrases such as Emerson's derogatory epithet of Poe as "jingleman" or James Robert Lowell's often-quoted lines, There came Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge Three fifths of him genius and two fifths fudge (ibid. :107).

In this regard, it is essential to give the full picture of the man, both in his advantages and disadvantages, as the critical debate sometimes falls short of giving a balanced view of the writer and his work. Those who have been close to him realize that "he was a Virginian gentleman, rigorously courteous, noted for the purity of his conversation and for the chivalrous attitude towards women"(Mabbott :x).

Most writings ignore this side and stress the common view held about him that his morbidity is matchless and that he is virtually the messenger of death. Hence the polar dichotomy of judgments and misconception of his final achievement.

Thus there is always a sense of persecution and injustice in the treatment and appreciation of Poe's writing which always keeps haunting him to which he finds an outlet in his creative and critical writings. The inevitable outcome is a state of neurosis, depression and drinking bouts. Besides, the disease of his young wife (Virginia) and her premature death have precipitated his own predilections to suicide and his realization that he is getting "insane with intervals of horrible sanity"(Lall 1999 :20). Apart from this excessive occupation with death , his emotional life has been greatly affected by the loss of the matrimonial warmth due to his mother's premature death. Indeed this point will be always haunting him throughout all his brief lifespan. His relationship with woman, especially elder women, betrays the feeling that he is suffering from mother-fixation. Even in his last years, he could not bring himself to get rid of this obsessive feeling towards mother-figures. Even in 1848, a year before his death, he repeats his proposal to marry the widow, Sarah Hellen (to whom he wrote his second version of the famous poem ' To Hellen'), but the latter declines for two reasons: she is older than he and in poor health (Thomas 1987: 713). His aunt's recollections of her nephew are illuminating in foregrounding his psychological; and emotional

instabilities at the time of writing his intellectual treatise, 'Eureka', and how his life is sprinkled with insomnia, pain and inability to be physically alone,

I used to sit with him, often until four o'clock in the morning; he at his desk, writing, and I dozing in my chair. When he was composing Eureka, we used to walk up and down the garden, his arm around me, mine around him, until I was so tired I could not walk"(ibid.:714).

Many of his poems elaborate this issue about this unquenchable thirst for the motherly affection.' For 'Annie', for instance, embodies his psychological recuperation when writing and feminine care could mitigate or even eliminate the scars of such woe-begonne life,

Thank heaven! The crisis-
The danger is past,
And the lingering illness
Is over at last-
And the fever called "living"
Is conquered at last.

The details of the sustaining and exuberant role of Annie's care for his innermost needs are striking and indicative of his continuous pining for motherly affection and tenderness. The date of writing the poem is worth mentioning (1849), because this is the year of his own death. This boils down to the fact that Poe could not overcome completely this crisis and it is still there despite his claims about the opposite of all this. His mind recollects rare moments which address his subconscious desire to be pampered and taken care of,

When the light was extinguished
She covered me warm
She prayed to the angels
To keep me from harm—
To the queen of the angels
To shield me from harm.

.....
But my heart; it is brighter
Than all of the many
Stars in the sky,
For it sparkles with Annie—
It glows with the light

Of the love of my Annie.

Poe can, at times, be more explicit and makes no qualms regarding his mixed feelings towards his wife, Virginia. Definitely, there is an Oedipal sense in the treatment of his wife. In ' To My Mother', Poe's longing for or pursuit of a mother-surrogate is the more striking and emphatic,

Because I feel that, in the Heavens above,
The angels , whispering to one another,
Can find, among their burning terms of love,
None so devotional as that of "Mother",
Therefore by that dear name I long have called you
And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed you
In setting my Virginia's spirit free.
My mother—my own mother, who died early,
Was but the mother of myself; but you
Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,
And thus one dearer than the mother I knew
By that infinity with which my life
Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life.

In ' To Helen' in its two versions (1832, 1848), Poe ostensibly talks about the fascinating female beauty represented by the archetypal Helen of Troy, the wife of King Menelaus of Greece whose beauty is the direct cause of a wild love and subsequent devastating war. The actual reason prompting Poe to write that poem is his own adolescent fascination with the mother of his schoolmate, Mrs. Jane Stith Standard who was then 27 while Poe himself was only 14. If she encouraged him to write poetry as a motherly gesture, the effect of that is ineradicable as he considers her his first love and poetic Muse.

If we leave aside his emotional and psychological deprivation, if not perversity, the fact remains that he is a man who is doomed to be aloof, living a life of virtual isolation. Moreover, his poetry gives the impression that he is out of touch with reality. In his poem ' Alone', the poet divulges all his distress and misery,

From my childhood's hour I have not seen
As other were—I have not seen
As others saw—I could not bring
My passions from a common spring—
From the same source I have not taken
My sorrow—I could not awaken

My heart to joy at the same tone—

And all I lov'd—I lov'd alone.(MacDonald 1965:83)

Elsewhere he is quoted to be saying that this longing for solitude is not a mere passing desire nor an erratic reaction to a terrible experience. Rather it is an invariable and conscious stand which he seeks to assert and justify "My life has been whim-passion-longing for solitude- a scorn of all things present, in an earnest desire for the future "(Hammond 1981: 143).This solitariness will be the cornerstone of his poems which substantiates this salient feature in his poetic writings.

In 'A Dream within a Dream', Poe philosophizes this personal trait of his and gives it a universal dimension. As any typical absurdist, in the twentieth century, Poe's alter ego, the speaker in the poem, represents the real human predicament: man's dreams are virtually groundless and his craving is merely a mirage, a self-deceptive act no more. It is a poem of self-pity where the poet keenly and exclusively concentrates on the bleak perspective of life,

You are not wrong who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.
I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I have within my hand
Grains of the golden sand—
How few ! Yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep
While I weep—while I weep!
O God ! can I not grasp
Them with a Higher clasp?
O God ! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?

In his customary insightful and probing judgment, T.S.Eliot writes in his review of this poem the following account. It is a

recognition of Poe's pioneering and futuristic perception of life and its implications,

In the first place his poetry is original. That is to say, his vision of life, though limited, was peculiar and coherent and his idiom unmistakable. He takes you into a world different from that of any other poet [...].Once his poems have become part of your experience, they are never dislodged.(qtd. In Hammond 1981: 164).

The other topic that gains much emphasis in his poetry is the existential awareness that man's lot in this world is suffering and death while the beautiful and joyous things are only transitory. In the poems already discussed, death is pivotal and indeed the predominant tone of his poems is elegiac and sorrowful. The keen consciousness of reality's inflictions drives the poet to involve himself in creative and critical writing as the only avenue of evading their terrifying impact. In 'Eureka', Poe asserts ,

No thinking being lives, who, at some luminous point of his life of thought

has not felt himself lost amid the surges of futile efforts, at understanding ,

or believing, that anything exists greater than his soul.(qtd. in Buranell 1971:23)

If the interior or the soul or 'Psyche' in 'To Helen' is what matters for Poe, it is logical to find that this perennial interest engages a vast space in his poems. As in any romantic writer, Poe's emphasis is laid on the frontiers of memories, conceptualizations, and intimations of worlds other than the daily and sordid. Indeed the actual world of mortals with its sufferings and pains is always brought to contrast with the visionary and idealistic where man's innocence, perfect beauty, purity ,freedom, and immortality are abundantly stressed. If the perceptible world of his fiction is full of pictures of "madness, perversity, phobias, hallucination"(Kennedy 2001:7), what he conceptualizes is a totally different matter: worlds drawn from religions, mystic visions, philosophies and folklore. Poe finds in these the correlative of what he virtually suffers from. In this regard, Poe "no less than the Puritans and the transcendentalists looks inward to discover the paradise above"(Gooder 1991:118). The contrast between the actual suffering and the dream of finding a better life is felt in his renowned poem, 'The Raven'. As he puts it, the poem originated in the

intention" to write a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste. The effect aimed at was one of beauty tinged with melancholy.—the most legitimate of all the poetic tones."(qtd. in Lodge 1971 :69). Music plays a part in the final choice of the diction of the poem since the refrain "nevermore" which terminates every stanza functions as a variation on the same tone which eventually lends a different interpretation and a fresh suggestion to the meaning of the word. As Poe puts it, " the refrain, or burden, not only is united to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity" (Perkin2002:1299). The theme of this poem is melancholy and bereavement: how a student's mind is engaged with the memories of his sweetheart and how it is rekindled by the unexpected advent of his unusual visitor—a raven. The time is the midnight of a cold and bleak December where illusion could get muddled with reality, the past and present, the factual and wishful. The striking thing about this uncommon encounter with this raven is that the bird knows only one word which it has learnt by rote-'nevermore', a word that matches very well the student's psychological status. It even crystallizes It goes without saying that this bird is a primordial witness of man's first folly and crime. Hence it has been associated with a bad omen. In sound and shape or color ,there is nothing attractive about it, since ravens or crows are by nature" solitary, and almost indestructible and live by the killing of others"(Sagar 2008:1). In contrast to other poems, this one capitalizes on presentation, rather than mere narration. It traces the situation of the bereaved student as he can not rid himself of the painful recollections of his dead lover. The setting of the poem (mid December) suggests that it could be a dream or a wishful thinking, since we have noticed that dreams and visions are the quintessence of Poe's poetic work. The memory is replete with images of the dead Lenore,

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered,
Weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door,
"Tis some visitor", I murmured, " tapping at my door"—
Only this and nothing more".

Discovering that this bird has chosen his abode as the place for spending the night, the student convinces himself that the presence of the raven is only temporary. Uttering the words that this bird will be leaving the following day, the answer he hears is the same: but this time it acquires a new sense, if not a symbolic signification: it may refer to his own grief which will be always accompanying him. 'Nevermore', then, becomes imbued with different suggestions and references depending on how the beholder receives and interprets it, But the Raven, sitting, on the placid but spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour,
Nothing further then he uttered, not a feather fluttered,
Till I scarcely more than muttered—"Other friends have flown before".

Then the bird said "Nevermore".

The climax of this bizarre situation takes place when the bewildered student asks the raven the critical question about whether he can reunite with his dead lover after death, the answer is the same, but it now carries a nihilistic touch as it denies even this possibility. This time the student could not control himself anymore,
"Prophet"! said I," thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us, by that God we both adore.
Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the dust any Aiden,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven"Nevermore".

Here the speaker's patience terminates and dismisses his guest (the raven) since he involuntarily interprets its single word in accordance with his psychological state.(It is apt to refer to the fact that Poe in his uncommon imaginary flights has predated the deconstructionists led by Derrida and their emphasis on the indeterminacy of meanings and their plurality.)The student's growing pain is felt in his impatient words addressed to the raven,
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!

The last words spoken by the student indicate that the raven has done only one thing: it has lacerated his physical and spiritual injuries. One plausible implication of this poem is that the student belongs to the "obsessive personalities weakened by some grief, either

real or imagined"(Dute 1979:19), as is common in most of Poe's characters and speakers. He cherishes a hope, however flimsy, that his agony will soon end but the prophetic words of his articulate bird have lessened, if not diminished it entirely.

The technical sides of the poem are self-evident in that the reader is forced or invited to follow the mechanism of the student's mind as he comes to terms with his mysterious and ominous visitor. The thematic side, however, is the more intriguing as this twilight picture could be viewed from different perspectives. Among these is perhaps the fact that the recollections are not easy to dismiss. Also the poem is about self-knowledge since reality always imposes itself on the individual taking different forms and manifestations. Moreover, Poe's professed principle of objectivity is not always adhered to as there is a clear and unmistakable biographical tone here. As one of his critics rightly puts it, " 'The Raven' is almost a parable about Poe's poetic career" (Davidson 1957:103). Such a description is valid in that Poe has remained throughout all his life oscillating between ineradicable memories of a painful past and longings to different vistas of experience that might bring some different from what is actually there.

Poe's view of science is typically romantic in that he is fully aware of its debilitating and disenchanting or dehumanizing aspects. In this regard, Poe aligns himself with those artists and thinkers that have warned about the demerits of science and its drastic impact on human life. Writers like Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis, George Bernard Shaw and D.H. Lawrence, to mention only a few, have all attracted our attention to the spiritual impoverishing and inevitable perdition. Poe's attitude here is prophetic when we recall man's present predicament in his global warming and the impending catastrophes,

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering,
To seek for treasure in the jeweled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Has thou not dragged Diana from her car
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood?

To seek shelter in some happier star,
Hast thou not torn the Naid from the flood?

Because of its polemic nature and the fresh treatment of its material, one of Poe's scholars is led to raise the ticklish question that "'To Science' is either one of the worst poems Poe produced or a spoof"(Thompson 1970:16). If one leaves aside such sweeping value judgments of this poem and its author, one finds it reasonable to state that the whole poem is in line with Poe's conviction that intuition is complementary to the mechanical process of induction and deduction. In 'Eureka', one comes across Poe's postulate about the integration between the purely scientific and intuitive faculties. The character in that influential essay is both poet and mathematician," whose imagination provides a hypothesis, whose reason controls its application and whose observation verifies it"(ibid. :3). Having said that, one can only stress the equilibrium between the two as each realm has its own justification and role to play in life. However, this does not render Poe the 'scientist' D.H.Lawrence has sought to establish," Poe is hardly an artist," argues Lawrence," He is rather a supine scientist. Art displays the movements of the pristine self, the living conjunction or communication between the self and its context" (Lawrence 1964:59).

In 'Al Araaf', a poem of more than 400 lines, Poe distinguishes himself as a visionary poet par excellence. This poem follows the same parameters of 'Israfel' in its profound investigation of the pleasure-pain duality. The title immediately brings to mind the Quranic image of the limbo where dwell those who are not completely bad or good. We are not quite sure of the reasons driving the agnostic Poe to choose such a locale. However, given his anguished and frustrated experiences, both on the domestic and social levels, one can argue that this supernatural world provides Poe with a vantage- point for reflecting his ideas about an unjust and dull world. Besides, it is his comment on a harsh materialistic culture that strips man from his basic constituents as a human being. The frantic pursuit of purely materialistic interests justifies his deliberate cutting off all ties with the actual world and drives him to have recourse to such ethereal and metaphysical flights. As in the case of 'Israfel' where the comparison between the earthly poet and the Heavenly one comes to the fore, Poe follows the same line of argument,

O! nothing earthly save the ray
(Thrown back from flowers) of Beauty's eye
As in those gardens where the day
Springs from the gems of Circassy—
O! nothing earthly save the thrill
Of melody in woodland drill-
Or (music of the passion-hatred)
Joy's voice so peacefully departed
Those like the murmur in the shell,
Its echo dwelleth and will dwell—
Oh, nothing of the dross of ours
Yet all the beauty—all the flowers, that lost our love, and deck our
bowers-
Adorn yon world afar, afar—
The wandering star.

The contrast between the ecstasy and sublime beauty of Heaven and the earthly toil is brought to light through the poet's showing of Nestace (Beauty's spirit) to implement God's dictates about conveying His message to 'other worlds'. Revealing God's message of 'supernatural' beauty, Nestace instructs Liegia to awaken and warn about the pride and absurdity of man and their drastic repercussions,

Divulge the secrets of thy embassy
To the proud orbs that twinkle—and so be
To e'ery heart a barrier and a ban
Lest the stars totter in the guilt of man.

Nestace awakens the angel Liegia to recall the train of seraphs that are ready to fulfill God's order. However, two of them are reluctant to do so. Lanthe and her lover ,Angelo, fail to implement these orders and eventually they are prevented from entering Heaven. Al Araaf ,then, is a place of disobedience, either through foolishness or love. What awaits such people of suffering is actually self-inflicted, either due to man's folly or love's absurdities. The conclusion of the poem is apt in that it centres on the lesson to be deduced from such a blasphemous act,

Thus, in discourse, the lovers whiled away
The night that waned and waned and brought no day

They fell: for Heaven to them no hope imparts
Who hear not the beating of their hearts.

One of the poem's themes is perhaps 'the disillusionment with the world of escape into some more congenial realm of dream or of the imagination'(Meyers 1992:7).The reason of this futile escape is that only in the world above can one find this harmony between beauty and truth, the poet's aesthetic theory of beauty. In this Platonic world of love and beauty can be perceived directly, without the intervention of man's faulty faculties, since its state is absolute and matchless,

Now happiest, loveliest in you lovely earth
When sprang the Idea of Beauty into birth.
She looked into infinity—and knelt.

What is striking in the poem is its climactic end: the necessity of appealing to man's intuition in judging and appreciating things. What kind of poem is this? Arguments about its type vary since the locale chosen for its world is explicitly religious and Poe himself is far from the devout one expects in such realms. 'Al Araaf' is a place where there is a thin line between innocence and guilt. However, it is a star that Poe associates with the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, which, after a few nights of splendor, suddenly disappeared"(Perkins 2002:1231).

In 'To Helen', the flat rejection of a dehumanizing and totally sensuous culture is felt through Poe's elaboration of a classic epic character. History of literature shows that Helen has surrendered to her passions and eventually led to the destruction of a family peace and whole country. Poe's handling of the archetypal theme of ardent love is different in that his emphasis is laid on a purely aesthetic object: beauty and its reincarnation. However, the poem has something else to say about the cultural malaise, since the Greek and Roman splendor appears to be lacking something else:

the spirituality which the poem refers to as Helen is brought in the poem to the world of the Holy land where her flesh is purified and sanctified,

Helen thy beauty is to me like those
Nicean barks of yore

That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore to his own shore.

.....
Lo! In your brilliant window-niche
And statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah!Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land.

Critics disagree about Poe's real position in literature and history of thought.

Indeed he represents a special case where the popular opposition between the supporting camp and the detractors. In general his admirers are not American. This is because his topics are remote from the American interests and sensibility. His critical writings show that he is not on friendly terms with others, as seen in the brief quotes mentioned earlier. His words in this regard are explicit," we thus find ourselves involved in the gross paradox of liking a stupid book better, because , sure enough, its stupidity is American"(qtd. in Ford 1991:116).Such a negative view of his nation is subversive to his own popularity and recognition in America. Indeed there is almost a unanimous consent that Poe's reputation has found a fertile soil in France, particularly the symbolist poets like Baudelaire ,Mallarme, and Verlaine. Baudelaire saw in Poe, the man and artist, his own mentor or " what he was going to do--or rather, to define"(Brerton 1957:151). Mallarme responded poetically to Poe's predicament and the failure of people to understand and appreciate Poe's distinction in the following lines,

Such as into himself at last Eternity changes him,
The poet arouses with a naked hymn
His century overawed itself in the strange voice:
But in a vile writhing of an hydra, they once hearing the Angel
To give too pure a meaning to the words of the tribe,
They (between themselves) thought (by him) the spell drunk
In the honourless flood of some dark mixture
Of the soil and the ether (while one) enemies, o struggle!(ibid. :153)

The fact of the matter is that Poe has great popularity in Europe, especially in France much more than in his own country. It is no surprise to find Baudelaire and Mallarme hailing him as "a wizard of

style"(Conklin 1960: vii).Current critical views with their incompatible schools find in Poe a good area for exploring or verifying their theories and speculations.

In his essays and reviews Poe shows that he is aware of the precise function of art, literature and thought in general. He seeks to shun the entanglements of didacticism and moralizing in literature. He is pro the Keatsian tenet that literature has only one aesthetic function. He, as in Coleridge's case, draws upon the German philosophy of Fichte, Kant Schelling and Hegel(Buranell 1971:31). In one of the important articles about his concept of poetry and the function assigned to it, he argues in the following terms," A poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of poetry elevating excitement"(Thompson 1978; 71).He almost reiterates Coleridge's definition of poetry ad verbatim in his understanding of the illuminating role of poetry in human life" a poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having for its immediate object, pleasure not truth"(Lall 1999:27). And is this aesthetic pleasure that strikes us most in his poetry.

Having said this, one has to refer to the fact that the tone of many of his poems is not thoroughly original. As one reads his major poems, one is continuously reminded of remote echoes of writers like Shelley, Keats, Coleridge and other romantic poets. But unlike those, and because of his endless financial straits and ill health, Poe finds himself surrendering totally to imaginative flights. Earlier in this paper, it has been pointed out that he is one of those poets who are obsessed by the refined and polished form. One reason for this is the contesting drives in his life: the creative and critical ones. This is exemplified in his inescapable realization that his major works betray the anxiety of influence as the deconstructionists like Harold Bloom keep arguing and that it suffers from some technical weaknesses (Apter 1982:67).Hence the ceaseless process of revising and refining. Sometimes one has the impression that Poe seeks artistic effects solely, irrespective of whether the syllable or repeated phrase is going to add something essential to what already been stated. It is this particular trait of his writing that drives Aldous Huxley to assert that, "the substance of Poe is refined; it is form that is vulgar. He is, as it were, one of Nature's gentlemen, unhappily cursed, with incorrigible taste"(Macdonald1965:11).

In conclusion, one can say that Poe as a poet has sought to initiate a path of his own, no matter how violent and hostile the reactions of critics and scholars might be. Writing for a man of Poe's sensibility is both a means of living and a compensation for the series of setbacks, bafflements and catastrophes. Psychologically speaking, writing is a haven for the unhappy and alienated artist in an indifferent community. His state of being at odds with his environment is a cause for pain and agony. His imaginative flights with angels and seraphs can be taken as his last-ditch or bulwark against an intimidating and sinister world. His recurrent themes are death, disillusionment and the bitter realization that man's joys are fleeting and ephemeral. Hence his uncommon emphasis on the visionary worlds of dreams, ideals, sublime beauty, and grace which stand in total contrast to the world of his short stories. There the other side of Poe is stressed in that he shows man's evil, violence, cruelty, revenge and the thirst to annihilate others. Also in terms of color there are suffocating and breathtaking events and overwhelming darkness whose motives lie deep in man's ego. His poems are permeated by the joy and beauty of Heaven, which is an indirect comment of its absence in actual reality. The contrast between the two worlds is a point of interest in Poe's art in general, and in his verse in particular.

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