



NEWSLETTER

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FIFTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING POE STUDIES ASSOCIATION

The annual meeting of the PSA was held at the San Francisco Hilton, 7:15-9:15 p.m., December 29, 1987, before a group of 42 people. The meeting, arranged and chaired by Glen A. Omans (Temple), opened with the Treasurer's Report by Dennis W. Eddings (Western Oregon). It indicated a membership of 255. Income for 1987 (to Dec. 10) was \$1316.00, expenses \$737.93, leaving a cash-on-hand balance of \$1827.91. Interest from the Prime Reserve fund was \$99.37, bringing the fund to \$1718.75. Total assets were \$3546.66.

Eddings then presented the results of the mail ballot on the three amendments to the bylaws proposed at the 1986 meeting. Amendment 1, establishing a program committee, failed 52 yes, 61 no; amendment 2, requiring mail ballots for all elections, passed 107 yes, 6 no; amendment 3, allowing for a vote on bylaws amendments when requested by petition from at least six members, failed 51 yes, 62 no.

Election of officers followed. The nominating committee--Eddings, chair, David Estes (Loyola, NO), Stanton Garner (Independent), Joel Myerson (South Carolina), and Lea Newman (North Adams State)--presented the following slate of candidates: Glen A. Omans, President; Lilliane Weissberg (Johns Hopkins), Vice-President and program chair; J. Gerald Kennedy (LSU) and Joan Dayan (Queens College, CUNY), at-large members. No further nominations coming from the floor, the nominated officers were unanimously elected.

A citation naming Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV an Honorary Member of the PSA was read by Eddings (see "Citation"). The honor was unanimously approved. Richard Kopley (Penn State/DuBois) made a brief announcement on the forthcoming Pym conference, and Omans announced a forthcoming vote on a dues increase to permit the expansion of the PSA Newsletter (see "Newsletter Expansion").

Omans then introduced the speakers: Lilliane Weissberg, "Shifting Margins: Poe's *Conchologist's First Book* and the Writing of the *Marginalia*"; Richard Kopley, "The 'Very Profound Under-current' of *Arthur Gordon Pym*"; and Beth L. Lueck (U Wisconsin, Milwaukee), "Poe's Landscape Fiction and the Picturesque Tour: Nature and Art in the American Wilderness." A spirited discussion followed. The topic for the 1988 meeting (to be held in New Orleans) will be "Poe and Critical Theory." Abstracts for proposed papers should be submitted to Professor Lilliane Weissberg, German Department, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218, by March 15.

Newsletter Expansion

As Poe Studies Association membership has grown and the number of scholarly Poe works per year has increased, the PSA Newsletter has expanded from four to eight pages. To support this expansion, which allows fuller coverage of significant Poe-related books and articles, as well as the inclusion of scholarly notes on Poe-related topics, the PSA Executive Committee has recommended a dues increase from \$5 yearly to \$8 yearly. A ballot regarding this dues increase--an increase which would be effective in 1989--will be sent to all PSA members in mid-March.

Citation

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV may be the youngest person to be put forth for Honorary Membership in the Poe Studies Association, but his accomplishments in both American and Victorian literature would do honor to a much grayer head. We honor him especially for his contributions to Poe studies and to the PSA. He has attended every one of our meetings since our inception, and served longer on our Executive Committee than any other member--six years as Vice President, four as President, and one as *ex officio* Past President. He has also, since 1977, served as chairman of the Annual Lecture Series of our sister organization, The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore.

Fisher's own work on Poe is noteworthy for its quality and, for one so young, its quantity. He has published on, among others, "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," "Metzengerstein," "The Assignment," the *Blackwood's* satires, and revisions in "Bon-Bon" and "Silence." Professional recognition for these efforts has led to his being asked to contribute the Poe items for *The Encyclopedia of American Literature*, *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Mystery-Detection volumes), and, as of 1987, the Poe chapter in *American Literary Scholarship*.

Professor Fisher's efforts do not end here. He serves as editor of *University of Mississippi Studies in English*, which published a Poe number in 1982, and on the editorial boards of *Poe Studies*, *Victorian Poetry*, and *Gothic*, among others. He has also edited several works on Poe, including *Poe at Work*, *Myths and Realities: The Mysterious Mr. Poe*, *Poe and Our Times*, and the forthcoming *Poe and His Times*. In these editorial capacities, Professor Fisher has given unstintingly of his time in encouraging other Poe students. He has done so not from any rigidly narrow view, but from an appreciation of the breadth and complexity of Poe, his work, and the many approaches that shed light on them. None, therefore, can doubt that his efforts deserve our recognition by naming him our newest Honorary Member.

Poe Studies Association Newsletter

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Masthead portrait of Poe by Berta R. Golahny

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A New Poe Letter

The following is a transcription of one of two Poe letters discovered in July 1985 by Frank Walker, Curator of Fales Library of New York University. These letters were found during the NEH-supported processing of the family papers of Elizabeth Robins, American actress, novelist, and suffragist. Poe's mother-in-law Maria Clemm, the recipient of the letters, lived in the Robins' family home in Putnam, Ohio in 1861-63 at the invitation of Elizabeth Robins' aunt, Sarah Elizabeth Robins. A facsimile of this August 5, 1849 letter was published in *NYU Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1987); we gratefully acknowledge the permission of Fales Library to publish this transcription. (The substance of the second of the two letters will appear in Kenneth Silverman's biography of Poe.)

Richmond--August 5.

My own dearest Muddy--What *can* be the reason that you have not written to me? Here I have been a whole fortnight & not *one line* from you yet. I did not think you would treat your poor Eddy in such a way as that. *Be sure* & write the moment you get this and, if possible, send the "article". Mr Thompson has accepted it. I gave him, also, the article about Mrs Lewis & he will publish it. Of course, I could not ask him anything for it--as it was a great favor to get him to insert it at any rate. I am still out at John's--although I have been to Mrs M's & am going back in a day or two to stay some time. Mrs M. was very cordial--but Louisa still more so. I think she is the sweetest creature in the world and makes John the best of wives. She is hardly changed in the least. You know how often I have spoken to you of her heavenly smile.--Be sure & enclose any notices of "Eureka". I write this in the greatest hurry, as John is getting ready to go to town. God bless you, my own dearest mother. Write *immediately*.

Your own Eddy.

Scholarly Poe Events

The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore and The Enoch Pratt Free Library sponsored the Sixty-fifth Annual Edgar Allan Poe Lecture at the Pratt Library on Sunday, October 4, 1987. Buford Jones (Duke Univ.) presented a paper titled "The 'Two Peaks of Parnassus': Poe's Criticisms of Hawthorne." The Sixty-sixth Annual Edgar Allan Poe Lecture will take place on Sunday, October 2, 1988 at the Pratt Library; the speaker, Richard Kopley (Penn State/DuBois), will discuss the newspaper origins of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

Details regarding the academic session of the Poe Studies Association at MLA '87 (San Francisco) and the topic for the PSA session at MLA '88 (New Orleans) are offered earlier in this issue.

The "Poe Studies" section at the NEMLA Convention (to be held at the Providence Marriott) will take place on Thursday, March 24, at 10:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. The chair will be Mary G. De Jong (Penn State/Shenango Valley); the secretary will be Beverly Voloshin (San Francisco State Univ.). Speakers will include Owen Schur (Univ. of New Orleans), "Writing and Doubling in 'William Wilson'"; Tracy Ware (Bishop's Univ.), "The 'Salutary Discomfort' in the Case of M. Valdemar"; and Paige Matthey Bynum (Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), "'Observe how healthily--how calmly I can tell you the whole story': Moral Insanity and Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart'."

Nicholas Ruddick (Univ. of Regina) will chair the Poe section at the Ninth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, to be held March 16-20, 1988 at the Fort Lauderdale Hilton Hotel in Dania, Florida. Paige Matthey Bynum

will present "When Fantasy Becomes Fact: Edgar Allan Poe and the Jurisprudence of Insanity," and Gordon E. Slethaug (Univ. of Waterloo) will speak on "Barth's *Sabbatical* as Imitation/Parody of Poe's *Pym*."

The scholarly conference "Arthur Gordon Pym and Contemporary Criticism" will take place at The Harbor House on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, May 19-22, 1988. John Barth, Guest of Honor, and G. R. Thompson, Keynote Speaker, will head a program comprised of six academic sessions featuring a diversity of critical approaches. Registration brochures have already been sent to all Poe Studies Association members. To obtain additional brochures and/or information, write to F. Wally Lester, Conference Coordinator, 409D Keller Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802, or call (814) 865-3211.

The Library of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, will feature a *Pym* exhibit from April 25 through June 3, 1988. The exhibit will be arranged by Kent P. Ljungquist (WPI). Another *Pym* exhibit will be offered at The Peter Foulger Library on Nantucket during the *Pym* Conference; Susan F. Beegel (U Mass/Boston--Nantucket Field Station) will coordinate this display.

Other Poe Events

Russell Currie's third Poe opera, *Ligeia*, a work-in-progress, was performed at the YWHA in Riverdale, New York on April 5, 1987. The event was sponsored by The Bronx Arts Ensemble. This work is the final one in a trilogy of Poe operas, which includes *A Dream Within A Dream* (based on "The Fall of the House of Usher") and *The Cask of Amontillado*. These earlier operas will be performed in the Symphony Space in New York City on June 10, 1988.

Following Buford Jones' talk on Poe and Hawthorne at The Enoch Pratt Free Library, Valerie Banks sang original musical compositions for two Poe poems, "Annabel Lee" and "Al Aaraaf."

Norman George performed "Poe Alone" at the University of Virginia on October 29, 1987 and at Virginia Commonwealth University on October 31, 1987. He will offer his one-man show on May 20, 1988 at the conference "Arthur Gordon Pym and Contemporary Criticism."

Jeff Jerome, curator of the Poe House in Baltimore, is helping to coordinate "An Evening With Poe," a tour first offered on November 20, 1987, and to be repeated on June 17 and October 21, 1988. The program is sponsored by Conestoga Tours.

Le Neon French-American Theatre Company will perform Poe's short story "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" at the Sanctuary Theatre in Washington, D. C. on March 11, 12, and 13, and April 22, 23, and 24.

Four Baltimoreans--Richard Bolan, Dick Turner, Henry Turner, and Brien Williams--have recently completed the film "Pym," a work inspired by the first chapter of Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Featured actors are Cliff Belt, Alex Martick, and Brook Yeaton.

Laura Raidonis' play "Raven Among The Vultures: Who Killed Edgar Allan Poe?" will premiere at the National Theatre of Yugoslavia later this year.

Recent Dissertations: April 1987 - November 1987

Sabiha Ahmed Kamaluddin, "Eureka': Poe's Narrative Strategy and Technique," *DAI*, 47 (April 1987), 3757A; David Lewis Simpson, "The Relationship of Common Sense Philosophy to Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville," *DAI*, 48 (July 1987), 128A; Michael Lambert Tritt, "Plotting Influence: Indebtedness and Innovation in 'The Pit and the Pendulum' and 'The Masque of the Red Death,'" *DAI*, 48 (August 1987), 393A; Susan Booker Welsh, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Rhetoric of Science," *DAI*, 47 (April 1987), 3760A.

Kenneth Alan Hovey
University of Texas at San Antonio

Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe 1809-1849*, Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987. 919 + xix pp. Cloth. \$75.00.

Publication of *The Poe Log* culminates nearly six decades of research, initiated by David K. Jackson in the early 1930's and carried to completion by Dwight Thomas during the past ten years. Jackson compiled the chapters relating to Poe's early years (through 1837) spent mainly in London, Baltimore, and Richmond; Thomas covered the remaining years (1838-1849) in Philadelphia and New York, which by virtue of more abundant evidence comprise two-thirds of the book. Like Jay Leyda's *The Melville Log* (the acknowledged model for the current project), *The Poe Log* collects virtually every shred of information on the author and arranges it in chronological order to form a "documentary life." The details emerge from a wide range of materials: letters (most excerpted or summarized) from Poe and his acquaintances; legal documents; diaries and notebooks; memoirs and reminiscences; newspaper articles; editorial columns and reviews from periodicals. In bringing together this mass of information about Poe, the compilers have produced an indispensable research tool, sure to become the basis for a subsequent definitive biography and of immediate value as a reference guide and sourcebook for anyone engaged in serious Poe scholarship.

Because *The Poe Log* aims for exhaustiveness, the book contains more than a few banal entries (John Allan's wife, Frances, caught a cold in Devonshire in October, 1818), some facts of unclear relevance to Poe or his family, and (after 1835) many tedious editorial comments about Poe, his writings, and the magazines that he edited. While these comments have an indisputable importance in gauging Poe's reception by the public and the publishing world, they do not lend themselves to sustained reading. One finds among the excerpts, however, a number of penetrating critical estimates (such as John S. Dwight's 6 December 1845 review of *The Raven and Other Poems*) and—with increasing frequency during the mid-1840s—vicious personal attacks on Poe, parodies of his style, and thinly-veiled caricatures of his appearance and manner. While there have been numerous studies of contemporary reviews of Poe, nowhere else can one follow from beginning to end (albeit through extracts) the unfolding response to this controversial presence in American letters.

The great importance of the present volume lies, however, in its collocation of hitherto disparate and obscure biographical information. To be sure, there is relatively little in *The Poe Log* that has not elsewhere appeared in print. Scholars will want to note the appearance of a brief new Poe letter (for 24 June 1842) and a letter fragment ("before March?" 1843). Most of the original material consists, however, of previously unpublished correspondence between acquaintances of Poe, discussing the author. For example, Charles Briggs' letters to James Russell Lowell trace the decline of the former's opinion of Poe, dating from their collaboration on the *Broadway Journal*. "I like Poe exceedingly well," he wrote on 6 January 1845; yet by 21 August of the same year (after Briggs' break with the *Journal*), he complained to Lowell: "I have never met a person so utterly deficient of high motive . . . The Bible, he says, is all rigamarole . . . He does not read Wordsworth." Personal differences notwithstanding, such observations enrich our understanding of Poe's mind and temperament. Of similar importance are people's recollections of Poe published in little-known works; many of these anecdotes have a ring of authenticity and will be new to all but the few who have tracked down the same farflung sources. Alexander Crane's story of Poe assembling the staff of the *Broadway Journal* to hear an actor named Murdock intone "The Raven" sketches a plausible and richly human scene which A. H. Quinn failed to include among his other citations from Crane in *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*.

Indeed, *The Poe Log* abounds in information not incorporated into Quinn's account. We learn, among other things, that John Allan had at least three illegitimate children;

that Poe (as Mabbott noted in *Works*, 2:3-4) composed and read to classmates a comic tale during his stay at the University of Virginia; that the captain of the ship carrying Poe and his regiment from Boston to South Carolina "extricated the vessel . . . from most imminent danger" off Cape Cod in 1827; that Poe in 1843 entered into an epistolary friendship with Abijah Ide, a young admirer and aspiring poet from Massachusetts; that he confessed himself involved "in the d_____dest amour" with Frances Sargent Osgood in the summer of 1845, borrowing ten dollars from Thomas Holley Chivers to finance an assignment in Providence with Mrs. Osgood; that among the "weird and fantastic" visions Poe experienced during his 1849 visit to Philadelphia was "an hallucination in which he saw Mrs. Clemm being dismembered."

One episode apparently unknown to Quinn but outlined in the present volume is Poe's failure to deliver the "Annual Poem" for the Philomathean and Euclean Societies of the "University of the City of New York" on 1 July 1845, in the midst of his affair with Mrs. Osgood. The prospect of writing an original poem evidently induced panic and then intoxication (or so Poe's adversary Thomas Dunn English reported); when the date of the reading arrived, Poe (according to his friend Chivers) feigned illness, spent the day in bed reading, and sent word of his "indisposition." This instance of writing anxiety precedes by just three months the famous Boston Lyceum debacle in which Poe again failed to produce an original poem for a formal occasion.

Such revelations suggest the obvious need for a new, definitive life of Poe. While *The Poe Log* provides the logical starting point for that work in opening a store of fresh information, Thomas and Jackson have unfortunately made little effort to discriminate between reliable and unreliable sources; only rarely do they note untrustworthy details. Some of their attributions, moreover, seem problematic: Poe is said to have composed a favorable review (19 November 1844) of Frederick William Thomas' *The Beechen Tree*; yet in a letter of 4 January 1845, Poe explicitly denies having reviewed it, and common sense suggests that, had he actually done so, Poe would have wanted his friend Thomas to know about it. Much weeding out thus remains to be done by a biographer, and many questions remain unanswered. What is the evidence for Poe's March 1827 stop in Baltimore? Why did he dedicate his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* to a mystery figure, Col. William Drayton? What is the evidence for Poe's 1843 visit to Saratoga Springs? Why did Poe make his March 1846 trip to Baltimore? What was his relationship, during the "many months" before and after Virginia's death, to his house guest and possible erstwhile sweetheart, Eliza White? Why did the compilers not cite Dr. John J. Moran's lengthy 1885 account of Poe's death?

These are but a few of the intriguing questions raised by *The Poe Log*. In effect a biography *manqué*, the volume offers an accretion of facts which every reader will construe and connect in different ways. If the documentary evidence of Poe's existence does not in itself constitute a narrative, it hints beguilingly at what that story might be. Running through the entries are certain persistent motifs—of poverty and debt, of infatuation and love, of friendship and hatred, of sobriety and inebriation, of devotion and betrayal. Through reading the many and contradictory reminiscences of Poe, one gains a deeper sense of the power of his personality and of his compulsive self-destructiveness. Surely Baudelaire had Poe in mind when he wrote his sonnet "*Le Guignon*," the jinxed one; at so many points in his life, Poe seemed within an inch of securing happiness, prosperity, success, and respect, only to make some fatal blunder, to fall victim to himself again. That pattern played itself out for the final time when, engaged to the well-to-do Elmira Shelton and buoyed by the promise of Edward Patterson's backing for the long-projected *Stylus*, Poe lapsed into alcoholic insensibility in Baltimore in 1849. *The Poe Log* limns this arresting tale of perverse fate, but it will suggest

different narratives to different readers, inviting all who study Poe to reformulate their own sense of his puzzling life.

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Recent Poe-related Books

1987 was a bountiful year for books pertaining to Poe; it offered not only the seven volumes listed in this column in the last issue, several of which are reviewed in this issue, but also the following six: *Fifty Southern Writers Before 1900: A Bibliographical Sourcebook*, eds. Robert Bain and Joseph M. Flora (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 601 pp., Cloth, \$75.00; *Critical Essays on Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987), 223 pp., Cloth, \$35.00; *Myths and Reality: The Mysterious Mr. Poe*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore: Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1987), 89 pp., Paper, \$5.00; Libretto, "A Dream Within a Dream," Robert Kornfeld (New York: Bronx Society of Science and Letters, 1987), 12 pp. (n. p.), Paper, \$2.50; *American Literary Critics and Scholars, 1800-1850* (Vol. 59 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*), eds. Jack Rathbun and Monica Greco (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1987), 550 pp., Cloth, \$92.00; and *The Most Noble of Professions: Poe and the Poverty of Authorship*, Bruce I. Weiner (Baltimore: Enoch Pratt Free Library, Edgar Allan Poe Society, and Library of the University of Baltimore, 1987), 23 pp., Paper, \$3.95. Early 1988 featured *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988), 394 pp., Cloth, \$35.00, Paper, \$12.95.

Forthcoming Poe-related Books

Among the Poe-related books to be published later in 1988 are *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*, Michael Deas (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1988), 225 pp., Cloth, price not set; *Poe and His Times*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore: Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1988), pagination and price not set; and *A World of Words: Language and Displacement in the Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, Michael J. S. Williams (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1988), 200 pp., Cloth, \$29.50.

Discount on *The Poe Log*

G. K. Hall has announced a 30% discount on the price of *The Poe Log* for members of the Poe Studies Association. Anyone wishing to take advantage of this discount should send a check in the amount of \$42.50, made out to the Poe Studies Association, to Dennis Eddings, Poe Studies Association, English Department, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, Oregon 97361. *The Poe Log* will then be mailed to you.

Burton R. Pollin. *Insights and Outlooks: Essays on Great Writers*. New York: Gordian Press, 1986. 239 + x pp. Cloth. \$17.50.

The essays in this volume are, with one exception, twice-told tales. They have been gathered together by their author from his many and varied contributions to academic journals, American and European, some of which had originally very limited circulation. Of the fourteen essays presented here, half are concerned with Poe matters; the other half illustrate Burton Pollin's wide cultural interests, ranging from the English Renaissance with an essay on "Hamlet, A Successful Suicide" to Oscar Wilde, but with a special emphasis on the Romantic period in Britain. Here, as in the following essays on Poe, Pollin is concerned with what he describes as "intergenerational roots and relationships, borrowings, influences, debts, traces, and new efflorescences from old growths" (p. vii). In his Preface, he disavows any unifying factor in these miscellan-

ous pieces, apart from the pleasure of variety; in reality, however, these essays do possess a kind of cohesion: most in one way or another are concerned with solving enigmas, and Pollin, like Poe's detective, is at his best hunting down and solving literary puzzles.

The first Poe essay on "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" takes as its starting point Poe's letter to P. P. Cooke in which he admitted, "I do not mean to say that they [the detective stories] are not ingenious--but people think them more ingenious than they are--on account of their method and *air* of method." Pollin goes on to demonstrate convincingly that Poe's tale is a web of false logic, absurd coincidences, jokes, word-plays, and a clever combination of the real and the impossible, the familiar and the incredible. As Pollin submits the story to close scrutiny, it falls apart as a rational sequence, and is exposed as either clumsily ineffectual or cleverly hoaxical at the gullible reader's expense--and Pollin is clear that the latter view is the correct one.

An important essay on "Poe and the Temperance Movement" examines first the prevalence of drink in Poe's life and writings, and then evaluates the response of the temperance press and its allies to a figure who rather easily fitted into the role of the drunkard who had ruined his life and probably his art through subservience to drink. Professor Pollin hunts out what remains of the temperance movement's naive and partial interest in Poe, and he is right in claiming that Poe's reputation was distorted by this narrow movement--though, of course, Poe supplied his calumniators with plenty of ammunition from his *Messenger* days onwards.

Also included here is a lively piece on "Poe and the Dance" which contributes to Pollin's on-going interest in Poe and the arts; this is followed by "The Hoax in Poe's Illustration for 'The Island of the Fay,'" an essay concerning an illustration which Pollin detects derives via John Sartain from John Martin's plan for the London water supply! Three essays on Poe influences complete the volume. First appears an essay on Henry James' changing attitudes to Poe, with the emphasis on his interest in Poe during his later period; then follows a piece that traces Kipling's debt to Poe in his prose and verse. The volume concludes with an unpublished and rather more speculative essay on Poe and Thomas Mann in which significant traces of "The Fall of the House of Usher" are discovered in *Buddenbrooks: The Decline of a Family*.

This book is a welcome drawing together of some of Burton Pollin's prolific contributions to literary scholarship, especially Poe studies, over the last two decades; but the volume would surely have benefitted from an index.

I. M. Walker
University of Manchester

J. Gerald Kennedy, *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987. 228 + xi pp. Cloth. \$19.50.

J. Gerald Kennedy's *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* is a valuable and provocative contribution to one of the most vital areas of Poe studies: the growing body of criticism that examines the work of Poe in light of contemporary linguistic and psychological theory. What distinguishes Kennedy's work from much of this criticism is that his emphasis is historical and biographical. Kennedy argues that Poe's career and texts must be understood in relation to one of the most important cultural phenomena of his time: the "destabilization" of traditional notions of death. The changing attitudes towards death, according to Kennedy, were a symptom of a metaphysical crisis that was also evident in the changing attitudes towards the nature and authority of texts. Poe's personal experience intersected with these cultural changes, and he therefore became one of the first to explore the void that had been left by a culture's loss of faith that death was filled with meaning and writing was filled with presence. Although Poe's works were

among the first to explore this "cultural uncertainty" (4) and its attendant anxieties, Kennedy argues that the encounter with the void led Poe to develop a strong yet uneasy commitment to the "life of writing" as a defiance of mortality, a resistance to oblivion" (91). Most of *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* examines the relationship between death and writing, between the possibility of meaning and the apparent emptiness of written words, in Poe's texts and in the development of his career.

Kennedy's focus on these issues enables him to offer new perspectives on Poe's fascination with premature burial, the death of beautiful women, cryptography, and narratives that are empty or concealing. Although the author occasionally slips into repetitive, epigrammatic vagueness, Kennedy's presentation is extremely lucid. In his effort to construct a theory of the connection between death and writing, Kennedy uses an unusual variety of philosophical discourses and illuminates the connections between them. Yet while Kennedy's work will interest those looking for new perspectives on Poe's preoccupations, it may disappoint those looking for new readings of Poe's texts. Kennedy's interpretive technique is not really designed to yield comprehensive readings of tales or poems. He will usually present an idea and then associate it with a portion of a Poe text. Having done this, he will go on to connect his original idea with a non-literary, usually psychoanalytic text. The result is a disconcerting mixture of exciting theoretical criticism and fragmentary, abstract, and often unconvincing practical criticism. In a discussion of "The Man of the Crowd," for example, Kennedy briefly suggests that the old man is fleeing in fear from the pursuing narrator. He does not address the numerous apparent indications in the text that the old man is unaware of the narrator. This unconvincing and undeveloped suggestion is presented in the midst of an excellent discussion of Poe's tendency to confound his readers through "misdirection, concealment, and deferral" (119). The point about the old man's fear of the narrator does not weaken the interesting theoretical discussion so much as it demonstrates the gap between textual commentary and theory. The point is not derived from the theory; it is simply, like much of Kennedy's direct criticism of the text, not connected with all of the interesting things happening around and above it.

A similar discrepancy between particular and idea is also evident in the way Kennedy appropriates biographical and textual particulars so that they can serve as evidence for his hypothesis. Every time Poe or one of his characters is described as speechless or motionless, every time either suffers a loss of power or feels anxiety about something, Kennedy is likely to insist that the real issue is death. After a while, a skeptical reader will wonder if it is possible to conceive of a fact that could evade the cleverness of Kennedy's interpretation or the generality of his theory. Kennedy suggests, for example, that when Poe, referring to his literary ambitions, writes in a letter that now he must "do or die," he is expressing his understanding of writing as a tool against death. Kennedy's fascinating gloss on this letter does address, but hardly resolves, the doubts of a reader who wonders whether Poe is not simply using one of the most conventional clichés for success and failure. Kennedy's readings are most successful when he does not push a text or a biographical fact into the range of his critical hypothesis. He is more convincing when he analyzes the corpses and crises of interpretation in *Pym* than when he's talking about the Perfect's speechlessness as symbolic of death.

Anyone who can forgive the unevenness of the practical criticism and accept the book as a kind of geography of Poe's imagination is likely to find the work useful. Like John Irwin's *American Hieroglyphics, Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* is alternately brilliant and exasperating, as valuable for the possibilities it creates as for what it actually provides. Yet, like Irwin's book, and like many other works of the eighties which are intellectually distinguished, but not always easily applicable to textual particulars, Kennedy's book raises a problem--one acknowledged near the work's close. "Theory," Kennedy

writes, "has not yet described with precision the juncture of language and mortality And so we must resort to improvisation, constructing what is at best a tentative account of the process by which the crisis in metaphysics infiltrated and transformed the field of writing" (186). If precision is the arbitrary creation of distinctions, and if all facts are interpretations, then it is probably true that all criticism is improvisation. How, then, can we choose among improvisations? Do we simply favor whatever sounds smarter or more interesting, or do we try to reconstruct rules of evidence so that we can have a "practical criticism" again? If we can't reconstruct such rules, why do we continue to structure our discourse as if we were presenting evidence? At some point, this problem is going to have to be thought out. In the meantime, J. Gerald Kennedy's *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* is likely to stimulate a great deal of intelligent and creative improvisation.

Dana Brand
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J. Lasley Dameron and James W. Matthews, eds. *No Fairer Land: Studies in Southern Literature Before 1900*. Troy, N.Y.: The Whitston Publishing Co., 1986. 225 pp. Cloth. \$22.50.

A. Robert Lee, ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: The Design of Order*. London: Vision Press; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1987. 224 pp. Cloth. \$28.50.

Varied perspectives appear in these books. The chief connection between the volumes is James H. Justus, who writes creditable pieces in each. Dameron-Matthews' book honors the late Richard Beale Davis with essays from his students. Four of these essays treat Poe. Zimmerman on Poe's mother and father fills in a segment of biographical concern. Dameron's own essay, a lecture to the Tennessee Philological Association, printed earlier in that group's publication, is welcome for its convenience here. Dupin emerges as a cultural hero in American letters. (Robert Giddings, in the Lee book, furnishes a deft companion study to this one in its analysis of Dupin as American cultural hero.) Elizabeth C. Phillips provides insights into Poe and contemporaneous attitudes toward race. Perhaps the late Helen Ensley's work on Poe's metrics is the most valuable of all in its sensible critique and in calling attention to some of Poe's less familiar poems. Justus' "Introduction" reasonably places Poe among other Southern writers of his era.

Just so, in aligning Poe with traditions of Southwest humor, Justus gives us the best essay in the Lee volume. Richard Gray's observations on Poe as Southern writer also deserve commendation. Harold Beaver's Lacanian reading of "MS. Found" is sensible and clearer than some other critical-theory works on Poe often are. Like Beaver, Arnold Goldman makes us reevaluate Poe's themes of premature burial, and David Murray fuels other critical fires by challenging the time-honored concept of Poe as Symbolist. Unfortunately, other portions of the contents mar Lee's volume. His over-long essay on *Pym* seems an unsuccessful attempt to graft a recent critical-theory approach onto far too familiar grounds in treatment of that ambiguous book. Furthermore, going from text to fn. 4 where we expect to find names of caving scholars, we seek clarification in vain. Mark Kincaid Weekes might have profitably consulted the essays on "Usher" in *A Ruined Eden . . .*, ed. Thompson-Lokke, not to mention Craig Howes' more recent *ESQ* essay on that tale. He might also have quoted correctly Poe on "terror . . . of the soul." Eric Mottram on law-philosophy in Poe is also suspect. For example, does "Cask" narrate a "perfect crime"? Why is the date of "Landor's Cottage" unknown? Is the second ship in "MS. Found" in fact named *Discovery*? More attention to detail might have improved this piece. Weightman's essay on Poe and the French also mingles rather more of the familiar with his own ideas than is needed. Since the purposes of Lee's volume as a

title in the "Critical Studies Series" are nowhere definitely stated, we wonder about the audience for this book. Seasoned scholars will find no great revelations in the main, and they will find much recent scholarship absent from these pages. Standard editions of Poe, all projects headed by Americans, are too often ignored in favor of paperbacks with unreliable texts. Too many of these essays, with exceptions as noted above (and once again Justus' article might be cited as a model, given increasing attention to Poe's urban vision), seem to appear more for bathing their creators in limelight than for making readily accessible aspects of Poe the artist. The great cost of the Lee volume will probably keep it from casual hands.

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Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *American Poetry: The Rhetoric of Its Forms*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987. 242 pp. Cloth. \$24.00.

This volume is a duodecimal taxonomy of poets from Poe to the present. Taking Jacques Derrida for critical guide, Blasing removes Emerson from the "privileged center" of American tradition in which Harold Bloom placed him and turns him into one of four direction-markers, the others being Whitman, Dickinson, and Poe, who, in his view, deserve equal attention. These poetic compass-points Blasing justifies by aligning the four authors with rhetorical quaternions provided by Kenneth Burke and Northrop Frye along critical axes supplied by Paul deMan, Roman Jakobson, and Tzvetan Todorov. Furthermore, each of the four Romantics is matched with one modern and one postmodern poet who has continued as nearly as possible in the due North, South, East, or West mapped out by his forebears. The result is a poetic cosmography as symmetrically quartered, perfectly paralleled, and well-centered (though no one occupies the center) as the four-humoured microcosm and four-elemented macrocosm of the ancient Western world-picture.

In this occult system, Poe assumes the role of paradigmatic pioneer for modern Eliot and post-modern Plath along the route to retrospective metonymic allegory. The Poe-paradigm is illustrated best, according to Blasing, by "The Raven," the one poem by Poe analyzed in the eighteen-page chapter devoted to him. In this analysis which weds the deconstruction of Derrida with the psychoanalysis of Marie Bonaparte, Blasing argues that the "maternal axis" of "oral, infantile satisfactions" and "the generic vowels of the past" (*o* and *r*!) are overwhelmed by the "paternal" axis of "codified formal and semantic patterns" and "letter fetishism, a species of necrophilia." What gaps the analysis may have in logic are bridged by rhetorical punning and catch-phrases: "the letters the 'grave' if not 'craven' raven speaks are graven or engraved in the mind of the raving persona"; "the conventional building blocks of poetry become for Poe . . . the stumbling blocks"; "Poe . . . ends up with a Gothic landscape and a Freudian inscape."

The blithe generalizations made about Poe's work alone are not as interesting as the parallels drawn between Poe and Eliot and, to a lesser extent, Poe and Plath. But the whole line that these three authors represent in Blasing's twelve-slotted schema remains anomalous. No one has ever, I believe, considered Emerson central to any of these authors and certainly not to Poe, whose poetry largely preceded Emerson's. Yet Emerson has always been considered central to Whitman (even by Whitman himself) and an important influence on Dickinson. Thus what Blasing has really done is divide the Emersonian camp into three separate lines and brought in the line of Poe to suggest that all four are as distinctive as Poe's is from the others. The roots of Poe in Byron and of Emerson and his followers in Wordsworth are not touched on either since Blasing assumes that true American poetry is in one respect absolutely uniform--in its rejection of tradition, American (for

no mention is made of Bradstreet, Taylor, Freneau, Bryant, etc.) no less than British. But historical roots are the last things that would interest or trouble this devotee of ageless occultism and its newest gurus.

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Edgar Allan Poe: *The Critical Heritage*. ed. I. M. Walker. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. Distributed by Methuen, Inc., New York. 419 + xvii pp. Cloth. \$55.00.

This attractively printed and styled volume compiled by the Senior Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Manchester is well worth the price. Its 111 selections represent nearly all the critical documents on Poe and his work between 1827 and 1850, including some minor notices, biographical items, passages from letters, Poe's own prefaces, and two foreign appraisals in 1854 and 1856. Included are the six essays in Volume I of Harrison's *Complete Works*, but not Griswold's lengthy out-of-print "Memoir." And by some strange oversight in an otherwise flawless text, on p. 228 nine lines are missing from Margaret Fuller's review of *The Raven and Other Poems*. Each selection is introduced by a concise headnote on the critic and his contribution. The Index is the more useful for being in two parts: I, Works, and II, General Index.

Chronologically arranged, the selections begin with two groups of reviews and notices on the early poems, followed by seven on "The Young Magazinish" (1832-36), eleven on *Pym*, twelve on the *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, and so forth, two groups of general estimates, ten obituary notices, and eight responses to the Griswold edition of 1850, among other critiques. The earlier selections help document Poe's frustrating struggle to achieve recognition as a poet and his opportunistic decision to turn to short fiction and work as a "young magazinist." Even *Pym* failed to reach an appreciative audience (except in England), since it was regarded as so improbable as to insult the reader. The short story, as Walker notes, was not the most popular or remunerative form; over twenty years, Poe earned less than \$300 from all his writings. For his best tale, "Ligeia," he was paid ten dollars. In general, Poe's Germanism, though admittedly powerful, was deplored. Of "The Balloon Hoax," Poe remarked that "the more intelligent believed, while the rabble, for the most part, rejected the whole with disdain"--a two-audience theory in reverse. The *Tales* of 1845 received a mixed reception, with some high praise, as in E.-D. Forgues' essay (included here in a translation by Liselotte Marshall and Walker). Duyckinck's insights are among the best when he speaks of Poe's "subtle dialectics" and "anatomy of the heart" being such as "to surprise the mind into activity . . ." Griswold's "Ludwig" obituary and "Memoir" brought forth notable "defenses" of Poe by Willis, Thompson, Duyckinck, Daniel, Graham, and others. Daniel's became the source for Baudelaire's 1852 essay, which, according to W. T. Bandy "has probably been read by more people in more different countries than anything ever written on Poe." In his long introduction, Walker carries his survey of the critical heritage to the early 1970's. All told, we are fortunate to have this exhaustive compilation of critical writings, for only through the full record of how Poe and his work were read during his career can we accurately place him in the literary and journalistic milieu of his time.

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Poe's Presence in the Fiction of 1987

Evidence abounds in important works of fiction of the past year that Poe's stimulus--or inspiration--is increasing. First in time was the short story collection (published late in 1986, for our 1987 reading) by Angela Carter, called *Saints and Strangers*, in which the popular Gothic fictionist of England develops the semi-biographical, semi-dramatized, and semi-surreal "Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" (with overtones of the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*). It is concocted out of details of Poe's parents' thespian life, Virginia's putatively lasting virginal married state, Poe's histrionic posturings, and his morbid narrative themes (especially the theme of "Berenice"). Poe's uncertain identity is hauntingly displayed in the flickering light of known history and vividly imagined psyche. This genre of semifiction has insistently and, here, creatively lured some admirers of Poe.

Additionally, in his new *Collected Stories, 1984-1986*, culminating over thirty books of distinguished fiction, the fine and varied craftsman Wright Morris includes "The Cat in the Picture," which is strikingly reminiscent of both "The Black Cat" and "The Oval Portrait." The main character, a retired captain who paints still-life oils, is aggrieved by his wife's cat's perching atop his model arrangement of fruit in a bowl and, more injuriously, by its having driven him from the connubial bed, where there is no love; hence, he semi-accidentally poisons the wife's companion-pet with a tube of pigment. In the hotel room, to which he has fled in a sort of panic, he unpacks the valise that his wife has sent him, to find, nested in his clothing, the body of the cat, with the creature's mouth stained red from the lethal paint, and he imagines the purring of the animal. Mr. Morris admits to a "lasting vein of the macabre" in his writing and a "commingling of the commonplace and the awesome" in his reply to my inquiry, but not to a conscious use of Poe's work. So be it, but the comparison leaps out from the text.

A small bag of mixed tricks was the offering by Frank Gannon in his "Yo, Poe" article, one that furnished the title of his little book of 1987. It sprang from the curious news that Sylvester Stallone, as a student of Poe, thirsts to write and star in a film biography of the author. This piece, first printed in *The New Yorker*, humorously presents prizefighter Poe and his manager Baudelaire. It is one of the many entertaining "make them up alive" charade sketches for the literate.

Two of the major novels of 1987 draw deeply from the Poe well. Saul Bellow's *More Die of Heartbreak* uses the first "To Helen" poem as a gleaming touchstone in eleven different passages of citation to assay and reveal the changing nature and attitudes of the two chief characters. These are a world-famous botanist uncle and his loving but derisive intellectual nephew, both of whom are in abject sway to their unworthy "Helens." In the setting of a corrupt and soul-degrading city, fit realm of the uncle's Medusa-Helen queen, ensnaring him for corrupt

gain, the torturous action ironically plunges the naive and well-intentioned professor into despair and finally enlightened release. The integral use of Poe's poem is a signal tribute by Bellow to his wide readership's prior acknowledgment of it as a basis cultural artifact. His earlier, less extensive incorporation of Poe's persona and works in several novels paves the way for these mosaic or stepping-stone passages of "To Helen" (all of which I have explicated in the current Winter 1988 issue of the *Saul Bellow Journal*).

A surprising coincidence is the important use made of Poe by a "new" novelist but experienced writer, whose attitudes and themes and even plot and characters are strikingly like those of Bellow in *Heartbreak*. Tom Wolfe, in *A Bonfire of the Vanities*, published a few months later (with no cross-stimulus possible), "exposes" the debasing values of New York City as opposed to Bellow's Chicago-like setting, and similar are the ironic twists of plot and the tendency of all actions to reveal sickeningly egocentric, amoral roots. Wolfe, reared in Richmond as was Poe, has become the clear-eyed, disenchanting interpreter of metropolitan trends and styles in art, modes, architecture, dining parties, displays of all sorts, and his novel applies the torch, both as lantern and as flame, to more fetishes and gewgaws of consumption than Savonarola denounced--and burned. When Sherman McCoy, the successful investment broker and self-termed "Master of the Universe," blunders into the Bronx in his red Mercedes, with his tryst-bound mistress, they accidentally strike a young black. He is just learning to "rip off" beleaguered motorists on his first foray from his home in the Poe Towers or Poe Projects (the name varies). Just before McCoy is traced and arraigned, his life is symbolically revealed in an amusingly elaborate dinner-fete, in the key-stone chapter (XV) of the lengthy volume, called "The Masque of the Red Death." The poet Lord Buffing, a near-winner of the Nobel prize, proposes an epic poem on America, based on the "prophetic vision" of Poe in his "Masque," pointedly related to all the surrounding guests of Prospero--the "Masters of the Universe" whose end Poe has described. Sherman McCoy, experiencing an ephiphany at this, the start of his legal and social downfall, even enjoys the grim joke that the doorman "Eddie" holds open the portal into the lobby where McCoy "half expected to see the shroud." The plague, "more virulent than ever," follows McCoy's mistress's husband in the restaurant, where he dies of an attack from "surfeit of food and drink." And repeatedly the reader is reminded that the now deceased Henry Lamb of the Poe Projects has provided the cynical generals of the unpossessing, demonstrating multitudes with a rallying cause for attacking this fallen "Master" and others still potent and proud. Surely Edgar A. Poe has opened wide the portals to a series of richly varied creations for the writers of 1987.

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Arthur Gordon Pym's Influence on Italian Literature

Edgar Allan Poe's imagination had a strong influence over Italian writers throughout the nineteenth century. The literati of the "Scapigliatura" (a group active in Northern Italy from the 1860's to the end of the century) were the first fervent imitators of Poe's motifs. They admired, in particular, his treatment of death and madness, which they read with the eyes of late Romanticism. After Poe's works had been made known by Baudelaire--his translations were available in Italy--Ugo Iginio Tarchetti (1839-1869), one of the "scapigliati" (lit. ruffled, unconventional), incorporated some of Pym's motifs into his short story "Re per ventiquattrore" (1864),¹ set on a utopian island. The Milanese protagonist is unexpectedly proclaimed Emperor of this exotic kingdom inhabited by two Pym-esque tribes (in one of which everybody has black teeth). Given a harem with women like those of Tsalal, "obliging in every respect," the emperor displeases his subjects so much as to cause an uprising. He is condemned to death, but wakes up from the fatal blow (and a bad dream) in his room at home.

A few years later, the psychological echo of Pym's adventures gave way to a renewed interest in the story's plot. Many writers during the golden age of the Italian adventure-tale echoed or incorporated elements directly taken from Pym, a work then seen more like a fine specimen of travel literature than an enigmatic work of art. Emilio Salgari (1863-1911), remembered mostly for the stories of Sandokan, often went back to Pym. In *Il re dell'aria*,² the description of the island Tristan de Acunha is taken almost *verbatim* from Pym. Penguins are depicted as walking erect and resembling human figures; and Rakoff, one of the characters, is proud of owning (like Peters in Pym) a truly American Bowie-knife. Color symbolism appears in the story "Inghiottiti dal Maelstrom,"³ with some insistence upon whiteness. Further reference to Pym may be found in the story "I selvaggi della Papuasias" (1883)⁴ and in the novel *I pescatori di Trepang*.⁵

Among the writers influenced by Pym was Enrico Novelli (1876-1945). He illustrated an early Italian version of Pym⁶--one obviously taken from the French translation. The picture on the cover features Death (Poe's "shrouded human figure") wearing a white robe and ready to destroy Pym and his companions. As a writer, Yambo (Novelli's pen name) made extensive use of Pym in *Il manoscritto trovato in una bottiglia*.⁷ The narrator reports on a story he found in a bottle, a story

whose ending is abruptly interrupted. (The novel was very popular when first published, and the printed text was contained in a paper bottle.) The protagonist, hidden in darkness within the hold of a vessel, is saved by Lampo, his dog; a deadly pestilence is described; and the setting includes a Polar island (called "The Warm Land") on which things are white and black, and a strange stream pushing South everything afloat. In a former novel (*Gli eroi del Gladiatore*),⁸ Novelli had had one of the characters--an English photographer!--called Gordon Pym; and this character at one point notices two black men waving white handkerchiefs (in Pym, Tsalal's inhabitants are afraid of Captain Guy's white handkerchief).

Luigi Motta (1881-1955), author of more than one hundred novels, made frequent use of Pym's motifs. In *I cacciatori del Far West*,⁹ the protagonist manages to escape from the hold of a vessel. In chapters XXII-XXIII, the issue of cannibalism (related to hunger, as in Pym) is brought to the reader's attention; and the narrator, as in Poe's work, states his desire to "run hastily" over this portion of the narrative.

As shown by this brief survey, Pym significantly influenced Italian literature. The suggestions given here are part of a full-length study in which Pym's influence on Italian literature will be analyzed in detail.

NOTES

1. In *Racconti umoristici*. Milan: Treves, 1869; then in Ghidetti, E., ed., *Tutte le opere*. Milan: Cappelli, 1967 (Vol. I: 203-44).
2. Firenze: Bemporad, 1907.
3. In *Silvio Pellico*, February 18 and 24, 1894; then in *LG/Argomenti*, I, 1 (1979): 18-21.
4. Information on this text is taken from Felice Pozzo, "I figli di Gordon Pym." *LG/Argomenti*, 20, 5/6 (1984): p. 67.
5. Milan: L.F. Cogliati, 1905 (first published in 1896).
6. Poe, Edgardo. *Le avventure di Gordon Pym*. Rome: E. Voghera, 1900 (Novelli's illustrations cover only one third of the text). Pozzo (see note 4) refers to another edition (Rome: Calzone Villa, 1906), which I was unable to locate.
7. Milan: Vallardi, 1927 (first published in 1905).
8. Rome: Calzone Villa, 1900 (then Milan: Vallardi, 1944).
9. Turin: Viglioni, 1949.

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