



NEWSLETTER

Volume XI
Number 1
Spring 1983

Published at Memphis State University
Memphis, TN 38152

TENTH ANNUAL MEETING: POE STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Los Angeles, California
December 28, 1983

Two meetings were held during this tenth anniversary year of the PSA. The first, 28 December 1982, from 7-9 p.m., in the San Pedro Room, Hotel Bonaventure, was opened by President Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, who welcomed the group—a small one, as were many others at this MLA convention.

President Fisher reminded the group that 1982 had been a banner year for Poe organizations, most of them older than the PSA, although not so academically oriented. In the spring the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore celebrated its sixtieth anniversary, with Maureen Cobb Mabbott as keynote speaker. Her talk, "Reading 'The Raven' by Poe and Others," was followed by a reading of the poem by Ben Fisher (Vice President for the Lecture Series). At the annual fall meeting, Kent Ljungquist delivered a lecture on Poe's landscapes.

A commendation was requested for Thomas H. Brown, our Secretary/Treasurer, whose good work again carried us financially through another year. Dr. Brown had urged a dues increase; with one dissenting vote, that measure passed. Dues are now five dollars (\$5.00) annually.

Another matter of business was that of a suitable location for PSA archives. At the suggestion of John E. Reilly, President Fisher communicated with the Jay B. Hubbell Center for American Literary Historiography, Duke University, and received a reply that that repository would be delighted to house PSA archives. Put to a vote, the proposal passed unanimously. Henceforward, anyone having materials of archival relevance to PSA can send them at the Library Rate to the Hubbell Center, requesting payment for postage from the Center.

James W. Gargano was awarded Honorary Member status in the PSA, with a citation read by Professor Fisher, after which commemorative Poe postage-stamp keychains were distributed to those attending the meeting as a memento of the tenth anniversary.

Professor Fisher then turned over the meeting to Kent Ljungquist, Vice President and Program Chairman, after announcing that an auto accident involving his wife prevented Professor Harrison T. Meserole from participating. Speakers were Robert Scholnick, College of William and Mary; "In Defense of Beauty: E. C. Stedman's Advocacy of Poe"; Liliane Weissberg, Harvard University; "Allegory and Figurative Language in Poe"; Richard Kopley, Illinois State University; "Poe's *Pym*-esque 'Tale of the Ragged Mountains.'" Lively discussion followed.

On 29 December, 7:15-9 p.m., in the San Fernando Room of the Hotel Bonaventure, a second meeting of the PSA during MLA was held to observe PSA's tenth anniversary. Professor Kent Ljungquist introduced Professor David P. McKay, of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, as having set to music the several Poe selections to be performed. In addition to poems, a version of "Diddling" and a partial operatic transcription

of "The Devil in the Belfry" were sung, the former with a reading accompaniment by Professor Fisher.

CITATION

Professor Fisher presented to the group the following citation:

James W. Gargano . . . Those of us who grew up envisioning Poe as a half-crazed, drug-ridden, lecherous alcoholic, as the author of a handful of lurid and melancholy poems and stories, may recall the later impact of reading "The Question of Poe's Narrators," "Poe's 'Ligeia': Dream or Destruction," and "Art and Irony in 'William Wilson.'" This past quarter-century, Poe's subtleties have been illuminated and made understandable, time and again, by the thoughtful readings of Professor Gargano, expressed in equally impressive writing. Among other Poe critics, Jim—as he is known to many of us—stands out as one who has significantly influenced the course of Poe studies, moving the subject from misty, dim regions of Bulwer à la Griswold and company into the realm of high art. In the manner of Poe the critic, Jim Gargano's critical writing tends toward the brevity that is the soul of wit. One of the founders of the Poe Studies Association, he read the first paper presented to our group, ten years ago, in Chicago—a paper on masquerade motifs in Poe's fiction. Jim's unflagging good spirits and sound counsel, his continuing attention to Poe (though with glances toward Henry James), his generosity to younger scholars: these combine with his broad, penetrating perspective on American literature to make him altogether a most welcome Honorary Member of the Poe Studies Association.

Fantastic in the Arts

March 24-27, 1983

Sheraton Hotel of Boca Raton, Florida

Richard Kopley (Illinois State University) chaired two sessions on "The Fantastic in the Works of E. A. Poe" during

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The PSA Newsletter is distributed by the Department of English, Memphis State University. Copies are available upon request.

the fourth international conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. Papers included: "A Progression of Horror in Four Stories of Poe," Jean Lorrain (Murray State University); "Poe's Perversity and the Split Narrative 'I,' or How Not to Tell A Story," Joseph Francavilla (SUNY at Buffalo); "Fantasy Figures in Poe's Poems," Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (University of Mississippi); "The Hoax of the Red Death: Poe as Allegorist," Nicholas Ruddick (University of Regina); "Variants of Fantastic Poetry: E. A. Poe and Georg Trakl," Peter Cersowsky; and "The Tale of the Fortunate Fall," Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet (Eastern Kentucky University).

REVIEWS

Dave Smith. *Homage to Edgar Allan Poe: Poems*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981, \$5.95 (paper).

"You would think," says the speaker in one of these poems, "time or something would tell why we are / compelled to return / to places and moments / where wreckage occurred." Throughout "Homage to Edgar Allan Poe," the six-poem title section of this volume, the speaker seems indeed compelled, because of his intense spiritual affinity for Poe, to return to Poe's places of "wreckage"—Baltimore, Richmond, New York. For example, in "Nekkid," from which the above lines are taken, the speaker describes an incident in his boyhood, when all alone he climbs to a dangerous hilltop cliff and views "Poe's city," Richmond, "naked" in the sun. From the cliff he sees also the spot where a young friend had drowned. The "wreckage" thus refers to the friend's end as well as to Poe's. It refers also, later in the poem, to the boy's idealistic attitude towards women, all but wrecked when he accidentally encounters a naked, amorous couple and flees, in terror and in love. These separate events and impressions become one, the intensity of each part adding to the intensity of the whole poem. As the speaker says, "The cry of this is the cry of that."

This mingling of past and present pain—this merging of the speaker's own experiences and fears with those he associates with Poe—is typical of what Dave Smith does in the "Homage" section of this volume. (Poe's shadow subtly haunts the other four sections of the volume as well.) The speaker identifies himself with Poe in these poems when he describes his own powerful and sometimes contradictory cravings—for an ordinary, loving father, for a fearsome, awesome apocalypse, for "pure women as static as truth." Sometimes the speaker directly addresses Poe; sometimes, as in John Berryman's *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, he assumes the voice and character of his spiritual forebear. Always, he celebrates in Poe (and by association in himself) the power of the imagination—both a poor substitute for the real and a way to transcend the real, both a curse and a blessing.

The poems in this volume, Smith's tenth book of poetry, seem to owe much to Charles Olson's advice about "magnetic fields" of association and about rhythmical "breath units," but whereas Olson's poems often seem random, spontaneous, and open-ended, Smith's are controlled, compressed, highly wrought units. The effects are carefully contrived, and the poems thereby *show* as well as *tell* their alliance with Poe. This volume solves no scholarly problems, resolves no contradictions with regard to Poe's life. Its value is in its acknowledgment, and its sharing, of human contradiction, human pain, and human imagination soaring beyond pain.

Laura Jehn Menides
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

John Evangelist Walsh. *Plumes in the Dust: The Love Affair of Edgar Allan Poe and Fanny Osgood*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980. \$14.95.

It really is too bad that Mr. Walsh did not choose to write a novel about Poe or to perpetrate one of those old-fashioned hoaxes. He certainly could have carried it off either way. With his flair for evoking and peopling the past, he could have turned out something far more entertaining than most of the fictions purportedly based upon Poe's life and character. Or without much revising, perhaps a little more of what Poe called "earnestness" and a little less obviousness in his determination to appear convincing, the author of *Plumes in the Dust* might have diddled his way into the company of such venerable Poe hoaxers as Ambrose Bierce, James Whitcomb Riley, and Poe himself. But *Plumes in the Dust* is neither a fiction nor a hoax, at least not deliberately. It is an argument that Poe was the father of Fanny Fay Osgood, the short-lived daughter of Frances Sargent Osgood, the then estranged wife of the portrait artist Samuel Stilman Osgood. The "fact" of Fanny Fay's origins explains, according to Walsh, why Poe (among other things) was persona non grata among the literati of New York during the closing years of his life and why he was relentlessly defamed for decades after his death.

Walsh discourages methodical scrutiny of his evidence by appending elaborations of his text (what he calls "Notes") in lieu of furnishing conventional documentation. Above all, he simply ignores obvious questions which would cripple his case. How, for example, could the secret of Fanny Fay's origins, a secret to which, as Walsh himself admits, a number of people must have been privy, people including Poe's bitter enemies as well as the busybodies and gossips among the literati, how could such a secret remain well kept until our time? One is likely to ask how, in these days when publishers complain of narrow financial straits, a book in the order of *Plumes in the Dust* found its way into print while so much genuine scholarship is compelled to remain silent?

John E. Reilly
College of the Holy Cross

Howard Kerr, John W. Crowley, and Charles L. Crow, eds.
The Haunted Dusk: American Supernatural Fiction, 1820-1920. Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983. \$18.00.

Either the primary or secondary focus of several essays in this collection, Poe receives fullest treatment in "Phantasms of Death in Poe's Fiction" by J. Gerald Kennedy, who argues that the Gothic tradition afforded a means of articulating man's primal fear of death. Contending that Poe refused to prettify mortality, Kennedy identifies four conceptions of death: (1) annihilation, or terror at man's creaturely condition; (2) compulsion, or the fascinated longing for the abyss; (3) separation, or estrangement from the beautiful Other; and (4) transformation, or the depiction of spiritual reunion. Kennedy's discussion ranges widely over nineteenth-century assumptions about death and draws heavily from Ernest Becker's classic study, *The Denial of Death* (1973). Insistent that Poe's visionary works reflect a material system culminating in universal dissolution, Kennedy allows little room for man's capacity to transcend the physical world through aesthetic experience. Rather, Poe's strongly mystical inclinations are explained away because of an inability to "escape an empirical vision of a bounded world" (p. 60). Despite nods to nineteenth-century cultural history, "Kennedy's Poe" emerges as a modern, earth-bound figure distanced from occult and Platonic traditions.

Designating Poe as an important literary forebear, other studies in this collection treat him in a more orthodox manner. Howard Kerr aligns two of Henry James's supernatural tales with literary Gothicism, although his suggestion that "The Ghostly Rental" marks a conscious demystification of "The Fall of the House of Usher" turns up little firm evidence. With apt references to "Ligeia" and "The Masque of the Red Death," Barton Levi St. Armand shows how Harriet Prescott Spofford's "The Amber Gods" boldly advanced features of the Gothic romance. Alan Gribben's survey of Mark Twain's occult interests contains useful queries about Poe's influence. Other essays, though not mentioning Poe, afford new perspectives on the supernatural, notably G. R. Thompson's penetrating estimation of Washington Irving's pioneering efforts in the American ghost story. As these essays carefully trace the shapes that haunt the dusk of much nineteenth-century fiction, Poe's unique artistic effects distinctly emerge.

Kent Ljungquist
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

The Unknown Poe. Edited by Raymond Foye. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1980. 117 pp. \$5.95 (paper).

Subtitled "An anthology of fugitive writings by Edgar Allan Poe, with appreciations by Charles Baudelaire, Stephane Mallarme, Paul Valery, J. K. Huysmans & Andre Breton," this slight anthology claims to present Poe's "lesser known, out of print, or hard to find writings in a single volume, with emphasis on the theoretical and esoteric," and in the second part, "seminal essays by Poe's famous admirers in France." Also: "There are the arcana of Edgar Allan Poe: writings on wit, humor, dreams, drunkenness, genius, madness, and apocalypse. Here is the mind of Poe at its most colorful, its most incisive, and its most exceptional." Apart from a three-page preface, the reader is offered no guidance through the few letters, poems, Marginalia, reviews, and essays totaling about 70 pages and is never told what he has missed by the omission of Poe's more important poetry and prose. Even so, four of the concluding five selections range from gross misreadings of *Pym* and "Dream-Land" to pretentious theorizing in abstract, labored prose. The section concludes with an Additional Bibliography of 32 books and articles, mostly standard sources.

Eric W. Carlson, Professor Emeritus
University of Connecticut

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Studies in the American Renaissance: 1982, edited by Joel Myerson. Boston: Twayne Publishers (G. K. Hall & Co.), 1982. 468 pp. \$45. Two essays on Poe are especially noteworthy. Glen A. Omans' "Victor Cousin: Still Another Source of Poe's Aesthetic Theory?" is a valuable addition to the growing scholarship identifying the sources of Poe's aesthetic theory. Although the influence of Coleridge, Locke, A. W. Schlegel, and Kant has been recognized, Victor Cousin's has not. The other Poe essay is Richard Kopley's "The Hidden Journey of *Arthur Gordon Pym*." In this second of two analyses of this novel, Kopley attempts to give "the material explanation" of the "shrouded human figure," the "Flying Dutchman" of chapter 10, Tsalal, Tekeli-li, and especially the relationship of Pym to Augustus and Peters as parallel to the relationship of Edgar Poe to his brother, Henry.

Of the remaining nine selections in this volume, two are reprints from the journals of Bronson Alcott and Covers Francis, two deal with Whitman, and one each is devoted to Thoreau, Dickinson, Jones Very, George Ripley, and James Freeman Clarke.

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Volume I, edited by Laurie Lanzen Harris. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1981. 588 pp. \$55. Subtitled "Excerpts from Criticism on the Works of Nineteenth-Century Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers," this is the first of several volumes, two of which have been published. Each volume professes to be "definitive" in providing an historical overview of the critical response from early to late, mainly from seminal essays and from recent criticism representing modern perspectives on a given writer, chronologically arranged. The Poe section occupies 42 double-column pages and ranges from single paragraph entries to excerpted articles. With the exception of one or two short selections, all are excerpted, some radically, others less so. Even Whitman's comment on Poe in *Specimen Days* is cut. Of the 38 critical commentaries, 14 appear (uncut) in *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Eric W. Carlson. For all its limitations, the Poe section—not intended as a text or a reliable "definitive" sourcebook for the specialist—has its value as a convenient compilation of many of the better-known and some of the lesser-known responses to Poe's work.

Poems of Edgar Allan Poe at Fordham, edited by Elizabeth Beirne. New York: Bronx County Historical Society, 1982. 16 pp. \$2. Seven poems that "reflect the scope of Poe's genius and give insight into his life at Fordham."

The Poe Studies Association and its *Newsletter* are independent of the journal *Poe Studies*, published at Washington State University, Pullman, Washington 99163, subscription \$4 per year (two issues, June, December).

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