



NEWSLETTER

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1984 Meeting: Poe Studies Association

The twelfth annual meeting of the Poe Studies Association took place in the Colorado Room of the Washington Sheraton, Washington, D.C., on December 28, 1984. Kent Ljungquist (Worcester Polytechnic Inst.) presiding. Secretary/Treasurer Dennis Eddings (Western Oregon State College) gave a report and announced a paid membership of 151. Income from dues for 1984 - \$519.85; expenses for the year - \$322.30. Total cash, including the year-ending balance in the Price-Rowe Prime Reserve Fund, \$2397.16.

Proposed by-laws changes having been circulated to the entire membership one month in advance of the meeting, Eddings moved their adoption on behalf of a subcommittee that included J. Lasley Dameron, James Gargano, Leonard Engel, and Richard Kopley. The motion passed. Professor John Reilly's subsequent motion requesting that consideration to change the by-laws of the Association be, in his words, "more timely, more open, and more comprehensive" than the "recommended changes" circulated to the PSA membership in November, 1984, also passed.

Professor Ljungquist made two announcements: (1) members of the PSA are eligible for a 40% discount on the two new Poe volumes in the Library of America series; and (2) PSA members qualify for a 20% discount on subscriptions to *Poe Studies*, now \$8.00 annually.

In the absence of David H. Hirsch (Brown Univ.), Ljungquist introduced the speakers: B.F. Fisher IV (Univ. of Mississippi), "Cities by the Sea and Away from the Sea"; J. Gerald Kennedy (Louisiana State Univ.), "Epistolary Masks: Poe and the Enigma of the Author"; George Monteiro (Brown Univ.), "Poe/Poe/Pessoa"; and Glen A. Omans (Temple Univ.), "The Sentiment of the Beautiful: Sense or Nonsense."

PSA By-Laws

Pursuant to a vote at the 1984 annual meeting, a subcommittee will continue to inspect and evaluate the organization's by-laws. Thus far, the following individuals have volunteered to serve on this subcommittee: Dennis Eddings (Western Oregon State College), chair; Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Univ. of Mississippi), PSA charter member; J. Lasley Dameron (Memphis State Univ.), PSA charter member; Lea Newman (North Adams State College), representing the PSA and the Hawthorne Society; Richard Kopley (Pennsylvania State Univ., DuBois), representing the PSA and the Melville Society; Leonard W. Engel (Quinnipiac College), and John Reilly (Holy Cross). John Stasny (West Virginia Univ.) has graciously volunteered to advise on matters related to the newsletter. Professor Stasny is a member of the Conference of Editors of Learned Journals. Among the issues raised thus far by members of the PSA: (1) Should the editor(s) of the newsletter be elected or appointed by the members of the Executive Committee? (2) Should the by-laws contain a stipulation about possible dissolution of the organization? (Such a stipulation already appears in our Articles of Incorporation in the State of Oregon, certified February 25, 1985.) (3) Should the Executive

Committee be expanded? Other inquiries relevant to this by-laws review should be directed to Professor Eddings. Additional copies of the by-laws, which were mailed to all members in November, will be furnished on request.

Poe-Related Research and Publications

Joan Dayan has authored "The Identity of Berenice, Poe's Idol of the Mind," *Studies in Romanticism*, 23 (Winter 1984), 489-511, and "The Analytic of the Dash: Poe's *Eureka*," *Genre*, 16 (Winter 1983), 437-466.

Kent Ljungquist's *The Grand and the Fair: Poe's Landscape Aesthetics and Pictorial Techniques* will be published by Scripta Humanistica. Ljungquist surveys Poe criticism in the forthcoming 1984 *American Literary Scholarship* (Duke Univ. Press).

The Rhetoric of American Romance: Dialectic and Identity in Emerson, Dickinson, Poe, and Hawthorne by Evan Carton (Univ. of Texas, Austin) is forthcoming from Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.

The *Bibliography of Gothic Studies* (Gothic Press) will appear in chapbook form covering secondary criticism from 1981 to 1983. Compilers are Frederick S. Frank (Allegheny College), Gary Crawford, Steve Eng, and Kent Ljungquist. B.F. Fisher's *The Gothic's Gothic*, a bibliography of secondary criticism, will be published by Garland.

Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, V. 2: The Brevities. Edited by Burton R. Pollin. Staten Island, N.Y.: Gordian Press, 1985. 575 pp., 1-1x. \$45.00 Cloth. Same sturdy, handsome format as v.1 of this edition. Includes "Pinakidia" and *Marginalia*, along with "Literary Small Talk," "A Chapter of Suggestions," and "Fifty Suggestions." Voluminous notes. Detailed index. A scholarly volume indispensable for Poe scholars.

Reviews

Judith L. Sutherland. *The Problematic Fictions of Poe, James, and Hawthorne*. Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1984. 133 pp. Cloth, \$16.00.

Poe Studies Association Newsletter

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Judith L. Sutherland's little book, 119 pp. of text, demonstrates that a critic does not have to write a tome to make a significant and broad contribution to criticism. Focusing only upon Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), James' *The Sacred Fount* (1901), and Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860), she reveals how these works served as fundamental keys that lead to an understanding of their authors as well as texts that reflect the complex character of the American symbolist movement during the nineteenth century.

Readers may be astonished and even skeptical of Ms. Sutherland's selection of these particular texts. Upon publication each proved to be unpopular with the reading public, and each has raised more critical questions than there have been answers. Recent critics, however, have found artistic merits in each, especially in Poe's *Pym*.

It is obvious that these texts reveal both the strengths and the faults of their authors. All three of the authors reacted suspiciously to the metaphorical freedom which Emerson had proposed in launching the American symbolist movement. He had maintained that since "words are signs of natural facts," therefore "particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts." "Nature," he had said, "is the symbol of spirit," which is identical to God, "the all-Fair," the source of beauty, truth, and goodness. According to him, the laws of nature are but application of the moral law.

Poe, Hawthorne, and James, according to Sutherland, were skeptical of Emerson's theory. They feared that if unchecked such a philosophy of correspondences could lead, in Sutherland's words, "to nihilism and the absurd." The value of the three texts she has selected, she explains, depends on their unusual character. They "hover on the borderline between romance and an absurd self-parody" and show each writer's efforts "to impose limitations and qualifications" on his text so as "to avoid Emerson's too facile identification of object and idea, of man and God."

Sutherland believes Poe the "harsh" taskmaster of her three authors. His texts, she maintains, present "so much difficulty because they create rhetorical situations in which it is nearly impossible to discover a 'safe' critical position." For this reason, she believes, thematic criticism always proves unsatisfactory in his case, failing "to touch the sources of fear and anxiety that Poe's work arouses even in sophisticated readers." These responses lie in Poe's ability to employ language so as "to create a hermeneutical nightmare." Poe's text is a "spider-fly" trap. Once caught in its web, the reader is obliged to play a "tricky, driving game of wills." For the more Poe eludes the reader, the more the latter is determined to outwit him. And Sutherland submits that "if we are willing to play the game long enough, our reward is a flashing glimpse of a world both awesome and dismaying in its unity." This situation accounts for the tension found in a Poe text. The real critical question in Poe, then, is not how he presents some abstract theme but how his use of language determines the author-reader relationship. Poe's technique, according to Sutherland, involves a process of construction and destruction. "Aesthetically," she says, "it produces a principle that results in stories destroying the forms that give them life." She adds, "because the movement is so pervasive, it is little wonder that Poe chose to spell it out in terms of the cosmos itself" as he did finally in *Eureka*.

In sum, Ms. Sutherland has produced a germinal book despite its brevity, for her argument is of signal importance, particularly in reference to Poe.

Richard P. Benton, *Professor Emeritus*
Trinity College, Hartford, CT

Alfred Kazin. *An American Procession: The Major American Writers from 1830 to 1930—The Crucial Century*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1984. 408 pp. Cloth, \$18.95.

It is hard to believe that the appearance of Alfred Kazin's new critical study, *An American Procession*, also marks the forty-second anniversary of his classic *On Native Grounds*. Yet, happily, four decades of examining American literature and life have not at all dimmed Kazin's ability to see or to say. If anything, *An American Procession* is richer and more resonant than the best Kazin to date, at once more ambitious and more certain of the subtle connections it finds between literary text and context.

Kazin's "procession" begins with Emerson in the 1830s and ends a century later with the triumph of modernism on the eve of the Great Depression. By examining the lives and literary times of some twenty writers working during this century of unbridled growth in American power and prosperity, Kazin tries to find answers to "what went wrong." How and why did Emerson's intimate "open secret" of the universe evolve into the open universe itself, as blank and featureless as the face of Moby-Dick, as indifferent as the dynamos of Henry Adams and the cities of Theodore Dreiser?

The century began with Thoreau, Whitman, and, most of all, Emerson, with his unflagging gift of total conviction, celebrating the unlimited self as the greatest resource. The transcendental movement produced some of our greatest literature, yet it foundered amidst the events of the 1850s, and finally split on the rocks of the Civil War. Whitman, alone among the major writers, escaped the wreckage of the first industrial war (because Whitman knew the common man and "understood popular opinion in a way that Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne did not attempt to understand it").

In Kazin's grand gallery, the portraits of Emerson, Thoreau, Dickinson, Twain, Dreiser, and Henry Adams are particularly impressive. Sadly for Poe scholars, however, the portrait of Poe is probably the least satisfactory in the collection. Perhaps it is that Poe, like Emily Dickinson, resists inclusion in anything like a "procession." Perhaps it is Kazin's greater enthusiasm for Hawthorne and Melville (the latter, for Kazin, is "the greatest working mind in the literature of the period"). Whatever the reason, Poe is barely limned here (for those counting, Poe gets nine pages of treatment to Thoreau's eighteen and Melville's thirty; even Dickinson gets twenty pages).

Too, Kazin uncharacteristically fails to explore, in any real way, Poe's connection to his cultural context. The omission might be explained by Kazin's belief that "Poe never felt that he lived here; his contempt was absolute." Instead, the Poe section is taken up with a "reading" of *Pym* and, to a lesser extent, *Eureka*, but from these excursions we learn little that is new. *Eureka* is "a dazzling catastrophe," and *Pym* is Poe's "longest, most sustainedly brutal, least 'supernatural' fiction." Poe's novel, that is, becomes "supernatural" only in its final chapters as *Pym* drifts into a confrontation with the great, shrouded human figure. As to why Poe ends his novel this way, Kazin avers that "the shock at which [Poe] always aimed turned up as an effect on himself, leaving him nothing more to say." Poe's conclusion, however, remains his "triumph" because it dramatizes the conclusion posited in *Eureka*: that there is no universe except as the mind creates one. The connections between *Pym* and *Eureka* have, of course, been explored before. Kazin's appearance here in the critical debate is far too abbreviated to add anything to its resolution.

It is equally unconvincing—and uncharacteristic—of Kazin to base his critical reading of work on a word—"supernatural"—which he puts in quotation marks, apparently as a hedge against its possible inaccuracy. The ending of *Pym* is "supernatural," but as Kazin himself observes, the episodic narrative which precedes the conclusion is filled with "the far-out, the totally bizarre and unexpected." Some clarification of terms is obviously in order here, but none is forthcoming.

Of Poe's other literary endeavors, Kazin offers only that Poe "was the most expert critic of his time" and "a poet so routinely professional that his famous effects are more those of a virtuoso musician indifferently tooting away than those of a thinker in poetry, a mesmerist in his ability to spellbind and intimidate the reader." Again, however, without further clarifying discussion, such praise (is it praise to label a writer "routinely professional"?) lacks the ring of conviction or the strength of persuasion.

Kazin sees the other American romantics—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville—as isolatoes whose refined, eloquently phrased personal visions were assaulted by the reformist turbulence of the 1850s and destroyed by the Civil War. Perhaps it is Poe's refusal to fit this thesis, coupled with Kazin's diminished enthusiasm for this writer, that is responsible for this critical lapse in his study.

While for Poe enthusiasts, such a critical lapse is poorly timed, there are very few others in the book. In the end, *An American Procession* is quintessential Kazin and further confirmation of his status as one of the great literary and cultural critics in the tradition of Van Wyck Brooks, F.O. Matthiessen, and Edmund Wilson.

Thomas C. Carlson
Memphis State University

The American Renaissance Reconsidered. Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1982-83. New Series, no. 9. Ed. by Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. 217 pp. Cloth, \$8.50.

Louis A. Renza's 10,000-word essay on "Poe's Secret Autobiography" (58-89) begins on a highly polemical note: "It seems time for the still unregenerate, antitheoretical American critic to face a Poe-esque truth as gleaned from one of his more recently deconstructed and re-deconstructed tales: that Francophile criticism has again purloined the Poe oeuvre from the archives of American literary history right before the eyes of the latter's self-consciously nationalistic guardians." This allusion to the Lacan-Derrida exchange over "The Purloined Letter" in *French Studies* (1972) hardly justifies the claim of having "again purloined the Poe oeuvre." As evidence that "American criticism has begrudgingly admitted his corpus . . . into American literature's Hall of Fame, that is, its institutional courses and anthologies," Renza cites the "primitive" and "narrow" range attributed to Poe by Henry James, F. O. Matthiessen in *The American Renaissance* (1941), Edward Davidson, and Edward Wagenknecht. No mention is made of Matthiessen's chapter on Poe in *The Literary History of the United States* (1946), where

Poe is recognized as "one of the very few great innovators in American literature" and "in international culture . . . an original creative force." In recent years, Leslie Fiedler, Jonathan Auerbach, John Irwin, and Joseph Riddel are credited with having read Poe as "the unconscious producer of postsemiotic texts."

Poe's secret autobiography appears as "a figure of Poe's reading of his own texts as he imagines them being misread by others." His tales "impishly advertise" their conventional derivations: "obsessive *topoi* such as premature burials, doubles, and dying, beautiful women," ciphers, "characters," repeated words and phrases, verbal jokes, and hoaxes. As the fiction lacks "an original ground from which one could apprehend it as a totally self-present mode of representation," the tales can be read only as contrived hoaxes that lead to "the cul-de-sac of his subliminally inscribed signature," illustrated by the title "Siope," an anagram for "is Poe," and "ape" (in "Rue Morgue") for Poe's initials, E.A.P. Although these "quite literal" autobiographical intimations distract the reader, they can be construed as autobiographical cryptograms, with "many other anagrams" to be discovered, such as *nevar* in the word *raven*. At the same time, we are told that because the aesthetic context is absent, this secret writing has "zero semantic value"; it is "a prematurely buried autobiographical subtext whose self-referential significance becomes discernible only through a purely speculative, self-alienating act of reading."

Poe's verbal doubling is illustrated by "The Gold Bug," in which the second section—the deciphering of the treasure map—"displaces or interrupts" the first narrative of the treasure's discovery. This narrative doubling or overturning of a narrative convention consists of Legrand's twice duping the narrator and of the author's "proleptic doubling" of the text, thus causing its aesthetic effect to be lost. But how can this "legitimate effect" distract the reader from "recognizing the authorial self-inscription" if the effect is lost? The self-inscription in turn conceals Poe's mechanical method of composition (hoaxes, anagrams, motifs, and narrational catachreses), resulting in the reader's adopting "a reflective *anaesthetic* relation to the text at hand." Only through a "misreading," then, out of his secret creative origins, can Poe catch the delicate prelinguistic fancies "which are *not* thoughts, and to which, *as yet*, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language."

"The Oval Portrait" also exemplifies Poe's staged scenarios of misreading in that there is a "second" reading which keeps the beautiful woman in the process of dying, "thus prolonging the tale's secret aesthetic life." Being about Poe's autobiographical relation to the death of a beautiful woman, the tales are "ghost stories," i.e. "they never quite exist." In

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NEW MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL FOR 1985

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Enclosed is my \$5 check for dues and subscription for the calendar year 1985. (Check should be made out to "Poe Studies Association" and mailed to Dennis W. Eddings, Poe Studies Association, English Department, Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, Oregon 97361.)

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"The Philosophy of Composition" Poe deconstructed the honorific literary texts of his day and their criteria. Following Griffith, Renza views "Ligeia" as a parody of literary Gothic/romantic conventions. Every Poe story ends in a "fall" of Poe and his muse.

Eureka, one of several challenges to the Transcendentalists' elitist circle, is an apocalyptic "negation" of Emerson's *Nature*, and in "Arnheim" Poe's Ellison revises Emerson's vision of nature by leading the reader through the narrative to an original experience of the Romantic Sublime. But, like the huge white apparition at the end of *Pym*, Poe's ghostly autobiographical figure is only momentarily Poe as it fades into the blank pages of the text, the secret to which only Poe can read autobiographically. Such "self-aggrandizing abuse of the literary medium" through tales that predict and predicate their own secret identity is contrary to both French deconstructionist and American traditionalist criteria. But it is consonant with Bloom's *agon* call for "an antithetical criticism in the American grain, affirming the self over language, while granting a priority to figurative language over meaning." Poe's value today is seen as consisting more in his subterranean *influence* than in the body of his work; that influence has enabled his work "to return to its original American ideological setting," there "to engender readings possessing the uncanny effect of a séance. But what is the nature, one might ask, and value of these séance-like readings? And what role does the American "ideological setting" play in the process, along with Poe's symbolism (Richard Wilbur) disciplined in its semantic intentions by a well-defined "philosophic perspective" (Allen Tate) and theory of art (Robert Jacobs)? By contrast, speculations on Poe's contrived use of anagram, doubling, verbal motif, and hoaxing reduce both his work and his influence to the self-aggrandizement of secret self-inscriptions, if we are to believe the anaesthetic misreadings of deconstructionism as set forth here. Confronted by this somewhat arrogant Francophile challenge, most Poe scholars will remain "still unregenerate and antitheoretical," preferring instead an eclectic blend of formalist and historical criticism. As structuralism cannot do without ontology and epistemology, so semiotics needs a system of ideatics.

— Eric W. Carlson, *Professor Emeritus*
University of Connecticut

Music Notes

Another major American composer has found inspiration for a large-scale work in Poe's poetry: Ned Rorem's "An

American Oratorio" for tenor, mixed chorus, and orchestra made its debut in Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh, with the Pittsburgh Symphony under Robert Page, 1/4-6/1985. Of the twelve parts, based on works by eight American nineteenth-century authors, the second which set the early "To Helen" was singled out for praise by several reviewers.

At long last students of Poe can hear for themselves the remains of Claude Debussy's decade-long struggle to achieve his plan for an opera based on "The Fall of the House of Usher," for which he had contracted with the Metropolitan's director Gatti-Gazzaza. The salvaged, crude fragments, published in Edward Lockspeiser's *Debussy et Edgar Poe* (Monaco, 1961) were thought irreclaimable until Carolyn Abbate and R. Kyr collaborated to decode and fill out the score. The first recording, newly issued by Angel Records (DS 38168), presents the realization of Juan Allende-Blin, performed by soloists and the Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra under Georges Pretre. The fascinating score, reminiscent of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* but stronger and more advanced, occupies a full side, with the other given over to Andre Caplet's "Masque of the Red Death" and Florent Schmitt's "Haunted Palace"—both purely instrumental. The first reflects the impressionism of the "tone poems" of Debussy, Caplet's acknowledged master and friend, especially "Afternoon of a Faun" and has occasionally been played in American concerts. The Schmitt piece is far less distinctive. In general, the record will be treasured by all Poeians.

Burton R. Pollin,
Professor Emeritus, CUNY

Poe in Performance

Laura Raidonis-Gillis has completed *Raven Among the Vultures*, a play that deals with Rufus Griswold's harassment of Poe. According to the author, "The play presents a trial, in Purgatory; the jury is played by the audience." Interested producers should write to the author at 3520 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60657.

Jeffrey Elwell (Virginia Intermont College) has adapted Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* for dramatic performance. In this adaptation, "Poe will serve as a narrator, as though he were writing the book and conversing with and controlling the characters, thereby fusing literature with performance."

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