FIRST-PERSON NARRATION IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S TALES

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Most readers and even some critics are inclined to describe Edgar Allan Poe's literary genius not to his controlled imaginative and perceptual powers, but to a disordered and chaotic mind, or to a morbid, semi-pathological state. The implication here is that Poe created the effect of his fanciful tales by chance or at best by devious or morally questionable means. Other unsympathetic but more sophisticated critics tend to dismiss Poe's tales as somewhat outmoded and Gothic juvenilia not worth serious study.¹ Thus, Poe's art depreciates to a bag of tricks handled by a clever but cheap charlatan. Then there still exists a host of Poe's devoted admirers who refuse to accept the notion that "Poe's fiction is nothing but murky autobiography or psychodrama."² These critics have in most instances proclaimed Poe's art more than they have explained it. There has been no really comprehensive examination of Poe's


tactics—particularly, his extensive, varied, and skillful employment of first-person narration.³

Of the sixty-five short stories credited to Poe, sixty-three are in first person; only two, "The Duc De L'Omelette" and "A Tale of Jerusalem," are in the third person; and both stories are among the five earliest tales that Poe is known to have written and are among those least regarded by readers and critics. His other pieces of creative prose are either dramatic skits or book-length novellas. The preponderant amount of Poe's short prose fiction in the first person makes it quite probable that he deliberately chose this method of narration in order both to produce the unity of effect which he so earnestly desired and to reveal the rationale of the disintegrating personality, which he seems to have preferred as a subject. Beyond this rather general observation concerning the connection of technique and subject lie the unexamined details of Poe's first-person technique.

In 1921, Percy Lubbock declared that the critic's function is to discover "the method by which . . . [the author] selects the information he offers,"⁴ and the "most obvious

³No definitive critical examination of Poe's use of narrative perspective has been published. Jay B. Hubbell, for example, laments that there is no "study of Poe's development . . . as a writer of tales." "Poe," Eight American Authors, edited by Floyd Stovall, New York, 1963, p. 20.

point of method is no doubt the difficult question of the
centre of vision." Lubbock then reiterates this idea at
the end of his study:

The whole intricate question of method, in the
craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the
question of the point of view--the question of
the relation in which the narrator stands to
the story.  

These injunctions have influenced literary criticism for
the past four decades, but oddly enough, no thorough appli-
cation of Lubbock's theory has ever been made to the work
of Edgar Allan Poe.

Later critics have echoed and applied Lubbock's ideas,
for example, Joseph Warren Beach in The Twentieth Century
Novel, 7 and Mark Schorer in an essay "Technique as Dis-
covery." 8 Thirty-four years after Lubbock, Norman Friedman
expressed the same opinion in a valuable essay, "Point of
View in Fiction: the Development of a Critical Concept"; he
makes the flat statement that "'point of view' is becom-
ing one of the most useful critical distinctions available
to the student of fiction today." 9

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5Ibid., p. 73.  6Ibid., p. 251.
7Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel:
8Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," Essays in
Modern Literary Criticism, edited by Ray B. West, Jr. (New
9Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction: The De-
velopment of a Critical Concept," PMLA, LXX (December, 1955),
1161.
There have been reservations, however, concerning the use of narrative method as a chief criterion of literary study. In *The Writing of Fiction* (1934), Arthur S. Hoffman remarks that he has "not happened to see a systematic covering of the possibilities" of different points of view, and he suggests that an infinite number of combinations and variations may exist. Wayne C. Booth also has questioned this critical method:

Like other notions used in talking about fiction, point-of-view has proved less useful than was expected by the critics who first brought it to our attention.

Booth believes that the difficulty of defining precisely and classifying point of view, except in a very general way, limits the usefulness of extensive discussion. In the fiction of Poe, however, where the point of view is limited largely to the first person, it is possible to examine his use of this method with a view to discovering patterns and variations which indicate conscious artistic sensibility.

As has been suggested, the narrative perspective of the first person is a structural principle with many

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12 Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren refer to this convention as the "focus of narration" in *Understanding Fiction*, rev. ed. (New York, 1959), p. 659. In this investigation, "point of view" will be used interchangeably with "narrative perspective," and both terms will mean the agent "or agency through whose eyes the events are seen," as explained in Jessie Rehder's book *The Young Writer at Work* (New York, 1962), p. 103.
possibilities. The narrator may be, and often is, the author per se; he may be a pseudo-author, or someone who is not the actual author but is pretending to be an author or setting himself up as one; he may be a character in the story; or he may be a mere observer (not necessarily the author) of the action. He can be either the main character or a minor character. These are the principal stances, but there are, of course, many combinations and variations.

There also exists for the first-person narrator a relationship to the story in distance—distance in time, distance in space, and distance in emotional involvement. Perspective may also be said to pertain to the position of the reader who oftentimes is not in the same relation to the events as the narrator or even the author. All of these technical factors together suggest or make manifest the author's intention and thus clarify his meaning and make possible certain valid judgments.

For the purpose of this study, Poe's tales were read and considered carefully in chronological order, the idea being to discover growth and development. Poe's literary career was relatively brief (1832-1849), and there are no dramatic or definite breaks or periods. Though his production shows growth in sophistication and artistry, it has been deemed more instructive to group Poe's first-person narrators according to the part they play in the story, that
is, (1) main actor or protagonist, (2) minor character, (3) observers and (4) combinations of the foregoing three. An attempt will be made to note both variation and pattern, and hence artistic skill, in Poe's handling of each particular type of narrator.

It is also of considerable import to examine Poe's direct statements concerning the matter of technique, in particular, point of view; for Poe was an astute and prolific critic of literary art; however, the terms, and perhaps even some of the ideas, of Lubbock were not available to him in a time when prose fiction—especially the short story—was in the childhood of its development. Chapter II of this thesis will discuss both point of view—its advantages and disadvantages—and Poe's apparent conception of it according to his pronouncements about it. Following chapters will take up each kind of narrator and point out excellencies and defects in Poe's method with individual stories. Finally an attempt will be made to evaluate this one aspect of Poe's artistry and its development during his brief and sad career.

All references to individual tales, except "The Elk," are from the Modern Library Edition of The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (n. d.) with an Introduction by Hervey Allen. References to "The Elk" will come from The


CHAPTER II

FIRST-PERSON NARRATION AND
POE'S LITERARY THEORY

Though it may not be possible to demonstrate conclusively that Poe deliberately chose the "I" narrative as the best means of obtaining the preconceived effect he desired, it can nevertheless be shown from his various critical remarks that he was quite aware of narrative perspective as a most important aspect of fictional technique. His position as editor and reviewer, as well as practicing artist, led him to consider in rather surprising detail and with great perspicacity the advantages, the difficulties, the problems, and the effects of first-person recitation.

Matters of point of view, which sometimes Poe merely suggested, have received great attention by writers and critics since his day, so that there now exists a body of rather generally acknowledged precepts regarding this area of the writer's art. The first and foremost advantage of "I" narration is that it limits the material at the disposal of the author and thereby provides greater focus and unity than the third-person point of view of the omniscient author. This is perhaps its greatest boon to short fiction. Poe's contribution to the theory of the short story is too
well-known to need quoting here. His insistence upon unity of preconceived effect and unity of tone and mood, though repeated often, was first and best stated in his now famous review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (May, 1842):

A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed. 1

It may be wondered why Poe, who wrote most of his stories in the first person, so much admired Hawthorne, whose tales are characteristically related by an omniscient author in third person. The answer to this question no doubt lies in the fact that, although Hawthorne used the third person, his method is nearly always narrative rather than dramatic. The reader sits at his feet and listens, almost as to an oral storyteller. The monotony in Hawthorne's prose fiction,

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which Poe later reproached in 1847, relates directly to this more or less dreamy tone of Hawthorne's narrative voice:

[Hawthorne] . . . has little or no variety of tone. He handles all subjects in the same subdued, misty, dreamy, suggestive, innuendo way, and although I think him the truest genius, upon the whole, which our literature possesses, I cannot help regarding him as the most desperate mannerist of his day.³

Poe's dissatisfaction here stems from his adherence to an artistic principle of variety of tone which, as will be demonstrated, he increased in his tales by using different kinds of first-person narrators for different types of story materials.⁴ Thus he hoped through this technique to avoid the monotony which he felt existed in Hawthorne's fictional prose. It apparently made more sense to Poe to have a new voice for a new story than to have the same voice in a new mood for each new story, and Poe's reasoning upon the subject certainly shows more artistic consideration for the principle of variety in entertainment.

²"Tone" to Poe meant "tone of voice," which could be varied from story to story according to the result desired. The narrator can proceed with a serious tone and thereby give to his story "its indispensable air of consequence, or causation" (Works, XIV, 193.) which in turn will aid plausibility. Or, the narrator can present his tale in a tone of banter in which case he can promote verisimilitude by using scientific detail. Works, XV, 128-129.

³Works, XVI, 43.

⁴Poe often speaks about "true originality" and evidently connects it with "artistic variety": "To originate is carefully, patiently, and understandingly to combine." Works, XIV, 73.
A second very obvious advantage of the first person is that it promotes credibility. The average reader tends to accept extraordinary or fantastic plots, or characters, more readily if the story is related by a participant or eyewitness. Poe speaks out often and quite directly on the value of plausibility. In discussing the sensation caused by Richard Adams Locke's "Moon-Story," which resembles Poe's "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall," Poe explained:

The great effect wrought upon the public mind is referable, first, to the novelty of the idea; secondly, to the fancy-exciting and reason-repressing character of the alleged discoveries; thirdly, to the consummate tact with which the deception was brought forth; fourthly, to the exquisite *vraisemblance* of the narration.7

Again, in attacking Hawthorne's allegorical tendencies, Poe declared his objection to allegory because it injured "the most vitally important point in fiction--that of earnestness or verisimilitude."6

In another revealing passage Poe described his method of obtaining the confidence of the reader--a method which palpably subsumes the use of the first person, though Poe made no overt mention of it.

It consists in a variety of points--principally in avoiding . . . that directness of expression which we have noticed . . . and thus leaving much to the imagination--in writing as if the author were firmly impressed with the truth, yet astonished at the immensity of the wonders he relates, and for which,

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professedly, he neither claims nor anticipates credence—in minuteness of detail, especially upon points which have no immediate bearing upon the general story—this minuteness not being at variance with indirectness of expression—in short, by making use of the infinity of arts which give verisimilitude to a narration [Italics mine]—and by leaving the result as a wonder not to be accounted for. It will be found that bizarreness thus conducted, are usually far more effective than those otherwise managed. The attention of the author, who does not depend upon explaining away his incredibilities, is directed to giving them the character and the luminousness of truth, and thus are brought about unwittingly, some of the most vivid creations of human intellect. The reader, too, readily perceives and falls in with the writer's humor, and suffers himself to be borne on there-by.7

Here the reference to the astonishment of the author, his professions of wonder or disbelief, can be proper only to the first-person narrator. A third-person author professing wonder or disbelief about something he himself has invented or created would seem almost laughably hypocritical. The above quotations are only a few of the many which impress the reader with Poe's concern for verisimilitude.

An additional advantage of first person is its assistance in establishing warmth and sympathy between the narrator and the reader. The intimate, informal, personal, and human qualities in "I" narration tend both to help the reader to identify with the narrator and to make it easier for the reader to feel at home in the story world. Poe implicitly acknowledged the desirability of evoking the

7Works, IX, 138-139.
reader's sympathy when he spoke of the narrator in *Jack Sheppard* by W. H. Ainsworth, "Nothing he relates seems ... of the slightest interest. [The] ... hero impresses us as a mere chimoera [sic], with whom we have no earthly concern." In the "I" narrative a bond of friendship and camaraderie develops and keeps the reader involved with the narrator's fortunes; the reader, in such cases, is likely to accept the frailty and the limited insight of the person addressing him just as he sometimes overlooks and makes excuses for the shortcomings of those in real life who make a confidant of him. Poe utilizes this willingness of readers to participate in a story and recognizes the pleasure that may be derived from living a character's experiences with him; for in Poe's tales, the pleasure often comes from the fact that the reader is flattered by his close association with a narrator who is very intelligent, highly educated, wealthy, and socially acceptable. The reader enjoys being treated as an equal by such a distinguished person, erratic though he may become.

Also, first-person narration offers an advantage in objectivity which appealed to Poe. The identification between narrator and reader possible with first person frequently disappears when the intrusive and omniscient comments and instructions of an author's voice distract the

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8 *Works, X, 218.*
reader. As might be expected in 1841, Poe's position was favorable toward direct authorial commentary:

The commenting force can never be safely disregarded. It is far better to have a dearth of incident, with skillful observation upon it, than the utmost variety of event. . . [In the old Greek drama, the] chorus came at length to supply, in some measure, a deficiency which is inseparable from dramatic action, and represented the expression of the public interest or sympathy in the matters transacted. 9

Again, in 1845, four years after the preceding remark, Poe approved of "what we understand by the 'authorial [sic] comment'--that which adds so deep a charm for readers to the novels of Scott, of Bulwer, or of D'Israeli--more especially to the works of Godwin and Brockden Brown." 10 However, too much or the wrong kind of authorial commentary can divert the reader's emotional involvement in a tale, and Poe, like Henry James, definitely disapproved of breaking the fictional spell. The following comment in Poe's "Marginalia" (1846) on the story "Mysteries of Paris" indicates the close attention which Poe now devoted to this aspect of technique:

In effect the writer is always saying to the reader, "Now--in one moment--you shall see what you shall see. I am about to produce on you a remarkable impression. Prepare to have your imagination, or your pity, greatly excited." The wires are not only not concealed, but displayed as things to be admired, equally with the puppets they set in motion. The result is, that in perusing, for example, a pathetic chapter in "Mysteries of Paris" we say to ourselves, without shedding a tear--"Now, here is something which will be sure to move every reader to tears." 11

9 Ibid., p. 201 10 Works, XII, 224. 11 Works, XVI, 104.
With first person, the author must disappear and cajole the reader into listening to someone else's story, avoiding, so to speak, responsibility for the truth of hard-to-believe happenings and, as Poe says, concealing the "wires." Four months before Poe's death, he still maintained the necessity of objectivity in fiction when he cautioned that seeing too much of a writer's "machinery" could destroy unity of effect because the reader's fancy is not excited and his reason is not set aside:

To see distinctly the machinery—the wheels and pinions—of any work of Art is, unquestionably, of itself, a pleasure, but one which we are able to enjoy only just in proportion as we do not enjoy the legitimate effect designed by the artist:—and, in fact, it too often happens that to reflect analytically upon Art, is to reflect after the fashion of the mirrors in the temple of Smyrna, which represent the fairest images as deformed. 12

On the whole, therefore, Poe seems to have developed an affinity for narrative objectivity as an aid in creating an author's preconceived effect.

Another advantage of the first-person point of view is that an imaginative and somewhat subjective rapport between character and author is easier to establish. Since the author's voice mingles with his character's voice in "I" narration, the writer finds an easier imaginative access to the story. Presenting life convincingly through the senses of a fictional character, especially one with a temperament

12 Ibid., p. 170.
different from his creator's, requires great imaginative ability, and first person makes congruence less difficult because the personal "I" automatically relates author and avatar. Poe discussed narrative ease in "The Poetic Principle" (1850):

This "ease," or naturalness, in a literary style, it has long been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone--as a point of really difficult attainment. But not so:--a natural manner is difficult only to him who should never meddle with it--to the unnatural. It is but the result of writing with the understanding, or with the instinct, that the tone, in composition, should always be that which the mass of mankind would adopt--and must perpetually vary, of course, with the occasion.13

Here, Poe implies that the tone of a fictional voice corresponds somewhat to the tone of a person speaking. Poe felt that Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, which is in first person, provided the best example of impressing readers with the artless sound of a narrator's voice and of convincing readers about the reality of the narrator's person: "Men do not look upon it [Robinson Crusoe] in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts; Robinson all."14 Thus, when the author's artistic effort is forgotten, the style appears natural, and Poe insisted that "the most simple, is the best, method of narration."15

A further advantage of first-person narration is the unification of tone within the story world despite changes

13Works, XIV, 277-278.  
14Works, XIII, 235.  
15Works, IX, 113.
or shifts in time and space. In a few brief and casual words, a first-person narrator can make a transition more graceful for a reader than a third-person narrator, who sometimes must explain at length why a change is being made. Thus, since less telling is required, necessary variations in scene are less confusing and more dramatic; that is, the business of moving a reader from year-to-year or from place-to-place does not of necessity weaken dramatic tension, for the overall tone of the first-person voice remains consistent and sustains the author's preconceived intention. In the following passage, Poe objected to *Night and Morning* because the author, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, failed to solve this problem:

So excessive is, here, the involution of circumstances, that it has been found impossible to dwell for more than a brief period upon any particular one. The writer seems in a perpetual flurry to accomplish what, in autorial [sic] parlance, is the vain attempt to keep all his multitudinous incidents at one and the same moment before the eye. His ability has been sadly taxed in the effort—but more sadly the time and temper of the reader. . . . And thus, since there is no sufficiently continuous scene in the whole novel, it results that there is no strongly effective one."

On the other hand, in 1839, he praised a plot because "everything is attended to, and nothing is out of time or out of place." Poe, likewise, showed himself to be conscious of the unities of both time and place in reviewing Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge*:

The effect of the present narrative might have been materially increased by confining the action within the limits of London. The "Notre Dame" of Hugo affords a fine example of the force which can be gained by concentration, or unity of place. The unity of time is also sadly neglected, to no purpose, in "Barnaby Rudge." 18

Poe's attitude in this matter derives directly from his interest in unity of effect or impression.

For Poe, one of the most useful features of the "I" narrative is that it permits a convincing display of subjective and psychological material when the narrator describes his own thoughts and emotions. This makes "telling" better than "showing," for faces, words, and deeds do not always reveal inner truths. Suffering, for example, is often internal and silent; and many of Poe's characters suffer. Moreover, Poe concerned himself not only with the fact of suffering, but also with the effect of suffering--of delusion, of obsession, and of horror--both on his narrators and, by empathy, on his readers. He observed that the votaries of fantasy "delight not only in novelty and unexpectedness of combination, but in the avoidance of proportion. The result is therefore abnormal, and to a healthy mind affords less of pleasure through its novelty, than of pain through its incoherence." 19 Poe here shows himself a rather shrewd student of human nature with its propensity for masochism, or at least for pain on paper.

A final interesting possibility of first-person narration, as used by Poe, is the dramatic irony involved when a story produces an effect opposite from that apparently intended by the narrator. Many of Poe's tales horrify readers by ending with a twist, which fully illustrates Poe's acquaintance with this ironical possibility, a particularly good example being "The Cask of Amontillado," which will be examined in detail later. In 1841, Poe pointed out the value of this effect in praising Barnaby Rudge:

The writer has not asserted it [the falsehood put into the mouth of a character] in his own person, but ingeniously conveyed an idea (false in itself, yet a belief in which is necessary for the effect of the tale) by the mouth of one of his characters.20

First person narration, despite its many advantages, has some notable drawbacks or difficulties to which Poe addressed himself successfully. The method presents difficulties in characterizing actors other than the narrator, because these people must be purveyed to the reader through a mediator who may not be entirely reliable because of prejudice or lack of information, especially because of being able only to guess at mental states. Also, it is, as has been pointed out, difficult for a protagonist to relate his own heroic or admirable exploits without seeming conceited. The protagonist as first person, too, has to be careful to maintain a nice balance between action and self-analysis. He can very

20 Works, XI, 51.
easily become too much self-concerned and introspective.
His subjectivity can thus destroy his reliability—a danger which Poe seems carefully to avoid. There is, of course, a good chance that an author can inject too much of himself into a first-person narrator, in which case objectivity and consistency again may suffer. Poe rejected Harry Lorrequer's *Charles O'Malley* for this reason:

The author, or narrator, for example, is supposed to be Harry Lorrequer as far as the end of the preface, which by the way, is one of the best portions of the book. O'Malley then tells his own story. But... there ensues a sad confusion of identity between O'Malley and Lorrequer, so that it is difficult, for the nonce, to say which is which.21

Another significant passage of this nature occurs in Poe's article on Charles Fenno Hoffman:

... the author has erred, first, in narrating the story in the first person, and secondly, in putting into the mouth of the narrator language and sentiments above the nature of an Indian. I say that the narration should not have been in the first person, because, although an Indian may and does fully experience a thousand delicate shades of sentiment, (the whole idea of the story is essentially sentimental,) still he has, clearly, no capacity for their various expression. Mr. Hoffman's hero is made to discourse very much after the manner of Rousseau.22

A severe restriction placed upon a first-person speaker, especially as minor character, is that he may have to be in places that he should not, and even could not, plausibly be.

21 Ibid., p. 91.  
22 *Works*, XV, 120.
He can thus become a sort of Peeping Tom, which annoys the reader and undermines the reliability of the narration. In an attempt to get around this difficulty, an author may waste time and space positioning his narrator and, thus, detract from the main story.

Some readers and critics, especially those of journalistic persuasion, consider narrative much inferior to drama and feel that showing is completely superior to telling. Others, like Henry James have feared the first person as too discursive, colloquial, and sloppy. Poe himself has something to say on this matter of colloquial simplicity in "Literati," a paper in which he objects to the style of writers like Charles F. Briggs:

They depend for their effect upon the relation in a straightforward manner, just as one would talk, of the most commonplace events—a kind of writing which, to ordinary, and especially to indolent intellects, has a very observable charm. To cultivated or to active minds it is in an equal degree distasteful, even when claiming the merit of originality.  

Poe seems always to have considered himself and other serious literary artists as litterateurs; he never adopts poses of ignorance, ill-breeding, or commonality.  

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23 Ibid., p. 263.

24 Exceptions to this rule can be found only in Poe's satires and burlesques. For example, "The Business Man" presents a type of narrator who is inept and uneducated: he is a half-wit who credits his "common sense" to an incident in his childhood when he was thrown against a bedpost by his nurse, and consequently, the methodical business man is pictured by Poe as having low intelligence. The narrator calls all geniuses "arrant asses," which not only indicates his opinion of educated gentry, but also demonstrates his colloquial style. On the whole, however, the language closely resembles Poe's formal diction. "How to Write a Blackwood Article" illustrates the type of lower class narrator, a woman, who consistently speaks in a colloquial manner.
On the whole, Poe as a critic indicates an unusual awareness of and a really remarkable insight into the problem of point of view--especially as it concerns first-person narration. The remaining chapters of this study will investigate how he put his insight into practice in his own stories, whether consciously or instinctively.
CHAPTER III

THE NARRATOR AS PROTAGONIST

Out of the sixty-three short stories that Poe wrote from the first person point of view, thirty-two have narrators who are the central character in the story.¹ The reasons why Poe favored this stance are obvious: it affords a convincing and intimate view of the hero's intense and disordered emotional states, and it permits, likewise, a display of mental processes not open to minor characters or mere observers. The weird, unusual, and awesome happenings preferred by Poe and all the Gothic storytellers of the romantic period practically demand eye-witness accounts of the person most affected if the story is to be accepted by the reader; and Poe's consistent use of the first person seems to have been a conscious effort on his part to obtain from the reader "a willing suspension of disbelief." His artistry in this matter is beyond question; his exploitation of the chief advantages of first-person narration—plausibility, focus, and psychological probing—scarcely needs pointing out.

¹A chronological list of these stories is provided in Appendix I. The dates in the Appendices, and those given throughout the remainder of this thesis, represent the arrangement found in The Complete Poems and Stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. II of 2 vols. (New York, 1958), pp. 1072-1085.
Poe's proficiency, however, in overcoming some of the disadvantages and in avoiding some of the pitfalls of his chosen method demands a much closer look. What special requirements, disadvantages, dangers, and difficulties does first-person protagonist narration impose upon an author?

To begin with, the matter of plausibility and acceptance is not so simple as it seems at first glance. The reader may be much inclined to believe the wild or strange story of someone on the spot who is the main actor. But there are, in effect, two kinds of plausibility: one has to do with the exterior events or the general situation; the other has to do with the narrator himself—his character, his motives, and his reliability as purveyor. The two considerations are, of course, inextricably welded in the story itself, but for the purpose of analysis may be looked at separately.

Concerning exterior events or the general situation, the author must account to the reader for the narrator's being where he was when the events happened and where he is when the story is being told. In other words, he must establish for the reader and the narrator a proper relationship in both time and distance to the events of the story. The author must make the narrator's present situation, both mental and physical, plausible with regard to what happens; for example, if the narrator dies or is killed in the course of the story, he cannot credibly talk to the reader about the events. For dead men tell no tales. Such devices as
the diary or journal, the scientific report, the memoir, the letter, and the written confession all lie at the disposal of the author who needs to vary the more direct and conventional oral-teller-to-listener situation. And Poe uses all of these methods to clarify the position of reader and narrator and to obtain and establish acceptance.

Perhaps the most delicate and difficult task of the author in stories where the main character narrates is the characterization of the narrator himself; for it is axiomatic that one seldom sees himself as others see him. If the author proposes to involve the reader sympathetically and deeply in the adventures and emotions of the protagonist, then this protagonist narrator has to be very careful in what he says about himself. He cannot insist upon his admirable traits and actions without presenting some kind of qualification, some kind of apology, or some kind of counter-balancing weakness. Otherwise the reader will reject the teller because of his conceit or self-centered interest and, therefore, will discredit what he has to say. Poe obviates this major difficulty by making practically all of his narrator protagonists victims of melancholy, fear, terror, horror, and other forms of agitation quite the opposite of heroic. They may perform brave deeds occasionally, but they are always terribly frightened just as any ordinary person would be. This almost unvarying pattern permits Poe liberally to bestow unusual mental
accomplishments, high social and economic status, gentility bordering on arrogance, and almost preternatural powers of observation upon his hero without seriously lessening the regard of the reader or interfering with his emotional acceptance of the character.

Another problem for the author of this type of story is to maintain a proper balance between introspection, or self-analysis, and event. Poe displays a notable predilection for self-scrutiny in his first-person protagonists, some of which can be accounted for by the fact that the tale is told in retrospect—powerful emotion, as it were, recollected in tranquillity. Yet the reader will soon tire of a narrator's lengthy description of feeling or rationale unless events of corresponding magnitude continue to take place. Poe does not always maintain this balance; his climactic events on occasion seem to be rather weak stimuli for his narrator's fascinated self-scrutiny.

Another less intricate aspect of plausibility in character of which Poe was most certainly aware was suiting the manner and style of the narration both to the content of the story and to the character of its teller. Poe's emphasis on a preconceived effect made him particularly attentive to the tone of voice of the narrator, which in all of the horror stories is serious, dignified, cultured, and even literary. This elevated style and these literary capabilities are not always sufficiently accounted for by the information the
narrator gives about himself, and at times the reader may find himself wondering how such an accomplished person can commit such atrocious crimes. It is, however, this very wonderment that Poe seeks to create, or at least does create, as a part of his overall effect; and thus he successfully overcomes what might have developed into a serious obstacle to his method of telling. In short, his heroes can write just as well as he does, and he is not put to the task of faking a style or manner unnatural to him. It is worth remarking that of the thirty-two tales in the category under discussion, twenty-seven employ the device of a written document as a means of purveying the story. Poe's extensive use of this indirection seems to indicate that he was well aware of its value to the stylistic plausibility of the narrator.

A matter which an author must address himself to is his narrator's awareness of the listener or audience. The written manuscript favored by Poe tends to present itself to the world at large and subsumes an unspecified type of reader. This device relieves the author of considering the reader as any other thing than the reader and permits him to concentrate upon the narrator and the narrator's story. Stories with a specific listener, where the individual reader is directly spoken to, divert the reader's attention to the narrator at the time of the telling and away from the time of the story he is telling. Poe is very careful, in these
stories, not to break his narrator's spell at any crucial point. It is true that the effect of direct address to a specific reader is more dramatic, but it has difficulties which Poe apparently deemed it wise to avoid. He uses this situation sparingly.

There are other more general difficulties and problems inescapably inherent in this type of narration. If Poe recognized them, he chose to ignore their danger. The protagonist-as-narrator method in itself sacrifices the variety and opinion of minor characters; above all, it sacrifices a certain amount of drama and conversational vitality. Poe's stories lack this kind of warmth and life. His big scenes tend to be claustrophobic and leave the overall impression that both author and narrator are cooped up in their own consciousness and somehow out of touch with the real world around them. What his stories say is that literature applies purely to fancy, not to life; and, in a larger way, the method cancels out the plausibility it seeks to establish.

It is obviously beyond the scope of this study to examine, from the standpoint of difficulties overcome or not overcome, every one of Poe's thirty-two stories in which the narrator is the protagonist. It is obvious, too, that each tale will have its own difficulties regardless of method. Hence, extended analysis will be limited to four representative but somewhat different examples of this method of narration.
These analyses will follow chronological order, the purpose being to demonstrate the development in Poe's skill in handling the possibilities of the protagonist position. The stories chosen are "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), and "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846). Whenever pertinent, reference will be made to other Gothic tales in the group. "The Business Man" (1840) will be considered last as an example of Poe's satires.

"MS. Found in a Bottle," one of Poe's earliest tales, was published in 1833. It is an account of a fantastic sea voyage based rather obviously on Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," minus the albatross and the gratuitous moral. The same phantom ship, the same phantom mariners, the same vast storm, the same spellbound narrator are all swallowed up by a stupendous whirlpool located at the South Pole. Only the bottle survives.

Poe's most pressing problem in this story is, of course, to invest bizarre and incredible events with an air of reality and make them acceptable to the reader. This he attempts to do by using the first-person narrator as protagonist and by giving him a scientific turn of mind.

Indeed, a strong relish for physical philosophy has, I fear, tinctured my mind with a very common error of this age—I mean the habit of referring occurrences, even the least susceptible of such reference, to the principles of that science. Upon the whole, no person could be less liable than myself to be led away from the severe precincts of truth by the ignes fatui of superstition.²

²Poe's Tales, p. 118.
This story thus becomes the first of a number of Poe's tales to make use of science or a scientific tone to establish the reliability and authority of the narrator. Somewhat the same technique and effect may be found in other stories of this narrator-as-protagonist group, such as "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844) and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845). Many others having nothing to do specifically with science rely upon an intellectually curious and philosophically oriented narrator. Still others, not in the protagonist group, are "Hans Pfaall" (1835), "The Balloon-Hoax" (1844), and "Von Kempelen and His Discovery" (1849).

As a further consideration of plausibility, Poe uses the manuscript and the bottle to allow for the death of his narrator at the catastrophe. Another suggestion implicit in this device is that the narrator takes desperate pains to record and preserve his experience as a contribution to the advancement of human knowledge. He becomes a kind of scientist-explorer-hero—of whom there were several in Poe's day, a sort of pre-astronaut—and gains thereby the reader's approbation and sympathy and thus his respectful attention.

And yet despite these rather elaborate precautionary measures, "MS. Found in a Bottle" is—to the modern reader, even to devotees of Poe—one of its author's least successful efforts, a story which one finds impossible to take seriously or in which to develop an interest. It has seldom been anthologized, and only one or two critics give it more
than passing notice. It might be pertinent to an appreciation of Poe's artistic development to inquire into why this early story is a failure.

Concerning technique, and particularly plausibility, there are several troublesome matters in "MS. Found in a Bottle." Only the most caviling and pragmatic type of reader will want to know how the hero crammed so many pages of foolscap into a little bottle, but it is nonetheless the very kind of small detail that one might expect an analyst like Poe to account for. If an author is going to be as elaborate as Poe is in this story, then he ought to think of everything.

Another problem in plausibility posed by the manuscript device, Poe either overlooked or chose to ignore. When and under what circumstances is all this lucid and polished prose set down? There is something faintly ridiculous in the spectacle of the narrator's undergoing absolutely

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3Richard Wilbur views Poe's "MS. Found in a Bottle," and his others of this type, as a journey from wakefulness to sleep. Wilbur bases his symbolic and allegorical interpretation upon one or two of Poe's remarks concerning that twilight condition of the mind just before deep sleep when the powers of imagination are released and go zooming beyond the bounds of reason. The voyage, to Wilbur, represents this harrowing progress which is finally consummated in the gigantic, remorseless whirlpool of sleep and forgetfulness. The feeling of helplessness, so often characteristic to Wilbur of the dreamer in his imaginative world, and the mind's unwillingness to submit to oblivion constitute the horror of the trip in "MS. Found in a Bottle." This interpretation, while fanciful and original, seems to be merely a hunt for symbols. Wilbur, Major Writers of America, 1, 379.
hair-raising ghostly visitations, viewing awesome natural phenomena, and then rushing immediately to his writing desk to speculate and report. The amount of careful, first-rate composition turned out under such stress, even by the most resolute scientist, defies the imagination of reader and critic alike. Poe, however, is not in bad company here. One can recall Hamlet bawling out for tablets right after he has talked with his father's ghost, or Pamela scrambling away from near-rapes to write ten-page letters that read like little short stories. Be it said to Poe's credit that his narrator's bursts of composition become shorter, a bit more emotional, and a bit less coherent toward the last when the deep is about towhelm him over.

A matter of even greater moment to the average reader is the inordinate amount of purely factual and, in one sense, inoperative detail dragged into the story. Whether Poe intended all of the nautical information to verify the observational powers of his narrator or whether he intended it to establish the reality of the impossible events, it has the effect of contrasting with and even breaking into the unavoidable air of fancy which enshrouds the supernatural happenings. In other words, this story lacks the unity of tone which Poe himself later insisted to be necessary to the short story.

Taking a broader view of the author and his works, one can speculate that Poe had perhaps not yet come to realize
that his most successful and memorable effects in first-
person protagonist narration were to be found in his probing
of the more psychological abnormalities and complexities.
"MS. Found in a Bottle" concerns itself primarily with
exterior phenomena, not interior. Poe's descriptive powers,
as great as they were from the start, hardly suffice to
carry the burden of the unreal events. Poe, unlike Coleridge
in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," insists upon the reality,
the actuality, of something that even a child can recognize
as pure imagination. This is Poe's most damaging mistake in
"MS. Found in a Bottle."

To the average reader, perhaps the most impressive tales
in the protagonist-as-narrator group are those which deal
with twisted minds and desperate psychoses.⁴ Some of Poe's
most renowned tales fit into this category; and, of course,
the protagonist's viewpoint ideally suits the subject.⁵ "The
Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) provides a good example of a semi-
madman who believes himself sane and who tries to convince
the reader likewise:

True!--nervous--very, very dreadfully nervous
I had been and am; but why will you say that I
am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses--
not destroyed--not dulled them. Above all was
the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things

⁴Vincent Buranelli, Edgar Allan Poe (New York, 1961),
p. 67.

⁵Such stories as "Berenice," "Ligeia," "The Black Cat,"
and "William Wilson."
in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.6

Here the last sentence alerts the reader to the fact that he may be listening to a madman; but as the story proceeds with great vividness and vigor, the impression of madness becomes less noticeable.7 In this case, one may feel that Poe's knowledge of mental disease, as known today, is less sound than his instinct for literary effect. On the other hand, in the process of the narration, in the reliving of the murder the narrator begins to lose his calm and toward the end almost dramatizes the scene. The heartbeats he heard, and still hears, are heard by him alone; they are the product of a suffering and guilty conscience, anticipating such fictional delinquents as Dostoevski's more fully and more carefully drawn Raskolnikov. Granted that Poe may have been more interested in fear than in morality, his rendition of a tortured and guilty soul is perhaps close to the truth in that it de-emphasizes the moral element and stresses the fear. When the reader closes Poe's work and looks around at reassuring, familiar objects, he will say to himself, "Here I am in this lovely present, of sound body and mind." The satisfaction in this observation may not be quite so

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6Poe's Tales, p. 303.

deep as that involved in contemplating the moral tragedies of fictional characters but it is pleasant enough for most.  

"The Tell-Tale Heart" is presented to the reader as a kind of oral confession. Poe has four other stories similar in technique: "Morella," "Why the Little Frenchman Wears his Hand in a Sling," "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Cask of Amontillado."

When the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" replies to someone--a police investigator, newspaper reporter, doctor, or lawyer--who seems to question the teller's sanity, Poe subtly suggests the narrator's motive and the situation in which he is speaking:

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But with what caution--with what foresight--with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.

Here, at the very outset, the reader understands that the narrator has committed a murder and that he is interested more in proving himself sane and clever than in hiding his crime. His moral obtundity gives him away, and all his protestations serve only to convince his hearers that they are observing an irrational and diseased mind capable of appalling cruelty. At the same time, the narrator's

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9Poe's Tales, p. 303.

obsessed fear that he is losing his mind and his desperate attempt to defend himself indicate a kind of subconscious suffering and remorse which work on the reader's imagination to produce both horror and pity.

This mysterious, unrecognized, and uncontrollable mental force operates upon all the oral-narrator protagonists who are criminals.\textsuperscript{11} The speakers in these other stories, however, reveal themselves in different ways: some unwittingly, as in "The Imp of the Perverse"; intentionally, as in "William Wilson"; some to convince the reader that they were victimized, as in "The Black Cat"; and some to impress the reader with their superior endowments, as in "The Cask of Amontillado." In each case both the irony and the pathos affect the reader as he listens to, or reads about, a character defensively appealing for acceptance.

Poe seems to have made a conscious effort in "The Tell-Tale Heart" to suit the language to his narrator's abnormal mental condition.\textsuperscript{12} The narrator speaks, especially toward the last, in such, short, choppy, broken, and sometimes obscure sentences that the careful reader may wonder how a

\textsuperscript{11}"William Wilson" and "The Imp of the Perverse" also have narrators who killed a conscience which subconsciously continues both to accuse them and to testify against them.

\textsuperscript{12}In 1845, Poe made the following remark about the use of language in a fantastic tale:
"The fantastic in itself . . . --phantasm--may be materially furthered in its development by the quaint in phraseology:--a proposition which any moralist may examine at his leisure for himself."
Works, XII, 6.
person so unbalanced can tell such a coherent story. One can momentarily glimpse Poe arranging the wires and setting the trap. This impression, however, with most readers is likely to be quite fleeting if experienced at all. It is not hard to believe that a person's obsessive concern for one matter may render him oblivious to other more important considerations.

To the person pondering this story carefully, a troublesome ambiguity arises about the narrator himself, an ambiguity that concerns the effect intended by the author. Poe indicates in the first paragraph that his narrator is ill. But how ill? And what is the disease? If he has committed murder as the result of a purely pathological condition, then he deserves the sympathy and understanding due the mental patient who does not realize the enormity of his crime or even know that he has committed a crime. The reader's repulsion then becomes a physical matter concerning the observable effect of the narrator's action on the victim.

But Poe's narrator in this story also had planned the crime for a week in advance and also insists upon his sanity. He tells in detail and with really artistic gusto how he perpetrated his crime; he even savors his discovery and arrest. Is he, then, a cold-blooded amoral monster like the principals in Truman Capote's In Cold Blood? Or is he a

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13Robert S. Dowst, The Technique of Fiction Writing (Franklin, Ohio, 1921), p. 92.
person who knows subconsciously the moral implications of what he has done and who not only expects to be punished but in a strange, masochistic way wants to be punished? The tell-tale heartbeats deafen him to reality, both because he is afraid of the police and because he is afraid of damnation in hell, for he says, "I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell." Poe's thesis seems definitely to be that murder will out somehow; if in no other way, then from the very soul of the murderer. Moral: do not commit murder unless you want punishment. Perhaps too much has been made of Poe's well-known proclamation against morality in art.

One possible objection to this story is that it leaves little to the imagination. The narrator's gloating reconstruction of his crime includes both his acts and feelings, and gives a very vivid description of a person's being waked up alone in a dark room by some unaccustomed sound and his nerve wracked waiting for the possibly sinister sound to be repeated. When the narrator gives way to his deep-seated psychotic impulse to talk his crime out to a sympathetic listener, he does not leave much to implication. As has been pointed out, the only question left in the reader's mind is "How crazy is this man?" Or, "Will I unwittingly reveal some of my secret sins the way this character does his?"

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"The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), written late in Poe's career, has long been acclaimed as one of its author's masterpieces, "a . . . perfect embodiment of all the principles of short-story writing Poe had taught the world."15 Here an old man tells how fifty years ago he avenged insults, either real or fancied, by luring his abuser into the catacombs and wine vaults beneath his ancestral mansion and then by wowing him up to die. Both the subject and the method in this tale are similar to those in "The Tell-Tale Heart." Both stories involve brutal murders and both have narrators acting under strange but not fully explained compulsion to describe and relive their crimes.

The ironical effect in "The Cask of Amontillado," however, is both sharper and more pervasive; it shows, without question, Poe's very considerable development in technique and sophistication. Montresor, the old narrator, quite obviously intends to impress his listener favorably. He recounts his exploit of fifty years ago with relish; with a strange mixture of unconcealed pride and disgusting, truckling humility; and, above all, with an eye to histrionic effect that doubly underscores: the cold, clever calculation with which he went about securing revenge. The manner of telling operates as strongly upon the reader as the story

itself and in perfect harmony with it.\textsuperscript{16} The pervasive irony lies in the fact that Montresor is creating upon his listener (or the reader) exactly the opposite effect from that which he apparently intends to produce and thinks he is producing.

As a narrator, Montresor does something else which not many of Poe's narrators do. He dramatizes the story he tells. There is conversation in which he seems to mimic Fortunato's manner and tone of voice and in which he acts out his own part in the scene, too. He makes the interplay of feeling between himself and his victim come to life before the reader's eyes. He is the most skillful and interesting of all Poe's fictional storytellers, and his art marks the advance of Poe's. This story reads aloud better than any other Poe story and has been made into an excellent recording.

Poe's economy in "The Cask of Amontillado" has been justly praised. At this stage in his career Poe had learned that most of his readers liked to be "gulled,"\textsuperscript{17} as he called it, by an author. Consequently, little attention is paid to verisimilitude and plausibility in "The Cask of Amontillado." The protagonist-narrator simply acts and talks as if he could not even conceive of anyone's questioning.


\textsuperscript{17}Works, XV, 128.
his veracity, and no one does. Poe thus cuts away much ponderous, obtrusive detail about the narrator and his reputation and increases the pace and concentration of the narrative.

Poe's effective use of contrast and symbol have also been commented upon by numerous critics and scholars. In fact, the lavish praise bestowed upon this piece as a flawless work of art has challenged students of the short story to find fault in it, no matter how minute. One critic, for example, objects to a possible ambiguity in Montresor's nationality—whether he was French or Italian. Another doubts that Fortunato realizes that he is being punished by a Catholic for being a mason. Still another sees the story as a dubious Christian allegory in which Fortunato is a Christ figure and Montresor is a kind of wandering Jew. A fourth suggests that ironically Poe is telling of Fortunato's revenge on Montresor. Some of these critical fulminations are as bizarre as anything Poe himself could ever have imagined.

18Allen Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," Modern Literary Criticism, edited by Irving Howe (Boston, 1955), pp. 262-263.


20Marvin Felheim, "'The Cask of Amontillado'," Notes and Queries, CXCIX (October, 1954), 447-448.

21Donald Pearce, "'The Cask of Amontillado'," Notes and Queries, CXCIX (October, 1954), 448.

But there is one point of psychological realism, of verisimilitude, upon which this story can be questioned, and this point has to do with the difficult problem of characterizing the narrator and his listener. Poe introduces the fact that Montresor committed the crime fifty years ago and is telling the story as an old man. In a way, his age makes his cold, gloating, neurotic manner even more horrible; however, the very vividness and gusto of his story makes him appear to be suffering, at the moment of telling, from the paranoia that gripped him half a century earlier. The reader, if he regards the narrator thoughtfully, cannot help wondering whether this paranoid state has continued unabated for fifty years after the chief cause has been removed and whether, if it has been continuous, other dire—perhaps even direr—activity unmentioned by the author has been the result. In other words, is "The Cask of Amontillado" only an early instance of the narrator's frightful obsession?

There is also the question of what motivates the old narrator, after so many years of silence, to reveal his crime. Poe suggests an answer, but the suggestion is so faint as to have gone unnoticed by even those explicators with microscopic minds. Montresor, in the second sentence of the story, says directly to his listener, "You who so well know the nature of my soul [Italics mine], will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat." The specific listener, then, is someone rather close to Montresor, someone
who knows him well. Since family pride is a great matter with Montresor, the listener could be a member of his family. But Montresor refers specifically to his soul and winds up his story with a religious benediction. The enclosing framework of the tale, then, suggests that the monologue is a confession and that the listener is a father confessor. The principal irony in this interpretation is that what may have been intended as humble penitence turns out to be unrepentant arrogance, which will seal the fate of Montresor's soul just as surely as he has sealed up Fortunato's body.

Regardless of this ambiguity and regardless of the interpretation put upon the story, it is the contention of this study that Poe's sacrifice of laborious detail establishing verisimilitude is more than compensated for by the gain in dramatic intensity and in reader participation. There can be little doubt that Poe purposely remains vague on some points in order to stimulate the reader's imagination instead of surfeiting it with detail. "The Cask of Amontillado" remains all that its most favorable critics have claimed it to be.

The thirty-two stories with protagonist-narrators embody a group of eleven pieces which the student and admirer of Poe would willingly pass over without notice. These are the satires. Though Poe was praised in his own day for his ability in this mode, satire was never his forte. The very
clarity which J. K. Paulding and others admired then seems today mere heavy-handedness and somewhat unrelieved ill-temper. The question thus arises whether Poe's failure was a matter of technique or a matter of temperament.

A brief look at one of the satires may provide clues to the answer. A little sketch entitled "The Business Man" (1840) has been chosen because it prefigures the long and bitter battle which twentieth century artists and savants have waged against the business world that dominates them just as it dominated Poe. It is worth remarking that the sub-title ("Method is the soul of business.--Old Saying") seems to indicate that Poe's main purpose is to mock the idea of the business world that it has a monopoly on method. Yet, "The Business Man" is actually more of a character sketch than the development of an idea or a story. Poe employs exactly the same stance as that he found so effective in his harrowing tales of the warped personality. A narrator who intends to impress the audience with his modesty, his acumen, his tremendous ability, and his phenomenal success reveals instead that he is a pompous, stupid ass, the very opposite of what he conceives himself to be. His modesty is false, his acumen is luck, his tremendous ability is sheer bumbling laziness, and his phenomenal success is

\[23\text{Works, VIII, x-xi.}\\
very cheap indeed. From the standpoint of artistry in technique, Poe insists too much and too early upon his narrator's disability, as the following passages from the first part of the story show:

I am a business man. I am a methodical man. Method is the thing, after all. But there are no people I more heartily despise than your eccentric fools who prate about method without understanding it; attending strictly to its letter, and violating its spirit.

If there is any thing on earth I hate, it is a genius. Your geniuses are all arrant asses--the greater the genius the greater the ass--and to this rule there is no exception whatever.

Now I am not in any respect a genius, but a regular business man. My day-book and ledger will evince this in a minute. They are well kept, though I say it myself; and, in my general habits of accuracy and punctuality, I am not to be beat by a clock.

Ten o'clock found me in some fashionable promenade or other place of public amusement. The precise regularity with which I turned my handsome person about, so as to bring successively into view every portion of the suit upon my back, was the admiration of all the knowing men in the trade.25

In the meantime the narrator has told how he was dropped on his head as an infant and how this accident favorably affected his success in business.

In addition to lack of subtlety in delineation, Poe permits a note of personal bitterness to vitiate and limit the

25Poe's Tales, pp. 413-415.
effect of the satire. The modern reader is reminded forcibly of Poe's long standing quarrel with his adoptive father, Mr. John Allan, a business man who tried to make his son go into business and who disinherited him when he refused. The story suffers badly also for want of incident and scene which the obtuse narrator summarizes in the dullest kind of way. Here Poe certainly lets his satirical purpose interfere with his artistic integrity. Neither the clever allegorical names (Peter Proffit, the narrator; Messrs. Cut and Comeagain, Merchant Tailors) nor the amusing entries in the business man's "day-book and ledger" relieve the general inefficacy of the story. Poe temperamentally seems to have been inclined to deal more with the creatures of his imagination than with the foibles of society generally; hence, his satires lack gusto and conviction.

Nevertheless, in looking back over all the thirty-two tales in which the narrator is the protagonist, the student cannot help being impressed by the extent to which Poe improved in handling this point of view in the imaginative works, which he valued the most. The laborious, creaky exposition in early tales like "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833), "Berenice" (1835), "Morella" (1835), has disappeared, and the later stories tend to move rapidly and dramatically for the reader on two levels of interest in a manner that compares favorably with the art of any later practitioner.

CHAPTER IV

THE NARRATOR AS MINOR CHARACTER

A minor character tells about the protagonist in fifteen of Poe's short stories. Critics rate these pieces among the most impressive and successful of their author's fiction. All but one story are tales of ratiocination—a type which Poe found very intriguing and congenial to his talents. With some justice, Poe can be called the founder of the modern detective story, and no one has materially improved upon the technique demonstrated in such famous accounts as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Gold Bug," and "The Purloined Letter." The influence of these compositions is apparent today in the popularity of hero-spies and super secret agents, such as James Bond. The reader derives his pleasure from marveling at someone who is able to overcome all obstacles, unravel the most profound mysteries, and keep poised and alert in the most difficult situations. Also an appeal lies in the solution of an enigma, a puzzle, which requires intellectual acumen and observational prowess far above the ordinary.

\footnote{A chronological list of these stories is provided in Appendix II.}
Concerning narrative stance, it is to Poe's credit that he perceived the value of using a minor actor as narrator in presenting his detectives and ratiocinators to the reader. These men have extraordinary analytical power which they themselves cannot talk about without appearing either conceited or laden with false modesty. Poe's indirect method of presenting his super-detectives is a mark of his artistic genius.

The mechanics of narrating through a minor character are not so simple or so obvious as they might appear. There are both advantages and difficulties in using the first-person narrator as someone who is not the central character in a story, especially in maintaining plausibility and acceptance for the narration. Here again, as in the narrator-as-protagonist tales, it is easier to examine the successful result of Poe's method than it is to ferret out difficulties overcome or not overcome.

The main benefit to be obtained in this kind of narration is, as has been said, that it avoids the difficulty of having a hero relate his superior intelligence and his successful exploits. At the same time, it provides the author with all of the advantages in plausibility derivable from an on-the-spot participant in hard to credit action. The mental feats of the protagonist would often be hard to accept unless someone was there to witness them; thus, the protagonist gains authenticity from being presented by another participant in the story.
An important, and sometimes crippling, limitation of this method is that the main character can be seen only from the outside. A minor character cannot enter the mind of the main character and tell exactly what he is thinking and feeling—that is, not with any certainty or reliability. In stories where understanding of complex emotional states and intensity of feeling are vital to the effect, the minor character is at great disadvantage. Poe, it may be observed, is very careful to keep his protagonist cool and calm, and to direct the interest of the reader toward rationality rather than emotionality.²

Another danger for the author using the viewpoint of a minor character is the characterization of this narrator. He has to be given certain traits, but the author has to be careful that these do not overshadow or detract from the man whose story is being told. It is very easy for the generous admiration and humble attitude of the minor character to contrast with hauteur, impatience, or cool confidence of the mental giant whom he is describing, and this contrast will work to the detriment of the protagonist as a person worthy of the reader's sympathy and attention. There is a danger that the reader will know and like the minor character better than the major character.

One of the lesser, but sometimes troublesome, problems in first-person narration by an onlooker is in getting the

²Carolyn Wells, The Technique of the Mystery Story (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1913), p. 63.
narrator in a position to witness what he has to tell about. This positioning must be done carefully so as not to throw doubts upon the narrator's character and reliability. The narrator's presence at a scene must be probable and possible, but too much time spent on getting him placed will distract the reader's interest in the actions of the protagonist. The author, too, must be careful not to make his narrator a Peeping Tom.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty inherent in the minor character's point of view is keeping a balance between explanation and incident. Americans have long been recognized as how-to-do-it or how-it-was-done people by their own authors, such as Melville in *Moby Dick* and Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*. They will take more good, clear explanation than almost any other national group; but explanations, even of baffling crimes, can become in fiction too detailed and too uninterrupted. For example, Poe, in "The Mystery of Marie Roget," pushes the reader's patience a little far, and the story dies a kind of lingering death in the long explanation at the last.

Since the stories in this group were composed relatively late in Poe's career and are themselves indications of Poe's development as an artist, two have been chosen for specific study simply as examples of the skill involved rather than the development: "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Purloined Letter." Where applicable, this discussion
will note difficulties overcome or not overcome in some of
the other tales in the group.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) takes a place
in Poe's fiction alongside "The Cask of Amontillado" as an
almost perfect example of Poe's artistry. It has been
anthologized and written about more than any other single
work by Poe, with the possible exception of "The Raven," and
it seems supererogation to recall at length the story of the
suffering and death of a morbid, neurotic character bordering
on insanity.

Roderick Usher seems out of place in a group with pro-
tagonists like Dupin and Legrand; he is more like the
tormented narrators of "The Tell-Tale Heart," "Legeia," and
"The Black Cat." One wonders why he did not tell his own
story and why this story is generally considered Poe's most
effective treatment of madness. How is it that the suffer-
ing undergone by Usher, which is both mental and emotional,
can be experienced so memorably through an onlooker?

Poe, in using a minor character as narrator, achieves
two effects which appeal to most readers. First, the

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3If Richard Wilbur's allegorical interpretation is
correct, then the puzzling aspect of horror as the dominant
atmosphere of the story is explained. Wilbur says,
"'The Fall of the House of Usher' is a journey into the
depths of self . . . a dream of the narrator . . . Roderick
Usher, then, is a part of the narrator's self, which the
narrator reaches by way of reverie."
Richard Wilbur, The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe, edited
position is more objective. The reader is asked to observe rather than to participate in the feverish activities of a disordered mind. He is invited to use his imagination fully along with the narrator to fill in gaps and gropings. He is kept a little bit more removed from the unpleasant subject of the tale, which some critics believe to be incest as well as madness. A Most of all, he is in a better position to experience both the horror and considered sympathy that madness should properly evoke. The reader may get a little too close to the narrator-protagonists who are madmen; he is too shocked, fascinated and horrified to be properly sympathetic. At no time, however, does the reader get the impression that Usher is a monster of depravity; on the contrary, through participation in the solicitude and sympathy of the friendly narrator, the reader tends to develop both fear and pity in equal measure. The tale is both fearsome and sorrowful; something in one's better nature is stirred. And this may be the reason why "The Fall of the House of Usher," despite all its Gothic claptrap, remains Poe's most popular story with all kinds of readers.

The main problem of the author in this tale is to expose the inner torture of his protagonist, whom he describes as a

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very reserved man. This he does by descriptive suggestion: Usher's nervous mannerisms, his many protestations of fear and anguish, his literary interests and endeavors, the wildness and the beauty of his fancy, as evidenced in his music and in his poetry, and the depth of his melancholic despair. Usher is the romantic, Byronic, and Poesque hero incarnate. Mad, yes. But beautifully, exotically so. No little part of this tremendous effect is due to Poe's skillful overcoming of one of the major disadvantages of his method.

"The Purloined Letter" (1845), a gem among Poe's masterly detective stories, is almost as well-known and admired as "The Fall of the House of Usher." Vincent Buranelli has done such a thorough and sensible job of analyzing Poe's method in this type of tale⁶ that it seems hardly necessary to do more than point out a few touches not specifically mentioned in Buranelli's book and in other studies.

⁶Buranelli sums up Poe's protagonist thus:
"Dupin wields the imaginative perception of meaningful symmetries that Poe says elsewhere is the key to both science and art. Intuition, acting amid a welter of clues, sets aside the trivia and fastens on a structure that emerges from putting the essential facts together. Then the intelligence may go to work in a more ordinary way, proving by deduction and induction that the solution thus arrived at is the true one—that the man apprehended is indeed the criminal in the case.

"What is needed is the imagination of the poet and the reasoning power of the mathematician. The thief of 'The Purloined Letter' successfully hides the letter from the police because he is both a poet and a mathematician. Dupin is able to find it because he too is both a poet and a mathematician."

Buranelli, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 67.
It is, in this latter respect, the minor character and his manner that need to be scrutinized. For one thing, Poe immediately establishes the unusual rapport that exists between the narrator and the hero, C. Auguste Dupin. They sit together in Dupin's library for one hour in "profound silence," contemplating murders and mysteries; at least, this is what the narrator says he was thinking about. Such incredibly extended mental communion ought to be sufficient warrant for the kind of oneness that would render the narrator a reasonably reliable informant on matters pertaining to Dupin's genius.

The narrator's next step is to acquaint the reader with the ineptitude of the police. This he does dramatically when the Prefect enters and, by his remarks, demonstrates his lack of acumen and his inferiority to Dupin. During this scene, Dupin remains impeccably polite, more so than the narrator himself, who demands rather gruffly that the Prefect "Be a little more explicit." This point needs to be made in order to keep the reader's sympathies entirely in the right place. Later, Dupin undoubtedly gets a bit sarcastic with the chief, but his sarcasm has a humorous and not unkindly aspect that does nothing to derogate the detective's character. The first seven pages of the story are developed by conversation which is replete with wit, irony, and paradox.

7Poe's Tales, p. 209.
Then, Dupin hands the Prefect the letter he has sought by tearing through the premises of the man who stole it. The narrator expresses his utter astonishment and awe, and then devotes the rest of the tale to the conversation between him and Dupin about how Dupin found the letter. In actuality, this story is like a little play in which a very interesting scheme is described. The narrator here does very little more than report verbatim his conversations, his admiration, and his astonishment, all of which are well accounted for. One of the better features of the tale is the cleverness with which Poe makes Dupin's powers and good will apparent through conversation. The reader sees and hears him as much as he sees and hears the narrator, who is almost forgotten.

Here again, as in "The Cask of Amontillado," it seems futile to cavil at the sacrifice of verisimilitude implicit in this dramatic method. One can ask, of course, how a narrator could reconstruct such lengthy conversation—the story is fifteen pages long—with such exactitude and such suspense. As in "The Cask of Amontillado," Poe does not bother much about establishing the verisimilitude of either his narrator, his motive for telling the story, or his concept of the listener. Poe spends his efforts wisely on the way his characters' words make them come to life, and he
depends upon the reader to overlook the lack of full information on all points. 8

Poe's interest in cryptography and puzzles is put to
good use in stories like "The Gold-Bug" and "Mystification"
and needs no further comment here. It is, actually, in the
detective stories that he seems at his mature best.

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8 It is worth noting that Poe felt that a mystery story should not trick the reader unfairly:
"The design of mystery, however, being once determined upon by an author, it becomes imperative, first, that no undue or inartistical means be employed to conceal the secret of the plot; and, secondly, that the secret be well kept." Works, XI, 51.
CHAPTER V

OBSERVER AND MULTIPLE NARRATORS

The remaining sixteen stories that make up the total of Poe's first-person short fiction fall into two general categories not covered precisely in the preceding chapters of this study. First, there are nine stories in which the narrator is an observer—one who takes no part in the story, who is completely unspecified, and who addresses the reader in a vaguely authorial fashion. In fact, this narrator-observer very much resembles the third-person author who limits his omniscience and tells only what he sees or hears. The reader of this type of story accepts the gambit that Poe is speaking in his proper person without any disguise whatsoever.

The convention of the first-person author-narrator is an expedient which permits the easy authorial intrusion so dear to the heart of many eighteenth and nineteenth century fictionists. This observing and commenting author engages in direct and intimate address to the reader and establishes a warm and sympathetic relationship with him. Also, this point of view enables the author to guide the reader gently along through complicated material and to pause and talk

1A chronological list of these stories can be found in Appendix III.
about characters and events to make certain that the reader is not getting the wrong impression. Furthermore, from this position the author can at will inject didactic statements of personal benefit to the reader's moral rectitude.

Although intimacy and didacticism were common in Romantic and Victorian fiction, Poe carefully avoids becoming intimate with his readers and he refuses to moralize. It may be wondered, then, why Poe used this intrusive authorial "I" at all. One reason is he felt that variety in method and, especially, tone were necessary in fiction. The observer as narrator and the multiple narrators afforded him two additional positions for his first person avatar. Two of the first five of Poe's stories in 1832, adopt this stance: "Metzengerstein" and "Bon-Bon."

In the first of these two tales, Poe composes a little first-person essay of two paragraphs, quite philosophical in tone, to impress the reader with the vast erudition of his narrator (who in this instance is probably Poe) and to throw out with elaborate carelessness a casual mention of such a mysterious subject as metempsychosis. Thereafter, this narrator disappears and is never heard from again, but a certain cultivated tone of voice has been set and is maintained throughout. Poe seems to have been acutely aware, from the

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2"Four Beasts in One" is an exception. Here the observer-narrator acts as a guide who speaks directly to the reader and pretends to take him bodily back through time and space to the locale of the story.
very first, of the importance of this tone. In "Metzengerstein" the tone, almost without assistance from other elements, operates on the reader to induce acceptance of a completely improbable Gothic tale straight out of Germany.

Respecting the observer-narrator, then, Poe must have employed this narrative position because of the mobility that it affords the speaker. There is no difficulty in positioning an observer in different places. Also, his movement does not detract from the influence of his narration on the reader. The question of plausibility presents little concern since the author-narrator has clearly fashioned his story into a fable. There is no specific time or place for the setting; consequently, the narrator can proceed in the "once upon a time" tradition of fairy tales.

There are several possible reasons why Poe did not continue to use the point of view of an observer. Poe was an actor, or at least he had acting in his blood. It may have been natural for him to pose, to imagine himself as someone else. If so, the author-observer point of view would place upon his histrionic tendency restrictions which he found annoying. All this is, of course, speculation. It is more documentable both that Poe had begun to grow disenchanted with the extensive authorial commentary in fiction and that he liked to think of himself as an innovator, an original. By 1846, he was complaining about indiscriminate authorial
commentary. Whatever the reason, Poe, as Mooney suggests, saw the value of "a technique that would require the reader to discover for himself where the meaning lies"; this technique excludes the personal author from the story material.

"The Masque of the Red Death" (1842) is probably the best known of Poe's stories recounted by an observer. Here Poe has made vast strides from "Metzengerstein" (1832) with its rather loose and verbose narration to the "salient compression of 'The Masque of the Red Death,' in which very little fact and information are given but in which the tone and movement are all."6

3Works, XVI, 104.


5In an unpublished master's thesis, Edna Rasco states that neither "Metzengerstein" nor "The Masque of the Red Death" are in first person. Nevertheless, the opening paragraph alone of "Metzengerstein" has four "I's" in it, and "The Masque of the Red Death" contains such expressions as "let me tell of the rooms," "as I have told," and "as I have painted." Edna Earle Rasco, "The Technique of Effect," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1941, p. 11. In another unpublished master's thesis, somewhat more attention is given to the manner of presentation in Poe's stories--three pages--but there is still no indication that Poe wrote so much of his fiction in first person, and there is no more than a cursory glance devoted to the technique of narrative perspective in Poe's tales. LaCola Lu Hanks, "The Narrative Art of Edgar Allan Poe," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1939, pp. 57-59.

6As is usually the case with Poe's critics, Edward H. Davidson makes this observation without reflecting that one of the reasons why the earlier story is not as good as the later one is that Poe had not yet either recognized or controlled the dangers of first person narration. Davidson, p. 154.
Despite Poe's dislike of allegory, this story is an allegory in which a Prince and his court seclude themselves in a castellated abbey to avoid a plague. Here they conduct spectacular revels. Despite their selfish precautions, death enters and destroys them. The Prince symbolizes the false sense of security which men have when they are prosperous, and the Red Death personifies an inexorable fate which strikes men down in their pride. The few intrusions of an "I" narrator, or Poe, into this story makes the impression more immediate and urgent.

Mention should also be made of "Hop-Frog" (1849)—a manuscript which Poe finished on Wednesday, February 7, 1849, in the year of his death. It is often overlooked even though it is the last significant tale of the grotesque which Poe wrote. The point of view in "Hop-Frog" is interesting because Poe employs an observer with whom he cannot identify as author and who, in keeping with the tale, carries the story along in a bantering tone of voice, quite colloquial and discursive. This tone underscores by contrast

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7In a letter to Annie L. Richmond, a close friend from New York, dated Thursday, February 8, 1849, Poe said, "The 5 [sic] prose pages I finished yesterday are called--what do you think?--I am sure you will never guess--'Hop-Frog'! Only think of you Eddy writing a story with such a name as 'Hop-Frog'! You would never guess the subject (which is a terrible one) from the title, I am sure." Edgar Allan Poe, The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, edited by John Ward Ostrom, Vol. II of 2 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948), p. 425.

8Only "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," "X-ing a Paragraph," and "Landor's Cottage" come after it.
the grim horror of the cruelty, which as one critic has asserted, is too extravagant to be believed.9

The last group of Poe's short stories consists of seven tales in which multiple narrators are employed.10 These framework, or Chinese-box, fictions are among the most sophisticated type of first-person narration which an author can attempt.11 The story within a story requires the author to present his fictional world through two or more narrators rather than through only one, thus increasing the advantages and difficulties of the other narrative stances, plus creating new benefits and dangers.

The first narrator provides a filter through which the second narrator, usually a protagonist, presents the main tale with purity and without interruption.12 Then, the story may either be concluded by the first narrator, sometimes called the editor--as in "Hans Pfaall," "Silence--A Fable," "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," "The Balloon-Hoax," and "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade." The framework, in effect, is closed. Sometimes, the second narrator may end without the reappearance of the first narrator--as in "A Descent into the Maelström," and "The Oval Portrait."

9Buranelli, p. 76.
10A chronological list of these stories can be found in Appendix IV.
11Hoffman, 335.
The second narrator may present his story in oral or written form. Poe obtains considerable variety by using all these possibilities in his multiple narrator stories.

One possible danger for an author using multiple narrators is that the editorial speaker, or minor narrator, may be given too much space within the story.\(^{13}\) If this happens, the essential point of view is violated and the reader becomes confused as to which narrator is the primary speaker. Consequently, the effect of the real story-teller is lessened. The difficulty confronting the author here is much the same as the one facing him when he uses a minor character as narrator. Poe carefully avoids creating this tension between his narrators in the tales told by two narrators.

"The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall" (1835), the first of this group to be written by Poe, is interesting because the first narrator is an observer who gives an interesting account of a dwarfed humanoid. This creature throws down the letter in which Hans Pfaall tells of his trip to the moon—or the main story. Poe commented at length upon his composition of this story which appeared only a short time before an elaborate newspaper hoax about a trip to the moon. Poe's story appearing in the *Southern Literary Messenger* did not receive the widespread attention of the newspaper hoax, and later, Poe was unjustifiably accused of

\(^{13}\)Hoffman, p. 340.
plagiarism. He proved to the satisfaction of all that his story appeared first. A portion of Poe's remarks follows:

About six months before this occurrence [the "Moon story"] the Harpers had issued an American edition of Sir John Herschel's "Treatise on Astronomy," and I had been much interested in what is there said respecting the possibility of future lunar investigations. The theme excited my fancy, and I longed to give free rein to it in depicting my day-dreams about the scenery of the moon—in short, I longed to write a story embodying these dreams. The obvious difficulty, of course, was that of accounting for the narrator's acquaintance with the satellite; and the equally obvious mode of surmounting the difficulty was the supposition of an extraordinary telescope. I saw at once that the chief interest of such a narrative must depend upon the reader's yielding his credence in some measure as to details of actual fact. . . . I conceived . . . that it would be in vain to attempt giving due verisimilitude to any fiction having the telescope as a basis. Reluctantly, therefore, and only half convinced (believing the public, in fact, more readily gullible than did my friends,) I gave up the idea of imparting very close verisimilitude to what I should write—that is to say, so close as really to deceive. I fell back upon a style half plausible, half bantering, and resolved to give what interest I could to an actual passage from the earth to the moon, describing the lunar scenery as if surveyed and personally examined by the narrator.14

In this passage, the student can recognize the conscious and careful consideration with which Poe approached the art of fiction even early in his career.

"A Descent into the Maelström" (1841) treats the same kind of story material as "MS. Found in a Bottle"—a ship, a violent storm, and a whirlpool. This story, as was

14 Works, XV, 127-128.
previously pointed out, is not very impressive. It lacks verisimilitude on several counts, particularly the character and position of the narrator; it is full of distracting detail; and it has too horrendous a denouement. "A Descent into the Maelstrom" corrects all these deficiencies. In the first place, the device of multiple narrators increases both the credibility and the drama. The second or minor narrator has survived the ordeal and has taken the first narrator out to the edge of a frightening precipice overlooking the water where the whirlpool is located. Here the main narrator, who is also the main character, tells about his terrifying experience and ends his tale on a high-pitched note of horror as he recalls his fear. The description of the whirlpool in this later story magnifies the effect of the narration on the reader. Also, both narrators are plain, seafaring men who are sparing with words and who know the ocean and its treacherousness. The result is gratifying.

See pages 30 through 33 in Chapter III of this thesis.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing investigation, an attempt has been made to assay only one aspect of Edgar Allan Poe's literary technique, his use of the first-person point of view. Little if any attention has been devoted by critics to the fact that all but two of Poe's short stories are written in first person. Undoubtedly, however, Poe selected this perspective with a purpose.

A careful study of Poe's critical works reveals that he was quite concerned with the various aspects of narration, such as unity of tone and effect, focus, plausibility, variety, reader warmth and sympathy, objectivity, imaginative access to the story material, revelation of subjective and psychological mental states, and dramatic irony. Though no systematic study had been made in Poe's time, he must have realized the relative benefits and dangers inherent in first-person narration because his tales reveal an ever increasing proficiency with the convention.

As far as can be determined, Poe's tales have never before been arranged according to the position of their four kinds of narrators: (1) protagonist, (2) minor character, (3) observer, and (4) combinations of the above three. Several rather obvious factors emerge when these four
narrative stances are individually inspected. First, over half of Poe's fiction belongs in the protagonist group, and the most notable feature of these stories is their emphasis upon terror—terror of the soul. Poe must have preferred the discourse of a protagonist because it makes possible this kind of intensely personal revelation and because he himself felt an innate kinship with characters of neurotic and imaginative tendencies. The vivid effect of these tales lies chiefly in their permitting the reader to share emotional experiences with the narrator. The wisdom of Poe's method is borne out by the fact that this large group of stories contains most of the prose fiction upon which Poe's literary and popular reputation principally depends: for example, such thrillers as "MS. Found in a Bottle," "Berenice," "Morella," "Shadow—a Parable," "Ligeia," "William Wilson," "Eleonora," "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," "The Premature Burial," "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," and "The Cask of Amontillado."

Poe evinces definite growth and development in protagonist-narration. For instance, in "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833), one of Poe's earliest tales, the narrator fails to overcome the difficulty of maintaining a proper balance between introspection, or self-analysis, and event. On the other hand, "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), published near the close of Poe's career, contains a narrator who
presents his story material plausibly and keeps a proper relationship between introspection and event.

The most notable feature of the second group of fifteen stories is that they are largely comprised of tales of ratiocination. Here the narrator is an admiring and rather ordinary onlooker or friend of the protagonist. These detective stories have established Poe as the inventor of a new and unique literary type. His success with these tales is beyond question. In works like "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Gold-Bug," and "The Purloined Letter," the intended effect is to stimulate intellectual pleasure for the reader as he witnesses the hero's puzzle-solving. The sole exception in this group is "The Fall of the House of Usher." The change to a minor actor-as-narrator in this story of horror indicates Poe's constant and successful attempts both to vary his narrative positions and to view from every angle the effect on his characters of supernatural and inexplicable phenomena.

The last two groups of nine and seven tales are the observers and the multiple narrators respectively. Although these sections contain such tales as "The Masque of the Red Death" and "A Descent into the Maelstrom," they are mainly significant because they indicate the variety of places from which Poe could view his story material.
The data examined in this study support the conclusion that Poe deliberately chose to tell his stories in the limited first person rather than in the more commonly employed third person with an omniscient author. The unity of effect, the plausibility, the objectivity, and the necessity for interior views of suffering or frightened people all constitute the reasons why Poe must have maintained this method throughout his career. Though limited in scope, his art in handling his chosen method is impressive to anyone who studies it.
APPENDIX I

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE TALES IN WHICH

THE NARRATOR IS THE PROTAGONIST

8. "How to Write a Blackwood Article," 1838.
11. "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," 1840.

APPENDIX II

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE TALES IN WHICH THE NARRATOR IS A MINOR CHARACTER

15. "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," 1849.
APPENDIX III

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE TALES IN WHICH THE NARRATOR
IS AN OBSERVER WHO IS NOT A PART OF THE STORY

2. "Bon-Bon," 1832.
APPENDIX IV

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE TALES IN WHICH FRAMEWORK IS EMPLOYED

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