THE TECHNIQUE OF EFFECT

A STUDY OF POE'S NARRATIVE METHOD

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INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe wrote many kinds of short stories, but they all had some things in common. These traits in common grew out of Poe’s conception of a good short story. His ideal story is well exemplified in several of his works, but the clearest and most concise definitions are found in three of his essays in literary criticism, namely, the "Review of Hawthorne’s Twice-Told Tales," "Tale Writing--Nathaniel Hawthorne," and "The Philosophy of Composition."

Probably the first thing the ordinary person thinks of when he considers Poe’s ideal story is the author’s firm conviction that a single unified effect must be obtained. No one can better express the importance of such an effect than Poe has done himself.

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 outbrining 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 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.¹

¹Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of Hawthorne’s Twice-Told Tales," The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, edited by
The same idea is expressed in "The Philosophy of Composition" in the two paragraphs quoted below:

It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.  

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect. Keeping originality always in view—for he is false to self who ventures to dispense with so obvious and easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, "Of innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?"

Having decided upon the effect to be attained, the author's next problem is to find the method to be used for securing that effect. It may be secured by a combination of events, by tone, or by a combination of the two. If both are used, one is usually allowed to predominate. There may be "ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or...peculiarity both of incident and tone."

If unity of effect is to be secured, the time element must be considered. Complete unity cannot be secured if a production cannot be read at a single sitting, that is, within an hour or an hour and a half. The deepest impression

James A. Harrison (17 vols.), XI, 108. All references to Poe's works made hereafter will be to this edition, which will be abbreviated as Complete Works.

²Complete Works, XIV, 193. ³Ibid., p. 194.

⁴Ibid.
on the mind of the reader is made by the effect which is not too long sustained. In his review of Hawthorne's stories, Poe says that the impressions of the short story are far more successful than those of the ordinary novel. The novel cannot be read at a single sitting; the affairs of the world intervene, and the force of totality is lost. Merely the cessation of reading will destroy the unity. In the tale, on the other hand, the writer is able to carry out his full intention in a short space, and during the time necessary for its reading, the reader's soul is at the complete mercy of the writer. Of course, the story should not go to the opposite extreme, for "extreme brevity will degenerate into epigrammatism." 

A third trait to be desired in a short story is originality. Many of Poe's severest criticisms against other writers are of their lack of originality. Novelty is the element of originality. The sense of the new is a very pleasing emotion to the reader, and anyone who gives him such a sensation is, for him, original. Though some contend that the original writer is unpopular because he is misunderstood, Poe maintains that an author whose work cannot be understood by the masses is not original but peculiar.

6Ibid., p. 107.
or idiosyncratic. The following paragraph not only shows the difference between Poe's conception of true originality and the conception of originality held by others, but states his theory of the best method of securing it.

With the vague opinion that to be original is to be unpopular, I could, indeed, agree, were I to adopt an understanding of originality which, to my surprise, I have known adopted by many who have a right to be called critical. They have limited, in a love for mere words, the literary to the metaphysical originality. They regard as original in letters, only such combinations of thought, of incident, and so forth, as are, in fact, absolutely novel. It is clear, however, not only that it is the novelty of effect alone which is worth consideration, but that this effect is best wrought, for the end of all fictitious composition, pleasure, by shunning rather than by seeking the absolute novelty of combination. Originality, thus understood, tasks and startles the intellect, and so brings into undue action the faculties to which, in the lighter literature, we least appeal. And thus understood, it cannot fail to prove unpopular with the masses, who, seeking in this literature amusement, are positively offended by instruction. But the true originality—true in respect of its purposes—is that which, in bringing out the half-formed, the reluctant, or the unexpressed fancies of mankind, or in exciting the more delicate pulses of the heart's passion, or in giving birth to some universal sentiment or instinct in the embryo, thus combines with the pleasurable effect of apparent novelty, a real egotistic delight.

Many stories have two meanings, an obvious one and an insinuated one. The obvious meaning will nearly always cover the insinuated one, so that often even the most thoughtful person will have difficulty in comprehending the underlying thought. If the novelty is of tone rather than matter, then it may be missed altogether. Thus the intended effect may be

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8 Ibid., pp. 145-146.
wholly new, while the effect produced upon the reader is not original at all.

To summarize, then, the requirements of the model short story as set up by Edgar Allan Poe, it must have a single unified effect, it must be neither too long nor too short, and it must be original. And, since his aim in writing a story is to impress the reader, an author fails to write a good story when he fails in forcing that reader "to receive the impression."\(^9\)

Poe put his theory into practice to such an extent that he soon influenced the writing of short stories in a remarkable degree. A new kind of short story became noticeable throughout this country. Canby says of it:

This new short story was practically an invention of Edgar Allan Poe. By this I do not mean that he created the modern short story out of nothing, and, as the shorter catechism has it, all very good. On the contrary, nearly all the materials, most of the subjects, all the interests, were there; but it was left to him to combine them, or, in other words, to devise a means of telling....His success was the result of the knowledge that an impression made strongly upon the intellect of the reader was the best means of exciting romantic thrills; and of his discovery of the means for conveying this impression through a short story....It was new only in technique.\(^10\)

It is the purpose of this paper to try to show the various methods used by Poe for securing a single unified effect in each of his stories. To facilitate the work, I shall

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 148.

\(^10\)Henry Seidel Canby, A Study of the Short Story, pp. 32-33.
divide his short stories into four groups: stories of effect, stories of ratiocination, stories of pseudo-science, and stories of satire and humor. It is inevitable that the chapters overlap in many instances because some methods are used in more than one type of story. Often a story may be placed in more than one group, since the divisions are so broad. Notwithstanding these difficulties, it is possible to find many methods used by Poe to develop the narrative style, so peculiarly his own, by which he seldom failed to produce a compelling story.
CHAPTER I

STORIES OF EFFECT

Since Poe's one objective was to achieve a single unified effect, we can truthfully call all of his stories "stories of effect." But there is one group of his tales which this term fits so perfectly that we think of them immediately when we think of it. It is of this group alone that Pattee might be speaking when he says, "The sole object of the writer was to create an impression upon his reader: every detail from the first sentence, which sets the pitch, to the final catastrophe, is added to accomplish this end."¹ The effects he sought to achieve were many; the predominating ones are horror, loathing, terror, mystery, and passion. Seldom do we find one of Poe's stories which leaves us with a sense of beauty or pleasure. In fact, Poe says that beauty is the realm of poetry.² Bement tells us that all Poe's tales "were saturated with the atmosphere of either horror, mystery, or beauty."³ Each story has in it a certain effect

¹Fred Lewis Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story, p. 138.

²"For Beauty can be better treated in a poem. Not so with terror, or passion, or horror, or a multitude of such other points." "Review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales," Complete Works, XI, 109.

³Douglas Bement, Weaving the Short Story, p. 11.
which is so carefully worked out that we forget everything else. The value of effect and the lack of value of other elements in Poe's stories are well expressed by Canby.

Modern criticism, in general, seems to be agreed that it is not the characters which are valuable in Poe's stories, except in so far as they reflect Poe's state of mind; or the scenes, except for their beauty; or the thought, except as it explains the story; or the plot, but, rather, just the vivid emotional effects which these narratives make upon the least imaginative readers. In other words, their value is artistic in the most limited sense. But these effects were made possible by technique... Thanks to it, Poe was able to control the products of his superheated imagination, reduce them to order, and make them comprehensible by less intense (and less morbid) imaginations.\(^4\)

Since critics are agreed that it is effect which makes Poe's stories valuable, let us see how that effect is achieved. Canby, in the paragraph quoted above, says that the desired result is the product of technique. He defines this technique as the art of perfect tone and of suspense.\(^5\) But let us go still further and determine, if we can, the methods used to secure perfect tone and suspense. To begin with, he built his plots deliberately. Pattee says that they are built as deliberately as a house is constructed.\(^6\) Poe would sacrifice anything for the desired effect, even truth. He worked with a calculated intellectual purpose; he made deliberate use of art. His outcome is always made

\(^4\)Canby, op. cit., p. 36. \(^5\)Ibid., p. 35. \(^6\)Pattee, op. cit., p. 139.
to appear logical; action or failure to act is shown responsible for the outcome. Campbell says that Poe's success is due to a "gift for casting about startling or improbable incident the illusion of reality."7

Here, then, is the real secret of Poe's method; his improbable incidents are made to appear so real, so vivid, that they become real to the reader at the time of perusal, and their memory lingers with him long after the book is laid aside. It is my purpose here to show the methods by which this "illusion of reality" is secured.

Character portrayal is one of Poe's most important methods. The simplest of all plots is that of character. It is universally acknowledged that Poe was a failure at picturing life as it really is. Campbell expresses the thought of the majority of critics for us.

His characters...are almost without exception without local habitation, and many of them are also without a name; they are virtually all children of the poet's fertile brain. Of them it may not unjustly be said that they are "out of space, out of time." His most distinctive figure is an idealized heroine of rare intellectual accomplishments and of extraordinary beauty....By her side is also an idealized hero, who may in like manner possess remarkable intellectual endowments and lordly bearing, who is possessed of some hallucination or desire for revenge, or is the victim of some mysterious malady or of a passion for strong drink.8

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7Killis Campbell, Poe's Short Stories, p. xv.

8Ibid., p. xix.
In characterization, furthermore, he was, it will inevitably be felt, a failure. Few, if any, of his men and women are convincingly real; few or none of them are in any sense individual; and they are without either variety or flexibility. Some are elaborated at considerable length; and others may appeal to the reader by reason of their ideality or because they shadow forth the poet's character or some striking mood; but most of them are either idealized types, like Ligeia and Eleonora and the Marchesa Aphrodite, or mere wooden figures functioning primarily as machinery for the development of plot or for the unfolding of some idea or situation.\(^9\)

Notwithstanding their unlikeness, Poe's characters are important to his type of stories. They are made to fit the situations and moods for which they are created. Just as the situations lack reality, so do the people who occupy them. Certainly the mood of melancholy and fear of "The Fall of the House of Usher" could not have been attained if the master of the house had been a common, healthy, and cheerful person. Therefore the master had to be made a moody, terrified man. Every word which depicts Usher and his sister helps to deepen the somberness and air of tragedy of the story as a whole, and to prepare the reader for the final destruction of family and home. The painter of "The Oval Portrait" is certainly far from our idea of a common man, but he suits admirably the rôle he is given. He is the personification of such devotion to art that all else is forgotten. Prince Prospero had to be shown as he was in order to make effective the contrast necessary for "The

\(^9\)Ibid., p. xxv.
Mask of the Red Death." Eleonora fits her rôle; her innocence and purity are necessary for the picture of idyllic happiness which introduces "Eleonora."

But regardless of the kind of characters depicted, our desire is to see how they are depicted. How does Poe show us the character needed for a particular effect? Many ways are open to an author who wishes to paint a word picture of people. The most obvious way is to give a direct description, but since most of Poe's stories are written in the first person, this method is seldom used. The nearest approach to it is a description of the character as seen through the eyes of the narrator. Ligeia is so described, and so are Berenice, Madeline, and others. Two examples of such word pictures will suffice, that of Usher and of the Marchesa Aphrodite.

A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely molded chin, speaking in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like

10 The only two stories of those considered here as stories of effect which are not in the first person are "The Mask of the Red Death" and "Metzengerstein."


softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up a countenance not easily to be forgotten.\footnote{Ibid., p. 278.}

She stood alone. Her small, bare, and silvery feet gleamed in the black mirror of marble beneath her. Her hair, not as yet more than half loosened for the night from its ball-room array, clustered, amid a shower of diamonds, round and round her classical head, in curls like those of the young hyacinth. A snowy-white and gauze-like drapery seemed to be nearly the sole covering to her delicate form; but the midsummer and midnight air was hot, sullen, and still, and no motion in the statue-like form itself, stirred even the folds of that raiment of very vapor which hung around it as the heavy marble hangs around Niobe.\footnote{"The Assignation," Complete Works, II, 111.}

More effective than this semi-direct description is Poe’s method of describing someone by showing the effect of that person’s appearance on another. In "Berenice" we find this method used in the following: "They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, the teeth of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died."\footnote{Complete Works, II, 23.}

Two more such selections are the following:

In time the crimson spot settled steadily upon the cheek, and the blue veins upon the pale forehead became prominent; and, one instant my nature melted into pity, but in the next, I met the glance of her meaning eyes, and then my soul sickened and became giddy with the giddiness of one who gazes downward into some dreary and unfathomable abyss.\footnote{"Morella," Complete Works, II, 29.}
Suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age,)--a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Anything even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before. I well remember that my first thought, upon beholding it, was that Tetszech, had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictorial incarnations of the fiend.  

Perry says "The more subtle, the more psychological the particular work of fiction happens to be, the greater becomes the possibilities of this indirect method of character delineation."  

In "The Pit and the Pendulum" we find a third method of character portrayal: the study of a character's behavior under "the particular conditions to which the novelist chooses to subject it." Mental, rather than physical, traits are usually seen in this type of sketch. The actions of the prisoner in the dungeon show us that he is a man who is courageous and resourceful, yet who can experience fear in its most excruciating forms. In "Premature Burial" the hero is also depicted through his thoughts and actions.  

Sometimes a character is shown through the development of his personality. To show this development the past, present, and future of the character must be revealed. This

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18 "The Man of the Crowd," Complete Works, IV, 139.
19 Bliss Perry, A Study of Prose Fiction, p. 104.
20 Ibid., p. 77.
method is used in "The Black Cat." Beginning with his childhood, the hero relates the story of his struggle, a struggle which ends in defeat. Of his early life he says,

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and was never so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure.  

How different this same man has become when he later confesses:

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my favorite haunts, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket.

Much the same development of character is evident in William Wilson. Again the hero paints his own picture by relating step by step the manner in which he reached the lowest depths of degradation. A somewhat similar method is used to depict Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and others. The difference is that the change in Wilson is mental, while the change in the women is physical.

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21 Complete Works, V, 143.  
22 Ibid., p. 145.
Often Poe uses character contrasts to aid in producing a desired atmosphere. Ligeia is the antithesis of "the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevenon, of Tremaine."23 The laughing, happy Berenice is a contrast to her dreamy cousin.24 Child-like Eleonora is unlike her successor, Ermengarde.25 Perhaps most effective of all is the contrast of Prince Prospero and his laughing happy guests to the intangible vision representing the plague.26

Often it is desirable to characterize by telling of habitual actions or seemingly trivial thoughts. It was the actions of the old man which led the narrator to conclude: "This old man...is the type and genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd."27 The king in "Hop Frog" is revealed through constant reference to his cruelty. The constant gnashing of Hop Frog's teeth suggests to us a temper held under control with difficulty. It was the actions of Usher which led his friend to see that he was a man in mortal terror of something.28

Sometimes a peculiar physical feature is made responsible for the action of a story. The teeth of Berenice were

the cause of a hideous crime;\textsuperscript{29} Ligeia's eyes and hair were the unmistakable evidence of her return;\textsuperscript{30} the eye of the old man caused his death;\textsuperscript{31} and Hop Frog's deformity and Trippetta's daintiness were responsible for their being at court.\textsuperscript{32}

Revelation of the working of a character's mind is one of Poe's best modes of characterization. Because most of the stories in this group are told in the first person, nearly all of them use this method to some extent. The method is most effective when the main character is the person relating the story. No better picture of a mad man could be painted than the following:

\begin{quote}
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--nor dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how stealthily--how calmly I can tell you the whole story.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

In "Berenice" there is the same type of mind-searching. The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29}"Berenice," \textit{Complete Works}, II, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{30}"Ligeia," \textit{Complete Works}, II, 266.
\item \textsuperscript{31}"The Tell-Tale Heart," \textit{Complete Works}, V, 88.
\item \textsuperscript{32}"Hop Frog," \textit{Complete Works}, VI, 217-218.
\item \textsuperscript{33}"The Tell-Tale Heart," \textit{Complete Works}, V, 88.
\end{itemize}
mental wandering of a diseased mind is traced until there stands before us a perfect picture of madness. "The Black Cat," "William Wilson," "Eleonora," and "The Premature Burial" all trace the working of a character's mind.

Occasionally Poe depicts a character by revealing his tastes. William Wilson's character is suggested time and again by his likes and dislikes. Of his life at Oxford he says:

Thither I soon went, the uncalculating vanity of my parents furnishing me with an outfit and annual establishment, which would enable me to indulge at will in the luxury already so dear to my heart,--to vie in profuseness of expenditure with the haughtiest heirs of the wealthiest earldoms in Great Britain.

Excited by such appliances to vice, my constitutional temperament broke forth with redoubled ardor, and I spurned even the common restraints of decency in the mad infatuation of my revels. But it were absurd to pause in the detail of my extravagance. Let it suffice, that among spendthrifts I out-Heroded Herod, and that, giving name to a multitude of novel follies, I added no brief appendix to the long catalogue of vices then usual in the most dissolute university of Europe. The moody, opium-crazed mind of the man in "Ligeia" is clearly seen in the bizarre home he prepared for his bride. In telling the reason for the preparation of such a castle, he gives us an insight into his mind.

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34 This expression is also used to express Prince Prospero's love of luxury. "The Mask of the Red Death," Complete Works, IV, 255.

Yet although the external abbey, with its verdant decay hanging about it, suffered but little alteration, I gave way with a child-like perversity, and perchance to a faint hope of alleviating my sorrows, to a display of regal magnificence within. - For such follies, even in childhood, I had imbibed a taste and now they came back to me as if in the dotage of grief. Alas, I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the tufted carpets of gold! I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams.\textsuperscript{36}

Another example of character revealed by taste is in "The Assignation." Being a man of unlimited means, the lover fitted for himself an unusual apartment which expressed his personality. Admittedly bizarre, the apartment followed not the fashions of the day, but contained its master's own "originality of conception in architecture and upholstery."\textsuperscript{37} In "The Domain of Arnheim," "Landor's Cottage," and "The Landscape Garden," an entirely different type of personality is portrayed through the tastes of the individual. Each of these last mentioned stories pictures for us a quiet, orderly man with an eye for natural beauty, but with also a mania for improving that beauty.

Occasionally Poe shows us a character with no individuality. Such a man is found in "The Pit and the Pendulum." He could be any man. There is no word to tell us his age,

\textsuperscript{36}Complete Works, II, 258.

\textsuperscript{37}Complete Works, II, 117.
size, coloring, tastes, and habits. As mentioned before, we see him through his actions, but through his actions alone, and any man under similar conditions might act as he did.

Regardless of method used to show character, Poe's men and women all have some things in common. They are nearly all people of wealth. If a story is told of a fisherman, that fisherman is a prosperous one. A man may lose his fortune as a result of his own behavior, as in "The Black Cat," but he is rich to begin with. The height of Poe's imagination regarding wealth is reached in "The Landscape Garden" and "The Domain of Arnheim" (the same story with an added section). In these two stories the hero is supposed to have inherited four hundred and fifty million dollars. Wealth is necessary to Poe's characters; were they not wealthy, they could not fit into the situations in which they are placed. Ordinary wealth is not sufficient for creating the atmosphere needed for the extraordinary events related. Poe tells us that contemplation of vast wealth so stuns the mind that we know not what to expect, and knowing not what to expect, we are prepared for anything.

But, for the inconceivable wealth in the possession of the young heir, these objects and all ordinary objects were felt to be inadequate. Recourse was had to figures; and figures but sufficed to confound. It was seen, that even at three per cent., the annual income of the inheritance would amount to no less than

38 Page 13.
thirteen millions and five hundred thousand dollars; which was one million and one hundred and twenty-five thousand per month; or thirty-six thousand, nine hundred and eighty-six per day; or one thousand five hundred and forty-one per hour; or six and twenty dollars for every minute that flew. Thus the usual track of supposition was thoroughly broken up. Men knew not what to imagine. 39

Other examples of great fortunes used in Poe's stories are those of "Metzengerstein," "William Wilson," and "Ligeia."

In addition to financial conditions, Poe's characters are much alike in physical and mental conditions. His men are all ill with some mental disease, his women with some physical disease. His one perfect woman, free from all blemish or disease, is the Marchesa Aphrodite. 40 He uses the illness of the women to further the mental weakness of the men. The death of Eleonora drove her lover mad; 41 Madeline's apparent death was the final blow to her brother's sanity; 42 both Morella 43 and Ligeia 44 made irrevocable impressions on the minds of their husbands at the moment of death. The weakness in the mind of the artist in "The Oval Portrait" was caused by complete devotion to his art, but it resulted in the death of his wife.

Madness is the theme used to produce an effect of horror in many of Poe's stories. Several methods are used to produce this effect. One of the best I have spoken of previously in connection with the development of a character. A man is allowed to express the thoughts of his mind as they arise. His protestations of madness leave us with no doubt that he is insane. Such is the case in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and in "The Black Cat." Often madness is revealed by tracing some disease of the mind. Seldom is the disease given a name but is referred to as the disease. The hero of "Eleonora" admits his madness, but at the same time he defines it in such a manner that it assumes an aspect unlike our usual conception of insanity.

Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not of the loftiest intelligence—whether much that is glorious—whether all that is profound—does not spring from the disease of thought—from moods of mind exalted at the expense of intellect. They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night. In their grey visions they obtain visions of eternity, and thrill, in awaking, to find that they have been upon the verge of some great secret. In snatches, they learn something of the wisdom which is of good, and more of the knowledge which is of evil....We will say, then, that I am mad. I grant, at least, that there are two distinct conditions of my mental existence—the condition of a lucid reason, not to be disputed, and belonging to the memory of events forming the first epoch of my life—and a condition of shadow and doubt, appertaining to the present, and to the recollection of what constitutes the second great era of my being.45

45 Complete Works, IV, 236.
It is this type of madness that Poe utilizes in his stories. The "grey vision" which contains a little good and much that is evil is conducive to the atmosphere or tone of the effect desired.

In "Berenice" another method is used to show madness, the method of picturing the victim sitting for hours or even days, his mind concentrated on one object or idea while everything else sinks into oblivion. The victim of such a malady has moments of lucid thought when he will not admit of insanity. But we are prepared for the final appalling spectacle of a man obsessed with the one idea of obtaining his cousin's teeth by such paragraphs as:

To muse for long unwearied hours with my attention riveted to some frivolous device on the margin, or in the topography of a book; to become absorbed for the better part of a summer's day in a quaint shadow falling upon the tapestry, or upon the door; to lose myself for an entire night in watching the steady flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire; to dream away whole days over the perfume of a flower; to repeat monotonously some common word, until the sound, by dint of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind; to lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of absolute bodily quiescence long and obstinately persevered in;—such were a few of the most common and least pernicious vagaries induced by a condition of the mental faculties, not, indeed, altogether unparalleled, but certainly bidding defiance to anything like analysis or explanation.46

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46Complete Works, II, 19.
Sometimes the madness induced by opium or strong drink suits Poe's purpose better than a diseased mind. The hero of "Ligeia" speaks many times of his addiction to the drug. He tells us several times that he was under the influence of opium when he had the strange illusion that Ligeia returned to life in the dead body of the Lady Rowena. The hero of "The Black Cat" informs us that his cruelty was caused by a "gin-nurtured" madness. Since everyone knows that fantastical things are done under the influence of madness, whether real or drug-inspired, Poe takes advantage of that knowledge to make his stories realistic.

I have said before that most of Poe's women characters and several of the men are possessed of some physical disease. Especially does he make use of the disease of catalepsy to produce his horror stories, for what could be more horrible than to be buried alive? Madeline is a victim of catalepsy (though the disease is unnamed in her case,) and it is her return from a premature burial that forms the climax of the story. 47 Berenice suffered trances which were the cause of her being buried before she died. 48 But it is in "The Premature Burial" that Poe bases his whole effect upon the nature of the disease. Atmosphere for this story

47 "The Fall of the House of Usher," Complete Works, III,

is obtained by relating instance after instance, supposedly true, of people being buried alive because of the close resemblance of the disease to death. That he greatly exaggerates in supposing that doctors are unable to tell the difference does not matter. He makes it seem real to the reader. Having produced the proper atmosphere by many gruesome stories, the hero proceeds to describe himself. He tells us of the gradual advance of the disease, how it finally grows so bad that he avoids strangers for fear he will fall in a trance and be mistaken for dead by them. He tells of his horror of being buried while in a trance and awakening in a grave, he tells of his preparations of a tomb from which he can easily escape if he is so buried. He relates his struggles to regain complete consciousness when awaking after a sleep. Then, after we are fully prepared for it, he tells us that the thing really happened, and the climax is reached as he reveals his thoughts as he lay in what he supposed to be a strange grave. Such a vivid method of portrayal fills us with unutterable horror.

The philosophy of metempsychosis serves as a conveyance for some of Poe's stories of effect. His method of using metempsychosis is to relate his story in such a way as to leave a question in the mind of the reader. The transformation is insinuated, never told as a fact. In "Morella" it is hinted by the abnormal growth, both mentally and physically,
of a child and in the startling resemblance of that child to her dead mother. The hint is strengthened by the revelation that no sign of the mother remained when the child was buried. In "Metzengerstein" the idea is secured through the relation of various coincidences and in hints that the young man was "impressed with the truth of some exciting idea." That the idea is the return of the old man in the form of a horse is suggested by the simultaneous death of the man in the fire, the coming of the horse from the fire, its resemblance to the horse of the tapestry, and the disappearance of the horse from the tapestry. The young man's fear of and determination to master the horse strengthens the conception of the belief. In "Ligeia" the return of a man's first wife in the dead body of his second is seen through his opium dreams. In "The Oval Portrait" there is a somewhat similar thought when the life of a girl goes into the making of her portrait to give it its lifelike appearance.

The portrayal of characters, their weaknesses, struggles, mental and physical characteristics, and their philosophies, is by no means Poe's only method of securing his effect, nor even his best. One of his favorite methods is to arouse the reader's imagination and let it work for him. In "The Pit and the Pendulum" we are never told what is in

49 Complete Works, II, 192.
the pit. In order to arouse horror, Poe does better than
tell us. He suggests the contents by telling us the effect
they had on the prisoner.

I rushed to its deadly brink. I threw my straining
vision below. The glare from the enkindled roof
illumined its inmost recesses. Yet, for a wild
moment, did my spirit refuse to comprehend the mean-
ing of what I saw. At length it forced--it wrestled
its way into my soul--it burned itself in upon my
shuddering reason--Oh! for a voice to speak!--oh!
horror!--oh! any horror but this! With a shriek I
rushed from the margin, and buried my face in my hands--
weeping bitterly. 50

The same method, making suggestions which give the imagination
full play, is used in these lines from "Berenice."

But of that dreary period which intervened I had no
positive--at least no definite comprehension. Yet
its memory was replete with horror--horror more
horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible
from ambiguity. It was a fearful page in the record
of my existence, written all over with dim, and
hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strived
to decipher them, but in vain: while ever and anon,
like the shriek of a departed sound, the shrill and
piercing shriek of a female voice seemed to be ring-
ing in my ears. I had done a deed--what was it? I
asked myself the question aloud, and the whispering
echoes of the chamber answered me "what was it?" 51

Such a challenge to the imagination paints for most people a
picture that mere descriptive words cannot rival.

Much the same effect as the preceding is obtained by
having a character strive to solve an unanswerable question.
An example of this may be found in "The Fall of the House of
Usher." Upon arriving at the house, the guest's attention
is caught and held by some indefinable sensation.

What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. 52

A similar example is found in "The Oval Portrait." There the observer tries to account for the realistic appearance of the portrait. That he finally finds the answer does not detract from the effectiveness of the searching inquiry.

Poe uses the influence of nature upon man as the means of securing atmosphere in several stories. Especially does he do so in his stories of landscaping. However, he is seldom content with describing nature as it is. It must be improved. Ellison says, "The original beauty is never so great as that which may be introduced." 53 Therefore, three of Poe's stories are of the improving of nature in order that man may more thoroughly comprehend it. These three stories are "The Landscape Garden," "The Domain of Arnheim," and "Landor's Cottage." Such perfection of landscaping is described that the effect achieved is "that the whole was one of those ingenious illusions sometimes exhibited under the name of 'vanishing pictures'." 54 In "The Island of the Fay" and "The Elk" there are descriptions of scenes in their natural forms. In both types of portrayal the atmosphere is secured by showing the effect the scenes have upon an observer.

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52 Complete Works, III, 273.
54 "Landor's Cottage," Complete Works, VI, 258.
It is the result of the most minute detailing of trees, grass, flowers, colors, perfumes, and contour of the land. Always the scene is pictured as if viewed by a person alone. The pleasure derived from the scenery is boundless.

But there is one pleasure still within the reach of fallen mortality—and perhaps only one—which owes even more than does music to the accessory sentiment of seclusion. I mean the happiness experienced in the contemplation of natural scenery. In truth, the man who would behold aright the glory of God upon earth must in solitude behold that glory. To me, at least, the presence—not of human life only, but of life in any other form than that of the green things which grow upon the soil and are voiceless—is a stain upon the landscape—is at war with the genius of the scene.55

The valley in which Eleonora dwelt with her lover and her mother was conducive to supreme happiness. Here Poe's method of using surroundings to give tone is slightly different; here he shows how the mind of men influence what they see in nature. Changes in character and surroundings become one and the same. The valley in its natural state shows the boy and girl as they spend their childhood within its protecting walls. With the advent of love the scene takes on more color and life. New flowers appear, new sounds are heard, new life appears in the form of fish and birds. Then comes the death of love; fish and foul disappear, the greener tints fade, the star-shape flowers shrink, and dark flowers spring up.

Not only is the influence of man's surroundings used to produce atmosphere in the nature stories. It is just as important in the stories of horror, madness, and fear. The censer with its strange writhing streams of light, the black and gold tapestries and the general fantasy of the bridal chamber greatly affected the mind of Lady Rowena.\textsuperscript{56} The air of decay and desolation of the House of Usher made the guest feel that he, too, would become insane if he remained there.\textsuperscript{57} The inconceivable magnificence of the apartment in "The Assignation" stunned the observer upon his entrance.

Poe makes frequent use of color, sound, movement, and perfume to produce his atmospheric effects. The effect in "The Mask of the Red Death" is based upon the influence of color upon the mind. Six colors are used to stimulate gaiety and a spirit of voluptuous revelry.

...windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example, in blue—and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange—the fifth with white—the sixth with violet.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} "Ligeia," \textit{Complete Works, II}, 262-263.

\textsuperscript{57} "The Fall of the House of Usher," \textit{Complete Works, III}, 297.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Complete Works, IV}, 252.
But the ornaments and colors of the seventh room were not such as would further the mad entertainment. In the seventh room the predominant color was one to produce a feeling of gloom and ghastliness, foreboding death.

The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet—a deep blood color...the effect of the firelight that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company who were bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.59

Colors are also used very effectively in "Eleonora." White and brilliant colors are used to denote happiness, dark colors show sorrow. Even the name of the valley is one to conjure up brilliance of color: the "Valley of the Many-Colored Grass." In "Ligeia" and again in "The Assignation" black and gold are used to give an effect of the bizzare. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" much atmosphere is secured by reference to unnatural colors of natural lights. There is "the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation,"60 and "the radiance... of the full, setting, and blood-red moon."61

59Ibid.

60Complete Works, III, 291.

61Ibid., p. 297. The same idea of a crimson moon is used in "Silence," II, 22.
waters" is used in one place to help advance the thought of
desolation.\textsuperscript{62} Poe sometimes secures an effect of great va-
riety of color with scarcely a color mentioned. One selection
will aptly illustrate;

Their sides sloped from the water's edge at an angle
of some forty-five degrees, and they were clothed
from base to summit—not a perceptible point escaping
—in a drapery of the most gorgeous flower-blossoms;
scarcely a green leaf being visible among the sea of
odorous and fluctuating color.\textsuperscript{63}

Here the effect is to show every color except green, yet
green is the only color mentioned.

Closely allied with the use of colors is the use of per-
fumes. In the quotation above, the odor of flowers is men-
tioned to heighten the effect of pleasure in the landscape.
In the Valley of Many-Colored Grass, the grass is spoken of
as being "vanilla-perfumed."\textsuperscript{64} The same idea of increased
pleasure is suggested in "Landor's Cottage" with the sensa-
tion of "more than Arabian perfumes,"\textsuperscript{65} and in "The Assigna-
tion" reference is made to the "mingled and conflicting per-
fumes"\textsuperscript{66} to further the sense of oppression.

Poe uses sound to produce a variety of effects. In
some stories he describes sweet, dreamy music, usually from

\textsuperscript{62} "Silence," \textit{Complete Works}, II, 221.
\textsuperscript{63} "The Domain of Arnheim," \textit{Complete Works}, VI, 192.
\textsuperscript{64} "Eleonora," \textit{Complete Works}, IV, 238.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Complete Works}, VI, 261.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Complete Works}, II, 116.
some unseen source, to aid in producing the sensation of pleasure. For instance: "Its ponderous wings are slowly and musically expanded... There is a gush of entrancing melody," and "rich draperies in every part of the room trembled to the vibration of low, melancholy music, whose origin was not to be discovered." But more often Poe uses sound to increase horror, fear, or madness. The dreadful hiss of the pendulum increases fear. Poe's description of the unearthly sound made by the cat,

"a cry at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman—a howl—a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have risen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and the demons that exult in the damnation," is a masterpiece of sound denotation which leaves us weak with a sense of dread of the unknown. In one place a sense of expectation is aroused by the coincidence of real sound with the reading of description of similar sound. The imagined sound of a footstep where there is no one gives atmosphere necessary for our acceptance of the idea of the return of a soul from

70 "The Black Cat," Complete Works, V, 155.
the regions of the dead.\textsuperscript{72} In one of his masterpieces, Poe produces an effect of perfect silence by describing many noises followed by the cessation of those noises.

And the moon ceased to totter up its pathway to heaven—and the thunder died away—and the lightning did not flash—and the clouds hung motionless—and the waters sunk to their level and remained—and the trees ceased to rock—and the water-lilies sighed no more—and the murmur was no longer heard from among them, nor any shadow of sound throughout the vast illimitable desert. And I looked upon the characters of the rock, and they were changed;—and the characters were SILENCE.\textsuperscript{73}

Then, having obtained the desired effect upon his reader, Poe strengthens it by telling the effect upon his character. "And the man shuddered, and turned his face away, and fled afar off, in haste."\textsuperscript{74} The result is to convince us that man is unable to endure absolute silence.

Another example of the use of sound to achieve effect, by relating the effect a particular sound may have upon the characters of a story, is found in "The Mask of the Red Death." Here the ominous striking of a huge ebony clock is the means used.

Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that,

\textsuperscript{72}"Ligeia," Complete Works, II, 263.

\textsuperscript{73}"Silence," Complete Works, II, 223-224.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., p. 225.
at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers performe ceased their revolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. 75

Movement is not used by Poe as often as color and sound, but it is used occasionally. Horror and terror are most often the products of movement. In "The Pit and the Pendulum" the measured swinging of the pendulum and the inward moving of the walls arouse terror. A sense of the fantastic is aroused by mentioning the writhing appearance of streams of light in "The Mask of the Red Death"76 and "Ligeia."77 The water-lilies that "stretch towards the heaven their long and ghastly necks, and nod to and fro their everlasting heads"78 help to picture desolation; and the sliding of the house into the tarn adds a finality to "The Fall of the House of Usher" that could have been obtained no other way.79 In the bridal chamber of "Ligeia" the phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong

75Complete Works, IV, 253. 76Ibid., p. 254.
77Complete Works, II, 264.
79Complete Works, III, 297.
continual current of wind behind the draperies—giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole."80

A method of comparison and contrast is often used by Poe. The repulsivness of Morella is forced upon the reader by means of a contrast between the pleasure her husband first felt in her voice and presence and the repugnance he later felt. The music of her original voice is in direct contrast to the unearthly tone she developed after she became ill.81 A comparison of her husband's early happiness and love with his later sorrow and hate is just as realistic.83 One of Poe's most forceful contrasts is found in "The Island of the Fay." Here the general effect is the influence nature has upon the thoughts of man. The contrast is secured by picturing one end of the island as a bright, fairy-like place of flowers, butterflies, and sweet perfumes; the other end is seen as a somber place of darkest shade. Sometimes the contrast is of two characters. Berenice is contrasted with her cousin;84 Ligeia with Lady Rowena,85 and the artist with his wife.86 In "The Pit and the Pendulum" are revealed two contrasting moods, alternating hope and despair.

80 Complete Works, II, 261.
Another method used by Poe is the reiteration of a thought to make it more forceful. "The Tell-Tale Heart" uses repetition more than the other stories. Sometimes a thought is repeated: for instance, the thought of the influence of the old man's eye. Sometimes it is an action: entering the room just at midnight every night for eight nights; or words: "It grew louder--louder--louder!" Once a complete sentence is repeated in almost the exact words: "There came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when it is enveloped in cotton." and "It was a low, dull, quick sound--much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton.

In some stories Poe makes use of a concrete symbol to strengthen his effect. Such an artistic piquancy is used in "The Gold-Bug," "The Black Cat," and "The Mask of the Red Death."

Regardless of how utterly fantastic his stories may be, Poe often inserts some scientific explanation, sometimes true and sometimes not, to secure realism. Thus, the impression of a cat on a wall is accounted for in this way: "The falling of the other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster;

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the lime of which, with the flames, and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it."92 In "The Premature Burial" the many instances of early interment is given a semblance of authority by reference to a supposedly medical journal of a foreign country.93

Mysticism and prophecy are used occasionally by Poe to aid in securing the proper atmosphere. A prophecy in "Metzengerstein" tells us ahead of time just what will happen there, but it is so obscured that it only serves to whet our curiosity.94 Morella prophesies the manner of her husband's life after her death, and the story is the working out of that prophecy.95 But foreshadowing is used more often than prophecy. Ligeia's constant reference to the "will to live" prepares us for her return to life in some form.96 The widowed Countess Berlifitzing unintentionally foretells the death of Metzengerstein when she expresses a wish "that the Baron might be at home when he did not wish to be at home...and ride when he did not wish to ride..."97 The white marking on the breast of the black cat is a foreshadowing of the fate of his master.98

93 Complete Works, V, 259. 94 Complete Works, II, 186.
The desired atmosphere for a story is quite often created by an elaborate introduction. This introduction is made to explain, ahead of time, the incidents of the story. Perhaps the best example of this is in "The Premature Burial." The main character takes pains to explain in great detail the nature and workings of the strange malady to which he is a victim before he tells us that he is its victim. The guest in "The Fall of the House of Usher" tells about the air of tragedy overhanging the house before he begins the story of the occupants. Belief in the doctrine of metempsychosis by many inhabitants of interior Hungary is used to introduce the story of "Metzengerstein."

Merely mentioning hell and its occupants makes many people have the shivers; therefore Poe uses reference to them to increase fear and horror. The wailing of the black cat is compared to the demons of hell. 99 It was a demon who suggested to a father that he name his daughter after her dead mother. 100 The horse of Metzengerstein is spoken of as a devil. 101 The pit is typical of hell itself. 102

Influence of the stars in heaven upon the lives of men is used in "Shadow" to gain an atmosphere indicative of fate. The atmosphere becomes more pronounced when the person responsible for the following words is portrayed as one no longer among the living.

To those, nevertheless, cunning in the stars, it was not unknown that the heavens wore an aspect of ill; and to me, the Greek Cinos, among others, it was evident that now had arrived the alternation of that seven hundred and ninety-fourth year when, at the entrance of Aries, the planet Jupiter is conjoined with the red ring of the terrible Saturnus. The peculiar spirit of the skies, if I mistake not greatly, made itself manifest, not only in the physical orb of the earth, but in the souls, imaginations, and meditations of mankind.103

Far from least of Poe's methods to secure a lasting impression upon his reader is his use of forceful endings. The best of his stories end abruptly, with no explanations to detract the mind from the mood induced by the story proper. It is hard to forget such endings as:

And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.104

Upon the bed, before the whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putridity.105

But of late it is a rare thing that I sleep soundly. There is a countenance which haunts me, turn as I will.


105 "M. Valdemar," Complete Works, VI, 166.
There is a hysterical laugh which will forever ring within my ears. But why shall I say more? To-day I wear these chains, and am here! To-morrow I shall be fetterless! --but where?

106 "The Oblong Box," Complete Works, V, 289.

CHAPTER II
STORIES OF RATIOCINATION

According to Phillip Van Doren Stern, April, 1941, was the hundredth anniversary of the modern detective story.¹ He points out that Edgar Allan Poe was the originator of the detective story as we know it today. Although not the first to write about murder, nor the first to make use of deduction as literary material, Poe gave us the story in which the puzzle element adds to the suspense of the reader, the story in which the mystery is solved by pure ratiocination. He gave us our first modern detective, the erratic but brilliant Dupin, and the Doctor Watson method of telling the story through the mouth of a spectator. His logical structure has continued almost unchanged; his philosophical asides are still imitated; his atmospheric effects have defied successful imitation. Period pieces in many respects, his stories are saved by their artistry from becoming dated; they have the advantage of using only the simplest means. "Simplicity of means, valid characters, and distinguished writing," says Stern, "are the qualities that enable crime

fiction to defy the ravages of time." Furthermore, it needs "that quality with which Poe endowed it at birth--atmosphere."3

What Stern says of the detective story is practically the same thing said by Canby regarding Poe's stories in general. What, then, is this new technique with which critics credit Poe? Bliss Perry names several of the methods used to produce the intriguing stories of ratiocination. One of the foremost is fidelity to fact. There is careful preparation for what is to come in both character and setting.4 Choice of words plays an important part. As Poe himself says:

Not only is all done that should be done, but (what perhaps is an end with more difficulty attained) there is nothing done which should not be. Every word tells, and there is not a word which does not tell.5

Perry also says that Poe has power of observation, of attention to detail,6 and an analytic vision,7 together with a vivid imagination,8 which enables him to understand the mental processes of the characters he strives to portray. There

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2Ibid., p. 230.
3Ibid., p. 236.
4Perry, op. cit., p. 39.
6Perry, op. cit., p. 81. 7Ibid., p. 85.
8Ibid., p. 89.
is imagination plus science which constitutes psychology.⁹ The prevailing element of any detective story is curiosity or suspense, and Poe carries them to the nth degree. The expectation of something about to happen lends interest to fiction as it does to real life.¹⁰

Canby, as well as Perry, has much to say about the technique of Poe. In the following paragraph it can be seen that Canby's idea is quite similar to that of Perry:

Poe carried to the nth power an old principle of narrative, namely suspense...he chose beforehand (this he says himself) a certain effect which he wished to make, and then held the reader in suspense until, at the end of the story and with all the force of accumulated interest, the desired effect was produced. The means he used can easily be described, and were easily imitated, although never, perhaps, with the success like the master's. Briefly, they consisted of a double device. First, the interest was shifted to the end of the story, which was accomplished by making each sentence from the first on point forward, sometimes in word, sometimes by suggestion, to that climactic moment which was the sum of the story....Next--and it is here rather than in structure that Poe excels his myriad followers--there is manifest a care that all the attributes of the story, characters, setting, and most of all the style, should lend their suggestive powers to the desired effect.¹¹

To all the above Pattee adds, "Poe worked coldly and without sentiment...without extravagance, and weighed and analyzed."¹²

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⁹Ibid., p. 86.
¹⁰Ibid., p. 143. ¹¹Canby, op. cit., p. 33.
It has been said above that Poe began with the effect he wished to produce and then built his characterizations in a manner best suited to secure that effect. In the detective stories the effect is mystery and suspense; the result is to show the power of the human mind to solve a puzzle by reasoning alone. Let us see, then, if the methods or techniques mentioned above can be traced through Poe's chief mystery stories, namely, "Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Purloined Letter," and "The Gold-Bug." 13

To be effective a mystery story must be realistic. To make his mysteries realistic, Poe had first to depict a character which would be in keeping with the ingenuity he was to display. Here the method of detail was essential. In the first three of the above named stories the master mind is that of Dupin; in the last one it is that of a man quite similar to him in many respects. To introduce these two characters, and to prepare us for the part they play, Poe clearly defines the mind which can best reach a correct conclusion through sheer reasoning, the mind of the analyst. 14

13 "Thou Art the Man" may also be classed among the mysteries, but it is not considered one of Poe's better stories. Much the same methods are used in it as in the other four.

14 This picture is given little by little in "Murders in the Rue Morgue" and in "The Gold-Bug" when Dupin and Legrand are first introduced, and later in comments throughout all four stories.
The analyst takes pleasure in anything pertaining to a puzzle, whether it be a game of whist, chess, or draughts, an enigma, conundrums, or hieroglyphics. The pleasure he derives is pleasure from the mental activity which disentangles. The higher powers of reflection necessary, the greater his enjoyment. If the game indulged in is of the type where an oversight on the part of his opponent makes success easy, then it is not so pleasurable to the analyst as a game in which such an oversight is impossible. Analytical power is not the same as ingenuity, for "while the analyst is necessarily ingenious, the ingenious man is often remarkably incapable of analysis."15 Mathematical analysis is not sufficient; to calculate is not to analyze. The analyst sees and observes details apt to escape the notice of a simpler nature. He not only sees but remembers in order that he may later apply the details in their proper perspective in his reasoning. Observations, usually made in silence, may be upon things which, at the time noted, are seemingly unrelated to the mystery at hand. For example, the finding of a boat and its later disappearance had no connection with the murder of Marie Roget save in the reasoning of Dupin. Actions, speech, and mannerisms of people are as much the stock in trade of the observant man as are more concrete objects.

15 "Murders in the Rue Morgue," Complete Works, IV, 149.
In addition to the many qualities of the abstract analyst, Poe's two detectives have other traits in common. Both are men whose families have at one time been wealthy. Though wealth plays no part in their mental ability, it permits high education, love of reading, and contemplative nature. Books are the one indulgence permitted to himself by each of the two men. Legrand has a mathematical mind. His is the ability to calculate or work out a puzzle by persistent effort. On the other hand, Dupin's ability lies in the psychological study of men. One instance will serve to show to what degree this ability was developed. While taking a walk with his friend, Dupin told that friend's thoughts at the moment and precisely how he happened to have those thoughts. To use his own words, Dupin said that "most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms."  

Portrayal of characters other than the main ones helps to further suspense and expectation, despite the fact that Poe's characters are not usually considered well drawn.  

Beauvais in "Marie Rogêt" is a busy-body who would naturally arouse suspicions by entering into that which was no concern of his. The vanity and conceit of the Prefect of Parisian police serve to delay the wheels of justice rather than to

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16 Ibid., p. 152.

17 See pp. 9-10. above.
accelerate them. Jupiter, in "The Gold-Bug," is the typical southern negro whose utterances serve the twofold purpose of giving comic relief and foreshadowing that which is to come.

Poe's method of securing realism by use of minute details is found throughout all of the detective stories. Often these details are given in the setting of the story, sometimes in conversation. But however shown, we find that no detail is used unless it has a direct bearing on the final solution. Use of hints or clues which lead us to expect developments that never occur is severely criticized by Poe.\textsuperscript{18}

Each word describing Dupin and his habits serves to prepare us for his method of solving crimes. Mention of his diseased and excitable mind paves the way for knowledge of his abnormal interest in the horrible and the gruesome. The condition of the nearly unoccupied house with the odd window shutters and lightning rods is given that we may follow the later reasoning of the detective. Constant reference to the unknown voices makes us expect them to play an important part in Dupin's finding the murderer in the Rue Morgue. In the many detailed descriptions of Marie Rogêt, each item has its place in the final solution. Not any one or two items would serve to identify the corpse because they might pertain to

\textsuperscript{18}In his review of "Barnaby Rudge," Poe points out several instances in which Dickens fails to follow up suggestions which seem to point to certain procedures. This, says Poe, is unfair to the reader who is led to expect subsequent explanations which are not forthcoming. Complete Works, XI, 53-64.
many ladies of Paris, but when all points fit together to
describe her, then the evidence becomes conclusive. In "The
Purloined Letter" it is the details of character traits which
are important. If Dupin had not known so well the character
of the man who stole the letter, he might not have been able
to recover it. In order for us to follow the steps in his
reasoning, it was necessary for the author to show us a de-
tailed picture of that character. The picture is of the
mental rather than the physical traits of the thief. It is
necessary that the reader understand that the minister is
unusually clever and something of a psychologist himself.
Therefore, details are given which show that he is a poet as
well as a mathematician, that he has the necessary imagina-
tion to understand the usual behavior of the police in search-
ing for a stolen article. In order for us to further compre-
hend the action of the minister, many details are given re-
garding the character and actions of the chief of police. In
the contrast of the two characters and the ability of the de-
tective to understand both lies one method of the author to
build up a story which has the desired effect of a mystery
solved by pure reasoning.

Although Poe usually manages to make us conceive the
possibility of the incidents used to achieve the solutions
in his detective stories, in one case, it seems to me, he
has failed to do so. In the instance of the eight year old
boy who taught a lasting lesson to the master detective, it is conceivable that the boy might work out a fairly sure system of winning in the game of even and odd, but the answer he gives Dupin regarding his method of determining the wisdom or stupidity of his opponent is not consistent with his age. The following statement is too improbable for one so young:

"When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face as accurately as possible in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression." 19

Such an incongruity breaks the unity of effect by including something highly improbable with what the author is trying to persuade us is natural.

Poe, unlike many of the mystery writers of today, usually gives us the answer to his puzzle before he explains the method of solution. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" Dupin had already told his friend that he was expecting a call from the ape's owner, in "The Purloined Letter" he had received the reward, and in "The Gold-Bug" the gold was found, before the process by which the solution was reached was explained. This method tends to throw the importance of the story on the power of the human mind to reason. If the question of whether or not the hero is able to solve the mystery is left until the final ending, we are apt to become more interested

in whether or not it is solved. Here, again, we find Poe's astuteness in keeping our suspense at the highest pitch. "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is an exception to this method. In this story Poe does not tell us until near the end that the problem is solved.\footnote{This exception to Poe's usual procedure is accounted for near the end of this chapter.}

One idea Poe advances many times to make his mystery stories seem logical is the reiteration that many seeming mysteries are too simple for the ordinary person to understand. For example, a crime is committed. At first glance, the solution appears difficult or impossible, hence those trying to solve the problem overlook the simple facts which provide the clue to the whole thing. To be more specific, the contention of the various witnesses in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" that the language spoken by the shrill voice was familiar to none of them even though they represented all the important nations of Europe, did not cause the police to consider that the voice might not be human at all. That the strength of four men was necessary to remove the body of the girl from the chimney, yet only two voices had been heard within the room, did not suggest to the police that the force which placed the body there might not be human. In "The Purloined Letter" the failure of the Prefect to find the stolen letter
lay in his inability to see the simplicity of the hiding place. But *simple* must not be confused with *ordinary*. Just as a thing in plain sight is often the hardest to find; the common mystery is the hardest to solve. Thus, says Poe through the voice of Dupin, don't look for common things in a mystery, but look for those things which have not occurred before. When something out of the ordinary is found, then the problem becomes simple. Constant reiteration that a problem is extremely easy causes the reader of a story to be convinced that it is so. He thinks that here is a puzzle which he had not considered, else he, too, could have solved it.

Use of foreshadowing to produce suspense is much more pronounced in "The Gold-Bug" than in the other mystery stories. The negro's constant reference to the *gold* bug is one of the strongest instances. Says Jupiter:

"Dey aint no tin in him, Massa Will, I keep a tellin on you," here interrupted Jupiter; "de bug is a goole bug, solid, ebery bit of him, inside and all, sep him wing neber feel half so hebby a bug in my life."\(^\text{21}\)

This insistence leads us to think that something pertaining to gold is to be found later in the story. Just before the treasure is unearthed the action of the dog portends something out of the ordinary. The mistake of Jupiter in denoting the eyes of the skull serves to keep alive our suspense by prolonging the feeling that something is to be found.

Coincidence, like foreshadowing, is much more important in the story of the treasure hunt than in the Dupin stories. Poe is very emphatic about the way coincidence should be used. It must be built into the story, not the story around it. The finding of the scarabaeus on the one day of the year when it was chilly enough to necessitate a fire, the lack of paper when some was desired, the entrance of the dog at the precise moment when Legrand’s friend started to look at the drawing, and the resemblance of the skull to that drawing are all coincidences, but they are coincidences without which the story could not be. Therefore they are, with the exception of the resemblance of Legrand’s drawing to the skull, carefully prepared for beforehand. The chilliness of the weather is mentioned long before the fire, and the affection of the dog for the visitor is explained by mention of former caresses. The resemblance of the two drawings is the one coincidence which seems made for the story, because the beetle itself had to be invented. There exists no such beetle as the one described by Poe. Yet it is this incident which is used for motivation of the entire story. It was the result of this incident which started Legrand searching for the problem and its solution. He says of it:

"I say the singularity of this coincidence absolutely stupefied me for a time. This is the usual effect of coincidences. The mind struggles to establish a connection—a sequence of cause and effect—and, being unable to do so, suffers a species of temporary paralysis." 22

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By using as the motivating force a coincidence so evidently made for the story, Poe departs from his own ideal: the ideal of coincidence built into the story instead of the story around it.

The very human desire to retaliate for some slight or merriment at one's expense is used to further interest, especially in "The Gold-Bug." One statement from Legrand will suffice to illustrate this point.

"Why, to be frank, I felt somewhat annoyed by your evident suspicions touching my sanity, and so resolved to punish you quietly, in my own way, by a little bit of sober mystification. For this reason I swung the beetle, and for this reason I let it fall from the tree." 23

Satire is not so important in the stories now under consideration as in the purely satirical stories, but it is one method used to secure interest. The most important instrument of satire is Dupin's constant reference to the Parisian police. His constant hints that they are too wise to see the simple clues is a very clever method of telling just how ineffective they are. Dupin says in speaking of the Prefect, "This mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so very self-evident." 24

The step by step relation of the method of solution is peculiarly clear and easy to follow in Poe's mystery stories.

23 Ibid., p. 141.

In each case the narrator returns to the very beginning of events and relates his story in order, in such a manner that each incident falls into its proper place. That these steps cannot be given in natural order in the story proper is obvious; there would then be no mystery. Poe himself acknowledges this, but insists that the reader must have all points clear in the final conclusion.

Now there can be no question that...many points...are endued with the interest of mystery; but neither can it be denied that a vast many more points are at the same time deprived of all effect, and become null, through the impossibility of comprehending them without the key. The author, who, cognizant of his plot, writes with this cognizance continually operating upon himself, does not, of course, feel that much of what is effective to his own informed perception, must necessarily be lost upon his uninformed readers; and he himself is never in condition, as regards his own work, to bring the matter to test.

The design of mystery, however, being once determined upon by the 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.25

I have said before that Poe tried to show the power of ratiocination in his detective stories. That his method does so adequately is amply proven in the solution of the Marie Roget story, for it is based upon true facts and solved through information received through newspapers alone. When the story was first published, the mystery had not been solved by the police. Therefore the concluding facts of the story

could not be related, and we have the exception of method mentioned above. In a later edition Poe gave us the following information through an appended footnote:

It may not be improper to record, that the confessions of two persons, (one of them the Madame Deluc of the narrative) made, at different periods, long subsequent to the publication, confirmed in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely all the chief hypothetical details by which the conclusion was attained.  

Nothing could be more conclusive proof of the success of Poe's method of proving the power of reasoning.

26 See p. 50.

CHAPTER III

PSEUDO-SCIENTIFIC STORIES

Poe's stories of pseudo-science are perhaps the least valuable of all his tales. Apparently his whole purpose in writing them was to fool people in an entertaining manner. It is hard in many cases to distinguish them from stories of effect, for, while they all tell the story of some extraordinary feat or adventure, many of them produce some distinct effect at the same time. "MS. Found in a Bottle" and "A Descent into the Maelström" are both stories of adventure which leave us with a feeling of horror. "Some Words with a Mummy" is as much a satire as a story of scientific experiment, if not more so. In many of these stories the author inserts statements which leave the impression that he is secretly laughing at the public for being so easily misled. To a later edition of "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall" he attaches a note in which he describes the whole affair as a hoax and points out many reasons why it, and a similar story written by Locke, should never have been considered true.¹ He tells us that his own story was written in a tone of banter."² He also includes a note in "The

¹Complete Works, II, 105-108. Hereafter this story will be referred to by the shorter name of "Hans Pfaall."
²Ibid., p. 103.
Balloon-Hoax" in which he points out how foolish people are to believe such tales. Yet these stories have such an interesting combination of imagination and science that they capture our fancy, and we find ourselves saying that they could be true.

In order for a story to convince us we must be able to accept what the writer tells us. The plot must appear probable. Poe at no time makes a more deliberate use of his art than in giving his extraordinary stories an appearance of probability. If we find ourselves almost believing the things which our reason tells us are not true, how much more susceptible must the people of Poe's own time have been? A new world of science was just opening to them, and they were willing to believe anything that had even a semblance of proof or authority. The majority were not educated enough to search for the truth in what they read. In their literature they were accustomed to romanticism, and Poe was a scientist made romanticist by his time. Consequently, his stories of the novel have in them the apparent authenticity of science.

Using a peculiar technique all his own, Poe was able to create stories of seeming realism from materials distinctly unreal. In many instances it will be seen that the methods used in writing the stories of extraordinary events overlap

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3 Complete Works, V, 224. 4 Bement, op. cit., p. 58.

5 Pattee, op. cit., p. 130.
those discussed in stories of effect and of mystery. As in the mystery stories, plot is of more importance than character.

Nothing lends a stronger sense of reality to stories than historical references; therefore Poe uses history in his tales. Some facts used are authentic, some are not; but unless the reader is quite a good historian he will be unable to distinguish true facts from those that are untrue; thus all are effective. Poe uses historical facts more often in "The Journal of Julius Rodman" than in any other story. In the introductory paragraphs is related the early history of the region explored by Rodman. Portions of the stories of Hearne, McKenzie, Lewis and Clarke, Pike, and others are included. Some of Jefferson's acts as president are related to add more realism. When paragraphs like the following are interspersed among those of the journal, the entire document assumes an air of truth.

Coincident with the exploring tour of Lewis and Clarke up the Missouri, was that of Major Zebulon M. Pike up the Mississippi, which he succeeded in tracing to its source in Itasca Lake. Upon his return from this voyage he penetrated, by orders of government, from the Mississippi westerwardly, during the

6Complete Works, IV, 16. Hereafter this story will be referred to by the shorter title of "Julius Rodman."

7Ibid., pp. 18-20.

8Ibid., pp. 12, 17.
years 1805, '6, and '7, to the head waters of the Arkansas (beyond the Rocky Mountains in latitude 40 N.) passing along the Osage and Kanzas rivers, and to the source of the Platte.9

One historical reference goes so far as to name the exact hour, day, and year of a great storm along the Norwegian coast. "In the year 1645, early in the morning of Sexagesima Sunday, it raged with such noise and impetuosity that the very stones of the houses on the coast fell to the ground."10 Ancient history is used in "Some Words With a Mummy" to strengthen the false impression that an old mummy comes to life. The mummy relates the history in telling of his former life.11

Closely allied to history is the family history Poe fabricates for so many of his characters. Hans Pfaall devotes a page of his manuscript to the story of his early life and his forefathers before he begins the story of his adventure.12 The history of the family of Julius Rodman is told from the time the family migrated from England until it finally settled in Kentucky, where the father and two sisters of Julius died.13 Such a family background attests to the reality of the stories by giving an air of reality to the characters taking part in them.

9Ibid., p. 19.
10"A Descent into the Maelström," Complete Works, II, 231.
11Complete Works, VI, 134.
Poe uses geography even more than history to make his stories of extraordinary adventures seem true. The geography of the middle west, which is now quite well known but in Poe's day was known to very few people, is used very effectively in "Julius Rodman." Both new and old names are given for several localities. For example, the town of Petite Côte is used in the course of the story and a note is appended which informs us that the name of that town is now Saint Charles.\footnote{Ibid., p. 23.} Another time reference is made to a certain locality, and a note tells us that the place is Council Bluffs.\footnote{Ibid., p. 41.} Throughout the entire story there is a most minute description of plants, animals, Indians, landscapes, rivers, and even chemical analyses of the soil in some places. In "Hans Pfaall" the author's imagination is allowed full sway as he paints for us the imaginary geography of the land around the North Pole.\footnote{Complete Works, II, 87.} Later in the same story, the geographical features of the earth as they would look from the moon are revealed. Hans says, "No traces of land or water could be discovered, and the whole was clouded with variable spots, and belted with tropical and equatorial zones."\footnote{Ibid., p. 99.} "A Descent into the Maelström" describes an exact geographical
location; names of mountains, bays, and islands are definite, and their location is exactly designated. 18

Mathematics is another subject used by Poe to make his scientific stories as realistic as possible. Campbell, who made a study of Poe's scholastic attainments, says of his knowledge of mathematics,

In mathematics, a subject which always attracted him, Poe's standing at West Point was seventh in a class of eighty-seven; and he not infrequently employs mathematical terms or formulas in his stories. In his notes on Eureka, furthermore, he enters upon a number of mathematical-astronomical speculations in support of the theories advanced, which, however inaccurate or immature they may be, evince at least a mathematical turn and considerable ingenuity in the manipulation of figures, and would seem to indicate acquittance with the subject well beyond that possessed by the average layman of intelligence at the present time. 19

It is in his two balloon stories that Poe makes the greatest use of mathematical calculations. In a very elaborate manner he figures the distance from the earth to the moon. 20 He calculates the distance which Hans Pfaall has travelled at various stages of his momentous journey. 21 By means of trigonometry, he determines the comparative distances of the earth and moon, and the velocity with which he leaves one and approaches the other. 22 The method by which the amount of gas necessary to lift a specific weight is determined

18 Ibid., pp. 226-228.
19 Campbell, The Mind of Poe and Other Studies, p. 16.
21 Ibid., pp. 68, 88.
22 Ibid., p. 93.
lends reality to the story of the trip across the Atlantic by balloon.\textsuperscript{23} In two different stories he uses geometry to account for a strange phenomenon, that of the apparent concavity of the earth when viewed from a great height.

A line dropped from an elevation of 25,000 feet, perpendicularly to the surface of the earth (or sea), would form the perpendicular of a right-angled triangle, of which the base would extend from the right angle to the horizon, and the hypothenuse from the horizon to the balloon. But the 25,000 feet of altitude is little or nothing, in comparison with the extent of the prospect. In other words, the base and the hypothenuse of the supposed triangle would be so long when compared with the perpendicular that the two former may be regarded as nearly parallel. In this manner the horizon of the aeronaut would appear to be on a level with the car. But as the point immediately beneath him seems, and is, at a great distance below him, it seems, of course, also, at a great distance below the horizon. Hence the impression of concavity.\textsuperscript{24}

This example is characteristic of the method by which Poe makes use of mathematics. We are told that figures don't lie; therefore, figures produce an effect of truth when employed in a story.

Astronomy has a share in making Poe's stories realistic, too, although most critics agree that his knowledge of astronomy was only superficial. It is only natural that this subject would be of more importance in the story of a trip


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 238. The same thought is presented, in very nearly the same words, in "Hans Pfaall," Complete Works, II, 73.
to the moon than in any other. Poe's method of using astronomy is to have his traveler give first hand information of the things he learned regarding sun, moon, and stars on his trip. The light of the sun is one of the first astronomical features discussed. There is demonstrated the difference in the time that the sun first appeared to the traveler and the time its light covered the surface of the earth which was visible to him. A "loud, crackling and terrific sound" is described several times as the moon is neared, and is supposed to be "some mighty volcanic fragment ... in all probability, one of that singular class of substances occasionally picked up near the earth, and termed meteoric stones for want of a better appellation." Occasionally throughout the story, the appearance and action of various stars are mentioned. One of the most fanciful of all his astronomical descriptions is that of the moon as seen upon close examination.

Another method used by Poe to make his stories as realistic as possible is to depict the sensations and physical conditions of his characters. The man who descended into the

26 Ibid., p. 90.  
27 Ibid., p. 92.
28 Ibid., p. 95.
maelström tells of his fear, his horror, and later of his wonder at the things he saw.\textsuperscript{29} The hero of "Ms. Found in a Bottle" does the same. We are told that on the trip across the Atlantic Ocean Mr. Osborne "complained of constriction of the chest—but this soon wore off."\textsuperscript{30} Julius Rodman relates the death of one member of his party from a rattlesnake bite\textsuperscript{31} and the severe illness of another.\textsuperscript{32} In "Hans Pfaall" the hero traces his physical condition throughout the entire story. He describes his sensations as he hung, head downward, upon falling from the basket at the beginning of the ascent. He pictures the difficulty of breathing as the air becomes more and more rare. He tells of bleeding at the nose, ears, and eyes, and how he procures relief by blood-letting. He describes the air condenser and the ease he obtained through its use. He not only depicts his own physical reactions, but those of the cat and pigeons taken along for experimenting. He tells how the old cat suffers, while the kittens, having been born in the rare atmosphere, remain completely free from pain.\textsuperscript{33} The patient in "Mesmeric Revelation" is described as suffering constant physical pain.

\textsuperscript{29}"A Descent Into the Maelström, Complete Works, II, 225 ff.

\textsuperscript{30}"The Balloon-Hoax," Complete Works, V, 237.

\textsuperscript{31}"Julius Rodman," Complete Works, IV, 38.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{33}Complete Works, II, 81.
which can be relieved only by mesmerism, and the hero of "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" has a chronic illness which is helped the same way. In the extremely ludicrous story, "Some Words with a Mummy," the fright and foolish actions of the men gathered around the mummy are noted. Such a recording of characters' sensations makes the characters themselves appear more real.

Psychological reactions of men under stress of some great emotion are sometimes used by Poe as one method of attaining realism. Two instances from "A Descent into the Maelström" will suffice to illustrate this method. One is the behavior of the elder brother when he decides that the ring is much safer to hold to than the cask which he had been using. So, under the influence of a fear so great that he failed to realize the danger it might mean to his beloved brother, he forced the brother's hands from the ring in order that he might use it himself. The other example occurs at the conclusion of the story. From sheer wonder, the hero's former friends and companions refuse to believe his story, because they thought no sane person could believe such a wild tale.

34 Ibid., V, 242.  
36 Ibid., VI, 121.  
37 Ibid., II, 241.  
38 Ibid., p. 247.
As in the stories of effect, Poe makes use of unusual phenomena in nature to secure the proper atmosphere and put his readers in the desired mood for accepting the novel things he tells. To introduce the terrible storm which is the real beginning of the adventure of the hero in "MS. Found in a Bottle," he tells of the unusual appearance of the sky, the size, shape, and color of the cloud, and the peculiar character of the sea. He tells how the atmospheric conditions change quickly; then he describes the storm itself.\textsuperscript{39} In "Hans Pfaall" the effect of a bolt of lightning as seen from above the cloud is described. The exact details of the description make it seem as if the hero had actually beheld the appalling spectacle. Having depicted the awful sight, he adds vividness by imagining how much more astounding it would have been could it have been witnessed at night.\textsuperscript{40} Other singular phenomena are often used. There is the odd spectacle of the sun appearing to the traveler while the earth remains in complete darkness,\textsuperscript{41} the sudden change in the direction of the balloon,\textsuperscript{42} its inversion,\textsuperscript{43} and the

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.}, II, 3-4.  
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Complete Works}, II, 69. \textsuperscript{41}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 87.  
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 91.  
\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 93.
change in atmospheric conditions as the moon is neared. The storm of "A Descent into the Maelström" is introduced in much the same way as that in "MS. Found in a Bottle." It, too, begins with "a singular copper colored cloud that rose with the most amazing velocity." There is also pictured the unique sight of a sky black with clouds save for one circular opening through which the moon shone brightly. Such pictures of nature leave the impression that they could not have been imagined, therefore, the story appears realistic.

Since the old days when it was a common belief that anything read in a book must be so, even a hint that something is from an authoritative source creates faith that it is true. Therefore, Poe often refers to some authority in his stories. Part of this authority may be real and part false, but, as in the case of history, few people bother to verify it, so it is all effective. The book which started Hans Pfaall on his trip was a "small pamphlet treatise on Speculative Astronomy, written either by Professor Encke of Berlin, or by a Frenchman of somewhat similar name." In

45Complete Works, II, 235.
46Ibid., p. 235.
making arrangements for the trip, he used information
"attained in the aeronautic expedition of Messieurs Gay-
Lussac and Biot," and for his mathematical calculations
he used information secured by various astronomers.
Mr. Van Kirk, in "Mesmeric Revelation," refers to Mr. Bronson
and Mr. Cousin for his authority on conditions of the soul.
Many authorities are referred to in the building of the
balloon in "The Balloon-Hoax," and in "A Descent into the
Maelström" one of the best of all references is quoted, The
Encyclopedia Britannica.

Along with his real and fake authorities, Poe used
e enough true scientific facts to give an air of scientific
verification to everything in his stories. For instance,
the complete absence of wind is tested by burning a candle
upon the deck of a ship, a condenser is used to make it
possible for man to breathe at a great height above the sur-
face of the earth, a cask is used to escape from the
maelström because a cylinder will sink into a vortex more
slowly than any other shape, and chemical content is de-
termined by using fire. Sometimes Poe produces the

48 Ibid., p. 63. 49 Ibid., pp. 63-65.
50 Complete Works, V, 243. 51 Ibid., II, 232.
54 "A Descent into the Maelström," Complete Works, II, 244.
55 "Some Words With a Mummy," Complete Works, VI, 120.
appearance of true science without actually naming the idea used. For instance, he does not give a name to the mysterious gas used in the balloon of Hans Pfaall, his excuse being that it is a secret which he is not at liberty to divulge.**56** Neither does he name the chemical used by Von Kempelen in his famous discovery, but always refers to it as "a certain substance."**57** This method of refusing to name the chemicals which are so potent is much more effective than use of a definite name would be. Not knowing what they are, no one can disprove them.

If an editor were editing a journal written by a scientist and considered that journal too long to be published in its entirety, he might condense some sections of it by telling briefly in his own words what the scientist told in many pages. Poe uses this device to make his stories of travel seem authentic, especially the story "Julius Rodman." He begins with a summary of the life of the traveler's family, which, he states, was much more complete in the original journal. Then, many times during the story, he gives brief parenthetical summaries of what was supposed to be much longer sections of the original work.**58**

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**56** "Hans Pfaall," *Complete Works*, II, 52.

**57** "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," *Complete Works*, VI, 253.

**58** *Complete Works*, IV, 11, 37, 39, 45, 55, 70, 79.
Poe many times uses footnotes to explain facts which the reader might not understand. To do this he writes the story in the first person and adds notes supposed to be written by the editor. This method is used more often in "Julius Rodman" than in any other story. Sometimes the note explains an unfamiliar word in the text. For example, the word *Pemmican* is used and a note appended to explain what it is and how it is prepared.\(^5^9\) Another time the word *cache* is used in the text and defined in a note.\(^6^0\) Sometimes the note forms a correction in the original manuscript as in the following quotations. The first is from the text, the second is the note.

It was at night on the 13th of May, that we were shown by Misquash the mouth of a large river, which in the settlements goes by the name of the Yellow Stone, but by the Indians called the Ahmateaza.

There appears to be some discrepancy here which we have not thought it worth while to alter, as, after all, Mr. Rodman may not be in the wrong. The Ahmateaza (according to the narrative of Lewis and Clarke) is the name given by the Minnetarees, not to the Yellow Stone, but to the Missouri itself.\(^6^1\)

This same method of using notes to secure an effect of authenticity is used in "Hans Pfaall." However, the notes in the latter story were nearly all added after the original publication to include something learned after the story was


first written. Occasionally there is a note to explain some word, phrase, or obscure term employed in the story proper.

As mentioned earlier, the people of Poe's day were very much interested in new inventions and philosophies. Poe was quick to take advantage of such interest. He takes a late invention, the voltaic battery, and makes it the means of advancing the plot of one of the most absurd of all his pseudo-scientific stories, "Some Words With a Mummy." By means of the battery, about which the ordinary person of his time knew little, he brings back to life a mummy which had been dead for thousands of years. To make it appear possible, he notes various differences in it and in an ordinary mummy. For example, there are no openings found on the body through which the brain and the vital organs had been removed. Then he accounts for the unusual difference by stating that his mummy had belonged to a certain tribe of Egypt which frequently embalmed a person while alive. The battery is also used as the means of bringing a man back to life in "The Premature Burial." Current belief in the effects of mesmerism also gave Poe a method for several stories.

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63 Ibid., pp. 64, 96.
64 Ibid., VI, 120.
65 Ibid., p. 128.
66 Ibid., V, 261.
In one such story he uses a person under mesmeric control to advance certain theories regarding the soul; in a second he makes mesmeric influence account for a strange adventure, and in a third he makes it the means for conducting a gruesome experiment to halt death in the body.

Perhaps the most effective of all Poe's methods for writing stories of extraordinary adventure is that of using vivid description. Since description was discussed more fully in Chapter I, it is unnecessary to go into detail here. It is enough to say that sights, sounds, and feelings are so pictured through the voice of the narrator in each story that they produce an exceedingly convincing realism.

The relation of little incidents along the course of the various journeys is another method used by Poe to make the trips appear realistic. In one story the actions of various crew members add realism. Many incidental occurrences are told of the long trip taken by Julius Rodman and his companions. For instance, on one occasion several Indians saw the negro of the party, and, never having seen a negro before, could not believe that the black was real. When they

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67 "Mesmeric Revelation," Complete Works, V, 244 ff.


69 "M. Valdemar," Complete Works, VI, 156.

told others of their tribe about him, the others refused to believe that they had seen such a thing. Consequently, they all went to get a good look at the strange man. Their actions and expressions as they view him, attempt to wash off the black, notice his bandy legs, and feel his wooly hair, are graphically portrayed.\textsuperscript{71} The amazement of the people on ships passed over in one of the balloon stories,\textsuperscript{72} and such incidents as those of the pigeons and cats on the other,\textsuperscript{73} have no real bearing on the main plot, but they add interest and sometimes humor.

Poe has one very clever method of making his stories seem true to the reader. As if afraid that the authenticity of his accounts might be questioned, he takes the precaution of warning his reader that there is no exaggeration. Most readers, finding a note like the following in a story read, will do just as Poe wishes, believe the entire thing.

"...we wish to call attention to the circumstance that, in every point, Mr. Rodman's account falls short of Captain Lewis's. With all his evident enthusiasm, our traveler is never prone to the exaggeration of facts....His facts are never heightened; his impressions from these facts must have, to ordinary perceptions, a tone of exaggeration. Yet there is no falsity in this exaggeration, except in view of a general sentiment upon the thing seen and described."\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71}"Julius Rodman," Complete Works, IV, 64.
\textsuperscript{72}"The Balloon-Hoax," Complete Works, V, 235.
\textsuperscript{73}"Hans Pfaall," Complete Works, II, 68.
\textsuperscript{74}"Julius Rodman," Complete Works, IV, 35.
Sometimes we are warned ahead of time that the story related is exceedingly novel, and therefore difficult to believe. For example, we are told in the beginning of "Hans Pfaall" that the events recorded there are so novel as to have "all physics in a ferment, all reason and astronomy together by the ears." The narrator of "A Descent into the Maelström" tells his listener that he probably will not believe the story he is told. It is human nature to believe the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction, so, when he warns his reader that what is to come is absolutely novel, Poe is only using psychology.

Since few trips or experiments are undertaken without accident, Poe puts accidents in his stories. Hans Pfaall was almost killed when he was knocked from his basket by the explosion at the beginning of the ascent. Another time he suffered acutely as the result of precipitantly throwing over too much ballast at once. An accident deprived him of his family of cats. Many accidents occurred during the journey of Julius Rodman. Several times his boat was hung up on sand bars, and once one of his men fell into an empty cache. By accident the watch stopped at exactly seven

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o'clock in "A Descent into the Maelström," and an accident was the cause of the balloonists' crossing the Atlantic from Wales instead of going to France as originally planned.

In several places Poe uses a method that he used quite often in the stories of effect, that of a character's inability to express himself regarding something seen or heard. For instance, the hero of "MS. Found in a Bottle" speaks thus of the storm: "If I trembled at the blast which has hitherto attended us, shall I not stand aghast at the warring of wind and ocean, to convey any idea of which the words tornado and simoon are trivial and ineffective?" In speaking of the noise made by the maelström, the hero of that story says, "...the yell that went up to the Heavens from out of that mist, I dare not attempt to describe." Most people have at some time seen or heard things which they felt themselves inadequate to describe; therefore, the method used here is obviously effective in securing realism.

The use of exact time and dates is another method utilized by Poe; however, he sometimes gives only part of a date. It was on the first of April that Hans Pfaall began

82 Complete Works, II, 238.


84 Complete Works, II, 13.

his ascent. The brothers always started home from their fishing at exactly seven o'clock. The balloon trip to America took place "between Saturday, the 6th instant, at 11, A. M., and 2, P. M., on Tuesday, the 9th instant." Use of a definite location is just as effective as use of a definite time; so in this group of stories, as in the mystery stories, Poe uses a definite location. At least, he begins them at a named location; they sometimes end in an unidentified spot. The adventure related in "MS. Found in a Bottle" began at Batavia, Java, and ended somewhere in the South Seas, with a hint that the final scene was at the pole itself. "A Descent into the Maelström" is located "close upon the Norwegian coast—in the sixty-eighth degree of latitude—in the province of Nordland—in the dreary district of Lofoden." Von Kempelen made his famous discovery at Bremen, Germany. The balloon expedition of Meneke and his companions began at "the Court-Yard of Wheal-Vor House—

89 Complete Works, II, 2. 90 Ibid., p. 15.
91 Ibid., p. 223.
92 "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," Complete Works, VI, 250.
about a mile from Penstruthal, in North Wales,"93 and ended near Charleston, South Carolina, in the vicinity of Fort Moultrie.94 In "Julius Rodman" we are not only told just where the voyage up river occurred, but are invited to take a map of North America and look it up for ourselves.95 The locality of each story is fixed where it best suits the general atmosphere of the story.

In "The Balloon-Hoax" Poe employs a method which is often used in his mystery stories but seldom anywhere else. That is the method of emphasizing the simplicity and ease with which a thing is done. He repeats this idea four times within four pages of the above named story. The result, as in the detective stories, is to create a belief in the idea so often reiterated.96

Poe departs from many of his usual methods in the story of "Von Kempelen and His Discovery." Instead of his usual

94 Ibid., p. 239. 95 Complete Works, IV, 14.
96 Complete Works, V. "And the feat is only so evidently feasible that the sole wonder is why men have scrupled to attempt it before" (p. 236). "The difficulty has been strangely exaggerated and misapprehended" (p. 237). "We have crossed the Atlantic—fairly and easily crossed it in a balloon" (p. 239). "Crossing the ocean in a balloon is not so difficult a feat after all" (p. 237).
mass of description and detail, he takes the view that such
details detract from the truth of a story. He says, "Pe-
sons who are narrating facts, are seldom so particular as
Mr. Kissem seems to be about the day and date and precise
location."97 This story is made interesting and convincing
through hints and half-truths which leave the reader at lib-
erty to interpret the facts put before him as he will. The
"science" of alchemy, which was widely practiced during the
Middle Ages, is still a fascinating one, and there are just
enough references to former alchemists and their work to
give the tale seeming authenticity. That the references
themselves are not authentic will not appear to the casual
reader. Interest is carried through the first part of the
story by merely hinting at what is to come. It is not until
the third from the last paragraph that we learn what the
great discovery is. Almost as soon as the secret is told,
we lose interest; hence the entire effect is gained by fore-
shadowing the outcome.

Humor and satire are used occasionally in this group
of stories, but since they are to be discussed in full in
the following chapter, it is only necessary to name them
here.

The 1941 reader of Poe's pseudo-scientific stories
will enjoy them as much as did the reader of 1841. However,

97 Complete Works, VI, 246.
the more modern reader is quite unlikely to be misled by them. Better education and scientific attainments undreamed of in that day make us marvel that people a few generations ago could become so excited over the hoaxes. And yet, when we consider that recently thousands of people became hysterical over a radio dramatization of an imaginary invasion from the planet Mars, we realize that public belief in a hoax is the greatest possible tribute to the author or actor who instigates it.
CHAPTER IV

SATIRE AND HUMOR

It would be hard indeed to separate humor and satire in Poe's stories. His humor is satiric; his satire is humorous. In one of his literary criticisms he comments on satire in the following manner: "That satire alone is worth talking about which at least appears to be the genial, good-humored out-pouring of irrepressible merriment."\(^1\) In the light of this remark it is easy to understand the close relationship of humor and satire in Poe's stories. Both are evident in the majority of his prose works. Sometimes the satire on a subject will be an entire story, sometimes only a paragraph or a sentence.

Although all of Poe's satires have in them some common traits, each subject is treated in a different manner. Therefore, this chapter will follow an outline not of method, as do the previous ones, but of subject matter. I shall point out various topics which Poe made the object of satire, and then attempt to show the different methods by which satire on each individual topic is accomplished.

\(^1\)Review of Lowell's A Fable for Critics, Complete Works, XIII, 168.
One of Poe's favorite targets for satire is the life of his fellow literary artists. He criticizes authors, editors, and critics. He often makes fun of others for doing the same things that he does himself. Let us see what some of these things are and the methods by which he makes them appear ridiculous.

Many times Poe satirizes the topics upon which the literary men of his day wrote. He does this by writing elaborately and at length upon some simple or ridiculous subject. In one story he makes hair-oil the subject of a poem. In fact, there is a pretense of two poems upon the subject; one is quoted, the other merely criticized. Both are absurd, but are highly praised. The satire is obtained by having the two absurd jingles treated as serious literature. The same effect is achieved in another story by having an aspiring authoress interview a famous writer. In the course of the interview, the famous man impresses upon his interviewer that it matters not what she writes about, just so she writes forcibly.

Along with subject matter, Poe criticizes style. By pretending that style is the most important phase of writing

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2 "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.," Complete Works, VI, 2.

3 "How to Write a Blackwood Article," Complete Works, II, 274.
he shows how foolish the editors and critics are who judge the worth of literature by style alone. In one story he says, speaking through the voice of Thingum Bob, "What I wrote it is unnecessary to say. The style!—that was the thing." In several places he makes sarcastic references to the fact that many writers have set styles, few of which are original. One establishes a style by cutting words, phrases, and sentences from various books, putting them into a pepper shaker, and shaking them out to form reviews. It did not matter that they failed to make intelligible reading; it was the style that counted. Another writer would take a thought from any old book and add enough meaningless phrases to form a long essay. This method is sarcastically referred to as the "filling-up" style. Such satires on style do not, of course, name any real writers. But sometimes a phrase or sentence will characterize the writing of an actual person. For instance, the following sentence expresses Poe's opinion of Carlyle's style: "The best pigeon-winger over all kinds of style, was my friend Mr. Carlyle."

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4 "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.," Complete Works, VI, 27.

5 Ibid., p. 21.

6 "How to Write a Blackwood Article," Complete Works, II, 277.

7 "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," Complete Works, IV, 221.
One thing satirized in "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq." is the inability of editors to comprehend true worth in literature. The result of such inability is that they accept mere drivel for publication and reject worthy articles and stories. Poe's method of satirizing this weakness of editors is very effective. He has four editors, fictitious of course, reject some of the world's best poetry, that of Milton, Virgil, and Dante. They reject it on the grounds that it is "entirely devoid of imagination," it is "sundry lines of most disgusting and unmeaning rant," it is just "stuff," and it "will not scan."\(^8\) At the same time they eagerly accept a most ridiculous poem as a great and glorious masterpiece. It is "a poetical gem," "a diamond-like effusion from the pen of a rising poet," and "is attracting universal commendation."\(^9\)

Plagiarism is another topic for Poe's satire, though he is guilty of this offense himself. Campbell says of Poe's borrowing:

For his "Journal of Julius Rodman," he borrowed freely from Irving's *Astoria*, at some points carrying over matter without substantial alteration. He levied in like manner upon Morrell's *Four Voyages to the South Seas* and upon official reports made to Congress by his friend J. N. Reynolds for matter in his *Arthur Gordon Pym*; and upon a pamphlet written by Robert Holland,\(^8\)*Complete Works*, VI, 5-6.\(^9\)*Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.
Moncke Mason, and others for some of the matter in his "Balloon-Hoax."

His own guilt did not make Poe's satire on plagiarism any less effective. For this satire he again makes use of his literary hero, Thingum Bob. Thingum Bob takes lines from several masterpieces of world literature and, putting them together to make one poem, tries to get them published as an original work of his own. They are refused, but not because they are stolen lines.

Another subject for Poe's satire is the poor pay received by authors. His method is to elaborate upon the vast sums paid them. Then he names those vast sums, at the same time expressing amazement that papers can continue to operate when they pay so much for contributions. Four of the amounts stated are "thirty-seven and a half cents," "fifty cents," sixty-two and a half cents," and "eighty-seven and a half cents." In one instance he goes further and has the editor offer to pay the author with advice; and one editor is made to express the opinion that the authors should pay him for the privilege of having their work published.

10 Campbell, Poe's Short Stories, p. xxii.

11 "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.," Complete Works, VI, 4-5.


13 Ibid., p. 13.
The conceit of authors, editors, and critics receives its share of Poe's sarcasm. The instrument of this satire is again his fictitious character, Thingum Bob. This great and mighty man shows his conceit in several ways. For one, he states that, since Shakespeare died, even he might have to die some day. Furthermore, if die he must, it was his duty to write an autobiography that others might profit by his greatness. Therefore, he writes a personal history to show how he "attained the high road to the pinnacle of human renown."\textsuperscript{14} Later he says, "Yes, I have made history. My fame is universal. It extends to the uttermost ends of the earth."\textsuperscript{15} By portraying the conceit of his character, Poe pictures to us the conceit he conceives his fellow artists to possess.

For years the public has been led to think that an author cannot work except under certain conditions. It thinks that he must live in a garret, use a certain pen, and have certain books in his possession. Twice Poe takes occasion to satirize this misconception on the part of the public. On one occasion, the father of the hero starts him on the road to fame with the offer of "a garrett, pen, ink, and paper, a rhyming dictionary, and a copy of the 'Gad-Fly.'"\textsuperscript{16} A still better example is found in the story of a young writer interviewing a famous author. The famous man insists that if the

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 2. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 26. \\
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 3.
young lady would gain fame, she must always use a certain kind of ink and pen. Furthermore, she must never, under any circumstance, mend the pen.\textsuperscript{17}

The propensity of editors to overestimate the importance of their papers is another thing of which Poe makes fun. He does so by having the editors of his four fictitious periodicals make the most astounding claims for their papers. One paper in particular makes exorbitant boasts. Its subscription list is made to increase from one hundred thousand to "precisely half a million" in one day. In the morning paper the former number is quoted, in the evening paper the latter number is used.\textsuperscript{18}

Some of Poe's most scathing satire is found in the names he bestows upon the papers in his stories. His pseudo-literary magazines he calls the "Hum-Drum," the "Rowdy-Dow," the "Gad-Fly," and the "Goosetherumfoodle." His critical magazines are named for the lowest of animals. They are the "Owl," the "Toad," the "Mole," and the "Daddy-Long-Legs." In keeping with the names bestowed upon the papers are the names of his fictitious editors and writers. Mr. Crab is the editor of one paper. Snob, Slyass, and Mumblethumb are contributors. A person who acts as a critic is called a Thomas

\textsuperscript{17}"How to Write a Blackwood Article," \textit{Complete Works}, II, 272.

\textsuperscript{18}"The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.," \textit{Complete Works}, VI, 18.
Hawk. Poe's derivation of this name is both sarcastic and humorous. Mr. Crab uses the expression when he assigns a new writer the task of writing criticism. The writer explains it in the following words:

"He assured me that he employed the words "Thomas Hawk" to avoid the colloquialism, Tommy, which was low—but that the true idea was Tommy Hawk—or tomahawk—and that by "playing tomahawk" he referred to scalping, brow-beating and otherwise using-up the herd of poor-devil authors."¹⁹

Use of such names indicates Poe's opinion of the people about whom he writes.

Vague, incoherent writing is satirized, too. The satire on failure to write intelligibly is found in "How to Write a Blackwood Article." Blackwood tells his interviewer, Miss Psyche, that she must never, under any circumstance, say what she means. She may say anything which approaches what she has in mind, but she must not say it outright. If she means one, she may say two, but not one. If she means "bread and butter," she may say "buck-wheat cake" or "oat-meal porridge, but never" "bread and butter."²⁰ He also advises her to be sure her writing cannot be understood, for "when manuscript can be read it is never worth reading."²¹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 20.
²⁰Complete Works, II, 276.
²¹Ibid., p. 273.
One thing that makes "The Confessions of an Opium-Eater" a good book, he tells her, is that it has "a good spicing of the decidedly unintelligible."²²

Poe was a critic. He wrote many critical essays; but nevertheless, he makes fun of critics. He places the critic in a very poor light in "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq." and in "How to Write a Blackwood Article." Blackwood must have been considering criticism when he advised Miss Psyche that a composition "can't be too brief. Can't be too snappish. Always a full stop. And never a paragraph."²³ Thingum Bob's method of playing Thomas Hawk, that is of writing literary criticism, is an interesting one. He cuts the most sarcastic words, phrases, and sentences from several bombastic speeches and books. These he puts into a pepper castor and shakes out upon a paper which has been covered with egg white. The result is a conglomeration of meaningless words. Seemingly, Poe would have us think that the critic's one desire is to be as severe as possible. For the effect of his criticism upon the poor author he cared not a whit.²⁴

Literature and literary people are by no means the only subjects of Poe's satire. He is constantly belittling

²²Ibid.  
²³Complete Works, II, 275.  
²⁴Ibid., VI, 21-22.
mankind in general. In "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" he ridicules man by comparing him to a species of vermin which inhabits the back of a huge sea-monster. He depicts the vermin as very ludicrous beings. In "Four Beasts in One" mankind in general is pictured as a rabble, ready to bow down to anyone in authority, yet ready to desert its leaders at the slightest approach of danger.

Man's selfishness is one object of satire in "Mellonta Tauta." To secure this satire, Poe imagines that selfishness continues increasing until the year 2848, when it reaches such a stage that no one cares for his neighbor or friends. The "mass" is the one concern of all humanity. War and pestilence are pictured as friends of humanity because they help rid the world of its surplus population.

In one story Poe ridicules man by making it appear impossible to tell the difference between a sane man and one who is insane. This he does by having the superintendent of a psychopathic institution lose his mind. The superintendent turns the inmates loose and places the guards in cells. A visitor arrives and is shown through the sanatorium. Poe's satire appears in the conversation of the host and his visitor and in the revelation of the latter's thoughts. He is introduced to the inmates and told that they are friends of

26 Complete Works, II, 206.

27 Complete Works, VI, 200.
his host. He admits to himself that their behavior is somewhat queer, but supposes that is because all people are rather odd at times. The theme of the story is put into a speech of the mad superintendent. He describes a mad man, and thereby reveals the narrow margin of difference between a sane and an insane person.

"His cunning, too, is proverbial, and great. If he has a project in view, he conceals his design with a marvelous wisdom; and the dexterity with which he counterfeits sanity, presents, to the metaphysician, one of the most singular problems in the study of the mind. When a mad man appears thoroughly sane, indeed, it is high time to put him in a straight jacket." 28

Most people of every age think that their own is far in advance of every past age, and are inclined to boast about what they have that their forefathers did not have. Such boasting is ably satirized in two stories. One is "Some Words With a Mummy." The method is simple. By means of a voltaic battery, a five-thousand year old mummy is brought to life. The men who are responsible for his return to life tell him of the many advantages enjoyed by them which were unknown to ancient Egypt. But every boast they make is minimized by the Egyptian who describes a similar but greater marvel of his own time. Phrenology and animal magnetism had their prototypes in ancient days, and the "manoeuvres of Mesmer were really very contemptible tricks when put in collation with the positive miracles of the Theban savans." 29

28 "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," Complete Works, VI, 72.
29 Complete Works, VI, 133.
Modern architecture cannot compare favorably with the buildings and pyramids of ancient Egypt. Railroads are inferior to the vast causeways upon which whole temples could be moved. Our sharpest steel-edged instruments will not cut as well as the tempered copper tools which were made hundreds of years ago but which modern science has found it impossible to duplicate. As for suffrage and political movements, they, too, were known in the day of the mummy but only proved nuisances. In fact, the mummy proved that the only thing the modern world possesses that was not bested in ancient times is patented medicine. 30

"Mellonta Tauta" is also a satire on modern life. 31 In this story the satire is achieved by placing the time a thousand years ahead, that is, in 2848. Here Poe imagines everything so far advanced as to make the marvels of his time appear insignificant. The small balloons which, were so wonderful in 1848, have become monsters carrying several hundred people each. New gases and materials are in vogue, the old ones have become merely names. Double track railroads have given way to twelve track ones. But most sarcastic of all is the manner in which Poe imagines the people of 2848 exclaiming and marveling at the ignorance and backwardness of the world in 1848. 32

30 Ibid., pp. 135-137.
31 By modern life here I mean during the time of Poe.
32 Complete Works, VI, 201.
Another type of ignorance is revealed in "The literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq." and "How to Write a Blackwood Article." This is the inability of some people to interpret what they read correctly. For example, an editor attempts to interpret the following line which Thingum Bob has submitted for publication under the pseudonym of Oppodeldoc, pretending that it was original with him.

"Hail, Holy Light! Offspring of Heaven, first born."\(^{33}\) The editor combines his interpretation of the line with a criticism of the man who submitted it.

"'Oppodeldoc,' (whoever he is,) will be kind enough to tell us, perhaps, how 'hail' can be 'holy light.' We always regarded it as frozen rain. Will he inform us, also, how frozen rain can be, at one and the same time, both 'holy light,' (whatever that is,) and an 'off-spring?'--which latter term, (if we understand anything about English,) is only employed, with propriety, in reference to small babies about six weeks old."\(^{34}\)

Other examples of literal interpretation of literature are found in "A Predicament" and "How to Write a Blackwood Article."\(^{35}\)

Politics is another favorite subject for Poe's satire. He has no story woven around politics, but manages to include a sentence here and a paragraph there which shows it

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\(^{33}\)From Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

\(^{34}\)Complete Works, VI, 30.

\(^{35}\)Complete Works, II, 269 ff.
in a very foolish manner. For instance, one father tells
his son that he should not become a lawyer because the busi-
ness has become ungentle and being a politician doesn't
pay. Mr. Gliddon could only make the mummy understand the
meaning of the word politics by drawing a caricature of a
politician making a stump speech. The devil admits taking
a hand personally in the politics of Rome at one time.
Miss Psyche pictures politicians writing their speeches in a
manner similar to that used by Thingum Bob in playing Thomas
Hawk.

Philosophy and philosophers are satirized in several
stories. They receive the most attention in "Bon-Bon."
Bon-Bon, who is himself a philosopher, is depicted as ridicu-
loous in both habit and dress. The places in which he keeps
his philosophical books also form a part of the satire.

A dish of polemics stood peacefully upon the dresser.
Here lay an oven-full of the latest ethics—there a
kettle of duodecimo melanges. Volumes of German
morality were hand in glove with the gridiron—a
toasting fork might be discovered by the side of
Musebius—Plato reclined at his ease in a frying pan—and
contemporary manuscripts were filed away upon the
spit.

36 "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.," Complete
Works, VI, 3.
37 "Some Words With a Mummy," Complete Works, VI, 125.
38 "Bon-Bon," Complete Works, II, 140.
39 "How to Write a Blackwood Article," Complete Works,
II, 271-272.
41 Ibid., p. 131.
The devil is revealed as the source of philosophy. Bon-Bon tries to get some ideas from his Satanic majesty, but his design is recognized and defeated. However, the devil admits being responsible for the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, though he would not give them the truth, and always misled them in their search for it. Using the devil's taste as his vehicle for advancing the idea, Poe tells us that few philosophers were original. The devil tells Bon-Bon,

"I found that Horace tasted very much like Aristotle...Terentius I could not have told from Menander. Naso, to my astonishment, was Nicander in disguise. Virgilius had a strong twang of Theocritus. Martial put me much in mind of Archilocus—and Titus Livius was positively Polybius and none other."  

As for the quality of the souls, even "the best, if not carefully shelled, are apt to be a little rancid on account of the gall." In another story philosophers are described as "ridiculous beings...half naked, with their faces painted, shouting and gesticulating to the rabble." The man who was constantly betting and swearing was suspected of being "affected with the transcendentals." In still another story

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42 Ibid., p. 136.  
43 Ibid., p. 139.  
44 Ibid., p. 142.  
46 "Four Beasts in One," Complete Works, II, 206.  
47 "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," Complete Works, IV, 220.
Poe imagines the people a thousand years hence ridiculing philosophers. 48

Some of Poe's best satire is on the dress styles of his time, though there is no particular story devoted to them. He merely inserts sentences or paragraphs in many stories which point out the ridiculous in clothes. The satire is usually accomplished through gross exaggeration. The bustle is the chief object of ridicule in women's clothes. One of the best examples is found in part of Scheherazade's tale of Sinbad's travels. Sinbad visits a land where the women are beset with the very queer idea that

"the thing which we describe as personal beauty, consists altogether in the protuberance of the region which lies not very far below the small of the back.--Perfection of loveliness...is in the direct ratio of the extent of this hump. Having been long possessed of this idea, and bolsters being cheap in that country, the days have long gone by since it was possible to distinguish a woman from a dromedary." 49

Men's clothes do not escape Poe's satire either. The comments and expressions of the mummy when he is dressed in the doctor's clothes form apt ridicule of men's styles. 50

Some of Poe's satire on clothes is on the idea that clothes make the wearer. "The Man That Was Used Up" has this

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48 "Mellonta Tauta," Complete Works, VI, 201.
50 "Some Words With a Mummy," Complete Works, VI, 137.
thought for its theme. As is usual with good satire, the plot is simple. A famous man always appears in public perfect in form and speech. An admirer goes to his home early one morning, before he is dressed for the day. There he find that the famous man is not at all what he seems. Clothes, paddings, a wig, false teeth, artificial limbs, and a glass eye give him his magnificent physique. An artificial palate is responsible for his excellent speaking voice.\textsuperscript{51} The same thought is used in "The Spectacles." Here it is a woman whose beauty is created by science. Powder, rouge, a wig, false teeth, and well-made clothing make an old woman so attractive that a near-sighted young man thinks she is a beautiful young lady.\textsuperscript{52} Miss Psyche thinks she makes a majestic appearance when dressed in her "new crimson satin dress, with the sky-blue Arabian mantelet, and the trimmings of green agnaffas, and the seven flounces of orange-colored auriculas."\textsuperscript{53}

*The proverbial talkativeness of women is another subject for Poe's satire. It, too, is a subject with no particular story devoted to it, but an occasional sentence carries the

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Complete Works}, III, 270-271.

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Complete Works}, V, 189, 203.

thought. In one story we find the short comment, "The ladies, as usual, talked a great deal." Here we see that the satire is contained in two words, "as usual." In another story women's love for talking is characterized in the following almost incoherent sentence. "Scheherazade, who, being lineally descended from Eve, fell heir, perhaps, to the whole seven baskets of talk which the latter lady, we all know, picked up from under the trees in the garden of Men."55

The main satire in "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" is on the propensity of people to refuse to believe in true wonders which they have not seen, while, at the same time, they have faith in many foolish things which are not true. To put over this idea that truth is stranger than fiction, Poe has Scheherazade describe many wonders of the world without naming any of them. She describes the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, petrified forests, a volcano, the Niger River, odd flowers, a balloon, coral islands, the electrotype machine, a train,56 and many other things. The king refuses to believe any of them; but when she relates the fabulous story that the earth is held up on the horns of a great blue cow, he immediately accepts the story as the truth.57

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54 "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," Complete Works, VI, 61.
56 Complete Works, VI, 88 ff.
57 Ibid., p. 96.
Even religion is not safe from the satirical pen of Poe. Catholicism is the religious form most often attacked. Several methods are used. Once he pictures the devil with a copy of the "Rituel Catholique" in his breast pocket. Later it is described as it gradually changes both color and title, the title changing to "Regître des Condamés." In the same story the habiliments and demeanor of Satan are likened to those of a clergyman. The king who married Scheherazade is represented as a very pious man who kills the beautiful girls of his kingdom because of a vow he made. If he breaks that vow, he must report to his priest and be absolved in the regular way. The Jewish custom of not eating pork is made light of in "A Tale of Jerusalem" by having the Roman officials present the Jewish Rabbis with an immense hog for their sacrifice.

Lionizing is both the theme and the sub-title of one of Poe's satires. An exaggerated account of the means by which fame is reached and the treatment accorded a famous man shows how foolish some people can be about famous people. To

58 "Bon-Bon," Complete Works, II, 134.
59 Ibid., p. 137.
60 Ibid., pp. 134-135.
secure the desired result most effectively, Poe makes his hero become famous for the most absurd reason, because he has the largest nose in town and writes an essay on "noseology." When his essay is published, he immediately becomes the man of the hour. He is feted on every hand. Nobles and plebeians vie for the honor of his acquaintance. His nose is admired and exclaimed over. The greatest artist of the time pays for the honor of painting its picture. Then the fickleness of the public to its idols is shown. Another man loses his nose entirely, and becomes the favorite instead of the hero. 63 "Four Beasts in One" also has the thought of public fickleness. The king is highly acclaimed until danger appears. Then it is every man for himself and the public idol is left to save himself as best he can. The moment danger is over, the crowd returns to honor him again. 64

"Evil in men furnishes one source of satire for Poe. He satirizes evil men by picturing them as men without souls. Very cleverly he relates how they sign a written agreement with the devil, whereby they exchange their souls for something they desire on earth. Such a bargain inconveniences them not at all; they do quite well without souls. Poe goes


64 Complete Works, II, 213.
further than usual and names specific men who have made such agreements. There are "Cain and Nimrod, and Nero, and Caligula, and Dionysius, and Pisistratus."65

"The Business Man" is a satire on method and genius. The former Poe satirizes by making a half-wit his methodical hero. The hero is supposed to have been made a man of method by a brain injury received in childhood. Thus a methodical man is pictured as a man with no intelligence. A genius is defined as any man out of the ordinary, and is described by the hero in the following manner: "Your geniuses are all arrant asses—the greater the genius the greater the ass—and to this rule there is no exception whatever."66

It would be difficult to say whether Poe's humor or satire is uppermost when he coins words to fit the occasion on which they are to be employed. Much of his humor is in the words he uses. I have mentioned previously the satire found in the names of papers and literary men. Other names, both common and proper, are made to fit just as aptly. Most of his coined names can be taken apart to reveal a hidden meaning. For instance, there is Allamistakeo, the name of the mummy who came to life.67 Divide it and we find All-a-mistake-o. The title of the book, Tellmenow Isitsoernot,

65"Bon-Bon," Complete Works, II, 144.

66Complete Works, IV, 123.

67"Some Words With a Mummy," Complete Works, VI, 118.
becomes Tell-me-now Is-it-so-or-not. Some names are already written in divided form. One story tells of the "Duchess of Bless-My-Soul," the "Marquis of So-and-So," the "Earl of This-and-That," and "His Royal Highness of Touch-Me-Not." In "King Pest" the names of the royal family are puns. There are King Pest, Queen Pest, "'His Grace the Arch Duke Pest-Iferous,' --'His Grace the Duke Pest-Illential' --'His Grace the Duke Tem-Pest' --and 'Her Serene Highness the Arch Duchess Ana-Pest.'

Sometimes the names are not coined but are simple words which give a desired meaning. The men who invented the system of tarring and feathering are called "Doctor Tarr" and "Professor Fether." "Toby Dammit" is the man who cannot resist betting and swearing. "Mob" is the ruler who gained control of an ancient democratic government.

Aside from his use of words, Poe's chief method of attaining humor is to picture in a humorous manner something

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70 Complete Works, II, 180.

71 "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," Complete Works, VI, 70.


which is not at all funny. The devil certainly cannot be considered a humorous topic, but several of Poe's humorous stories are built around him. Although decidedly sarcastic throughout, the story of his visit with Bon-Bon is comical. His appearance, his penchant for the souls of living men, his starts at the mention of God's name, his wagging tail, and his refusal to take advantage of the philosopher's drunken state, all have much humor in them.  

There is something decidedly amusing in the way he broke up the calm and placid life of the little Dutch burghers in another story.  

The terrible plague of London is no more humorous than the devil, but Poe makes it the basis of a funny story. He secures humor through the actions of the two sailors, one so tall and skinny and the other so short and fat, and in the ridiculous manner in which he pictures the members of King Pest's family. Drinking is not a funny theme either, but it is used comically. "The Angel of the Odd" is woven around the result of drink, and is one of Poe's funniest stories.

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74 "Bon-Bon," Complete Works, II, 133 ff.


76 "King Pest," Complete Works, II, 75-77.
Both the appearance and action of the angel are portrayed comically, especially his appearance. The mental image evoked by the described assortment of bottles, kegs, and casks is very distinct.  

Poe does not often make use of dialect, but he does try humorous dialect in some stories. The speech of the Angel of the Odd is in dialect, and so is that of the Irishman in "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling."  

Although there are undoubtedly other instances of both satire and humor in Poe's stories, enough have been pointed out to show that the two go hand in hand. Furthermore, it will be seen that of the two things, satire is of far more importance in the majority of the stories quoted. The strictly humorous stories of Poe are very few, and of little importance among the whole of his tales.

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77 Complete Works, VI, 105.

78 Complete Works, IV, 114 ff.
CONCLUSION

Poe's method of writing stories and poems has been a sort of myth to the American public for years. There are still many people who firmly believe that the best of Poe's stories were written under the influence of some powerful drug or liquor. However, intensive study of his work by various students in the last few years has so completely disproved this theory that anyone who takes the trouble to read modern criticism will have no doubt that his stories are the result of careful planning. Careful reading of the stories themselves will reveal to the least critical reader many of the devices Poe used to produce the effect he desired. When several stories reveal the same methods used over and over again, we cannot consider such uses accidental.

If a person who is unfamiliar with Poe's work were given all of them to read without being told who wrote them, he would have difficulty in believing them all by the same author. It is hard to conceive how the same person who wrote "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq." and "X-ing a Paragraph" could also write such masterpieces as "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Masque of the Red Death." The two groups of stories are as far apart as the poles in both type and quality, yet the study presented in the previous chapters
reveals that many of the same methods are used for securing the widely different results. Let us briefly review the methods used in common in two or more different types of Poe's short stories. One method common to all four kinds of the stories is description so vivid that it paints mental pictures as clear as any painted landscape put on canvas by the best artists. Whether the image is one of the devil, as in "Bon-Bon," of an exquisite landscape, as in "The Island of the Fay," or of a man driven mad by fear and grief, as in "The Fall of the House of Usher," it is equally clear. Accuracy in small details is another method common to all stories. Writing the stories in the first person, and advancing the plot through revelation of the characters' minds are others. Use of the power of suggestion is just as effective in the poorer stories as in the better ones. Use of particularly effective words is another common characteristic of all stories. Poe seems to have certain favorite words and phrases which he uses over and over again. For example, the words "writhing" and "ghastly" and the phrase "at a forty-five degree angle" are used many times. The phrase "out-Heroding Herod" is found in two stories, but they are both of the same kind.

One common failure binds together all types of Poe's short stories. That is his failure to depict life-like characters. I have pointed out in Chapter I that the characters
used are the only kind that could be effective in his stories of effect. Yet it seems as if the characters in his other types of stories could have been more lifelike.

In the Introduction I mentioned the three requirements of a model short story as set up by Poe. It must have a single unified effect, it must be neither too long nor too short, and it must be original. I have tried to show the many methods used in each of the four kinds of stories to achieve the unified effect which Poe deems necessary. Let us see now if the stories fulfill these requirements.

In order to achieve a single unified effect, Poe makes every word, every thought in each story point to the final outcome. He said himself that the proper place to begin a story is with the climax. The process by which "The Raven" was written, as described in "The Philosophy of Composition," has been dubbed just another of Poe's hoaxes. With this opinion I cannot agree. It does not seem possible that every word in a story could consistently point to the dénouement if the end were not kept in mind throughout the composition. In addition to making every word point to the final outcome, Poe uses another method to secure a unified effect. He does in prose


2Bement, Weaving the Short Story, p. 9.
what others have done in poetry. Poetry is the realm of the emotions, prose the realm of the intellect. Poe appeals to the emotion through the intellect, especially in his better stories. He wishes his reader to experience the sensations of horror, terror, or despair, and, as these are not suited to poetry, he uses poetic words and methods in prose. As his emotion rises, his language becomes more and more poetic, and his thoughts attain a rhythmic repetition until they culminate in a climax fully as forceful as that in the greatest poetry.

Since Poe's prose is poetic in effect, in order to attain unity it must, like a good poem, not be of excessive length. Poe is quite definite about the length of a good poem. He says,

A poem must intensely excite. Excitement is its province, its essentiality. Its value is in the ratio of its (elevating) excitement. But all excitement is, from a psychical necessity, transient. It cannot be sustained through a poem of great length.  

For the same reason, a story which excites strong emotions must necessarily be short. In his better stories, the stories of effect, Poe keeps well within the limits of length which can sustain strong emotion. In his poorer stories, those of pseudo-science, he lets his love of detail carry him beyond the limits. "The Journal of Julius Rodman" and "The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall" are so long that they

become tiresome long before the end is reached. The same is true of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," one of the detective stories. However, excessive length can be excused in the last named story more easily than in the other two. Since it is based on true facts, it is necessary that all the data be presented.

Poe's third requirement is originality. If we keep in mind his definition of literary originality as presented in the Introduction, we have no difficulty in determining that originality is one of the strongest points in his stories. His originality is of tone and atmosphere. Few, if any, of the facts in his stories are novel, but no one will deny that the effects are such as had seldom been attempted before his time, and had never been so perfectly accomplished. Some of the material used in his stories could not be tolerated if the effect were not so artistical.

How much of Poe's life and ideals is revealed in his stories has long been an interesting question. His fondness for depiciting deterioration in human life may be the result of the gradual downfall of his own health and ideals. Love for his young wife and grief at her early death can easily have been responsible for his many stories of madness caused by grief for a loved one. The satire he constantly uses toward editors, writers, and the world in general may be the
bitter reflection of his own misfortunes. Undoubtedly, love and gratitude for his mother-in-law are revealed in the story of "Eleonora."

Putting aside all thought of technicalities, methods used, and possible shortcomings in Poe's short stories, we come to the final conclusion that they do fulfill the "end of all fictitious composition, pleasure." One critic gives the following description of a story which gives pleasure to its reader:

That book is likely to give the most pleasure to the reader which presents, in accordance with the conventions and in the terms of art, the sense of uncertainty, the blindfold striving, the constant awaiting of the revelation of the coming moment, which plays such an appreciable part in life itself.

Certainly there can be no question but that Poe's better stories, at least, do exactly this.

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TEXT


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