

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUBJECT IN  
THE SHORT FICTION OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME II

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CHAPTER 5

MYTHS OF THE FULL OBJECT.

## 1. POE'S AESTHETIC THEORIES: A CRITIQUE

If the detective and the mesmerist enter Poe's fiction as mythical instances of the "full" subject, the same may be said of a third figure, the artist. In this case, however, the question is complicated by the concrete physical status of the artist's products; a mythology of the artist necessarily implies a mythology of the art-object. The latter will be examined first, in this chapter. In Poe's writing, taken as a whole, the individual artwork and the private interior (an aesthetic totality including a collection of artworks) recur as embodiments of the ideology of "unity". The artwork, as a made and finished object, and the interior, as an organised accumulation of such objects, appear to confirm the subject in its own illusory coherence and closure; to the artist (and consumer) as "full" subject corresponds the artwork as "full" object. The subject-object relation constituted in idealist aesthetics has already been examined in Chapter 1, in relation to Coleridge and to the kind of materialist critique of idealism represented by Macherey (A Theory of Literary Production, 1966) and Eagleton (Criticism and Ideology, 1976).<sup>1</sup> This relation will be examined in detail in the discussion that follows; it will be shown that in Poe's aesthetic writings the ideology of "unity" in practice enters into conflict with a contrary tendency, the constitution of writing (and reading) as active, dynamic processes of material construction. Furthermore, in the texts (both theoretical and fictional) that centre on the interior as privileged location, the apparent coherence of the "unified" space is ruptured by disintegrative tendencies; the interior becomes a locus of disorientation and destruction, and thus comes to undermine the subject as much as it confirms it. In this chapter, the first section concentrates on

Poe's theoretical and critical writings on literature; the corpus of aesthetic writings is taken as a whole, with particular attention devoted to the second (1847) review of Hawthorne's tales ('Tale-Writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne' - H XIII, 141-55), to 'The Philosophy of Composition' (1846 - H XIV, 193-208) and to 'The Poetic Principle' (written 1848, published 1850 - H XIV, 266-92). The second section examines the interior as constituted in the essay 'Philosophy of Furniture' (1840 - M II, 495-503); considers some related concepts (synaesthesia, phantasmagoria, Gothic, grotesque, arabesque); and analyses the fictional constructions of interiors in a series of tales.

Poe's aesthetic theories, which will here be considered as a whole, are constructed across the oeuvre both through explicit theoretical manifestos (e.g. 'The Poetic Principle') and in the course of critical reviews of specific works (e.g. the Hawthorne essays); 'The Philosophy of Composition' is a special case, since it is simultaneously an aesthetic manifesto and a self-criticism of Poe's own 'The Raven'. The theoretical positions developed in these texts should, necessarily, be considered in the context of the dominant conditions of literary production.

The relations of production under which Poe wrote his fiction and journalism have already been described, in Chapter 1.<sup>2</sup> The practice of journalism for mass-circulation magazines, the low salaries and piece-rates, the high rate of exploitation and the writer's relative absence of control over the conditions of work - all these factors were typical of the situation of the professional writer in the U.S. of the 1830s and 40s (Hawthorne, for instance, worked under similar

conditions),<sup>3</sup> and constituted a market-oriented mode of literary production that can be considered as quite recognisably capitalist. The dominance of the short story and the short essay in Poe's oeuvre can be explained in terms of economic exigencies - the absence of an international copyright law negatively conditioned the saleability of native books in the U.S., forcing most writers to concentrate on brief genres (Hawthorne published only five novels over a writing career considerably longer than Poe's).

The magazine writer's situation was typically that of an exploited and underpaid producer of commodities for the market, and of surplus value for his employer. Thus the writer Horatio Bridge wrote to Hawthorne (1 February 1837), concerning the latter's relations with his employer, S. G. Goodrich, editor of The Token: 'I coincide perfectly with you touching the disparity of profit between a writer's labor and a publisher's. It is hard that you should do so much and receive so little from the Token.'<sup>4</sup> Hawthorne himself wrote to a correspondent called Hillard (24 March 1844): 'It will never do for me to continue merely a writer for the magazines - the most unprofitable business in the world.'<sup>5</sup> The whole process which Lukács (Studies in European Realism, 1948) calls the 'transformation of literature into a commodity'<sup>6</sup> had come to characterise the writer's situation in all the advanced capitalist economies. Thus, in Balzac's Illusions perdues (1843), Lucien de Rubempré, entering the literary market in Paris, discovers 'le brutal et matériel aspect que prenait la littérature': 'Pour ces libraires, les livres étaient comme des bonnets de coton pour des bonnetiers, une marchandise à vendre cher, à acheter bon marché.'<sup>7</sup> A book becomes a commodity ('marchandise') like any other, to be bought in the cheapest market and sold in the

dearest.<sup>8</sup> The corollary of the commodification of the text is the exploitation of the writer; as the journalist Étienne Lousteau explains in Balzac's novel, 'il s'agit d'exploiter le travail d'autrui. Les propriétaires de journaux sont des entrepreneurs, nous sommes des maçons.'<sup>9</sup> Poe was himself conscious of the situation, as is clear from his 1845 article (already quoted in Chapter 1)<sup>10</sup> 'Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House':

... hence we have Magazine publishers ... who, under certain conditions of good conduct, occasional puffs, and decent subserviency at all times, make it a point of conscience to encourage the poor devil author with a dollar or two, more or less as he behaves himself properly ... (M III, 1207)

The dominant model for the relations of literary production was, then, that of the subordinate (if not always 'subservient') 'poor devil author' and the 'fat "editor and proprietor"' (ibid., 1208). Poe's attempt (never fully realised) at setting up his own magazine implies a recognition of the limits of the existing situation, and a tentative (if purely individualist) protest against it; as he wrote in his outline of the project, Prospectus of the Penn Magazine (1841) (H XVII, 58-61), in connection with his earlier work on the Southern Literary Messenger:

Having in it no proprietary rights, my objects, too being at variance with those of its very worthy owner, I found difficulty in stamping upon its pages that individuality which I believe essential to the full success of all similar publications.... in founding a Magazine of my own lies my sole chance of carrying out to completion whatever peculiar intentions I may have entertained. (58-59)

The mode of protest involved here is simply that of becoming an individual magazine-owner oneself; but what is important is the awareness of a situation of lack of control over production and product.<sup>11</sup>



At the same time as the commodification of writing became objectively dominant, the ideology of the autonomy of art gained ground. The artist came to be seen as a privileged, heroic, uniquely gifted subject, while the artwork was transformed into a unified, self-referential object of contemplation. This double myth of a unitary subject and object has already been seen in the making, in the discussion in Chapter 1 of Coleridge's definition of poetry and the poet, in Biographia Literaria (1817).<sup>12</sup> If in Coleridge's theory both poet and poem are seen in terms of 'unity' and 'balance',<sup>13</sup> in 'Kubla Khan' (1798) the aesthetic realm is conceived in terms of a hermetic closure. The poet is presented as (ideally) a being of superior perceptions, surrounded by a magic circle from which he can dominate and intimidate listener and reader:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.<sup>14</sup>

The notion of the aesthetic as a privileged, closed domain recurs in Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821): 'poetry ... creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitant of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos.'<sup>15</sup> Later in the century, Baudelaire, constructing the myth of the poète maudit, saw the artist (in 'Bénédiction' (1857))<sup>16</sup> as set apart from the rest of humanity, the privileged wearer of a 'couronne mystique', a 'beau diadème éblouissant et clair' made of 'pure lumière'.<sup>17</sup> The poet thus effectively becomes a secular saint, surrounded by a halo. In the late prose-poem 'Perte d'Auréole' (1869),<sup>18</sup> the halo, significantly enough, falls off, and the poet becomes an ordinary mortal: 'Et me

voici, tout semblable à vous',<sup>19</sup> But the typical Baudelairean position is that of 'Bénédiction', the idealist notion of the autonomy of art. The artist becomes the highest possible instance of the unitary, self-sufficient subject.

In their different ways, the discourses of Coleridge, Shelley and Baudelaire (and, as will be seen, Poe) tend, at least part of the time, to constitute the artist, the artwork and the aesthetic domain as autonomous, surrounded by a "circle" or "halo" that isolates them from wider social and historical concerns (though Shelley, of course, simultaneously believed in the poet as politically committed 'legislator').<sup>20</sup> What is in question, in this kind of discourse, is the illusory phenomenon which Benjamin identifies as the 'aura'.<sup>21</sup> This concept is presented in 'A Small History of Photography' (1931), and further developed in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) and Charles Baudelaire (1935-39).<sup>22</sup> The 1931 text contains the clearest definition: the aura is seen as 'the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be'; the artwork thus appears as an isolated, unrepeatable object of contemplation. Modern technology, however, tends to destroy the aura by making the artwork reproducible: 'even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness - by means of reproduction'.<sup>23</sup> The quasi-religious function of the aura is emphasised in the 1936 essay, where it is placed in relation to the 'cult value of the work of art': 'Unapproachability is ... a major quality of the cult image.'<sup>24</sup> In the Baudelaire study, the aura is seen as constantly under threat, liable to break down under pressure from the shocks and stresses of urban reality; 'Perte d'Auréole' consummates what

Benjamin calls 'the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock'.<sup>25</sup> Cultural myth the notion of the aura may be, but it was (and remains) a pervasive and influential ideology, conditioning received ideas of art and the artist.

The ideology of the autonomous artwork may be considered as a direct consequence of artists' actual dependence on the market. Deprived of control over the conditions of production, artists developed the compensatory myth of the autonomy of their product; 'l'art pour l'art' may thus be seen as a form of protest against alienation, even if frequently itself conceived in the alienated discourse of idealism. Raymond Williams, in Culture and Society 1780-1950 (1958),<sup>26</sup> describes the process by which 'art' came to stand for a special kind of truth, ... and 'artist' for a special kind of person'.<sup>27</sup> The economic shift from a patronage to a market system was accompanied, in the Romantic period, by an ideological shift: 'the idea of the independent creative writer, the autonomous genius, was becoming a kind of rule'.<sup>28</sup> Williams sees the new ideology of art as deriving both from writers' desire for compensation for their bondage to the market, and from a more general opposition to the values of the emergent industrialist-capitalist system;<sup>29</sup> artists became 'convinced that the principles on which the new society was being organized were actively hostile to the necessary principles of art'.<sup>30</sup> However, this oppositional dynamic - as expressed in a text like 'A Defence of Poetry' - entailed the risk of the 'separation of poets from other men (sic), and their classification into an idealised general person, "Poet" or "Artist", which was to be so widely and so damagingly received'.<sup>31</sup> In the specific case of Poe, Louis Harap ('Edgar Allan Poe and Journalism', 1971) suggests that Poe's 'literary theory ... is that

of the alienated artist',<sup>32</sup> forced into the practice of mass journalism and exemplifying the 'repulsion felt by so many great artists of his century against a commodity-oriented social order'; in protest against the commodity structure, Poe evolved a 'doctrine of pure poetry'.<sup>33</sup> This interpretation of Poe's theories is convergent with Williams' notion of Romantic aesthetics as a mode of protest.

The writer's dependence on the market was accompanied by the unprecedented development of technology, which could be seen as posing a further threat to art. The rapid pace of technological progress threatened to make the artist's activity seem outdated and static, while, as shown earlier in this study, new technologies transformed the conditions of literary production itself, permitting the emergence of a mass market.<sup>34</sup> In particular, the photograph, or daguerreotype, was perceived as a problematic innovation. The daguerreotype process was developed over the 1830s by Louis-Jacques-Mondé Daguerre, and officially announced at the French Academy of Sciences in 1839.<sup>35</sup>

It is mentioned in Poe's 'The Thousand-and-second Tale of Scheherazade' (1845) as one of the technological marvels Sinbad encounters in Britain;<sup>36</sup> the various 'magicians' he meets (M III, 1167) include one who 'directed the sun to paint his portrait, and the sun did' (1168). The new technique also appears prominently in Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables (1851), where Holgrave's profession of daguerreotypist symbolises his modernity. If neither Poe nor Hawthorne seems to have received the daguerreotype negatively, denunciation was not lacking from other quarters. Benjamin, in 'A Small History of Photography' (1931), quotes an attack on Daguerre published in the Leipziger Stadtanzeiger: 'To try to capture fleeting mirror

images ... is not just an impossible undertaking ...; the very wish to do such a thing is blasphemous.... The utmost the artist may venture, borne on the wings of divine inspiration, is to reproduce man's God-given features without the help of any machine'.<sup>37</sup>

Photography is here seen as "unnatural" and threatening to the dominant ideology. In similar, if less extreme tones, Baudelaire denounced photography in his Salon de 1859 :<sup>38</sup>

Dans ces jours déplorable, une industrie nouvelle se produisit, qui ne contribua pas peu ... à ruiner ce qui pouvait rester de divin dans l'esprit français.... la société immonde se rua, comme un seul Narcisse, pour contempler sa triviale image sur le métal ... l'industrie, faisant irruption dans l'art, en devient la plus mortelle ennemie ... S'il est permis à la photographie de suppléer l'art dans quelques-unes de ses fonctions, elle l'aura bientôt supplanté ou corrompu tout à fait ...<sup>39</sup>

Like the anonymous German writer, Baudelaire sees photography as blasphemous, threatening the "divine" element in humanity; and, besides, as encouraging narcissism rather than imaginative self-transcendence, and as reinforcing the public prejudice in favour of realism in art

(l'industrie qui nous donnerait un résultat identique à la nature serait l'art absolu').<sup>40</sup> This ultra-defensive reaction derives partly from the fear that technology may actually supersede art, replacing it instead of remaining its 'très-humble servante';<sup>41</sup> and partly from the perception that the reproducibility of the art-object, via photography, threatens its aura of uniqueness - and therefore undermines the ideology of art as the essence of 'ce qu'il y a, de plus étheré et de plus immatériel'.<sup>42</sup>

One possible strategy against the threat represented by technology in general, and photography in particular, was to turn art itself into a technique - to develop aesthetic theories that would privilege the

making, constructive role of the artist, and convert the writer into an engineer (even if he still, paradoxically, kept his halo). Art could protect itself against the "irruption of industry" that Baudelaire complained of, if it showed itself to be a form of labour, as rigorous and organised an activity as industry. It is in this context that one may place Gustave Flaubert's celebrated emphasis on literary technique (to quote Roland Barthes (Le Degré zero de l'écriture, 1953),<sup>43</sup> for Flaubert 'l'écriture sera sauvée ... grâce au travail qu'elle aura coûté');<sup>44</sup> or Baudelaire's comments, in the 'Préambule' to 'La Genèse d'un Poème', his translation of 'The Philosophy of Composition' (1859),<sup>45</sup> on the poet's status as 'compositeur', stressing 'quel labeur exige cet objet de luxe qu'on nomme Poésie'.<sup>46</sup> If Baudelaire here seems still to see the artist's work as artisanal, by the time of Valéry ('Situation de Baudelaire', 1928) the writer has become a fully-fledged technician; for the latter, Poe himself was 'l'ingénieur littéraire que profondit et utilise toutes les ressources de l'art',<sup>47</sup> and 'l'inventeur de plusieurs genres'.<sup>48</sup> The artist as engineer-inventor is thus enabled to compete in full equality with the scientist. As will be shown below,<sup>49</sup> there is a direct line from Poe to Valéry, through Baudelaire and Mallarmé, corresponding to the development of the concept of writing as labour, as technique. Poe was clearly aware of the potential antagonism (or competition) between technology and art, as is evidenced in his 1845 essay 'The American Drama' (H XIII, 33-73),<sup>50</sup> where the fine arts are contrasted to the 'utilitarian' or 'business' arts (33); 'No one complains of the decline of the art of Engineering', Poe argues (34), while the fine arts 'seem to have declined, because they have remained stationary' (35). Poe's theoretical privileging of the 'making' aspect of poetry, in 'The Philosophy of Composition', may

be seen as an attempt at countering this notion of relative decline by promoting the claims of art as technique.

The autonomy of art, on the one hand; art as labour, on the other - both notions figure among the principal tendencies in nineteenth-century aesthetics, and both are ultimately the product of larger economic and social determinants (the commodity structure, technological development). They also enter into visible contradiction with each other, often in the work of the same writer - as in Baudelaire, or in Balzac's 'Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu' (1832)<sup>51</sup> (a text to be discussed below in connection with Poe's 'The Oval Portrait'),<sup>52</sup> where the painter Frenhofer has devoted endless, painstaking labour to a canvas which he nonetheless perceives as an autonomous, living entity. The same tension marks the aesthetic theories of Poe; as Macherey (A Theory of Literary Production, 1966) has pointed out, 'The Philosophy of Composition' is characterised by 'an embarrassing contradiction: the work is the product both of a certain labour and of a passive contemplation'.<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, for Poe, 'composition is construction';<sup>54</sup> on the other, he endows the text with 'a unity and totality into which it vanishes'.<sup>55</sup> To this contradiction in Poe's model of the text (as both made object and autonomous essence) may be added another, in his model of reading (seen alternately as domination of the reader by writer and text, and as a process of active reconstruction). Poe's aesthetic and critical writings will now be examined in detail, in the light of this double contradiction.

Poe's concept of the relation between art and nature is clearly expressed in his anti-naturalist comments in 'The Poetic Principle'.

Here, he rejects out of hand any notion of writing as the simple reproduction of external reality: 'the mere oral or written repetition of ... forms, and sounds, and colours, and odours, and sentiments ... is not poetry' (H XIV, 273). An art-product, for Poe, is more than a simple aggregation of descriptions of phenomena; it is the result of a determinate process of mental activity on the part of the human subject. The materials, the necessary preconditions, of poetry are drawn from the objects of perception - located either in physical nature: 'in the bright orbs that shine in Heaven - in the volutes of the flower' (290-91), or in the human social universe: 'in all noble thoughts ... in all holy impulses ... in the beauty of woman' (291). However, between these preconditions and the finished poem, there intervenes the mediating activity of the human subject. The 'Poetic Sentiment', by whose operations these objects are transformed into an art-product, is located in the human mind. Variouslly defined as 'an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave' (273-74) or 'the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty' (290), it corresponds to an image in the human mind of authentic and unalienated being; whatever its alleged supernatural origins, it is clearly a function of the writer as mental agent (Harap ('Poe and Dostoevsky', 1976) relates the 'Poetic Sentiment' to the desire to reject the 'dehumanized world' of commodity production).<sup>56</sup> Poe's position in 'The Poetic Principle' may be reformulated as follows:

NATURE + MIND = POEM

A similar model of the art-nature relation is offered, this time for the area of prose fiction, in Poe's review of Henry Cockton's Stanley Thorn (1842 - H XI, 10-15):



... mere incidents are not books. Neither are they the basis of books - of which the idiosyncrasy is thought in contradistinction from deed. A book without action cannot be; but a book is only such, to the extent of its thought, independently of its deed. (11)

Or, to reformulate:

EVENT + THOUGHT = FICTION

The major component in the production of a text is, then, not the objects or events represented, but the conscious activity of the writer as subject.

The process of literary creation thus appears as an instance of human labour; Poe, indeed, presents writing, in 'The Poetic Principle', in terms of struggle: 'We struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness ...' (274). The concept of 'combination' supposes a conscious, organising force motivating the writing-process. Poe consistently presents the writer, optimally conceived, as working in complete control of his material; thus, in the 'Marginalia' (1846), he writes: 'In the hands of the true artist the theme, or "work", is but a mass of clay, of which anything ... may be fashioned at will or according to the skill of the workman. The clay is, in fact, the slave of the artist. It belongs to him.' (H XIV, 99). Writing is thus seen as a form of labour, and the artist as a 'workman'. Besides, in general, Poe's criticism tends to evaluate writers according to the degree of technical skill present in their work. To posit "control" and "construction" as essential criteria for writing is, in effect, to assimilate the finished object completely to the producing subject; if the final text, ideally conceived, appears as something perfectly

constructed and internally consistent, then it remains solely and totally within the possession of the writer. It constitutes itself as the objectification of his labour, and beyond that, in its perfection it justifies that labour.

Hence, in his review of Elizabeth Barrett's The Drama of Exile, and other Poems (1845 - H XII, 1-35), Poe imagines a utopian series of poems, to be written at some future date by a hypothetical ideal poet, by virtue of 'that mental and moral combination which shall unite in one person ... the most profound instinct of Art, and the sternest Will properly to blend and vigorously to control all' (34). The notions of "unity" and "blending" are clearly Coleridgean, recalling the definition of the poet in Biographia Literaria (1817);<sup>57</sup> Poe, however, places more emphasis than Coleridge on the "will", seen as the organising quality par excellence. Here, as in the 'Marginalia' extract quoted above, Poe's aesthetic theory converges with the discourse of mesmerism; the raw materials of art are subjected to the transforming force of the artist's will, which dominates the 'clay', and 'blends' and 'controls', as the mesmerist's will dominates that of the patient.

The kind of hypothetical perfect text postulated in the Barrett review would be, in its flawless consistency, a simulacrum of the universe itself, as described in the model of Eureka:

In the construction of plot ... we should aim at so arranging the incidents that we shall not be able to determine, of any one of them, whether it depends from any one other or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is really, or practically, unattainable - but only because it is a finite intelligence that constructs. The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a plot of God. (Beaver, Science Fiction, p. 292)

An ideally constructed text implies an ideally autonomous producing subject. While the divine freedom of Poe's artist-demiurge is clearly unattainable, the organising, constructive labour which the writer exerts on his text is conceived as an expression of human freedom. By encouraging writers to plan and design their works to the maximum, Poe strikes a blow at the alienating pressures of the commodity structure; if the writer cannot control the conditions or relations of production, at least he can claim, and practise, maximum control over what remains within his jurisdiction, that is, the process of production. When Poe writes, in the 1847 Hawthorne review, that when (ideally) '(a) skilful artist has constructed a tale', every word tends to 'the one pre-established design' (H XIII, 153), this elevation of 'skill' and 'design' constitutes a vindication of the writer's free productive labour (as if disengaged from the commodity structure) as well as a claim for art as implying as much organisational rigour as technology.

Thus, in the Barnaby Rudge review (1842 - H XI, 38-64), Poe blames the lapses in construction he observes in Dickens' novel on the conditions of magazine writing; the text is seen as bearing manifest scars of its serial production:

It is, perhaps, but one of a thousand instances of the disadvantages, both to the author and the public, of the present absurd fashion of periodical novel-writing, that our author had not sufficiently considered or determined upon any particular plot when he began the story ... (54)

Similarly, in the review of Francis Marryatt's Joseph Rushbrook, or the Poacher (1841 - H X, 197-202), the deficiencies of plot are put down to economic factors:

The novels of Marryatt ... are evidently written to order, for certain considerations, and have to be delivered within certain periods.... There is none of that binding power perceptible, which often gives a species of unity ... to the most random narrations. (201)

To organise a narrative rigorously, to exercise the writer's 'binding power', thus becomes an act of protest against the literary market economy; Poe's criticism in this respect affirms the value of writing as labour, rather than that of the text as commodity.

However, as already observed, this potentially materialist concept of writing enters into contradiction, across the critical oeuvre, with an idealist notion of the artwork as an autonomous entity, a distant object of contemplation surrounded and protected by its impenetrable aura. The poem is seen as a self-referential, autotelic object; thus, in 'The Poetic Principle', Poe presents his concept of the 'poem which is a poem and nothing more - ... written solely for the poem's sake' - in short, the 'poem per se' (272). A more flagrant instance of the ideology of aesthetic autonomy could scarcely be conceived. The artwork becomes a fetish; the attempt to liberate it from the commodity structure through the process of making paradoxically only endows it with a phantom autonomy which parallels that of the fetishised commodity itself.<sup>58</sup> In Marx's theory of alienation (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844), 'the worker is related to the product of his (sic) labour as to an alien object ... the life which he (sic) has bestowed on the object confronts him (sic) as hostile and alien';<sup>59</sup> in Poe's aesthetics, the art-object takes on a similar autonomy from the producer (and consumer).

Poe tends to present the aesthetic realm as a closed, hermetically-

sealed space (as will be shown below, this notion of aesthetic closure receives its concrete symbolisation in the private interiors of tales like 'The Assignation' and 'Usher').<sup>60</sup> Thus, in 'The Philosophy of Composition', the poetic universe of 'The Raven' - as well as the imaginary physical space, the 'richly furnished room', constructed in the poem - is presented in terms of circumscription, insulation, framing: 'it has always appeared to me that a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident: - it has the force of a frame to a picture' (H XIV, 204). The text is here conceived as a closed system, existing outside the reader's social existence, to be contemplated with awe like a picture in a gallery. The metaphor of spatial circumscription also occurs in 'The Drake-Halleck Review' (1836 - H VIII, 275-318), where the poetic domain is signified through the metaphor of the circle:

If, indeed, there be any one circle of thought distinctly and palpably marked out from amid the jarring and tumultuous chaos of human intelligence, it is that evergreen and radiant Paradise which the true poet knows, and knows alone, as the limited realm of his authority - as the circumscribed Eden of his dreams. (281)

The 'circle of thought' and 'circumscribed Eden' recall the circle that, in 'Kubla Khan', surrounds the poet who has 'drunk the milk of Paradise'; and, also, the closed aesthetic domain of 'A Defence of Poetry', 'a world to which the familiar world is a chaos'.<sup>61</sup> Art thus becomes a "special" activity, demarcated and insulated from all others.

The concept of closure is closely linked to that of "totality" or "unity"; the artwork is seen as not only isolated but homogeneous, ideally (at least) free from conflict or contradiction. Poe takes

over and develops a myth already present in the aesthetics of Coleridge (the Poe-Coleridge relation has been examined in detail by, for instance, Elio Chinol, in 'Poe's Essays on Poetry' (1946)),<sup>62</sup> reproducing the ideology of "unity" constituted in Biographia Literaria. For Coleridge, the poet is characterised by 'the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect'.<sup>63</sup> Poe, similarly, refers, in 'The Poetic Principle', to 'that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity', defined as 'totality of effect or impression' (267); and, in 'The Philosophy of Composition', to 'the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity, of effect' (196).<sup>64</sup> It has already been shown, in Chapter 1, how the myth of the unified artwork tends to reinforce the myth of the unitary subject, confirming both writer and reader in the illusory coherence of their subjectivity; the conflict-free art-object reflects and doubles the conflict-free self.<sup>65</sup>

In its turn, the notion of "unity" implies, in Poe's hands, that of brevity. Poe develops, and takes to an extreme, Coleridge's elevation of the short poem over the long poem,<sup>66</sup> and, in addition, considers the short story to be a superior art-form to the novel. According to Coleridge, 'a poem of any length neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry';<sup>67</sup> it would follow that an epic poem is "poetry" only some of the time. Poe goes further, rejecting the epic and the long poem altogether, considering them not to be authentic "poetry" at all; in 'The Poetic Principle', he argues that Paradise Lost is 'to be regarded as poetry, only when ... we view it merely as a series of minor poems', since qualitatively it alternates between 'true poetry' and 'platitude'. He concludes that 'the ultimate aggregate, or absolute effect of even the best epic

under the sun, is a nullity' (267). Since only the short poem can be qualitatively homogeneous, and therefore totally "unified", Poe argues, in 'The Philosophy of Composition', that 'the limit of a single sitting ... can never properly be overpassed in a poem' (196), and finally suggests that the 'proper length' for a poem is not more than 'one hundred lines' (197). As for the novel, Poe argues in the 1847 Hawthorne review that the artistic value of the form is - as with the epic - severely limited by its length: 'As the novel cannot be read at one sitting, it cannot avail itself of the immense benefit of totality.' (153) On the other hand, the short story permits the attainment of that 'totality': 'The tale proper affords the fairest field which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose, for the exercise of the highest genius.' (151)

Poe's doctrine of brevity has been subjected to damaging normative criticism, e.g. by Yvor Winters ('Edgar Allan Poe: A Crisis in the History of American Obscurantism', 1937),<sup>68</sup> who sees it as an attempt to '(eliminate) from the field of English poetry nearly all of the greatest acknowledged masters'.<sup>69</sup> It may be more useful, however, to examine it historically and ideologically. On the historical level, it is partly dictated by the literary commodity market, and partly a protest against it. In the first place, brevity was saleable; Poe's theory and practice reveal a marked awareness of the pressures of the new mass-circulation journalism, which - as seen in Chapter 1<sup>70</sup> - was represented in the U.S. by the likes of Graham's Magazine and Godey's Lady's Book. F. L. Mott (A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850), 1939) differentiates between a 'review' or 'journal' and a 'magazine'. The former were mainly 'serious', whereas a magazine

contained 'a variety of reading matter', with 'a strong connotation of entertainment'.<sup>71</sup> Poe recognised that the whole emphasis in journalism was shifting from reviews to magazines; thus, in the 'Marginalia' (1846), he wrote:

The whole tendency of the age is Magazine-ward. The Quarterly Reviews have never been popular.... their ponderosity is quite out of keeping with the rush of the age. We now demand the light artillery of the intellect; we need the curt, the condensed, the pointed, the readily diffused - in place of the verbose, the detailed, the voluminous, the inaccessible. (117-18)

The short story and short poem imposed themselves as marketable kinds of text, since they could easily be included in the varied menu offered by the magazines. At the same time, however, the tale had an aesthetic advantage over the novel, in the magazine context. As seen in Chapter 1,<sup>72</sup> the lack of an international copyright law made native novels all but unsaleable in the U.S. in book form; serial publication in magazines was a far more viable proposition. Poe's harsh comments, as quoted above, on the 'present absurd fashion of periodical novel-writing' (Barnaby Rudge review, 54)<sup>73</sup> suggest that one of the determinants of his preference, in theory and practice, of the tale over the novel was that the former offered more scope for rigorous construction and revision. The tale was not liable to the dangers of improvisation that beset the novel (thus, in 'The Philosophy of Composition', Poe wrote: 'It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation' (193)), and its length permitted frequent republication, and therefore revision. It may also be noted that the only type of novel which Poe excludes from his strictures on the genre in 'The Philosophy of Composition' appears to be the loose, episodic novel of adventure (as demanding no unity); the example



given is Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719) (196), but it could as well have been Poe's own Arthur Gordon Pym. The ideology of brevity is, in part, an ex post facto justification of Poe's own practice; but both theory and practice are also expressions of protest against the writer's dependence on the magazine system, to the extent that brevity permits a greater degree of control over the writing-process.

The notion of brevity may also be understood in ideological terms; the brief text becomes a privileged locus for the confirmation of the reader's illusory autonomy as subject, thanks to the specific character of the reading-process involved. Whereas a longer text, epic or novel, has to be read discontinuously over a certain period, the short poem or tale can be read at one sitting; the "entire", uninterrupted reading-process thus confirms the reader's self-image as "entire", homogeneous subject. Like the mirror-image of the child's body, the brief text appears as a continuous whole. The ideology of aesthetic brevity and "unity" thus tends, in Poe's work, to work against both the elements of disintegration present on the level of the signified, and the theoretical emphasis on the text as construct; it may be viewed as an attempt to shore up the continually threatened subjectivity of both writer and reader. This ideological function is clearly present in the 1847 Hawthorne review. Here, Poe objects to the novel on the grounds of the discontinuous reading it demands: 'Worldly interests, intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, counteract and annul the impressions intended. But simple cessation in reading would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity.' In contrast, the short story permits an uninterrupted reading: 'In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry

out his full design without interruption. During the hour of perusal, the soul of the reader is at the writer's control.' The tale can thus be swallowed whole, with its "unity" unimpaired: 'The idea of the tale, its thesis, has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed - an end absolutely demanded, yet, in the novel, altogether unattainable.' (153) The tale is thus seen as a double "unity", perceived as a unitary construct and consumed through a unitary process; that is, it doubly reassures the reader's sense of her/his uninterrupted subjectivity. The lexis of this passage is replete with signifiers of plenitude and coherence: 'the true unity', 'his full design', 'unblemished', 'undisturbed'. The reader is held to emerge from the reading-process with 'a sense of the fullest satisfaction' (ibid.); from the text he/she has received a mirror-image of her/himself as 'full' and 'unblemished' subject (this spurious convergence between subject and object is, however, both reproduced and undermined in 'Usher', where - as will be shown below<sup>74</sup> - the 'specious totality' (M II, 400) of the House, itself an artwork, is shattered as both Usher and the narrator head towards psychic disintegration).

Poe's model of the text/reader relation is, then, one of object confirming subject. Attention must, however, also be focussed on his construction of the writer/reader relation - which, in the Hawthorne review, is essentially one of domination: 'the soul of the reader is at the writer's control' (153). As suggested above,<sup>75</sup> the writer, exercising his will, controls the reader's perceptions as the mesmerist induces hallucinations in his patient: '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' (ibid.). The writer thus, via the text conceived as cult-object, introduces

images into the reader's mind; the reader's own role in the exchange is largely passive, confined to receptive "contemplation" (a certain activity is implicit in the phrase 'with a kindred art', since the 'art' of contemplation has to be learned, but it is ultimately the art of being manipulated). The writer aims to produce a series of 'impressions' in the reader's mind, to work on him ('having deliberately conceived a certain single effect to be wrought' - *ibid.*); the effectiveness of his writing is judged by the extent of his success in thus dominating the reader, as the efficacy of mesmerism depends on the degree of psychic control produced. Similarly, in 'The Poetic Principle', the writer/reader relation, conceived as the production of 'effect', is seen in terms of 'impression', of the active writer's manipulation of the inert reader: 'common sense ... will prefer deciding upon a work of art ... by the impression it makes, by the effect it produces ... There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax.' (268-69) The reader is thus reduced to 'wax' in the writer's hands. These passages clearly tend towards an authoritarian concept of art, which leaves no room for the reader's active reconstruction, interpretation or contestation of the text. In this aspect, Poe's theory of reading presupposes the acceptance of what Barthes (S/Z, 1970) calls 'le divorce impitoyable que l'institution littéraire maintient entre le fabricant et l'usager du texte, son propriétaire et son client, son auteur et son lecteur'.<sup>76</sup> A poem is to be evaluated in terms of how far it reproduces in the reader the sensations present in the writer's mind at the time of production; to quote 'The Drake-Halleck Review':

... since Poetry ... is the practical result, expressed in language, of this Poetic Sentiment in certain individuals, the only proper method of testing the merits of a poem is by

measuring its capabilities of exciting the Poetic Sentiment in others. (284)

The reader is expected to ingest the poem, to surrender passively; the pleasure of reading is not a matter of active engagement with the text, but, in the terms of 'The Poetic Principle', an 'elevating excitement' (266) deriving from 'the contemplation of the Beautiful' (275).

However, Poe's criticism also contains the germs of a less authoritarian, more reader-centred view of reading. He occasionally employs the concept of the 'under-current', that is, the hidden or submerged meaning of the text, as it were flowing under and parallel to the surface meaning. Thus, in his review of de la Motte Fouqué's Undine (1839 - H X, 30-39), he declares: 'Beneath all, there runs a mystic or under current of meaning' (35). The narrative of a knight who marries a water-sprite, is left by her, and later remarries only to be destroyed by his first wife, is read as a symbolic representation of the writer's own 'ill-assorted marriage' (36). On the one hand, Poe condemns the presence of this under-current as a 'radical defect', presumably because it undermines a 'unity' that is otherwise 'absolute' (37); on the other hand, his critical handling of Fouqué's narrative implies the possibility of the reader's appropriation of the text. It is true that this takes the form of Poe's recovery of an alleged intended or "chosen" second meaning ('a personal object alone induced him to choose it' - *ibid.*), which he then hands back to Fouqué; nonetheless, a process of active interpretation has been set in motion, even if it remains within the limits of intentionism. Similarly, in the first (1842) version of the Hawthorne review ('Twice-Told Tales. By Nathaniel Hawthorne' - H XI, 104-13), the notion of

the under-current is invoked to justify the possibility of interpretation; in Hawthorne's essays, Poe argues, 'a strong under-current of suggestion runs continuously beneath the upper stream of the tranquil thesis' (106), while, among the tales, 'The Minister's Black Veil' is read as working on two levels:

The obvious meaning of this article will be found to smother its insinuated one. The moral put into the mouth of the dying minister will be supposed to convey the true import of the narrative; and that a crime of dark dye ... has been committed, is a point which only minds congenial with that of the author will perceive. (111)

Here, as in Poe's reading of Undine, the hidden meaning is conceived in intentionist terms, as being 'insinuated' by the writer; and the sophisticated reader's act of interpretation is seen as a returning of the text to the writer by a mind 'congenial with', or parallel to, the latter's own. However, reading is, here too, conceived in terms of activity and effort; the notion of the under-current serves to undermine the ideology of unitary meaning, even if it replaces it by one of double intended meaning. It may, at all events, be considered a first step in the direction of a polysemic model of reading which would, in Barthes' terms (S/Z), 'faire du lecteur, non plus un consommateur, mais un producteur du texte'.<sup>77</sup>

Poe's model of reading, then, oscillates between writer-centred and reader-centred tendencies; between notions of reading as passive reception and as active interpretation. The former tendency, the view of reading as the surrender to a preconceived 'impression', is dominant across the critical oeuvre, but the contradiction remains, running parallel to that in his model of the text. The tensions that run through Poe's aesthetic writings - between idealist and materialist

theories of the text, between authoritarian and participatory views of reading - reach their extreme point in relation to 'The Philosophy of Composition', a text which has already been quoted in passing, but will now be analysed in detail.

'The Philosophy of Composition' is both an account (fictional or otherwise) of how Poe wrote 'The Raven', and a critical analysis and interpretation of that poem. Poe thus effectively splits himself into poet and critic, practising the critic's activity on a text he wrote himself. The essay has been diversely received, by both critics and poets. For Baudelaire ('Préambule' to 'La Genèse d'un Poème', 1859), it is an "authentic" document, an account of the poet's 'admirable méthode' and an instance of 'quels bénéfices l'art peut tirer de la délibération'.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Stéphane Mallarmé ('Scolies' to Les Poèmes d'Edgar Poe, 1888)<sup>79</sup> sees it as no 'mystification', but a rigorous demonstration of 'l'art subtil de structure': 'ce singulier morceau de prose où Poe se complait à analyser son Corbeau, démontant, strophe à strophe, le poème, pour en expliquer l'effroi mystérieux et par quel subtil mécanisme d'imagination il séduit nos âmes'.<sup>80</sup> Valéry, too ('Sur la technique littéraire', 1889), considers Poe's text a major document of poetic theory, characterised by 'acuité dans l'analyse' and 'rigueur dans le logique développement des principes découverts par l'observation', which 'démontre avec netteté le mécanisme de la gestation poétique'.<sup>81</sup> For the three French poets, 'The Philosophy of Composition' is an object-lesson in the analysis of the structuring principles of the poetic art.

On the other hand, the text has been read as a fiction or hoax, if not a fraud. Thus T. S. Eliot ('From Poe to Valéry', 1949) suggests

that 'we are likely to draw the conclusion that Poe in analyzing his poem was practising either a hoax, or a piece of self-deception in setting down the way in which he wanted to think that he had written it';<sup>82</sup> Raymond Queneau ('Poe et l'"Analyse"', 1957) sees the essay as, to some extent, a 'sophisme';<sup>83</sup> and Fernando Pessoa ('Erostratus', 1925)<sup>84</sup> dismisses it as an 'auto-ilusão' ('self-deception').<sup>85</sup> It can, however, be argued that the question of the "veracity" or "sincerity" of Poe's text, apart from being unprovable, is irrelevant to its status as a theoretical document; 'The Philosophy of Composition' proves, not that 'The Raven' was written according to the method described, but that the text of the poem permits the critical hypothesis that it could have been written in that method (i.e. backwards). As the Brazilian critic Haroldo de Campos ('Edgar Allan Poe: uma engenharia de avessos', 1971)<sup>86</sup> suggests, the notion of "sincerity" is made irrelevant by Poe's assumption, in this text, of the poet's role as 'fingidor' ('pretender'), as 'literary histrion' ('The Philosophy of Composition', 195), which implies that all writing is artifice.<sup>87</sup> The present discussion will concentrate on the ideological status of the poetics put forward in the text, following Macherey in his identification - as summarised above<sup>88</sup> - of the contradiction at its heart, i.e. that between the text as made object and the text as fetish.

'The Philosophy of Composition' includes Poe's most extensive development of the notion - crucial, as shown above, to his aesthetic model<sup>89</sup> - of writing as making, as construction. For Baudelaire, it constitutes a refutation of the theory of spontaneous inspiration, showing writing to be a matter of 'labeur', in contradiction to the naive spontaneism of 'les amateurs du délire';<sup>90</sup> Valéry, similarly, stresses that, under

Poe's influence, the poet is no longer 'le délirant échevelé', but 'un froid savant, presque un algébriste'.<sup>91</sup> Poe's text is marked by the insistent recurrence of signifiers of making: 'construction' (194, 197), 'composition' (194, 202), 'combination' (194, 204); and it is openly presented as an experiment in demystification, in which the apparent unity of the text is dismantled. The poem is viewed as an object which has been put together: 'no one point in its composition is referrible (sic) either to accident or intuition - ... the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem' (195); and which can, conversely, be taken apart, by an exposure of its mechanisms: 'the wheels and pinions - the tackle for scene-shifting - the step-ladders and demon-traps - the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which ... constitute the properties of the literary histrion' (ibid.). The imagery of stage-properties, and the notion of the writer as 'histrion', or actor, imply a project of demystification; the superficial coherence of the poem, like that of a theatrical spectacle, is illusory, the product of a heterogeneous material labour. By showing 'the modus operandi by which some one of my own works was put together' (ibid.), Poe effectively takes his poem to pieces, reducing it to its component elements. His 'analysis, or reconstruction' (ibid.) of the writing-process is also an act of deconstitution.

The effect of demystification is increased by Poe's account of the way the poem was written backwards. As Macherey suggests, this reversal of linear sequence tends to denaturalise the text: 'a text can be read in more than one direction, and thus there can co-exist within a text a front and a back at least'.<sup>92</sup> The deceptive 'front'



is the poem as linear narrative; the concealed 'back' is the writer's non-linear conception of the events. Poe demonstrates, convincingly enough, how the narrative of 'The Raven' builds towards the climactic sixteenth stanza (R, 91-96),<sup>93</sup> which contains 'that query ... in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair' (202). This stanza, in which the lover finally comes to believe that he will never regain his lost Lenore in any world, may legitimately be considered the poem's turning-point, since it accounts for his passage, in the eighteenth stanza (R, 103-108), into the eternal present of psychosis (as Poe puts it, in the last two stanzas the poem moves out of 'the limits of the accountable - of the real' (206)); its pivotal role can therefore be accepted, whether or not, as Poe claims, it was actually 'here ... that I first put pen to paper' (202). The point is that the activity of (Poe) the critic breaks down the linear narrative sequence, exposing the determining effect of the climax on what precedes it. Thus, whether or not written backwards, the poem can be criticised, and re-read, backwards.

Poe's analysis of 'The Raven' further tends to demystify its surface coherence by showing how it is structured in terms of a series of conceptual antitheses - love and death ('the death ... of a beautiful woman' (201)), human and non-human/linguistic and non-linguistic (the raven is 'a non-reasoning creature capable of speech' (200)), question and answer (207), inside and outside (205), black and white (the ebony raven on the marble bust (ibid.)). He explicitly refers to this structuring element of antithesis, as 'the effect of contrast' (ibid.); the poem's discourse is thus effectively denaturalised by the exposure of the conceptual principles on which it is constructed.

To this extent, the essay implies a model of the artwork as something made through a determinate labour-process, and of art as a skill, a technique, that can compete with technology on its own terms;<sup>94</sup> thus Poe's text employs mechanical imagery to signify literary production ('the mechanism of Barnaby Rudge' (193)), and, similarly, Baudelaire, in his 'Préambule', introduces the essay in the language of the workshop: 'voyons ... l'atelier, le laboratoire, le mécanisme intérieur'.<sup>95</sup> Writing thus appears as an instance of material production. However, as Macherey points out,<sup>96</sup> this component of Poe's discourse coexists with the simultaneous, and contradictory, ideological insistence of "unity"; once made, the text is rigidified into an illusory, static coherence: 'having been constructed, it is stable and continuous'.<sup>97</sup> Poe affirms, here as elsewhere,<sup>98</sup> the necessity of 'totality, or unity, of effect' - 'the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression' (196). This 'unity' is both a characteristic of the finished text and an 'impression' (of fullness and coherence) produced in the reader, whose allotted role is here crucial. It seems, in fact, that while for the writer and critic the text is a heterogeneous sum of materials, to be laboriously put together or taken apart, for the reader it is to remain a unity, a mysterious and unapproachable object; the demystification offered in 'The Philosophy of Composition' is not intended to apply to the act of reading, but, rather, to demonstrate the writer's control over both text and reader. What is a made object from one viewpoint is an object of contemplation from another.

The fact that the central contradiction in Poe's argument bears upon the reader's role suggests the necessity of a careful examination of the writer/reader relations constructed both in the essay and in

'The Raven'. Here as in the 1847 Hawthorne review, Poe conceives writing as essentially the manipulation of the reader.<sup>99</sup> He argues that the merit of a poem is proportional to 'the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing' (197); 'induce' implies the production of an effect in the reader's mind, the control of the other's mental horizon. On this model, the text belongs to the writer, not the reader; the latter's role is reduced to that of passively registering the sensations ('excitement or elevation' (ibid.)) that the writer transmits via the text. Convergently with this notion of domination, Poe assumes, throughout the text, that he, as writer-and-critic, is in full and privileged possession of the meaning of his poem; no interpretations other than his own are mentioned, and 'intention' thus becomes synonymous with signification, as in his reference to 'the intention of making him (i.e. the raven) emblematical of Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance' (208).

However, the poem and essay, taken together, also furnish evidence for a more reader-centred model of the transaction. If the Janus-faced Poe of 'The Philosophy of Composition' is viewed as the poet, then his comments will, to some readers, be invested with the aura of authority; but if he is viewed as the critic, then his reading may be received as having only the value of one possible interpretation among many. The text of 'The Raven' visibly permits other symbolic readings of the ebony bird than those which the writer-critic suggests (death, given its 'ominous reputation' (201), and 'Never-ending Remembrance' (208)); madness, which Poe does not mention, is implied in the narrator's passage, in the last stanza, from the temporality of the simple past into a timeless present that may implicate the immobile bird as symbol of his psychosis: 'And the Raven, never

flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting ...' (R, 103). As David Baguley ('Guimard's Poetics of Death and "The Raven"', 1982)<sup>100</sup> suggests, 'Poe's own description of the genesis of the poem clearly leaves no room for ... the generative force of ... imaginative determinants' other than those Poe himself mentions;<sup>101</sup> but the reader is under no obligation to accept the analysis given in 'The Philosophy of Composition' as "complete" or "exhaustive". Thus Baguley reads the poem as an exploration of 'the aesthetics of death',<sup>102</sup> giving far more attention to this aspect than Poe himself; while Roman Jakobson ('Le langage en action', 1942) sees it as primarily a text that centres on 'les problèmes les plus complexes de la communication'.<sup>103</sup>

Besides, the poem itself contains, in the dialogue between narrator and raven, an instance of the reading-process at work, which tends to subvert the model proposed in Poe's commentary. The raven's "text" - its one repeated lexical item, 'Nevermore' - is "read" by the narrator, and has been presumably "written" by its onetime owner, its 'unhappy master' (R, 63), from whom it has learnt that one word alone. This text is meaningless to the raven itself, but meaningful to both the master ("writer") and the narrator ("reader"); the raven, perched motionless on the bust of Pallas, may be seen as symbolising the book, itself an inert object, yet the vehicle of an interpretable and appropriable message. Whatever 'Nevermore' meant to the master is not what it means to the narrator; as he asks the raven a series of questions, knowing in advance what answer he will receive, the specific meaning of 'Nevermore' shifts according to the context it is placed in by the question. Jakobson argues that, in this unequal exchange, the

answer determines the question: 'chaque question est prédéterminée par la réponse qui suit';<sup>104</sup> it is more correct, however, to conclude that if the answer determines the question on the level of the signifier (the narrator has to choose questions that permit the answer 'Nevermore'), on the level of the signified the question determines the answer. The shifts in the meaning of 'Nevermore' - from the raven's name (R, 48) to "Lenore is unforgettable" (84) to "there is no consolation" (90) to "You will never meet her again" (96) to "I will never leave you" (102)<sup>105</sup> - are produced by the shifting signification of the narrator's questions; by providing a series of contexts for the raven's text, he effectively endows it with meaning. He speculates on the possible sense of the bird's discourse, on 'what this ... bird ../ Meant in croaking "Nevermore"' (71-72); but in fact, it is he who provides its specific sense. The narrator may be considered as paradigmatic of the active reader who appropriates the text, providing it with a context in which its "intended" meanings can be modified in conformity with his/her own concerns. Reading thus no longer appears a one-way process of manipulation, but, rather, a co-production of meaning; the writer produces the letter of the text, which the reader cannot alter, but can place in context, thus transforming the text's sense. The writer-centred model of 'The Philosophy of Composition' is thus called in question by the very text it purports to analyse.

'The Philosophy of Composition' does not resolve the contradictions it generates, any more than Poe's aesthetic writings do as a whole. Some general considerations may now, finally be advanced, on the value and influence of his theories. In the first place, his privileging of brevity, if in many ways arbitrary, should not be dismissed out of hand. To elevate the short story over the novel is clearly to ignore

the latter genre's unique capacity to signify the interrelations and the complex dynamic of the social totality; nonetheless, Poe's declarations may be seen as a polemical blow in defence of a genre then in its infancy, which, even today, is not always taken seriously. As for Poe's devaluation of the long poem, whatever may be said of it prescriptively, in descriptive, historical terms it has proved prophetic. Poe wrote, in 'The Poetic Principle': 'it is ... clear that no very long poem will ever be popular again' (267). As Pessoa suggests in 'Erostratus', such has been the case in the twentieth century: 'Um dos triunfos críticos de Poe foi prever a necessidade de poemas breves. Foi esta uma das suas visões do futuro' ('One of Poe's critical triumphs was his anticipation of the need for short poems. This was one of his visions of the future' ),<sup>106</sup> Octavio Paz ('L'archer, la flèche et la cible', 1986), writing on Borges, has recently stressed how the latter 'a suivi sans hésiter le conseil de Poe: un poème moderne ne doit pas dépasser les cinquante lignes'.<sup>107</sup> It may be added that the longest poem in Les Fleurs du Mal, 'Le Voyage', contains 144 lines, i.e. 44 more than the maximum of 100 laid down in 'The Philosophy of Composition' (197), while most are well under that limit; and that the typical twentieth-century long poem - Hart Crane's The Bridge (1930), Pablo Neruda's Canto general (1950) - is in fact a series of shorter poems.

Poe's notion of writing as construction or technique was, as has been seen, admired and taken up by the French symbolists, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry. In particular, the last-named's essay, 'Sur la technique littéraire', is little more than a restatement of Poe's main aesthetic postulates, 'la Poétique si originale d'Edgar Poe';<sup>108</sup> the text, for Valéry as for his predecessors, has to be 'soigneusement

composé en vue d'un effet final et foudroyant'.<sup>109</sup> As Eliot suggests, 'the notion that the composition of a poem should be as conscious and deliberate as possible', central to the symbolist project, originates in Poe.<sup>110</sup> To some extent, the emphasis on construction constitutes writing as a form of labour, and may be seen as partly anticipating materialist theories - for instance Benjamin's notion of the writer as material producer, whether as traditional 'artisan' ('The Storyteller', 1936)<sup>111</sup> or as modern 'engineer' ('The Author as Producer', 1934),<sup>112</sup> or Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez's view of art (Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics, 1965)<sup>113</sup> as a form of 'truly creative labor', aimed at the production of pleasure rather than use-value:<sup>114</sup> 'art as a higher form of labor is a manifestation of the practical activity of man (sic) by which he (sic) expresses and confirms himself (sic) in the objective world'.<sup>115</sup> In particular, it may be noted that Benjamin includes Poe among his instances of the artisanal storyteller, the traditional 'craftsman' (sic) of narrative;<sup>116</sup> this view of Poe's practice as archaic rather than modern may be incorrect, but the connection with his insistence on writing as work is arresting.

On the other hand, the materialist tendency in Poe's theory enters into conflict with the idealist notion of the autonomous artwork. The contradiction which Macherey notes in 'The Philosophy of Composition' is also present in the aesthetics of French symbolism, and, specifically, in the symbolists' comments on Poe. It is there in Baudelaire's formulation, as noted above, of the 'labeur' demanded by the writing of a poem, which is nonetheless, once finished, seen as an 'objet de luxe';<sup>117</sup> in Mallarmé's notion ('Sur Poe', c. 1890)<sup>118</sup> of the text as a piece of 'architecture spontanée et magique' ('spontanée' and 'magique' imply the illusory coherence of an object which is yet admitted to

be made, the product of 'de puissants calculs');<sup>119</sup> in Valéry's view of Poe ('Situation de Baudelaire') as combining 'la mysticité avec le calcul'.<sup>120</sup> If Valéry's concept of the artist as 'ingénieur',<sup>121</sup> as cited above, partially anticipates Benjamin's materialist model, his comments on Poe also point towards the modernist myth of the autonomous, "difficult", hermetically sealed artwork, impenetrable to the masses; thus, in 'Sur la technique littéraire', he writes: 'Et nous aimons l'art de ce temps, compliqué et artificiel, ... d'autant plus qu'il devient plus mystérieux, plus étroit, plus inaccessible à la foule.'<sup>122</sup> Valéry's 'mystérieux', 'inaccessible' art-object, surrounded by its aura, may be considered as an extreme, more elitist development of Poe's 'poem per se' or his tale consumed independently of 'worldly interests';<sup>123</sup> in both cases, art is abstracted from the totality of social relations and isolated in a closed, "special" aesthetic realm. It may be concluded that the dominant element in Poe's theory of art is that of the "unity" and autonomy of the artwork; but that this idealist tendency is undermined and called in question by the contrary, materialist emphasis on art as construction. The unified artwork, as metaphor for the unified subject, is thus a precarious construct, liable to subversion. Similarly, the authoritarian model of writing as control, while remaining dominant, is susceptible to undermining by more reader-centred tendencies. It will be shown in the next section how the interior, as concrete instance of the artwork in Poe's fiction, becomes a space of contradiction and disintegration.



## 2. THE INTERIOR

### i. Interiors in Poe's Tales

The interior, that is, the private, luxurious living-space, occupies a privileged position in Poe's fiction; a whole series of tales - 'The Assignation' (1834), 'Berenice' (1835), 'Ligeia' (1838), 'Usher' (1839), 'The Oval Portrait' (1842) and 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842) - are located wholly or partly in interiors, while the concept is explicitly theorised in the essay 'Philosophy of Furniture' (1840 - M II, 495-503). The tales in question belong to the "Gothic" pole of his fiction, but a link with the "modern" pole is formed by the specific contemporaneity of 'Philosophy of Furniture', and by the presence of the interior theme in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841), in the account, as noted above,<sup>1</sup> of Dupin's seclusion (M II, 532-33). The interior was not only a property of fictional aristocrats, but a reality of nineteenth-century bourgeois life. As both an art-object in its own right - the product of architectural design - and a collection of art-objects, encompassing diverse artefacts from different periods and cultures, it takes on the characteristics of the autonomous artwork, tending to confirm the subject in its illusory closure, yet at the same time liable to subversion from its own inbuilt disintegrative tendencies. In this section, the theme will be considered in synthetic terms, with specific reference to the abovementioned texts, four of which ('The Oval Portrait', 'Ligeia', 'Berenice', 'Usher') will be subjected to individual analysis, in relation to the questions of the artist and sexuality, in the final chapter (a fifth related tale, 'Morella', differs from the others in not laying stress on the interior). 'The Assignation' and 'The Masque of the Red Death' will be considered briefly at the end of the present chapter.

The luxurious interior is a recurrent image in Gothic, Romantic and later nineteenth-century writing; instances include William Beckford's Vathek (1786);<sup>2</sup> Keats' Lamia (1820);<sup>3</sup> Balzac's La Peau de Chagrin (1831);<sup>4</sup> several of Baudelaire's poems and prose-poems, notably 'L'Invitation au Voyage' (poem, 1855;<sup>5</sup> prose-poem with the same title, 1857)<sup>6</sup> and the prose-poem 'La Chambre double' (1862);<sup>7</sup> and Huysmans' A rebours (1884).<sup>8</sup> As the extracts that follow suggest, the interior is typically characterised by sensuality and profusion, contains objects aimed at the gratification of the various senses, and tends to induce perceptual confusion and distortion in the onlooker.

In Vathek, the decadent Caliph has five palaces built, each dedicated to a particular sense. In one: 'Rarities, collected from every corner of the earth, were ... found in such profusion as to dazzle and confound, but for the order in which they were arranged.'; in another: 'Flambeaux and aromatic lamps were ... lighted in open day.'; the result is an 'agreeable delirium'.<sup>9</sup> Lamia, the snake-woman protagonist of Keats' poem, designs a luxurious banquet-room for her wedding feast:

Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room,  
Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume:  
Before each lucid pannel fuming stood  
A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,  
Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,  
Whose slender feet wide-swerv'd upon the soft  
Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke  
From fifty censers their light voyage took  
To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose  
Along the mirror'd walls by twin-clouds odorous.<sup>10</sup>

In both these texts, there is a marked element of richness and multiplicity of sensation; the perceptions of the different senses combine and threaten to convert into one another, in phrases like 'aromatic lamps' or 'twin-clouds odorous', while night is turned into day

through the use of 'flambeaux' and 'censers'. The result - even though, in Beckford's text, the five senses are kept partially apart in the different palaces - is a tendency to perceptual confusion in the on-looker (and reader).

'La Peau de Chagrin' contains a series of luxurious interiors - the antique-shop where Valentin acquires the magic skin, the "hôtel" where the banker Taillefer holds his banquet, and the apartment of Foedora, the 'femme sans coeur'. The antique-shop (signified in the essentially non-realist terms of an "impossible" profusion and plenitude) is a collection of objects from the most diverse places and periods: 'Un vase de Sèvres, où Mme Jacotot avait peint Napoléon, se trouvait auprès d'un sphinx dédié à Sésotris. Le commencement du monde et les événements d'hier se mariaient avec une grotesque bonhomie.'<sup>11</sup> The effect on the already semi-delirious Valentin of this 'chaos d'antiquités'<sup>12</sup> is one of total disorientation: 'Poursuivi par les formes les plus étranges, ... il marchait dans les enchantements d'un songe.... Enfin c'était des travaux à dégoûter du travail, des chefs-d'oeuvre accumulés à faire prendre en haine les arts et à tuer l'enthousiasme.... il était malade de toutes ces pensées humaines, assassiné par le luxe et les arts, oppressé sous ces formes renaissantes qui ... lui livraient un combat sans fin.'<sup>13</sup> The interior threatens to collapse under the weight of its own excess. Similarly, the suite where Taillefer's banquet takes place is characterised in terms of extraordinary luxury: 'La soie et l'or tapissaient les appartements. De riches candélabres supportant d'innombrables bougies faisaient briller ... les somptueuses couleurs de l'ameublement.'<sup>14</sup> However, this space too becomes a scene of perceptual confusion; by the end of the banquet, the objects have lost their contours, and reality and

hallucination blend inextricably: 'Contempler en ce moment les salons, c'était avoir une vue anticipée du Pandémonium de Milton.... L'ivresse, l'amour, le délire, l'oubli du monde étaient ... écrits sur les tapis, exprimés par le désordre ... il leur était impossible de reconnaître ce qu'il y avait de réel dans les fantaisies bizarres, de possible dans les tableaux surnaturels qui passaient incessamment devant leurs yeux lassés'.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Foedora's private suite is signified in terms of order and coherence: 'Les salons étaient meublés avec un goût exquis. J'y vis des tableaux de choix.... la tenture de soie, les agréments, la forme des meubles, le moindre décor s'harmoniaient avec une pensée première. Dans une boudoir gothique dont les portes étaient cachées par des rideaux en tapisserie, les encadrements de l'étoffe, la pendule, les dessins du tapis étaient gothiques ... rien ne détruisait l'ensemble de cette jolie décoration'.<sup>16</sup> The Gothic boudoir, like Poe's ideal short story in which every word tends to the 'one pre-established design' (1847 Hawthorne review - H XIII, 153), appears as an autonomous, unified artwork, isolated from the social universe.<sup>17</sup> In fact, however, this apparent plenitude is constructed around an absent centre; the promise of fulness is undermined by Foedora's later refusal to enter on an erotic relation with Valentin.

It is clear, then, that the interior as literary motif precedes Poe's work (the Baudelaire and Huysmans texts, which exhibit his influence, will be considered later). From the examples given, it emerges as a problematic, contradictory construct; the richness, the multiplicity, the mingling of the senses at first induce a sense of aesthetic fulness, but eventually tend to provoke sensations of confusion and disintegration - or else, the interior is revealed to have

associations of emptiness, violence, or death. In Vathek, the palaces of the the senses are the work of a sadist who is capable of massacring fifty children;<sup>18</sup> Lamia's house, at first a space of erotic gratification, becomes, with the wedding feast, the scene of her disappearance and the terrified death of her lover, Lycius; and in La Peau de Chagrin, the apparent plenitude or coherence promised by the interiors is succeeded by disorientation or absence - to the point where, in the account of the antique-shop, art itself ceases to gratify, as Valentin is metaphorically 'assassiné par le luxe et les arts'.

It is in this context that Poe's interiors should be considered. As noted above, the theme has already been briefly examined in this study, in the discussion of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'; Dupin, as has been shown, exhibits certain convergences with the artist-protagonists of tales like 'Ligeia' and 'Usher'. Dupin and the narrator isolate themselves in what is clearly, given the latter's wealth, an expensively furnished 'mansion', where they convert night into day: 'At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building, lighting a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays.' (M II, 532-33). The artificial light and the perfumed tapers recall the passages from Vathek and Lamia quoted above, with their 'aromatic lamps' and 'pervading brilliance and perfume';<sup>19</sup> as will be seen, these characteristics of the interior are also paralleled in Poe's "Gothic" tales.

The interior as cultural construct receives theoretical illumination from the work of Benjamin. Like the artwork surrounded by its aura,<sup>20</sup>

it appears in the nineteenth century as a concrete symbol of the illusory autonomy of the subject. Thus, in Charles Baudelaire (1935-39), Benjamin writes:

For the private citizen, for the first time the living-space became distinguished from the place of work. The former constituted itself as the interior. The office was its complement. The private citizen who in the office took reality into account, required of the interior that it should support him in his illusions. This necessity was all the more pressing since he had no intention of adding social preoccupations to his business ones. In the creation of his private environment he suppressed them both. From this sprang the phantasmagorias of the interior. This represented the universe for the private citizen. In it he assembled the distant in space and in time. His drawing-room was a box in the world-theatre.<sup>21</sup>

The interior represents the bourgeois proprietor's attempt to dissociate himself from social and economic reality, and to disavow history through the assembling of a collection that would level the cultural differences between objects perceived simultaneously; as Adorno suggested in his comments on the passage (letter to Benjamin, 2 August 1935),<sup>22</sup> the 'self-containedness' of the interior is an illusion that requires exposure 'vis-à-vis the real social process'.<sup>23</sup> What is in question is a form of alienation, in which the subject constructs an object that estranges him/her from that 'real social process'; Benjamin's analysis of the 'private environment' may be compared with the passage in Dickens' Great Expectations (1861)<sup>24</sup> which describes the 'Castle' into which the clerk Wemmick turns his house. As an exercise in military 'gothic',<sup>25</sup> it represents the conversion of history from an ongoing, continuous process into pure spectacle, and also the alienation of the subject from the public world of work; Wemmick declares: "the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me."<sup>26</sup>

Benjamin further specifies that the interior was an individualist phenomenon; its goal, confirmed later in the century in the practice of Art Nouveau, was the 'transfiguration of the lone soul': 'there appeared the house as expression of the personality'.<sup>27</sup> The interior thus confirms the ideology of the unique, self-sufficient individual, visibly symbolising the owner's difference from all others. At the same time, it represents an attempt to negate the commodity character of the object:

The collector was the true inhabitant of the interior. He made the glorification of things his concern. To him fell the task of Sisyphus which consisted of stripping things of their commodity character by means of his possession of them. But he conferred upon them only a fancier's value, rather than use-value. The collector dreamed that he was in a world which was not only far-off in distance and in time, but which was also a better one, ... in which things were free from the bondage of being useful.<sup>28</sup>

The interior thus signifies the illusory autonomy of both subject and object. The collector aimed to free the object from its commodity status, by withdrawing it from the market. However, it retained its character as fetish - no longer as commodity, but as artwork; collecting, like the ideology of l'art pour l'art,<sup>29</sup> thus stands in an ambivalent relation to commodity production, being both a reaction against it and a displaced expression of its values. The 'fancier's value' which the collector confers on the art-object is a version of the 'cult value' which l'art pour l'art attributes to it, as described in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936);<sup>30</sup> in that essay, Benjamin suggests that 'the collector ... always retains some traces of the fetishist and ..., by owning the work of art, shares in its ritual power'.<sup>31</sup> The artist and the collector are thus parallel figures; one produces, the other accumulates and consumes, art-objects whose ideological role is to alienate him from history and

confirm him in the illusion of autonomy. The collector becomes a divine, ordering figure at the centre of his room, the private universe which he has arranged. It may be suggested, however, that the interior is an inherently unstable construct, since it rests on a contradiction; the collection is seen as a whole, therefore a unity, yet so is each of the individual objects comprising it. The individual artwork is thus simultaneously autonomous and non-autonomous, an end in itself from one point of view and, from another, a term in a system of relations. The collection may, paradoxically, be seen as tending to undermine the very notion of aesthetic autonomy it exists to promote.

Thus placed in historical context, the interior becomes a text which requires interpretation. Indeed, in Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin refers to Poe as 'the first physiognomist of the interior',<sup>32</sup> citing both 'Philosophy of Furniture' and the detective stories. Physiognomy, according to the O.E.D., is 'the art of judging character and dispositions from the features of the face';<sup>33</sup> Poe's texts, then, permit the reader to interpret a room, to penetrate beyond the interior to the subjectivity of its owner. The interior, as instance of the 'close circumscription of space' described approvingly in 'The Philosophy of Composition' (1846 - H XIV, 204),<sup>34</sup> appears to confirm the closure of both the text and its fictional events ('insulated incident' - *ibid.*) and the subject him/herself; thus in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', the narrator declares of his private life with Dupin: 'Our seclusion was perfect.' (M II, 532). However, as in the other nineteenth-century texts analysed above, this apparent 'circumscription' or 'seclusion' is, in practice, subject to disturbance; the interior in Poe's writing will now be examined in detail, as a contradictory signifier.



It will first be useful to summarise the salient features of the interiors constructed in the six tales under examination, which will, for the purposes of this tabulation, be abbreviated as follows: 'The Assignment' (A), 'Berenice' (B), 'Ligeia' (L), 'Usher' (U), 'The Oval Portrait' (OP), 'The Masque of the Red Death' (MRD) (the interior of 'Philosophy of Furniture' will be analysed later).<sup>35</sup> Some use is here made of the similar detailing of Poe's interiors offered by Margaret Kane ('Edgar Allan Poe and Architecture', 1932);<sup>36</sup> Kane's analysis, however, considers the various architectural elements as means to the production of a 'preconceived effect',<sup>37</sup> and not as having a metaphoric sense. All page references in the tabulation are to M II.

The following general features characterise the types of building presented in the six tales: 1) it is large and "aristocratic" - a 'Palazzo' (A, 156), a 'mansion' (B, 209; U, 398), a 'castellated abbey' (L, 321; MRD, 670), a 'chateau' (OP, 662); 2) its possession signifies wealth on the owner's part, whether inherited or otherwise acquired - it is 'purchased' in L (320), purpose-built in MRD ('the creation of the prince's ... taste' - 670) and inherited in B ('hereditary halls' - 209) and U ('the family mansion' - 399); 3) it is isolated - in L standing in a 'remote and unsocial region' (320), in U surrounded by its own 'domain' (397), in OP in the Apennines (662), and in MRD enclosed by a wall (670).<sup>38</sup>

The owner, typically: 4) is an aristocrat - the Prince Prospero in MRD, a 'true gentleman' in A (161), the scion of a feudal family in B and U (in OP the owner is absent - 662); 5) has himself designed the interior (A, 165), or had it designed under his supervision (MRD, 673), or both ('my labors and my orders' - L, 320) (alternatively,

the interior may have been designed by his ancestors - B, 209); 6) is an artist, practising, variously, poetry (A, 162; U, 406), painting (U, 405), musical composition and performance (U, 406), or costume design (MRD, 673).

The interior location in which the narrated events wholly or partly take place tends: 7) to be restricted, a smaller space within the house - one room (A. (the second half), B, L (the second half), OP), two rooms (U - Usher's 'studio' (400) and the narrator's bedroom (411)), or an interconnected suite of rooms (MRD); 8) to be decorated without regard for the accepted norms of 'decorum' and 'keeping', thus appearing 'eccentric' and 'bizarre' (MRD, 670, 671) - in A: 'Little attention had been paid to the decora of what is technically called keeping' (157), in L 'there was no system, no keeping' (321), in MRD Prospero 'disregarded the decora of mere fashion' (673); 9) to be dominated by irregular lines and/or curves - 'many dark and intricate passages' (U, 400), 'very many nooks which the bizarre architecture of the chateau rendered necessary' (OP, 662-63), 'apartments ... irregularly disposed', with 'a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards' (MRD, 671).

Its contents include: 10) original artworks (paintings, sculptures or other artefacts) (A, 157, 160; B, 209; L, 322; OP, 662), books (most of B takes place in a library (209), while books also figure in the decor of A (162) and U (408-409)), and music, heard in performance in A (157), U (406) and MRD (672). The artworks are: 11) drawn from a variety of cultures and periods, without attention to the 'proprieties of nationality' (A, 157) - from Greece, Italy and Egypt (A, *ibid.*), or Egypt and India (L, 322) (Usher's books are all European, and therefore

'do not, as Richard Wilbur ('The House of Poe', 1959) would have it, '(belong) to all times and tongues',<sup>39</sup> but nonetheless range in origin from first-century Latin texts to Swedenborg). The walls are:

12) hung with 'drapery' or 'tapestry' (A, 157; B, 209; L, 320; U, 400; OP, 662; MRD, 672).<sup>40</sup> The lighting is: 13) artificial, deriving from at least one flaring and flickering censer-cum-candelabrum (A, 157; L, 321) and/or other candelabra (L, *ibid.*; OP, 663) or braziers (MRD, 672); and/or 14) provided by daylight artificially transformed, filtered through coloured glass (A, 158; L, 321; U, 401).<sup>41</sup> The room may also be: 15) perfumed (A, 157; L, 321), thanks to the censer or censers, which produce a synaesthetic effect.

The lexis employed to signify the apartment or its inmates typically includes at least one of the following terms: 16) 'Gothic' - 'a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device' (L, 321); 'the Gothic archway' (U, 400); 'a tall and narrow Gothic window' (MRD, 671); 17) 'grotesque' - 'the grotesques of the Greek painters' (A, 157); 'the wildest and most grotesque specimens' (L, 321); 'the masqueraders ... were grotesque' (MRD, 673); 18) 'arabesque' - 'these arabesque censers' (A, 166); 'arabesque figures' (L, 322); 'frames of rich golden arabesque' (OP, 662); 'arabesque figures' (MRD, 673). There are, further, elements of: 19) 'glare' - 'an actual glare' (A, 157); 'the glare of the censer' (L, 326); 'much glare and glitter' (MRD, 673); and 20) 'gloom' - 'gloomy-looking oak' (L, 321); 'the gloomy furniture' (U, 411). The decor is presented as both: 21) ancient and decaying ('The general furniture was ... comfortless, antique, and tattered.' - U, 401; 'Its decorations were ... tattered and antique.' - OP, 662), and yet 22) luxurious - 'princely magnificence' (A, 157); 'more than regal magnificence' (L, 320); 'sumptuously furnished apartments' (OP, 662); 'an imperial suite' (MRD, 671). Finally, the

overall effect is signified in the language of: 23) dream or delirium - 'a bower of dreams ... the delirium of this scene' (A, 165, 166); 'my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams' (L, 320); 'To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked ... a multitude of dreams.' (MRD, 673); and 24) phantasmagoria - 'the phantasmagoric effect (of the arabesque figures on the tapestries)' (L, 322); 'the phantasmagoric influences of the chamber' (L, 323-24); 'the phantasmagoric armorial trophies' (U, 400); 'a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances' (MRD, 672).

From the foregoing, it should be clear that Poe's interiors, while in many respects similar to each other, are by no means identical; any attempt at generalisation will have to take note of the exceptions. There are, besides, tensions within and between the "interior" tales. In particular, there is a tension between elements 19 (glare) and 20 (gloom); and between 21 (decay) and 22 (luxury). Thus, in 'Ligeia', 'glare' and 'gloom' coexist in the same space; while the 'comfortless' furniture of 'Usher' (401) contrasts with the 'princely magnificence' of the room in 'The Assignation' (157).

Nonetheless, the interiors present enough shared features to confirm their common status as signifiers of the "autonomous" subject. The connotation of autonomy is given by elements 3 (isolation), 7 (restricted space), 8 (eccentric individuality), 11 (negation of history and geography), and, further, by all those elements which tend to constitute the interior as private, "different" space - 12 (drapery), 13 (artificial light), 14 (coloured glass), 15 (perfume). In particular, the accumulation of objects from diverse cultures and epochs tends - as with the antique-shop of La Peau de Chagrin<sup>42</sup> - to confirm Benjamin's notion

of the collection as an attempt at escape from history (and from cultural difference), reducing all artefacts to the common denominator of cult-object.<sup>43</sup> Besides, Poe's frequent use of the signifier 'apartment' (not in the modern sense of flat, but in the sense defined by the O.E.D. as 'a single room of a house')<sup>44</sup> merits attention. It occurs in 'The Assignation' (157), 'Ligeia' (322), 'Usher' ('the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house' - 410), 'The Oval Portrait' (662) and 'The Masque of the Red Death' ('the apartments were ... irregularly disposed' - 671); and also in 'Philosophy of Furniture' ('The soul of the apartment is the carpet.' - 497). 'Apartment', with its connotations of apartness, draws attention to the element of separateness, of isolation in the lifestyle of the owners, constituting them as instances of the unique, autonomous subject who stands 'essentially apart from all other human beings' ('The Assignation', 161).

The notion of the designer's individuality overriding 'keeping' and 'decorum' also requires comment. The O.E.D. defines 'keeping', in the relevant senses, as: 1) ('in painting') 'the maintenance of harmony of composition'; and 2) ('generally') 'agreement, congruity, harmony';<sup>45</sup> and 'decorum', in its aesthetic sense, as 'fitness, propriety, congruity'.<sup>46</sup> Both terms are clearly used by Poe in the instances cited above (tabulation, 8) to signify 'propriety', the observance of rules, in the specific context of interior decoration. This 'propriety', however, is negated by Poe's designers, whether the 'Visionary' of 'The Assignation', the narrator of 'Ligeia' or Prince Prospero; their interiors thus come to signify the autocratic, self-referential subject, free from external limitations, who imposes his unique "personality" on the house.<sup>47</sup> The subject declares his

independence from history, from all preceding practice in decoration; as the Visionary puts it: "Proprieties of place, and especially of time, are the bugbears which terrify mankind from the contemplation of the magnificent." (165-66). At the same time, this degree of autocratic eccentricity endangers his own survival, since his autonomy is ultimately based on a cultural consensus which is called in question by his refusal to observe rules. The rejection of 'keeping' implies an aristocratic, "Byronic" disdain for convention which, as will be shown, especially characterises the protagonists of 'The Assniation' and 'The Masque of the Red Death'.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, the Poe interior contains within itself the preconditions of its own disintegration (which parallels the breakdown of the "full" subjectivity of its owner). Certain elements of tension and contradiction have already been noted; besides, the element of 'dream' and 'delirium' (tabulation, 23) tends towards a rupture of the interior. No longer fixed and static, it becomes the scene of distorted perceptions; objects lose their contours and hallucination threatens to substitute material reality. The subject's limits break down; it suddenly appears as divided and problematic, traversed by 'delirious fancies such as the madman fashions' ('The Masque of the Red Death', 673). In this context, the components of "arabesque" (18) and "phantasmagoria" (24) are especially significant, and will be analysed in detail below.<sup>49</sup> The interior contains, then, elements that tend towards the undermining of its own closure, and, therefore, of that of the subject, which it was constructed to symbolise and protect; it is thus necessarily a contradictory signifier.

The interior theme in Poe has been subjected to both "unitary" and "ironic" readings; the first may be represented by Richard Wilbur's 'The House of Poe' (1959),<sup>50</sup> and the second by G. R. Thompson's Poe' Fiction (1973).<sup>51</sup> Wilbur's essay is mainly devoted to a lengthy description and analysis of the Poe interior. He claims that Poe's texts consistently signify the negation of material reality, 'the effort of the poetic soul to escape all consciousness of the world in dream'.<sup>52</sup> Poe's 'circumscription of space' is thus a metaphor for what Wilbur calls 'the exclusion from consciousness of the so-called real world'.<sup>53</sup> The various components of the interior are read as having allegorical meaning; the artificial lighting signifies the rejection of 'waking consciousness', while the eclecticism of the decor indicates 'the visionary soul's transcendence of spatial and temporal limitations'.<sup>54</sup> Wilbur concludes that 'Poe's chamber of dreams is autonomous in every ... respect';<sup>55</sup> this autonomy, he claims, is logical, since 'the sensuous life of dream is self-sufficient and immaterial'.<sup>56</sup> This reading clearly implies an idealist conception of both dreaming and art, and the dissociation of an "autonomous" psyche from all material determinants. Indeed, Wilbur manages to expel all elements of disintegration, disturbance or fear from the texts; the decayed state of the buildings signifies only 'visionary remoteness from the physical', or 'pure spirituality', while the collapse of the House of Usher, far from inducing fear, becomes a 'triumphant' declaration of transcendence of the material.<sup>57</sup> The fictions of the interior are thus read as means to the attainment of a homogeneous, dematerialised "unity"; text, interior and subject all appear as autonomous, ahistorical and unproblematic.

Thompson, in contrast, reads the interior in terms of irony and tension, arguing that in the tales in question, 'Poe uses what is basically a satiric decor, and a satiric lighting arrangement'. The rooms constructed in these narratives are not to be read as exemplary of interior design; rather, the arabesque decor and the 'infernal lighting' signify an 'extreme psychological state', a 'tormented mind'.<sup>58</sup> The disturbing or exaggerated elements in the interior serve as indicators of the narrators' mental imbalance, and hence as warnings to the reader not to take the narrative at face value. The interior thus participates in the character of the arabesque as Thompson defines it - i.e. 'the ironic interplay of contradictions'.<sup>59</sup> On this reading, 'the delusive or dreamlike effect of interior design'<sup>60</sup> is crucial; the hallucinatory influence of the interior is a clear textual warning against Wilburesque "transcendental" readings. The present analysis will take up and develop some of Thompson's suggestions about the relation between disintegrative tendencies in interior and subject.

## ii. 'Philosophy of Furniture'

Before Poe's fictional interiors are examined in the above context, it will be useful to consider his programmatic account of an "ideal" interior in 'Philosophy of Furniture', in its points of similarity to and difference from those of the tales. This essay is a manifesto text, addressing itself directly to U.S. social reality. It may be divided into three parts: an attack on the prevailing modes of 'internal decoration' (495) in the U.S., and a eulogy of the English (not Scottish) mode (495-97); a summary of the negative features of U.S. decoration, with suggested alternatives (497-500); and a



description of an ideal room, 'with whose decorations no fault can be found' (500) (500-503).

This text has received attention from Benjamin, as seen above,<sup>61</sup> and also from Michel Butor ('Philosophie de l'ameublement', 1964).<sup>62</sup>

Butor argues that Poe's text may be read as indicating the metaphoric importance of space in fiction. The fictional room described by the novelist functions as a metaphor for both the possessor and the social structure into which the latter is inserted:

Poe montre que l'arrangement habituel des maisons riches de son pays est lié étroitement à une façon de vivre et de penser, au fait que l'argent est dans son pays la "valeur" par excellence ....<sup>63</sup> décrire des meubles, des objets, c'est une façon de décrire les personnages ...<sup>64</sup> écrire un roman, ... ce sera non seulement composer un ensemble d'actions humaines, mais aussi composer un ensemble d'objets tous liés nécessairement à des personnages.<sup>65</sup>

The interior signifies its owner; it becomes, then, a metaphor for a subject, who is in turn determined by the social structure which the interior also signifies.

Poe's essay explicitly relates the prevalent modes of furnishing in the U.S. to the social structure, albeit from a conservative viewpoint. U.S. interior decoration, the text claims, is 'preposterous' (496), 'offensive to the eye of an artist' (497). Its main characteristic is the display of wealth, via the 'parade of costly appurtenances' (496): 'The cost of an article of furniture has at length come to be, with us, nearly the sole test of its merit in a decorative point of view' (496-97). This confusion of 'taste' with 'show' (496) is attributed to the republican regime, and the absence of a hereditary aristocracy. English interiors are seen as tasteful ('the English

are supreme' - 495), and U.S. interiors as tasteless; this contrast is presented as a direct product of the contrast in political systems. The U.S. interior signifies 'republican institutions' (500), the English interior monarchy and aristocracy.

This text is marked by a quite open statement of conservative ideology; British-style "aristocracy" (i.e. constitutional monarchy) is preferred to U.S. democracy:

We have no aristocracy of blood, and having therefore ... fashioned for ourselves an aristocracy of dollars, the display of wealth has here to take the place and perform the office of the heraldic display in monarchical countries.... wealth is not, in England, the loftiest object of ambition as constituting a nobility; ... there, the true nobility of blood, confining itself within the strict limits of legitimate taste, rather avoids than affects that mere costliness in which a parvenu rivalry may at any time be successfully attempted. The people will imitate the nobles, and the result is a thorough diffusion of the proper feeling. But in America, the coins current being the sole arms of the aristocracy, their display may be said, in general, to be the sole means of aristocratic distinction; and the populace, looking always upward for models, are insensibly led to confound the two entirely separate ideas of magnificence and beauty. (496)

Democracy, conceived as the absence of the hereditary principle, is blamed for an alleged 'corruption of taste' (500) throughout U.S. society. Baudelaire approvingly referred to this passage, in 'Edgar Poe, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres' (1856):

Poe, qui était de bonne souche, ... professait que le grand malheur de son pays était de n'avoir pas d'aristocratie de race, attendu, disait-il, que chez un peuple sans aristocratie le culte du Beau ne peut que se corrompre, s'amoinrir et disparaître ...<sup>66</sup>

Both writers consciously appropriate art for "aristocracy", that is, for a model of society that was, objectively, historically superseded in both France and the U.S. (let alone Britain).<sup>67</sup>

'Philosophy of Furniture', then, explicitly links the interior with aristocracy; the 'proprietor' of its imaginary room (500) may be considered an honorary or "spiritual" aristocrat. In the tales, as shown above (tabulation 4), the owner-designer is typically an aristocrat (in 'Ligeia' he is, at least, married into the aristocracy via Rowena). The interior is thus associated with a class whose hegemony corresponded to an earlier, pre-capitalist mode of production. The privileging of this class as the true bearers of aesthetic values, or 'taste', in both the essay and the tales, has certain concrete ideological effects. First, it distances the texts from the economic realities of the existing society, and therefore - at least on a superficial reading - from the reader's world. Poe's social analysis in 'Philosophy of Furniture' is in fact incorrect, since the British, and especially the English, aristocracy was, objectively, incorporated into capitalism as a class fraction of the bourgeoisie;<sup>68</sup> to oppose a British 'aristocracy of blood' to a U.S. 'aristocracy of dollars' is misleading, since both societies were capitalist (Britain, indeed, was more homogeneously so, having no domestic equivalent to the slave economy of the U.S. South) and therefore dominated by accumulated, not inherited wealth. At all events, the "aristocratic" character of Poe's interiors tends to give the tales an archaic, distant patina. Second, the ideological privileging of inherited wealth - however false in objective historical terms - tends to produce a notion of society as fixed and static. Thus in 'Berenice', Egaeus declares: 'there are no towers in the land more time-honored than my gloomy, gray hereditary halls' (209); and in 'Usher', the narrator refers to the 'time-honored' stem of the Usher race', and the 'undeviating transmission, from sire to son,

of the patrimony with the name' (399). This textual stress on the 'time-honored' and the 'undeviating' - the archaic and unchanging - tends to have a reassuring effect on the reader, inculcating the traditionalist view that society either is, or ought to be, an immobile structure of fixed "ranks". In reality, the social universe of capitalism was one of dynamic mobility, in which the signifier "wealth" no longer had a fixed signified of origin attached to it. As the narrator of Balzac's 'Sarrasine' (1830) puts it: 'à Paris ... les écus même tachés de sang ou de boue ne trahissent rien et représentent tout';<sup>69</sup> or to quote Marx, in the first volume of Capital (1867):

Since every commodity disappears when it becomes money it is impossible to tell from the money itself how it got into the hands of its possessor, or what article has been changed into it. Non olet, from whatever source it may come.<sup>70</sup>

Under capitalism, money non olet (does not smell), that is, it does not reveal its origins (Marx quotes a saying attributed to the Roman emperor Vespasian, which Balzac too refers to in the same passage of 'Sarrasine': 'En nul pays peut-être l'axiome de Vespasien n'est mieux compris.').<sup>71</sup> Poe's privileging of an archaic notion of aristocracy, however, tends to encourage an immobilist notion of wealth as (at least normatively) indicating "birth".

On the one hand, Poe's ideology of aristocracy can be seen as corresponding to the interests of the Southern ruling class, into which he was adopted, and with which he subjectively identified;<sup>72</sup> the Southern planter class tended to be seen, by itself and others, as an aristocracy in all but name,<sup>73</sup> and its values were characterised by the immobilism of the pre-capitalist slaveholding system from which

they derived. As Mark Twain put it in Life on the Mississippi (1883),<sup>74</sup> if the French Revolution 'broke the chains of the ancien régime' and Napoleon 'instituted the setting of merit above birth', the Southern ruling class remained fixated on 'decayed and degraded systems of government' and the 'sham chivalries of a ... long-vanished society', and obsessed with 'reverence for rank and caste'.<sup>75</sup> The 'hereditary halls' of an Egaeus or an Usher may be read as tending, on one level, to validate this Southern concept of the naturalness and legitimacy of a rigid class structure (although, as will be shown below, the text of 'Usher' in practice calls in question the very ideology of aristocracy it appears to promote).<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the aristocratic theme may also be considered to reinforce (in one direction) the bourgeois reader's notion of his/her autonomous subjectivity; the idea of a fixed class structure carries over into the psychological area, encouraging the perception of individual identity in terms of fixity and stasis. The interests of capitalism are thus served by the ideological appropriation of an image (the aristocrat) deriving from pre-capitalist society.

Nonetheless, aristocracy is, in the nineteenth century, a highly ambivalent concept; if the image of the aristocrat tends to underwrite the bourgeois subject's "autonomy" in one direction, it is actually threatening to it in others. The notion of a fixed social order is only reassuring to the subject to the extent that the latter represses any sense of history; the aristocracy is also the class which preceded the bourgeoisie in the exercise of social hegemony, and it can therefore remind the bourgeois reader of the impermanence of his/her class's power, of the possibility that it may one day itself be replaced in its hegemonic role. What has been made can be unmade;

the concept of aristocracy implies fixity from a synchronic perspective, but change if viewed diachronically. Its signification can, therefore, serve to denaturalise bourgeois rule. David Punter (The Literature of Terror, 1980) suggests that much Gothic literature draws on the ambivalence with which the bourgeoisie viewed its predecessor, the 'mingled interest and fear which the middle classes felt in connexion with the aristocracy';<sup>77</sup> hence, for instance, the figure of the aristocratic vampire, in John Polidori's 'The Vampyre' (1818)<sup>78</sup> or Stoker's Dracula (1897).<sup>79</sup> A disturbing element is thus written into the 'hereditary halls' and their inmates; indeed, the aristocratic principle of inbreeding, as in 'Usher', tends to undermine the coherence of both social order and subject, through its associations of incest and physical degeneration.<sup>80</sup> Besides, aristocratic mores were ideologically suspect in the eyes of bourgeois puritanism, given the link with "Byronism" and unrepressed pleasure; as will be shown below,<sup>81</sup> this is an important factor in the disturbing effect of 'The Assination' and 'The Masque of the Red Death'. The textual function of aristocracy is, then - as will be shown in detail for 'Usher' - rather more complex than 'Philosophy of Furniture' would suggest.

Poe's essay is also important for its detailed account of the ideal room, imagined to have been designed by an unspecified U.S. 'proprietor' (500). It should be stressed immediately that this room diverges, in major respects, from those constructed in the tales. Daniel Hoffman (Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, 1972) notes in relation to 'Ligeia' that the decor in this tale does not correspond to 'Poe's ideal conception of the well-appointed chamber', given the 'disarrangements ... of the elements which are harmoniously unified

in "Philosophy of Furniture";<sup>82</sup> Kane, similarly, observes the 'striking contrast' between the 'restlessness' of the rooms in the tales and the 'tranquil' interior of the essay.<sup>83</sup> Thompson, however, sees the divergences as only apparent, disappearing if 'Philosophy of Furniture' is read as an ironic text. He claims that Poe argues against 'glare' and 'glitter', yet produces a room which is, like those in the tales, full of those qualities; and that the title is 'mock-serious' and a pointer to the essay's satiric character.<sup>84</sup> It is, however, doubtful whether the ideal room is actually so glaring, since one of the dominant colours (crimson) sets off the brightness of the other (gold), and it contains only 'one mirror' (502), in contrast to the 'glitter upon glitter' of rooms with 'four or five mirrors' that Poe condemns (500). The title, too, may be read as claiming that furniture is, in fact, as "philosophical" a subject, and as worthy of sustained analysis, as more "serious" topics; one can compare 'The Philosophy of Composition' and (if it is by Poe) 'The Philosophy of Animal Magnetism'.<sup>85</sup> Certainly, modern structuralism would not disagree with the affirmations of Poe's original first paragraph (deleted in 1845):<sup>86</sup> 'no one will deny that Philosophy has its merits, and is applicable to an infinity of purposes. There is reason, it is said, in the roasting of eggs, and there is philosophy even in furniture';<sup>87</sup> a project like Barthes' Mythologies<sup>88</sup> is based on the assumption that the most apparently banal objects are susceptible to analysis. It may be suggested that the undoubted satiric element in 'Philosophy of Furniture' is directed at the taste of the U.S. bourgeoisie, with their carpets 'bedizzened out like a Riccaree Indian' (498), and does not extend to the ideal room itself; rather, it represents an ideological attempt at the symbolic constitution of the autonomous subject (hence, as Hoffman notes, its 'harmoniously

unified' character), and therefore moves in the reverse direction from the tales, where both interior and subject tend towards disintegration.

The points of convergence between the interior of 'Philosophy of Furniture' and those of the tales will now be summarised briefly (with reference to the tabulation on pp. 498-501 above). Straight lines are rejected, in favour of circles and curves, wherever possible. In most U.S. interiors, Poe argues: 'Straight lines are too prevalent - too uninterruptedly continued' (497); in contrast, in the ideal interior, the pattern of the carpet is formed by 'a succession of short irregular curves' (501), the mirror is 'nearly circular' (502), and the room itself has 'slightly rounded angles' (503) (cf. tabulation, 9). Arabesque decoration is recommended: 'whether on carpets, or curtains, or tapestry, or ottoman coverings, all upholstery of this nature should be rigidly Arabesque' (498); thus, in the room, the wallpaper is 'spotted with small Arabesque devices' (502) (cf. 18). Coloured glass is also present, the window-panes being 'of a crimson-tinted glass' (501) (cf. 14); and the room is lit by two lamps, one perfumed, the other tinted - 'a tall candelabrum, bearing a small antique lamp with highly perfumed oil', and 'an Argand lamp, with a plain crimson-tinted ground-glass shade, which depends from the lofty vaulted ceiling by a slender gold chain' (503) (cf. 13, 15).

However, the points of divergence also require enumeration. The notions of 'decorum' and 'keeping', rejected in the tales (cf. 8), are accepted in the essay: 'The Scotch are poor decorists' (496); 'We speak of the keeping of a room as we would of the keeping of a picture -



for both the picture and the room are amenable to those undeviating principles which regulate all varieties of art' (497). The positive valuation of these concepts is compatible with Poe's use of the terms in his criticism; thus, in 'The Poetry of Rufus Dawes - a Retrospective Criticism' (1842 - H XI, 131-47), he writes: 'An utter want of keeping is especially manifest throughout.' (141), and, in his article 'William Cullen Bryant' (1846 - H XIII, 125-41): 'The conventionalities, even the most justifiable decora of composition, are regarded, per se, with a suspicious eye.' (129). Further, the profusion of drapery is castigated (cf. 12): 'an extensive volume of drapery of any kind is, under any circumstances, irreconcilable with good taste' (497). The room has window-curtains 'of an exceedingly rich crimson silk' (501), but the piano and table are both 'without cover', since 'the drapery of the curtains has been thought sufficient' (502). Flickering lights, of the type found in 'The Assination' ('flickering tongues of ... fire' - 157) (cf. 13) are unequivocally rejected: 'Flickering, unquiet lights are sometimes pleasing - to children and idiots always so - but in the embellishment of a room they should be scrupulously avoided.' (499). Finally, as seen above,<sup>89</sup> 'glare' and 'glitter' are proscribed (cf. 19): 'Glare is a leading error in the philosophy of American household decoration' (498); 'glitter - ... in that one word how much of all that is detestable do we express!' (499).

From the above points of similarity and contrast, it may be concluded that the fictional interiors differ from that of the essay primarily in their marked element of excess - especially in drapery and lighting. If the ideal room represents the norm, then the interiors of 'Ligeia', 'The Assination' or 'The Masque of the Red Death' are, finally, transgressions of that norm, in their 'want of keeping'. The caustic

reference in the essay to 'children and idiots' is paralleled in 'Ligeia' by the narrator's self-critical admission of a 'childlike perversity' in his own interior design (320); indeed, the term 'perversity' links him with the self-destructive narrators of the "urban murder tales". It appears that, even on the level of intention, the excessive character of the fictional interiors signifies the centrifugal, disintegrative tendencies in their designers' minds; a room without keeping corresponds to an "unbalanced" subject, as a metaphor from 'Berenice' - 'the disordered chamber of my brain' (215) - suggests. The narrator of 'Ligeia', indeed, makes an explicit link between the decor and his own mental instability:

Alas, I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold! (320)

The 'Bedlam patterns' of the carpets contrast with the restrained motif ('the appearance of a gold cord') that decorates that of 'Philosophy of Furniture', in a room where 'there are no cornices' (501); while the 'wild ... furniture' scarcely appears philosophical! The interiors constructed by the narrator of 'Ligeia', by the Visionary, by Prospero, if intended by them as expressions of the autocratic plenitude of their subjectivity, in the end become symbols of their disintegrative tendencies; a similar role is played, in 'Usher' and 'The Oval Portrait', by the element of decay in the furnishings. 'Philosophy of Furniture', then, constructs an interior which externalises the "unified", balanced, unruptured subject ('with whose decorations no fault can be found' - 500; '(the lamp) throws a tranquil but magical radiance over all' - 503); which is centred and coherent, with the carpet as its 'soul' (497); and which, simultaneously, serves

as an ideological norm against which the "disintegrative" interiors (and subjects) of the tales can be contrasted.

### iii. Phantasmagoria

The general characteristics of Poe's interiors having been established, certain of their components will now be subjected to more detailed analysis, and placed in historical context: phantasmagoria (tabulation, 24), Gothic (16), grotesque (17), arabesque (18) and synaesthesia (15).

In the case of the first-named, Benjamin, as seen above, refers to the 'phantasmagorias of the interior';<sup>90</sup> it must be stressed that, in nineteenth-century discourse, this term has, overtly or covertly, a specific, technical sense. The word was coined by a certain Philipstal in 1802;<sup>91</sup> the original, literal sense was, according to the O.E.D.: 'A name invented for an exhibition of optical illusions produced chiefly by means of the magic lantern, first exhibited in London in 1802'. The dictionary adds: 'In Philipstal's "phantasmagoria" the figures were made rapidly to increase and decrease in size, to advance and retreat, dissolve, vanish, and pass into each other, in a manner then considered marvellous'. This primary meaning was extended, to cover any similar kind of optical effect, real or imaginary. The O.E.D. gives two further senses: 1) 'A shifting series or succession of phantasms or imaginary figures, as seen in a dream or fevered condition, as called up by the imagination, or as created by literary description'; and 2) 'A shifting and changing external scene consisting of many elements'.<sup>92</sup>

In nineteenth-century literary usage, the term tends to signify oneiric or hallucinatory effects. It can denote an actual disturbance of

perception, as in Balzac's La Peau de Chagrin (1831) where, in the antique-shop episode,<sup>93</sup> the semi-delirious Valentin perceives the objects as figures in a phantasmagoria:

... il souhaita plus vivement que jamais de mourir, en laissant errer ses regards à travers les fantasmagories de ce panorama du passé.... A la faveur de l'ombre, et mises en danse par la fiévreuse tourmente qui fermentait dans son cerveau brisé, ces oeuvres s'agitèrent et tourbillonnèrent devant lui ...<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850), Hester Prynne's fantasies on the scaffold take the form of a phantasmagoric exhibition:

Her mind, and especially her memory, was preternaturally active, and kept bringing up other scenes ... Reminiscences ... came swarming back on her ... one picture precisely as vivid as another ... Possibly, it was an instinctive device of her spirit, to relieve itself, by the exhibition of these phantasmagoric forms, from the cruel weight and hardness of the reality.<sup>95</sup>

In another Hawthorne narrative, 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' (1832),<sup>96</sup> while the term 'phantasmagoria' does not actually occur, the account of Robin Molineux's hypnagogic fantasies, with 'his mind ... vibrating between fancy and reality', contains a shifting succession of shapes that suggests those of Philipstal's exhibition:

... by turns, the pillars of the balcony lengthened into the tall, bare stems of pines, dwindled down to human figures, settled again into their true shape and size, and then commenced a new succession of changes.<sup>97</sup>

In the above examples, the implicit or explicit references to phantasmagoria occur in the context of borderline mental states or perceptual confusion. In Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop (1841), a phantasmagoric reference intensifies the associations of Quilp with the sinister and disturbing:

Quilp ... looked fixedly at him, retreated a little distance ...,

approached again, again withdrew, and so on for half-a-dozen times, like a head in a phantasmagoria.<sup>98</sup>

In all these instances, the original, technical sense of "phantasmagoria" remains visible - the term implies an exhibition of shifting, ever-mutating shapes. Its occurrences in Poe's tales follow much the same pattern. As shown above (tabulation, 24), the term appears, or is implied, in 'Ligeia', 'Usher' and 'The Masque of the Red Death'; these instances will now be examined in detail.

The most specific and detailed instance is in 'Ligeia', in the account of the bridal chamber. The arabesque patterns on the carpet, curtains, upholstery, etc. are made 'changeable in aspect', altering according to the spectator's point of view. The effect produced on the onlooker is comparable to that of the shifting figures in Philipstal's phantasmagoria:

... as the visiter moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk. The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies - giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole. (322)

Phantasmagoria is here associated with dream ('guilty slumbers'), terror ('ghastly', 'hideous') and continual movement ('endless succession', 'uneasy animation'); the combination recalls the terrifying dreams of De Quincey's Confessions.<sup>99</sup> The term thus becomes a signifier of perpetual disturbance and disorientation; the observer no longer knows where he/she stands, under the 'phantasmagoric influences of the chamber' (323-24).

In 'The Masque of the Red Death', the term itself does not appear, but is implied in the account of the bizarre effects of the firelight in Prospero's suite:

... in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light... was ghastly in the extreme ... (672)

These 'fantastic appearances' parallel those produced in 'Ligeia', in their multiplicity and their 'ghastly' character; shifting and changing with the movements of the flames, they are clearly phantasmagoric. Again, they induce disturbance in the onlooker; the images in the black chamber produce 'so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all' (ibid.).

In 'Usher', the phantasmagoric references are less specific, but the term occurs twice (and three times in the original, 1839 text).<sup>100</sup> First, 'phantasmagoric armorial trophies' (400) form part of the melancholy Gothic decor, stirring up 'unfamiliar ... fancies' in the narrator. Second, Usher's paintings are called 'phantasmagoric conceptions' (405), presumably because of their status as shadowy, non-representational 'vaguenesses'.<sup>101</sup> Third, in the 1839 text (and subsequent versions until 1845),<sup>102</sup> the 'influence' of the 'gloomy furniture' and the swaying draperies in the narrator's bedroom is described as 'phantasmagoric' (later revised to 'bewildering'). In the original version, the disorienting 'influence' of the interior recalls the passage from 'Ligeia' quoted above; while the substitution itself points to the link between phantasmagoria and bewilderment. In general, the

phantasmagoric references in 'Usher' occur in the context of objects perceived as threatening, in their lack of determinate shape or limit.

The explicit references to "phantasmagoria" in these tales, then, signify an element of disturbance - a blurring of contours and confusion of perspective that threatens the 'close circumscription of space'. The connotations of dream and hallucination imply the potential rupture of the subject's perceptions, and hence the negation of its "unity" and "autonomy". It also implies breakdown and loss of limits; there is no necessary order or logic to the movements of the shifting figures. The 'ghastly forms' and 'fantastic appearances' are a component of the interior tending towards its rupture - towards the negation of its status as metaphor for the "full" subject.

#### iv. Gothic

The interiors are characterised in the texts in terms of three specific styles: "Gothic", "grotesque" and "arabesque", which will now be considered in turn. The connotations of "Gothic" as the name of a literary genre have been considered in Chapter 1;<sup>103</sup> here, the term will be examined in its architectural and decorative sense. The exteriors of the buildings signified in 'Usher', 'Ligeia' and 'The Masque of the Red Death' are clearly medieval, and therefore Gothic (as in the 'Gothic archway' of 'Usher' (400), which mediates between inside and outside); attention will, however, be concentrated on the interiors (see tabulation, 16).

As Punter shows in The Literature of Terror, the original sense of the word was "to do with the Goths", and, therefore, "barbarous",

"uncivilised"; by the mid-eighteenth century, it had taken on the sense of "medieval", and was thus opposed to "classical", usually with negative connotations:<sup>104</sup>

where the classical was well ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a set of cultural models to be followed, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the products of the wild and the uncivilised.<sup>105</sup>

Gothic thus, on the one hand, implies a withdrawal from contemporary realities into the medieval past; on the other, the cultivation of indiscipline and disorganisation.

A further connotation is intricacy, given the complexity and proliferation of detail characteristic of Gothic architecture. In this respect, there was a frequent confusion in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century usage between "Gothic" and "Saracenic" or "Arabesque", perhaps owing to the common characteristic of intricacy. The O.E.D. traces the spread of this confusion to an error made by Christopher Wren in 1713.<sup>106</sup> The passage is quoted by Thompson in Poe's Fiction; in his Parentalia, Wren refers to 'the Gothick manner of architecture, ... which should with more reason be called the Saracen style'.<sup>107</sup> Thompson shows that, up to the Romantic period, the terms "grotesque", "arabesque" and "Gothic" were 'perennially confused';<sup>108</sup> thus later Gothic styles ("Decorated", "Flamboyant", "Perpendicular", etc.) were frequently termed 'arabesque Gothic'.<sup>109</sup> Poe, it may be noted, does not make this confusion, distinguishing carefully between Gothic and arabesque even when a hybrid style is in question; thus 'The Domain of Arnheim' (1846) culminates in the vision of 'a mass of semi-Gothic, semi-Saracenic architecture ... with a hundred oriels, minarets, and pinnacles' (M III, 1283). Here, the separation of the two terms



implies they are autonomous architectural categories, although not incapable of fusion. Similarly, in 'Ligeia', the 'semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical' fretting of the ceiling should be read as stylistically differentiated from the 'Saracenic' censer (321); indeed, three separate styles - Gothic, Celtic and arabesque - are present. As Thompson suggests in relation to 'Ligeia', there is a 'close association' between 'Gothic' and 'arabesque' in Poe's writing,<sup>110</sup> but this does not mean a total identity.

The element of confusion is also central to the perception of the Gothic. Medieval architecture tends to be characterised by an extreme profusion of detail that obscures the lines of the building; and by the absence of any single vantage point from which the building can be grasped as a whole. This disorienting tendency was seized on by hostile neo-classicists. Thus Thompson quotes John Evelyn (Account of Architects and Architecture, 1697), for whom Gothic was 'a certain fantastical ... Manner of Building ... full of fret and lamentable Imagery'; its effect was that 'a judicious Spectator is distracted and quite confounded'.<sup>111</sup> According to Thompson, this 'element of deception and confusion' remained dominant in perceptions of Gothic until well into the nineteenth century.<sup>112</sup> More positive valuations were, however, made by Romantic writers; Hoffmann, in The Devil's Elixirs (1816), presents the contradictions of Gothic as leading ultimately to synthesis in a larger 'unity'. For Hoffmann's narrator, 'the old masters ... were able to fuse the apparently separate and contradictory elements into a simple, glorious, meaningful entity.... the Gothic artist must be impelled by a particular awareness of the Romantic, since here there is no question of his keeping to a pattern

of rules, as he can with Classical forms'.<sup>113</sup> The "rulelessness" of Gothic is here seen as only apparent since its 'contradictions' are ultimately 'fuse(d)'. In the case of Poe's interiors, however, there is, in practice, no final fusion of the contradictory elements; the chamber in 'Ligeia', for instance, is conceived by the narrator as an aesthetic whole, yet can never be perceived as a stable entity owing to the ever-changing phantasmagoric effects. The state of mind that Poe's interiors produce in the onlooker is neither a classic calm nor a mystical sense of synthesis. It is, rather, one of disturbance, as indicated by the signifier 'wild'; the fretting of the ceiling in 'Ligeia' is of 'the wildest ... device' (321), while the firelight seen through the 'Gothic window' (671) of Prospero's seventh room produces a 'wild ... look' on the guests' countenances (672). Similarly, in 'The Domain of Arnheim', the Gothic-Saracenic pile is described as 'upspringing confusedly', rather than uniting its diverse elements into a seamless whole (1283).

Finally, "Gothic" carries connotations of barbarism, given the etymological link with the Goths, destroyers of the "civilised" Roman Empire - and, further, the frequent confusion with the arabesque, the style of the non-Christian Arabs. Hence, as Punter suggests, Gothic fiction, with its medieval castles and modern prisons, can come to signify, not only past barbarities, but 'the hidden barbarities of the present'.<sup>114</sup> Horace Walpole, in his 'Preface' to The Castle of Otranto (1765),<sup>115</sup> presents his novel as quite literally a Gothic text ('in the black letter'), located in an epoch of 'barbarism': 'The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of christianity (sic)';<sup>116</sup> he thus makes an explicit link between the Gothic and the barbaric. In 'The Masque of the Red Death',

Prospero's 'conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre' (673); here as in Walpole's novel,<sup>117</sup> the themes of aristocracy and barbarity fuse in a medieval space perceived as threatening and unstable. Poe's Gothic interiors eventually, of course, become scenarios of "barbaric", primordial forms of violence.

The Gothic element in Poe's interiors might be seen superficially as implying an unproblematic escapism; in practice, however, its connotations of intricacy, confusion and barbarism tend to constitute it as a signifier of the breakdown of the subject. The Gothic interior induces perceptual disorientation and becomes a theatre of archaic violence. As shown above, the signifier is closely related to "arabesque", and also - via such medieval phenomena as gargoyles<sup>118</sup> - to "grotesque", two intimately linked terms which will be discussed in the next section.

#### v. Grotesque and Arabesque

The terms "grotesque" and "arabesque" must first be established in relation to each other, before being examined separately. They occur together in Poe's 'Preface' to Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque (1840) (M II, 473-74); their exact sense there, however, is problematic, and has been variously interpreted. The first sentence reads: 'The epithets "Grotesque" and "Arabesque" will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published.'; but nowhere in the text does Poe actually define either 'epithet'. Critics have often assumed that "grotesque" refers to the comic tales, and "arabesque" to the Gothic tales; this reading is offered by, for instance, A. H. Quinn (Edgar Allan Poe, 1941)<sup>119</sup> and Daniel Hoffman (Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, 1972).<sup>120</sup> Thompson, however,

contests this position, arguing that the two terms are virtual synonyms:

Poe did not mean to split apart the comic and the serious ... he conceived of "effect" as a continuum of emotional involvement with the grotesque and arabesque as terms indicating closely proximate areas of feeling or impact ... Arabesque in fact seems often to be an alternative term for grotesque. If arabesque has any clearcut distinction from grotesque in normal Romantic usage, it is only in its stronger suggestion of a deceptive overall pattern ... Both terms have as a constant element a tension between opposites ...<sup>121</sup>

For Thompson, then, both terms have similar connotations of deceptive confusion and ironic tension. Thompson's reading is based on a study of the two terms in German Romantic usage, and is rigorously argued and substantiated. The question must be posed, then, whether "grotesque" and "arabesque" are, in Poe, near-synonymous or antithetical signifiers.

In the case of the 'Preface', a definitive answer may be impossible. Poe here certainly implies a distinction between comic and serious tales; he refers in the first paragraph to 'my serious tales', and in the second to 'one or two ... articles ... (conceived and executed in the purest spirit of extravaganza,) to which I expect no serious attention' (473). However, a comic/serious contrast is not necessarily the same as a grotesque/arabesque contrast. Certainly, Poe refers to 'the prevalence of the "Arabesque" in my serious tales', and by implication associates 'arabesque' with the fantastic (the tales as a whole are called "'phantasy-pieces'") and with fear ('terror ... of the soul') (ibid.). "Grotesque", however, does not occur in the text after the first sentence, so that its exact signification remains unclear. It is possible either that "grotesque" refers to the comic,

and 'arabesque' to the serious tales; or else that 'grotesque and arabesque' together signify all the tales except for the 'one or two' dismissed as extravaganzas. The latter reading will be adopted in this study.

External evidence may be called on here. Poe's use of the two terms in the 'Preface' is generally traced back - e.g. by Quinn<sup>122</sup> and Mabbott<sup>123</sup> - to Walter Scott's essay of 1827, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition, and particularly on the work of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann'.<sup>124</sup> Scott uses both "grotesque" and "arabesque" to signify the types of fiction practised by Hoffmann; the two terms seem to be interchangeable with each other and with a third, "fantastic". For Scott, fantastic literature is characterised by the absence of rules; it is a 'mode of writing' in which 'the most wild and unbounded license (sic) is given to an irregular fancy, and all species of combination, however ludicrous, or however shocking, are attempted and executed without scruple'.<sup>125</sup> He considers Hoffmann to be 'the first distinguished artist who exhibited the fantastic or supernatural grotesque in his compositions';<sup>126</sup> "fantastic" and "grotesque" are here, then, near-synonyms, used to refer to the same kind of 'irregular' imagination. Scott further employs "arabesque" in his specification of Hoffmann's grotesque, explicitly borrowing the term from painting:<sup>127</sup>

The grotesque in his compositions partly resembles the arabesque in painting, in which is (sic) introduced the most strange and complicated monsters, resembling centaurs, griffins, sphinxes, chimeras, rocs, and all the other creatures of romantic imagination, dazzling the beholder as it were by the unbounded fertility of the author's imagination, ... while there is in reality nothing to satisfy the understanding or inform the judgment: Hoffmann spent his lifetime ... in weaving webs of this wild and imaginative character.<sup>128</sup>

Scott moves, then, from "fantastic" to "grotesque", and from "grotesque" to "arabesque", in such a way as to constitute all three terms as virtual synonyms. All signify a (to Scott) reprehensible lack of discipline; Hoffmann's grotesque and arabesque imagination is castigated for being 'irregular', 'wild' and 'unbounded'. As will be seen, Poe uses both "grotesque" and "arabesque" in similar senses to Scott's,<sup>129</sup> although not necessarily with negative connotations; Scott's text provides, in fact, some support for Thompson's view that the two terms are interchangeable (indeed, he uses it to back his case).<sup>130</sup> It will be shown below that in the tales they are, if not identical, at least closely related, sharing the connotations of breakdown and disorientation.

"Grotesque", like "arabesque", is a term that originally pertained to painting. It derives from Italian "grottesco", and thence from "grotta" (grotto, or cave); at the Renaissance, Roman mural paintings were discovered in underground rooms, known as grottos, and "grotesque" thus initially referred to such paintings, or to their characteristics. The O.E.D. defines the noun, in this sense, as follows: 'A kind of decorative painting or sculpture, consisting of representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers'.<sup>131</sup> "Grotesque" and "arabesque" were, in fact, differentiated by nineteenth-century writers. Patricia C. Smith ('Poe's Arabesque', 1974)<sup>132</sup> quotes the 1831 Encyclopaedia Americana, which defines "grotesques" as 'paintings, in which flowers, genii, men and beasts, buildings, &c., are mingled together according to the fancy of the artist'.<sup>133</sup> It is this technical, classical sense that the term appears in 'The Assignation', where the Visionary's collection includes 'the grotesques of the Greek painters' (157).

However, the term more often appears in Poe's writing in various non-technical senses, corresponding to (or extending) the more general senses given in the O.E.D., i.e. (for the adjective): 1) 'Of designs or forms: characterized by distortion or unnatural combinations; fantastically extravagant; bizarre, quaint. Also transf. of immaterial things, esp. of literary style'; 2) 'ludicrous from incongruity; fantastically absurd'.<sup>134</sup> It should be noted that in the second sense, "grotesque" acquires a comic connotation.

Instances of "grotesque" or "grotesquerie", in various extended senses, in Poe's writing include the following: a) of a person, ugly and absurd, e.g.: 'the grotesque groups scattered here and there (of which) ... our two seamen ... formed the most interesting' ('King Pest' (1835) - M II, 240); b) of an art-object, building or place, bizarre, eccentric-looking, extravagantly wrought, e.g.: 'idols grotesquely hewn' ('A Tale of the Ragged Mountains' - M III, 945);<sup>135</sup> 'a time-eaten and grotesque mansion' ('The Murders in the Rue Morgue' - M II, 532);<sup>136</sup> 'that most grotesque habitation of man, the remarkable city of Antioch' ('Four Beasts in One' (1836) - M II, 120); c) of writing, again, extravagant and therefore original, e.g.: 'It is in this species of brilliant, or rather, glowing grotesquerie, uttered with a rushing abandon vastly heightening its effect, that Hood's marked originality mainly consisted' (comments on Thomas Hood in 'Marginalia' (1849) - H XVI, 178); d) of an incident, absurd, ridiculous, e.g.: 'To Ritzner, ever upon the lookout for the grotesque, his peculiarities had for a long time past afforded food for mystification.' ('Mystification' (1837) - M II, 298); e) of an act or device of torture or murder, ingeniously or extraordinarily cruel or horrific, e.g.: 'the grotesquerie of these dungeon deaths' ('The Pit and the Pendulum' (1842) - M II, 690);

'a grotesquerie in horror absolutely alien from humanity' ('The Murders in the Rue Morgue' - M II, 558).<sup>137</sup>

It should be clear from these examples that, across the Poe canon, "grotesque" and "grotesquerie" tend to connote strangeness, distortion, eccentricity in general - over a wide range of contexts, ranging from the absurd (the ugly appearance of the sailors in 'King Pest') to the terrifying (the murders committed by the ape in 'Rue Morgue'). The comic element is sometimes, but not invariably present (which suggests that "grotesque" may not necessarily mean "comic" in the 1840 'Preface'). However, the signifier does seem generally to contain a potential for tension and irony; the grotesque object is contradictory, heterogeneous, excessive - something which cannot be taken wholly seriously (even the murders in the Rue Morgue or the 'dungeon deaths' of the Inquisition would be ludicrous in their extravagance were they not so disturbing). It is admirable in its elaborate, wrought quality, yet absurd in its exaggeration. Thompson stresses this contradictory character of the grotesque mode, citing Friedrich Schlegel's view (Athenäum, 1798) of the grotesque as the 'paradoxical antithesis and fusion of the ridiculous and the terrifying', and points out that on this kind of definition, the concept becomes closely 'associated with irony'.<sup>138</sup>

In Poe's fictions of the interior - as seen in the tabulation (17) - "grotesque" tends to occur in the second sense (b) defined above, i.e. denoting an extravagant, bizarre art-object, with a certain ironic connotation; the excess of ornament leads to difficulty in perceiving the object as a whole, and thus tends to threaten the stability and coherence of both onlooker and artist-owner. Thus in 'Ligeia', the



'grotesque' fretting of the ceiling (321), in its weirdness, points to its designer's 'incipient madness' (320), and also contributes to the atmosphere that undermines Rowena's health; and in 'The Masque of the Red Death', the 'grotesque', disorienting appearance of the masquers (673) suggests their final dissolution in death (the grotesque threatens to dissolve into phantasmagoria, into 'delirious fancies' (673)). In the tales in question, then, "grotesque" is an ambivalent signifier; it connotes both the creative power of the artist, and, through its mingled suggestions of the comic and the terrible, the disorientation and disintegration of the subject.

Poe's use of "arabesque" differs from his use of "grotesque" in being more rigorously technical; the connotations are also somewhat different. As Smith suggests, if 'in Poe's tales, the word "grotesque" often appears in its extended sense ... the word "arabesque" and descriptions of art forms which, though unnamed, are clearly arabesques are never used casually'.<sup>139</sup> Like its companion term, "arabesque" originally referred to a style of painting and decoration, as is clear from Scott's definition quoted above.<sup>140</sup> The O.E.D. defines the adjective as referring to whatever is 'Arabian or Moorish in ornamental design', and the noun as: 'A species of mural or surface decoration in colour or low relief, composed in flowing lines of branches, leaves, and scroll-work fancifully intertwined'. The dictionary adds that the arabesques of the Renaissance often included human and animal figures, and that in contrast to this type, the original, Arabic type may be distinguished as 'Moorish Arabesque, or Moresque'.<sup>141</sup> 'Moresque' is defined in its own right as (adjective): 'Moorish in style, or ornamental design', and (noun): 'Arabesque ornament';<sup>142</sup> while the definition of 'Saracenic' is: 'Applied to Mohammedan architecture in

its various forms, or to any features of it'.<sup>143</sup>

The O.E.D., then, contrasts Renaissance arabesque (permitting human and animal figures) with Moorish arabesque (excluding such figures).

The Encyclopaedia Americana (quoted by Smith) makes a similar distinction, but between grotesque and arabesque:

All ornaments compounded in a fantastical manner, of men, beasts, flowers, plants, &c., are sometimes called arabesques, and sometimes grotesques; but there is a distinction between them. Arabesques are flower-pieces, consisting of all kinds of leaves and flowers, real or imaginary. They are so called from the Arabians, who first used them, because they were not permitted to copy beasts and men.<sup>144</sup>

For the encyclopaedia writer, Renaissance arabesque would then not be arabesque at all, but a kind of grotesque; Scott's description, on the other hand, by admitting the presence of animals (even if imaginary 'monsters'),<sup>145</sup> is effectively of the Renaissance arabesque, admitted as a legitimate type. Poe, as will be seen, uses "arabesque" in the strict sense, excluding human and animal representation; his usage, like that of the Encyclopaedia, is convergent with the Islamic prohibition underlying the original arabesques.

By the late eighteenth century, the term had also acquired metaphoric significations. The O.E.D. gives the extended meaning for the adjective: 'strangely mixed, fantastic', and implies the same for the noun ('Also fig.'), citing Carlyle (Miscellany, 1827): 'His manner of writing is - a wild complicated Arabesque'.<sup>146</sup> The term, then, can signify a bizarre, 'wild' construction in any medium. Thus it occurs, in both literal and metaphoric senses, with some frequency in Gothic and Romantic literature. In Vathek, it appears in its literal sense: 'Gulchenrouz could ... paint upon vellum the most elegant arabesques

that fancy could devise.'<sup>147</sup> La Peau de Chagrin contains a similar instance, when, in the antique-shop, Valentin admires 'les arabesques d'azur et d'or qui enrichissaient quelque précieux missel manuscrit'<sup>148</sup> (the reference is here to medieval or Renaissance quasi-arabesque); and also a metaphoric use, when, at Taillefer's banquet, the journalist Emile Blondet perceives the courtesan Aquilina as a living arabesque:

... aussi Emile la compara-t-il vaguement à une tragédie de Shakespeare, espèce d'arabesque admirable où la joie hurle, où l'amour a je ne sais quoi de sauvage, où la magie de la grâce et le feu de bonheur succèdent aux sanglants tumultes de la colère ...<sup>149</sup>

In the first case, 'arabesque' occurs in the hallucinatory context of the antique-shop, with its disorienting effect on Valentin's perceptions;<sup>150</sup> in the second, it points to the coexistence of unresolved contradictions and the absence of classical discipline (as implied by the reference to Shakespeare and the 'sauvage' elements in his writing). Arabesque reference acquires "unreal" connotations in Hoffmann's 'The Golden Pot' (1813),<sup>151</sup> where the student Anselmus copies some 'Arabic manuscripts',<sup>152</sup> and has to translate some 'strangely intertwined characters';<sup>153</sup> here, arabesque intricacy reinforces the oneiric character of the narrative, in which reality is invaded by dream as the Archivarius Lindhorst, owner of the manuscripts, proves to be a Salamander from Atlantis. In all these instances, the oriental connotations of "arabesque" are exploited, whether to colour an actual Eastern setting, as in Vathek, or else to intensify textual connotations of dream, hallucination, or perceptual or emotional confusion; as in 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains', or De Quincey's Eastern dreams, the Oriental becomes a signifier for repressed or marginal areas of consciousness.<sup>154</sup>

The alternation of opposites and the absence of a fixed perspective in the second Balzac extract suggest that "arabesque" is used with marked ironic connotations. Thompson emphasises that, in German Romantic usage, the term tends to imply the 'ironic interplay of contradictions', the presence of unresolved tensions, to the point where "arabesque" and "irony" become near-synonyms.<sup>155</sup> Thus he quotes Schlegel's Lectures on Poetry (1800), in which the works of Cervantes and (again) Shakespeare are seen as instances of literary arabesque, characterised by 'artfully regulated confusion, ... charming symmetry of contradictions, ... strange and constant alternation between irony and enthusiasm'.<sup>156</sup> "Arabesque" can, then, connote an effect of confusion similar to that produced by "Gothic"; it signifies the absence of a definitive point of view, and the coexistence of contrary tendencies whose conflictive interplay remains unresolved, or pushes towards disintegration.

Poe's use of the term is convergent with the examples given above, and, to a large extent, runs parallel to his use of "Gothic" and "grotesque", with similar connotations of confusion, disorientation and disintegration. At the same time, however, it carries a highly specific connotation, which distinguishes it from its companion terms (and is not fully taken account of in Thompson's notion of "grotesque" and "arabesque" as near-synonyms):<sup>157</sup> that of abstraction. Thus, in 'Philosophy of Furniture', as seen above,<sup>158</sup> arabesque decoration is recommended for furnishings - with a clear, if displaced, reference to the Islamic prohibition on representation, which is, indeed, extended to cover any living objects whatever; Poe here favours 'vivid circular or cycloid figures, of no meaning', and further specifies: 'The

abomination of flowers, or representations of well-known objects of any kind, should not be endured within the limits of Christendom.... all upholstery ... should be rigidly Arabesque' (498). Indeed, his criteria are more 'rigidly Arabesque' than those of the Arabs themselves, excluding both the figures of monsters admitted by Scott and the flower-pieces of the Encyclopaedia.

What is crucial to Poe's arabesque, is, then, the element of abstraction, or non-representation. In 'Philosophy of Furniture', this may be placed in relation to the owner's attempt to abstract his interior from history and from social responsibilities (he is, significantly, represented as lying 'asleep on a sofa' (500), that is, abstracting himself from the social world). Elsewhere, however, the non-figurative patterns play, in addition, a more disturbing role, symbolising the subject's tendency to disintegration; the abstract figure has no definable identity, threatening to become an empty signifier, and can thus objectify the possibility of self-annihilation in its designer and owner. This connotation is clearly present in 'Ligeia', both in the censer, 'Saracenic in pattern' (321), and in the 'arabesque figures' on the hangings (322). As shown above,<sup>159</sup> 'Saracenic' is, in practice, a synonym for arabesque (indeed, the first three texts of the tale have 'Arabesque' here);<sup>160</sup> the 'writhing of the parti-colored fires' (326) creates more arabesque patterns, which disorient the perceptions of both Rowena and the narrator (it is under the censer that the latter first imagines he sees Ligeia's shadow (325)).<sup>161</sup> The arabesque is thus associated with hallucination and mental breakdown. Similarly, the arabesques on the draperies exert a highly disturbing effect:

The material ... was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought

upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black. But these figures partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view. (322)

Perceived from the correct vantage point, the arabesques become an 'endless succession of ... ghastly forms' (ibid.), that is, the disturbing phantasmagoria discussed above.<sup>162</sup> The 'true character of the arabesque' may be considered to imply: abstraction (as in 'Philosophy of Furniture'), writhing lines ('endless succession') and, finally, disorientation; here too, the coherence of the subject is undermined by the 'uneasy animation' (ibid.) of the arabesque forms.

In 'The Assignation', the 'strange convolute censers' (157) are, again, arabesque in form, and are described as such on their first appearance in the earlier versions.<sup>163</sup> Their flames, too, form arabesque patterns, 'multitudinous flaring and flickering tongues' (ibid.), which the Visionary openly appropriates as symbolising his own mental state: 'Like these arabesque censers, my spirit is writhing in fire' (166); "arabesque" thus takes on connotations of 'delirium' (ibid.) and, finally, of the total disintegration of the subject in suicide.<sup>164</sup> Arabesque and delirium are similarly associated in 'The Masque of the Red Death', where the masquers include 'arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments' (673). Here, the element of unresolved contradiction is present, as well as that of perceptual distortion; the same masquers are seen as resembling 'delirious fancies such as the madman fashions'. Their movements, too, are arabesque (they 'writhed in and about' to the music (ibid.)), and ultimately disturbing, anticipating, through the connotation of abstraction, their final annihilation by the Red Death. The link with delirium is also evident in 'The Oval Portrait', where both 'arabesque' and its synonym 'Moresque'<sup>165</sup> appear to describe the frames of the paintings. All the paintings in the apartment have

'frames of rich golden arabesque' (662), and the frame of the oval portrait itself is 'richly gilded and filigreed in Moresque' (664); on the evidence of 'Philosophy of Furniture', it may be presumed that both 'arabesque' and 'Moresque' refer to either floral or to totally non-figurative decoration. The arabesque element in the decor corresponds to, and reinforces, the wounded narrator's 'incipient delirium' (663), and may be related to the disintegrative tendencies and repressed fears brought out in him by the portrait.<sup>166</sup> Finally, the connotation of abstraction is most clearly visible in 'Usher'. The one occurrence of the term in this tale is entirely metaphoric; the narrator, describing Usher's face surrounded by his writhing hair, comments: 'I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity' (402). 'Arabesque' here signifies Usher's tendency to abstract himself from human relations into a private universe of fantasy, the same 'spirit of abstraction' as characterises his paintings (405); it may also be read as one more indicator of his tendency towards psychic breakdown.<sup>167</sup>

'Arabesque', then, functions in Poe's writing as a complex, ambivalent signifier. On the one hand, it corresponds to the subject's desire to abstract itself from history, thus tending to constitute it in its illusory autonomy; on the other hand, the connotations of tension and intricacy, and the associations of perceptual distortion, disorientation and disintegration tend in the contrary direction, deconstituting and rupturing that illusion. Unproblematic readings of Poe's arabesque are, of course, found. Daniel Hoffman alleges that the term signifies 'renunciation and transcendence of the body' and thus the absorption of the subject into a mystical totality;<sup>168</sup> while Patricia Smith claims that its main function is 'to suggest that the nature

of ... death is some sort of dissolution into Unity'.<sup>169</sup> Such readings tend to repress the element of contradiction crucial to the texts; Thompson's reading of the arabesque theme, in terms of unresolved tension, is to be preferred, although it runs the risk of sliding into a quasi-Derridean privileging of indeterminacy.<sup>170</sup> In conclusion, it may be suggested that "arabesque", like its companion term "grotesque", operates as a signifier for contradictions in the subject that are, ultimately, historically produced; and that, in Poe's writing (including the 'Preface'), the two terms are near-synonyms (but not totally interchangeable, since "grotesque" specifically connotes "sinister and comic", and "arabesque" abstraction), both implying disorientation, bewilderment and, therefore, the absence of "unity".

#### vi. Synaesthesia

Synaesthesia, or the mingling of sense-perceptions, is a commonplace motif in nineteenth-century literature, as is shown by the examples from Beckford and Keats quoted above.<sup>171</sup> In those instances, the main effect of the synaesthetic atmosphere is to induce a sense of gratified fulness (although that apparent plenitude is accompanied by perceptual confusion, and subverted later in the texts). In Poe's work, synaesthetic references occur in diverse contexts, not necessarily reassuring. The possible existence of objective parallels between different sense-perceptions is suggested in the 'Marginalia' (1844):

The orange ray of the spectrum and the buzz of the gnat ... affect me with nearly similar sensations. In hearing the gnat, I perceive the color. In perceiving the color, I hear the gnat. (H XVI, 17-18)

Here, synaesthesia is presented as an object of scientific enquiry. In 'The Colloquy of Monos and Una' (1841), the perceptions of Monos,



on the threshold of death, are signified in synaesthetic terms:

The senses were unusually active, although eccentrically so - assuming often each other's functions at random. The taste and the smell were inextricably confounded, and became one sentiment, abnormal and intense.... (M II, 612-13)  
this effect (of light on the retina) was so far anomalous that I appreciated it only as sound- sound sweet or discordant as the matters presenting themselves at my side were light or dark in shade - curved or angular in outline.... (613)  
issuing from the flame of each lamp, ... there flowed unbrokenly into my ears a strain of melodious monotone. (614)

Poe's text not only offers a definition of synaesthesia ('the senses ... assuming each other's functions'), but presents it as an ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, Monos' transformed perceptions contain elements of gratification ('melodious monotone'); on the other, there is an evident loss of limits and bearings ('inextricably confounded') and a dimension of unpleasure ('discordant'). In the narrator's own words: 'Of pain there was some little; of pleasure there was much' (613). It is clear that synaesthesia is not an unproblematically reassuring phenomenon. Indeed, elsewhere in Poe's writing it is associated unequivocally with terror. In 'Valdemar', as shown above,<sup>172</sup> the disturbing effect of the voice from the dead is reinforced by the comparison with 'gelatinous or glutinous matters' (M III, 1240); while in 'Shadow' (1835), the multiplied voices of the dead 'fell duskily on our ears' (M II, 191). Synaesthesia can thus connote both the "harmonious" constitution of the subject, and its disturbance and breakdown.

In the "interior" tales, the two main occurrences are in 'The Assignment' and 'Ligeia' (see tabulation, 15). In both cases, the synaesthetic effect is produced by a perfumed censer. This fusion of visual and olfactory perceptions has its precedents, as seen above, in the decors of Vathek and Lamia, and is paralleled elsewhere in Poe's work - in

'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' and 'Philosophy of Furniture' (again as shown above),<sup>173</sup> and also in 'Hop-Frog' (1849): 'a flambeau, emitting sweet odor, was placed in the right hand of each of the Caryatides' (M III, 1351). The two principal passages are worth quoting and analysing in full:

The senses were oppressed by mingled and conflicting perfumes, reeking up from strange convolute censers, together with multitudinous flaring and flickering tongues of emerald and violet fire. ('The Assignation', 157)

From out the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting, depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metal, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out of them, as if endued with a serpent vitality, a continual succession of parti-colored fires. ('Ligeia', 321)

These passages, which have already been considered from the viewpoint of the arabesque,<sup>174</sup> will now be examined in their entirety, as attempts at a synaesthetic totality.

Synaesthesia can be seen as an instance of the Romantic and Symbolist project of fusing all the areas of perception and all the arts into a totality. It thus pertains to the ideology of "unity"; to quote another practitioner of synaesthesia, Baudelaire ('Note' to 'Révélation magnétique', 1848): 'L'idée de l'unité a ... poursuivi Edgar Poe'.<sup>175</sup>

In one direction, these passages tend to reinforce the notion of the unified subject, mingling sense-perceptions from different areas into what seems a self-sufficient, all-embracing aesthetic totality. The flames are, in both cases, clearly phallic, in their 'serpent vitality', connoting the (male) artist's creative potency, and the power of words ('tongues of ... fire' suggests the myth of Pentecost). At the same time, however, the texts point in directions that lead away from the confirmation of the "full" subject. On the level of the signified, in

'The Assignation', 'oppressed' introduces a connotation of excess and over-plenitude, while 'conflicting' and 'multitudinous' imply disorientation and confusion, rather than 'unity'; in 'Ligeia', 'endless succession' suggests the shifting forms of a phantasmagoria or an opium dream, and thus implies the breakdown of limits. The multiplication of 'mingled' perfumes in 'The Assignation', and the doubling of colours in both ('emerald and violet', 'parti-colored') tend to undermine any sense of unitary coherence. On the level of the signifier, the syntax in which the 'convolute' censers and 'writhing' flames are signified is itself writhing and convolute, indeed arabesque, with its multiplication of -ing forms (present participles used verbally or adjectively) ('The Assignation') and -ed forms (simple past or past participles used adjectivally) ('Ligeia'). Both sentences, too, are marked phonologically by a high incidence of repetition. In 'The Assignation', 'conflicting' and 'convolute' share the same prefix, and there is alliteration on m ('mingled', 'multitudinous', 'emerald'), l ('conflicting', 'flaring', 'violet', etc.) and the pair f/v (unvoiced/voiced) ('conflicting', 'perfumes', 'convolute', 'violet', etc.); in 'Ligeia', 'contrived' and 'writhed' form a near-rhyme, 'continual' repeats phonemes from both 'contrived' and 'endued', and there is alliteration on, again, f/v ('vaulting', 'perforations', 'vitality', 'fires', etc.) and the unvoiced s ('central', 'recess', 'censer', 'Saracenic' etc.). All in all, the convolutions of the writing correspond to the synaesthetic project, producing a sense of aesthetic profusion; at the same time, through its very richness, this kind of writing carries a heavy charge of excess, producing, through its plethoric syntax and incantatory repetitions, an effect of confusion, if not hallucination in the reader. The synaesthetic element in Poe's decor tends in its over-fulness to undermine the very coherence of the subject that it seeks to underwrite.

The ambivalence attaching to the synaesthetic motif in Poe's work is reproduced in its occurrences in Baudelaire. The latter's famous sonnet 'Correspondances' (1857)<sup>176</sup> has been linked with Poe by Edmund Wilson (Axel's Castle, 1931),<sup>177</sup> who compares it with the passage from 'Monos and Una' cited above;<sup>178</sup> it is worth quoting in full here:

La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,  
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,  
Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,  
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens  
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.<sup>179</sup>

Benjamin suggests that the theory of 'correspondances' is one of the instances in Baudelaire's work of self-protection against the shocks of modernity, an attempt to construct 'an experience which seeks to establish itself in crisis-proof form'.<sup>180</sup> Superficially, the vision of a natural universe in which objects and sensations parallel and echo each other appears to confirm the subject in its coherence, producing a sense of organisation and equilibrium; signifiers like 'unité', 'se répondent', 'triomphants', imply the fulness, even the apotheosis, of the writing or reading mind. However, close examination reveals that this construct of unproblematic "unity" threatens continually to break down. It is undermined by a series of signifiers: 'confuses', 'se confondent', 'vaste', 'corrompus', 'expansion', 'infinies'. These introduce the ideas of confusion, disorientation, loss of limits; and,

in the case of 'corrompus' - ironically coming straight after 'trionphants' - the decay and decomposition of the subject. The subject is signified as threatened with rupture, in the very process of constituting its own "fulness" and "unity". These tensions in the Baudelaire text correspond closely to those in Poe's synaesthetic passages; in both, the subject's perceptions threaten to dissolve into hallucinatory chaos. Signifiers like 'confuses' and 'expansion' are paralleled in Poe's texts by 'conflicting' and 'multitudinous' ('The Assigination'), 'continued succession' ('Ligeia'), 'inextricably confounded' ('Monos and Una'); indeed, Baudelaire's association of synaesthesia with corruption recalls the proximity, in 'Valdemar', of synaesthetic reference and the decomposition of the body.<sup>181</sup>

#### vii. Interiors in Baudelaire and Huysmans: A Note

'Correspondances' is connected to the interior theme by the architectural image of nature as a temple; in Baudelaire's detailed constructions of interiors, the synaesthetic element recurs, with disintegrative connotations. Indeed, Baudelaire explicitly noted, in 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe' (1857) the incidence of luxurious interiors in Poe's work, 'ce goût immodéré pour ... les milieux ornés et les somptuosités orientales',<sup>182</sup> and translated 'Philosophy of Furniture' as 'Philosophie de l'Ameublement' (1852).<sup>183</sup> Comparable 'milieux ornés' are constructed in his own writings. Thus, in 'L'Invitation au Voyage' (verse-poem), an erotic utopia is imagined, including an interior which, if examined carefully, emerges as synaesthetic in character:

Des meubles luisants,  
Polis par les ans  
Décoreraient notre chambre;  
Les plus rares fleurs  
Mêlant leurs odeurs

Aux vagues senteurs de l'ambre,  
 Les riches plafonds,  
 Les miroirs profonds,  
 La splendeur orientale,  
 Tout y parlerait  
 A l'âme en secret  
 Sa douce langue natale.<sup>184</sup>

The objects of visual and olfactory perception (the furniture, flowers etc.) speak ('tout y parlerait'), as the perfumes in 'Correspondances' 'chantent'.<sup>185</sup> This synaesthetic element is in keeping with the textual emphasis on totality; the interior appears as an ordered autonomous space:

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,  
 Luxe, calme et volupté.<sup>186</sup>

This seems, if anything, more "unified" than Poe's interiors, which are luxurious and 'voluptuous' ('The Masque of the Red Death', 671), but scarcely - other than in 'Philosophy of Furniture' - calm. However, even here the disintegrative tendency observed at work in 'Correspondances' is present, in the indefiniteness of 'mêlant' and 'vagues'.

The coherence of the interior is more markedly undermined in the prose-poem of the same name, which functions as a semi-ironic pendant to its verse counterpart. Here, a similar interior is constituted, in greater detail, full of 'meubles bizarres' and with, again, a synaesthetic element; but the writing contains an ironic charge of self-conscious exaggeration: 'Les miroirs, les métaux, les étoffes, l'orfèvrerie et la faïence y jouent pour les yeux une symphonie muette y mystérieuse'. The room is presented as a totality, impregnated throughout by a 'parfum singulier ... qui est comme l'âme de l'appartement';<sup>187</sup> the perfume plays the cohering role of the carpet which, in 'Philosophy of Furniture', is 'the soul of the apartment'

(497)<sup>188</sup> (rendered by Baudelaire as, precisely, 'l'âme de l'appartement').<sup>189</sup> However, there is a textual stress on excess and distortion, expressed in adjectives like 'curieux', 'bizarres', 'singulier',<sup>190</sup> which tends to subvert the illusion of coherence. Further, irony is present from the beginning, since the text admits that this 'pays de Cocagne' does not exist, that it is a product of 'la chaude et capricieuse fantaisie';<sup>191</sup> and towards the end, the imaginary country and its interior are reduced to the simulacrum of an opium-dream: 'Des rêves! toujours des rêves!'<sup>192</sup> The synaesthetic interior thus emerges as a far more problematic and fragile construct than in the verse-poem. The convergence with Poe's interiors, and their disintegrative element, is reinforced by the phrase 'meubles bizarres', which suggests the 'wild furniture' of 'Ligeia' (320), which Baudelaire translated as 'ameublements bizarres'.<sup>193</sup>

The rupture of the interior is carried further in 'La Chambre double', a text which makes the duplicity of the motif evident in its title; a luxurious imaginary room is constructed, only to be annihilated and replaced by its real double. In the first part, an interior is described that closely resembles that of 'Philosophy of Furniture': 'Une chambre qui ressemble à une rêverie, une chambre véritablement spirituelle'<sup>194</sup> (this recalls Poe's reference in the essay to 'the spirituality of a British boudoir' (M II, 500), which Baudelaire rendered as 'la haute spiritualité d'un boudoir anglais').<sup>195</sup> The décor is characterised by the absence of representational art: 'Sur les murs nulle abomination artistique.'<sup>196</sup> extending Poe's rejection of 'the abomination of flowers' (ibid., 498) ('l'abomination des fleurs')<sup>197</sup> for his ideal room. The drapery is abundant: 'La mousseline pleut abondamment devant les fenêtres et devant le lit; elle s'épanche

en cascades neigeuses.';<sup>198</sup> this recalls the interiors of 'Ligeia' and, especially, 'The Assignment', where the curtains 'rolled from their cornices like cataracts of molten silver' (158). The synaesthetic element, too, recurs: 'Les étoffes parlent une langue muette, comme les fleurs, comme les ciels, comme les soleils couchants.' All in all, this interior appears to offer a gratifying sense of coherence and "unity"; the subject sees himself as 'entouré de mystère, de silence, de paix et de parfums', about to enter a realm of 'béatitude', abstracted from history ('Le temps a disparu; c'est l'Éternité qui règne'). However, the whole cloud-castle is suddenly shattered by a knock on the door, followed by what seems a re-run of 'The Masque of the Red Death', with its punitive phantom: 'Et puis un Spectre est entré.' The spectre is, in fact, a representative of the real social world, calling the subject back to time and history: 'le Temps a reparu; le Temps règne'; the voluptuous interior is replaced by the real hovel ('taudis'), proving to be the product of an opium-dream.<sup>199</sup> Its seeming coherence and fulness are thus exposed as illusory, a deceptive evasion of material reality. Here, then, Baudelaire repeats the process of deconstitution of the interior observed in Poe, taking it to the extreme of total annihilation.

Huysmans' A rebours (1884), a novel which pushes the interior theme to its ultimate limits, quite openly exhibits Poe's influence in the textual references (mentioned in Chapter 2) to the earlier writer's psychological acumen;<sup>200</sup> the protagonist, the Duc Jean des Esseintes, closely resembles Usher, with whom he at one point specifically identifies himself (this parallel will be examined more closely in the analysis of 'Usher').<sup>201</sup> Like Usher, he withdraws into a private interior; his mansion, outside Paris, is isolated by height and location from



'le brouhaha des immondes foules'<sup>202</sup> (the phrasing here recalls Dupin's aristocratic disdain for the 'unwashed' in 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' (M III, 760)).<sup>203</sup> Even the servants who make his sybaritic existence possible are virtually excluded from direct contact with him: 'il s'arrangea ... de façon à ne pas être souvent obligé de leur parler ou de les voir'<sup>204</sup> (in 'Ligeia', similarly, 'the turret was altogether apart from the portion of the abbey tenanted by the servants' (327)). He sleeps by day and lives by night, under the kind of artificial light which characterises Poe's interiors: 'Ce qu'il voulait, c'étaient des couleurs dont l'expression s'affirmât aux lumières factices des lampes ... car il ne vivait guère que la nuit, pensant qu'on était mieux chez soi, plus seul'.<sup>205</sup> Like Dupin, he is 'enamored of the Night for her own sake' ('The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (M II, 532));<sup>206</sup> but unlike Poe's detective, who spends the daytime indoors and the night in flânerie, des Esseintes spends both day and night in his interior, rarely going out, and thus more closely resembles Usher.

Entrenched in this closed space, Huysmans' protagonist dedicates himself to a rigorous cultivation of sensations. He engages in synaesthetic experiments, creating "orchestras" of liqueurs<sup>207</sup> and perfumes,<sup>208</sup> to the point where the minute and multiplied details of correspondence push the concept to breaking point:

Il appelait cette réunion de barils à liqueurs, son orgue à bouche.... chaque liqueur correspondait, selon lui, comme goût, au son d'un instrument. Le curaçao sec, par exemple, à la clarinette dont le chant est aigrelet et velouté; le kummel au hautbois dont le timbre sonore nasille ...<sup>209</sup>

This account of a 'mouth-organ' of liqueurs reads like a parody of Baudelaire's 'Correspondances', and constitutes the reductio ad absurdum

of the kind of synaesthetic effect represented in Poe by the aromatic censers. Following Poe's protagonists, he tries, in general, to substitute dream for reality, on the lines of Egaeus or the Visionary;<sup>210</sup> since 'l'imagination lui semblait pouvoir aisément suppléer à la vulgaire réalité des faits',<sup>211</sup> he sees himself as 'un homme dont l'existence essaierait ... de se reléguer dans la contemplation, de se détenir dans le rêve'.<sup>212</sup>

His interior in itself - luxurious and eccentric, with eclectic furnishings and diverse art-objects - bears a general, rather than specific resemblance to those of Poe's tales; as a private collection, it signifies, as in Poe, the owner's attempt to withdraw himself from history. Once again, it reveals itself as traversed by a self-destructive tendency. The whole text is pervaded by a corrosive irony; des Esseintes' ultra-refined activities are narrated in a plethoric detail that reduces them to absurdity, as in the accounts of the jewelled tortoise<sup>213</sup> and the bizarre hothouse plants.<sup>214</sup> The narrative simultaneously constructs the autonomous, autocratic subject in its unconfined creative play, and ironically subverts and parodies that whole notion. Besides, des Esseintes is, throughout, unequivocally specified as being ill, both physically and mentally. From the beginning, he is said to suffer from neuralgia,<sup>215</sup> and he goes on to develop visual and auditory hallucinations,<sup>216</sup> trembling fits<sup>217</sup> and vomiting.<sup>218</sup> The composite clinical picture suggests a case of hysteria, and recalls Usher;<sup>219</sup> here as in Poe's tale, the subject that the interior apparently signifies in all its proud autonomy is all the time being undermined by disintegrative tendencies. Finally, des Esseintes develops a potentially fatal 'névrose', a 'maladie dont tout le côté spirituel échappait à la force chimique des remèdes'.<sup>220</sup> The doctor orders him

to leave his house and return to the wider social world; removal-men arrive and dismantle the interior.

The text, then, does not permit des Esseintes to enjoy the fulness of his private environment to the end; it finally deconstitutes the interior, and, like 'La Chambre double', returns its protagonist to history. The autonomous subject, as symbolised by the interior, is exposed as an illusory construct; the subject is forced to re-confront its own sociality. In Huysmans as in Baudelaire, the apparent coherence of the interior is undermined by ironic and subversive tendencies which lead eventually to its destruction; the vicissitudes of the motif in their texts may be considered as developments of the interior theme as signified in Poe.

#### viii. 'The Assignation'

The above considerations on the influence of Poe's interiors suggest that what the texts of the two later writers bring out even more visibly than do Poe's tales is the inherently unstable, self-destructive character of the interior. In Poe, as has been shown, the elements of phantasmagoria, Gothic, grotesque, arabesque and synaesthesia all tend ultimately towards the rupture and disintegration of the interior, and thence of the subject. The interior may itself be literally destroyed, as in 'Usher', where the entire house collapses, or be overwhelmed by darkness, as in 'The Masque of the Red Death'; elsewhere, it becomes a theatre of death, violence or madness, as in 'The Assignation' (suicide) and 'Ligeia' (sadism, death, hallucination). In 'Berenice', Egaeus learns of his own sadistic acts in the library; in 'The Oval Portrait', the narrator reads a tale about death in the bedroom. It

is clear, then, that finally the interior is associated with the deconstitution of the subject, more than with its constitution. Before the more detailed analyses of 'The Oval Portrait', 'Ligeia' and 'Usher', which (together with some comments on 'Morella' and 'Berenice') make up Chapter 6, briefer consideration will now be given to 'The Assignation' and 'The Masque of the Red Death', two tales of the interior which privilege the role of the owner as aristocratic, Byronic artist.

'The Assignation' (1834) - originally titled 'The Visionary' (until the 1845 text)<sup>221</sup> - deals with the narrator's encounter, in Venice, with an unnamed 'Englishman' (164), a solitary, aristocratic poet who has designed a luxurious interior in a 'Palazzo' on the Grand Canal (156-57). The Visionary enters on a secret erotic relationship (which may or may not have been consummated) with Aphrodite, the wife of the Marchese di Mentoni, whose child he rescues from drowning; they make a suicide pact, that each will poison him/herself separately, in their respective residences and at the same hour. The tale concludes with the narrator witnessing the Visionary's death-throes in the Palazzo.

This bizarre narrative has been variously read. For Palmer Cobb (The Influence of E. T. A. Hoffmann on the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe, 1908), the tale is largely an imitation of Hoffmann's 'Doge and Dogressa' (1818),<sup>222</sup> For other critics, it is less imitation than satiric pastiche; R. P. Benton ('Is Poe's "The Assignation" A Hoax?', 1963)<sup>223</sup> sees it as a parody of the figure of Lord Byron, and of his relationship with the Countess Teresa Guiccioli,<sup>224</sup> while Thompson (Poe's Fiction, 1973)

considers it a serio-comic hoax, not only on Byron but on his biographer Thomas Moore: 'a pretended Romantic tale of passion which actually lampoons the type as well as the prototypes of its unnamed hero and unnamed narrator'.<sup>225</sup> In contrast, Mabbott (1980) reads it as 'the most romantic story Poe ever wrote',<sup>226</sup> while Edward W. Pitcher ('Poe's "The Assination": A Reconsideration', 1980)<sup>227</sup> interprets the tale as largely a "serious" study in romantic idealism, with the suicide pact representing 'the union of love beyond this world of appearances'.<sup>228</sup>

To a large extent, the debate over this tale centres on the status of its protagonist, the aristocratic Visionary; the Hoffmann connexion, in this case, does not appear of great importance (Poe's tale resembles 'Doge and Dogaressa' insofar as it contains a relationship between a young man and a married woman of the Venetian ruling class, but in Hoffmann's story the protagonist is not an artist, and the lovers' death is in a storm at sea, thus arising from accident, not design).<sup>229</sup>

The link with Byron is, however, essential to the understanding of the tale. The protagonist is, on the one hand, an artist, with an unusual creative sensibility; on the other hand, a destroyer, both of himself and of the woman who agrees on the suicide pact for love of him. Hence his ambivalent status; it will be argued here that in a sense - as Thompson implies - both "serious" and "ironic" readings are partially correct, since what is in question is the constitution and deconstitution of the Romantic artist-as-hero - a cultural myth for which the figure of Byron is crucial.

The "Byronic hero" - a composite figure combining characteristics of the poet himself and of his fictional protagonists - may be considered a key mythical representative of the ideology of the autonomous subject;

its development has been traced by Mario Praz in The Romantic Agony (1930).<sup>230</sup> As aristocrat and artist, Byron appeared as a magnified, larger-than-life image of the "unique", self-responsible individual, imposing his "personality" and creativity on the world; yet this image was as disturbing as it was fascinating, since the poet was also, notoriously, associated with "deviant" sexual practices, ideological revolt, and emotional destructiveness - in Praz's words: 'It was in transgression that Byron found his own life-rhythm.'<sup>231</sup> "Byronism" was also dangerous to bourgeois hegemony insofar as it embodied the "aristocratic" cultivation of pleasure as an end in itself, and therefore threatened the dominant repressive ethos.<sup>232</sup> The Byronic hero, besides, appears in the poems as an inherently unstable figure, traversed by contradictions, and, typically, ultimately destroyed, reduced to fragments. Giuseppe Mazzini, in an important essay ('Byron and Goethe', 1839)<sup>233</sup> on Byron's influence, articulates some of the complexities of the figure:

In Byron the Ego is revealed in all its pride of power, freedom, and desire, in the uncontrolled plenitude of all its faculties; inhaling existence at every pore, eager to seize 'the life of life'. The world around him neither rules nor tempers him. The Byronian Ego aspires to rule it; but solely for dominion's sake, to exercise upon it the Titanic force of his will. Accurately speaking, he cannot be said to derive from it either colour, tone, or image; for it is he who colours; he who sings; he whose image is everywhere reflected and reproduced. His poetry emanates from his own soul; to be thence diffused upon things external; he holds his state in the centre of the Universe, and from thence projects the light radiating from the depths of his own mind; as scorching and intense as the concentrated solar ray. Hence that terrible unity which only the superficial reader could mistake for monotony.<sup>234</sup>

Mazzini's analysis brings out several key aspects of the 'Byronian Ego': its appearance of 'plenitude' and 'unity', its constitution of itself as 'centre of the Universe', its cultivation of the 'will', its

affirmation of 'desire' and pleasure; the notion of the will connects the artist-hero with the parallel figure of the scientist-hero, as embodied in the mesmerist.<sup>235</sup> His lexis is, besides, itself thoroughly Byronic (if perhaps reinforced by the translation). The phrase 'the life of life' comes from The Corsair (1814),<sup>236</sup> where the pirate-hero's crewmen sing: 'we snatch the life of life',<sup>237</sup> while the pirate himself, Conrad, is characterised by: 'The power of Thought - the magic of the Mind',<sup>238</sup> so that 'all obey ... his will';<sup>239</sup> and the notion of the subject colouring the world around it (and not vice versa) originates in Manfred (1816), where - in a passage already quoted in Chapter 2<sup>240</sup> - the protagonist declares that the 'immortal' mind 'derives/No colour from the fleeting things without'.<sup>241</sup>

Mazzini goes on, however, to suggest that this autocratic 'Ego' is, ultimately, an illusory construct, representing a false abstraction of the individual from the community: 'the individual; free, but nothing more than free'. The Byronic heroes, he argues, 'live from their own life only ... Each of them says: I have faith in myself; never, I have faith in ourselves.'<sup>242</sup> He attributes this solipsistic tendency to the contradictions of the post-revolutionary period, seen as an era of transition between aristocracy and democracy, and marked by deep ideological crisis.<sup>243</sup> In the end, Mazzini argues, 'Individualism',<sup>244</sup> cannot be sustained; thus the poet himself eventually sacrificed his individuality to the cause of Greek independence,<sup>245</sup> while the fictional heroes are, characteristically, shattered at the end of the poem: 'Byron destroys them one after the other ... They fall unwept, like a withered leaf into the stream of time.' Byron's work thus signifies 'the life and death of solitary individuality';<sup>246</sup> or, to put it another way, the constitution and deconstitution of the autonomous

subject. In historical terms, Mazzini attributes this contradiction in the texts to Byron's class position in his epoch; his work is read as 'the death-song, the epitaph of the aristocratic idea'.<sup>247</sup> It may be argued, however, that if aristocratic political hegemony was, in the advanced nations, objectively dead by Poe's day, the 'aristocratic idea' was not; the Byronic figure still had the power to disturb the bourgeois order, especially through its connotations of pleasure (a dimension which, as will be shown below in relation to 'The Masque of the Red Death', is particularly visible in Don Juan (1819-24)).<sup>248</sup>

The Byronic hero is classically constituted in, for instance, Manfred, Lara (1814) and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-18).<sup>249</sup> In Manfred, apart from the passage already referred to, the protagonist affirms himself as a 'stranger', superior to, and separate from, the mass of humanity:

... From my youth upwards  
My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,  
Nor look'd upon the earth with human eyes;  
The thirst of their ambition was not mine,  
The aim of their existence was not mine;  
My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers,  
Made me a stranger ...<sup>250</sup>

Lara contains the notion of the exceptional individual as a being apart, in the famous description of the hero (already quoted in relation to the 'perverse' in Poe)<sup>251</sup> which Praz sees as the locus classicus of Byronism:<sup>252</sup>

He stood a stranger in this breathing world,  
An erring spirit from another hurl'd; ...  
With more capacity for love than earth  
Bestows on most of mortal mould and birth ...  
And long'd by good or ill to separate  
Himself from all who shared his mortal state ...<sup>253</sup>



The Byronic hero appears here as an ambivalent figure, both creative and destructive, with unusual 'capacity' and yet with Satanic connotations, as implied in 'erring spirit'. In Childe Harold, the twin figures of hero and narrator, which tend increasingly to merge as the poem develops, are both incarnations of the exceptional individual as 'stranger'; Harold isolates himself in disdainful withdrawal ('Apart he stalk'd in joyless reverie'),<sup>254</sup> while the narrator (who is Byron fictionalised) asserts his own superiority as man and artist to time and circumstance:

But there is that within me which shall tire  
Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire;  
Something unearthly, which they deem not of,  
Like the remember'd tone of a mute lyre ...<sup>255</sup>

The subject here claims the existence within itself of an essential individuality, irreducible and indestructible, expressed through art (the lyre).

Nonetheless, the logic of Byron's narratives tends to call in question the apparent coherence of the heroic individual. Lara is finally killed, and is buried in a nameless grave, consigned to oblivion along with the other characters:

And Kaled - Lara - Ezzelin, are gone,  
Alike without their monumental stone!<sup>256</sup>

The unique, charismatic individual whose 'spirit seem'd to dare you to forget'<sup>257</sup> is thus, ironically, forgotten. Manfred, who has declared his mind 'immortal',<sup>258</sup> is reduced in death to a coldness that - anticipating the end of Poe's 'Mesmeric Revelation'<sup>259</sup> - tends to undermine the notion of immortality, constituting death as an absence (his lips

are 'white' in death, and his body 'cold - even to the heart').<sup>260</sup>

In Childe Harold, the narrator finally allows the figure of Harold to be swallowed up in darkness:

But where is he, the Pilgrim of my song,  
The being who upheld it through the past? ...  
He is no more - these breathings are his last;  
His wanderings done, his visions ebbing fast,  
And he himself as nothing: - ...  
His shadow fades away into Destruction's mass,

Which gathers shadow, substance, life and all  
That we inherit in its mortal shroud,  
And spreads the dim and universal pall  
Through which all things grow phantoms ...<sup>261</sup>

The magnificent hero is thus reduced to 'nothing', to a fading 'shadow' or 'phantom', in a fantasy of universal destruction that points towards the end of 'The Masque of the Red Death'.<sup>262</sup> Moreover, the narrator himself is, in the penultimate stanza, all but absorbed into 'Destruction's mass', as he signifies his own fading and disintegration:

My task is done, my song hath ceased, my theme  
Has died into an echo; it is fit  
The spell should break of this protracted dream.  
The torch shall be extinguished which hath lit  
My midnight lamp ... I am not now  
That which I have been ... and the glow  
Which in my spirit dwelt is fluttering, faint, and low.<sup>263</sup>

The undying 'that within me' of the narrator's earlier self, the indestructible spark of individuality, is now on the verge of extinction: 'I am not now/That which I have been'. The Byronic 'I' thus exposes itself as a problematic and fragile construct; the Byronic element in 'The Assigination' should, then, be read in terms of the constructive/destructive dialectic that marks the signification of subjectivity in the earlier writer's work.

Poe's tale contains several unmistakable references to Byron's writings. The (final) title itself ("assignation" means "lovers' meeting",<sup>264</sup> referring to the lovers' pact to meet again beyond the grave) may derive from Beppo (1818),<sup>265</sup> where the word occurs in the context of forbidden desires:

When love links two young people in one fetter,  
Vile assignations, and adulterous beds ...<sup>266</sup>

The reference to Venice in the first paragraph, too, seems to derive from Childe Harold: 'that city of dim visions, thine own Venice - which is a star-beloved Elysium of the sea' (151). Byron's poem includes the lines:

I saw from out the wave her structures rise  
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand ...<sup>267</sup>

and also refers to Venice as 'a fairy city of the heart';<sup>268</sup> in both texts, the sea-and-cityscape threatens to dissolve into a phantasmagoria. Further, the Visionary is represented as being the writer of a poem - in fact Poe's own, and later reprinted (1841), with modifications, as 'To One in Paradise'<sup>269</sup> - which, as critics have shown, is heavily Byronic in theme and expression. The line 'No more - no more - no more' ('To One in Paradise', l.16), present in the context of lost love ('The light of life is o'er', l.15), suggests, for instance, the well-known stanza of Don Juan beginning:

No more - no more - Oh! never more on me  
The freshness of the heart can fall like dew ...<sup>270</sup>

The Byronic element in the poem, which does not stop there, has been traced by R. P. Basler ('Byronism in Poe's "To One in Paradise"', 1973);<sup>271</sup> it may be stressed here that the intertextual link provided by 'No more'

tends to emphasise the problematic constitution of the subject, in Poe's tale, in terms of an absence, thus anticipating the Visionary's death, the moment at which he will be literally 'no more'.

In addition, Poe's tale has been shown to draw on Thomas Moore's narrative, in his Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of His Life (1830),<sup>272</sup> of his visit to the poet at the Palazzo Mocenigo in Venice, in 1819; the connection has been demonstrated by Benton<sup>273</sup> and Thompson,<sup>274</sup> both of whom conclude that Poe's narrator is a disguised version of Byron's friend (as Benton points out, the link is covertly made in the text by a punning reference to Moore's namesake, Sir Thomas More! (158)).<sup>275</sup> There is a certain limited resemblance between the Visionary's 'apartment' (157) and that occupied by Byron in Venice. Moore writes: 'We entered into an apartment not only spacious and elegant, but wearing an aspect of comfort and habitableness';<sup>276</sup> however, there was no collection: 'there were no paintings of any consequence, nor, besides himself, anything worthy of notice!'.<sup>277</sup> On the other hand, Moore refers, in the same sequence, to Byron's heterodox opinions on the visual arts: 'On the subject of painting and sculpture Lord Byron has, in several of his letters, expressed strongly, and, as to most persons will appear, heretically his opinions', and accuses him, retrospectively, of a 'want ... of a due appreciation of these arts'.<sup>278</sup> Similarly, the Visionary chooses his art-objects 'with little deference to the opinions of Virtu' (i.e. of the acknowledged experts) (160); while his unorthodox devaluation of the 'Venus of the Medici' (ibid.) is, as Benton points out,<sup>279</sup> legitimated in Byronic terms by the poet's comments on the statue in a letter to John Murray (26 April 1817): 'The Venus is more for admiration than love',<sup>280</sup> and his converse elevation of Antonio Canova's Venus (1805) (160) is

paralleled, as Mabbott notes,<sup>281</sup> by the verdict given in Childe Harold: 'Such as the great of yore, Canova is to-day',<sup>282</sup> These parallels are all significant, though the lack of correspondence between Byron's interior and the Visionary's is also noteworthy; it may be concluded that in its protagonist Poe's text fuses two mythical embodiments of "full" subjectivity - the Romantic artist and the collector.<sup>283</sup>

The figure of the Visionary will now be examined more closely. He is, in the first place, an artist - with one of "his" poems quoted in full to supply the evidence, and has himself designed the interior; secondly, an aristocrat - hence the narrator's reaction to his 'demeanor' and 'temperament': 'in the manner of the true gentleman, we are always aware of a difference from the bearing of the vulgar' (161); and thirdly, an exile - like Byron, an Englishman living in Italy (164). For all these reasons, he appears as psychologically alone, and different from the mass of humanity, and thus corresponds to the Byronic prototype; he is marked by a 'peculiarity of spirit which seemed to place him so essentially apart from all other human beings' (161). This 'essential' apartness recalls the characterisations of Manfred, Lara and Harold, as cited above,<sup>284</sup> and serves to define him as typical Romantic artist. Thus he is presented, in idealist terms, as 'cultivating the life of the imagination, transforming reality into dream and living 'a life of magnificent meditation', of 'visionary hours'; his creativity is seen as the expression of a timeless metaphysical essence, of 'everlasting energies' (151). His idiosyncratic aesthetic judgment, as noted above, and his 'originality of conception in architecture and upholstery' (158), disregarding 'proprieties' (165), are instances of a general 'eccentricity' (159) which reinforces his

status as "unique", "special" individual.<sup>285</sup> Disdaining convention, the artist appears as an exalted version of the autonomous subject, heroic in his creative self-sufficiency and his (alleged) 'visionary' transcendence of the material world (which does not prevent him from owning vast wealth and innumerable possessions!); indeed, his heroic role is reinforced in the narrative by his rescue of Aphrodite's child, in which he appears as a saviour-figure, 'the deliverer' (154). Like Byron, he corresponds, on one level, to the reader's ideal self-image, the unique, perfect hero that the latter would like to be - 'the graceful person of a very young man, with the sound of whose name the greater part of Europe was then ringing' (ibid.).

Nevertheless, this heroic artist exhibits contradictions that undermine his apparent coherence. The interior he constructs, as shown above,<sup>286</sup> contains grotesque, arabesque and synaesthetic elements that disturb and bewilder the narrator; its predominant characteristic is excess: 'an apartment whose unparalleled splendor burst through the opening door with an actual glare, making me blind and dizzy with luxuriousness ... the evident design had been to dazzle and astound ... The eye wandered from object to object, and rested on none' (157). The effect of 'the overpowering sense of splendor and perfume, and music' (159) is to disorient the perceptions of the onlooker; the collector's apartment becomes a space of contradictory sensations. Since it has been explicitly constructed as an expression of the Visionary's subjectivity ('to dream has been the business of my life. I have therefore framed ... a bower of dreams.' (165)), its disintegrative tendencies call in question his own stability as subject. In addition, the Visionary is, in certain passages, characterised in terms which imply that he himself is a grotesque or arabesque. He speaks with a 'mingled

tone of levity and solemnity' (161), and is defined by 'a habit of intense and continual thought, ... interweaving itself with his very flashes of merriment - like adders which writhe from out the eyes of the grinning masks in the cornices around the temples of Persepolis' (ibid.). The interplay of opposite qualities - 'levity'/'merriment' and 'solemnity'/'intens(ity)' - and the contradictory images of the snakes and the 'grinning masks' suggest the grotesque, with its 'interweaving' of the sinister and the comic;<sup>287</sup> while the writhing of the adders is arabesque, doubling the writhing of the lights in the censers (157). Indeed, as noted above,<sup>288</sup> the Visionary towards the end compares his own consciousness to the flickering censers, thus signifying himself as an arabesque: "'Like these arabesque censers, my spirit is writhing in fire'" (166). These grotesque and arabesque qualities imply a subjectivity traversed by perilous contradictions, always on the brink of collapse; indeed, the writhings of the censers - like the snakelike writhings of the Visionary's thoughts - ironically anticipate the poison-induced convulsions of his death. It may further be suggested that the mingling of 'levity and solemnity' in his discourse adds another dimension to the Byronic connexion approximating Poe's protagonist to the narrator of Don Juan. The discourse of Byron's comic epic, or 'half-serious rhyme',<sup>289</sup> consists of precisely such a disorienting mixture of 'intense and continual thought' with 'flashes of merriment':

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,  
'Tis that I may not weep ...<sup>290</sup>

The Byronic artist here appears, no longer as a unitary, but as an ambivalent, problematic figure; Poe's text thus implies the ironic scepticism of Don Juan as well as the idealist metaphysics of Manfred.

Above all, the Visionary reveals an insistent self-destructive tendency that culminates in his suicide. This is made clear in the very first sentence: 'Ill-fated and mysterious man! - bewildered in the brilliancy of thine own imagination, and fallen in the flames of thine own youth!' (150). His suicide is deliberately and carefully planned, presumably with the delusive aim of meeting Aphrodite in another world; it is scheduled for 'one hour after sunrise', as his lover makes clear in her whispered words to him: "'we shall meet - so let it be!'" (155), and he invites the narrator to the palace to witness his last moments (156). The latter arrives 'shortly after sunrise' (ibid.), and watches him die after the stroke of 'the first hour after sunrise' (165). What is in question, then, is a conscious and organised case of destruction of self and other, since he has 'conquered' Aphrodite (155) and persuaded her to die with him. This pattern relates the Visionary to the perverse protagonists of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and 'The Imp of the Perverse'; if they are artists in murder, he is a murderous artist.<sup>291</sup> It appears that the Visionary believes, rightly or wrongly, that his love for Aphrodite can only be consummated in death; there may be material obstacles to its physical consummation, but, since his apartment is evidently his own space, it is more likely that his belief derives from a combination of extreme Romantic idealism and sexual repression. Rather than enter on a physical relationship with his lover, he plans to meet her in an imaginary 'land of real dreams' (166); his dying words, a quotation from Henry King's 'The Exequy' (1657):<sup>292</sup>

"Stay for me there! I will not fail  
To meet thee in that hollow vale." (166)

make it clear that he envisages a reunion in the 'hollow vale' of death. His death-agony is, as Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933) suggests,<sup>293</sup>



quasi-orgasmic, a masochistic Liebestod offering a final and substitutive gratification of his desires; the 'writhing' of his spirit suggests not only the convulsions of death, but also those of orgasm, while the lexis employed to signify his last moments is not innocent of sexual connotations: 'erecting his frame, he ... ejaculated the lines ...' (166). Alienated from his own body, the Visionary appears to be the victim of a literal belief in Romantic transcendence. The notion of lovers meeting after death in a utopian otherworld, which occurs symbolically in, for instance, Shelley's Laon and Cythna (1817),<sup>294</sup> where the 'Paradise' of the last canto signifies the indestructibility of revolutionary 'virtue',<sup>295</sup> is here taken to the letter; believing in 'real dreams', Poe's protagonist comes to substitute dream for reality and thus dies in 'delirium' (166). The delusive character of his beliefs is underlined by his liability to auditory hallucination, which links him, not only to a Romantic artist-figure like Usher,<sup>296</sup> but to the psychotic narrator of 'The Tell-Tale Heart':<sup>297</sup> 'he seemed to be listening in the deepest attention, as if ... to sounds which must have had existence in his imagination alone' (161); 'He ... seemed to listen to a sound which I could not hear.' (166). Poe's narrative, then, brings to the surface the self-destructiveness latent in Byronic individualism and Romantic idealism. Suicide is not in itself a typical Byronic theme (although Manfred unsuccessfully attempts it),<sup>298</sup> but it is only one step away from the psychological fragmentation that besets his protagonists, and it is an overt theme in Shelley (Alastor, 1816)<sup>299</sup> and Keats ('Ode to a Nightingale', 1820).<sup>300</sup> Shelley's protagonist believes he will meet his ideal lover beyond the grave, and calls out: "'Vision and Love! ... Sleep and death/Shall not divide us long!'"<sup>301</sup> Keats' speaker is 'half in love with easeful Death', declaring: 'Now more than ever seems it rich to die'.<sup>302</sup> Poe's

Visionary takes the Romantic fascination with death to its ultimate extreme, elevating suicide into an unequivocally positive goal, to be preferred over the material fulfilment of desire.<sup>303</sup>

Idealist criticism, as seen above in the case of Pitcher (1980),<sup>304</sup> has taken the Visionary's discourse to the letter, reading the narrative as an object-lesson in transcendental metaphysics. Pitcher argues that the 'symbolic union of the lovers' offers 'evidence of that spiritual yearning in man (sic) which foretells his eventual destiny';<sup>305</sup> similarly, Wilbur ('The Poe Mystery Case', 1967) reads the tale literally, alleging that the 'visionary hero ... escapes with the Marchesa ... to the "land of real dreams"'.<sup>306</sup> It is true that the narrator seems at least to consider taking a similar line, since he declares in the first paragraph: 'There are surely other worlds than this - other thoughts than the thoughts of the multitude' (151); but this demonstrates no more than his susceptibility to influence, as with the narrators of 'Tarr and Fether' and 'Usher'.<sup>307</sup> The idealist reading, viewing the text as ultimately paradigmatic of a mystical "unity", represses the visible elements of contradiction and tension, and, besides, fails to engage with the disturbing effect of the Visionary's death. The tale ends as follows: 'I staggered back towards the table - my hand fell upon a cracked and blackened goblet - and a consciousness of the entire and terrible truth flashed suddenly over my soul.' (166). Pitcher argues that the 'truth' the narrator here discovers is that of the validity of his companion's 'mystical idealism';<sup>308</sup> it can, however, equally be read as a disorienting psychological truth, that of his destructive and self-destructive tendencies and their effects. The text as a whole tends, rather, to bear out Thompson's "ironic" reading, and to confirm his conclusion that 'The Assignment' is 'a synecdoche of the seriocomic,

ironic ambivalence of Poe's arabesque tale'.<sup>309</sup> If it is not wholly a satire on Byron, neither is it a piece of uncritical hero-worship. Rather, it articulates the tensions underlying the figure of the Romantic-Byronic artist, suggesting both its apotheosis and its apocalypse; while the textual link between art and suicide makes it clear that the artist, and a fortiori the subject, is not here constituted as "unitary" or conflict-free.

ix. 'The Masque of the Red Death'

'The Masque of the Red Death' resembles 'The Assignation' in its aristocratic protagonist, its extravagant interior and its violent climax - and, as will be argued, in its marked Byronic element. It is, nonetheless, a tale of high specificity in the Poe canon, given its third-person narrator and the unequivocally "merveilleux" status of the events. The absence of the customary first-person narrator, and indeed, for much of the narrative, of any individual point of view, here prevents the emergence of an "étrange" explanation of the main enigmatic element, the phantom, in contrast to such tales as 'Ligeia', 'Usher' or 'The Tell-Tale Heart'.<sup>310</sup> A crude supernaturalist reading is not necessary, however, since a phantom named 'the Red Death' (676) cries out to be read metonymically, as a symbol of Death in general.

The tale narrates the failed attempt of Prince Prospero (otherwise known as 'the duke' - 671) at cheating death; it is set in an unspecified time and place, probably in a petty European principality. At a time when plague ('the "Red Death"' - 670) is ravaging his country, Prospero locks himself and a thousand 'knights and dames of his court' (ibid.) in a luxuriously furnished walled abbey, where they dedicate themselves

to a life of 'pleasure' (671). During 'a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence' (ibid.), the abbey is penetrated by a supernatural figure, a 'spectral image' (675) whose face resembles that of a victim of the Red Death. The spectre kills Prospero, the courtiers fall dead one by one of the plague, and the interior is shrouded in darkness.

The tale has been subjected to multiple readings, especially intertextual and psychoanalytic; the former tend to concentrate on its literary antecedents, the latter on the interpretation of the central conflict between Prospero and the Red Death. Robert Regan ('Hawthorne's "Plagiary"; Poe's Duplicity', 1970)<sup>311</sup> sees the tale as a thematic and stylistic pastiche of Hawthorne, and specifically of his tale-sequence 'Legends of the Province House' (1838-39);<sup>312</sup> it thus becomes an elaborate 'critical exercise which out-Hawthornes Hawthorne',<sup>313</sup> a 'parody of Hawthorne's use of the mysterious and menacing'.<sup>314</sup> Kermit Vanderbilt ('Art and Nature in "The Masque of the Red Death"', 1968)<sup>315</sup> reads Poe's text as a commentary on Shakespeare's The Tempest (1612),<sup>316</sup> with Prospero playing the role of his Shakespearean namesake, and the Red Death as Caliban; the tale, like the play, symbolises the ultimate failure of art in its project of controlling nature.<sup>317</sup> Psychoanalytic perspectives include those of Marie Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933) and J.-P. Weber ('Edgar Poe ou le thème de l'horloge', 1958). For Bonaparte, Poe's tale is a narrative of Oedipal revolt; Prospero and the courtiers represent the rebellious son, and the phantom is the killing and castrating father,<sup>318</sup> while the ebony clock that stands in the black chamber is another father-symbol, 'the double of the spectre of doom'.<sup>319</sup> The abbey is the mother's body, which Prospero has symbolically raped, and his death (which is also castration) is his punishment for that act of transgression.<sup>320</sup> Weber, in contrast, reads Prospero as a father-

figure, and his murder as an expression of 'la jalousie inconsciente de Poe';<sup>321</sup> the phantom would therefore, presumably, symbolise the Oedipal revolt of the son. Ironic, idealist and "generic" readings are also found. Thompson (Poe's Fiction, 1973) sees the narrative as a study in the grotesque and arabesque, creating elaborate structures (the interior, the masque) which it then ironically destroys: 'The narrative point of view is that of the arabesque - of the sardonically superior Romantic Ironist, who, after having evoked the sinister scene ..., at the end soars freely above it all.'<sup>322</sup> The text thus becomes a space of contradictions which are resolved only through destruction. The idealist reading may be represented by J. P. Roppolo ('Meaning and "The Masque of the Red Death"', 1963),<sup>323</sup> who views the narrative in terms of the ideology of "unity" of Eureka, seeing the concluding apocalypse (and therefore death in general) as a return to the primal unity.<sup>324</sup> Roppolo also sees Poe's tale as an early instance of a new genre, the prose-poem;<sup>325</sup> while Gerhard Hoffmann ('Space and Symbol in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe', 1971), concludes that, in its manipulation of symbolic space, it anticipates 'modern modes of presentation such as the surrealistic'.<sup>326</sup>

As the intertextual and generic readings suggest, the self-conscious literarity of this text is evident; it is quite visibly a piece of artifice, a written production in language, with its frequently convoluted syntax and deliberate use of archaisms, alliteration and assonance (as in the last sentence: 'And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.' (677), with its alliteration on d and l and assonance on the short e and short i; or as in another sentence from the last paragraph: 'And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in

the despairing posture of his fall.' (676), with its inversion of the usual subject-verb order, and archaic use of 'revel'). These characteristics of the writing should be sufficient, in themselves, to alert the reader against a naïve supernaturalist acceptance of the surface events. The tale's literarity, besides, suggests that it is, on one level, a meta-literary text, marked by multiple and dense intertextual references (as is suggested by the explicit mention of Victor Hugo's Hernani (1830) (673)).

The connexions with Hawthorne and Shakespeare, as identified respectively by Regan and Roppolo, are present beyond doubt. Hawthorne's four 'Legends of the Province House' are a series of historical narratives linked by the common setting of the Old Province House in Boston, former residence of the colonial royal governors of Massachusetts, and by the themes of aristocracy and monarchism; they were conceived in the terms of a democratic critique of British and colonial notions of aristocracy. In one of the 'Legends', 'Howe's Masquerade' (1838), Sir William Howe, the last royal governor, witnesses a masquerade, staged by the democratic opposition, which culminates in a muffled figure which appears to be his own double, and which so terrifies him that he 'let fall his sword upon the floor'.<sup>327</sup> A character concludes: "The empire of Britain, in this ancient province, is at its last gasp tonight; almost while I speak it is a dead corpse!",<sup>328</sup> In another, 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle' (1838), a British noblewoman, seen as an 'emblem of aristocracy and hereditary pride',<sup>329</sup> is responsible for bringing to Boston a plague, from which she eventually dies. The convergences with Poe's tale are evident; Poe mentions 'Howe's Masquerade' in his 1842 Hawthorne review, in the context of an accusation of plagiarism from 'William Wilson' (H XI, 112-13) (since 'Wilson' was published

after Hawthorne's tale, in 1839, Regan suggests that this allegation may be no more than a ruse: 'Poe's substanceless charge against Hawthorne was a diversionary thrust intended to distract our attention from his raid upon "Howe's Masquerade" and the other "Legends".'<sup>330</sup> 'The Masque of the Red Death' is visibly linked to the 'Legends' by the themes of aristocracy, masquerade and plague; indeed, on one level, the narrative of Prospero's humiliation and death constitutes, in practice, even more of an anti-aristocratic manifesto than the 'Legends', given the divergences between Poe's (anti-democratic) and Hawthorne's (pro-democratic) conscious ideologies. In terms of textual detail, too, the parallels are close; Howe's dropping of his sword is replicated by Prospero: 'the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet' (676), and in Poe's tale the aristocratic idea becomes as much of a 'dead corpse', via the duke, as the 'empire of Britain' does in 'Howe's Masquerade'. Similarly, in 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle', the plague - 'that mighty conqueror ... the Small-Pox' - is represented as 'stalking to and fro across the Three Hills',<sup>331</sup> while Poe's phantom 'stalked to and fro among the waltzers' (675).<sup>332</sup> Poe's tale, then, stands in close intertextual relation with Hawthorne's sequence, and the connexion reinforces the problematic status of its constitution of the aristocrat.

The link between Poe's tale and The Tempest should strike the reader's eye at once, thanks to the protagonist's name. The parallel has been pointed out, not only by Vanderbilt, but also by critics who view it in terms less of similarity than of contrast; Mabbott (1980) points out that 'Prospero, like his namesake in The Tempest, fled from the world, but ironically Poe's prince ceased to prosper',<sup>333</sup> while Thompson argues that 'Prospero's sinister stronghold contrasts directly with the enchanted island of his namesake'.<sup>334</sup> It may certainly be suggested

that, in comparison with his Shakespearean counterpart, Poe's Prospero is, in the end, a failure, unable to maintain the material and emotional prosperity that his name promises. Like his namesake, he is both prince and duke (in The Tempest, Prospero was originally 'the Duke of Milan and /A prince of power').<sup>335</sup> Besides, both are artists; each masterminds and stagemanages a masquerade, and is in general (at first) in control of events in his circumscribed domain. Poe's masque is an embodiment of its designer's private fantasies, or 'delirious fancies' (673); Prospero, similarly, declares that the actors in his masque are:

Spirits, which by mine art  
I have from their confines call'd to enact  
My present fancies.<sup>336</sup>

These correspondences are, however, to a large extent ironic. In The Tempest, Prospero remains largely in charge of events on the island, and his final renunciation of power is his own choice. The masque is, admittedly, broken off before its scheduled end,<sup>337</sup> but it is not violently subverted as in Poe's tale; towards the end of the play, Prospero confidently affirms his unfaltering, unfailing mastery of the situation:

Now does my project gather to a head:  
My charms crack not: my spirits obey ...<sup>338</sup>

Prospero is not totally successful on all counts, as in his failure to educate Caliban; finally, he relinquishes his magic hold over the island, but, in compensation, regains his dukedom.<sup>339</sup> His counterpart, however, has both power and life violently taken away from him. Thus, if, as Vanderbilt argues, the Red Death represents Caliban,<sup>340</sup> it is a far more threatening Caliban, whose conspiracy succeeds (although, given the textual evidence pointing to the phantom's role as a symbol



of patriarchal authority, the parallel with Shakespeare's unrepressed "savage" appears in any case to be unfounded).<sup>341</sup> It may be concluded that the protagonist of Poe's tale is, ultimately, less a second Prospero than an anti-Prospero.

A further intertextual dimension, however, requires close attention. Prospero is, among other things, an extreme case of the Romantic artist, and the tale should be considered alongside the construction of this figure in Coleridge and, especially, Byron. Enclosed inside the wall of his castellated abbey ('A strong and lofty wall girdled it in.' - 670), he resembles the poet of 'Kubla Khan' (1798), surrounded by his magic circle,<sup>342</sup> and also Kubla himself, whose 'pleasure-dome'<sup>343</sup> is similarly walled in:

So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round ...<sup>344</sup>

The verb 'girdled' occurring in both texts, links them on the level of the signifier; on the level of the signified, Prospero is, like the Khan, an autocrat who has had his castle made to order (it is 'the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste' - 670), as Kubla 'did ... decree' the making of his dome,<sup>345</sup> and, like the poet, an artist, isolated in a private world of aesthetic sensation. The Coleridgean reference also points to Prospero's status as a hedonist, a seeker after pleasure ('The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure.' - 671); the castle thus becomes another 'pleasure-dome', but, where Kubla's palace is threatened vaguely and distantly by 'ancestral voices prophesying war',<sup>346</sup> Prospero's private space is violently invaded by death.

The explicit textual reference to 'pleasure' also connects Prospero's enterprise with a similar project in Byron's Don Juan (1819-24). In the episode dealing with Juan's relations with Haidée (the daughter of Lambro, a Greek trader) (Cantos II-IV), an erotic hedonistic utopia is briefly created on the island which Lambro normally rules. In his absence, and after the mourning for his supposed death, Juan and Haidée together turn the island over to the pursuit of pleasure, organising an elaborate ongoing party:

Hence all this rice, meat, dancing, wine, and fiddling,  
Which turn'd the isle into a place of pleasure, ...  
Her father's hospitality seem'd middling,  
Compared with what Haidée did with his treasure;  
'Twas wonderful how things went on improving,  
While she had not one hour to spare from loving.<sup>347</sup>

Prospero's entertainment resembles the party in Don Juan, both in its general extravagance ('a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence' - 671), and in specific details: 'There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine.' (ibid.). The buffoons and dancers are paralleled in Don Juan, where the entertainments include 'a dwarf buffoon ... telling tales',<sup>348</sup> and 'dancing-girls'.<sup>349</sup> The lovers, too, transform Lambro's home into a luxurious interior, with multi-coloured tapestried hangings and arabesque decoration:

The hangings of the room were tapestry, made  
Of velvet panels, each of different hue,  
And thick with damask flowers of silk inlaid ...<sup>350</sup>

Prospero's interior, not dissimilarly, consists of a suite of rooms hung with 'velvet tapestries' (672), each room a different colour. Besides, some of the sexual liberalism of Byron's poem - where the lovers' physical relations are made quite obvious - seems to have

transferred itself, in a more discreet form, to Poe's tale. Bonaparte suggests that the textual references to 'the wanton' and 'the bizarre' (673) imply illicit sexual practices;<sup>351</sup> certainly, the accumulation of signifiers like 'pleasure', 'Beauty', 'voluptuous' (671), 'license' (674) suggests that sexual gratification is not absent from Prospero's castle. The building - significantly built in the form of an abbey (670), implying the initial dominance of institutionalised repression - is, it would seem, transformed, like Lambro's island, into a 'place of pleasure'. Art, in both texts, speaks the language of desire, not that of social control; Haidée and Juan, having presumably masterminded the festivities and the decor, can be considered artists as much as the stage-manager and designer Prospero. In this case, Prospero's role would correspond to that of the lovers, as rebels against the cultural order, and the phantom, like Lambro, would represent the insistence of the patriarchal norm. In Don Juan, the short-lived utopia is destroyed by Lambro's return, followed by Juan's removal and Haidée's madness; the reimposition of the patriarchal law finally results in the elimination of all life on the island ('That isle is now all desolate and bare').<sup>352</sup> Poe's tale will here be read as a parallel narrative of the conflict between Desire and Law, culminating in generalised destruction.

The specific status of Prospero will now be examined in detail, from both sociological and psychoanalytic viewpoints. His role as aristocrat requires careful consideration; as shown above in relation to 'Philosophy of Furniture',<sup>353</sup> the aristocrat is a complex, ambivalent figure in Gothic writing in general, and in Poe's work in particular. Prospero, on one level, in spite of his class position, constitutes himself as autonomous bourgeois subject through the act of self-enclosure; he and

his followers 'retired to the deep seclusion' of the abbey (670), locking themselves in a closed space from which there is 'means neither of ingress or egress' (671). They thus repeat the attitude of Dupin and the narrator in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' ('Our seclusion was perfect.' - M II, 532); the lexical parallel suggests a link between Prospero and the bourgeois modernity of that tale. Besides, the enclosed private universe of the abbey constitutes it as an autonomous artwork, paralleling Poe's model of the short story ('The external world could take care of itself.' - 671); it is isolated from the 'external world' as, in the Hawthorne review, the reading of the autonomous text is insulated from 'worldly interests' (H XIII, 446).<sup>354</sup> As shown in the first part of this chapter,<sup>355</sup> the notion of aesthetic autonomy is essentially a phenomenon of bourgeois society, born out of a protest against commodity fetishism and yet reproducing that fetishism in displaced form; Prospero is, in his construction of a closed aesthetic universe, very much a mid-nineteenth-century figure.

At the same time, Poe's duke exhibits other traits which are clearly aristocratic. In the first place, his attitudes reflect the authoritarianism of one born to rule; his 'followers' obey him unquestioningly (673), and when confronted by the phantom, his reaction is that of outraged power: "'Who dares ... insult us with this blasphemous mockery?'" (675); the royal 'we' and the quasi-religious use of 'blasphemous' suggest the archaic notion of the divine right of rulers. This type of feudal attitude belongs, in its class dimension, to the pre-capitalist past; but Prospero's aristocratic associations also imply a subversive threat to the bourgeois order, through his open, Byronic cultivation of pleasure (as seen above). His entertainment, with its barely concealed erotic dimension, speaks the language of the body as much as does that

in Don Juan. The 'barbaric lustre' of his 'conceptions' (673) threatens the existing repressive order; hence it is that they contain 'not a little of that which might have excited disgust' (ibid.).<sup>356</sup> Prospero, then, simultaneously displays aristocratic and bourgeois characteristics; the contradictions in the signification of class in this text reflect the complexities of the U.S. social formation, with a capitalist structure in the North and a pre-capitalist order in the South.<sup>357</sup>

Prospero's authoritarianism has, however, a further dimension; it is a question not only of class but of patriarchy. His evident belief that he was born to rule, and his total domination of his 'followers' constitute him as an instance of the authoritarian father. Yet, at the same time, it may be doubted whether his exercise of patriarchal power is entirely legitimate; by permitting the emergence of pleasure, he is, in practice, undoing the repression on which the whole edifice of patriarchy rests. 'Eccentric' (670) and possibly 'mad' (673), he may be considered a guardian of the law who has betrayed his trust; a "father" who, by failing to exercise his repressive role, has become a "son", a patriarch turned rebel. The authentic representative of the Law of the Father in this text will here be considered - following Bonaparte against Weber<sup>358</sup> - to be not Prospero, but the Phantom; analysis must now, therefore, turn to the relation between the two central figures.

The title itself suggests an intimate link between them. Like other Poe titles - 'The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Fall of the House of Usher'<sup>359</sup> - it permits more than one interpretation, especially in its original form, 'The Mask of the Red Death' (changed in 1845).<sup>360</sup> 'Masque/Mask'

can, on the phonological level, signify: 1) 'masque' (masked ball); 2) 'mask' (individual masquer); 3) 'mask' (facial disguise worn by a masquer); in the tale, the phantom enters the masque (1), as a mask (2) wearing a mask (3) (675, 676). 'The Masque of the Red Death' signifies the ball arranged by Prospero, but interrupted by the phantom, and thus serves to connect the two figures; while 'The Mask of the Red Death' draws attention to the phantom, both to its role as uninvited participant in the masquerade and to its mask, behind which there is 'no tangible form'. That is, under Prospero's masque there lies (via the pun) the mask of the phantom - under which there lies nothing. The title thus masks (at least to the naïve reader) the tale's multiplicity of meaning, while objectively linking Prospero's discourse of pleasure to that other discourse of Power which will destroy him.

The phantom may be considered Prospero's double, the externalisation of the patriarchal law he has transgressed. In this sense, it plays a similar role to that of the double in 'William Wilson', as representative of the cultural norm; indeed, the climax of 'Wilson' is reversed, with a parallel confrontation at a masked ball, but here culminating in the murder of the rebellious subject by the agent of the law, rather than vice versa. In the earlier tale, libidinal revolt led to exile from culture via madness; here, the punishment is death.<sup>361</sup> It may also be noted that in the 1842 Hawthorne review, in his comments on 'Howe's Masquerade', Poe refers to the masked figure in that tale as 'the phantom or reduplication of Sir William Howe' (H XI, 112). There is clear textual evidence for the notion of doubling. Both are authoritative figures (though Prospero's power is ultimately illegitimate); the prince is 'bold and robust', the phantom walks with 'a slow and solemn movement' (675). Besides, it 'stalked to and fro' (ibid.), repeating the movements of

the waltzers (as determined by Prospero's own 'guiding taste'): 'To and fro ... there stalked a multitude of dreams.' (673) The prince is suspected of being 'mad' in his taste (ibid.), while the phantom is characterised by 'mad assumptions' (676). The 'shudder either of terror or distaste' (675) with which Prospero reacts to the intruder derives from fear of his own double, of the embodiment of that internalised cultural law he has negated, but cannot abolish.

However, if the phantom represents the internal law, or superego, it also - as Bonaparte suggests - symbolises the father, as external agent of the law. As in the return of Lambro, the reign of desire is cut short by the irruption of patriarchal authority; the music, symbolising pleasure, and the waltz (considered a risqué dance, therefore implying sexual gratification) cease (675) as Prospero confronts it. As Bonaparte shows, the phantom's murder of the prince is simultaneously an act of symbolic castration, as represented by the fall of his dagger (loss of weapon);<sup>362</sup> Prospero attacks the intruder in the fulness of his phallic pride ('He bore aloft a drawn dagger'), only to be reduced to a "female" horizontal position in death: 'There was a sharp cry - and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero.' (676) Transgression of the law, the undoing of repression, is thus punished with the full rigour of the father's authority. The 'nameless awe', the 'deadly terror' which grips the masquers is thus not only that of death, but that of castration; and the facelessness of the phantom, its absence of features and 'tangible form' may be read as having similar connotations, given the 'unutterable horror' produced by the discovery (ibid.).

The spectral intruder, then, signifies the castrating father; it is also, however, quite literally an image of Death, 'the type of the Red Death' (675). Prospero's attempt to brazen out the plague may be read as, on one level, signifying the denial of death, and, therefore, the nineteenth-century project of the mastery of nature. Like the narrator of 'Valdemar', the prince believes he can control and circumvent death, and, in this sense, may be read as symbolic of the conquering mid-century bourgeoisie, confident in the unlimited expansion of human control over the external world.<sup>363</sup> As in 'Valdemar', however, the project is violently subverted by the terrifying irruption of Death itself, signifying the material limits to human power; the subject is thus forced to undo its earlier disavowal of material reality: 'And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death.' (676) As Valdemar's body disintegrates, so Prospero falls prostrate.

But whether the phantom symbolises the vengeful patriarchal law, or the limiting power of death, it is clear for the text that Prospero's programme of defiance is doomed from the start. As shown above, his interior, with its phantasmagoric, Gothic, grotesque and arabesque elements, is an unstable construct, traversed by a disintegrative movement;<sup>364</sup> there are, moreover, other components of the decor, specific to this tale, which speak the necessity and inevitability of death. The colours he chooses for the seventh room - black and scarlet ('a deep blood color' - 672) - not only suggest his unconscious acceptance of death, but anticipate his death in that chamber. Further, the 'gigantic clock of ebony' (ibid.) - which Bonaparte, as shown above, sees as doubling the spectre<sup>365</sup> - is a visible symbol of both death and patriarchal



power, which Prospero himself has had placed there. Its huge 'pendulum' (ibid.), as Bonaparte suggests, points to the father's phallic potency;<sup>366</sup> while the fear, the 'disconcert and tremulousness' (673) which its tones produce in the waltzers prefigures the 'deadly terror' (676) later to be spread by the phantom. Prospero's death is also anticipated in a pun on 'stricken' ('when ... the hour was to be stricken' - 672); as the clock strikes the hour, so the spectre will strike Prospero down, 'within the shadow of the ebony clock' (676). It may be concluded that, unconsciously, the prince knows his death is inevitable, and this knowledge is written into the decor he designs; and, further, that his guests also share this unconscious knowledge, as is implied in their reactions to the clock. On its stroke: 'The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand.' (673); the imagery of freezing and stiffness points towards the phantom's mask, resembling 'the countenance of a stiffened corpse' (675), and suggests the ultimate coldness of death ('And the flames of the tripods expired.' - 677). Besides, as Gerhard Hoffmann suggests, the grotesque and arabesque movements of the dancers imply a tendency towards disintegration, and therefore physical dissolution.<sup>367</sup> Death, then, is written across the text, even in the actions and movements intended as denying it.

'The Masque of the Red Death' concludes with a fantasy of universal annihilation, with death holding 'illimitable dominion over all' (677). The illusory coherence of Prospero as subject, as symbolised by his enclosed interior, is thus ruptured, and replaced by total disintegration; the idealist reading, as represented by Roppolo,<sup>368</sup> once again fails to take account of the textual elements of violence and terror. Poe's tale finally produces, not an unproblematic 'unity', but a chaos of non-

differentiation, in which the earlier multiplicity of colour gives way to the unbroken dominion of 'Darkness' (ibid.). Prospero, the artist-hero, is sardonically eliminated, as Childe Harold fades away 'into Destruction's mass';<sup>369</sup> his palace of pleasure is depopulated, as Haidée's island becomes 'desolate and bare'.<sup>370</sup> The complexities and difficulties of this tale are considerable, with the protagonist playing the roles of both aristocrat and bourgeois, patriarch and rebel; but what is quite clear is that the Byronic artist, and the interior he creates, here as in 'The Assination', signify not the plenitude of the subject, but its tendency towards disintegration.

The interior in Poe's fiction is, then, a site of multiple contradictions; the same may be said of his theory of the artwork, and of his fictional constructions of the artist. In 'The Assination' and 'The Masque of the Red Death', the self-destructiveness of the artist, as symbolised in the interior, is not innocent of relation with his sexuality, in the suicide pact of the first and the thinly disguised 'license' of the second. In the principal tales that remain to be discussed, beginning with 'The Oval Portrait', the erotic theme attains greater prominence; the interior becomes a space of destructive sexual relations, overt or covert, and the artist appears as both manipulator and sadist.

CHAPTER 6

DESIRE, DEATH AND THE ARTIST.

## 1. THE RETURN OF THE ACTIVE WOMAN

### i. 'The Oval Portrait'

In the group of five tales to be discussed in this chapter, subjectivity is constituted primarily in terms of art and sexuality. In each case, the male protagonist is an artist and/or intellectual, who constructs or inhabits a private interior; at the same time, he enters into problematic relations with a woman whose sexuality, directly or indirectly, threatens his self-image as gendered subject, that is, as a male subject positively inserted into culture. This woman is signified as destructive, in such a way that sexuality and death converge to undermine the coherence of the male subject. In 'Ligeia', 'Morella' and 'Berenice', the protagonist is also the narrator; in 'Usher', where the narrator is a friend of the protagonist, his presence serves both to construct and to question the dividing-line between "normal" and "abnormal"; while 'The Oval Portrait' is a double narrative, with the narrator as first-person protagonist of the framing story and a painter as third-person protagonist of the inset story. All these tales (except 'Morella') give prominence to the interior (in 'Berenice', primarily to the library and its contents); and all contain the key image of the woman who returns (or seems to return) from death. The five tales will now be examined in turn (although 'Morella' and 'Berenice', which are best read as first versions of 'Ligeia' and 'Usher' respectively, will receive only brief consideration); four will be considered in the first part of this chapter, after which 'Usher' will be analysed separately and in close detail.

'The Oval Portrait' (1842) was originally subtitled 'Life in Death' (the change was made in 1845),<sup>1</sup> and is unusual among Poe's major tales - both for the substantial revision it underwent between the 1842 and

1845 texts,<sup>2</sup> including the deletion of the entire first paragraph, which contained a reference to opium, and for the use of the double narrative, as already mentioned. The revisions consist mainly of deletions, to the point where 'Life in Death' and 'The Oval Portrait' are all but separate tales; in this section, the titles will be abbreviated as LD and OP respectively. The text(s) will be referred to by paragraph numbers, with the deleted first paragraph (LD only) numbered as 0. The paragraphs are as follows:

<u>Number</u>	<u>First Words</u>	<u>Page Numbers</u> <u>in Mabbott, II.</u>
(0	'My fever had been excessive ...'	667n)
1	'The chateau ...'	662-63
2	'Long - long I read ...'	663
3	'But the action ...'	663
4	'That I now saw aright ...'	663-64
5	'The portrait ...'	664
6	'"She was a maiden ..."'	664-66

The double narrative structure divides the tale sharply into two parts: the first-person narrative, from (1) (in LD, from 0) to 5); and the third-person narrative of the history of the oval portrait contained in (6). The first part relates the narrator's arrival at the deserted chateau, and describes the turret apartment where he sleeps, the paintings on the walls and the oval portrait of a woman which disturbs him; the second part, a narrative which he reads in a catalogue describing the paintings, concerns an unnamed painter, his marriage, and his insistence on using his wife as model in an unhealthy turret room until she dies, at the moment of completion of the oval portrait.

The tale has been variously read, in terms of the question of "étrange"/ "merveilleux" and of symbolic interpretation of the oval portrait; the relation between the two versions has also been subjected to critical scrutiny. The portrait disturbs the narrator with its appearance of animation; its 'absolute life-likeness of expression' (5) gives it almost the appearance of a real person. The unusual word 'life-likeness' pushes beyond the conventional notion of "life-like" realism, suggesting that the portrait may be "life-likely", that is, likely to be alive. Supernaturalist critics have taken this suggestion to the letter, reading the portrait as magically "alive", and claiming that the painter actually transferred his wife's life from her body into the portrait; the words: 'the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sat beside him' (6) are thus read quite literally. Mabbott claims that the tale's 'central idea is the very ancient one that the spirit may take up its residence in a facsimile';<sup>3</sup> while P. F. Quinn (The French Face of Edgar Poe, 1957)<sup>4</sup> claims that 'the life of the woman was drained from her body, but instead of being dissipated this life was transferred to her portrait', in pursuit of a general contention that Poe's work tends to encourage the reader 'to see the organic in the inorganic'.<sup>5</sup> R. W. Dowell ('The Ironic History of Poe's "Life in Death": A Literary Skeleton in the Closet', 1970)<sup>6</sup> argues that the deletion of the reference to opium in OP suggests that, while in LD the incident of the portrait was conceived as 'a hallucination brought on by an excess of opium',<sup>7</sup> in the final text this is no longer the case; LD would thus be a case of "étrange", but OP probably one of "merveilleux". Similarly, Seymour Gross ('Poe's Revision of "The Oval Portrait"', 1959)<sup>8</sup> argues that the elimination of the first paragraph removes the 'implication of hallucination',<sup>9</sup> thus moving the tale away from the psychological and

into the 'moral'<sup>10</sup> (and therefore, presumably, away from the material).

However, as Freud shows in 'The "Uncanny"' (1919), the animation of the inanimate, as one of the uncanny effects to be found in literature, can be interpreted psychologically, rather than supernaturally or 'morally', as an instance of the return of the repressed.<sup>11</sup> The hallucinatory reading is convergent with a psychoanalytic view of the text, in the sense that it eliminates any supernatural element. G. R. Thompson (Poe's Fiction, 1973) argues that OP, while 'ostensibly an occult tale of the metempsychosis of a young woman's soul into a painting',<sup>12</sup> is in fact a tale of delirium (even without the opium references of LD), and that both the animation of the portrait and the story of the painter are dreams of the narrator;<sup>13</sup> he thus takes issue with Gross, whose reading is seen as implying that 'Poe ... had shifted the intent from the psychological to the occult'.<sup>14</sup> Psychoanalytic interpretations of the tale include those of Marie Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933), H el ene Cixous ('Poe re-lu', 1972)<sup>15</sup> and Monique Dubanton ('L'ovale du portrait: la fonction de l' criture chez Edgar Poe', 1979).<sup>16</sup> Bonaparte draws attention to the 'sadistic' character of the painter, while reading the tale in largely biographical terms, with the portrait seen as indirectly representing Poe's mother.<sup>17</sup> For Cixous, the text exemplifies the narrative structure, repeatedly present in Poe's tales, of a woman's death followed by her triumphant return to dominate the man.<sup>18</sup> The painter sadistically kills his wife: 'Le Portrait ovale met l'accent ... sur l'union de la mort au d sir ... Le peintre tue l' pouse aim e';<sup>19</sup> but she returns from the dead, through the portrait that symbolises, in its oval (egg-shaped) form, the indestructibility of female creativity: 'Ovale du r cit, vie repli e dans l'oeuf.'<sup>20</sup> Dubanton reads the text as a narrative

of unwilling self-discovery; her interpretation binds the two halves of the tale together, by making narrator and painter one and the same person. The narrator is revisiting the chateau where he painted and killed his wife ('il revient sur les lieux du crime'),<sup>21</sup> and the history he reads is his own; his aim in returning is to rid himself of his own sadistic tendencies,<sup>22</sup> but he finds they are inescapable. The uncanny effect of the portrait, the 'angoisse' it produces, 'prend racine aux tréfonds de l'inconscient';<sup>23</sup> the principal determinant of its disturbing impact is male sadism, but - for Dubanton as for Cixous - it also represents women's fertile potential, since 'l'ovale du portrait, c'est aussi l'image de l'oeuf foetal'.<sup>24</sup>

The present analysis will adopt a psychological perspective, although Dubanton's notion of the identity between narrator and painter will not be adopted. They will be seen, rather, as doubling each other, in the sense that both are males and therefore positively inserted into culture vis-à-vis the woman (Dubanton's claim for their identity rests largely on the occurrences of the term 'turret' to signify both the narrator's apartment (1) and the painter's studio (6);<sup>25</sup> but the lexical repetition can equally well be taken as pointing to doubling, i.e. a similarity which is not identity). The painter's relation to his wife will be seen, following Bonaparte and Dubanton, as sadistic; while her return, through the ovular portrait, will be read as symbolising the emergence of repressed female creativity and sexuality - in keeping with Cixous' scheme, which is of considerable pertinence for all the tales to be discussed in this chapter.

Before the tale is interpreted in detail, the question of "étrange" versus "merveilleux" readings will be examined more closely. The case



for a 'merveilleux' reading is, in fact, minimal; the idea of the 'tints' of a painting being 'drawn' from the woman's cheeks (6), on which it rests to a large extent,<sup>26</sup> may be considered as simply signifying the gradual deterioration of the woman's health pari passu with the development of the painting. The notion that the portrait is 'indeed Life itself!' (6) may be considered a delusive belief on the painter's part, just as the possibility of its animation is a hallucinatory impression on the narrator's part, over-impressed as he is with its 'life-likeness' (5). Indeed, the case for a supernatural reading appears slightly more convincing for LD, which - apart from the mystical implications of its title - has the following epigraph (deleted in 1845): 'Egli è vivo e parlerebbe se non osservasse la rigola del silenzio (sic). Inscription beneath an Italian picture of St. Bruno' (the Italian sentence may be translated: 'It is alive and would speak if it did not observe the rule of silence').<sup>27</sup> This epigraph might appear to give credibility to the notion of the portrait being literally alive; its disappearance, conversely, works against the supernatural reading. Similarly, the deleted last sentence of LD ('The painter then added - "But is this indeed Death?"')<sup>28</sup> could be read as encouraging the view that the woman's life was preserved in the portrait; whereas OP ends, climactically, with the words 'She was dead!', which imply a conception of death in terms of finality.

However, if the 'étrange' reading appears visibly preferable, and the portrait's disturbing effect is therefore to be read in terms of hallucination or perceptual distortion, the question of the exact status of the narrator's perceptions still has to be resolved. In LD, the explicit references to opium point unequivocally to the drug as

prime cause of his unreliability. Most of LD (0) is taken up with details of the narrator's past and present use of opium, and further mention of the hallucinogen is made in (1) and (2); no reference whatever to the drug remains in OP. In the first version, he is suffering from a high fever, 'excessive and of long duration', brought on by loss of blood in a fight ('the affray with the banditti') (0), in which he was 'desperately wounded' (1). The fever is accompanied by insomnia ('my reeling senses had not been blessed [with sleep] for more than a week' (0)) and delirium ('the dull delirium which already oppressed me' (0); 'my incipient delirium' (1)). To relieve his sufferings, he resorts to opium, a drug of which he is a habitual user: 'at Constantinople I had acquired the habit of smoking the weed with the drug' (0). He swallows what he admits may have been an 'excessively large' piece of solid opium (ibid.). This admission is, in itself, enough to constitute him as unreliable for the rest of the narrative; indeed, the text raises the possibility that the fever and the drug together may have induced a state of temporary psychosis, since he specifies that his opium use has in the past produced 'symptoms of mental derangement', and, further, confesses to 'the incoherence of my reason' (ibid.). Later, his perceptions of both the paintings and the catalogue are presented as distorted by the opium; in LD, the second paragraph contains, after 'Long - long I read - and devoutly, devotedly I gazed.', the following three sentences (all deleted in OP):

I felt meantime, the voluptuous narcotic stealing its way to my brain. I felt that in its magical influence lay much of the gorgeous richness and variety of the frames - much of the ethereal hue that gleamed from the canvas - and much of the vivid interest of the book which I perused. Yet this consciousness rather strengthened than impaired the delight of the illusion, while it weakened the illusion itself.

Given all this, the rest of the narrative can be read as wholly or largely an 'illusion', or hallucination, induced by the 'voluptuous narcotic'; for LD, then, the "étrange" reading advanced by Gross and Dowell appears to be correct.

The text of OP, however, suppresses all drug references. Nonetheless, certain indications of the narrator's unreliability remain: his 'desperately wounded condition', the fever (which the former state still implies) and the 'incipient delirium' (1). Insomnia, too, is still implicitly present in the phrase: 'that I might resign myself, if not to sleep, at least alternately to the contemplation of these pictures; and the perusal of a small volume ...' (ibid.). As the narrator contemplates and reads, then, his perceptions are distorted by fever, delirium and insomnia. The absence of the opium does not, therefore, invalidate the "étrange" reading; as Thompson suggests, although the revisions tend towards a 'reduction of the obviousness of the narrator's imbalance of mind',<sup>29</sup> the final text still 'provides symbolic "clues" to the deceptive quality of the narrator's experience'.<sup>30</sup> Besides - as Thompson also points out - the 'apartment', as instance of the Poe interior, contains elements connoting perceptual confusion: the 'bizarre architecture' (1), the 'candelabrum' (ibid.) with its 'flashing' light (4), the 'arabesque' frames of the paintings (1) and the 'Moresque' frame of the oval portrait itself (5).<sup>31</sup> However, if the narrator's unreliability is clear enough, its extent still has to be established; if in LD the huge dose of opium suggests that the whole narrative may be a hallucination, this is not necessarily the case for OP, where the hallucinogenic atmosphere is toned down. Thompson concludes that virtually everything after the second paragraph is a dream;<sup>32</sup> it may be doubted, however, whether a dream would

contain a narrative text so rigorously and logically constructed as that of the sixth paragraph. Besides, the impact of the doubling between narrator and painter - to be discussed below<sup>33</sup> - would be reduced if the latter became merely a figure in the former's dream; as will be shown, the tale comes across as far more disturbing if narrator and painter are both seen as representing male power in the real social universe. The present analysis will assume that both portrait and catalogue are "real" within the tale, but that the narrator's perception of the former is distorted by the factors mentioned above; it is therefore a question of partial misperception, not of total hallucination. It may be suggested that the text of OP constitutes an improvement on LD, insofar as the removal of the drug element moves the emphasis away from the narrator's idiosyncratic subjectivity, and towards the system of relations constituted by narrator, portrait, painter and woman. The two latter subjects become, no longer inventions of the narrator, but concrete social agents existing in a cultural universe parallel to his own; while the narrator himself becomes more representative of the social norm, by losing his "unacceptable" drug habit.

In spite of his perceptual unreliability, the narrator constitutes himself as an authoritative figure - as a male member of the ruling class, and as an intellectual and connoisseur. He is probably a U.S. citizen, given the reference (5) to the contemporary painter Robert M. Sully, of Philadelphia;<sup>34</sup> besides, since he employs a 'valet' (1), he may be considered a "gentleman", on a social level equivalent to that of the owners of the chateau (who seem to have 'temporarily and very lately abandoned' it (ibid.)), and are specified in LD (1) as 'the family who tenanted it'). His educated status is

clear from his "cultural" references<sup>35</sup> to the novels of Ann Radcliffe, 'arabesque' (1) and 'Moresque' (5); indeed, he presents himself as an expert on art, in his description of the portrait: 'It was a mere head and shoulders, done in what is technically termed a vignette manner; much in the style of the favorite heads of Sully.' (5) As such, he exhibits certain idealist notions of art corresponding to his class position.

His approach to the art-object is by means of contemplation ('the contemplation of these pictures' (1)). As Benjamin shows in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) (as discussed above, in Chapter 5),<sup>36</sup> contemplation is an essential component of the ideology of aesthetic autonomy. The artwork, surrounded by its aura, becomes the subject of a quasi-religious devotion: 'the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function'.<sup>37</sup> It thus demands to be consumed through 'contemplative immersion':<sup>38</sup> 'A man (sic) who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it.'<sup>39</sup> The art-object temporarily dominates the contemplator's mental universe, offering him/her, in its apparent self-sufficiency and closure, an idealised image of her/his own illusory autonomy as subject. It is very much in these terms that Poe's narrator confronts the paintings in the chateau, and the oval portrait in particular. Of the paintings in general, he says: 'devoutly, devotedly I gazed' (2); of the oval portrait: 'I again looked fixedly at the painting' (3); 'I remained, for an hour perhaps, ... with my vision riveted upon the portrait.' (5). Finally, the portrait leaves him with a sense of 'deep and reverent awe' (ibid.). He thus perceives the art-object in general as a cult-object, as the religious lexis ('devoutly', 'reverent',

'awe') suggests; 'contemplation' (1) is linked etymologically to the idea of religion, via its derivation from 'temple'.<sup>40</sup> This contemplative/religious dimension is further emphasised in Baudelaire's translation ('Le Portrait ovale', 1855),<sup>41</sup> where 'contemplation' occurs twice and 'contempler' three times, in contrast to the one instance of the noun in Poe's original; 'contemplation' translates its cognate in (1), and also the noun 'gaze' in (3),<sup>42</sup> while the verb 'gaze' becomes 'contempler' on three occasions (2, 6 (twice)).<sup>43</sup> Besides, Baudelaire renders 'resign myself' (1) as 'me consoler', and 'devoutly, devotedly' (2) as 'religieusement, d evotement';<sup>44</sup> the effect of these lexical changes is to reinforce the extent to which art is ideologically produced as a quasi-religious, mystical phenomenon.

It is with such a notion of art the the narrator approaches the oval portrait. What it induces in him, however, is not plenitude, but disturbance. In theory, it should console and exalt; in practice, while this expected reaction is to some extent present - as in the 'reverent awe' which the portrait induces (5) - it is subordinated to an unexpected reaction of shock and disorientation. The pre-conditions for a contemplative surrender to the art-object are certainly there. He perceives the portrait as technically outstanding: 'As a thing of art nothing could be more admirable than the painting itself.' (ibid.); it is, therefore, presumably, likely to induce a sense of satisfaction, like the well-wrought tale of the Hawthorne review. It is, besides, ornately framed; its frame is 'richly gilded and filagreed' (ibid.), thus isolating it from the external social world (similarly, in 'The Philosophy of Composition', the 'close circum-scription of space', constituting the text as closed system, is claimed to have a 'force' equivalent to that of 'a frame to a picture'

(H XIV, 204)). The woman it represents too, is described in terms of 'immortal beauty' (5); a formulation which connotes the portrait itself as a "timeless" object of quasi-religious devotion. All these factors should tend to confirm it in its impregnable autonomy, and thus also reinforce the "unified" subjectivity of the person who contemplates it. Indeed, such is the narrator's reaction to the other paintings ('Rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by' (2)) - but not to the oval portrait.

The portrait comes into view unexpectedly, after the narrator shifts the candelabrum; its discovery has a shock effect on him like that produced in 'The Man of the Crowd' by the old man's face. Indeed, this tends to situate the portrait's disturbing impact in the area of modernity, as characterised by Benjamin;<sup>45</sup> it is not by chance that the paintings are specified as 'modern' (1). The invasion of the narrator's field of vision by the portrait is described as follows: 'But the action produced an effect altogether unanticipated. The rays of the numerous candles ... now fell within a niche of the room which had hitherto been thrown into deep shade by one of the bed-posts. I thus saw in vivid light a picture all unnoticed before.' (3). The shock effect continues in his perception, not only of the portrait itself, but of its content. An instant after taking it in, the narrator shuts off from it: 'I glanced at the painting hurriedly, and then closed my eyes.' (ibid.). There is, then, something immediately disturbing about the portrait that provokes a defensive reaction.

Its effect is, in fact, uncanny, in Freud's sense: 'Why I did this was not at first apparent even to my own perception.' (ibid.). As

Dubanton points out,<sup>46</sup> this is a case of an 'angoisse' that at first appears unmotivated, but whose determinants lie in the unconscious; to quote Freud, 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar',<sup>47</sup> even if it may appear to be 'not known and familiar'.<sup>48</sup> After he reopens his eyes and looks more closely at the painting, the uncanny element persists; it continues to strike him as unfamiliar, inexplicable, inducing a 'deep agitation' (5). He finds in it some quality that 'suddenly and ... vehemently moved me', and 'at first startling, finally confounded, subdued and appalled me' (ibid.). The components of his reaction include, then: shock, fear, intimidation, confusion and a generalised sense of extremity ('vehemently moved me'). At first unable to account for his own reaction, he tries to penetrate the enigma, 'thinking earnestly' until he is convinced that he has 'found the true secret of its effect': 'I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute life-likeness of expression' (ibid.)

This explanation, however - couched in terms of the portrait's realism - is best read as a rationalisation; a consummate realism, tending to naturalise the surface of things, would be more likely to confirm his subjectivity. As John Berger et al. suggest in Ways of Seeing (1972),<sup>49</sup> oil painting - hegemonic between c. 1500 and c. 1900 - is particularly suited to the production of a realist illusion: 'What distinguishes oil painting from any other form of painting is its special ability to render the tangibility, the texture, the lustre, the solidity of what it depicts.... its potential of illusionism is far greater than that of sculpture, for it can suggest objects possessing colour, texture and temperature, filling a space and, by



implication, filling the entire world'.<sup>50</sup> This is, at least, the case where the oil technique and a realist project go hand in hand - as has clearly happened with the oval portrait. The source of its disturbing effect should be sought elsewhere. Indeed, the explanation in terms of realism is not sufficient to remove the narrator's fear; having evolved his theory, he remains captive to the ambivalent fascination of the portrait, turning at once to its history in the catalogue.

The uncanny effect of the portrait comes into clearer focus once the inset narrative is examined; the painter proves to be a figure in many ways parallel to the narrator. The narrative found in the catalogue (6) presents his activity in terms of a metaphysical discourse of art and the artist. 'Studios' and 'austere', he is dominated by his work: 'Having already a bride in his Art ... he, the painter, took glory in his work ... wild with the ardor of his work'. His temperament corresponds to a certain stereotype of the artist ('he was a passionate, and wild, and moody man, who became lost in reveries'), recalling the 'Visionary' of 'The Assignation';<sup>51</sup> one may compare a passage in Balzac's La Cousine Bette (1846):<sup>52</sup> 'les véritables artistes (sont) taxés de personnalité, de sauvagerie, de rébellion aux lois du monde ... Ces hommes ... tombent dans l'exclusivité de la solitude; ils deviennent inexplicables pour la majorité'.<sup>53</sup> The artist is perceived as "wild", necessarily solitary and "different", concentrating his energies on his art, seen as a heroic and private endeavour. This metaphysical notion of the artist is constructed by Poe's text itself, which - as witness the capitalisation of 'Art' - shares and endorses the ideology it attributes to its characters. Further, the art-object becomes a fetish; at the

end, the painter stands 'entranced before the work which he had wrought'. Having produced an object with the labour of his own hands, he attributes to it - once finished - an autonomous existence, seeing it as 'Life itself', and worshipping it as a cult-object - much as the savage worships the fetish he has made. As in Poe's aesthetic theories, the fetishism of the artwork parallels that of the commodity;<sup>54</sup> in the process of commodity fetishism described by Marx, the 'products of men's (sic) hands' appear as 'autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own'.<sup>55</sup> Whether the oval portrait was offered for sale or not, its phantom autonomy as artwork duplicates that of the commodity which, after all, most artworks were destined to become.

The painter's ideology of the aesthetic corresponds closely to the narrator's. Both subscribe to a metaphysical notion of 'Art', and, both engage in the practice of contemplation. For the narrator, as he views the paintings, the hours pass 'gloriously' (2), while the painter takes 'glory' in his work (6). The former gazes ('devoutly, devotedly I gazed' (2)), as does the latter ('while he yet gazed' (6)), in a quasi-religious ecstasy ('entranced'). The former's discovery of 'life-likeness' in the portrait (5) corresponds - down to the underlining - to the painter's own appraisal, "This is indeed Life itself!" (6). This series of lexical correspondences suggests that painter and narrator play complementary roles in the text. Both participate in the same ideology of art, as, respectively, producer and consumer; this relation corresponds to that constituted in the 1847 Hawthorne review, where the 'skilful artist' who has 'constructed a tale' is complemented by the reader who 'contemplates it with a kindred art' (H XIII, 153). Producer and consumer reinforce each other, provided the onlooker/reader remains within the bounds of

respectful contemplation.<sup>56</sup> The consumer of art thus becomes a kind of double, or shadow, of the artist.

Nonetheless, in practice the oval portrait fails to induce, in either consumer or producer, the full, unproblematic sense of 'satisfaction' that the Hawthorne review lays down as the goal (H XIII, loc. cit.). Its disturbing effect on the narrator has already been noted; where he is 'appalled' (5), the painter, similarly, after the brief moment of entrancement, 'grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast' (6). The reactions of the two subjects thus correspond in their aspects of both plenitude and disturbance. What is in question, then, is clearly a relation of doubling; and this dimension is the more evident given that they are both reacting to the same portrait - and that both, as men, are reacting to a female image. At this point - and before the painting's uncanny effect is explicated - the factor of sexual politics in the text demands examination.

The cultural situation of male dominance and female subordination has already been expressed symbolically - as Dubanton points out<sup>57</sup> - at the beginning, indeed in the very first sentence of the revised text: 'The chateau into which my valet had ventured to make forcible entrance ...' (1). If the castle, as in 'The Masque of the Red Death',<sup>58</sup> symbolises the female body, the 'forcible entrance' - as in the bayonet episode in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'<sup>59</sup> - suggests sadistic penetration. On the other hand, the possibility of active femaleness is also signified in the same paragraph, in the reference to 'the fancy of Mrs. Radcliffe', i.e. to a woman writer (the castle resembles that in Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794)).<sup>60</sup>

It is, however, in the account in (6) of the painter's relations with his wife that the sexual problematic comes fully into view.

The painter is male, and his model female; this, as Berger et al. point out, was also the norm in the 'art-form of the European nude': 'The painters and spectator-owners were usually men, and the persons treated as objects, usually women.'<sup>61</sup> The female nude was, typically, deliberately desexualised, to the point where, in a canvas like Venus, Cupid, Time and Love by Bronzino (1503-72), the woman's body signifies less female than male sexuality: 'The woman's sexual passion needs to be minimized so that the spectator may feel that he has the monopoly of such passion.'<sup>62</sup> Poe's oval portrait is not a nude, but a head-and-shoulders vignette; but the general point holds. What the painter intends to put into the portrait is the depiction of a passive femininity, to be owned and contemplated by an active masculinity. The woman is treated as an object in the act of painting, and her image becomes an object of contemplation; the narrative is constructed around a male painter, a male spectator, a female model and a portrait of a woman. The production and consumption of art are reserved for men; the woman's role in the aesthetic process is simply to be beautiful.

Painting is constituted symbolically in the text as a male, phallic activity. The painter is famous (of 'high renown' (6)), and his reputation emphasises his 'power', of which the oval portrait is considered a 'proof'; he thus has access to areas of social activity and status that were typically open to men only. His sexuality is, to a large extent, sublimated into his work; he is 'passionate', but seems to relate to his 'bride' Art as a substitute lover. The 'fervid

and burning pleasure' he takes in painting the portrait indicates that wielding the brush validates his "masculinity", given the phallic connotations of the activity. As the portrait proceeds, he loses affective (and presumably) sexual interest in his wife: 'for the painter had grown wild with the ardor of his work, and turned his eyes from the canvass rarely, even to regard the countenance of his wife'. There is a gradual reorientation of his libido away from sexual goals, towards the sublimated goal of artistic achievement - the 'bride' Art increasingly wins out over the flesh-and-blood bride. Once he begins to work on the portrait 'day and night' (ibid.), it may be surmised that his sexual activity is increasingly curtailed; painting his wife becomes a substitute for making love with her.

His sexuality, however, is not all sublimated into art; desire, fused with aggression, becomes sadism. There is no evidence here of physical violence, in contrast to 'The Black Cat'; but psychological violence is not lacking. There may be a certain masochistic element in his wife's attraction to him in the first place: 'And evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter.'

(6). The act of painting - the 'desire to portray' - becomes an act of sadistic possession; as he paints his wife, exposing her to the unhealthy, dark environment of the turret, he is metaphorically preying on her like a vampire, killing her by degrees. Nonetheless, she accepts the situation passively, as one who 'so loved him': 'she was humble and obedient, and sat meekly for many weeks ... she smiled on, and still on, uncomplainingly'. Like the 'uncomplaining' wife in 'The Black Cat' (M III, 856),<sup>63</sup> she accepts her subordinate, 'obedient' role as given. Meanwhile, as his wife becomes, as if

vampirised, 'daily more dispirited and weak' (6), the husband shows a remarkable imperviousness to her state: 'he would not see that the light, which fell so ghastlily in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride ... And he would not see that the tints ... were drawn from the cheeks of her ...'. This strange blindness on his part may suggest that unconsciously he wants his wife dead, excluded in the flesh from his field of vision. From all this, in spite of the textual reference to 'his deep love for her', the reader may ask with Blake ('Visions of the Daughters of Albion', 1793):<sup>64</sup> 'Can that be Love that drinks another as a sponge drinks water ...?'<sup>65</sup> What is in question is a culturally-determined notion of 'love' as male sadism and female masochism. At the same time, the text constitutes art itself as a form of sadism; to paint is to destroy. The painter is thus convergent with other artist-dominators in Poe - Usher,<sup>66</sup> Templeton the writer-cum-mesmerist,<sup>67</sup> or the manipulative tale-writer of the 1847 Hawthorne review.<sup>68</sup> Art becomes less a means of communication than a mode of domination.

This construction of art as sadism is paralleled in a tale by Hawthorne, 'The Prophetic Pictures' (1837),<sup>69</sup> which critics have linked to OP.<sup>70</sup> In this tale, the (unnamed) painter is male, and his models are two: a married couple, Walter and Elinor, of each of whom he paints a portrait. The twin portraits, commissioned by the couple just before their wedding, are 'prophetic' in the sense that they bring to the surface, in the 'expressions' they attribute to husband and wife, latent sadistic and masochistic tendencies respectively. Walter's portrait is marked by 'wild passion',<sup>71</sup> Elinor's by a 'sad and anxious expression'.<sup>72</sup> The painter leaves on

his travels; meanwhile the marriage gradually deteriorates. Eventually he returns to their house, to find Walter about to knife Elinor; the painter intervenes to save her life. The elements of male sadism and female masochism in the marriage are evident; Elinor has married her husband from choice ('Walter Ludlow was the chosen of her heart'),<sup>73</sup> and to the painter's final question, "'Did I not warn you?'" she answers: "'But - I loved him!'"<sup>74</sup>

Hawthorne's text implies the existence of a sadistic component not only in male-female relations, but also in the artist's activity. The central enigma of the text concerns the portraits; the question is whether the pictures simply elicit a potential tension in the marriage, which would have emerged in due course anyway - or whether they actively facilitate the emergence of violence which would otherwise have remained purely latent. Thus the painter asks himself: 'Was not ... he a chief agent of the coming evil which he had foreshadowed?'<sup>75</sup> The text may be read as suggesting that both husband (directly) and painter (indirectly) share responsibility for Elinor's sufferings - in which case, both would stand in a sadistic relation to her, although in the painter's case it is involuntary, and compensated for by his final intervention. Art, then, becomes a potentially destructive activity; thus the text refers to 'the spell of evil influence, that the painter had cast upon (Walter's) features'.<sup>76</sup>

There are clear convergences between this tale and OP, on both lexical and thematic levels. Hawthorne's painter has a 'powerful mind',<sup>77</sup> while Poe's text refers to 'the power of the painter' (6); both have achieved fame, as artists of 'eminence'<sup>78</sup> and 'high renown' (OP, *ibid.*) respectively; and both have attained a peak of technical

competence - where the two 'prophetic pictures' are considered to be 'among the most admirable specimens of modern portraiture',<sup>79</sup> Poe's narrator says of the oval portrait: 'nothing could be more admirable than the painting itself' (5). In both texts, then, painting becomes a symbol of male power; the phallic dimension of the brushes in OP has already been noted, while Hawthorne's painter rhapsodises over his 'potent Art'.<sup>80</sup> The power in question, however, is exercised destructively; art fails to console, it disturbs. Hawthorne's painter believes in the autonomy of art, as a quasi-divine activity: "'Oh, glorious Art! ... Thou art the image of the Creator's own.'" <sup>81</sup> This absorption in his art is explicitly condemned by the narrator: 'he was insulated from the mass of human kind. He had no aim - no pleasure - no sympathies - but what were ultimately connected with his art.'<sup>82</sup> This estrangement from human relations is paralleled in Poe's painter, 'having a bride ... in his Art' (6); but the explicit didacticism of Hawthorne's text is absent from OP, in keeping with Poe's usual practice. However, the sadistic potential of art is as evident in OP as in 'The Prophetic Pictures'; indeed more so, since Poe's painter stands in a much closer relation to his model, and, indeed, may be read as a condensation of Hawthorne's husband and artist into one destructive figure. At the same time, the deletion, in Poe's text, of the male model produces a sharper polarisation between the active/sadistic male painter and the passive female model/victim.

Besides the sadistic dimension, Poe's text further exposes the subordination of women by presenting the wife as little more than an object - while, at the same time, the portrait is elevated to the status of



subject. The active element in the woman's sexuality seems confined to her choice of love-object, when she 'saw, and loved, and wedded the painter' (6). Before marriage, she appears to be overflowing with libidinal energy, 'full of glee ..., frolicksome as the young fawn' (ibid.); once married, however, she is reduced - as shown above - to a purely passive role, becoming her husband's possession and model. Conversely, the painter raises the oval portrait, once completed, to the position of a living subject: "'This is indeed Life itself!"' (ibid.). To the fetishisation of the portrait (as remarked above)<sup>83</sup> there corresponds, then, the reification of the woman; the intimate relation between the two processes is underlined by the coincidence of the portrait's completion with the woman's death.

This double process of reification and fetishisation is paralleled elsewhere in nineteenth-century writing, for instance in Balzac's 'Sarrasine' (1830) and 'Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu' (1831). In the first tale, the sculptor-protagonist, on his first sight of the soprano Zambinella (a castrato whom he believes to be a woman), converts "her" ideologically into an art-object: 'C'était plus qu'une femme, c'était un chef-d'oeuvre!'<sup>84</sup> Conversely, in the second tale, the painter Frenhofer declares of his own painting (intended to represent a beautiful woman): "'Ce n'est pas une toile, c'est une femme!'"<sup>85</sup> If the two texts are viewed together, the two statements complement one another; a "woman" becomes an artwork, an artwork becomes a woman. The conceptual similarity with 'The Oval Portrait' is evident; it will now be useful to compare Poe's tale and 'Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu' in some detail.

Balzac's tale narrates an imaginary episode from the youth of Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), concerning the relations between two painters - the historical Poussin and the fictitious Frenhofer. The latter has long been working on a nude painting of a courtesan - "La Belle-Noiseuse" - which he has never shown to anyone, and considers his masterpiece. In order to complete the painting, however, he requires a woman to pose naked for him. Poussin offers the services of his lover, Gillette, demanding in return the chance to view Frenhofer's secret masterpiece. Gillette poses, and the painting is completed; but once exposed to Poussin's gaze, it turns out to be no picture of a woman at all, but a 'chaos de couleurs, de tons, de nuances indéfinies, espèce de brouillard sans forme'.<sup>86</sup> Frenhofer suddenly realises his perceptions have been distorted; what he thought represented a woman is in fact an abstraction. He burns his paintings and commits suicide.

This text is important for its remarkable anticipation of abstract impressionism (e.g. late Monet), and, in this "precursor" aspect, may be compared to Poe's 'Usher', which also contains an anticipation of abstract painting;<sup>87</sup> however, for present purposes, what matters is its constitution of the relations: painter-woman, painter-artwork and woman-artwork. Balzac's narrative presents three painters, all male (the third, Porbus, plays a minor role), and one female model - though it should be noted that Frenhofer does not actually paint Gillette, using her body, rather, as a yardstick against which to judge what he believes to be his nude figure.<sup>88</sup> The part of sadistic lover is played by Poussin, that of main user of the model by Frenhofer; they thus divide between them the functions which coincide in Poe's

painter (although Poussin incidentally also paints Gillette himself).

As already seen, Frenhofer views his painting as an animate cult-object, converting it into a 'woman' in an extreme instance of fetishisation which parallels Poe's painter's "'This is Life itself!'" . At the same time, his possessiveness towards it is explicitly compared to a husband's towards his wife; the text thus links the fetishisation of art with the oppression of women; "Voilà dix ans que je vis avec cette femme, elle est à moi, à moi seul ... La faire voir! quel est le mari, l'amant assez vil pour conduire sa femme au déshonneur?"<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the extent to which Frenhofer views women as objects is made evident by his use of the veil metaphor: "Montrer ma créature, mon épouse? déchirer le voile sous lequel j'ai chastement couvert mon bonheur? Mais ce serait une horrible prostitution!"<sup>90</sup> Similarly, what Frenhofer does in his discourse, Poussin does in practice, pressurising Gillette to pose against her will and subordinating her sensibilities to his own artistic career. She becomes a means to his ambition; 'pour ma gloire à venir ..., pour me faire grand peintre',<sup>91</sup> he determines to 'la sacrifier à la peinture'.<sup>92</sup> In the episode in which Porbus, acting as intermediary, puts Poussin's deal to Frenhofer, woman and painting are presented as interchangeable objects of exchange: "'s'il consent à vous la prêter, au moins faudrait-il nous laisser voir votre toile'"<sup>93</sup> The verb 'prêter' implies that Gillette is no more than Poussin's possession, to be loaned out at will; later, Porbus defines the deal as, quite simply, an exchange of women!: "'Mais n'est-ce pas femme pour femme?"<sup>94</sup> (woman for woman equals object for object).

Poussin quite consciously uses Gillette as an object, as Poe's painter sacrifices his wife's health to his art. When Gillette agrees to the deal, her lover's reaction is ecstatic: 'Ne voyant plus que son art, le Poussin pressa Gillette dans ses bras.';<sup>95</sup> like Poe's painter, 'having ... a bride in his Art', he subordinates both the woman and his own sexuality to an aesthetic project. Again like his counterpart in Poe's tale, Balzac's artist-lover directs his contemplative gaze less at his companion than at art-objects; she complains of the occasions when she poses naked for him: "Dans ces moments-là, tes yeux ne me disent plus rien. Tu ne penses plus à moi."<sup>96</sup> Later, in Frenhofer's studio, she watches her lover 'contempler' one of the older painter's canvasses, and says to herself: "Il ne m'a jamais regardée ainsi".<sup>97</sup> Finally, as soon as Frenhofer's "Belle-Noiseuse" is introduced, the text cynically eliminates all mention of Gillette, adopting the vantage point of the three men, all absorbed in the painting and oblivious of her. Only on the last page does the narrator suddenly "remember" her, 'oubliée dans un coin'.<sup>98</sup> Here as in OP, the male protagonist fails to see the woman in the same way as he sees the artwork; Poussin's reaction is very similar to that of Poe's painter, who would not see his wife's condition.

In both texts, then, the art-object becomes a fetish while the female model is reduced to an object. However, Balzac's narrative concludes with an intimation of female resistance; Gillette, when at last rediscovered by Poussin, exclaims: "Je serais infâme de t'aimer encore, car je te méprise. Je t'aime et je crois que je te hais déjà."<sup>99</sup> Her reaction, though ambivalent, suggests a possible future rejection of her lover; the humiliating act of posing for Frenhofer has proved

completely useless, since his painting was not what it claimed to be and Poussin has learnt nothing that could advance his career. The text thus points to the possibility of women contesting their status as objects; while OP contains no such moment of contestation during the woman's lifetime, it will now be shown that female affirmativeness is not altogether absent from the text.

At this point, analysis will once again be focussed on the oval portrait and its disturbing impact on both narrator and painter. Both, as has been shown, react to it with fear;<sup>100</sup> the unconscious origins of the portrait's uncanny effect will now be considered. As seen above, both attempt to justify their reaction on the grounds of the painting's realism ('life-likeness of expression'; "'This is Life itself!";<sup>101</sup> this, however, may be seen as a rationalisation of a fear whose determinants are ultimately sexual. On the surface level, the realism of the painting appears such that it terrifies because it seems alive; under the surface, what "comes alive" symbolically in the oval portrait is female sexuality.

Freud suggests, in his 1931 paper on the subject, that the active component in female sexuality, still visible in the pre-Oedipal child, is typically repressed in the Oedipal phase, during which the cultural norm of female passivity is implanted in the girl.<sup>102</sup> However, whatever is repressed can return; and the uncanny effect produced in OP (as in 'Morella', 'Ligeia' and 'Usher', as will be seen) may be read as corresponding to the symbolic return of active femininity. The possibility of women reassuming the active role from which they have been estranged continues to haunt the male unconscious under patriarchy; thus, in 'The Taboo of Virginity' (1918), Freud refers to a 'generalised

dread of women' existing among many primitive peoples,<sup>103</sup> which underlies the practice, found in diverse cultures, of entrusting the "defloration" of brides to some person other than the husband. Freud argues that 'with the taboo of virginity primitive man is defending himself against a correctly sensed, although psychical, danger';<sup>104</sup> the first act of intercourse may bring out the latent activity and aggressiveness in the woman: 'defloration ... unleashes an archaic reaction of hostility towards (the man)'.<sup>105</sup> In this context, one may invoke Walter Scott's The Bride of Lammermoor (1819),<sup>106</sup> where Lucy Ashton, victim of an arranged marriage, attempts to kill her husband - not quite on the wedding-night, but soon after the ceremony. Her action involves all the aggressiveness "normally" repressed in women: 'her features convulsed into a wild paroxysm of insanity ... with the frantic gestures of an exulting demoniac ...<sup>107</sup> the bride, in a sudden fit of insanity, had stabbed the bridegroom at the threshold of the apartment'.<sup>108</sup> In Poe's works, the resurgence of active femininity tends to occur - with the exceptions of 'Ligeia' and 'Morella' - less in the woman's life than at or just before her death (or indeed after it, in the male characters' imagination). It has been shown already how in 'The Black Cat' the wife's act of resistance precedes her death;<sup>109</sup> the cases of 'Berenice' and 'Usher' will be considered below. In OP, the woman is, throughout her marriage, uniformly passive and compliant, 'uncomplainingly' accepting her position in culture up to her death. The portrait, however, signifies, after her death, the continued possibility of female aggression, through its disturbing impact on the two male onlookers; it thus impels a female image into a position of dominance over men. Its uncanny effect, may, then, be traced to a latent knowledge and fear, in the male unconscious, of

active female sexuality and its re-emergence.

The irony is that it is the painter's own labour that has produced this disorienting image. He has chosen to give the portrait its oval shape, which symbolically embodies his own repressed awareness of female creativity; and it is he who has given the 'mouth' and the 'eye' (6) their disturbing quality (which, as will be seen below,<sup>110</sup> is especially focussed in LD). As for the narrator's fear, its sexual origin is implicit in his initial reaction: 'I glanced at the painting hurriedly, and then closed my eyes.' (3). It is not surprising that he has difficulty in identifying his 'reason for so shutting them' (ibid.); it is a temporary, self-induced condition of blindness, and blindness, as Freud shows in his analysis of Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' in 'The "Uncanny"', signifies castration in the unconscious.<sup>111</sup> Hoffmann's protagonist, Nathaniel, believes himself persecuted by a terrifying figure whom he identifies with a childhood bogey, the Sandman who 'comes after children ... and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes, so that they jump out of their heads all bloody'.<sup>112</sup> According to Freud, the fear of blinding in this text, with its uncanny effect, derives from the 'substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies';<sup>113</sup> it has already been shown how, in Poe's work, the castration fear is evoked by the old man's filmy, unseeing eye in 'The Tell-Tale Heart', and by the one-eyed second cat in 'The Black Cat'.<sup>114</sup> In OP, the extremity of the narrator's 'deep agitation' (5) suggests that the portrait has evoked castration anxiety in him; the woman's 'expression' thus 'at first startling, finally confounded, subdued and appalled me' (ibid.), The act of eye-closure not only signifies fear of female activity, but is also a recognition of its objective (if latent)

existence; circumstances could occur in which a woman might blind (castrate) a man, i.e. assume power. Similarly, when the painter becomes 'pallid' and 'aghast' at the sight of the portrait (6), he is terrified by the image of female desire which his own hands have brought to view.

The latent sexual character of the painting is made clear by its description as 'the portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood' (3); the terminology suggests the transformations of puberty (as well as pointing to a rather early marriage). The problematic of 'womanhood', or femininity, is thus explicitly focussed. The text of OP has little to say about the precise character of the woman's disturbing 'expression' (5); LD (5), however, contains a sentence, deleted in the 1845 text, which throws some light on the matter. After the sentence ending 'appalled me', LD adds: 'I could no longer support the sad meaning smile of the half-parted lips, nor the too real lustre of the wild eye.'<sup>115</sup> Gross calls this sentence 'a flagrantly inappropriate piece of Gothicism', considering its excision an improvement;<sup>116</sup> if, however, Gothic conventions are read as symbolic expressions of social anxieties,<sup>117</sup> the textual change may be viewed, rather, as an act of authorial censorship. The "insupportable" character of the portrait's effect reinforces the extremity of the narrator's fear; while the explicit signification of eye and lips, absent from OP (5), points up the sexual symbolism. If the 'half-parted lips', with their 'sad meaning smile', suggest the norm of female receptiveness and passivity, the 'wild eye', with its burning 'lustre', points in a different direction. The intensity of the woman's gaze forms a counterpoint to the narrator's self-imposed blindness in (3); if the latter symbolises castration, the former, conversely, connotes phallic potency. 'Wild' in Poe's



writing tends to imply extremity of some kind (as in Dupin's 'wild whims' in 'Rue Morgue' (M II, 532)),<sup>118</sup> and here the extremity is sexual; Ligeia, too, has 'wild eyes' (M II, 316).<sup>119</sup> The 'wild eye' (in the singular) suggests at least a partial phallisation of the woman, and therefore has a "castrating" effect on the narrator, threatening him with loss of power; at the same time, having been put there by the painter, it represents the return of his own repressed knowledge of female desire. The excision of the sentence from OP may, then, have been motivated by its over-explicit representation of active femininity, since 'wildness' "should" belong only to men (or, if ascribed to women, should occur only in what is ultimately a negative context, as in 'Ligeia'). Similarly, another deleted sentence of LD (5) may have been removed owing to its even more obvious sexual connotations. After 'the painting itself', LD adds: 'The loveliness of the face surpassed that of the fabulous Houris.';<sup>120</sup> the erotic associations of the Houris, the nymphs of the Islamic paradise, serve too visibly to sexualise the woman.

The oval portrait signifies femininity as simultaneously passive and active. The woman is, on the one hand, the painter's model, and the object of the male gazer's contemplation; and on the other, a potentially active and affirmative being, with her activity signified in the 'wild eye' and her creativity in the oval form. This dimension seems to have remained latent in her own consciousness, and is brought out only in the portrait and its effect on men. Nonetheless, the element of active femininity is clearly crucial to the text, since it is responsible for the disturbance factor. Further, there are striking lexical convergences with 'Ligeia', a tale where - as will be shown below<sup>121</sup> - the female protagonist is quite openly signified as

active. In OP (5), the narrator is 'vehemently moved' by the portrait; in 'Ligeia', his counterpart is struck by his wife's 'eager vehemence of desire for life' (317-18). Both, too, are 'appalled' - the narrator of OP by the portrait, his equivalent in 'Ligeia' by the 'miraculous expansion' of the woman's eyes (315); 'Ligeia' also contains a reference to 'the fabulous Houri of the Turk' (313). The parallels suggest that the activity which manifestly marks Ligeia, as an anomalous woman in her culture, is also latent in the model-victim of OP.

This reading of Poe's tale in terms of female sexuality may be confirmed by intertextual comparison with three texts which may be seen as having influenced, or having been influenced by OP. The original title, 'Life in Death', probably derives from Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798).<sup>122</sup> In the final version (1834) of the poem, the spectre-woman, 'Life-in-Death', is described as follows:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,  
Her locks were yellow as gold:  
Her skin was white as leprosy,  
The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,  
Who thicks man's blood with cold.<sup>123</sup>

Coleridge's text presents a destructive female figure, who is simultaneously seen as sexually active ('her looks were free'); female sexuality is thus implicitly condemned. She appears as erotic, via the stress on 'lips' and 'locks', and as threatening to men; the phrase 'thicks man's blood with cold' may be read as referring either to 'man' (humanity) or to man (the male sex), the latter reading being more apposite, given that the narrator is male. Indeed, the image of freezing blood can be taken as a symbolic representation of castration (coldness = absence of 'heat'). The erotic charge of Poe's portrait may appear more evident if the antecedent of the original title is

taken into account.

A text which bears traces of OP, and focusses on female eroticism in the context of portraiture, is Baudelaire's prose-poem 'Le Désir de Peindre' (1863).<sup>124</sup> Here too, there is a lexical continuity. Poe's text refers to the painter's 'desire to portray even his young bride' (6), which Baudelaire's translation (1855) renders: 'le désir de peindre même sa jeune épouse'.<sup>125</sup> The title of the prose-poem thus derives from 'Le Portrait ovale'; but the woman whom the "I" of Baudelaire's text wishes to paint is conceived as sexually assertive, even sadistic, and is overtly contrasted with a representative of the passive norm, the typical 'froide mariée', unaware of her sexuality. She signifies 'l'inconnu et l'impossible',<sup>126</sup> the emergence of repressed desire, while the emphasis on her "will" may point back to the erotically charged force of will of Ligeia;<sup>127</sup> 'Dans son petit front habitent la volonté tenace et l'amour de la proie.... celle-ci donne le désir de mourir lentement sous son regard'.<sup>128</sup> In contrast to OP, the woman's active sexuality is here conscious, but the destructive effect ('le désir de mourir') is common to both texts. Baudelaire's prose-poem may be seen as bringing into the open the latent sexual content of OP, turning painting into a conscious expression of desire. Where Baudelaire's painter desires to paint an active woman ('Je brûle de peindre celle qui m'est apparue'),<sup>129</sup> Poe's painter desires to paint a passive woman, and is then shocked at how his work brings out her active potential.

Poe's oval portrait, in its destructive aspect, may also underlie an episode in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891).<sup>130</sup> When Tess and Angel Clare, on their ill-fated honeymoon, arrive at the

farmhouse in Wellbridge, they encounter 'two life-size portraits on panels built into the masonry', representing 'women of middle age ... whose lineaments once seen can never be forgotten'. Their features are obviously aggressive, even vampiric, in a way that those of the woman in OP are not; one has a 'narrow eye, and smirk', the other has a 'large teeth, and bold eye ...', suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity'.<sup>131</sup> These 'horrid women'<sup>132</sup> produce fear in both Tess and Angel, and the disturbing effect is reinforced later in the narrative. After Tess's confession, Angel considers consummating the marriage after all, but is deterred by the sight of one of the portraits:

In the act he caught sight of one of the d'Urberville dames, whose portrait was immediately over the entrance of Tess's bedchamber. In the candlelight the painting was more than unpleasant. Sinister design lurked in the woman's features, a concentrated purpose of revenge on the other sex ...<sup>133</sup>

Here, as in OP, a portrait seen under candlelight shocks the male on-looker. The sexual element, implicit in Poe's text, is more evident in Tess, where the woman of the portrait has a low 'Caroline bodice',<sup>134</sup> while the aggressive dimension is also brought out quite unequivocally in the later text. The connexion with Hardy's novel<sup>135</sup> suggests that OP, too, may contain a symbolic representation of the possibility of female 'revenge on the other sex'.

It may be concluded that OP signifies, through the uncanny effects it produces, both the return of the repressed (male fear of female sexuality) and the revenge of the oppressed (woman terrorises man from beyond the grave). The fantastic text thus permits the contestation (in symbolic and disguised form) of the cultural norm. Indeed, in OP female sexuality proves indestructible, resistant to male attempts to control or repress it. The narrator replaces the candelabrum, in

order to 'shut from view' the portrait, the 'cause of my deep agitation' (5); this attempt at renewed repression fails, since the story of the painter returns him to the portrait and its disturbing effect. What he reads is a re-run of his own 'agitation'; the text thus spirals back on itself, constituting female sexuality, once made visible, as an unavoidable reality. In the light of the above analysis, Cixous' reading, stressing the triumphant insistence of female desire, is to be preferred to Dubanton's notion of identity between narrator and painter.<sup>136</sup> The point is not that the painter and narrator are one and the same, but that the similarity of their reactions as representative males indicates, and generalises, the disturbing effect of active female desire on the male subject. The text exploits apparently supernatural effects to signify the persistence of active femininity. The kind of posthumous revenge of the oppressed it constructs is paralleled in a text like Kleist's 'The Beggarwoman of Locarno' (1811),<sup>137</sup> where a destitute woman is refused help by a marquis, and dies in his castle. She passively accepts her fate; but her ghost returns, to drive the marquis mad with 'inexplicable sounds',<sup>138</sup> to the point where he burns the castle down. In both this tale and OP, the fantastic discourse obliquely signifies the reversal of power-structures, and thus the possible undermining of the social fabric.

In OP, art and sexuality enter into problematic conjunction. Art perturbs instead of consoling; the interior becomes a space of perceptual and psychological disturbance; the artist appears as a sadist. Female desire emerges from its repression, to be perceived by the male protagonists as threatening and destructive. The processes at work in this text are also present - with the further disturbing elements of consciously assumed female sexual and intellectual activity - in the

next tale to be analysed, 'Ligeia'.

ii. 'Ligeia'

'Ligeia' (1838) is linked to 'The Oval Portrait' by the themes of art as sadism and the interior as disorienting space, and by its construction of female sexuality in terms of an active/passive dialectic. It differs from the later tale, however, in its largely homogeneous first-person narrative, which conforms to the usual Poe model; and in its constitution of a triangular system of relations between one man and two women (rather than one woman and two men). The active and passive characteristics which combine in the model of the oval portrait are, in this tale, divided between Ligeia and Rowena respectively; while the former is, in her openly assumed sexual, intellectual and artistic activity, by far the most active woman in the Poe canon (the case of Morella will be considered below).<sup>139</sup>

References to 'Ligeia' will be made, in this section, by paragraph numbers. The inset poem 'The Conqueror Worm' occurs between paragraphs 9 and 10 (M II, 318-19). The numbering is as follows:

<u>Number</u>	<u>First Words</u>	<u>Page Numbers in Mabbott, II</u>
1	'I cannot, for my soul ...'	310-11
2	'There is one dear topic ...'	311-12
3	'For eyes ...'	312-13
4	'There is no point ...'	313-14
5	'Length of years ...'	315
6	'I have spoken ...'	315-16
7	'How poignant ...'	316-17

8	'That she loved me ...'	317-18
9	'At high noon of the night ...'	318-19
10	'"O God! ..."'	319
11	'And now, as if exhausted ...'	319-20
12	'She died ...'	320-21
13	'There is no individual portion ...'	321
14	'Some few ottomans ...'	321-22
15	'In halls such as these ...'	323
16	'About the commencement ...'	323-24
17	'One night ...'	324-25
18	'Yet I cannot conceal it ...'	326
19	'It might have been midnight ...'	326-27
20	'An hour thus elapsed ...'	327-28
21	'And again I sunk ...'	328-29
22	'The greater part ...'	329
23	'I trembled not ...'	329-30

Given its active female protagonist, 'Ligeia' demands, more than any other of Poe's tales, to be read in the context of both nineteenth-century feminism and the literature of the active woman; Ligeia is perceived by her husband (who is also the narrator) as simultaneously fascinating yet destructive, admirable yet anomalous. The existence of a feminist discourse in Britain and the U.S., in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792) and Margaret Fuller (Woman in the Nineteenth Century, 1845) has already been noted, in Chapter 1, along with Poe's negative comments on both;<sup>140</sup> Fuller's book appeared seven years after 'Ligeia', but both texts may be considered as products of the same social and ideological climate.

A contestatory feminist discourse existed, even if Poe was consciously opposed to it. A further factor, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, was the entry of women workers on to the labour market, in both Britain and the U.S.; the literary representation of this phenomenon in Dickens and Melville has, again, been examined in Chapter 1,<sup>141</sup> while, as seen in Chapter 3, Poe's own 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840) contains a reference to young working women.<sup>142</sup> The appearance of women in the public sphere of production raised the possibility, and the threat, of their more wide-ranging engagement in visible social activity.

Neither Wollstonecraft's nor Fuller's text contains any explicit defence of active female sexuality; for a woman to publish such a defence would, in any case, have been all but culturally impossible. Both, however, do affirm the possibility and the desirability of female intellectual activity, on a par with that of men. Wollstonecraft denounces the situation in which 'everything conspires to render the cultivation of the understanding more difficult in the female than the male world',<sup>143</sup> and also the attitude of 'the man who can be contented to live with a pretty, useful companion without a mind'.<sup>144</sup> She affirms, conversely, that women who have, exceptionally, 'received a masculine education' have managed to break out of the stereotype mould, acquiring 'courage and resolution':<sup>145</sup> 'Most of the women, in the circle of my observation, who have acted like rational creatures, or shown any vigour of intellect, have accidentally been allowed to run wild'.<sup>146</sup> Her demand for education is also a demand for equality: 'Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience'.<sup>147</sup> Fuller's emphasis on equality is even more



marked; demanding 'intellectual companionship' within marriage, she declares: 'literary men, and artists have often found in their wives companions and confidantes in thought no less than in feeling. And as the intellectual development of Woman has spread wider and risen higher, they have not unfrequently shared the same employment'.<sup>148</sup> She demands an extension of this tendency, in the interests of intellectual equality; 'I would have Woman lay aside all thought ... of being taught and led by men',<sup>149</sup> and affirms that woman has 'a mind of her own'.<sup>150</sup> Like Wollstonecraft, she stresses the cases of exceptional women who, thanks to an untypical education, have acquired 'a dignified sense of self-dependence', taking their place in 'the world of mind'.<sup>151</sup> While convinced of the justice of her positions, she acknowledges that the threat they pose to male power constitutes them as revolutionary: 'society at large is not so prepared for the demands of this party, but that its members are and will be for some time coldly regarded as the Jacobins of their day'.<sup>152</sup>

The text of 'Ligeia' exhibits both the pressure of feminist 'demands' and of the male reaction to that 'Jacobin' threat. Ligeia, as will be shown below in detail, diverges from the dominant gender norms in various respects, including her intellectual activity; the narrator presents her as 'the partner of my studies' (1) - an "intellectual companion" in Fuller's terms - indeed, as teaching him rather than 'being taught and led': 'I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation' (6). Ligeia has a 'mind of her own', which has been strengthened by enlargement; she is very far from being Wollstonecraft's 'companion without a mind'. Elsewhere in his writings, Poe satirises intellectual women,

as in the pretentious, obtuse 'Psyche Zenobia' of 'How to Write a Blackwood Article' (1838), or the 'Miss Bas-Bleu' of 'The Man that was Used Up' (1839) (M II, 385). In 'Ligeia', however, the female intellect is given voice. Ligeia is, besides, a woman writer; from the 1845 text on,<sup>153</sup> the tale includes Poe's own poem, 'The Conqueror Worm' (1843),<sup>154</sup> which, within the narrative, is ascribed to the female protagonist, as being 'certain verses composed by herself' (9). The insertion of the poem thus places Ligeia on a par with the Visionary of 'The Assination' and Roderick Usher, two male artist-protagonists who are also presented as the writers of poems ('To One In Paradise' and 'The Haunted Palace') actually by Poe<sup>155</sup> (Morella, too, in the earlier versions of the tale bearing her name, appears as the writer of Poe's 'Catholic Hymn').<sup>156</sup> As woman writer, Ligeia necessarily appears as threatening to her husband; Virginia Woolf shows in A Room of One's Own (1928)<sup>157</sup> that in the nineteenth century the traditional condemnation of women writers as "unfeminine" still had some currency: 'It was the relic of the sense of chastity that dictated anonymity to women even so late in the nineteenth century ... Thus they did homage to the convention ... that publicity in women is detestable.'<sup>158</sup> Poe's own criticism of women writers tends to sacrifice objectivity to a "chivalry" that is ultimately oppressive, since it refuses to judge women by the same criteria as men - as in his article on the poetry of Estelle Anna Lewis (1849 - H XIII, 215-25), one of whose poems is called 'the most beautiful ballad of its kind ever written' (218), while it is said of another: 'A nobler poem ... could not be easily pointed out.' (224). Poe admits openly to the existence of this convention in his review of Elizabeth Barrett's The Drama of Exile and other Poems (1845 - H XII, 1-35): 'the inherent chivalry of the critical man renders it not only an unpleasant task to him "to speak

ill of a woman", ... but an almost impossible task not to laud her ad nauseam' (1). In the review in question, he makes an exception for Barrett, presenting his criticisms as an objective exercise in the interests of 'the truth' (3); his usual practice, however, is that of the Lewis review. Nonetheless, "chivalry" did not prevent Poe from roundly condemning Fuller's feminist discourse, in his paper 'Sarah Margaret Fuller' (in 'The Literati of New York', 1846 - H XV, 73-83), as being ideologically subversive, disregarding 'the intention of the Deity as regards sexual differences' (74-75). In that paper, besides, Poe parries the threat represented by Fuller by dismissing her as anomalous - unrepresentative, in fact "not a real woman":

Woman in the Nineteenth Century is a book which few women in the country could have written, and no woman in the country would have published, with the exception of Miss Fuller.... she judges woman by the heart and intellect of Miss Fuller, but there are not more than one or two dozen Miss Fullers on the whole face of the earth. (74-75)<sup>159</sup>

The strategies available to men in order to counter the threat of the woman writer included, then, outright ideological condemnation of women writing as such (as in the 'convention' described by Woolf); "chivalry", which was simply the reverse of the first strategy; and marginalisation of individual women writers as anomalous. Poe follows the second and third strategies; nonetheless, the text of 'Ligeia' suggests a certain recognition, whether conscious or unconscious, of the subversive potential of the woman writer - Ligeia's poem, as will be seen, becomes a means to her domination of her husband.<sup>160</sup> This recognition may underlie Fuller's own favourable comments, in her review of Poe's 1845 Tales (New York Daily Tribune, 11 July 1845),<sup>161</sup> on the 'penetration into the causes of things' evidenced by his writings.<sup>162</sup>

Ligeia, however, is not only a woman intellectual and writer; she is visibly sexually affirmative and active - 'a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion' (5), expressing her desire with 'more than passionate devotion' (8). Poe's tale thus requires to be placed in the context of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century representations of female desire, as signified (typically by male writers) in, especially, Gothic fiction and Romantic poetry. Ligeia is, inter alia, an instance of the literary stereotype of the "passionate woman" - a figure often, though not necessarily, presented in destructive terms, as the femme fatale. This figure typically has long, dark hair and large, dark, "wild" eyes, is fully aware of her sexuality, and tends to take the initiative, or to respond immediately to male initiatives. Mario Praz, in The Romantic Agony (1930), constructs a whole genealogy of femmes fatales, in a chapter titled (with reference to Keats' poem of 1820, to be discussed below)<sup>163</sup> 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'.<sup>164</sup> Praz's 'line of tradition'<sup>165</sup> begins with Matilda in Matthew Lewis' The Monk (1796),<sup>166</sup> and reaches its culmination in Prosper Mérimée's 'Carmen' (1845).<sup>167</sup>

Mérimée's Spanish gypsy woman may be taken as typical of the figure. She has large, dark eyes ('elle avait de très grands yeux',<sup>168</sup> 'son grand oeil noir'),<sup>169</sup> and is visibly and openly sensual: 'Elle avait dans les cheveux un gros bouquet de jasmin, dont les pétales exhalent le soir une odeur enivrante.'<sup>170</sup> (the jasmine, with its intoxicating odour, signifies the sexual attraction of the body it decorates). She comes to dominate the protagonist, Don José, to the point where he resigns his post in the army, becomes an outlaw, and kills for her sake, before finally killing her out of jealousy. The "normal" male/female relation is thus reversed: 'J'étais si faible devant cette créature,

que j'obéissais à tous ses caprices.'<sup>171</sup> From José's viewpoint, it is Carmen who is responsible for his degradation and social exile: "'... c'est toi qui m'as perdu; c'est pour toi que je suis devenu un voleur et un meurtrier'"<sup>172</sup> the fatal woman is thus presented as a diabolic, destructive figure: 'cette femme était un démon'.<sup>173</sup>

'Carmen' is a double first-person narrative, with José's story framed by the narrative of a French archaeologist; the absence of a definitive viewpoint certainly permits the text to be read against the grain, as giving voice to the silenced discourse of female desire, but the fact remains that Mérimée's nouvelle has typically been read as incarnating a certain misogynist myth of the destroyer-woman.

Negative constructions of the active woman before Poe include Matilda in The Monk (as seen above), Undine in Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's novel of that name (1811),<sup>174</sup> and Euphemia in Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs (1816). Lewis' fatal woman is, quite literally, a devil in human shape,<sup>175</sup> who enters the monastery of which Ambrosio, the protagonist, is abbot, disguised as a male novice. She proceeds to seduce Ambrosio, openly signifying herself as a sexually active and conscious woman: "'... I lust for the enjoyment of your person. The Woman reigns in my bosom, and I am become a prey to the wildest of passions.... My bosom burns with love, with unutterable love ... I must enjoy you, or die.'"<sup>176</sup> Thus visibly diverging from the gender norm, representing unrepressed 'Woman', she is explicitly presented in the text as 'unfeminine' in cultural terms, and therefore unacceptable: 'She assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse but ill calculated to please him.... when He (i.e. Ambrosio) thought of her expressions ..., He could not help blaming them as cruel and unfeminine.'<sup>177</sup> Matilda is, besides, intellectually active -

unusually well educated ('" ... my understanding acquired more strength and justness, than generally falls to the lot of my sex'"')<sup>178</sup> and endowed with 'astonishing powers of ... mind' that force her lover to 'confess the superiority of her judgment'.<sup>179</sup> She is ultimately held responsible for plunging Ambrosio into a career of crime that culminates in rape, incest and matricide; the text thus effectively condemns active femininity, whether in the intellectual or sexual spheres, as diabolic and destructive. Matilda's unusual education recalls both Wollstonecraft's and Fuller's exemplary cases,<sup>180</sup> and anticipates Ligeia; but Lewis' novel must be read as implying that women should not be educated, that intellectual women are 'unfeminine' and dangerous.

Fouqué's Undine was - as noted in Chapters 3 and 5<sup>181</sup> - reviewed by Poe in 1839 (H X, 30-39). Undine is a siren, or water-nymph, who marries a human, the knight Huldbrand. He is unfaithful to her and remarries, but she returns on his wedding-night and destroys him. In his review, Poe describes Undine as being of an 'extravagantly wild and perverse ... temperament' (39);<sup>182</sup> the tell-tale adjective 'wild' suggests sexual activity, and constitutes Undine as a parallel figure to Ligeia. Indeed, Fouqué's text characterises the siren as "unfeminine"; she makes the first advances to Huldbrand, upon which her foster-mother reproves for not being a 'modest girl'.<sup>183</sup> On the night of his wedding to Undine, the knight has 'strange and horrible dreams ... of fair women whose faces suddenly became the masks of dragons'.<sup>184</sup> These dreams anticipate the climax, when Undine confronts her faithless husband; their last conversation is as follows:

'And if I might only die upon a kiss of thine!'  
'And so you shall, my darling.'<sup>185</sup>

The text presents Undine as an essentially active, and therefore destructive woman (or 'dragon'); rather than being exculpated as the abandoned party, she is effectively found guilty for not being 'modest'. 'Ligeia' exhibits certain parallels with Fouqué's narrative (whether or not Poe read Undine before writing his tale); there is the triangle of husband, first wife and second wife, and the destructive return of the first wife (in Fouqué's text to kill the man, in Poe's - at least of the surface - to kill and replace the other woman). In both narratives, female 'wildness', or sexual activity, is constructed as destructive and culturally unacceptable.

Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs is primarily a novel on the double theme, and has been examined as such in Chapter 2, in relation to 'William Wilson'.<sup>186</sup> It also contains, however, an instance of the femme fatale, in the figure of Euphemia - a character whom Praz has linked to Lewis' Matilda.<sup>187</sup> While staying at the castle of the Baron F-, the protagonist, Medardus, becomes involved with his host's wife, Euphemia. She is first described to him by Reinhold, a friend of the Baron, in the following terms:

(She displayed) a roguish irony which stimulated the appetite like a sharp, pungent herb ... This Circe made a remarkable impression on the Baron ... in conversation with him she displayed a culture and an understanding such as he had scarcely ever found in a woman.<sup>188</sup>

Reinhold further emphasises his aversion to this woman ('she repelled me in some unaccountable way'); he finds a 'destructive fire' in the 'strange glow in her eyes'.<sup>189</sup> Here again, as in The Monk, the

intellectually and sexually active woman is presented in a negative light; the 'pungent herb' image, like the jasmine image in 'Carmen', suggests the fascinating but destructive appeal of the woman's body, while the Circe reference implies the conversion of men into beasts, and therefore an "unnatural" situation of female dominance. Medardus, however, enters on sexual relations with Euphemia; she has no qualms about deceiving the Baron, justifying herself on the grounds of her 'superior will'.<sup>190</sup> Eventually, she instigates her lover to murder her husband; he refuses and decides to kill her, but discovers she has already poisoned herself.<sup>191</sup> It later emerges that Euphemia was in fact Medardus' half-sister, so that the affair was incestuous.<sup>192</sup> The plot of Hoffmann's novel thus associates female sexual activity with murder and incest; Euphemia anticipates Ligeia in her glowing eyes, her power of 'will' and unusual 'culture and understanding', but it is, once again, a case of a negative precedent.

The active woman was not, however, always necessarily signified in a destructive light; the task of redressing the ideological balance fell to the two revolutionary poets, Byron and Shelley. Byron's poetical work is marked by the repeated presence of sexually active female subjects, not all of them destructive; the most celebrated is Haidée in Don Juan (1819-24), a figure already considered in Chapter 5.<sup>193</sup> Haidée's desire for Juan is consciously assumed and expressed without repression; her physique, besides, bears all the characteristics of the passionate woman. She is unusually tall ('and though her stature were/Even of the highest for a female mould') with long 'clustering hair',<sup>194</sup> and eyes 'black as death'.<sup>195</sup> When she confronts her father, after the latter has discovered her with Juan, she is presented as 'masculinised' in a positive sense, less 'unfeminine' than 'more-than-



feminine":

She stood as one who champion'd human fears -  
Pale, statue-like, and stern, she woo'd the blow;  
And tall beyond her sex, and their compeers,  
She drew up to her height, as if to show  
A fairer mark; and with a fix'd eye scann'd  
Her father's face ...<sup>196</sup>

Haidée's resistance is eventually in vain; her father sends Juan away, and she dies in silence and madness. However, the brief utopia of pleasure she and Juan construct suggests the possibility of open and unrepressed sexual pleasure for women. Ligeia resembles Haidée in her dark eyes, her tallness ('In stature she was tall' (2)) and her sensuality; but her activity is not textually validated as part of a libertarian project. If Haidée is seen as destroyed by the social forces represented by her father ('her days and pleasures were/Brief, but delightful - such as had not stayed/Long with her destiny'),<sup>197</sup> Ligeia is, to some extent, presented as destructive.<sup>198</sup> On the other hand, Poe's active woman has a characteristic absent in Byron's, in her intellectual development; Haidée's liberation is incomplete insofar as she remains illiterate,<sup>199</sup> and her revolt is entirely intuitive, without any consciously assumed oppositional discourse. Ideological revolt is, however, signified in Byron's late, unfinished drama, Heaven and Earth (1823),<sup>200</sup> which contains some of his most daring speculations. In this "mystery", two mortal women, Anah and Aholibamah, daughters of Cain, choose to escape with their lovers, two rebel angels, in spite of the warning of the archangel Raphael. On the one hand, their respective passions are consciously affirmed and recognised; thus Anah sees herself as: 'Her whose heart death could not keep from o'erflowing'.<sup>201</sup> On the other hand, there is an element of intellectual revolt in their choice, since both decide to reject the law of Jehovah,

represented by Raphael, and accompany the rebel angels in their search for some space where that law will not prevail, 'a brighter world than this'.<sup>202</sup> Their flight implies the possibility of a cultural alternative, and thus constitutes the active woman as both a sexual and intellectual rebel - this in spite of Byron's own notorious dislike (as expressed in the first canto of Don Juan) of 'ladies intellectual'.<sup>203</sup>

The active woman is generally also prominently signified in the work of Shelley. The early Gothic novel Zastrozzi (1810)<sup>204</sup> contains some curious lexical parallels with 'Ligeia'. This text, preceding as it does the development of a distinctively Shelleyan discourse, ostensibly condemns female sexuality - but, at the same time, gives voice to what it condemns, through the insistent and repeated signification of desire. The protagonist, Verezzi, enters into relations with two women, the passive Julia and the active, and significantly named, Matilda. If Julia conforms to the dominant gender norms, as a woman 'whose feminine delicacy shrunk from the slightest suspicion, even, of indecorum',<sup>205</sup> Matilda is dark-eyed, and openly passionate: 'Her bosom was scorched by an ardent and unquenchable fire'.<sup>206</sup> She declares herself openly to Verezzi ('I adore you to madness'), but only succeeds in provoking his criticism for transgressing role stereotypes: 'this discourse is improper - it is not suiting ... the delicacy of your sex'.<sup>207</sup> The lexis used to signify her passion is at one point remarkably similar to that employed in 'Ligeia': 'the peculiar expression which beamed in her dark eye, told the tumultuous wishes of her bosom';<sup>208</sup> one may compare the references in Poe's tale to 'the expression of the eyes of Ligeia', with its 'peculiarity' (3), and to 'the tumultuous vultures of stern passion' (5). Matilda's desire, 'the extreme violence of her sensations',<sup>209</sup> is condemned by the

narrator, and yet is openly signified in all its intensity ('her pulse beat with unwonted violence ... an ardent and voluptuous fire darted from her eyes').<sup>210</sup> Her role in the novel is essentially destructive; she eventually kills Julia, and drives Verezzi to suicide. The logic of the narrative thus validates the passive model of femininity, devaluing the active woman; but the words on the page have told a rather different story, pointing towards Shelley's later, positive valuation of female desire. The lexical parallels with 'Ligeia', however, tend to anticipate the ambivalence with which Poe's text signifies the active woman; while the active/passive opposition between Matilda and Julia is repeated in the Ligeia/Rowena antithesis.

In Laon and Cythna (1817) (the first, uncensored version of The Revolt of Islam (1818)), under the influence of Wollstonecraft's discourse,<sup>211</sup> Shelley narrated an imaginary revolution, making it clear that the notion of social transformation implied an end to the oppression of women and the breakdown of gender stereotypes. His revolutionary protagonist, Cythna, is thus both sexually and intellectually active. She has 'dark and deepening eyes',<sup>212</sup> and 'dark tresses',<sup>213</sup> and consciously assumes and consummates her relationship with her lover, Laon (in this uncensored version her brother).<sup>214</sup> At the same time, she is a feminist militant who takes it on herself to raise the consciousness of the women around her ('Thus she doth equal laws and justice teach/To woman, outraged and polluted long')<sup>215</sup> and, besides, that of Laon himself ('Nor are the strong and the severe to keep/The empire of the world: thus Cythna taught ...').<sup>216</sup> She is, then, a teacher, whose lessons expand her lover's mental horizons ('she/... who had indued/My purpose with a wider sympathy');<sup>217</sup> as with Wollstonecraft's exemplary

cases , she has had an unusual education, which facilitated the development in her of 'the female mind':

Within that fairest form, the female mind  
Untainted by the poison clouds which rest  
On the dark world, a sacred home did find ...<sup>218</sup>

'Untainted' by the 'poison clouds' of a sexist upbringing, Cythna becomes intellectually active, capable of thinking independently; she is, besides, a woman artist, a composer of revolutionary songs.<sup>219</sup> Her activity tends, not to the mere reversal of role stereotypes, but to their dissolution in an androgynous practice. This is exemplified in her relationship with Laon, where each alternately assumes the active, protective role; thus at one point Cythna requires her lover's protection ('And for a space in my embrace she rested'),<sup>220</sup> but at another appears, 'masculinised' and 'waving a sword', to save his life.<sup>221</sup> Shelley's text denaturalises the existing social universe with its rigid gender stereotypes, and points towards its possible transformation through a revolutionary counter-pedagogy; according to Nathaniel Brown (Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley, 1979),<sup>222</sup> it is 'the most powerful feminist poem in the language', with '(its) battle cry sexual revolution'.<sup>223</sup> The figure of Cythna, negating the ideology of female 'delicacy' that was affirmed in Zastrozzi, signifies the possibility of equality between the sexes. Poe's own reading of Shelley, like that of so many others, represses all the politics out of the poems (as in 'Marginalia', 1849 - H XVI, 148-50), reducing the Shelleyan oeuvre to an instance of l'art pour l'art: ('If ever poet sang - ... to himself solely - and for the mere joy of his own song - that poet was the author of "The Sensitive Plant."' - 148); nonetheless, the figure of Cythna may be considered as one of the literary determinants of Ligeia, embodying women's potential sexual and intellectual activity

and independence, and their possible role as teachers of men.

However, a Cythna, or even a Haidée, has only the status of an untypical figure among nineteenth-century representations of active women; while not all instances of the figure are as overwhelmingly destructive as Lewis' Matilda or Hoffmann's Euphemia, it is frequently presented with ambivalence. Franco Moretti, in 'The Dialectic of Fear' (1978), stresses how 'nineteenth-century bourgeois high culture ... treated Eros and sex as ambivalent phenomena'; in its literary representations of the erotic, 'fear and desire incessantly overturn into one another', as in the figure of the vampiric woman. Moretti's examples of this motif include 'Baudelaire's women' (one could cite, for example, the woman of 'Le Désir de Peindre', quoted above),<sup>224</sup> Keats' Lamia, and, specifically, Poe's Berenice and Ligeia.<sup>225</sup> The notion of vampirism is, of course, not to be taken literally; it implies a predatory, destructive sexuality that is, at the same time, perceived as seductive and fascinating: 'Vampirism is an excellent example of the identity of desire and fear',<sup>226</sup> The active woman is signified as ambivalent, rather than wholly destructive, in certain texts by Keats (Moretti's example, Lamia (1820), and 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' (1820)),<sup>227</sup> and Hawthorne ('Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844), and The Blithedale Romance (1852)).

Lamia has already been mentioned, in Chapter 5,<sup>228</sup> for its construction of the interior as bewildering space; indeed, the perceptually disorienting effect of the interior (created by Lamia herself) corresponds to the ideologically disorienting role of the poem's female protagonist. Lamia, the serpent-woman, is an artist - both a singer, with her voice 'luting soft',<sup>229</sup> and an interior designer,<sup>230</sup> Prospero-like summoning

up spirits to construct the banquet-room 'in fit magnificence'.<sup>231</sup> Sexually, she is 'in the lore/Of love deep learned',<sup>232</sup> and as demonstratively and atypically active as Shelley's Matilda; having fallen in love with the male protagonist, Lycius, she declares herself immediately.<sup>233</sup> In the relationship (at first clandestine) that ensues, Lamia is alternately presented as loving and destructive, 'gentle'<sup>234</sup> and 'cruel'.<sup>235</sup> At one point the active/passive stereotype is reversed, with Lamia dominating Lycius;<sup>236</sup> but later the gender norms are reconstituted, as her lover 'took delight/Luxurious in her sorrows',<sup>237</sup> while '(she) burnt, she lov'd the tyranny',<sup>238</sup> and consents to have their relationship officialised with a public wedding. At the marriage-feast, the philosopher Apollonius intervenes to denounce Lamia as a serpent, upon which she disappears and Lycius dies. On a superficial reading, the serpent-bride seems to be responsible for her husband's death, with female desire thus appearing in a negative light; however, the text can also be read as implying that Lycius was responsible for his own destruction, less by loving her than by insisting on legitimating, through marriage, a relationship which, given its transgression of cultural norms, could only have survived in clandestinity. Keats' poem has been linked, as Mabbott shows,<sup>239</sup> with Poe's 'Sonnet - To Science' (1829); more importantly, however, the figure of Lamia - sexually active and aesthetically creative, ambivalently erotic and destructive - may be read as anticipating Ligeia. The two figures are further linked by their ('real' or apparent) supernatural associations. Lamia's non-human status, as serpent-woman, serves to mark her as culturally different and non-assimilable; while Ligeia, like Lamia, who has 'no friends' (i.e. no relations),<sup>240</sup> lacks a family name ('I have never known the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed' - 1) - the absence of surname suggesting, on

one level, supernatural status, and, on another, non-integration into the patriarchal law. In 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', similarly, the 'faery' lady's non-human character reinforces her anomalous status as sexually aware and active woman. She, too, takes erotic initiatives ("I love thee true"),<sup>241</sup> and, as a singer,<sup>242</sup> is an artist; specifically, she anticipates Ligeia in her physical characteristics: 'Her hair was long, her foot was light,/And her eyes were wild.'<sup>243</sup> Ligeia, too, has 'luxuriant ... tresses' (2) and 'wild eyes' (23), and the narrator stresses the 'lightness and elasticity of her footfall' (2). Keats' Belle Dame is, as much as Lamia, an ambivalent figure. On the one hand, she can be read as vampirically destroying her lover, the knight, physically and psychologically, as his dream of 'pale kings and princes'<sup>244</sup> would suggest; on the other hand, that dream itself may represent his own fears of active femininity, and the breakdown of the relationship may be due to his inability to respond to the sexual and ideological challenge presented by the Belle Dame, whose Celtic-faery characteristics suggest her cultural otherness.<sup>245</sup> The ambivalence with which Keats' poems give voice to a female desire which both is and is not seen as destructive is, as will be shown, visibly reproduced in 'Ligeia'.<sup>246</sup>

Hawthorne's two most striking constructions of the active woman - the figures of Beatrice in 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844) and Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance (1852) - both postdate 'Ligeia', but merit close examination alongside Poe's protagonist. 'Rappaccini's Daughter' has already been mentioned in Chapter 2, in the context of the tradition of "artificial human" or "modified human" stories,<sup>247</sup> and in Chapter 4 in the context of the figure of the destructive scientist.<sup>248</sup> Beatrice Rappaccini's metabolism has been modified by her scientist

father, who has poisoned her breath in the hope of creating a new race of beings. He sets her up to attract a young man, Giovanni Guasconti, who immediately falls in love with her. Giovanni's perception of Beatrice is marked by precisely that ambivalence which Moretti sees as typifying nineteenth-century representations of the erotic; she simultaneously provokes in him 'love and horror', in a 'lurid intermixture'<sup>249</sup> - as, similarly, Ligeia's husband is both 'delighted and appalled' by his wife (5). Beatrice is presented as destructive (her breath poisons insects), and therefore full of a disturbing 'energy'<sup>250</sup> (the same signifier is used to characterise Ligeia (5)). Her visible divergence from gender norms is made explicit in the text, when her father states that he has made her escape 'the condition of a weak woman': "'... thou dost (stand apart) ... from ordinary women'"<sup>251</sup> (Ligeia, similarly, is seen by the narrator as different from 'all the women whom I have ever known' (5)). Hawthorne's 'Belle Empoisonneuse'<sup>252</sup> is a two-faced figure, signified at one and the same time as seductive and destructive, 'as terrible as ... beautiful';<sup>253</sup> she differs, however, from Ligeia in having her activity and destructiveness to a large extent forced on her by her father's experiment, against her will ("I would fain have been loved, not feared").<sup>254</sup> Indeed, her entry into a forced active role may be seen as indirectly corresponding to women's entry on to the labour market, and therefore into public visibility, at the behest of capitalism.<sup>255</sup> At all events, Rappaccini's experiment brings out the latent active component in female sexuality.<sup>256</sup>

In The Blithedale Romance, however, Zenobia's activeness is entirely her own choice, the product of a militantly assumed feminist discourse.



Hawthorne's novel has already been examined for its use of mesmerism in the context of exploitative male/female relations;<sup>257</sup> it is also important in that it gives voice, through Zenobia, to a discourse that challenges the active/passive gender stereotypes. At the same time, Zenobia is contrasted with Priscilla, her half-sister, who, to a large extent, represents the passive norm; there is, then, an antithetical pairing similar to that constituted in 'Ligeia' between the protagonist and Rowena. As Leslie Fiedler suggests in Love and Death in the American Novel (1960), Zenobia is, on one level, an instance of the Gothic figure of the 'Dark Lady';<sup>258</sup> but the element of conscious feminism serves to transform that figure into one of ideological as well as sexual revolt. Indeed, Hawthorne's Dark Lady is generally considered to be modelled on Margaret Fuller<sup>259</sup> (who is actually mentioned in the text when Coverdale, the narrator, receives a letter from 'Miss Margaret Fuller').<sup>260</sup> Zenobia is an intellectual and 'female reformer',<sup>261</sup> a journalist who has, like Fuller, published feminist documents ('tracts in defence of the sex')<sup>262</sup> as well as short stories; she reads one of the latter ('Zenobia's Legend') in chapter 13,<sup>263</sup> in a destructive context, insofar as the plot parallels, and anticipates, the conspiracy into which Zenobia is to enter against Priscilla (who is intimidated and psychologically undermined by the reading).<sup>264</sup> The destructive impact of Zenobia's text corresponds to that of Ligeia's poem, 'The Conqueror Worm';<sup>265</sup> in both cases the woman writer is, in practice, pictured in a negative light. As a sexual being, Zenobia is another Lamia, visibly experienced and aware; Coverdale concludes: 'Zenobia has lived, and loved! There is no folded petal, no latent dew-drop, in this perfectly-developed rose!'<sup>266</sup> Physically, she corresponds to the Gothic-Romantic model of the active woman, with her long hair, 'dark, glossy, and of singular abundance',<sup>267</sup>

and her 'bright' eyes.<sup>268</sup> The text stresses her energy - her 'vigor',<sup>269</sup> or 'passionate intensity';<sup>270</sup> the lexis here reproduces that of 'Ligeia' ('the will, with its vigor' (10); 'the passionate wife' (7)). She is, besides, repeatedly signified as anomalous, different from other women; her laugh is 'not in the least like an ordinary woman's laugh',<sup>271</sup> her hand is 'larger than most women would like to have'.<sup>272</sup> In this respect, she recalls not only Ligeia (and Beatrice Rappaccini),<sup>273</sup> but also Fuller, as seen by Poe.<sup>274</sup> Over the novel, Zenobia is presented as destructive, both of others (intervening in Priscilla's life out of jealousy) and of self, in her final suicide; at the same time, however, Coverdale tries to excuse her by presenting her as a victim of a hostile society: 'the world should throw open all its avenues to the passport of a woman's bleeding heart'.<sup>275</sup> Nonetheless, while Zenobia's attitudes are, to some extent, justified in the text on an individual level, Coverdale (and presumably Hawthorne) refuses to admit the general applicability of her feminist discourse. Her demands are seen as, at least possibly, legitimate for her because she is different; while that difference is itself seen as in part the product of particular emotional disappointments, that is, chance:

... women, however intellectually superior, so seldom disquiet themselves about the rights or wrongs of their sex, unless their own individual affections chance to lie in idleness, or to be ill at ease. They are not natural reformers, but become such by the pressure of exceptional misfortune. I could measure Zenobia's inward trouble, by the animosity with which she now took up the general quarrel of woman against man.<sup>276</sup>

In contrast to Laon and Cythna, Hawthorne's text fails to give general validation to the feminist discourse it voices; rather, the militant is seen as a freak, and her feminism attributed to individual frustration. Further, Priscilla, over most of the novel passive and compliant ('"I never have any free-will"',<sup>277</sup> largely corresponds to the cultural

stereotype - in Zenobia's words, to 'the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it'.<sup>278</sup> The Blithedale Romance, then, on the one hand, admits and gives voice to the active contestation of gender norms;<sup>279</sup> but, on the other, allows that contestation, at best, only an individual validity. Nonetheless, Hawthorne's novel illuminates 'Ligeia', given the various textual parallels between the two active women, by making explicit the feminist discourse that in Poe's tale remains implicit.

In nineteenth-century literature, then, the active woman takes various shapes - the sexually conscious woman, the woman writer, the woman intellectual, the feminist militant; but, whatever form she assumes, she is typically presented by male writers - with such few exceptions as Shelley and, to some extent, Byron - as at best ambiguous, and at worst totally "evil". In spite of Poe's conscious anti-feminism, as expressed in his hostility to both Wollstonecraft and Fuller, 'Ligeia' may be classed among the texts in which the active woman appears as ambivalent (if in the end destructive), rather than downright "evil". Before the sexual dimension of the tale is considered in detail, however, it will first be useful to examine the critical literature.

The plot of 'Ligeia' raises various problems. The status of the narrator (reliable or unreliable?) has to be determined, as well as the "reality" or otherwise of the events he relates. On the surface, the story is as follows. The narrative falls into two halves. In the first part, the narrator meets Ligeia in Germany, and marries her; they engage in philosophical speculation together. She evolves the belief that the human will can triumph over death, and then dies. In

the second part, her widower moves to England, where he buys and furnishes an abbey, in which he settles with his second wife, Rowena (having meanwhile taken to opium). He treats her sadistically; she falls ill, and, one evening, watching over her in their turret bedroom, the narrator "sees" a 'shadow of angelic aspect', and, later, some drops of a 'ruby colored fluid' falling into a goblet of wine, from which Rowena then drinks (17). Three nights later, Rowena dies; the following night, sitting up next to the corpse, the narrator "sees" it gradually come to life, until it gets up and walks into the middle of the room - but with the features, not of Rowena, but of Ligeia. The reader thus has to decide, above all, whether this apparent transformation of the corpse, and the consequent resurrection of Ligeia, are "real" or not within the narrative.

The critical debate over the tale has been intense, and at times acrimonious. Together with 'Usher', 'Ligeia' has tended to be a test case for the rival "étrange" and "merveilleux" readings of Poe's work in general; there have also been differing views of "what happens" in the narrative (does the narrator kill Rowena? does he also kill Ligeia?); and multiple metaphoric interpretations have been offered. In particular, the tale was the pretext for an ongoing critical conflict between Roy P. Basler, defending the "étrange" reading, and James Schroeter, proponent of the "merveilleux" reading (Basler, 'The Interpretation of "Ligeia"', 1944;<sup>280</sup> Schroeter, 'A Misreading of Poe's "Ligeia"', 1961;<sup>281</sup> Basler, 'Poe's "Ligeia"', 1962).<sup>282</sup>

The supernatural reading is defended by Mabbott (1978), who claims: 'We cannot doubt that the author intended a story of real magic',

justifying this notion via the pentagonal shape of the turret room (13),<sup>283</sup> and suggesting that the 'ruby colored' drops (17) represent the 'elixir vitae', poured into the goblet by Ligeia's 'disembodied spirit'.<sup>284</sup> A. H. Quinn (Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography, 1941) sees Ligeia as a 'superhuman' being, declaring: 'The supernatural ending is prepared for ... in the very first sentence';<sup>285</sup> E. H. Davidson (Poe: A Critical Study, 1957) takes Ligeia's notion of the will to the letter, claiming: 'The will is a renunciation of visible reality and the recasting of the world wholly in terms of the most intimate visions of the self';<sup>286</sup> Vincent Buranelli (Edgar Allan Poe, 1961) thinks that 'Ligeia returns spiritually, poisons the second wife, takes possession of the dead body, and rises from her bier',<sup>287</sup> thus offering a hyper-literal reading of the surface narrative, which openly adheres to its 'evident meaning'.<sup>288</sup> Muriel West, in two articles ('Poe's "Ligeia"', 1963;<sup>289</sup> 'Poe's "Ligeia" and Isaac D'Israeli', 1964),<sup>290</sup> dismissing psychoanalytic readings on historicist grounds,<sup>291</sup> justifies Ligeia's supernatural status on the grounds of the narrator's failure to recall her surname, which is read as showing her to be a being 'above and apart from the earth', while the detail of the ruby drops is seen as invoking alchemical lore, pointing to the elixir of life<sup>292</sup> (West simultaneously offers a metaphoric reading of the text, which will be considered below).<sup>293</sup> Schroeter, in a sustained exposition of the 'merveilleux' reading, rejects all hermeneutic and/or psychoanalytic readings, especially Basler's, on intentionist grounds;<sup>294</sup> he argues that the narrator is completely reliable, and that his opium habit only points to his 'superior ... powers of perception',<sup>295</sup> that Ligeia is a 'semi-deity',<sup>296</sup> and that the entire narrative belongs to the realm of the 'marvelous'.<sup>297</sup>

On the other hand, an 'étrange' reading, in terms of the narrator's unreliability and mental disintegration, is persuasively defended by various critics. Basler (1944) argues that in 'Ligeia', as in 'Berenice' and 'Morella', 'Poe dealt deliberately with the psychological themes of obsession and madness';<sup>298</sup> he sees the narrator as suffering from a delusive belief in resurrection: 'It is his will to conquer death that motivates the ... story, not hers.'<sup>299</sup> Ligeia's husband is further read as exhibiting symptoms of megalomania<sup>300</sup> and erotic obsession;<sup>301</sup> the 'shadow' in the bedroom is hallucinatory,<sup>302</sup> while the ruby drops are a distorted perception of a bottle of poison which he is actually holding in his hand,<sup>303</sup> and the final transformation of the corpse is another hallucination, the product of his 'obsessed brain and senses'.<sup>304</sup> Indeed, he is seen as an opium user and a sadist, who first persecutes and then poisons Rowena;<sup>305</sup> he is, therefore, a completely unreliable witness, whose testimony in fact consists of two stories - 'the story which the narrator means to tell', and the one which 'he tells without meaning to, as he unconsciously reveals himself'.<sup>306</sup> As in Richard's reading of 'The Tell-Tale Heart', Basler's analysis thus deconstitutes 'Ligeia' into a manifest text and a latent counter-text.<sup>307</sup> In his 1962 note, Basler replies to Schroeter's view that the notion of the narrator's madness is incompatible with the careful organisation of his narrative, stressing that organisation and delusion are not incompatible<sup>308</sup> (indeed, on this point, one may compare the highly systematised delusional beliefs exhibited by Roderick Usher).<sup>309</sup> In an argument similar in orientation to Basler's, James W. Gargano ('Poe's "Ligeia": Dream and Destruction', 1962)<sup>310</sup> argues that the tale dramatises the narrator's 'journey into madness',<sup>311</sup> with the transformation of the corpse marking his 'complete withdrawal into

an all-absorbing private fantasy';<sup>312</sup> Ligeia is seen as representing the Romantic notion of a 'poetic or ideal world',<sup>313</sup> which her husband insanely believes he can inhabit literally and permanently. Similarly, D. N. Koster ('Poe, Romance and Reality', 1973)<sup>314</sup> argues that the tale is only apparently supernatural, and in reality probes the 'depths of the human psyche';<sup>315</sup> he reads the narrator as a 'psychopathic murderer' who has killed 'not only Rowena but Ligeia as well'.<sup>316</sup> Intimidated by his first wife and suffering from a 'sense of inferiority on both the emotional and intellectual planes', he decides to kill her, to rid himself of her disturbing 'physical presence'.<sup>317</sup> Later, Rowena's death is accomplished with a 'massive potion of poison' (i.e. the 'ruby colored fluid').<sup>318</sup> The tale is thus read as both a narrative of madness and a disguised account of a double murder. G. R. Thompson (Poe's Fiction, 1973) takes a position very similar to those of Basler and Koster, arguing that the text 'develops an ironic distance between the reader and the narrator';<sup>319</sup> 'Ligeia' is not a 'Gothic tale of the supernatural',<sup>320</sup> but, rather, 'the story of the ambiguous delusions of a guilt-ridden madman who has probably murdered at least one wife and has hallucinated a weird rationalization of his crimes'.<sup>321</sup> Thompson draws attention, in particular, to the disorienting role of the decor, and to how the detail of the wind machine (14) openly and sardonically shatters the 'spooky effect'.<sup>322</sup> The "étrange" reading, then, in general tends to privilege the textual indications of narratorial unreliability, and to view the tale in terms of madness, hallucination and (in most cases) murder.

Other interpretations concern themselves less with 'what happens' in the narrative than with its metaphoric or symbolic signification. This kind of reading is also offered by some of the critics who engage in

the "étrange"/"merveilleux" debate; thus Gargano, as seen above, sees Ligeia as representing an extreme, deluded Romantic idealism, while West (1964) reads her as the 'muse', or the poetic imagination<sup>323</sup> ('Ligeia represents an ideal spiritual divine presence. '),<sup>324</sup> seeing the transformation of the corpse as symbolising the transmutation of a 'horror tale' into 'a prose poem of great beauty'.<sup>325</sup> A similarly metaliterary reading is put forward by Clark Griffith ('Poe's "Ligeia" and the English Romantics', 1954),<sup>326</sup> for whom Rowena (who is probably from Cornwall)<sup>327</sup> represents British Romanticism, while Ligeia (whom the narrator met 'near the Rhine' - (1)) symbolises its German counterpart; the transformation thus allegorically signifies the modification of Anglo-American Romantic discourse under German influence<sup>328</sup> (whose mystical excesses are satirised through the figure of Ligeia).<sup>329</sup> The tale thus, on this reading, becomes a disguised literary satire. In a different direction, Maurice J. Bennett ('"The Madness of Art": Poe's "Ligeia" as Metafiction', 1981)<sup>330</sup> proposes a Wilbur-influenced reading which is both metaliterary and extreme-idealist. For Bennett, Ligeia symbolises a metaphysical concept of art, promising 'escape into the ideal world of poetry',<sup>331</sup> while Rowena represents the demands of 'everyday reality';<sup>332</sup> the transformation scene therefore allegorises the definitive triumph of the imagination, which 'negates dull reality by transforming it'.<sup>333</sup> The tale is thus a symbolic, meta-poetic representation of the ups and downs of 'the processes of aesthetic consciousness',<sup>334</sup> the alternation in the poet's mind of the demands of imagination (Ligeia) and reality (Rowena), culminating in the victory of the former (Ligeia's return).

As well as the idealist readings of West and Bennett, and Griffith's empiricist perspectives, several depth-psychological interpretations



have been advanced. D. H. Lawrence ('Edgar Allan Poe', in Studies in Classic American Literature, 1923)<sup>335</sup> sees the marital relation in the tale as a 'battle of wills';<sup>336</sup> the narrator is accused of over-intellectualisation of desire, of trying to know his wife 'mentally' rather than physically ('darkly, in the blood').<sup>337</sup> This reading, for all its obscurantist blood-mysticism, has the merit of highlighting both the tale's sexual dimension and, specifically, the narrator's alienation from his own body. Marie Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933), reading the tale biographically, sees Ligeia as the Oedipal mother, idealised as omniscient and all-powerful, and the transformation as signifying the impossibility of a total or permanent transference from the mother to another love-object; the text thus demonstrates Poe's own Oedipal mother-fixation.<sup>338</sup> Hélène Cixous ('Poe re-lu', 1972), in keeping with her general thesis, as summarised above,<sup>339</sup> reads Ligeia's 'fierceness of resistance' to death (7) as a symbolic expression of 'le désir', that is, female sexuality;<sup>340</sup> her 'wild eyes' (7) have a phallic potency which permits the reversal of gender stereotypes in the marital relation: 'le narrateur ... est pénétré par l'étrangeté de l'aimée ... l'organe de la pénétration étant, violemment, le regard'.<sup>341</sup> Ligeia's return is thus the triumphant return of female desire ('la femme est-elle jamais morte?').<sup>342</sup> Finally, Jules Zanger ('Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge', 1978)<sup>343</sup> suggests that 'Ligeia' (together with 'Morella') can be read as an expression of male fear of female sexuality. The secret of Ligeia's eyes is that of her desire (woman perceived as an 'engulfing sexual force'), and the 'forbidden' knowledge (6) that she and her husband pursue is sexual knowledge.<sup>344</sup> The textual presentation of Ligeia as destructive and disturbing reflects, on Zanger's analysis, the view, which had some currency in the period,

of sexually active women as 'sperm absorbers' who posed a threat to male potency<sup>345</sup> (this specific ideology can be related to the more general male fear of female desire described by Freud in 'The Taboo of Virginity', as seen above).<sup>346</sup> If Bonaparte's reading of 'Ligeia' remains narrowly biographical and Oedipal (while nonetheless introducing the notion of the potent mother), the analyses of Cixous and Zanger thrust the text firmly into the arena of sexual politics.

The text of 'Ligeia' will now be examined in detail, in the light of the interpretive possibilities suggested by the above psycho-sexual readings. First, however, the "étrange"/"merveilleux" problematic will be dealt with. On the "merveilleux" reading, as adopted by Mabbott, Schroeter and the other critics listed above,<sup>347</sup> Ligeia's return from the dead is taken quite literally, as a demonstration of the ability of the will to triumph over death; Ligeia herself is at the least a magician, if not a supernatural being, whether angel, devil or vampire; her spirit is responsible for Rowena's death, whether by vampirically undermining her health or by poisoning her; the ruby drops are either poison or the elixir of life (in the latter case employed to effect the reanimation of the corpse); and the transformation of Rowena's body into Ligeia's is to be read to the letter, as an instance of metempsychosis. It is true that Poe wrote of the tale, in a letter to Philip P. Cooke (21 September 1839 - (01, 117-19)), in a way that could imply that he himself read it literally: 'I should have intimated that the will did not perfect its intention - there should have been a relapse' (118). This comment indicates, on the one hand, that the transformation was intended as only temporary (as, in 'Valdemar', the mesmerist's arresting of death is only transitory);

but, on the other, the use of the simple past to refer to the textual events suggests that (perhaps) the transformation could be taken as "real", so far as it goes. Indeed, in the same letter Poe refers to the narrator's 'perception of the fact that Ligeia lives again in the person of Rowena' (ibid.) - but this 'fact' could be read as existing only in the narrator's perception (and no-one else's). At all events, the interpretation offered in this letter has been read as a rationalisation, or even a deception; thus Basler argues that it does not tally with 'the essentially "unconscious" source' of the tale,<sup>348</sup> while Koster suggests that Poe appeared to agree with his correspondent that the tale was supernatural, for purely commercial reasons, strategically complying (on the surface) with the expectations of his readership.<sup>349</sup> It has already been argued in this study that textual meaning is not coextensive with intention;<sup>350</sup> and, even on that level, Poe's comments in the letter may be read as a hoax on Cooke, and on the credulous reader in general.

The apparently supernatural events, which all occur in the second half of the tale, will now be examined more closely. Rowena's decline is first indicated in (15): 'the Lady Rowena was attacked with sudden illness ... The fever which consumed her rendered her nights uneasy; and in her perturbed state of half-slumber, she spoke of sounds, and of motions, in and about the chamber'. On the "merveilleux" reading, Rowena's wasting illness would be the result of the disembodied Ligeia's vampiric nocturnal attacks on her, and the 'sounds' and 'motions' would be the evidence of the spirit's invisible but audible presence. However, here as in 'The Oval Portrait',<sup>351</sup> the character's perceptions may be considered unreliable, 'perturbed' by fever. The narrator himself

goes on to advance this hypothesis, and then to suggest another; the 'sounds' and 'motions', he concludes, 'had no origin save in the distemper of her fancy, or perhaps in the phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself' (ibid.). As already shown in Chapter 5,<sup>352</sup> the interior of 'Ligeia', the bridal chamber in which the death and "resurrection" take place, has been quite explicitly designed, by the narrator himself, as a space likely to produce perceptual distortion; its grotesque, arabesque and phantasmagoric decor and bizarre lighting are calculated to induce hallucinations (whether visual or auditory) in anyone condemned to inhabit it. Rowena may, then, be considered at this point to be suffering from hallucinations.

Rowena continues to "hear" the "sounds", but, it must be stressed, at this moment the narrator does not; he himself points out that the 'unusual motions among the tapestries' (16) obviously derive from the 'customary rushing of the wind' (17), that is, the effect already referred to as 'the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies' (14). Her hallucinations are 'of sounds which she then heard, but which I could not hear - of motions which she then saw, but which I could not perceive' (17). Later in the same paragraph, however, he begins himself to believe in a supernatural presence, audible and palpable and which, if invisible in itself, leaves visible traces. He "feels" its proximity: 'I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed by my person'; he "sees" it in its traces - the 'faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect' on the carpet, and the 'drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid' that seem to fall into the glass; and he "hears" it, at last replicating Rowena's hallucination: 'It was then that I became aware of a gentle foot-fall upon the carpet'. However, Rowena herself does

not seem to "perceive" any of these things; as the narrator specifies for the 'drops': 'If this I saw - not so Rowena.' There is no evidence that she has even "heard" the 'footfall', whose presence would be convergent with her previous "perceptions" of 'motions'.

At the beginning of (18), Rowena dies, and is therefore removed completely as a witness; there are no others, since 'the turret was altogether apart from the portion of the abbey tenanted by the servants - there were none within call' (19). It may be noted, then, that, over the portion of the narrative (16-18) when she is available as a witness of the "supernatural" events, at no point do her "perceptions" coincide with those of the narrator. What she "hears" and "sees", he does not; what he "sees" and "hears", she does not. The text thus pointedly excludes the factor of simultaneity, which is employed elsewhere in Gothic fiction to legitimate supernatural interventions; the more the eye-witnesses, the more credible the "events" will seem. This narrative tactic is employed at the end of Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer (1820),<sup>353</sup> a text which, on the level of surface narrative, pertains to the "merveilleux" genre. Melmoth, the Faustian protagonist, is finally claimed by Satan, who drags him out of his room and throws him over a cliff; the diabolic visitor is not directly presented, but his presence is indicated through the sounds heard from Melmoth's room by two witnesses.<sup>354</sup> This double testimony, emphasised by the repeated uses of the third person plural, tends to validate the supernatural element within the narrative. Poe, it may be noted, refers, in 'Letter to B-' (1836 - H VII, xxxv-xliii), to 'the devil in Melmoth (sic)' (xxxviii); and in 'The Masque of the Red Death', which, as seen above,<sup>355</sup> is one of the few major tales whose surface narrative

requires a 'merveilleux' reading, the 'reality' of the phantom is similarly validated, since its appearance is perceived not only by Prospero, but by his thousand guests. In 'Ligeia', in contrast, the narrator's 'perceptions' of the 'spirit' are out of step with Rowena's - which would, in itself, suggest that what he 'perceives' is largely a result of a process of influence or suggestion which, once begun, works independently of Rowena's own ideas.

Indeed, the narrator himself admits that the whole incident 'must, after all, ... have been but the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour' (17). He has just taken 'an immoderate dose of opium' (*ibid.*), a drug to which he has already confessed he had become 'a bounden slave' (12), 'habitually fettered' in its 'shackles' (15). Here, as in the first version of 'The Oval Portrait',<sup>356</sup> an 'étrange' explanation is provided by reference to a drug whose hallucinogenic properties were, thanks to De Quincey's Confessions,<sup>357</sup> notorious; indeed, the narrator has already referred to what sound like De Quinceyan 'opium dreams' characterised by 'excitement' (15), so that the 'shadow' and the 'drops' may be read as no more than drug-induced hallucinations (unless the latter are poison). Besides, the reader should also take into account the disorienting effect of the arabesque decor, which is itself textually linked to its designer's opium use ('my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams' (12)). It is not just a question of the wind machine; the narrator "sees" the shadow 'upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich lustre thrown by the censer' (17). The shadow may, then, be no more than a visual effect produced by the endless bewildering arabesque

writhing of the 'parti-colored fires' of the censer (13);<sup>358</sup> or, alternatively, simply one of the 'jetty black', phantasmagorically 'changeable' arabesque figures that decorate the carpet (14). Even had the narrator not been 'wild with ... opium' (17), the effect of a decor conceived under the influence of that drug would be enough to disorient his perceptions. Under the combined influence of opium, the interior, Rowena's condition and his own obsession with Ligeia, he may be read as crossing over, in the course of (17), into what is at least a temporary psychotic state. The moment of transition corresponds to the sentence beginning 'I had felt'; one may compare the similar moment in 'The Tell-Tale Heart', when the auditory hallucination imposes itself as "real" ('at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears' - M III, 797).<sup>359</sup> Indeed, the narrator has already referred to his 'incipient madness' and 'mental alienation' (12).

From (18), the narrator is alone, and the apparent revivification of Rowena's corpse may be read, from beginning to end, as his private hallucination. The same determinants of his perceptual disturbance are operative as in the previous incident (17); the opium ('Wild visions, opium-engendered, flitted, shadow-like, before me.' (18)); the obsessive memory of Ligeia ('Then rushed upon me a thousand memories of Ligeia' (ibid.)); and the interior ('I gazed with unquiet eye upon ... the varying figures of the drapery, and upon the writhing of the parti-colored fires in the censer overhead.' (ibid.)). Indeed, the "resurrection" may be considered as no more than an opium dream, one of the 'passionate waking visions of Ligeia' (19) which the narrator openly admits beset him; while the final "revelation" of Ligeia's eyes takes place, as the reader is explicitly reminded, under the full confusing

influence of the arabesque interior - in the 'rushing atmosphere of the chamber' (20) - and, moreover, the 'reanimated corpse' seems to walk 'bodily and palpably into the middle of the apartment' (19), where it takes off its 'ghastly cerements'. That is, the climax takes place directly under the censer (which hangs from 'the most central recess' of the ceiling (13), and under whose 'glare' the "shadow" was allegedly seen (18)) - and therefore under the strongest possible influence of its bewildering, disorienting lighting. Given all this circumstantial evidence, the narrator's perceptions may be read as totally unreliable for the entire episode. The 'sob' which he "hears" around midnight (19) - an hour he particularly associates with Ligeia, since it was soon after 'high noon of the night' that she died (9) - is another auditory hallucination, like the 'foot-fall' in (17); his desire to be with his first wife again imposes itself on his perceptions, in a psychotic remodelling of reality. The visual hallucinations - continuing in the line of the "shadow" and "drops" of (17) - begin when he "sees" 'a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge of color' in the cheeks and eyelids of the corpse (19). The subsequent revivifications and relapses represent the obsessive repetition and development of this complex auditory-visual hallucination, culminating in the climax, when the corpse appears to get up from the bed, move to under the censer, and expose its hair and eyes. During the process, the narrator textually admits to his own psychic disintegration, referring explicitly to madness twice in (22): 'There was a mad disorder in my thoughts - a tumult unappeasable.... What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought?'. He becomes overwhelmed by his own internal perceptions, reduced (until he leaps from his seat towards the end of (22)) to a schizophrenic immobility and rigidity that will be



paralleled in Roderick Usher:<sup>360</sup> 'I had long ceased to struggle or to move, and remained sitting rigidly upon the ottoman, a helpless prey to a whirl of violent emotions' (21). Finally, the last sentence, in which the hallucination is reinforced by a confirmed delusive belief, marks the high point of the psychosis:

"Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never - can I never be mistaken - these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes --of my lost love - of the lady - of the LADY LIGEIA!" (22)

This declaration, 'shrieked' by the narrator to himself, signifies its own psychotic character, through the repetitions and interruptions; its role is parallel to that of the similar climactic declarations in 'Usher' ('"Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!"' (M II, 416))<sup>361</sup> and 'The Tell-Tale Heart' ('it is the beating of his hideous heart!' (M III, 797)).<sup>362</sup> In all three cases, the declarative use of the simple present indicates the total remodelling of reality that characterises psychosis;<sup>363</sup> the subject perceives as animate an object which is in reality dead - perceives as being, that which is not. In 'Ligeia', the psychosis presumably moderates when (as Poe suggests in the letter to Cooke)<sup>364</sup> there is a further 'relapse' and the corpse is finally entombed; the image of Ligeia fails to impose itself permanently on the narrator's perceptual universe. However, the delusion (if not the hallucination) seems ineradicable, since as narrator he believes in the "resurrection" fully as much as he does as protagonist - even though 'long years have elapsed' (1) between the climax and the moment of writing.

That Ligeia's husband, both as protagonist and narrator, suffers from at least occasional psychotic tendencies is surely beyond doubt.

'Buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outward world' (1), he inhabits a remodelled universe in which internal fantasy is dominant over external perception - in which the imaginary imposes itself as real. Thus he 'would call aloud upon [Ligeia's] name, ... as if ... I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned - ah, could it be forever? - upon the earth' (15); the 'as if', in practice, drops out, and hallucination substitutes itself for objective perception. As narrator, he refers several times to his tendency to amnesia; the very first sentence ('I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia.' (1)) should be enough to alert the reader to his unreliability, and later he implies that on many subjects 'my memory fails me' (2), and reiterates that he is 'sadly forgetful on topics of deep moment' (13). Indeed, given his stubborn belief in the reality of the "resurrection", he may be seen as also suffering from paramnesias, and in this sense his private psychotic universe resembles that constructed by William Wilson.<sup>365</sup> The psychological reading is further reinforced by the narrator's declared interest in 'the science of mind' (4) (rendered by Baudelaire ('Ligeia', 1855)<sup>366</sup> as 'la science psychologique'),<sup>367</sup> and his 'no little medical reading' (20); the irony is that he fails to apply his reading and knowledge to his own case.

Basler diagnoses the narrator as suffering from erotic 'obsession' and 'megalomania';<sup>368</sup> the obsessional character of his attitude to the dead Ligeia is clear enough from the text ('My memory flew back, (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved' (15)), while megalomania is indicated by his belief, borrowed from his dead wife,

that the individual will - in this case, his own - can reverse death and 'restore' the lost love-object (15) (this element further links him to William Wilson).<sup>369</sup> A further dimension may be added to the diagnosis: he may be read as also suffering from paranoia, given the element of fear that combines with desire in his attitude to Ligeia. In life, she both 'delighted' and 'appalled' him (5); after her death, her hallucinatory return, although so ardently desired, imposes itself in a terrifying form: 'I listened - in extremity of horror.' (20); 'the unspeakable horrors of that night' (21); 'the fearful night' (22); 'a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the ... figure ... had paralyzed - had chilled me into stone' (23). The loved woman, then, returns as a persecutor. The question of paranoia will be discussed in detail below, in relation to 'Usher';<sup>370</sup> it may be suggested here that, given that paranoia tends to operate in terms of the transformation of the content of a primary emotion,<sup>371</sup> what happens in 'Ligeia' is that "I love you" is transformed into "You hate me" - while the megalomaniac element ("I love myself") may be seen as a similar transform of that original emotion.<sup>372</sup> Alienated from his own body and desire, the narrator develops symptoms in which that desire emerges in distorted and destructive form. It may be added that his delusion fulfils a further condition of paranoia, in being visibly systematised, since it is underpinned by a textually validated theory, the notion of the will derived from his and Ligeia's joint reading (4,11).

More concretely, some critics (Basler, Thompson, Koster), as shown above,<sup>373</sup> have seen the narrator as not only a madman but a criminal - in Koster's words, 'a psychopathic murderer'.<sup>374</sup> All three think he kills Rowena, with Basler (and Koster) suggesting that the "drops" are

poison; on Basler's reading, what happens in (17) is that the narrator misperceives the drops as falling into Rowena's goblet by an external agency, when in fact it is he who pours them, from a bottle held in his own hand.<sup>375</sup> This reading is certainly plausible, since, as the narrator claims, 'immediately subsequent to the fall of the ruby-drops, a rapid change for the worse took place in the disorder of my wife; so that, on the third subsequent night, the hands of her menials prepared her for the tomb' (18). In this case, he would join the company of direct or indirect uxoricides formed by the narrator of 'The Black Cat' and the painter in 'The Oval Portrait'. Yet even if he does not poison her, he may be considered as effectively killing her by degrees, through what Basler himself calls 'psychological cruelty'<sup>376</sup> ('the fierce moodiness of my temper' (15)), in his confining her in the bewildering and disturbing bridal chamber (which, with its 'ebony bed' (14) and 'sarcophagi' (18), is, as Thompson points out,<sup>377</sup> in practice more like a funeral chamber). Whether, as Koster thinks and Thompson suggests, the narrator has also murdered Ligeia is more open to question. Koster's evidence for this contention lies in the following passages: 'I saw that she must die' (7) and 'a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed' (8).<sup>378</sup> This evidence is somewhat thin; it is true that 'must' implies a stronger sense of subjective involvement than 'have to', but in context the choice of modal may simply indicate the narrator's emotional stake in his wife. As for his devaluation of his own merits in (8), this can be read as signifying not so much any murderous designs as a dim awareness of his own sexual repression, the alienation from his own body that makes him unable fully to satisfy his wife's sexual demands on him. It would seem more congruent with the text to argue that his antagonism to his first wife is largely unconscious (though to some extent avowed, in a term like 'appalled' (5)), and emerges,

not in murder, but (displaced on to her) in the paranoiac fantasy of the climax ("You hate me" derives from "I love you", but also from "I hate you").

The disturbing insistence of madness and (perhaps) criminality in the tale is reinforced by the visible textual presence of the compulsion to repeat. As much as 'The Man of the Crowd'<sup>379</sup> and 'The Purloined Letter',<sup>380</sup> 'Ligeia' bears the marks of this psychic structure. The lexeme 'repeat' occurs twice in the text: Ligeia asks her husband to 'repeat certain verses composed by herself' (i.e. 'The Conqueror Worm') (9); and on the climactic night, the 'hideous drama of revivification' is 'repeated', 'time after time' (21). Besides, the "quotation" on the power of the will (ostensibly from Joseph Glanvill, but, according to Mabbott, probably Poe's own concoction, since it has 'never been found' in the seventeenth-century philosopher's works)<sup>381</sup> occurs four times in the text - as the epigraph, in (4) in full, and in (10) and (11) in part. Originally incorporated into Ligeia's discourse, and repeated by her (10, 11), it is then (in terms of the linear sequence of events) repeated by the narrator in (4). The narrator repeats not only Ligeia's poem and the quotation, but her entire discourse, taking over her obsession with the will and making it his own; as a result, he longs to repeat the history of his relations with her, and therefore to 'restore' her to life (the compulsion to repeat is linked to the tendency to restore an earlier state of things).<sup>382</sup> The reanimation of the corpse, itself an illusory restoration of a past love-object, takes the form of a repeated series of revivals and relapses. Further, 'The Conqueror Worm' itself contains an image of endless repetition, which anticipates the circular movements of the man of the crowd:<sup>383</sup>

That motley drama! - oh, be sure  
 It shall not be forgot!  
 With its Phantom chased forevermore,  
 By a crowd that seize it not,  
 Through a circle that ever returneth in  
 To the self-same spot ... (l. 17-22)<sup>384</sup>

The narrator can himself be seen as, like the 'crowd' of the poem, endlessly chasing the 'phantom' of Ligeia, trapped in the repetitive, circular logic of his own obsession. As much as the man of the crowd, he is the prisoner of his own self-repeating symptoms; besides, since the compulsion to repeat is one of the manifestations of the death-drive, he may be linked to the perverse protagonists of the "urban murder tales". Indeed, the self-destructive character of his activity as decorist is indicated by the use of the term 'perversity', in a sense convergent with that of 'The Imp of the Perverse':<sup>385</sup> 'I gave way, with a child-like perversity, ... to a display of more than regal magnificence within' (12). Destructive of both self and other, Ligeia's husband reveals the insistence of Thanatos in his surrender to his own disintegrative tendencies.

Repetition is, for Freud, one of the manifestations of the uncanny;<sup>386</sup> 'Ligeia' further reveals a whole series of other instances, which, taken together, make the tale almost a textbook case of the "unheimlich". There is also the animation of the inanimate (in the revival of the corpse), as in 'The Oval Portrait';<sup>387</sup> the notion of the 'omnipotence of thoughts', the belief that thinking can by itself modify external reality (in the concept of the will);<sup>388</sup> and the disturbing role played by Ligeia's eyes, which, as will be shown below,<sup>389</sup> can be linked to the castration complex.<sup>390</sup> 'Ligeia' is, then, a compendium of uncanny themes; if, as Freud argues, the uncanny is an instance of the return of the

repressed,<sup>391</sup> then it remains to be determined precisely what the repressed material is that emerges, in distorted form, in this text.

The various uncanny effects listed above are all linked, in one way or another, to the central concept of 'Ligeia', the will. It is the will that (the narrator believes) revives Ligeia; her force of will is expressed in her eyes; she believes that the will can modify reality, arresting death; and the passage on the will is several times repeated. This concept, then, requires close examination; it will prove to be intimately related to the repressed material that underlies the narrative. As shown in Chapter 4,<sup>392</sup> the will was a central component of the ideology of mesmerism, and was thus in practice associated with the constitution of unequal, manipulative power-relations. 'Ligeia' precedes both the mesmeric tales and Poe's interest in the subject; nonetheless, the connection points up the connotations of sexuality and power contained in the signifier "will". Ligeia's will is, in fact, associated with both her intellectual power and her sexual energy, and with the way in which she dominates her husband on both counts. Her characteristics in both areas will now be analysed in detail, in the context of the repeated "quotation from Glanvill", which is worth reproducing in full:

And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor?. For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will. (epigraph)

Ligeia is presented as a woman who is intellectually extraordinary, both in intelligence and attainment; her husband refers to her 'rare

learning' (1), and later expands on the theme:

I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense - such as I have never known in woman. In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. Indeed, upon any theme of the most admired, because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the academy, have I ever found Ligeia at fault? ... I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman - but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive, that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation ... (6)

Ligeia, then, has access to areas of knowledge normally denied to women in her culture and confined to the male-dominated discourses of 'the academy'. Clearly the product of an exceptional education, with her learning 'such as I have never known in woman', she parallels the unusual women mentioned by Wollstonecraft, who had 'been allowed to run wild' and thus developed 'vigour of intellect', and the similar cases described by Fuller;<sup>393</sup> her encroachment on the preserves of male thought and learning also corresponds to that of Shelley's Cythna<sup>394</sup> and Hawthorne's Zenobia.<sup>395</sup> Her relation with her husband is, among other things, one of intellectual collaboration (he describes her as 'the partner of my studies' (1)); indeed, she comes to dominate him intellectually, thus reversing the "normal" gender stereotypes of male teacher and female pupil, as he 'resign[s] [himself] ... to her guidance'. She thus fulfils Wollstonecraft's (and anticipates Fuller's) demand for what the latter calls 'intellectual companionship' between the sexes;<sup>396</sup> indeed, she not only breaks out of the mould of 'blind obedience' that Wollstonecraft condemns,<sup>397</sup> but becomes another Cythna, a teacher of men.<sup>398</sup> This intellectual dominance is one of the reasons why she is ultimately presented by the text as a



destructive figure; women's exercise of independent thought constitutes a threat to male power. Ligeia's intelligence and knowledge recall those of more obviously destructive active women - Hoffmann's Euphemia, with her degree of 'culture and understanding ... scarcely ever found in a woman',<sup>399</sup> and, indeed, Lewis' Matilda, with her diabolic omniscience and her 'understanding (of) more strength and justness, than generally falls to the lot of my sex'.<sup>400</sup> On the 'merveilleux' reading, Ligeia's own omniscience could suggest that she is a devil; on the 'étrange' reading, if not literally diabolic, her figure nonetheless has "satanic" connotations of cultural revolt and contestation. Ligeia's will, then, represents, on one level, what both Wollstonecraft and Shelley call the 'female mind',<sup>401</sup> insurgent against male power, and thus finally perceived as threatening and destructive.

Ligeia's intellectual activity cannot be totally severed from her sexual activity. As Zanger suggests, the 'forbidden' knowledge that she and her husband explore is, on one level, sexual knowledge;<sup>402</sup> thus the latter specifies 'With how vast a triumph - with how vivid a delight - ... did I feel ... that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!' (6). The lexis here is clearly not without erotic connotations; what Ligeia's sexual partner discovers, through the expansion of the 'delicious vista', is female sexuality, as well as academic knowledge. Freud argues, in a 1915 addition to 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), that the adult's will to knowledge derives, in the first instance, from the child's sexual curiosity, its forbidden desire to penetrate areas that are (typically) excluded from its questioning: 'the instinct for knowledge in children is

attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is in fact possibly first aroused by them';<sup>403</sup> in Poe's tale, both the intense pleasure (as implied through the signifiers 'delicious', 'gorgeous', 'divinely') and the sense of taboo attached to the 'wisdom' the narrator acquires with Ligeia testify to its sexual connotations.

Besides, Ligeia's access to knowledge is itself sufficient, quite apart from her sexually active character, to 'masculinise' her - to endow her with 'unfeminine' phallic potency. Her anomalousness is signified repeatedly in the text: 'Of all the women I have ever known' (5); 'such as I have never known in woman' (6); 'more than womanly abandonment' (8). Penetrating male domains of learning and excelling her husband intellectually, she acquires quasi-masculine potent status; it is her 'presence', her 'readings' that give meaning and energy to the texts they read together, rendering them 'vividly luminous'. Without her, the texts cease to burn: 'Wanting the radiant lustre of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead.' (7). Once aware of her impending death, the narrator confesses to losing his hold on language (even in retrospect), and signifies himself as "unmasculine", deficient in potency - 'Words are impotent', he says, 'to convey any idea' of Ligeia's last hours (ibid.). It seems that thinking and intellectual activity become powerfully sexualised - but only in Ligeia's presence; as Cixous suggests, 'le désir [passe] toujours par le savoir': "L'entrée en savoir se substitue à la pénétration".<sup>404</sup> Indeed, as she further argues, Ligeia is definitively 'masculinised' via her intellectual activity, which thus acquires a sexual dimension, overturning gender stereotypes: 'La femme est présentée, par opposition à l'affaiblissement du je, comme un objet superlatif, qui unit aux qualités traditionnelles de la femme, portées

à leur maximum, celle, traditionnellement masculine, d'être un parangon du savoir.<sup>405</sup>

It may further be suggested that the sexuality that the narrator discovers through his first wife is more hers than his - that, in defiance of all cultural norms, she is more aware of her own body and desire than he is of his. This disparity is implied in his reference to 'Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed'. Alienated from his own body, he cannot fully respond, cannot "merit" the desire which she expresses with a 'more than womanly' (unrepressed, culturally anomalous) extremity. Indeed, it is only after her death that he becomes more immediately conscious of his own desire for her - only once that desire has, in practice, become "safe", since unrealisable: 'I revelled in recollections of ... her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own.' (15). The fire image connects with Ligeia's previously mentioned capacity to make letters 'lambent and golden' (7), and suggests that it is only through her that her widower has (albeit belatedly) regained contact with his own sexuality.

Ligeia's conscious desire is signified in her physical appearance, which conforms, in various particulars, to the literary model of the active woman. She is tall (2), and this anomalous characteristic is emphasised in the transformation scene ('had she then grown taller since her malady?' (23)). In contrast to the "feminine" Rowena, Ligeia is "masculinised" by her exceptional stature; she is paralleled in this respect by Byron's Haidée, 'tall beyond her sex'.<sup>406</sup> Her voice, too, is evidently sensual; 'the dear music of her low sweet voice' (2)

recalls Lamia's 'voice luting soft'.<sup>407</sup> Her long, dark hair, 'blacker than the wings of the midnight' (23),<sup>408</sup> is a familiar attribute of the active woman; its length is reproduced from the figures of Haidée<sup>409</sup> and La Belle Dame sans Merci,<sup>410</sup> and its colour from that of Cythna,<sup>411</sup> while both characteristics recur in Zenobia.<sup>412</sup> Above all, her eyes, large, dark and 'wild' ('the full, and the black, and the wild eyes' (23)) mark her as desiring, creative/destructive and threatening; they are paralleled, most obviously in Keats' faery lady, whose 'eyes were wild',<sup>413</sup> but also in Carmen,<sup>414</sup> Haidée,<sup>415</sup> Shelley's Matilda<sup>416</sup> and Cythna,<sup>417</sup> and Zenobia.<sup>418</sup> Besides, as will be shown, these eyes are the privileged signifiers of her force of will.

Through the exercise of the will, Ligeia in practice "masculinises" herself; so much is clear from the "Glanvill quotation" itself, which she incorporates into her own discourse (10). The "quotation" refers exclusively to male subjects as bearers of 'the will, with its vigor', whether divine or human - 'God', as 'a great will pervading all things' (with visible phallic connotations in the verb 'pervade'), and 'Man', who, it is implied, could overcome 'the weakness of his feeble will'. However, in the narrative it is a female subject, a member of the so-called "weaker sex", who adopts the ideology of the will. It will now be useful to examine in detail the presentation of the concept in paragraphs (2) to (5), and its signification through the image of Ligeia's eyes.

Calling up the memory of Ligeia's 'person' in (2), the narrator refers to a certain 'strangeness' in her - an elusive quality which he tries to locate in her various features, finally finding it in her eyes: 'And then I peered into the large eyes of Ligeia.' (ibid.). The

strangeness, he decides, resides not in any physical peculiarity but in their 'expression' (3): 'The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I ... struggled to fathom it!' (ibid.). The eyes become an enigma to be penetrated; like the narrator of 'The Oval Portrait' before the painting,<sup>419</sup> or that of 'Usher' before the House,<sup>420</sup> he strives, with great difficulty, to 'fathom' the mystery, to attach signified to signifier: 'What was it - that something more profound than the well of Democritus - which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What was it? I was possessed with a passion to discover.' (3). According to Democritus, truth lies in a well;<sup>421</sup> the narrator tries to locate the "truth" behind Ligeia's 'expression', but the reader too can seek to identify a different "truth".

In (4), the narrator offers a series of analogues to that 'expression', in the 'material world': in 'a rapidly growing vine - in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water.... the ocean ... the falling of a meteor ... one or two stars in heaven'. He finds further analogues in the human world: in 'the glances of unusually aged people', and, above all, in the arts - 'certain sounds from stringed instruments', and 'passages from books' (ibid.). The natural images, with their emphasis on creation and growth (the vine, the chrysalis), suggest that Ligeia's eyes symbolise Eros, the life-principle of the material universe; the 'unusually aged people' suggest the defiance of death, while the sensations derived from the arts imply the operations of the libido, as determinant of aesthetic practice. Thus, if the narrator of 'The Imp of the Perverse' is placed under the sign of Thanatos,<sup>422</sup> Ligeia stands under the sign of Eros - the life-drive, implying sexuality, reproduction and the will to live. It is the sexual

aspect, however, that is crucial.

Finally, the narrator locates a close equivalent to Ligeia's 'expression', in the "passage from Glanvill" on the will (as quoted in full above).<sup>423</sup>

The 'sentiment' that 'I felt always aroused within me by her large and luminous orbs' is also 'inspire[d]' in him by the "quotation" (4). He concludes: 'Length of years, and subsequent reflection, have enabled me to trace, indeed, some remote connection between this passage in the English moralist and a portion of the character of Ligeia.' (5)

Ligeia's eyes are thus seen as signifiers of the will; next, the will itself - her 'gigantic volition' - is associated with 'passion'. That 'passion', in turn, is located in her eyes: 'of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me' (ibid.). 'Passion' is clearly an alibi for sexuality; Ligeia's eyes, then, signify her force of will, which is itself synonymous with the force of female desire: 'Of all the women whom I have ever known, she ... was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion.' (ibid.).<sup>424</sup>

By a gradual, detailed process of association - so gradual that the naïve or inattentive reader may never notice - the narrator has turned his wife's eyes into a symbol of active female desire. He is probably not fully conscious himself of the extent of Ligeia's sexual awareness; it is hardly surprising that he should associate her eyes with 'strangeness', since female desire is, in his culture, "strange" and anomalous - nor that he should declare of the 'sentiment' they arouse: 'Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it.' (4). The difficulty he experiences in naming or defining the 'sentiment' suggests that the text is here dealing with repressed

material, which can come to the surface only after a massive resistance.<sup>425</sup> Here as in 'The Imp of the Perverse',<sup>426</sup> the unnameable in the text points to the discourse of the unconscious; in this case, the unconscious material that emerges is the male knowledge (and fear) of female sexuality.

Later, Ligeia's will to live - her 'wild desire for life, - for life - but for life', her 'fierceness of resistance' in the struggle with death (7) - may be read as signifying, in one sense, the life-drive, the impulse to survival, but in another, once again, her sexuality. The 'struggles of the passionate wife' (ibid.) derive from the desire to hold on to pleasure as well as life; hence it is not surprising that, here too, the narrator finds himself lost for words, bereft of a discourse in which to signify her: 'It is this wild longing - it is this eager vehemence of desire for life - but for life - that I have no power to portray - no utterance capable of expressing.' (8).

His reaction to Ligeia is, in fact, highly ambivalent - here as in 'Rappaccini's Daughter', female sexuality provokes both 'love and horror' in the man exposed to it.<sup>427</sup> Desire is visibly present in, say, his descriptions of her lips ('the magnificent turn of the short upper lip - the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under' (2)), or the comparison of her appearance to 'the beauty of the fabulous Houris of the Turk' (3) (here as in the first version of 'The Oval Portrait', 'Houris' has marked erotic connotations).<sup>428</sup> However, it coexists with fear in the ambivalent formulation 'delighted and appalled me' (5); what he fears in Ligeia is, clearly, her desire. In order to handle this disturbing woman, whether in the flesh or in memory, her husband deploys various strategies of defence. At certain moments, he quite simply lies, denying

her sexuality and reducing her back to the female norm, by referring to her alleged 'purity' and 'ethereal nature' (i.e. sexlessness and bodilessness) (15). At others, he effectively makes her "safe" and unthreatening by converting her into an artwork, a fixed and static object of contemplation; thus in 'the formation of the chin' he finds 'the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek - the contours which the God Apollo revealed, but in a dream, to Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian' (2), while her nose is compared to those of 'the graceful medallions of the Hebrews' (ibid.). The reduction of Ligeia to an art-object immobilises her (and therefore her sexuality), while further decomposing her via the (alleged) 'spirituality' of art; she thus becomes less a woman than an 'airy and spirit-lifting vision' (ibid.). Indeed, the piecemeal description of Ligeia's features which occupies most of (2) (and, as Thompson points out,<sup>429</sup> has its comic counterpart in the similar organ-by-organ account of General Smith in 'The Man that was Used Up')<sup>430</sup> itself, taken as a whole, serves the purpose of controlling her - denying her body and the threat it offers, by deconstituting it; her husband's analysis first detaches her face from her body, and then fragments the face into forehead, hair, nose, mouth, teeth, chin and eyes.<sup>431</sup> At yet other moments, he admits her sexuality, but tries to "normalise" her by presenting her as a victim, the 'prey' of an alien, external force that has taken over her "female nature"; this is implied in the image of Ligeia being 'a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion' (5), as if she were a woman Prometheus suffering from the cruel vultures of nymphomania!

From the multiplicity of these defensive strategies, it is clear that Ligeia poses a massive threat to her husband's "masculinity"; living with her, he is in danger of losing his grip on his gender identity, and



therefore on his integration into culture. The "masculinisation" of Ligeia, already implicit in the epigraph,<sup>432</sup> is written right across the text - above all in the lexis employed to describe her, and in the image of the eyes. She is repeatedly signified across the tale through a series of terms which, in their connotations of force and power, would traditionally denote a male subject. These signifiers, occurring in the contexts of her force of will (5-6), her struggle with death (7-10) and the "revivification" (22-23), include: 'eager' (8); 'energetic' (7)/'energy' (5,22); 'fierce' (5, 7)/'fierceness' (7); 'impetuously' (7); 'passion' (5)/'passionate' (7); 'stern' (5, 7); 'strength' (8); 'tumultuous' (5); 'vehemence' (8); 'vigor' (10)/'vigorously' (22, twice); 'violently' (5); 'wild' (5, 7 (twice), 8, 23). Taken together, this lexicon tends to constitute Ligeia as an active, affirmative subject, aware of her sexuality ('passionate'), able to resist attack ('fierce') and escaping control ('wild'); she thus overturns the "natural" gender stereotypes of weakness and passivity, being characterised, on the contrary, by 'energy' and 'strength'. Indeed, the narrator also uses 'fierce' to signify his own aggression towards Rowena (15), and refers to the 'wild eagerness' of his 'passion' for Ligeia after her death (15), thus implicitly turning his first wife into his double, and therefore into a "masculinised" woman. It may be concluded, then, that in Ligeia's case the "normal" repression of the active component in female sexuality has simply not taken place.<sup>433</sup>

This reading may be confirmed by lexical comparison with some of the textual constructions of active, anomalous women referred to earlier in this discussion. Thus Ligeia resembles Lewis' Matilda, who is 'a prey to the wildest of passions',<sup>434</sup> but is also seen as 'cruel and unfeminine' Byron's 'stern' Haidēe;<sup>436</sup> Shelley's Matilda, defined as active/destructive

by the 'tumultuous wishes of her bosom' and the 'extreme violence of her sensations';<sup>437</sup> Keats' Belle Dame sans Merci, whose 'eyes were wild';<sup>438</sup> and Hawthorne's Beatrice, with her 'energy',<sup>439</sup> and Zenobia, with her 'vigor' and 'passionate intensity',<sup>440</sup> Poe's 'passionate wife' (7) is thus lexically placed firmly in the line of male representations of active women; the lexical parallels also highlight the signification of her as destructive, since those other 'wild' women (Haidée apart) are presented, in their relations with men, as destroyer-figures, or, at best, as ambivalent. The extent to which Ligeia is 'masculinised' may be gauged from the use of the signifier 'stern'. It appears in Byron's Cain (1821),<sup>441</sup> in the context of a markedly male act of ideological revolt; after the murder of Abel, an angel says to Cain: 'Stern hast thou been and stubborn from the womb',<sup>442</sup> and the rebel himself refers to 'this stern blood of mine'.<sup>443</sup> Further, Poe himself employs it, in the passage from his review of Elizabeth Barrett's poems (H XII, 1-35) on the ideal poet of the future (already quoted in Chapter 5);<sup>444</sup> this hypothetical figure - significantly enough, assumed to be male although the context is a review of a book by a woman writer - is envisaged as possessing 'the sternest Will ... vigorously to control all' (34). Ligeia, with her 'stern passion' (5) and 'stern nature' (7), thus appears as a female Cain (recalling, indeed, the daughters of Cain in Byron's Heaven and Earth),<sup>445</sup> engaged in revolt against her allotted place in culture; and as a woman equivalent to the heroic poet, with his vigour of will.

Ligeia's 'maleness', indicated through the lexis of the text, is further signified via the image of her eyes. As Zanger suggests, Ligeia's eyes can be read as signifiers of her sexuality;<sup>446</sup> but it is, beyond that, necessary to argue, with Cixous, that they indicate the active

character of that sexuality, and therefore constitute her as a phallic, "masculinised" woman (the narrator, as she stresses, is psychologically 'pénétré' by Ligeia, via her 'regard').<sup>447</sup> The "normal" relation of male dominance and female subordination is reversed, with the man occupying the passive position, not only in the teacher-taught relation, but generally - as in the episode where the narrator recites Ligeia's poem: 'beckoning me, peremptorily, to her side, she bade me repeat certain verses composed by herself.... I obeyed her.' (9). The phallic, dominative role in the relationship is thus played by the woman; if, as Bonaparte argues, Ligeia is a maternal figure,<sup>448</sup> she is less the passive/desired Oedipal mother than the active, pre-Oedipal mother, whom the child perceives as aggressive and destructive in her withdrawal of the breast.<sup>449</sup> Ligeia's eyes symbolically indicate a quasi-phallic potency, in their size ('far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race' (3)), and their capacity for 'expansion' (5) 'in moments of intense excitement' (3); the suggestions of sexual energy implied in the reference to the 'wild eye' in 'Life in Death' (later deleted from 'The Oval Portrait')<sup>450</sup> are here far more visible (and are not subjected to censorship). The fear induced in the narrator by his wife's eyes, through their 'miraculous expansion ... which ... appalled me' (5) may, then, be read as castration anxiety - that is, symbolically, the fear of losing his grip on power, in this case through the reversal of gender stereotypes. As in 'The Oval Portrait',<sup>451</sup> the uncanny effect is related to what Freud calls the 'substitutive relation' between eye and phallus.<sup>452</sup> The intense ambivalence with which the narrator responds to Ligeia<sup>453</sup> derives from his perception of her active, unrepressed desire - which produces, simultaneously, sexual excitement and fear of exclusion from power. "Masculinisation" of the woman thus implies, as its corollary, "feminisation" of the man.

Ligeia is, then, an active woman, both intellectually and sexually, and her 'gigantic volition' (5) signifies that activity, in both areas. Her exceptional character in these respects is, however, underlined in the text through the contrast with Rowena, who serves to represent the female norm. As Fiedler suggests, this figure exhibits 'the stereotyped data which indicate the Fair Lady',<sup>454</sup> the conformist, desexualised and "safe" woman. The antithetical pairing of Ligeia and Rowena, Dark Lady and Fair Lady, is paralleled elsewhere in the literature of active femininity - in the Matilda/Julia contrast in Zastrozzi,<sup>455</sup> and the Zenobia/Priscilla opposition in The Blithedale Romance.<sup>456</sup> Rowena, 'fair-eyed and blue-eyed' (12), and shorter than Ligeia (since the "transformed" corpse appears 'taller' (23)), contrasts with her predecessor both physically and psychologically. She passively accepts maltreatment (which quite possibly includes wife-beating) at her husband's hands: 'My wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper - ... she shunned me and loved me but little' (15); like the 'uncomplaining' wives of 'The Black Cat' (M III, 856)<sup>457</sup> and 'The Oval Portrait' (M II, 665),<sup>458</sup> she appears to accept her status as victim and possession without resistance. Her husband disorients and confuses her perceptions through the sadistic, hallucinogenic decor, and her death may not be unrelated to having to live day and night in such surroundings (even if he does not actually murder her). His sadistic attitude to her ('I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man.' (15)) may derive from the need to reaffirm the "masculinity" that was undermined by Ligeia - to reconstitute, through a second marriage, the dominant male/submissive female structure that was scandalously reversed in the first (hence the 'pleasure' he gains from her fear of him (ibid.)). Besides, if Rowena's husband treats her as an object, this simply reinforces the existing structures of patriarchal power; she is effectively

sold to him by her parents, in what appears a mercenary arranged marriage: 'Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment so bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved?' (13). Rowena is thus the victim both of a sadistic husband (the textual stress on her pre-marital maidenhood suggests a possibly traumatising wedding-night) and of an oppressive familial system. Given her insertion as fictional subject into so visibly unequal a structure of power-relations, it must be concluded that readings such as that of Bennett (who would see her as representing 'everyday reality' and 'mere humanity', and thus elides the cultural specificities of her situation as woman) do the text no service by alienating it from history.<sup>459</sup>

Ligeia negates Rowena, her "return" symbolising the indestructibility of female sexuality, both in itself and in the male unconscious; but, equally, Rowena negates Ligeia, representing the stereotype of total passivity and non-resistance. Indeed, the active/passive antithesis is more absolute in Poe's tale than in The Blithedale Romance, where Priscilla not only proves a more successful survivor than Zenobia, but, having succeeded where her sister failed in winning and marrying Hollingsworth, ends up, however unobtrusively, as, in some ways, the dominant partner: 'the powerfully built man showed a self-distrustful weakness, and a childlike, or childish, tendency to press close, and closer still, to the side of the slender woman whose arm was within his. In Priscilla's manner, there was a protective and watchful quality'.<sup>460</sup> Rowena undergoes no such transformation, and thus serves to reinforce the norm that Ligeia transgresses. All in all, in spite of the ambivalence that marks the narrator's reaction to Ligeia across

the text, it has to be concluded that in the end she (and therefore female desire) is signified as destructive. On the 'merveilleux' reading, Ligeia destroys Rowena and returns to terrorise her husband; on the 'étrange' reading, she drives her husband mad with her delusive notion of the will. Finally, the tale reproduces a certain ideology of gender norms; any woman who diverges from the Rowena model is seen as not only anomalous but dangerous.

But if the text signifies woman as destructive, the same may be said of its construction of art and the artist. Both Ligeia and her husband are artists - her production is represented by 'The Conqueror Worm', his by the interior. The characteristics of the bridal chamber, with its bewildering effect, have been considered in detail in Chapter 5;<sup>461</sup> it may be stressed here that the effect of the narrator's interior design is to disorient not only Rowena's perceptions, but his own, since, on the 'étrange' reading, the decor facilitates his hallucination of Ligeia. Art thus becomes a means to destruction, of both other and self. As for Ligeia's poem, destruction (the triumph of death) is its theme:

But see, amid the mimic rout,  
A crawling shape intrude!  
A blood-red thing that writhes from out  
The scenic solitude!  
It writhes! - it writhes! - with mortal pangs  
The mimes become its food ... (l. 25-30)

In the tale, the Conqueror Worm strikes twice; Ligeia and Rowena are both victims of the 'blood-red thing'. It is true that the insertion of the poem into the 1845 text<sup>462</sup> may be taken, as Mabbott suggests, as an indication to the reader that 'the human will was too feeble to enable Ligeia to win'<sup>463</sup> - that death's triumph over her was inevitable.

Ligeia herself, however, seems to have composed the poem as an expression of the norm she wished to transgress; the power of death is signified as a challenge to be surmounted ("shall these things be undeviatingly so? - shall this Conqueror be not once conquered?" (10)). Her husband appears to read it in the same way, since it precedes (and presumably helps inculcate) his belief that his own desire could 'restore her' (15). The insertion of the poem thus serves to reinforce both Ligeia's destructive role, and that of art in general; the effect of art is to undermine the subject who consumes it, via the encouragement of delusions that lead to psychic disintegration. 'The Conqueror Worm' is, then, a destructive poem about destruction. As stressed earlier in this chapter, it is also the work of a woman writer<sup>464</sup> - a factor which the critics who read 'Ligeia' as a metaliterary text seem to have overlooked;<sup>465</sup> but, given its objective role in the narrative, it hardly places the woman writer in a flattering light. Ligeia's aesthetic activity is, rather, presented as on a par with her intellectual and sexual activity, as threatening the structures of male power.

In conclusion, 'Ligeia' may be read as a text which signifies the active woman in terms that are always ambivalent and finally negative; the figure is presented as anomalous, as destructive and as endangering both the power-structures of patriarchy and the self-image of the male subject. The threat is, to some extent, parried by the textual emphasis - as in Poe's essay on Fuller,<sup>466</sup> as in Hawthorne's narrator's reading of Zenobia<sup>467</sup> - on Ligeia's difference, her non-representativeness. She thus becomes a special case, a freak of nature seen as totally discontinuous with ordinary women; the presence of Rowena, as representative of the norm, thus acts as a reassurance to both narrator and male

reader. At the same time, however, the text gives a certain voice to the discourse of female activity and desire, and thus signifies the possibility of contestation of those very norms it upholds. The point is not that Ligeia is a feminist, or a disguised portrait of Margaret Fuller (who, as Mabbott points out, was 'still an obscure writer' in 1838, and probably unknown to Poe);<sup>468</sup> but, rather, that the tale indirectly voices an emergent social tendency, and that its signifying possibilities are illuminated if it is read alongside earlier and later instances of feminist discourse and representations of active femininity. In 'Ligeia', female desire is signified as destructive, yet signifies itself as indestructible.

### iii. 'Morella': A Note

'Morella' (1835) is, in many ways, a first version of 'Ligeia', and has been regarded as such by critics: 'a preliminary study for "Ligeia"' (A. H. Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe, 1941);<sup>469</sup> 'an imperfect forerunner to "Ligeia"' (D. N. Koster, 'Poe, Romance and Reality', 1973).<sup>470</sup> The thematic and lexical parallels are evident. The narrator of 'Morella' feels a deep ambivalence towards his wife - 'a feeling of deep yet most singular affection' (M II, 229) - which modulates into hatred ('I longed with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of Morella's decease' (232)). Like Ligeia, she is intellectually active and remarkably well-educated: 'Morella's erudition was profound.... her powers of mind were gigantic' (229) (Ligeia's 'learning ... was immense', and her 'acquisitions ... were gigantic' (6)).<sup>471</sup> She comes to dominate her husband intellectually: 'I ... became her pupil.' (229); 'I abandoned myself implicitly to the guidance of my wife, and entered ... into the intricacies of her studies' (230) (similarly, the narrator of 'Ligeia' is willing to 'resign myself ... to her guidance through the



chaotic world of metaphysical investigation' (6)).<sup>472</sup> What they study together is 'forbidden' knowledge: 'poring over forbidden pages, I felt a forbidden spirit enkindling within me' (230) (in 'Ligeia', the couple study 'a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!' (6)).<sup>473</sup> Morella also resembles Ligeia physically, with the 'low tone of her musical language' and the 'lustre of her melancholy eyes' (231) (Ligeia, apart from the eyes, is marked by 'the dear music of her low sweet voice' (2)).<sup>474</sup> In the earlier tale too, the presence of the woman induces fear: 'And then ... would I dwell upon the music of her voice - until, at length, its melody was tainted with terror, - and there fell a shadow upon my soul - and I grew pale, and shuddered inwardly.... And thus, joy suddenly faded into horror' (230); and this fear is associated, above all, with her eyes: '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' (231-32) (these passages anticipate Ligeia's husband's 'delighted and appalled' reaction (5) to his wife's 'wild eyes' (23)).<sup>475</sup>

The first part of 'Morella', up to the woman's death, thus very clearly anticipates 'Ligeia' both verbally and conceptually. Thereafter, however, the development of the earlier tale is different. There is no arabesque interior, nor does a Rowena-figure appear to represent the female norm. Rather, 'Morella' introduces two themes which are not taken up in 'Ligeia': the taboo on the woman's name, and the birth, life and death of her child. The latter element is particularly striking in terms of the Poe canon, since the marriages in the tales ('The Oval Portrait', 'Eleonora', 'The Black Cat', 'Ligeia' itself) are typically childless (although the theme of women's fertility is

symbolically represented in the ovular shape of the oval portrait).<sup>476</sup> Morella's child is born at the moment of her death; the narrator comes to feel the same ambivalence to her as he did to her mother. He never again mentions Morella's name, which 'died with her at her death', while the child 'remained nameless' (235) until the age of ten, when he decides to baptise her. At the ceremony, seized by an unaccountable compulsion ('What fiend spoke from the recesses of my soul ...?'), he names the child "Morella" - upon which she cries out; "'I am here!'", and immediately dies (ibid.). Her father buries her in the family vault - and 'laughed with a long and bitter laugh as I found no traces of the first, in the charnel where I laid the second - Morella' (236).

The various critical readings of the tale are markedly similar to those which the same critics have proposed for 'Ligeia'. Mabbott (1978) offers a 'merveilleux' reading, in terms of metempsychosis;<sup>477</sup> Thompson (Poe's Fiction, 1973), taking an 'étrange' line, sees 'Morella' as an 'ostensibly supernatural text' where the narrator's 'suggested madness' in fact implies that it is a disguised murder story, and that he has killed both wife and child<sup>478</sup> (the resemblances to his reading of 'Ligeia' are obvious).<sup>479</sup> Bonaparte, Cixous and Zanger read the text in sexual terms, closely paralleling their interpretations of the later tale. Thus Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933) sees Morella as, like Ligeia, a 'mother-transference figure',<sup>480</sup> and her apparent return in her daughter's shape as indicating Poe's own Oedipal mother-fixation,<sup>481</sup> and reads the 'forbidden' knowledge into which she initiates her husband as 'doubtless sexual knowledge'.<sup>482</sup> Cixous ('Poe re-lu', 1972) reads the woman protagonist of this tale as - like her equivalent in 'Ligeia'<sup>483</sup> - endowed with a quasi-phallic potency that has a castrating effect on her husband, bringing about a reversal of gender roles (which the latter

eventually undoes, killing the child by pronouncing her name): 'Il a re-tuë Morella qui le tue encore; mise en scène d'une castration réciproque'.<sup>484</sup> Zanger ('Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge', 1978) reads Morella's eyes (like Ligeia's)<sup>485</sup> as suggesting her erotic dangerousness (woman as 'engulfing sexual force').<sup>486</sup>

The 'merveilleux' reading would imply that Morella is reincarnated in her child, and that the child's death occurs when the taboo on her mother's name is broken; the 'étrange' reading, that the narrator is, once again, unreliable, subject to paramnesias as narrating subject, and delusions and hallucinations as narrated subject. It may be argued, following Thompson, that Morella's husband in fact moves gradually in the direction of psychosis; the resemblance of child to mother is explicable in terms of heredity, while the absence of the mother's corpse from the 'charnel' (236) could indicate either body-snatching (as in 'The Premature Burial' (1844) (M III, 960)) or a negative hallucination on the narrator's part. Indeed, by the last paragraph, Morella's widower seems, like William Wilson,<sup>487</sup> to have entered a psychotic private universe of delusion: 'the hemlock and the cypress overshadowed me night and day. And I kept no reckoning of time or place, and the stars of my fate faded from heaven, and therefore the earth grew dark, and its figures passed by me, like flitting shadows, and among them all I beheld only - Morella.' (236). The imagery of death (hemlock and cypress), darkness and shadows suggests an overpowering obsession that shuts him out from human relations, while his loss of the sense of time recalls the last stanza of 'The Raven' ('And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor/ Shall be lifted - nevermore!' (M I; lines 107-108)). 'Morella' may, then, be legitimately read as a tale

of psychosis; whether or not the narrator, as Thompson thinks, has killed both Morellas is not clearly indicated in the text, although there is no doubt of his quite conscious antagonism to both.

The narrator's symptoms may be read as deriving from an unconscious fear of female sexuality - a fear which becomes conscious via displacement on to Morella's eyes, and, above all, her name. Morella's sexuality, if not so obviously unrepressed as Ligeia's, is visibly active, given her 'meaning eyes' (231) and the terror they induce; and, like Ligeia, she is - as Cixous implies - in practice "masculinised" through her intellectual domination of her husband. Indeed, the deletion of the ultra-religious poem (attributed to Morella), the 'Catholic Hymn',<sup>488</sup> from the 1842 text<sup>489</sup> may have been made because of its inappropriateness to the unvirginal Morella; it constituted her as a woman writer, but even Poe may consciously have found this hymn to the Virgin Mary absurdly incoherent with its alleged writer's role in the tale.<sup>490</sup> But if Morella is sexually aware, initiating her husband into the 'forbidden' knowledge of the body (230), he himself is quite unusually repressed, even for a Poe protagonist. Ligeia's husband thinks her desire for him is 'unmerited' (8), but is, at least, able to feel 'delighted' as well as 'appalled' by her eyes (5), and, after her death, 'burn[s]' for her (15).<sup>491</sup> His counterpart in 'Morella', however, is incapable of looking his own desire in the face. Thus the tale begins: 'With a feeling of deep yet most singular affection I regarded my friend Morella.... my soul, from our first meeting, burned with fires it had never before known; but the fires were not of Eros, and ... I could in no manner define their unusual meaning, or regulate their vague intensity' (229). They marry, but: 'I never spoke of passion, nor thought of love' (ibid.). Zanger suggests that this denial of any sexual interest in his wife

defines the narrator as 'self-deceiver or even ... hypocrite';<sup>492</sup> this is possible, but the denial may also originate in a repression so intense that he is unable to recognise or name his own desire, perceived as something 'singular', 'unusual' or 'vague'. 'Passion' is that which cannot be spoken of, and 'Eros' is invoked only to deny its existence. Thus it is not surprising that when he feels forbidden desire 'enkindling' inside him, his reaction should be one of 'horror' (230); or that Morella should refer to "'... that affection - ah, how little! - which thou didst feel for me'" (232-33). His reaction to a woman less repressed than himself is, in the end, largely one of fear and revulsion.

After Morella's death, her name is silenced: 'Of the mother I had never spoken to the daughter; - it was impossible to speak.' (235). As the father 'never spoke of passion' (229), so now he never speaks of the woman whose name comes, metonymically, to signify her desire. The daughter is the 'perfect resemblance' of her mother (233), which already suggests that her mother's sexuality will return in her. She grows with precocious speed (a phenomenon which is rare, but not impossible); her father detects in her eyes 'the passions of maturity' (234), and, besides, 'Morella's own intense and bewildering meaning' (ibid.). They are, then, the doubles of her mother's own 'meaning eyes' (231); what both 'mean' - the mother's in practice, the daughter's in potential - is active female desire (hence, too, the second Morella's surprising tallness, her growth in 'stature' (230), which connects her to the threatening Ligeia).<sup>493</sup> The father thus comes to fear his child: 'suspicions, of a nature fearful and exciting, crept in upon my spirit ... And, hourly, grew darker these shadows of similitude, and more ... hideously terrible' (234). What he observes (or thinks he observes) in

his child is the growth of her sexuality, perceived as threatening yet fascinating ('fearful and exciting'); if this seems over-precocious in a child who dies at ten, it may be put down to the unconscious sexual obsessions of her father, who "perceives" sexual maturity where it is not yet present. His unconscious fear of doubling of Morella's sexuality finds displaced expression in conscious fear at the doubling of her identity; Morella's desire lives on in her child.

Meanwhile he attempts to control his daughter, shutting her off from the 'scrutiny of the world', in 'rigid seclusion' (234); as with the sale of Rowena in 'Ligeia',<sup>494</sup> this act of paternal oppression exemplifies the familial control of women, and therefore the patriarchal norms from which both Morella and Ligeia diverge. But female sexuality cannot, in the end, be so easily controlled. The child's namelessness corresponds to her father's refusal to name woman (and therefore woman's desire); while his final decision to baptise her, with the choice of her mother's name, may be read as deriving from a perverse, self-destructive impulse to signify the very female sexuality he fears. He lifts the taboo on woman, pronouncing his dead wife's name; the child dies, yet female desire, as symbolised through 'the syllables - Morella' (235), persists, since the narrator, in his subsequent psychosis, continually "hears" her indestructible name: 'The winds of the firmament breathed but one sound within my ears, and the ripples upon the sea murmured evermore - Morella.' (236).

In 'Morella', then, female desire - perceived as alien by a male subject alienated from his own desire - dies in the mother, only to re-live in the daughter, who herself dies, only to reactivate her mother's memory. What is taboo and unnameable is nonetheless indestructible; the idea of

active femininity persists in the male unconscious, and the tale comes full circle, ending on the very name of the active woman - 'Morella' (236).

iv. 'Berenice': A Note

'Berenice' (1835) stands in relation to 'Usher' much as 'Morella' does to 'Ligeia'; it contains many of the elements of the later tale, including: the isolated Gothic mansion, with its elaborate interior and esoteric library; the affective relationship between close relatives (cousins in 'Berenice', brother and sister in 'Usher'); the male protagonist's mental illness; the female protagonist's catalepsy; her (actual or supposed) premature burial; and a final act (whether imaginary or "real") of female revenge, from the grave or its threshold. The specificity of the earlier tale resides in its identification of narrator and protagonist (the first-person narrator, who is - untypically in the canon - given a name, Egaeus, is also Berenice's cousin, whereas 'Usher' is organised around the triad of Roderick, Madeline and the unnamed narrator, an outsider to the family); and in Egaeus' highly idiosyncratic obsession with his cousin's teeth. 'Berenice' further resembles 'Ligeia' and 'The Oval Portrait' in its interior setting, and 'Ligeia' and 'Morella' in its metonymic privileging of a particular attribute of the woman (teeth, eyes and name respectively). It is also marked, as much as those three tales, by the presence of the active woman.

Egaeus narrates the story of his relations with his cousin Berenice, with whom he grows up in 'my paternal halls' (M II, 210). Both suffer from strange illnesses - she, from a 'fatal disease' that transforms her physical appearance (211), and later induces catalepsy, 'a species

of epilepsy not unfrequently terminating in trance' (ibid.); he, from an obsessive 'monomania', which takes the form of a hyperattentive, compulsive concentration on trivial objects (ibid.). Nonetheless, Egaeus proposes marriage; soon after, he begins to be obsessed with the image of Berenice's teeth, which comes to assume the autonomy of a hallucination. Berenice then, it seems, dies; the night after the burial, in a trance, Egaeus violates her grave, opening the coffin to extract the teeth. He only becomes aware of this bizarre action afterwards, through the narrative of a servant; he then discovers that his hand is 'indented with the impress of human nails' (218) - that is, Berenice had been buried alive in a cataleptic trance, and had - presumably - died only during, or after, his sadistic attack on her. Since the text contains no apparently supernatural events (Berenice's revival being explained by her catalepsy), the "étrange"/"merveilleux" question does not arise; interpretations, however, have been diverse.

Poe wrote, in a letter to Thomas W. White (30 April 1835 - 01, 57-59), that the tale 'originated in a bet that I could produce nothing effective on a subject so singular' (57), and this account of its origins has encouraged some critics to read 'Berenice' as less a "serious" than a satiric text. Thus Thompson (Poe's Fiction, 1973) sees it as satirising 'Gothic horrors and ... transcendental mysticism', through a protagonist who has himself been 'born and brought up in a library', and thus constructs his life out of literary conventions;<sup>495</sup> while Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweete ('Poe's Satiric Use of Vampirism in "Berenice"', 1981)<sup>496</sup> read the tale as a satire on the literature of vampirism, arguing that the teeth constitute Berenice as a vampire - but only in Egaeus' 'diseased imagination'.<sup>497</sup> Baudelaire ('Edgar



Allan Poe, *sa Vie et ses Ouvrages*', 1852), in contrast, concentrates on the element of mental disturbance in the tale, reading it as a bona fide psychological study, an instance of Poe's penetration into 'les maladies de l'esprit'.<sup>498</sup> The 'maladie mystérieuse' which attacks Berenice is diagnosed as 'distortion de personnalité'; and, besides, as hysteria: 'On dirait qu'il est question d'hystérie.';<sup>499</sup> while Egaeus is seen as suffering from 'hallucination' and, in his violation of the tomb, 'absence de conscience'.<sup>500</sup> In a comparable vein, Barbara Lanati (*Una Ligeia, cento Ligeie*', 1978) reads Egaeus as the victim of a slow process of psychic disintegration, gradually sliding into schizophrenia; for her, 'Berenice' is, above all, the story of '(il) graduale disfacimento delle facoltà intellettive del protagonista' ('(the) gradual disintegration of the protagonist's intellectual faculties').<sup>501</sup> Other critics have offered psycho-sexual readings: for Bonaparte (*Edgar Poe*, 1933) (who also thinks Egaeus reveals 'schizoid tendencies'),<sup>502</sup> Berenice, once again, symbolises the Oedipal mother, and the threatening teeth derive from the child's fantasy of the vagina dentata (the vagina furnished with teeth), thus pointing to the castration fear;<sup>503</sup> Cixous ('Poe re-lu', 1972) sees the extraction of the teeth as a sado-necrophiliac substitute for coitus ('comme si la mort était une distortion des épousailles');<sup>504</sup> while Moretti ('The Dialectic of Fear', 1978) reads the teeth as indicating vampirism, not satirically but in terms of emotional ambivalence (building on Bonaparte's analysis, he argues that the vampire motif, concretised in the teeth, symbolises the 'identity of desire and fear',<sup>505</sup> and the threat posed by female sexuality).<sup>506</sup>

That 'Berenice' is, on one level, a literary satire is beyond doubt; its self-conscious textuality is evident from the location of nearly

all the events, from Egaeus' birth to the final revelation, in the library, some of whose esoteric contents are detailed at length (213). However, for present purposes attention will be concentrated on two other aspects: the character of the protagonists' illnesses, and the symbolic role of the teeth.

Baudelaire suggests Berenice suffers from hysteria; indeed, the same may be said of her fiancé. The vicissitudes of this illness in nineteenth-century psychiatry, and its place in psychoanalytic theory, will be discussed in full below, in relation to 'Usher';<sup>507</sup> it may be said here that the term "hysteria" encompasses a wide range of both mental and somatic disturbances without discernible organic causes. Berenice's illness affects her in both mind and body, in her 'physical frame' and her 'personal identity' (213); the symptoms include the cataleptic fits, and also a change in the colour of her hair, from 'jetty' to 'a vivid yellow' (215) (the latter transformation is, according to Bonaparte, a 'phenomenon unknown to clinical observation',<sup>508</sup> but may be admitted as a fictional hysterical symptom). As for Egaeus, he suffers not only from the obsessive hyperconcentration he calls 'monomania', but from hallucinations, as when the 'white and ghastly spectrum of the teeth' (215) comes to dominate his field of vision: 'still the phantasma of the teeth maintained its terrible ascendancy, as, with the most vivid and hideous distinctness, it floated about amid the changing lights and shadows of the chamber' (216). Besides, his midnight assault on the tomb can only be explained, as Baudelaire suggests, in terms of an 'absence de conscience',<sup>509</sup> - as an anti-social and psychotic act, committed, like Franklin Blake's theft of the jewel in Collins' The Moonstone (1868),<sup>510</sup> in a state of dissociated consciousness in which self acts as another. The act is followed by amnesia ('I had done a

deed - what was it?' (218)), and he finally reconstructs the sequence only with difficulty and with the aid of external testimony. Both the hallucinations and the double consciousness are paralleled in actual cases of hysteria - like that of "Anna O.", described above in Chapter 2;<sup>511</sup> the controversial question of male hysteria will be considered in detail below, in relation to 'Usher',<sup>512</sup> but it may be concluded here that both Berenice and her cousin suffer from different symptoms of the same disease.

The hysterical symptoms undermine the coherence of both Egaeus and Berenice as subjects, through the double consciousness and the catalepsy respectively. According to psychoanalytic theory, hysteria originates in repressed sexual ideas;<sup>513</sup> the relation between the two cousins (and fiancés) should be examined in this light. Clearly it is unconsummated, since the marriage never takes place; Berenice may be considered as largely repressed and passive, although not without active potential (before the illness, she is described as 'overflowing with energy' (210)). Her only concrete intervention after the disease occurs in the incident when she appears, staring, silent and motionless in the library (214-15); however, she may actually be less alienated from her body than her cousin is from his, since he proposes marriage on the grounds that 'she had loved me long' (214). At all events, her illness may be seen as deriving from her desire, part-repressed and part-frustrated.

Before Berenice's illness, Egaeus, by his own confession, was totally alienated from his own sexuality - indeed, not only from his own body but from hers, since he failed to perceive her as a physical being at all:

During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings, with me, had never been of the heart, and my passions always were of the mind... I had seen her - not as the living and breathing Berenice,<sup>514</sup> but as the Berenice of a dream; not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being ... (213-14)

Like the narrator of 'Morella', he claims, in effect, that the fires within him are 'not of Eros';<sup>515</sup> feelings seen as not 'of the heart' are perceived as non-sexual, and his mind thus appears totally dissociated from his body.<sup>516</sup> Berenice, whom he had earlier disembodied by conversion into a 'sylph' or 'Naiad' (210), is here converted into an 'abstraction', the bodiless image 'of a dream'.(214). Thus; rather than recognising her physicality, her existence as another subject, he reduces her to less than an object - to an appearance in his own dreams, and thus to a mere epiphenomenon of himself as subject. However, her illness forces him to pay attention to her body, and thus, finally, to acknowledge the existence of her 'physical frame' (213).

Yet her body imposes itself on him only in a destructive, obsessional way. After her visit to him in the library, his consciousness becomes dominated by the hallucination of the teeth - the metonymic substitution of part-object for entire body making it clear that, even now, he cannot confront her physicality in all its threatening concreteness. The teeth - 'long, narrow and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them' (215) - are clearly vampiric; but their vampire connotations should be taken as indicating the potential presence, in Berenice, of active female desire. As Moretti suggests, vampirism derives from 'an ambivalent impulse of the child towards its mother';<sup>517</sup> Bonaparte's reference to the vagina dentata<sup>518</sup> points to the castrating aspect of the Oedipal mother, but, beyond this, the figure of the

female vampire, sexually aware and destructive, may be read as a symbolic recollection of the active pre-Oedipal mother.<sup>519</sup> The sexually threatening character of the female vampire is evident in the episode of the portraits in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891), as cited above;<sup>520</sup> and also in Stoker's Dracula (1897), where Lucy Westenra, vampirised by the Count, is seen as converted into a sexually conscious and destructive monster: 'The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness.... the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing'.<sup>521</sup> In the case of Berenice, what her teeth signify is less any consciously active desire on her part than her lover's fear of the active potential contained in her body. Thus the extreme terror which their image produces in Egaeus, as indicated in the lexis ('ghastly', 'terrible' (215); 'hideous' (216)), derives from the castration fear; if a woman acquires 'long, narrow' appendages (215) capable of penetration and drawing blood, then she becomes "masculinised", and therefore poses a threat to male power.

Egaeus is thus terrorised by the teeth, which threaten his own insertion, as a male, into the patriarchal law. His reaction is to remove the threat, through physical possession of the teeth: 'I felt that their possession could alone ever release me to peace' (216). Hence the nocturnal visit to the grave, which has, certainly, the aim of dispossessing Berenice of the offending objects, and, probably, the further objective of punishing her for the symbolic menace to patriarchy that she has unwittingly represented. Her fiancé knows of her cataleptic symptoms, and could have refused permission for her burial; besides, in a passage deleted in 1845,<sup>522</sup> he visits her bedroom after her "death", and sees, or imagines, that 'the finger of the enshrouded

dead ... stirred in the white cerement that bound it'.<sup>523</sup> This suggests that he knows, perhaps, unconsciously - even in his dissociated second consciousness - that Berenice is still alive, and that the extraction of the teeth is therefore also a sadistic act of violence on her living body. It is, besides, a symbolic reconstitution of the male/female power-structure reversed by the teeth; if Berenice acquires phallic power through them, then - as Bonaparte suggests<sup>524</sup> - their removal symbolically castrates her, destroying her active sexuality. Further, the textual references to the 'violated grave' and 'disfigured body', and the 'gore' clotting the intruder's clothes (218) all go to suggest that what happens is an act of symbolic rape - as Cixous suggests, it is a distorted and sadistic parody of the wedding-night that never was.<sup>525</sup> As if all this were not enough, in all probability Egaeus murders Berenice; he discovers her 'still alive!' (218), awakened from her trance, but instead of restoring her to society, destroys her life in the process of extraction. The violation of the grave is, then, a composite act of murder and symbolic rape and castration, in which woman is reduced back to her allotted place in culture; it is thus a corrective intervention of 'dental surgery' (219), not only on the body of Berenice, but on the body politic.

However, Berenice - like the wife in 'The Black Cat'<sup>526</sup> - resists, in her last moments of life. Her mutilator's hands are 'indented with the impress of human nails' (218); this is the visible sign of her resistance, her capacity to fight back against the oppressor. Indeed, 'indented' etymologically suggests teeth (the French 'dents' has appeared earlier in the text (216)), and so ironically keeps alive that image, and hence the possibility of female activity. The edifice of male power has been reconstituted, but not without female

contestation - Berenice's last act testifies to the fragility of the whole structure, based as it is on repression and oppression. Egaeus' cohesion as subject has been definitively undermined through the very act by which he sought to reaffirm it, since he will henceforth live in a guilt-ridden private world of 'misery' and 'anguish' (1). The text of 'Berenice', then, in symbolically raising the possibility of active female sexuality, exposes the coherence of the male subject as illusory, as permanently liable to disturbance. Under the apparent equilibrium of the male self-image there lies the repressed knowledge and fear of active female desire.

'Dans les Nouvelles de Poe, il n'y a jamais d'amour.', claimed Baudelaire in 'Edgar Poe, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres' (1856).<sup>527</sup> It is, indeed, true that anything resembling a male-female relationship based on reciprocal and conscious sexual desire is virtually absent from the canon, and certainly from the stories discussed in this chapter-part, even though three of them include marriage, and one contains a ~~birth~~. However, it is more correct to conclude with Cortázar ('El poeta, el narrador y el crítico', 1956) that in Poe's tales 'la pasión amorosa ... asume los rasgos propios del sádico, el masoquista y el necrófilo' ('the emotion of love ... takes on the very features of the sadist, the masochist and the necrophile'), thus becoming 'una pasión que el héroe es el primero en no saber cómo calificar' ('a passion which the hero is the first to admit he does not know how to describe').<sup>528</sup>

The male protagonists of 'The Oval Portrait', 'Ligeia', 'Morella' and 'Berenice' are alienated from their own bodies, estranged from desires that they cannot define, and which emerge in distorted, sadistic forms; at the same time, they are ravaged by unconscious fears of female sexuality and of the undermining of patriarchal power. In the sexual

field, then, subjectivity is constituted in these tales as constantly tending to rupture and disintegration; in 'Ligeia' and 'The Oval Portrait', the aesthetic field enters as another area in which the illusory "unified" subject is not confirmed but subverted. Besides, all four tales centre on the figure of the active woman (Ligeia and Morella, active in life; Berenice, active on the threshold of death; the woman of the oval portrait, imagined to be active after death); this figure, "returning" from the grave, signifies both the indestructibility of female sexuality in the face of repression and social control, and the possibility of a historic change in gender relations, as demanded in the discourse of the early feminists. All these themes, as will be shown, recur in the last text to be discussed in this study, 'The Fall of the House of Usher'.

## 2. 'THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER': A BUILDING ON THE EDGE OF COLLAPSE

### i. A Study in 'Mental Disorder'

'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839) has been chosen for the final analysis of this study, as being one of Poe's most-read and most-discussed tales; it also contains, in particularly concentrated form, many of the key themes (psychological, sexual-political, socio-political) identified above as present in Poe's other stories. The figure of the active woman, which dominates the tales discussed in the previous chapter-part, returns here too; the interior recurs; the myth of the artist is problematised, as in 'The Oval Portrait' and 'Ligeia'; the disintegration of the subject is signified, as in 'William Wilson', 'The Tell-Tale Heart'



and 'Ligeia', but in greater detail; and the "normal"/"abnormal" dividing line is called in question, as in 'The Man of the Crowd', 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether' and 'The Purloined Letter'. While 'Usher' belongs primarily to the "Gothic" pole of Poe's fiction, it is not innocent of "modernity"; if the text of 'Ligeia' signifies its own contemporaneity (through its convergence with feminist discourses), the same may be said of 'Usher', insofar as its presentation of mental disorder corresponds to contemporaneous psychological theories (while also permitting a psychoanalytic reading). As will be shown in the following analysis, the deconstitution of the "unified" subject reaches its extreme point in this tale, given that the disintegrative process takes place not only in the avowedly disturbed Usher, but also in the allegedly "normal" narrator.

Reference to the text of 'Usher'<sup>1</sup> is made in this chapter by paragraph numbers; since the tale contains an inset narrative, 'The Mad Trist', the three paragraphs corresponding to that narrative (32, 34, 37) have also been numbered: MT (1), (2), (3). The inset poem, 'The Haunted Palace', occurs between paragraphs (18) and (19) (M II, 406-407).

The numbering is as follows:

<u>Number</u>	<u>First Words</u>	<u>Page Numbers in Mabbott, -11</u>
1	'During the whole ...'	397-98
2	'Nevertheless ...'	398
3	'Although, as boys ...'	398-99
4	'I have said ...'	399-400
5	'Shaking off ...'	400
6	'Noticing these things ...'	400-401
7	'The room in which ...'	401

8	'Upon my entrance ...'	401-402
9	'In the manner ...'	402
10	'It was thus ...'	402-403
11	'To an anomalous species ...'	403
12	'I learned, moreover ...'	403
13	'He admitted ...'	403-404
14	'The disease ...'	404
15	'For several days ...'	404-405
16	'I shall ever ...'	405
17	'One of the phantasmagoric conceptions ...'	405
18	'I have just spoken ...' (leading to the poem)	406
19	'I well remember ...'	408
20	'Our books ...'	408-409
21	'I could not help ...'	409
22	'At the request ...'	409-410
23	'Having deposited ...'	410
24	'And now, some days ...'	410-11
25	'It was, especially ...'	411-12
26	'I had taken ...'	412
27	'"And you have not seen it?"...'	412
28	'The impetuous fury ...'	412
29	'"You must not ..."'	412-13
30	'The antique volume ...'	413
31	'I had arrived ...'	413
32 (MT1)	'"And Ethelred ..."'	413-14
33	'At the termination ...'	414
34 (MT2)	'"But the good champion ..."'	414

35	'Here again I paused ...'	414
36	'Oppressed, as I certainly was ...'	414-15
37 (MT3)	""And now, the champion ...""	415
38	'No sooner ...'	415-16
39	""Not hear it? ...""	416
40	'As if in the superhuman energy ...'	416-17
41	'From that chamber ...'	417

The title of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' - like others in Poe's fiction ('The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Masque of the Red Death')<sup>2</sup> - is open to multiple interpretation. The formulation: 'House of Usher' clearly indicates both the house as dwelling and the "house" or family; this is later confirmed by the narrator when he refers to the 'quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher" ... which seemed to include ... both the family and the family mansion' (3). The "fall" of the title is thus both the collapse of the House and the extinction of the family; the title is 'equivocal' in a third sense, since "fall" also means autumn (the narrator arrives in 'the autumn of the year' (1), and the family can be considered to be in its autumn). The title is, further, proleptic; it informs the reader from the beginning that the House is going to fall and - once, from (3) onwards, she/he has identified the second meaning of "House" - that the family is going to be extinguished. Indeed, it encapsulates the outline of the story: the decline (autumn) and extinction of the Usher family and the collapse of their mansion. It may be considered as the first instance in the text of a mise en abyme, i.e. a résumé of the main narrative, inserted into it in such a way as partially to disturb its linearity.<sup>3</sup> The main text is also preceded by an epigraph, derived (with one slight alteration) from Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780-1857):<sup>4</sup>

Son coeur est un luth suspendu;  
Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.

This epigraph also anticipates themes of the narrative. The notion of a hypersensitive heart ('Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.') suggests Usher's hyperaesthesia (10), and also his aesthetic sensitivity, his 'peculiar sensibility of temperament' (3). The image of the lute ('un luth suspendu') also warns the reader to expect an artist-protagonist.

The plot of 'Usher' contains various events of ambivalent status, which force the reader to opt for either an "étrange" or a "merveilleux" solution; indeed, like 'Ligeia',<sup>5</sup> this tale has been a testing-ground for the critical controversy over this aspect of Poe's work. The narrator, an old schoolmate of Roderick Usher's, receives a letter from him, requesting a visit. The tale opens with his arrival at the lonely, isolated House, which stands on the edge of a tarn, and his account of the bizarre sensation of fear induced by its physical appearance (1, 4-5). He enters, and meets Usher, who describes the strange illness from which he suffers, and its multiple symptoms (10-12); these include the notion that the House is alive, and exerts a direct influence on his own destiny (12, 19). Usher's sister, Madeline, suffers from an anomalous disease, whose symptoms include cataleptic attacks (14); the narrator only meets her once, after which she takes to her bed. For several days, Usher and his guest devote their time (in the former's 'studio' (6)) to the arts - reading, painting, music; one of Usher's paintings is described in detail (17), and his poem (in fact Poe's own), 'The Haunted Palace', is reproduced in full (406-407). One evening Usher informs his friend that Madeline is dead, and that he intends to preserve her corpse, for a fortnight, in a vault under the house (21); together, they deposit the coffin in the vault, securing

its 'door, of massive iron' (22) behind them (22-23). About a week later, during a storm, Usher enters the narrator's bedroom at night, with his symptoms visibly worse (26); in an effort to calm him, his guest reads him passages from a 'romance' (29), 'the "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning' (30). During the reading, strange, violent sounds are "heard" by both, coming from inside the house. Finally, Usher tells the narrator that Madeline, buried alive, has escaped from her tomb, and is now standing outside the door (39); the latter then "sees" her enter the room and collapse on to her brother - upon which (he believes), both simultaneously die. He at once flees from the House, and gets outside just in time, before it too collapses into the tarn.

The main problematic elements in this narrative - permitting both "étrange" and "merveilleux" readings - are: first, Usher's belief that the house is animated (which is, to some extent, reproduced in the narrator's notion that house and grounds are surrounded by 'an atmosphere peculiar to themselves' (4)); and second, the "return" of Madeline from the locked vault. Supernaturalist interpretations are offered by, for instance, Darrell Abel ('A Key to the House of Usher', 1949),<sup>6</sup> who argues: 'Throughout the tale, alternative explanations, natural and supernatural, of the phenomena are set forth; and we are induced ... to accept imaginatively the supernatural explanation.'<sup>7</sup> (i.e. that Madeline literally returns from the dead); J. O. Bailey ('What Happens in "The Fall of the House of Usher"?', 1964), who reads the tale in terms of vampirism, seeing both Madeline and the House as vampires that jointly persecute Usher;<sup>8</sup> and Mabbott (1978), who claims that the House 'has only one soul which has its abode in the mansion and in the members of the family', and that 'if one dies, all must perish together'.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Todorov (Introduction à la littérature

fantastique, 1970) reads 'Usher' as an exemplary instance of the fantastic-"étrange", arguing that the apparently supernatural events - the return of Madeline and the collapse of the House - are signified as "étrange" via certain textual clues - the 'fissure' in the House (5) and Madeline's catalepsy: 'Ainsi pourraient apparaître surnaturelles la résurrection de la soeur et la chute de la maison après la mort de ses habitants; mais Poe n'a pas manqué d'expliquer rationnellement l'une et l'autre.'<sup>10</sup> More detailed "étrange" explanations are offered by I. M. Walker ('The "Legitimate Sources" of Terror in "The Fall of the House of Usher"', 1966)<sup>11</sup> and G. R. Thompson ('The Face in the Pool: Reflections on the Doppelgänger Motif in "The Fall of the House of Usher"', 1973;<sup>12</sup> Poe's Fiction, 1973).<sup>13</sup> Walker points out that the "peculiar atmosphere" surrounding the House can be explained in terms of the nineteenth-century concept of "miasma", i.e. a poisonous gas believed to arise from stagnant water and decayed vegetable matter; this gas was considered deleterious to physical and mental health, and, specifically, hallucinogenic.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the narrator refers to the 'rank miasma of the tarn' (29), and, as Walker suggests, both his and Usher's "perception" of the return of Madeline can be read as an effect of the hallucinogenic atmosphere that has arisen up from the stagnant tarn and 'decayed trees' (4). Further, Walker stresses that Madeline's return is a physical impossibility; as he shows, even had Madeline been buried alive and then woken up, she could not possibly have got out of the coffin, with its 'screwed down' lid, or opened the 'secured ... door of iron' (23). He concludes that the "return" is a double hallucination on the part of Usher and the narrator;<sup>15</sup> a similar line is taken by Thompson, whose analysis stresses the latter's mounting unreliability: 'we do not know for sure that the House splits apart ..., for the narrator has by now been revealed to be

totally untrustworthy'.<sup>16</sup> The physical impossibility of Madeline's escape - which Todorov fails to note, but Bailey, on the supernaturalist side, does register<sup>17</sup> - has to be taken account of in any "étrange" reading; her catalepsy does not, in context, permit her appearance in the narrator's room to be read as "real", and hallucination is therefore the only rational explanation coherent with the text.

The present analysis follows the Walker-Thompson line of interpretation of the fictional events; on the assumption that 'Usher' is primarily about mental disintegration (both Usher's and the narrator's), the tale's psychological dimension will receive close attention, in the context both of nineteenth-century discourses of mental illness and of psychoanalytic theory (the latter dimension is neglected by Walker, and appears in Thompson's discussion only in the shape of non-specific reference to 'the subconscious (sic) mind').<sup>18</sup> The attempt is made to offer a double diagnosis of Usher's illness, in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century terms; attention is also focussed on the role of Madeline and the psycho-sexual determinants of the illnesses of both siblings. The triadic relation between Usher, Madeline and the narrator is then examined, with particular emphasis on the role of the last-named as (apparent) representative of cultural "normality". Consideration is also given to the tale's possible social and political significations (in relation to the "Southern question"), and to its textual construction of art and the artist (with detailed analysis of the various artworks described or quoted in the text - including the House itself). Finally, the critical tradition that would read the tale in terms of "unity" is examined and rejected, in favour of the view that this text is, rather, highly subversive of a whole series of cultural orthodoxies, and a crucial index of the crisis of the subject.

The different interpretive readings put forward by critics in relation to the tale's multiple themes are examined at the relevant points of the discussion.

ii. Usher and Madeline: A Diagnosis

The "étrange" reading having been established in principle, a detailed specification of Usher's illness (and, later, Madeline's) is now in order. First, however, two further problems on the level of "what happens" in the tale have to be resolved: is the relation between Usher and his sister incestuous?; and to what extent is it sadistic (does he deliberately bury her alive?). Incest has been located in the tale by D. H. Lawrence (Studies in Classic American Literature, 1923)<sup>19</sup> ('Here the love is between brother and sister.');<sup>20</sup> Marie Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933),<sup>21</sup> who sees Usher's incestuous desire as essentially Oedipal, with Madeline as a displacement of the mother;<sup>22</sup> and Allen Tate ('Our Cousin, Mr Poe', 1949),<sup>23</sup> who sees Madeline's final collapse on to her brother as a 'sexual embrace'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the presence of incest in 'Usher' has become something of a critical commonplace, from which only the most intentionist of critics would demur (Mabbott (1978) argues that 'conscious use of such a theme is contrary to Poe's usual practice',<sup>25</sup> which is true, but irrelevant if the principle of unconscious determination is accepted; Julian Symons (The Tell-Tale Heart, 1978) claims that 'Usher' cannot be about incest because 'the word is not mentioned in the story',<sup>26</sup> by which line of reasoning, Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850) equally cannot be about adultery, since that signifier never enters the text!). However, assuming there is incest in the tale, several questions have to be answered: is Usher's incestuous desire conscious or not?; is it reciprocated, consciously or unconsciously,



by Madeline?; is it consummated literally, or symbolically, or not at all?; and if it is consummated, when?

Usher's desire for his sister has often been assumed to be conscious and consummated. Thus Cortázar ('El poeta, el narrador y el crítico', 1956) suggests that Usher recognises his own desire, but silences it, at least to the narrator, 'aterrado por el peso de su culpa o su obsesión' ('terrified by the weight of his guilt or his obsession').<sup>27</sup> The possibility of consummation, implied by Cortázar in his reference to guilt, is raised by various critics: John L. Marsh ('The Psycho-Sexual Reading of "The Fall of the House of Usher"', 1972)<sup>28</sup> sees Usher as a 'sexual criminal', who has maintained a 'long-standing, deliberately incestuous relationship' with Madeline,<sup>29</sup> and, besides, physically violates her dead body (hence the 'blood upon her white robes' when she returns (40));<sup>30</sup> Renata R. M. Wasserman ('The Self, the Mirror, the Other: "The Fall of the House of Usher"', 1977)<sup>31</sup> reads Usher and Madeline as breaking the incest taboo, thus introducing 'disorder ... in the social fabric', and exiling themselves from culture;<sup>32</sup> and Rosemary Jackson (Fantasy, 1981) goes so far as to read the House as 'a place where transgression and taboo are permitted', where 'Madeleine sic) and Usher have an incestuous relationship'.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Gerald M. Garmon ('Roderick Usher: Portrait of the Madman as an Artist', 1973)<sup>34</sup> suggests that the incestuous desire, while mutual, remains latent: 'There is ... no suggestion of physical incest between Roderick and Madeline ... In their very inability to consummate an incestuous relationship, Roderick and Madeline have come to the end of the line.';<sup>35</sup> while Leslie Fiedler (Love and Death in the American Novel, 1960), following Tate,<sup>36</sup> implies that only in the final scene is Usher's desire put into practice: 'Madeline ... returns from the

grave to claim her brother just as he has, almost equally, feared and desired ... It is the most horrific of Liebestods'.<sup>37</sup>

It is clear that Usher is characterised by the insistence of his libido; so much is evident from his fascination with Pomponius Mela's descriptions of the 'old African Satyrs and Aegipans' (= goat-pans) (20);<sup>38</sup> the symbolism of goats and satyrs speaks for itself. This forceful sexuality may, however, be repressed, only emerging in the "innocent", antiquarian context of Usher's reading. Indeed, if, as Freud suggests in the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), 'neuroses are ... the negative of perversions',<sup>39</sup> the evident presence of neurotic symptoms in Usher<sup>40</sup> may suggest that his tendencies to sexual "perversion" remain on the level of unconscious fantasy. It is not necessary to accept that Usher has actually committed incest or necrophilia, despite the possible analogy with 'Berenice', where at least symbolic violation of the corpse seems undeniable.<sup>41</sup>

The existence of incestuous desire in Usher is attested by his admission that 'sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them' (23). If idealist readings are discounted, this can only refer to incest-wishes - given the isolation of the siblings and the absence of any other potential sexual object for either. However, if for Usher these 'sympathies' are 'unintelligible', this may be because their true character is repressed. At all events, the extremity of his feelings towards Madeline is beyond doubt; at the prospect of her death, he sheds 'many passionate tears' (13), and he reacts to the worsening in her condition with 'inexpressible agitation' (14), and to her death with 'bitter grief' (24).

Certainly, Usher and Madeline may be the products of incestuous relations, as Thompson suggests;<sup>42</sup> the family has been noted for centuries for its tendency to inbreeding (3). This does not necessarily imply that Usher and Madeline have themselves committed incest; the psychological decay of the stock may have reached the point where neither is capable emotionally of initiating or maintaining a sexual relationship. As will be suggested below in the section on hysteria,<sup>43</sup> one possible interpretation of the situation is that Usher suffers from repressed incestuous wishes towards Madeline, which express themselves somatically in hysterical symptoms; the hallucinatory return of Madeline may then be read as the imaginary consummation of his previously repressed fantasies (and, quite possibly, of the narrator's incestuous fantasies too). On this basis, it may be suggested that the incest in the text is unconscious, present on the level of repressed desire; and that it is consummated only symbolically in the joint fantasy of the dying Usher and the narrator (the question of Madeline's own desire will be examined later).<sup>44</sup>

Usher's relation to his sister has, besides, been read as not only incestuous but (consciously or unconsciously) sadistic. The reader is forced by the text to ask whether Madeline was in fact buried alive, as Usher thinks ("We have put her living in the tomb!" (39)), and, if that is the case, whether Usher was consciously responsible. Thus Thompson poses (without actually answering) the question: 'Did Roderick intentionally try to murder Madeline ...?';<sup>45</sup> Bonaparte explicitly sees Usher as a sadist;<sup>46</sup> while Daniel Hoffman (Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, 1972) argues that the burial-alive was a deliberate, if self-destructive act, dictated by Usher's own 'inescapable Imp of the Perverse, willing his own destruction ... through the mechanism of making him

will hers'.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, here as with Egaeus in 'Berenice',<sup>48</sup> Usher's awareness of Madeline's catalepsy does not prevent him from having her encoffined or from screwing down the coffin-lid (31). One may contrast the life-preserving coffin described in 'The Premature Burial' (1844) with its lever, springs and bell, placed in a vault whose 'iron portals' are 'readily opened from within' (M III, 965-66); designed for a cataleptic sufferer, this coffin and vault form the polar opposite to Madeline's burial conditions. Since Usher takes no such precautions, this suggests a possible sadistic element in his decision to place the corpse in the vault. Indeed, the existence of such a tendency in him is suggested by the pleasure he takes in reading Eyméric de Gironne's Directorium Inquisitorum (1503) (20),<sup>49</sup> a manual of instructions to priests examining heretics;<sup>50</sup> this detail connects with the account of inquisitorial sadism in 'The Pit and the Pendulum' (1842), and prompted Mario Praz (The Romantic Agony, 1930) to read Usher as a prototype of the literary 'cliché of the sadist'.<sup>51</sup> The tendency may be presumed hereditary, given the narrator's comment on the burial vault: 'It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep' (22), and the later references to it as 'the donjon' (by the narrator (25)) and 'her prison' (by Usher (39)); all this suggests that the vault was, in the past, at best a highly unpleasant prison, and at worst - as Marsh suggests<sup>52</sup> - a torture-chamber. Usher also believes his ancestor-architect to have been a sadist, inflicting suffering on his descendants via the spirits in the stones (19).<sup>53</sup> It may further be noted, on the lexical level, how the verb 'to torture' occurs in the text with some frequency: 'an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime' (1); 'his eyes were tortured

by even a faint light' (10); 'the dark and tattered draperies, ... tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest' (25). The theme of sadism is thus connoted even at seemingly "innocent" moments in the narrative. The question will be taken up again later, in relation to Usher's practice as artist;<sup>54</sup> it may be affirmed here that his sadistic tendencies are undeniable, and that what matters is that he thinks he has buried his sister alive.

In the context of the incestuous and sadistic tendencies identified above, the attempt will be made to establish the specific character of Usher's disease, which combines 'bodily illness' with 'mental disorder' (2). The clinical picture is complex - considerably more so than in 'Ligeia' or 'Berenice'.<sup>55</sup> The narrator, like other Poe protagonists,<sup>56</sup> claims a certain medical expertise; so much is implicit in his statement: 'the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies' (30), and his claim is, in fact, borne out by what is, as will be shown, his correct use of terms like 'hypochondria' and 'hysteria' (Elizabeth Phillips (Edgar Allan Poe - An American Imagination, 1979) stresses that Poe's employment of medical terminology is, in general, accurate: '(his) use of technical terms ... suggests that they are terms to which he was accustomed without question').<sup>57</sup> Usher's illness will be examined from the viewpoint of various medical theories existent in Poe's own day; after which, the diagnosis will be reformulated in psychoanalytic terms. For the first stage of the clinical analysis, use will be made of Michel Foucault's Histoire de la Folie (Madness and Civilization) (1961), which includes detailed discussions of mania and hysteria/hypochondria,<sup>58</sup> and Ilza Veith's Hysteria: The History of a Disease (1965);<sup>59</sup> reference will also be

made to three studies on 'Usher'; I. M. Walker's article (1966) (already referred to above),<sup>60</sup> David W. Butler's 'Usher's Hypochondriasis: Mental Alienation and Romantic Idealism in Poe's Gothic Tales' (1976),<sup>61</sup> and the relevant chapter of Phillips' study, as mentioned above.<sup>62</sup>

Foucault's study describes certain clinical orthodoxies which, though evolved earlier, underlie the "'scientific psychiatry" of the nineteenth century'.<sup>63</sup> The mania/melancholia alternation will be taken first.

According to Foucault, this clinical phenomenon was already established in the eighteenth century: 'Virtually all the physicians of the eighteenth century acknowledged the proximity of mania and melancholia.' The two conditions were considered variously as separate, but closely-related diseases; and as 'two manifestations of the same disease'.<sup>64</sup>

Melancholia was defined by Thomas Willis (Opera omnia, 1681) as 'a madness without fever or frenzy, accompanied by fear and sadness';<sup>65</sup> eighteenth-century writers tended to suggest the following symptomatology (as summarised by Foucault): 'sadness, bitterness, a preference for immobility ... inertia, ... despair, ... a sort of dull stupor'.<sup>66</sup>

There was also a tendency to obsessive thinking, with the 'mind ... fixed upon a single object'.<sup>67</sup> It was believed, further, that in melancholia the "animal spirits" (supposed to be present in the 'channels of the nerves',<sup>68</sup> and defined by the O.E.D. as 'the supposed "spirit" or principle of sensation and voluntary motion')<sup>69</sup> became 'immobilized',<sup>70</sup> and darkened from their normal light colour, turning (in Willis' words) 'obscure, opaque, shadowy';<sup>71</sup> and that the nervous fibres, too, became rigidified, owing to excessive tension: 'only a few fibers vibrate in the melancholic, those which correspond to the precise point of his delirium'.<sup>72</sup>

In Poe's work, the obsessive 'monomania' of Egeus in 'Berenice' (1835) (M II, 211) as noted in the previous chapter,<sup>73</sup> may be considered a symptom of melancholia (as a further element in the clinical picture, additional to hysteria); while, as Phillips points out,<sup>74</sup> 'melancholy' is used in a specifically medical sense in his review of the anonymous novel Sheppard Lee (1836 - H IX, 126-39), where (in the words of Poe's plot summary) the protagonist falls into a 'melancholy derangement' which produces 'delirium' (136). Usher is seen by the narrator as suffering from 'melancholy' (15), and his symptomatology includes: 'gloom' and 'bitterness' (13); obsessive brooding on a limited number of ideas (the animation of the house, the family destiny, Madeline's illness); fear of madness and death (11). His mind is characterised in terms of darkness: 'a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom' (15). This image recalls a passage in Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-18) which describes the mental state of 'those that walk in darkness' and 'colour things to come with hues of Night';<sup>75</sup> Harold, with his 'life-abhorring gloom',<sup>76</sup> may be considered a sufferer from melancholia, while Byron himself, in his journal 'Detached Thoughts' (15 October 1821), refers to 'the Melancholy which runs through my writings'.<sup>77</sup> The textual reference to 'darkness' also suggests the idea of darkening of the animal spirits - which are themselves referred to in the text of 'Usher', when the protagonist's voice, in its 'tremulous' phase, is said to imply a condition in which 'the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance' (9) (which suggests they are not only darkened but immobilised).

Melancholia, however, was seen as only one moment in a dialectical alternation. Mania, for the theorists summarised by Foucault, was both the opposite pole to melancholia, and a condition into which the former condition could easily mutate. Where in melancholia, the nervous fibres were virtually immobilised, in mania they became hyperactive. In Foucault's words, the maniac, victim of 'a perpetual flux of impetuous thoughts',<sup>78</sup> 'vibrates to any and every stimulus'.<sup>79</sup> Mania was characterised by 'audacity and fury', and by alienation from reality as generally conceived: 'the totality of thought is disturbed in its essential relation to truth'.<sup>80</sup> According to one of Foucault's authorities, Charles-Gaspard de la Rive ('Sur un établissement pour la guérison des aliénés'), the maniac believes that 'the ideas produced by the deranged state of his brain ... represent real objects, and judges accordingly'.<sup>81</sup> Maniacs, then, were seen as liable to delusions and hallucinations.

The term "mania" does not actually occur in 'Usher'. However, "mania" and "maniac" appear in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841), where the narrator declares: "'A madman ... has done this deed - some raving maniac, escaped from a neighboring Maison de Santé.'" (M II, 558);<sup>82</sup> and in 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether' (1845), in Maillard's reference to the 'raging maniac' (M III, 1006),<sup>83</sup> and the narrator's claim to be familiar with 'the metaphysics of mania' (ibid., 1004).<sup>84</sup> Further, in the passage deleted from the later versions of 'Berenice',<sup>85</sup> Egaeus, terrified at the sight of his cousin in her coffin, 'rushed forth a maniac from that apartment'.<sup>86</sup> From these examples, it is clear that in Poe's fiction mania is associated with violence and extremity; maniacs are 'raging' or 'raving'. It may also be concluded that Poe's use of the signifier "mania" is specific and technical.



Elizabeth Phillips, it is true, argues against the interpretation of the term in its modern sense (implying one pole of the manic-depressive cycle), claiming: 'In the nineteenth century, ...'mania' was the general term for mental disease'.<sup>87</sup> However, her study makes no reference whatever to Foucault, whose analysis tends to suggest a high degree of specificity for the term; while all the instances in Poe, except for that of the narrator of 'Tarr and Fether', are convergent with the specific sense (the narrator of that tale, it will be remembered, is a fool, less aware of the realities of madness than the keeper-turned-inmate Maillard).<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Poe's use of 'maniac' is more technical than that of, say, Shelley in Julian and Maddalo (1818),<sup>89</sup> a text which presents a 'lorn maniac'<sup>90</sup> who does not exhibit violent tendencies.

According to Willis, melancholia and mania 'often change into one another'.<sup>91</sup> Thus a condition of melancholia could eventually degenerate into one of mania, so that mania could be seen as the last phase of melancholia; Foucault cites the opinion of Joseph Lieutaud: 'a melancholia that lasts a long time and whose delirium is exacerbated loses its traditional symptoms and assumes a strange resemblance to mania'.<sup>92</sup> Both conditions were believed to derive ultimately from the same source, i.e. a tension in the nervous system - only where in melancholia the fibres were 'immobilized by too great a tension', in mania the tension had the opposite effect, making them hyperactive: 'Mania was thus a tension of the fibers carried to its paroxysm, the maniac a sort of instrument whose strings ... began to vibrate at the remotest and faintest stimulus'.<sup>93</sup> The mania/melancholia alternation is, then, by the mid-eighteenth century already 'given as an observed phenomenon';<sup>94</sup> thus Foucault quotes Robert James (Dictionnaire universe) de médecine

(trans. 1746-48)): 'It is absolutely necessary to reduce melancholia and mania to a single species of disease ... melancholics ... easily become maniacal, and when the mania ceases, the melancholia begins again'.<sup>95</sup>

Usher's illness may be read as exhibiting, in certain aspects, the mania/melancholia alternation: 'His action was alternately vivacious and sullen.' (9) His voice varies from a 'tremulous indecision', indicative of immobilised animal spirits and hence of melancholia, to an 'energetic concision' that signifies a manic 'intense excitement'. This alternation implies that Usher's mania and melancholia may have a common origin in his hypersensitive nervous system; the lute image of the epigraph<sup>96</sup> suggests Foucault's comparison of the maniac to a sensitised musical instrument. After Madeline's death, it may be argued, the quick alternation of manic and melancholic phases is succeeded by a prolonged melancholic phase: 'The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more; and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance.' (24); the "manic" voice disappears, and the "melancholic" voice alone remains, while the element of 'terror' implies melancholia. Usher's last moments, however, are marked by a return to the manic phase, evidenced in his violence and hyperexcitement ('here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables' (39)), in the 'superhuman energy of his utterance' (40), and in what is, presumably, his dying hallucination of Madeline. Usher's illness, then, in one sense corresponds to the model of mania and melancholia. As Foucault stresses, however, medical theory also identified another pair of diseases, which, over the eighteenth century, increasingly entered the area of mental, rather than organic, illness<sup>97</sup> -

that is, hysteria and hypochondria. This pair will now be examined.

The question of hysteria has already been briefly considered for 'Berenice', where Baudelaire's diagnosis of Berenice's illness as 'hystérie' ('Edgar Allan Poe, sa Vie et ses Ouvrages', 1852)<sup>98</sup> was noted, and it was further suggested that Egaeus, too, could be read as a victim of that illness.<sup>99</sup> The term occurs in the text of 'Usher', in the narrator's description of his friend's appearance when the latter knocks at his bedroom door: 'there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes - an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanor' (26). Usher is, then, at this point, seen as trying to 'restrain' tendencies which are, in some sense, 'hysterical'. 'Hysteria' here has, no doubt, on one level, its colloquial sense of lack of control, irrationality, etc.; but this does not necessarily invalidate the technical sense. The narrator, with his claims to medical knowledge and his correct use of the parallel term 'hypochondria',<sup>100</sup> would be unlikely to employ a term signifying a recognised disease in a merely colloquial sense; besides, from the D text (1845) on, 'hysteria' is italicised<sup>101</sup> - a textual change which would tend to increase the emphasis on the term's specificity. It is true that the O.E.D. quotes this passage from 'Usher' to exemplify the word in the non-technical sense of 'morbidly excited condition; unhealthy emotion or excitement';<sup>102</sup> but the presence of one sense does not negate the other.

Little critical attention has been given to the possible presence of hysteria in 'Usher', although Symons (The Tell-Tale Heart, 1978) suggests that there is 'a strong element of hysteria' in the clinical picture (but does not enlarge on the matter).<sup>103</sup> Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933) sees Usher as suffering from 'anxiety-hysteria' (i.e. phobia,

not conversion hysteria).<sup>104</sup> However, no specific phobia seems to enter the picture, unless it be Usher's fear of the House (which will however, here be seen as paranoiac in character);<sup>105</sup> Bonaparte's analysis does not raise the possibility of somatic conversion in Usher's symptomatology.<sup>106</sup> Phillips notes the narrator's diagnosis, but does not take it further.<sup>107</sup> However, Baudelaire refers to a general presence of hysteria in Poe's writing (not only in 'Berenice'); in 'Edgar Poe, sa Vie et ses Œuvres' (1856), considering Poe's general project of psychological investigation of 'l'homme (sic) nerveux', he sees the signification of hysterical states as recurrent across the canon: 'l'hystérie usurpant la place de la volonté, la contradiction établie entre les nerfs et l'esprit'.<sup>108</sup> 'Hystérie' here clearly refers to functional and psychosomatic disturbances, in the context of a problematic interaction of mind and body. Besides, Baudelaire's translation of 'Usher' ('La Chute de la Maison Usher', 1855)<sup>109</sup> retains 'hystérie', though without the italicisation: 'il y avait ... dans toutes ses manières une espèce d'hystérie évidemment contenue'.<sup>110</sup>

The text of 'Usher', and Baudelaire's comments on Poe's work, both raise the vexed question of male hysteria (Baudelaire, besides, uses the term elsewhere to refer to a male subject, as in 'Le mauvais Vitrier' (1862) - a text already discussed in relation to 'The Imp of the Perverse'<sup>111</sup> - which contains an account of a perverse tendency, 'hystérique selon les médecins', which manifests itself in the male narrator's actions).<sup>112</sup> It is sometimes believed that, until the time of Jean-Martin Charcot,<sup>113</sup> this concept was not admitted; thus Freud, in An Autobiographical Study (1925), describes how, in 1886, an old Viennese doctor declared to him: "But, my dear sir, how can you talk such nonsense? Hysteron (sic)<sup>114</sup> means the uterus. So how can

a man be hysterical?"<sup>115</sup> However, both literature and medical theory had, in fact, raised the possibility of male hysteria before Charcot.

Before Poe and Baudelaire, male hysteria had been signified in literature in the writings of Coleridge and Byron. The former, in his introduction (1809) to 'The Three Graves' (1798), uses 'hysterical' with reference to a male subject. Summarising the plot of his own poem (in which the male protagonist discovers that his fiancée's mother is in love with him), he writes:

... thus taken by surprise, whether from the effect of the horror which he felt, acting as it were hysterically on his nervous system, or that at the first moment he lost the sense of the guilt of the proposal in the feeling of its strangeness and absurdity, he flung her from him and burst into a fit of laughter.<sup>116</sup>

Hysteria is here, it may be noted, explicitly associated with prohibited sexual ideas, and therefore with 'guilt'. Byron, in a letter to R. C. Dallas (21 August 1811), wrote: 'I am ... subject to a kind of hysterical merriment, or rather laughter without merriment, which I can neither account for nor conquer'.<sup>117</sup> Later, in Collins' The Moonstone (1868), Ezra Jennings admits to hysterical tendencies (and, in the same breath, to the transgression of gender boundaries): "I ... burst out crying. An hysterical relief ... nothing more! Physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions—and I am one of them!"<sup>118</sup> In all these cases, male hysteria is associated with strange, anomalous mental phenomena, and, in the Collins, explicitly with androgyny; the analogies with 'Usher' are evident, as will become clear.

In Hysteria: The History of a Disease, Ilza Veith details the medical vicissitudes of the notion of male hysteria. The concept was, as she shows, accepted by the following authorities: Joseph Raulin (Traité des affections vaporeuses (1758));<sup>119</sup> François Boissier de Sauvages (Nosologia methodica sistens morborum classes (1763));<sup>120</sup> William Cullen (First Lines of the Practice of Physic (1796));<sup>121</sup> Ernst von Feuchtersleben (The Principles of Medical Psychology (1845));<sup>122</sup> Robert Brudenell Carter (On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria (1853));<sup>123</sup> Wilhelm Griesinger (Mental Pathology and Therapeutics (1867)).<sup>124</sup> All these writers, however, while recognising the existence of male hysteria, consider the illness to be far commoner in women; thus, for instance, Cullen 'found the disease to be more frequent in women than in men'.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, Feuchtersleben significantly adds the qualification: 'when men are attacked by genuine hysterical fits ... which certainly does occur, they are for the most part effeminate (sic) men',<sup>126</sup> thus accompanying a scientific observation with an ideological restatement of gender stereotypes. Male hysteria, while often admitted to exist, tended to be seen as anomalous, and therefore threatening to the established sexual-political structures.

In Poe's text, Usher exhibits various symptoms which can be considered hysterical, whether in terms of nineteenth-century or psychoanalytic discourse; his 'habitual trepidancy', or 'excessive nervous agitation' (9), and hyperaesthesia, or 'morbid acuteness of the senses' (10), appear to be functional disturbances without evident organic causes. Similar symptoms are attested in the pre-Freudian literature; thus Feuchtersleben's symptomatology includes "'hyperaphia," a condition of such extreme and general sensitivity that even the slightest touch

was intolerable'.<sup>127</sup> This may be compared to Usher's condition, in which 'he could only wear garments of certain texture' (10). Charcot (Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière, 1889) attests both 'sensory disturbances' of a general character, including hyperaesthesia, and 'disturbances of the special senses', including sight and hearing;<sup>128</sup> in Usher's case, all five senses are disturbed (10).

Usher may, then, be legitimately diagnosed as suffering from hysterical symptoms. As for the aetiology of the disease, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature was, as Veith shows, marked by an ongoing controversy over whether its origins were physiological or psychological. Apart from the ancient uterine theory, which still had its adherents, the following aetiological factors were put forward: 1) genital disturbances (Cullen,<sup>129</sup> Griesinger);<sup>130</sup> 2) disturbances of the nervous system, probably of hereditary origin (Sauvages,<sup>131</sup> Griesinger);<sup>132</sup> 3) sexual factors, including abstinence (Sauvages,<sup>133</sup> Carter)<sup>134</sup> and excessive desire (Feuchtersleben)<sup>135</sup> (Carter, besides, as early as 1853, anticipated Freud in suggesting repressed sexual ideas as a possible determinant);<sup>136</sup> 4) an over-emotional character (Griesinger,<sup>137</sup> Carter)<sup>138</sup> (on this theory, the hysteric fell ill thanks to a constitutional predisposition).

In Usher's case, hysteria may be attributed to the following recognised causal factors: a hereditary, organic fragility of the nervous system; sexual abstinence; and a hypersensitive, over-emotional, over-imaginative temperament. In the first place, Usher stresses the hereditary factor, considering his illness to be 'a constitutional and a family evil' (10); his 'nervous agitation' (9) may be related to the 'peculiar sensibility of temperament' that has always marked his family (3).

Similarly, Robert Whytt (Nervous, Hypochondriac or Hysterical Disorders, 1764) argues that hysteria and related nervous illnesses are largely 'owing to an uncommon delicacy or unnatural sensibility of the nerves, and are therefore observed chiefly to affect persons of such a constitution'.<sup>139</sup> The abstinence factor is clearly present, given Usher's isolation and the absence of any other sexual object than the prohibited Madeline. As for his 'temperament' (inherited or not), it corresponds to what Griesinger identified as a 'congenital emotional predisposition'.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, it was often thought that the hysterical sufferer was, in large measure, responsible for her/his illness. For Griesinger, again, the patients 'were censurable for their unattractive traits'; in general, hysterical 'misbehavior' was 'sometimes attributed to an inborn character defect'.<sup>141</sup> Foucault confirms that, from the late eighteenth century, hysterics were increasingly blamed for falling ill: 'nervous sufferers ... have an easily impressionable soul, an unquiet heart, too strong a sympathy for what happens around them'.<sup>142</sup> He concludes: 'From now on one fell ill from too much feeling';<sup>143</sup> the manifestations of hysteria, seen as a form of madness, became 'the psychological effect of a moral fault'.<sup>144</sup> Usher, in the context of his inherited 'sensibility' (reinforced by the lute image of the epigraph), may be read as a case of such an oversensitive temperament. On the one hand, his illness could be considered as the product of hereditary factors beyond his control; on the other hand, as a hypersensitive male, and therefore ideologically suspect for his transgression of gender stereotypes, he could be seen as personally responsible for his own hysteria. At all events, the diagnosis is perfectly compatible with pre-psychoanalytic theory; the psychoanalytic dimension will be considered later.<sup>145</sup>



The concept of hysteria is intimately related, in nineteenth-century medical writing, to that of hypochondria (or hypochondriasis); the narrator three times refers to Usher as 'the hypochondriac' (16, 21, 30), thus explicitly linking the two diseases. The term is clearly used - as Butler shows<sup>146</sup> - in its medical, not its popular sense; Usher's illness, Butler concludes, 'closely follows the medically recognised patterns of hypochondriasis'.<sup>147</sup> He is, then, not a 'malade imaginaire', but the victim of a disease closely allied to hysteria. Veith shows that hypochondria was seen sometimes as the male equivalent of hysteria (e.g. by Whytt),<sup>148</sup> sometimes as a disease similar to hysteria, but which could occur in both sexes (e.g. by Cullen<sup>149</sup> and Feuchtersleben).<sup>150</sup> In the first case, hysteria was seen as occurring only in women, and hypochondria only in men; in the second, each disease could affect persons of either sex, although hysteria was "typically" female, and hypochondria "typically" male.

The symptoms of hypochondria included withdrawal and unsociability; for Feuchtersleben, the term was already synonymous with "spleen", thus approximating to something like its modern sense.<sup>151</sup> Butler offers the following symptomatology: reserve and avoidance of others; cultivation of mind over body; obsessive imagination; pallor; hyper-aesthesia; irrational fears.<sup>152</sup> His authorities include James Johnson (An Essay on Morbid Sensitivity of the Stomach and Bowels, 1827) ('The nerves of sense ... are morbidly susceptible to an astonishing degree.');

<sup>153</sup> and Benjamin Rush (Medical Inquiries and Observations, 1812), for whom the characteristic symptom of the disease was 'distress'.<sup>154</sup> Walker cites the parallel opinion of John MacCulloch (An Essay on the Remittent and Intermittent Diseases, 1828) ('Despair and fear ... are ... the two great mental affections of hypochondriasis').<sup>155</sup>

As for the aetiology of hypochondria, Foucault demonstrates that the arguments were similar to those over hysteria. It was seen either as a disease of the nerves, or a disease of the mind;<sup>156</sup> increasingly, as for hysteria, an 'excess of sensibility' came to be seen as the crucial determinant.<sup>157</sup> As Butler shows, a hereditary aetiology was often suggested,<sup>158</sup> while psychological factors, such as 'grief', were also adduced (e.g. by Rush).<sup>159</sup> Walker adds a further possible determinant, in the form of elements in the physical environment; as already mentioned,<sup>160</sup> marsh gas, or 'febrile miasma', was seen by some authorities as contributing to mental illness in general, and hypochondria in particular. The writers quoted by Walker on this point include MacCulloch, for whom hypochondria was a kind of 'marsh fever' in which the 'intellectual faculties' were affected, alternating between 'torpidity' and 'excitement';<sup>161</sup> and Thomas Upham (Elements of Mental Philosophy, 1837), who argued that in those affected by miasma, the 'creations of the imagination' would be 'strange, spectral and terrifying'.<sup>162</sup>

Poe employs the terms 'hypochondriac' and 'hypochondriasis' in his discussion of the character and writings of Thomas Hood (review of Prose and Verse. By Thomas Hood (1845- H XII, 213-22; the connexion with 'Usher' is noted by Butler)).<sup>163</sup> Here, Hood is diagnosed as hypochondriac owing to his 'temperament', marked by 'habitual despondency': 'The continuous and premeditated puns of Hood ... are the hypochondriac's struggles at mirth - they are the grinnings of the death's-head.' (215); 'the genius of Hood is the result of vivid Fancy impelled, or controlled - certainly tintured, at all points, by hypochondriasis'. (217). The association of hypochondria with melancholy

and aesthetic sensibility, and the implied aetiology of temperament, invite comparison with Usher. Literary parallels also occur in the writing of Byron and Melville. The former, in his Ravenna journal (2 February 1821), diagnoses himself as hypochondriac:

I always wake, at a certain hour in the morning, and always in very bad spirits - I may say, in actual despair and despondency, in all respects ... In England, five years ago, I had the same kind of hypochondria ... At present ... the depression of spirits is no less violent ...<sup>164</sup>

The symptomatology - 'despair', 'despondency', 'depression of spirits' - seems orthodox; one may compare Byron's self-diagnosis elsewhere as 'hysterical', as noted above.<sup>165</sup> In Melville's 'Benito Cereno' (1856)<sup>166</sup> - where Byron himself is referred to as an example of a hypochondriac<sup>167</sup> - the protagonist is diagnosed (as in 'Usher', several times) as suffering from the disease.<sup>168</sup> Cereno resembles Usher, insofar as he is afflicted with both 'bodily and mental' disturbances ('This distempered spirit was lodged ... in as distempered a frame.'). The somatic symptoms include thinness (he is 'almost worn to a skeleton'), a voice reduced to a 'husky whisper', and a 'totter(ing)' gait; the mental symptoms include 'settled dejection'<sup>169</sup> and 'withdrawn' attitudes.<sup>170</sup> While his illness clearly derives in part from the traumatic experiences he has undergone (loss of power, death threats, forced role-playing), constitutional factors are also adduced (a 'morbidly sensitive' temperament);<sup>171</sup> the text refers to his 'debility, constitutional or induced by hardships'.<sup>172</sup> The construction of hypochondria in the context of mind/body interaction invites comparison with 'Usher'.

Usher's hypochondriac symptoms include: reserve and withdrawal (he has 'never ventured forth' from the House for years (12)); cultivation

of mind over body; pallor ('cadaverousness of complexion' (8)); hyperaesthesia (his 'morbid acuteness of the senses' (10)); obsessive imagination ('an excited and highly distempered ideality' (16)); and irrational fears (of death and madness (11)).<sup>173</sup> In terms of aetiology, one may point to his inherited 'sensibility of temperament' (3), his anxieties over Madeline (13), and the environmental factor of 'miasma' (29).<sup>174</sup> It may be concluded that the narrator's diagnosis of him as both hysterical and hypochondriac implies an effective identity between the two diseases.

In terms of nineteenth-century medical discourses, Usher's illness may be read as a complex amalgam of hysteria/hypochondria and mania/melancholia; while his last moments correspond to a definitive passage into mania. On this diagnosis, the most prominent element in the aetiology of his illness is an excessive sensitivity of the nervous system, which may be a hereditary, organic defect, or simply an index of his "character". Usher may thus be read, following Foucault, as an ideologically suspect individual, someone who has fallen ill owing to character defects;<sup>175</sup> in addition, he emerges as culturally unacceptable owing to the marked "feminine" component in his make-up (expressed in his hysteria), which defines him as a non-stereotype male, whose existence threatens the rigid antitheses that structure patriarchal power. If Usher is ill, it is, then - in terms of the clinical ideologies of the period - largely his own fault; the negative textual construction of mental illness may thus be compared with that of 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether'.<sup>176</sup>

Usher's illness may, however, equally be examined from a psychoanalytic perspective. In this context, the mania/melancholia alternation is

redefined as a manic-depressive illness; the concept of hypochondria disappears, to be subsumed under a revised concept of hysteria; a new entity, paranoia, enters the picture; and the final passage into mania becomes a case of hallucinatory psychosis. Within this overall picture, attention will now be focussed on the question of hysteria and paranoia, which are the areas in which psychoanalysis may most usefully be applied to Usher's case.

Laplanche and Pontalis (The Language of Psycho-Analysis, 1967) define conversion hysteria as a neurosis 'in which the psychical conflict is expressed symbolically in somatic symptoms of the most varied kinds'.<sup>177</sup> The classical Freudian model of hysteria is expounded in Studies on Hysteria (1893-95),<sup>178</sup> the "Dora" case (1905),<sup>179</sup> and two papers, 'Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality' (1908)<sup>180</sup> and 'Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks' (1909).<sup>181</sup> It may be summarised as follows: hysterical symptoms are both the products and signs of repressed sexual ideas; the symptom, as Freud writes in "Dora", 'has a psychological significance, a meaning',<sup>182</sup> which can be recovered by interpretation. The following comments from the same case-history may be considered to encapsulate the Freudian view of hysteria: 'The causes of hysterical disorders are to be found in the intimacies of the patients' psychosexual life ... hysterical symptoms are the expression of their most secret and repressed wishes';<sup>183</sup> 'sexuality ... provides the motive power for every single symptom, and for every single manifestation of a symptom. The symptoms of the disease are nothing else than the patient's sexual activity.'<sup>184</sup>

The Freudian theory of hysteria may be applied to the cases of both Madeline and Usher, on the assumption that both suffer from a (mutual)

repressed incestuous desire.<sup>185</sup> The case of Madeline will be discussed below;<sup>186</sup> as for Usher, the hysterical character of certain of his symptoms (trembling, hyperaesthesia) has been established above.<sup>187</sup> It may be hypothesised that he suffers from a disturbance of the nervous system which is functional, i.e. does not originate in any organic lesion. His symptoms resemble some of those attested in the psychoanalytic, as well as the pre-psychoanalytic literature (the cases observed by Freud and Breuer in the Studies are included in the former category, since they provided the raw material on which Freud based his theories). Habitual tremors are identified as a hysterical symptom in Breuer's case of "Anna O.",<sup>188</sup> and for a patient mentioned in a footnote to Freud's case of "Emmy von N.".<sup>189</sup> Disturbances of the senses, parallel to Usher's, if more extreme, appear in "Anna O.": inability to see clearly,<sup>190</sup> 'restriction of the visual field',<sup>191</sup> sporadic deafness.<sup>192</sup> Another of Freud's cases, that of "Elisabeth von. R.", provides an instance of 'hyperalgesia of the skin and muscles' of both legs<sup>193</sup> - an oversensitivity comparable to that exhibited by Usher, who 'could wear only garments of certain texture! (10).

The above examples confirm the view that hysteria is at least one element in Usher's composite illness. In this case, given Freud's model of the sexual determination of hysteria, an erotic factor should be sought in the aetiology of his disease; such a factor may, obviously, be located in his repressed incestuous wishes towards his sister. Clearly, this desire is partly sublimated into an innocent-seeming fraternal affection, but, given the absence of any other sexual object for Usher, such sublimation can only be partial. Repressed desire, it may be argued, remains operative in his unconscious, and is converted into hysterical symptoms (or, to be more precise, the affect corresponding

to the desire is transformed into a somatic disturbance whose specific form symbolises the desire itself). Usher's hysterical symptoms may be interpreted as having a sexual meaning. Freud argues, in 'Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks', that hysterical convulsions are distorted representations of orgasm,<sup>194</sup> while the "absence", or loss of consciousness, in a hysterical attack symbolises the 'lapse of consciousness' that follows orgasm.<sup>195</sup> A similar interpretive method may be applied to Usher's symptoms. The 'habitual trepidancy' (1) can be read as a chronic equivalent to the convulsions of an attack, and thus as symbolising the tremors of orgasm; while his hyperaesthesia, involving all the senses, may be seen as representing the sensation of total bodily excitation that characterises orgasm. The symptoms may thus be read as both signs and products of his repressed desire to reach orgasm with his sister - that desire which is symbolically consummated in their final, quasi-orgasmic Liebestod (40).<sup>196</sup> This derivation of Usher's hysterical symptoms from repressed incest-wishes may be compared to Freud's interpretation of the case of "Elisabeth von R." This patient's symptoms (as described above) were found to originate in a repressed desire for her brother-in-law, 'a tenderness whose acceptance into consciousness was resisted by her whole moral being'<sup>197</sup> ('She repressed her erotic idea from consciousness and transformed the amount of its affect into physical sensations of pain.').<sup>198</sup>

There is, then, sufficient evidence for the contention that Usher's illness is, in part, hysterical and of sexual origin. At this point, certain parallel cases in nineteenth-century writing - of illnesses visibly deriving from sexual frustration and/or repression - are worth noting; the work of various writers provides textual evidence (whatever the authorial intentions) for a link between somatic and/or mental

disturbances (whether or not specifically characterised as hysterical) and sexual factors. Thus De Quincey, in his biographical study 'William Wordsworth' (1839),<sup>199</sup> presents Dorothy Wordsworth as suffering permanently from nervous agitation and speech disturbances, including stammering. The account exhibits parallels with the description of Usher: 'Even her very utterance and enunciation ... suffered in point of clearness and steadiness, from the agitation of her excessive organic sensibility, and, perhaps, from some morbid irritability of the nerves.'<sup>200</sup> (one may compare Usher's 'peculiar sensibility of temperament' (3) and 'morbid acuteness of the senses' (10), and the 'tremulous indecision' (9) of his depressive-phase voice). De Quincey's text also refers to Dorothy's 'maidenly condition' and 'the self-counteracting and self-baffling of her feelings',<sup>201</sup> and, later, to her 'irritable temperament' and the 'trembling movement' of her person;<sup>202</sup> while, at the same time, her adhesion to cultural norms is indicated in favourable comment: 'She was under the continual restraint of severe good sense',<sup>203</sup> 'a woman most thoroughly virtuous and well-principled'.<sup>204</sup> The 'impassioned Dorothy',<sup>205</sup> could, on the material evidence provided by the text, be diagnosed as suffering from hysterical symptoms. In terms of the nineteenth-century model, her hysteria could be attributed to constitutional factors, to excess sensibility;<sup>206</sup> while from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, the references to her 'maidenly condition' and 'self-baffling' (read repression) imply a sexual aetiology (the comparison with Usher would gain force, of course, if the repressed desire in question were to be seen as incestuous).

Another example of anomalous tendencies in a female subject - this time explicitly signified as hysterical - is provided by the figure of Rachel Verinder in Collins' The Moonstone (1868). If Ezra Jennings exemplifies



male hysteria in this novel,<sup>207</sup> the female version of the disease is embodied in Rachel, who herself refers to 'hysterics' ('"Is there a form of hysterics that bursts into words instead of tears?"'),<sup>208</sup> and is described (by Miss Clack, the narrator of the relevant section) as speaking 'the language of hysterics'.<sup>209</sup> Her activities after the theft of her jewel are signified as 'spiteful' and 'savage',<sup>210</sup> as 'unaccountable',<sup>211</sup> as a case of 'nervous excitement'.<sup>212</sup> These behavioural disturbances may be explained as deriving from the internal conflict between her desire for Franklin Blake and her knowledge that he has stolen the gem and is therefore 'unworthy'<sup>213</sup> (she is unaware that he took it under the influence of opium administered without consent).<sup>214</sup> In the words of Martin A. Kayman ('A Responsabilidade Moral', 1980): 'O seu comportamento tem uma origem sexual' ('Her behaviour is sexual in origin');<sup>215</sup> her aberrant attitudes originate in a desire which she continues to admit, but condemns as culturally unacceptable ('a feeling which horrifies me at myself', yet 'fascinates me at the same time').<sup>216</sup> If her desire is not exactly repressed, it is certainly prohibited, and her symptoms arise from her only partially successful attempt to repress it.

The work of Shelley contains several instances of psychological disturbances of sexual origin, of which three may be cited; there is, in Shelley, an untypically high degree of awareness of the sexual factor on the writer's part. In Alastor (1816) - a text mentioned by Poe in his comments on Shelley in the 'Marginalia' (1849) (H XVI, 148-50 (149)) - the imaginary poet's wasted appearance may be read as deriving from the frustration consequent on his rejection of real sexual relations in favour of an ideal dream-woman:

And now his limbs were lean; his scattered hair  
Sered by the autumn of strange suffering  
Sung dirges in the wind; his listless hand  
Hung like dead bone within its withered skin ...<sup>217</sup>

The 'woe/That wasted him' is 'interpret(ed)' - in vain - by the women he rejects;<sup>218</sup> it is, visibly enough, sexual frustration (as will be shown below, Shelley's poet also exhibits interesting parallels with Usher, as instance of the Romantic artist).<sup>219</sup> Similarly, in 'Prince Athanase' (1817),<sup>220</sup> the protagonist's melancholy ('grief'<sup>221</sup> and 'disquietude')<sup>222</sup> is diagnosed by a friend as deriving from frustration, from the lack of real affective relations ('"Thou lovest, and thy secret heart is laden/With feelings which should not be unrequited."');<sup>223</sup> while in Julian and Maddalo (1818), the illness of the 'maniac'<sup>224</sup> is presented as the direct result of rejection in love, its sexual associations being evident from the reference to his castration fantasies.<sup>225</sup> Finally, in a rather different vein, Balzac's Louis Lambert (1832) presents a male protagonist who goes mad on the eve of his marriage, owing to fear of his own sexuality - of 'la violence de mes dēsirs'.<sup>226</sup> Lambert discovers that his desire, long repressed or sublimated into intellectual activity, threatens to explode in sadism once legitimised by marriage. Terrified at the prospect of the wedding night, he falls into a cataleptic fit, then tries to castrate himself,<sup>227</sup> and finally lapses into 'folie',<sup>228</sup> a vegetative catatonia; the link between repression and the emergence of (actual or potential) sadism is thus textually constituted, here as in 'Usher'.<sup>229</sup>

From the above examples, it may be concluded that Poe's tale does not stand alone in its textual anticipation of Freud's discovery of the link between functional disturbances and the blockage of desire; if Carter foreshadowed the Freudian theory in the area of medical discourse,<sup>230</sup>

the groundwork had also been laid in literary texts. Usher's hysterical symptoms may be read as the displaced expression of his repressed sexual wishes towards his sister. At the same time, however, the protagonist of Poe's tale reveals visible symptoms of another illness whose elucidation requires the aid of psychoanalysis - that is, paranoia.

Usher may be read as suffering from paranoia, both in the lay sense of "persecution mania" and the clinical sense of "systematised delusion".

The psychoanalytic concept of paranoia has been defined as follows:

'Chronic psychosis characterised by more or less systematised delusion, predominance of ideas of reference but with no weakening of the intellect and, generally speaking, no tendency towards deterioration.'

(Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, 1967);<sup>231</sup>

'Functional psychosis characterized by delusions of grandeur and persecution, but without intellectual deterioration. In classic cases of paranoia, the delusions are organized into a coherent, internally consistent delusional system on which the patient is prepared to act.'

(Charles Rycroft, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, 1968).<sup>232</sup>

The quality of organisation is crucial to paranoia, distinguishing its delusions from those of schizophrenia.<sup>233</sup> The classical Freudian model of paranoia is outlined in the Schreber case-study (1911) (to be discussed below),<sup>234</sup> where Freud specifies four different types of paranoia: persecution mania; erotomania; delusional jealousy; and megalomania.<sup>235</sup>

In Usher's case, the first type alone, persecution mania, is operative, and there is thus a close fit between the technical and the popular senses of the term.

Usher constructs a delusional system relating to the House, as reported by the narrator in (19). It may be summarised as follows:

- 1) All vegetable things are sentient; there is no essential distinction between the animal and vegetable kingdoms.
- 2) Furthermore, mineral objects (pertaining to the 'kingdom of inorganization') can, 'under certain conditions', become sentient.
- 3) The ancestor of Usher who designed the House was aware of these 'conditions', and also possessed certain magical powers; he was thus able to arrange the stones in such a way as to confer sentience on them.
- 4) The House is, therefore, alive; there are spirits in the stones (mineral objects) and in the fungi on the walls and trees of the domain (vegetable objects); and, quite possibly, in the 'still waters of the tarn'. The 'atmosphere' that surrounds the House and domain is 'evidence of the sentience'.
- 5) The spirits have, over many centuries, exercised a 'silent, yet importunate and terrible influence' over the Usher family.
- 6) Usher's present mental condition - 'what I now saw him' - is determined by the influence of the spirits.

All the above is either explicit in the text, or deducible from Usher's statements. While the spirits are not actually named, they may be assumed as a necessary element in the delusion; the same may be said for Usher's magician ancestor, who is not specifically mentioned (although his 'forefathers' (19) are, in general terms). The point is that, within the terms of the system, if the stones are 'sentient', then they must be animated by something; and, equally, the 'collocation' and 'arrangement' of the stones (19) must have been masterminded by someone - and, given the mention of 'forefathers', by whom but an Usher? It may further be presumed that, since Usher is known to believe in his own impending madness and death (11), he also believes that the spirits are conspiring

against him, and have already willed his fate - and, probably, Madeline's as well, since he thinks their 'influence' has 'moulded the destinies' of the entire family (19). Usher, then, believes that he is persecuted, and that his death is inevitable, predetermined; it will come, 'sooner or later' (11), at a moment unknown to him, but known precisely to the spirits who will it.

Certain aspects of this delusional system merit comment. The notion of vegetable sentience is not, in itself, a psychotic belief; as the narrator notes, 'other men have thought thus' (19). Indeed, in the D text, Poe adds a footnote citing various authorities on the matter, including 'Watson' and 'the Bishop of Landaff (sic)' (who are, in fact, one and the same person).<sup>236</sup> Herbert F. Smith ('Usher's Madness and Poe's Organicism: A Source', 1967)<sup>237</sup> has shown that the notion of vegetable sentience enjoyed a certain scientific credibility, and was, indeed, advanced by Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, in his Chemical Essays (1787), as stated in Poe's footnote. Watson argued that there is no evidence for positing an absolute dividing-line between the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and, further, that the line between the vegetable and mineral realms might prove, on investigation, to be equally arbitrary: 'I know not whether it would be a very extravagant conjecture which should suppose that all matter is, or hath been organized, enlivened, animated'.<sup>238</sup> Smith stresses that Watson was writing as a scientist, and that '(his) argument ... is unquestionably rational, not metaphysical'.<sup>239</sup> Usher's delusion derives, then, from a rational antecedent; its "scientific" history may stand as evidence for the organised character of his paranoiac beliefs.

In 'Usher' - as in 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether'<sup>240</sup> - madness reveals itself as possessed of a discourse, as rigorously structured. The various propositions in Usher's system follow logically from one another: if mineral objects can sometimes be sentient, then it follows that the stones may be alive; the notion of malign spirits in the stones makes sense if a sadistic ancestor is premised. The delusive system is internally coherent; it may be seen as a series of logical deductions from two false premises (mineral sentience and the existence of magicians). Besides, the narrator presents Usher's 'persuasion' (19) as, precisely, an organised train of thought; his metalanguage clearly defines it as falling within the realm of describable concepts: 'an opinion of Usher's ... idea ... belief ... opinions' (ibid.). Further, the presence, within his account of Usher's system, of such terms as 'method', 'collocation', 'order' and 'arrangement' reinforces the connotation of organisation; what Usher has evolved is both an organised delusional system and a delusional system about organisation.

Usher's system may, then, be considered as an instance of the organised, internally coherent delusions characteristic of paranoia. This view may be affirmed in spite of certain recent critical misunderstandings of the phrase 'the kingdom of inorganization' (19). Elizabeth Phillips (Edgar Allan Poe - An American Imagination, 1979) argues that these words (which she misquotes as 'the kingdom of disorganization') refer to Usher's mental state;<sup>241</sup> while Rosemary Jackson (Fantasy, 1981), finding an "entropic", disintegrative tendency at work in the protagonist, claims: "'The House of Usher" describes Usher's ideal as "the kingdom of inorganization".<sup>242</sup> These readings imply that the delusion summarised

in (19) should itself be read as an indicator of Usher's mental 'inorganization'; since, however 'the kingdom of inorganization' is the mineral kingdom, and the progression in Usher's argument from vegetable to mineral is perfectly logical (even if the product of a 'disordered fancy' (ibid.)), it may be suggested that in context the phrase points, rather, to the organised character of his delusion. Usher's illness will, certainly, later enter a phase of near-total disintegration, prior to his death;<sup>243</sup> but at this point, organised and disorganised elements are present side by side in his consciousness, and the paranoiac component pertains to the former, not the latter category.

The content and structure of Usher's paranoiac delusion having been established, the question of its origins remains. The idea that the House is alive is, once again, an instance in Poe's work of the uncanny phenomenon of the animation of the inanimate; here, as in 'The Oval Portrait' and 'Ligeia',<sup>244</sup> the psychoanalytic theory of the uncanny requires that the origins of this effect be sought in the repressed. The delusion will be read as the product of psycho-sexual determinants at work in Usher's unconscious; before this reading is advanced, however, it will be useful to compare the fictional case with an actual case of paranoia— that of Schreber, as analysed by Freud.

Daniel Paul Schreber (1842-1911), Senatspräsident of the Appeal Courts of various German cities, published his memoirs in 1903,<sup>245</sup> narrating the history of his mental illness from 1893 to 1902. Freud's text, Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides) (1914),<sup>246</sup> is a psychoanalytic discussion of the case on the basis of Schreber's account. Freud never analysed

or met Schreber himself; his text includes substantial quotations from both the patient's memoirs and the three medico-legal reports (1899, 1900, 1902) of his physician, Dr G. Weber.<sup>247</sup>

Schreber's illness had two stages, of which the first was dominated by visual and auditory hallucinations;<sup>248</sup> only in the second stage did he evolve what Freud called an 'ingenious delusional structure'<sup>249</sup> - the 'theologico-psychological system'<sup>250</sup> which permitted diagnosis of him as paranoiac. Freud, in fact, diagnosed Schreber's illness as a composite of paranoia and schizophrenia - 'paranoid dementia';<sup>251</sup> 'in its production of a wishful phantasy and of hallucination it shows paraphrenic<sup>252</sup> traits, while in its exciting cause, in its use of the mechanism of projection, and in its outcome it exhibits a paranoid character'.<sup>253</sup>

Weber comments: 'the initial comparatively acute psychosis, which ... deserved the name of "hallucinatory insanity", developed more and more clearly ... into the paranoic clinical picture that we have before us to-day'.<sup>254</sup> He describes Schreber's mental state in the second stage as follows:

... at the present time, apart from certain obvious psychomotor symptoms ..., Herr Senatspräsident Dr Schreber shows no signs of confusion or of psychical inhibition, nor is his intelligence noticeably impaired. His mind is collected, his memory is excellent, he has at his disposal a very considerable store of knowledge ..., and he is able to reproduce it in a connected train of thought. He takes an interest in following events in the world of politics, science and art, etc. ... In spite of all this, however, the patient is full of ideas of pathological origin, which have formed themselves into a complete system ...<sup>255</sup>

Schreber's delusional system, as reported by Freud via Weber, will now be summarised. God had charged him with a 'mission to redeem the



world'.<sup>256</sup> This mission could only be accomplished by his transformation into a woman. God was thus in the process of gradually "feminising" him, by the introduction of "'female nerves'" into his body; this process, in effect a gradual castration, 'will probably require decades, if not centuries for its completion'. Once the transformation was completed, 'a new race of men' would be generated from Schreber's body, 'through a process of direct impregnation by God'.<sup>257</sup> This fantasy contains both "male" and "female" elements; Schreber seems to see himself as both a second Christ and a second Mary.

At the same time, Schreber believed himself to be persecuted. 'The part of persecutor', writes Freud, 'was at first assigned to Professor Flechsig, the physician in whose charge he was; later, his place was taken by God Himself.'<sup>258</sup> Schreber believed at first that there was a 'conspiracy' against him; in his own words, his body, once transformed into a woman, was to be 'surrendered' to Flechsig 'with a view to sexual abuse';<sup>259</sup> later, this role of persecutor/sexual abuser was to be filled by God, who came to be seen as - to quote Freud - 'the instigator of the plot'.<sup>260</sup> Nonetheless, Schreber came to see God's plot as 'a purpose in consonance with the Order of Things';<sup>261</sup> the imaginary transformations, however unpleasant, were seen as necessary to the cosmic order and, to that extent, rational. In Freud's words, 'he began to reconcile himself to the transformation and bring it into harmony with the higher purposes of God'.<sup>262</sup>

The systematic, complex character of Schreber's delusive beliefs is evident. As seen above, both Weber and Freud describe them as forming a "system", while for Schreber himself they were dictated by

the 'Order of Things'. Indeed, the Schreber world-view includes a complex theory of the human nervous system. Thus, he believed that (in the words of Weber's paraphrase) 'nerves in a condition of great excitement ... have the property of exerting an attraction upon God';<sup>263</sup> and that, under certain conditions (i.e. the existence of 'spiritual voluptuousness' in the recipient),<sup>264</sup> the 'nerves of God'<sup>265</sup> could penetrate the human nervous system (and, specifically, his own).

It may be concluded that the Schreber case offers a classic instance of the systematised delusions characteristic of paranoia. The fictional case of Usher exhibits certain parallels with this historical case. Here too - at least up to the burial of Madeline - the intelligence and the memory remain unimpaired; as Schreber continues to interest himself in art and science, Usher - again, while Madeline remains alive - devotes himself to the arts and shows enough scientific interest to incorporate current theories into his system. Further, Usher's system, like Schreber's, appears to an outsider (the narrator, who plays the diagnostic role filled by Weber and Freud in Schreber's case) to be organised and internally coherent, as shown above. In both systems, quasi-scientific ideas ('sentience', the 'nerves of God') are present as general propositions which can only be effective under certain particular conditions. Schreber presents his own case, as Usher does his, as a particular, concrete instance of identifiable general principles. The organised character of paranoiac discourse is thus evident in both cases. One may further note the determinist element common to both systems; Usher believes his fate to be predestined by the House (11, 12, 19), as Schreber believes his to be prescribed by the 'Order of Things'. Finally, it may be noted that Schreber's fantasy of feminisation constitutes him, to both himself and his culture, as gender-

problematic (once, before his illness, he had a fantasy that 'it really must be very nice to be a woman submitting to the act of copulation').<sup>266</sup> Usher's culturally anomalous status as non-stereotype, hysterical male has already been noted above;<sup>267</sup> this last parallel leads to the question of the persecutor and the origins of Usher's paranoia.

From under Schreber's two imaginary persecutors - Flechsig and God - Freud's analysis exhumed the figure of the persecuting Oedipal father; Schreber is seen as having displaced the fear originally directed at the father on to the two substitute figures.<sup>268</sup> In Usher's case, analysis may similarly wish to identify a primal figure behind the surrogate persecutor (the animate House). It must, however, be remembered that in the second part of the tale a second persecutor appears, in the form of Madeline. In the delusional system itself, there is only one persecutor, the animated House; but after Madeline's burial, Usher comes to believe she is going to return to take revenge for his premature act ("Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste?" (39)). He does not, after the burial, refer to his delusion about the House again; to this extent, Madeline comes to replace the House as his persecutor. It is therefore necessary to determine whether the primal persecutor in Usher's case is Madeline (or what she represents), or the House (or what it represents), or, in some sense, both.

The psychoanalytic theory of paranoia supposes that the original aggression derives not from without, but from within; the characteristic mechanism of this illness is projection. Freud's comments on projection in the Schreber case-history have already been noted in this study, in relation to 'The Tell-Tale Heart';<sup>269</sup> here, as in that tale, the paranoiac subject can be read as projecting his own destructive tendencies

on to the other. In 'The Tell-Tale Heart', the narrator projects his own aggression on to the old man and his evil eye;<sup>270</sup> in 'Usher', the protagonist may be read as projecting his own sadistic tendencies - expressed in practice in the (actual or intended) burial-alive<sup>271</sup> - on to, first the House, and then Madeline. The process may be formulated as follows:

"I hate her" → "She hates me" → "It hates me"

In this case, the process of transformation would be partly reversed when Madeline replaces the House as persecutor. Nonetheless, on a classical Freudian reading, the primal persecutor would be a male figure - here as with Schreber, the Oedipal father. According to Freud, the genesis of paranoia lies - for both sexes - in repressed homosexuality; in the case of males, the illness ultimately derives from the "negative" or "inverted" Oedipus complex (the male child's passive, erotic relation to the father, a concept already discussed in Chapter 4).<sup>272</sup> Thus, in the Schreber case-study, Freud writes: 'what lies at the core of the conflict in cases of paranoia among males is a homosexual wishful phantasy of loving a man'.<sup>273</sup> For Freud, Schreber's fantasy of castration and impregnation by God corresponds to 'one of the typical forms taken by the infantile nuclear complex';<sup>274</sup> 'we find ourselves once again on the familiar ground of the father-complex',<sup>275</sup> since Schreber's paranoid attitude towards God reproduces 'the feminine attitude towards his father which he had exhibited in the earliest years of his childhood',<sup>276</sup> - i.e. the negative Oedipus complex. Assuming this theory of paranoia to be correct, in the case of Usher the formula suggested above would, then, have to be recast as follows:

"I love him" → "I hate him" → "He hates me" → "It/She hates me"

On this basis, the primal persecutor, underlying both Madeline and the House, would be the loved and feared Oedipal father. Certainly, the presence of the father is signified in the text through the references to 'forefathers' (19), 'patrimony' and 'transmission, from sire to son' (3); and the 'grim phantasm, FEAR' (11) which Usher dreads suggests the punitive, persecuting father. However, if the classical theory of paranoia is abandoned in favour of Melanie Klein's modified model, the complexities of the text may be more clearly illuminated.

Certainly, for Freud there is a necessary link between paranoia and homosexuality; he reiterates his position in 'A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Disease' (1915)<sup>277</sup> (a paper covering a case which he interprets as only apparently 'running counter' to his model): 'the persecutor must be of the same sex as the person persecuted'.<sup>278</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis confirm: 'Paranoia is defined in Freudian psychoanalysis ... as a defence against homosexuality.'<sup>279</sup> However, Freud's view may be considered excessively schematic, an instance of his tendency to classify and separate at all costs (as Juliet Mitchell ('Introduction' to The Selected Melanie Klein, 1986) says, 'The clinical picture is always mixed but to Freud the theory must not echo this state of affairs.'<sup>281</sup> To presume that paranoia necessarily derives from the homosexual component of the subject's sexuality (whereas hysteria, for instance, according to the classical theory, reflects the subject's full bisexuality)<sup>282</sup> does not seem completely to tally with the psychoanalytic concept of bisexuality as an omnipresent (if latent) determining instance.<sup>283</sup> In preference to the classical model of paranoia, that put forward by Klein - according to which the persecutor can be of either sex - will here be adopted; the Kleinian explanation is considered to be more consonant, not only with the theory of bisexuality,

but with the late-Freudian model of female sexuality<sup>284</sup> (which has been found of crucial relevance to the interpretation of many of Poe's tales, as seen above).<sup>285</sup> To suppose that an imaginary persecutor in the unconscious can be either male or female (corresponding to either parent) appears to be more in keeping with the notions of active femininity and the pre-Oedipal mother; this supposition, besides, permits a more satisfactory explanation of the last stages of Usher's illness.

Klein's model of paranoia should be considered in the context of her overall theory, which extends psychoanalytic enquiry into areas left largely uncharted by Freud (earliest infancy and psychosis, especially schizophrenia), and, as Michael Rustin ('A Socialist Consideration of Kleinian Psychoanalysis', 1982)<sup>286</sup> stresses, 'develop[s] (Freud's) view of normal bisexual aspects to the personality'.<sup>287</sup> For Klein, the persecution fears of paranoia ultimately derive from a moment that predates the Oedipus complex - that is, the "paranoid-schizoid position", corresponding to the first few months of life ('Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms', 1946).<sup>288</sup> At this point, the infant experiences an intense ambivalence towards its first object (or, technically, part-object), the mother's breast. The breast, as internal object, becomes split into a "good" (benevolent, satisfying) and a "bad" (frustrating, persecuting) breast ('in states of gratification love feelings turn towards the gratifying breast, while in states of frustration hatred and persecutory anxiety attach themselves to the frustrating breast');<sup>289</sup> the infant simultaneously splits itself into "good" and "bad" selves. The "bad" breast is the prototype of all later persecutor-figures; thus, in 'schizoid personalities', 'the violent splitting of the self and excessive projection have the effect that the person towards whom this

process is directed is felt as a persecutor'<sup>290</sup> (the splitting mechanism is parallel to that which the infant activates towards both the breast and itself). Later, the infant passes through the "depressive position" (which reaches its climax around the middle of the first year), in which it comes to realise that the "good" and "bad" breast are one and the same, thus 'synthesizing the good and bad (loved and hated) aspects of the object'.<sup>291</sup> The paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions are seen as developmental moments through which all children pass; while psychosis is viewed as a regression to one or other of these pre-Oedipal phases ('In early infancy ... the fixation-points for all psychotic disorders are to be found.').<sup>292</sup> Since 'anxieties of a psychotic nature are ubiquitous in infancy', there is ultimately 'no structural difference' between 'the normal, the neurotic and the psychotic'.<sup>293</sup>

If the primal persecutor is the breast, then the 'terrifying, punishing internal parents' - the persecutory Oedipal father and mother - derive from that prototype;<sup>294</sup> an adult delusion of persecution may (depending on the fixation points) derive partly from Oedipal and partly from pre-Oedipal sources, and is thus likely to reflect the subject's bisexuality, rather than its homosexual component alone. Indeed, for Klein the Oedipal persecutor frequently takes the composite, androgynous form of a 'combined parental figure'.<sup>295</sup> Klein, then presents a model of paranoia in which the persecutor is not necessarily of the same sex as the subject; and in which the determinants of the illness lie in the child's ambivalent (and bisexual) attitude to both parents, and, in the last analysis, in its relation to the mother and her breast.

If the Kleinian model is applied to 'Usher', the protagonist's persecution

fears can be seen as pointing back to both the Oedipal father (the House) and the pre-Oedipal mother (Madeline). The replacement of the House by Madeline as the chief source of persecutory anxiety corresponds to a worsening in Usher's condition, in which the original hysterical paranoia develops into something closer to paranoid schizophrenia; this would suggest that, if the first phase of his illness is, to a large extent, of Oedipal origin, in the second phase he regresses to a pre-Oedipal fixation point. The figure of Madeline would then represent the active, persecutory, pre-Oedipal mother (this, of course, implies a certain posthumous 'masculinisation' of her - a factor to be discussed below).<sup>296</sup>

There is, then, sufficient evidence to permit the diagnosis of Usher as paranoiac (in the sense that paranoia is one element in a composite clinical picture); he constructs an elaborate delusional system, and fears persecution from both the House (corresponding to the Oedipal father) and, later, Madeline (corresponding to the pre-Oedipal mother). The primal persecutor is the maternal breast (symbolised by Madeline, whose 'white robes' (40) suggest the mother's milk), which in its active/frustrating aspect, implies the active femininity which Usher fears; at the same time, the persecuting House, constructed by his ancestor and thus symbolising paternal authority, is a potentially castrating force, threatening his 'masculinity'. His identity as gendered subject is thus threatened from both directions, by both imaginary persecutors. It is true that paranoia was not recognised as a clinical entity in Poe's day (it was first used, in its modern sense, by E. Kraepelin (Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie, 1896)).<sup>297</sup> However, there is ample textual evidence for the presence of paranoia on the level of the signified, if not that of the signifier; besides, a further literary analogue



to the modern concept of paranoia may be found in Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' (1816),<sup>298</sup> where Nathaniel not only believes himself persecuted by the terrifying Sandman-figure, but constructs a delusional system, a 'mystical theory of devils and cruel powers'.<sup>299</sup>

The attempt may now be made, in the light of all the foregoing, to suggest a global diagnosis, on psychoanalytic lines, for Usher's illness. It is clearly to be divided into phases - before and after Madeline's burial (after which, as the narrator points out, 'an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend' (24)).

In the first phase (1-14) Usher may be read as suffering from a composite illness, whose symptomatology implies elements of both hysteria and paranoia, with a further manic-depressive component. He is thus in a borderline state between neurosis and psychosis (paranoia, while classified as a psychosis, does not imply the advanced state of disintegration that characterises schizophrenia);<sup>300</sup> his intellect, at this point, shows no signs of deterioration, as is evidenced by the systematised character of his delusional beliefs, while his creative powers remain active. His capacity for object-relations, although impaired by years of self-confinement in the House, is still in existence, as witnessed by the intensity of his feelings for Madeline and by his letter to the narrator, which is followed by a 'closer and still closer intimacy' (15). However, his delusional beliefs and persecution mania place him dangerously close to psychosis and its delusive remodelling of reality.<sup>301</sup> Finally, the entombment of Madeline, when he knows she may still be alive, reveals that Usher - like the narrators of 'Berenice' and 'The Black Cat' - is capable of sadistic acts of a culturally unacceptable character; he is thus, already, on the verge of psychosis, of exile from culture.

The second phase, after the burial (15-40), may be further subdivided into a series of stages, through which he progresses into an ever more advanced state of psychosis - coming finally to resemble the narrators of 'William Wilson'<sup>302</sup> and 'The Tell-Tale Heart'<sup>303</sup> in their last stages, inhabiting a private universe of delusion and hallucination. The stages of this process may be identified as follows:

1) At first, the manic-depressive cycle seems broken in favour of a continuous depression: 'the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out. The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more' (24). The alternation in his voice described in (9), between a manic 'guttural utterance' and a depressive 'tremulous indecision', disappears; only the 'tremulous quaver' (24) remains. His mental state is now characterised by depression, fear ('extreme terror') and restlessness; he is reduced to repetitive, self-destructive, arbitrary movements that recall the man of the crowd: 'He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step.' (ibid.).<sup>304</sup> Besides, he is no longer able to find therapy in art: 'His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten.' (ibid.). There is no further reference to production or consumption of art until the reading of the 'Mad Trist', forced on Usher by the narrator. Usher appears to have moved closer to the frontier of psychosis; his ability to communicate with his friend is severely impaired, and he becomes subject to auditory hallucinations: 'I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound' (ibid.). The hallucinations correspond to his delusive belief in Madeline as persecutor; the connection with 'The Tell-Tale Heart' is obvious, and points up his intensifying psychosis.<sup>305</sup>

2) When Usher appears in the narrator's bedroom, however (26), some eight days later, he seems to have entered a manic phase ('there was

a species of mad hilarity in his eyes'); he listens, or so it seems, to the 'Mad Trist' with a 'wild overstrained air of vivacity' (30).

3) This momentary hyperexcitation is succeeded by a further, and drastic, deterioration; the next time the narrator remembers to look at Usher (36), he notices 'a strange alteration ... in his manner'. During the reading, Usher's mind has been again invaded by auditory hallucinations; he appears not only to have returned to the depressive phase, but to have all but withdrawn into a private hallucinatory universe. He is scarcely able to communicate, 'murmuring inaudibly' - probably to himself, not to the narrator, of whom he seems oblivious; while the 'gentle yet constant and uniform sway' of his rocking movements suggests a return to infancy (the child in the cradle) and a corresponding withdrawal from the external world.

4) In his last moments (38, 39), Usher seems almost totally unaware of external reality. He speaks, it is true, apparently to the narrator, but near-inaudibly (until the last climactic sentence): 'he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence' (38). His first words: "'Not hear it?'" are a response to an imaginary question; he addresses a 'you' and recalls that "We have put her living in the tomb!" (39), but the addressee may be, not the real narrator but his hallucinated image, for there is no guarantee that Usher is aware of his surroundings at all. Further - as David Punter (The Literature of Terror, 1980) points out - the 'madman' of Usher's last sentence ("Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!" (39)) may refer either to the narrator, or to Usher himself ('Roderick ... has seen the madness in his companion; or, Roderick has finally seen his own insanity in its full colours').<sup>306</sup> If Usher is talking to himself, then his subjectivity is now split beyond recall, and the 'you' addressed by the 'I' is a split-off part of the addresser himself. In

his last seconds of life, depression gives way to a final manic extremity ('here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables'), while his mind is definitively invaded and dominated by hallucination and delusion. The auditory hallucinations become acute - the "'foot-step on the stair'", the "'beating of her heart'" - and impel him to the delusive belief that "she now stands without the door!" (Usher may also have a visual hallucination of Madeline in his dying moments, but this point will be discussed later).<sup>307</sup>

This final phase, culminating in the shrieked avowal of a delusive belief, marks Usher's definitive passage into psychosis (and corresponds to parallel moments in 'The Tell-Tale Heart'<sup>308</sup> and 'Ligeia',<sup>309</sup> when the narrators become irrevocably convinced of the "reality" of their delusions). He is no longer able to distinguish mental images from external perceptions; the phantasy of Madeline imposes itself on the external world, as a portion of the real. At this point, then, Usher may be considered as entering the universe of (paranoid) schizophrenia; his capacity to relate to others and to external reality is now deeply impaired. 'Usher' may, then, be read as a classic instance of the 'progressione graduale ... dentro la pazzia' ('gradual progression ... deeper into madness') which Lanati ('Una Ligeia, cento Ligeie', 1978) sees as a repeated structure in Poe's fiction.<sup>310</sup> It is also at this moment, as already noted,<sup>311</sup> that the physical figure of Madeline reappears, symbolising the pre-Oedipal mother and pointing to the equally pre-Oedipal origins of schizophrenia;<sup>312</sup> at this point in the present analysis, the specific role of Usher's sister demands to be examined in closer detail.

Madeline is the only woman signified in the text; here as in 'The Oval

Portrait', one woman is placed in relation to two men. At first, like her counterpart in that tale,<sup>313</sup> she appears to conform to the patriarchal stereotype of the passive woman. She is totally silent on her first appearance: 'the lady Madeline ... passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared' (13); and, indeed, is presented as silent throughout the narrative, except for the (hallucinated) 'low moaning cry' at the end (40). Even in the account of her illness, she appears as a passive victim: 'she succumbed ... to the prostrating power of the destroyer' (14).

She suffers from an 'unusual' (14, 21) illness which 'had long baffled the skill of her physicians' (14). The symptomatology is as follows: 'a settled apathy'; 'a gradual wasting away of the person'; 'frequent transient affections of a partially cataleptical character' (ibid.). To this, the 'diagnosis' reported by the narrator (ibid.), may be added, perhaps, somnambulism, since she fails to notice the narrator's presence on the one occasion when she sees him (13). These symptoms suggest that - like the wasted and cataleptic Berenice,<sup>314</sup> and like her brother<sup>315</sup> - she can be diagnosed as suffering from hysteria. In the pre-psychoanalytic literature, Whytt (1764) (as cited by Veith) includes catalepsy among hysterical symptoms;<sup>316</sup> while Freud and Breuer, in their 'Preliminary Communication' (1893),<sup>317</sup> include 'cataleptic rigidity' in their symptomatology.<sup>318</sup> In the case of "Anna O.", besides, Breuer observed anorexia (or wasting-away),<sup>319</sup> 'a period of persisting somnambulism',<sup>320</sup> and a failure to recognise the existence of strangers: 'a consultant was brought in, whom, like all strangers, she completely ignored'.<sup>321</sup>

Given this diagnosis, here as in the case of her brother, the symptoms

may be considered to derive from repressed sexual ideas. The possibility of a mutual unconscious incestuous desire may be inferred from Usher's reference to the 'sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature' that 'had always existed between them' (23).<sup>322</sup> Madeline, besides, seems to have had no other accessible sexual object than her brother. Nonetheless, from the external evidence, she does not, in life, assume any kind of active role, sexual or intellectual; she resembles Rowena rather than Ligeia.<sup>323</sup> At all events, the Usher siblings suffer, it may be argued, from the same disease and, perhaps, the same unconscious desires. Indeed, Thompson ('The Face in the Pool', 1973) suggests that Madeline is, in some sense, Usher's double.<sup>324</sup> This notion gains force from the examination of a deleted passage, in which the two Ushers appear as totally identical twins. In (13), the A to C texts include the sentence: 'Her figure, her air, her features - all, in their very minutest development were those - were identically (I can use no other sufficient term) were identically those of the Roderick Usher who sat behind me.'<sup>325</sup> Similarly, in the A to C texts, when the narrator sees Madeline in the coffin, he is 'startled and confounded' by 'the exact similitude between the brother and sister';<sup>326</sup> in the final text, this is toned down to 'a striking similitude', which 'arrested my attention' (23). While the 'exact similitude' is removed from the final text, Usher and Madeline remain twins (ibid.), and thus the connotation of doubling is present, to a greater or lesser degree, in all versions of the text.

If Madeline is to be seen as Usher's double, this may be in the sense that she symbolises a certain unacceptable or unadmitted element in his subjectivity. The resemblance suggests that what Madeline represents in Usher's unconscious is his own, culturally unacceptable, "feminine"

side. After all, if their features reveal an 'exact similitude', this points to androgynous characteristics in both - if Usher is thus 'feminised', Madeline, equally, is 'masculinised'. Indeed, the reason for the suppression of this detail may lie in the dangerous clarity with which it subverts the "natural" antithesis between the sexes. Usher, with his hysterical symptoms and aesthetic sensibility, is visibly gender-problematic in the eyes of his culture; the epigraph, implicitly reducing him to a lute that sounds as soon as touched, points to the passive, "feminine" element in his character.<sup>327</sup> If Madeline is seen as the external representative of Usher's "femininity", then, in his unconscious, she becomes dangerous to his self-image - given the insistence with which role stereotypes are inscribed into the minds even of those whose behaviour tends to subvert them. It may then be hypothesised that Usher's (real or imaginary) burial-alive of his sister is an attempt to rid himself of an unacceptable part of himself. Thus the attempted murder of Madeline may be read as an overdetermined act, deriving not only from repressed sadism in Usher,<sup>328</sup> but from his unconscious wish to "kill" his own "feminine" self.

But if Madeline signifies the unconscious male fear of androgyny, she also points to another repressed fear in the male subject - that of female sexuality per se. It is in this light that the narrator's reaction to Madeline, on her first appearance, may be read: 'I regarded her with utter astonishment not unmingled with dread - and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me' (13). This seemingly unaccountable 'dread' may correspond - here as in 'The Oval Portrait' and 'Ligeia',<sup>329</sup> - to the repressed male fear of female sexuality; the narrator and Usher may both be read as terrified of that female desire whose emergence would subvert

the structures that guarantee their hold on power, and the burial of Madeline may thus be further determined by Usher's desire to "kill" female sexuality.

The relation between Madeline and the narrator merits closer examination; as Thompson again suggests,<sup>330</sup> this too is a case of doubling. If it is supposed (as argued above) that Madeline's return is the product of a joint hallucination (both Usher's and the narrator's),<sup>331</sup> then it follows that the latter hallucinates her image, not only under his friend's influence, but also under the pressure of his own unconscious fears. Indeed, the topography of the text also tends to associate the narrator with Madeline. The vault is specified as 'lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment' (22); as Thompson stresses, this detail tends to 'link her dreamlike manifestation directly to the psyche of the narrator'.<sup>332</sup> Madeline "returns", rising from the 'depth' of the vault (22) to the 'upper portion of the house' (23), as repressed ideas emerge from the unconscious, threatening the stability of the subject. The narrator, quite as much as Usher, enjoys, and therefore represents, male power (so much is clear from his very freedom to travel 'alone' (1)); thus it is significant that the "return" should take place, not in Usher's studio (where Madeline was first seen), but in the narrator's bedroom. It may be added that Usher's guest has, to some extent, acquiesced in the burial-alive (if such it is) ('I had no desire to oppose what I regarded as at best but a harmless ... precaution' (21)). Punter goes so far as to suggest he may actually be a 'murderer',<sup>333</sup> - although, obviously, he has less knowledge than Usher of Madeline's medical history, and can only, in practice, give an opinion



on a decision that is ultimately his host's. At all events, he has 'personally aided' Usher (22) in the entombment, and thus symbolically participated in that act of violence against woman. Here as in 'The Oval Portrait',<sup>334</sup> the textual presence of two males underscores the culturally representative character of both; Madeline's "return" gives concrete form to their fears of their own "femaleness", and also to the phantoms of female activity and revenge that haunt the male unconscious of both Usher and the narrator.

The "return", besides, constitutes Madeline as a physically active woman, and therefore - in the imagination of the male protagonists - as a (potential) cultural scandal. Its physical impossibility, as established above,<sup>335</sup> does not obviate its crucial role in the text, as a male fantasy about women. The process of her imagined escape from the vault begins in (33), when the narrator "hears" a 'cracking and ripping sound', followed by a 'harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound' (35) and a 'metallic, and clangorous ... reverberation' (38). These "sounds" are identified by Usher as "'the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault'" (39). It should be noted that these sounds, in their 'harsh', 'grating' and 'metallic' character, have clearly "unfeminine" connotations. The breaking of the coffin, described as 'ripping' and 'rending', appears an eminently male act, suggesting forcible penetration (even though, in the fantasy, it is done in order to get out rather than in); one may compare the forcing of the door in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (M II, 537).<sup>336</sup> To break out of the coffin and the vault, Madeline would have had to employ an extraordinary physical strength, indeed to become - like Ligeia

in another context - 'more than womanly' (M II, 317).<sup>337</sup> This imaginary display of Amazonian power in a woman is paralleled in the episode in Balzac's Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes (1847), already discussed in Chapter 4,<sup>338</sup> where Léontine de Sérizy breaks the iron bar of the prison gate. In Balzac's text, the display of a 'terrible pouvoir physique'<sup>339</sup> by a woman is directly linked to her prohibited desire (for Lucien de Rubempré, who has died in the prison), and is condemned as culturally unacceptable. Indeed, it is seen as a kind of hysterical 'accès', or fit; a character observes: "'Une femme comme il faut ne devrait pas être sujette à de pareils accès!'".<sup>340</sup> In 'Usher', the connections between 'unwomanly' energy, hysteria and sexuality remain below the textual surface, but can still be disinterred; Madeline's "return" symbolises the emergence of woman's repressed active desire, and of the fear of that desire in the male unconscious. It is thus not only Madeline's coffin, but the whole cultural structure of gender stereotypes that is "rent" in the imagination of the two male characters. She "returns" to take revenge on Usher, in retaliation (he believes) for his destructive attack on her ("to upbraid me for my haste" (39)), as the woman in 'The Oval Portrait' takes posthumous revenge on men through her image.<sup>341</sup>

Besides, the sexual symbolism in the "return" is evident, and serves further to "masculinise" Madeline. She "appears" at the door in a dominant, erect position: 'without those doors there did stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher' (40); finally, at least in the narrator's imagination, when she collapses it is on top of Usher: 'then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-

agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse' (ibid.). As Fiedler suggests, this fantasy is a Liebestod, combining desire and death;<sup>342</sup> it is also the imaginary consummation of the mutual incestuous desire of the Usher siblings. The sexual connotations of the fantasy are evident - the 'blood' on Madeline's robes, her 'trembling', and the 'low moaning cry' (40); but it should also be stressed that she falls upon her brother in the dominant, 'male' position. She is, besides, the grammatical subject of the sentence narrating the Liebestod, while both the adjective 'violent' (altered in the D text from 'horrible';<sup>343</sup> the change suggests a convergence with the desire of Ligeia)<sup>344</sup> and the adverb 'inward' (connoting penetration) tend further to 'masculinise' her and place her in a position of power.

If Madeline comes to symbolise the mother, it is surely less (pace Bonaparte)<sup>345</sup> the Oedipal than the pre-Oedipal mother - the persecutory figure who withdraws the breast, refusing to gratify, whom the child wishes to destroy, whose retaliatory violence it fears. If this figure is destructive, it is also active, and implies the possibility of affirmative female desire. However, it may further be suggested that in her "return" Madeline is also placed in the position of the Oedipal father - not that she is a father-symbol, but that she takes over the father's punitive, dominating role, and thus further emerges as 'masculinised'.

It has already been shown how she replaces the House (read as father-symbol) as the main object of Usher's persecutory anxieties.<sup>346</sup> In addition, J.-P. Weber ('Edgar Poe ou le thème de l'horloge', 1958) argues that Madeline can be read as the minute-hand (the father) which, at midnight, superimposes itself on the hour-hand (the mother).<sup>347</sup> Thus,

if the climax of 'Usher' re-creates the "primal scene" in which the child observes its parents' coitus, it is with the roles reversed, with Madeline in the position of the dominant father - as 'la grande aiguille, c'est-à-dire le père'.<sup>348</sup> In this case, the return of Madeline would signify the subversive irruption of woman into the law of the father; and behind the usurpation of the father's role may lie the figure of the pre-Oedipal mother.

Also of interest here are two hidden Shakespearean references in Poe's text. If in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' the narrator is "feminised" through intertextual reference to Lady Macbeth,<sup>349</sup> here the converse occurs; Madeline is further "masculinised" through concealed quotations that identify her with the ghost in Hamlet (1604).<sup>350</sup> After Madeline's burial, Usher is described as 'gazing upon vacancy ... as if listening to some imaginary sound' (24); this (as Elizabeth Phillips points out)<sup>351</sup> recalls Gertrude's words to Hamlet, at a moment when he (and not she) can see the ghost of his father:

Alas, how is't with you,  
That you do bend your eye on vacancy ...?<sup>352</sup>

Later, Madeline's "return" is ushered in with the words: 'the huge antique pannels ... threw back their ponderous and ebony jaws' (40). This transparently refers back to Hamlet's question to the ghost:

... why the sepulchre,  
Wherein we saw thee quietly inurned,  
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws  
To cast thee up again? ...<sup>353</sup>

In both cases, the lexical convergences with Hamlet place Madeline in the position of the ghost (Usher gazes on vacancy, listening out for Madeline; Hamlet, looking at the ghost). That is, Madeline once again

takes the place of the father. The Shakespearean connexion is the narrator's, not Usher's; this is further evidence that the fear of active femininity that the link implies is operative, above all, in his unconscious.

Madeline, then, is, at the climax of the tale, repeatedly 'masculinised', transformed into a sadistic and punitive 'father'. Here as elsewhere in Poe's tales, there is an evident disturbance of gender stereotypes and sexual power-structures. However, in Madeline's case there is no conscious assumption of an active role on the woman's part; if the 'return' is hallucinated, then she cannot be said to contest cultural norms in herself. She is thus clearly differentiated from Ligeia and Morella - or, indeed, the queen in 'The Purloined Letter' - who all consciously assume the position of active woman. Nor is there the resistance on the threshold of death that flares up in Berenice or the wife in 'The Black Cat'. The closest parallel is, in fact, with the woman of 'The Oval Portrait' who, passive to the end in life, 'returns' to become active after death. In 'Usher', as in that tale, the textual images of female aggressiveness are produced by the unconscious fears of the male characters; nonetheless, Madeline signifies the continual possibility of active female desire.

### iii. The Narrator: The Voice of "Normality"

Attention will now be focussed more closely on the third principal figure in the tale, the narrator. In contrast to the set-up in most of the other 'Gothic' tales, the narrator of 'Usher' is not directly involved in the events in the sense that the narrator-protagonists of 'Ligeia', 'Morella' or 'Berenice' are; he is, rather, a relative outsider

to what he narrates (although less so than the narrator of 'The Oval Portrait', who learns the history of the portrait only by reading it). His relation to Usher includes the dimensions of observer, confidant and therapist; this is, in fact, a narratorial role unique in the Poe canon, since it constitutes him as part-outsider and part-insider. The narrators he most resembles are those of 'The Man of the Crowd' and 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether' - who both, like him, signify themselves as "normal" in relation to the "anomalous" phenomena they describe (although, unlike his counterpart in 'Tarr and Fether', he reveals considerable intellectual capacities, while his capacity for communication distinguishes him from his equivalent in 'The Man of the Crowd'). The narrator of 'Usher', above all, represents the non-Usher social universe, and therefore the discourse of "normality" - which is effectively subverted across the tale, as the relation between Usher and his guest develops.

Usher writes to the narrator, an old boyhood friend, in a desperate attempt to re-establish contact with the world outside the Usher house and family; as Renata Wasserman ('The Self, the Mirror, the Other', 1977) puts it, 'Roderick feels the imminence of a crisis, and ... in order to avert it he calls the narrator, representative of the non-Usher world, into the closed system he has established.... the narrator functions as a mediator between the House of Usher and the world on the other side of the tarn.'<sup>354</sup> Usher will not leave the House, but is prepared sufficiently to compromise with the outside world to meet it halfway, introducing an external element into his private universe. His friend is, clearly, of the same social class, another aristocrat; this is evident from his mode of reference to the Usher interior: 'the objects around me ... were but matters to which, or to such as which, I

had been accustomed from my infancy' (6). He is, besides, like Usher, an intellectual, and a producer and consumer of art ('We painted and read together' (15)). These points of resemblance already suggest an element of doubling between the two; however, the narrator initially maintains a certain independence from Usher, simply by the fact of being non-Usher and therefore representing that "normality" with which Usher desires contact. What the owner of the House requires from his friend is company and therapy; in his letter of invitation, he 'spoke of ... an earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady' (2).

The narrator's own relation to the environment in which he finds himself may be characterised as, above all, that of an interpreter or reader. Towards Usher's illness, making 'earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend' (5), he plays not only the role of therapist, but that of diagnostician;<sup>355</sup> he lays claim to a certain medical knowledge (as evidenced by his correct use - as shown above<sup>356</sup> - of clinical terms ('melancholy', 'hysteria', 'hypochondria') and his comment that 'the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies' (30)). He thus considers himself competent not only to help Usher, but to read him, to label and classify him in terms of an "abnormality" to which he sees himself as completely alien.

Indeed, he signifies himself as an interpreter right from the beginning, both in relation to the external world and to his own internal sensations. This is evident in his attempt to "read" the fear induced in him by the House: 'What was it ... that so unnerved me ...? ... It was a mystery all insoluble' (1); and in his ensuing interpretation of Usher's

handwriting: 'The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation.' For the narrator, then, in potential, everything can be "read" and interpreted; and since to read the world implies an attempt to control it in some measure, his reading of Usher's script contains the germ of what will be seen below as his subsequent attempt to control Usher himself.

The opening sequence, preceding his entry into the House in (6), serves to define the narrator before his relations with Usher begin. From the beginning, the House induces sensations of depression and fear: 'a sense of insufferable gloom', 'an utterdepression of soul' (1). His attempt at explaining this effect fails, at this point; the 'mystery' remains 'insoluble'. The reader may deduce later that the immediate cause of this 'depression' is the "peculiar atmosphere", first mentioned in (4).<sup>357</sup> Nonetheless, the extremity of the narrator's reaction suggests that psychological factors are also at work. The House produces an uncanny effect<sup>358</sup> - a disturbing effect which is 'insoluble' to consciousness because its origins lie in the unconscious. Here as with Ligeia's eyes,<sup>359</sup> the reader too has to ask: 'What was it?', in order to explain the origins of the fear produced.

In this connection, Thompson ('The Face in the Pool', 1973) suggests that the narrator has perceived the façade as a symbolic death's-head: 'The narrator's first impression of the House is that it is like a human face, especially with its two vacant eye-like windows.'<sup>360</sup> So specific an identification of the House with a skull rests on the assumption that there are only two windows visible to the narrator, which does not appear to have any definite textual justification - although it is, certainly, a possible reading. Nonetheless, the House and domain clearly have connotations of death - the windows may suggest the vacant eyes of



a corpse, the trees are 'decayed' (1), the time is sunset and the season autumn. It may be suggested that the narrator's reaction to the House derives from a repressed fear of death - that fear which Usher, in contrast, openly admits in (11), and which his friend diagnostically calls 'an anomalous species of terror'. For Freud, one source of uncanny effects is precisely the fear of death - 'man's (sic) attitude to death', which continues to be influenced by the 'primitive fear of the dead'.<sup>361</sup>

The narrator tries to 'annihilate' the uncanny effect of the House by the stratagem of looking at it from a different viewpoint (1); he looks, not at the House, but its reflection in the tarn. However, this experiment only increases his fear - the mirrored image produces 'a shudder even more thrilling than before' (1), which merely serves to 'deepen the first singular impression' (4). This effect of intensified fear may be explained in terms of the element of doubling, introduced by the reflection. The image of the House in the tarn is both the same as the original, yet different from it, 'remodelled and inverted' (1); it may thus be read as an analogue of the unconscious, of that "I" which is "not-I" (as Freud writes in 'The Unconscious' (1915), 'all the acts and manifestations which I notice in myself and do not know how to link up with the rest of my mental life must be judged as if they belonged to someone else').<sup>362</sup> The mirror-image of the House signifies, not the illusory coherence of the narrator's subjectivity (as in the Lacanian mirror-phase),<sup>363</sup> but, rather, his own potential otherness, his difference from himself; the object-as-other comes to symbolise the subject-as-other, and the narrator's fear of the House can thus be seen as deriving, in part, from fear of his own unconscious. Thompson, in his discussion of this passage, goes so far as to suggest that what

he sees in the tarn is actually an image of 'his own reflected features';<sup>364</sup> while a physical resemblance between the House and his own face is clearly possible, the important point here is surely the phenomenon of doubling in itself - the narrator does not actually have to be the House's physical double to see, in the doubling between original and image, the displaced expression of his own doubleness.

It should further be noted that the narrator, in these four opening paragraphs, reveals various "abnormal" or "anomalous" tendencies, which not only demonstrate the insistence of the unconscious, but mark him as unreliable and liable to mental disturbance (in defiance of his self-image as "normal"). He exposes himself as susceptible to extreme, irrational fears ('terror' (4)), and to 'depression' (1); he admits to a certain tendency to 'superstition', evidenced in the 'somewhat childish experiment' with the reflection (4); and he confesses to a suspiciously detailed knowledge of the effects of opium (referring to 'the after-dream of the reveller upon opium' (1)), which suggests that he may, like the narrators of 'Ligeia' and 'Life in Death', and also Bedloe in 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains', be, or have been, an opium user himself. The narrator, then, in this opening sequence, at one and the same time ideologically signifies himself as "normal" (through his "objective" diagnosis of his correspondent's 'nervous agitation' (2), presented in such a way as to exclude the subject from the field of illness), and displays certain "abnormal", disintegrative tendencies.

Having entered the House (6), he continues to experience it - from the inside as much as from the outside - in terms of fear. He perceives the interior in terms which confirm the indefinable fear of the opening: 'Much that I encountered ... contributed, I know not how, to heighten

the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken.' (ibid.). The elements of the decor - tapestries, carvings, armorial trophies - produce a further uncanny sensation: 'While the objects around me ... were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy - while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this - I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up.' (6). Here as in the opening sentence of 'The Black Cat',<sup>365</sup> the letter of the text provides a classic instance of the uncanny, of that which is simultaneously 'familiar' and 'unfamiliar' or, in the words of the later tale, 'wild' and 'homely' (M III, 849). The 'fancies' evoked by the objects in the House are 'unfamiliar', yet, as the textual link with 'infancy' suggests, are potentially explicable by reference to the narrator's own, once-familiar, repressed childhood memories or fantasies; the House of Usher has, through association with the narrator's own childhood environment, called up long-buried images, whose source remains inaccessible to his consciousness. As Freud specifies in 'The "Uncanny"', 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'.<sup>366</sup> What the narrator discovers in the House of Usher will prove to be both unheimlich (unfamiliar, disturbing) and heimlich (familiar, intimately known);<sup>367</sup> in particular, his later perceptions of Madeline should be read in this context (her figure will evoke repressed desires and fears pertaining to earliest 'infancy').<sup>368</sup> The connexion with 'The "Uncanny"' (implicitly noted by Rosemary Jackson (Fantasy, 1981), who stresses the 'strangely familiar' character of the House to the narrator)<sup>369</sup> confirms the degree to which Poe's writing anticipates Freud in the laying-bare of the workings of the unconscious.

The disturbing effect of the interior continues when the narrator enters Usher's studio (7). The disorienting function of the Gothic decor has already been discussed in Chapter 5;<sup>370</sup> what is important, in context, is its role in reinforcing the depressive mental state which the exterior of the House has already induced in him: 'I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.' (7). This effect recurs in the reference to 'gloomy apartments' in (23), and in the description of his bedroom on the night of the storm. The narrator is disturbed, and his perceptions are confused, by 'the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room - of the dark and tattered draperies' (25). Here as in 'Ligeia', the decor tends to distort the perceptions of the narrator;<sup>371</sup> the effect in both cases is to cast further doubt on his reliability.

The narrator thus emerges as generally nervous, superstitious, and susceptible to environmental influences; he suffers from recurrent attacks of extreme fear, produced variously by the exterior of the House, by its mirror-image, by its interior, and by Madeline (see his reaction to her first appearance, discussed above).<sup>372</sup> Nonetheless, he continues to signify himself as "normal" - not only in his relation to Usher (which will be examined in detail below),<sup>373</sup> but in his attempts at self-analysis. As seen already, he tries from the beginning to subject his irrational fears to rational enquiry;<sup>374</sup> Thus, in the first paragraph, he presents himself in the process of thinking: 'I paused to think ... I pondered ... I reflected ... acting upon this idea' (1). In (4) he goes further, claiming the capacity to analyse the sensations of fear and subject them to 'law': 'Such, I have long

known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis.' Yet, at the same time, he admits that he does not understand his own fears; 'the analysis of this power (i.e. the power of external objects to produce fear) lies among considerations beyond our depth' (1); 'I know not how' (6); 'I found it impossible to account for such feelings' (13); 'I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered knowing not why' (16); 'an incubus of utterly causeless alarm' (25). Failing to understand his fears, he tries to explain them away as imaginary ('Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream ...' (5)); but at no point does he consider the hypothesis that the origin of these fears may lie within himself. The House, its reflection, Madeline; all may be seen as symbolising his own unconscious fears - of death, of his own splitting, of the Oedipal father and pre-Oedipal mother, of female sexuality, of androgyny. He cannot account for his own fears, in the first place because in 1839 no discourse existed to signify their causes - but also because he persists in seeing himself as "full", "normal" subject, and thus refuses to examine his own repressions and contradictions.

After the entombment, the narrator becomes increasingly unreliable; his mental faculties deteriorate almost in tandem with Usher's. He admits to being increasingly influenced by Usher's delusive beliefs: 'I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions.' (24). The word 'superstitions' connects back to the narrator's account of his fears in (4) ('the rapid increase of my superstition') - yet he refuses to make this link, implicitly presenting himself as a "normal" person temporarily "influenced" by an extraordinary environment. Nonetheless,

he comes to share Usher's auditory hallucinations, at first intermittently from the beginning of the storm onwards: 'I ... harkened ... to certain low and indefinite sounds ...' (25); after attempts to explain the 'sounds' as the product of his imagination ('I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me' (33)), he finally becomes convinced of their reality: 'There could be no doubt whatever that ... I did actually hear ... a most unusual screaming or grating sound' (35); 'I became aware of a distinct, hollow ... reverberation' (38). From this point up to the end, he fully believes in the return of Madeline, and at the climax hallucinates her figure, perhaps even outdoing Usher, since the reader does not know if Usher actually "saw" Madeline or not: 'but then without those doors there did stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the Lady Madeline of Usher' (40). These passages, with their frantically over-emphasised affirmatives ('I did actually hear ...', 'there did stand ...'), point to the now total invasion of the narrator's consciousness by visual and auditory hallucinations; indeed, he seems temporarily to have entered a psychotic state comparable to the final condition of his counterpart in 'Ligeia'.<sup>375</sup> In the light of all the above evidence, it is difficult to agree with Elizabeth Phillips' view that 'it is hardly certain that he suffers from an aberration of mind'.<sup>376</sup>

Rather, the view that the narrator suffers from (scarcely acknowledged) disintegrative tendencies is confirmed by examination of the lexical parallels between him and Usher. Thompson suggests that the two figures should be read as doubling each other;<sup>377</sup> apart from the references to 'superstition' (4, 24) already noted, the mental state of both is signified as 'unnerved' (1, 11) and 'pitiabile' (11, 25), both are the victims of 'terror' (4, 11), and if Usher is possessed by a 'peculiar

gloom' (13), the House fills the narrator, too, with a 'sense of insufferable gloom' (1). Usher, it may be concluded, functions in the text as the narrator's double, his disturbing mirror-image; the latter's perception of his host is coloured by a marked element of projection, of externalisation of his own unacceptable tendencies, displaced on to the "abnormal" other.

The development of the relation between the two will now be examined in detail. In spite of their 'closer and still closer intimacy' (15), their interaction takes the form, to a great extent, of a struggle for power. This is clear even before their reunion; Usher's 'summons', expressed in his letter, is 'obeyed forthwith' (2), the lexis of authoritarianism suggesting the former's desire to impose his power on his friend - yet, as shown above,<sup>378</sup> the latter at once strikes back, through his attempt to interpret Usher's text (and its script), and thus acquire the information that will permit a counter-affirmation of his own power. On their meeting (8), the narrator's first reaction shows a continuing desire to control Usher by interpreting him; Usher's 'vivacious warmth' of greeting is initially read as showing an 'overdone cordiality', marking him as a recognisable type, 'the ennuyé man of the world'. Next, although he withdraws this interpretation, he continues trying to master Usher for himself, through the description of his features; Usher is effectively dismembered into eye, lips, nose, chin, hair, brow. Here as in 'Ligeia', the piecemeal description is an attempt to appropriate the other through symbolic fragmentation.<sup>379</sup>

The comments made on Usher's various features include the attempt to label him, through the activation of cultural (in this case, orientalist) stereotypes ('a nose of a delicate Hebrew model'; the 'Arabesque expression'

of his face); and, notably, a certain normative element of negative "moral" evaluation ('a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy'). Here, in accusing Usher of "moral" inadequacy, the narrator is speaking for the society that rejects sufferers from mental illness as degenerate; in Foucault's terms (as quoted above), he is seeing mental illness as 'the psychological effect of a moral fault'<sup>380</sup> - and thus constitutes himself as both psychologically and morally "normal". This attempt at evaluation continues in the phrenological analysis of Usher's brow;<sup>381</sup> the 'inordinate expansion' of his brow points, certainly, to a development of the organ of ideality (the imaginative faculty), but beyond that, to a hyperdevelopment, seen as unhealthy, since 'inordinate' again contains a connotation of moral condemnation. In the account of Usher's symptoms which follows, the normative element is again present, in the narrator's comparison of his 'manic' voice<sup>382</sup> to that of 'the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium' (9); one may note here a possible hypocrisy on the narrator's part, given his own, perhaps intimate, knowledge of opium implied in (1).<sup>383</sup> Yet in this first encounter, working against the tendency to label and evaluate, there also enters an avowed fear of Usher. The narrator's first emotional reaction to him is 'a feeling half of pity, half of awe', condescension mixed with fear (8); later, he admits that Usher's appearance 'startled and even awed me' (ibid.). This fear derives, no doubt, from his unconscious recognition that in Usher he is confronting his double, the embodiment of his own unadmitted tendencies to disintegration and madness.

From the second day on, the narrator begins to assume the role of therapist demanded by Usher. Nonetheless, in practice the dominant party in the "therapeutic" relation seems to be Usher, throughout 'the studies,



or ... the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way' (16) (here, Usher is both grammatical subject and dominant partner). The narrator is intimidated by his friend's paintings (his attention is 'arrested and overawed' (ibid.)), and is similarly 'forcibly impressed' by Usher's poem, 'The Haunted Palace' (18). The lexis of power - 'arrested', 'forcibly', 'impressed' - tends to work in Usher's favour, although the narrator tries to reassert himself by interpreting the poem (18), if not the paintings.

In his account of Usher's delusional system (19), the narrator views it as irrational, as deriving from 'his disordered fancy'; yet, at the same time, Usher's exposition produces fear in him - when Usher refers to the "peculiar atmosphere", the narrator admits: 'I here started as he spoke'. He thus shows himself as, to some extent, under Usher's influence; and this impression is confirmed in his failure to question Usher's declaration of Madeline's death, and his ready participation in the entombment - as suggested above, he is, quite possibly, an accomplice in the crime.<sup>384</sup> After the burial, he continues to keep up the 'normal/abnormal' barrier, in his references to 'the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness' (24) and to the 'anomalies' of 'mental disorder' (30); but, at the same time, he admits, as seen above, to Usher's increasing 'influences' on him (24).<sup>385</sup>

In the storm sequence, the narrator tries once more to regain control; he moves Usher away from the window in an authoritarian fashion: "'You must not - you shall not behold this!" said I, shudderingly, to Usher, as I led him, with a gentle violence, from the window to a seat.' (29). Here, the modal verbs of prohibition, the verb 'led' and the noun 'violence' all indicate the narrator's attempt to dominate; the power-situation

of (16), where Usher 'led ... the way', is reversed. The narrator, further, assumes the role of mentor, explicating the 'electrical phenomena' of the storm; and then, taking up the 'Mad Trist', begins to assume the dominant position of reader-aloud: "'I will read, and you shall listen'" (29). Meanwhile, he continues to define himself as "normal" by, once again, referring to Usher as 'the hypochondriac' (ibid.); ironically, this last claim to "normality" occurs just before his final capitulation to Usher's delusion, as he "hears" the imaginary sounds, in his passage into temporary psychosis, as described above.<sup>386</sup> In his surrender to hallucination at the climax, it is clear that he is fully under Usher's influence, to the point of reproducing the latter's auditory hallucinations and spontaneously producing a visual hallucination based on his delusive beliefs.

Usher, then, is victorious in the power-struggle, although the narrator never fully admits this. It will here be useful to examine their interaction more closely, on the plane of discourse; that is, to differentiate and comment on the various modes of discourse used in the text to represent their conversations. As will be shown, the differing modes of discourse employed correspond to the various aspects of the power-struggle. The concepts deployed here derive from Vološinov (Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, 1930)<sup>387</sup> and Todorov (Poétique (Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?, 2), 1968).<sup>388</sup> Vološinov identifies four modes of discourse, to which may be added a fifth specified by Todorov. The five modes will now be summarised, with examples following, and expanding on, Vološinov's transformations of a sentence from Balzac ('Il protesta: Son père la haïssait!').<sup>389</sup> They are as follows:

1) direct discourse: 'Il protesta et s'écria: "Mon père te hait!"'

- 2) indirect discourse (où l'on garde le "contenu" de la réplique censément prononcée, mais en l'intégrant grammaticalement dans le récit du narrateur' (Todorov)):<sup>390</sup> 'Il protesta et s'écria que son père la haïssait.'
- 3) quasi-direct discourse (or, in Todorov's terminology, 'style indirect libre'):<sup>391</sup> the character's words are transposed into the register of indirect discourse, but without any preceding phrase such as '(s)he said': 'Il protesta: Son père la haïssait!'
- 4) quasi-indirect discourse (distinguished by Vološinov only): the register of indirect discourse is maintained, but the reported words are put in quotation marks: 'Il protesta: "son père, s'écria-t-il, la haïssait!"'
- 5) "discours raconté" (distinguished by Todorov only): the character's speech is paraphrased and probably abridged: 'on se contente ...d' enregistrer le contenu de l'acte de parole sans en retenir aucun élément'.<sup>392</sup> Vološinov's example may be transformed as follows: 'Il en réfèra à la haine que son père ressentait envers elle.'; an example from 'Usher' is: 'He stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight' (21).

The text of 'Usher', in fact, employs all the above-mentioned modes of discourse (which will, for purposes of the analysis that follows, be abbreviated as follows: DD, ID, QDD, QID, DR). DD appears, obviously, in various forms: the narrator's discourse, both as narrating and as narrated "I", and Usher's speeches; but much of the power-struggle between the two characters is signified through the interplay of the other modes of discourse (Madeline, significantly enough, does not speak at all, nor is her discourse reported in any form at any point in the narrative). Specifically, the narrator employs all five modes of

discourse, at different moments, to reproduce, with greater or lesser fidelity, Usher's part of their conversations. Where ID - or, still more, DR - is dominant, the narrator is clearly in control, incorporating Usher's discourse into his own, and thus appropriating it - and, in the case of DR, rewriting (and therefore modifying) it. In contrast, where DD is dominant Usher is allowed to speak for himself, on his own terms; the same may be said of QID, except that the transposition into indirect register implies a certain degree of narratorial appropriation. With QDD, however, the narrator's discourse is, in practice, being controlled by Usher; it is the narrator who appears to speak, but through him Usher speaks and thus, in a sense, takes him over.<sup>393</sup> The various modes may thus be placed on a scale according to who is dominant (the narrator or Usher):

N dominant	Intermediate cases			U dominant
DR	ID	QID	DD	QDD

The framing voice for the whole narrative is, of course, the narrator's; on the other hand, Usher speaks (in DD) far more than his companion. Usher's "exact words" are transposed into DD in (11), (27) and (39) (in the last case, at length), and also once into QID, in (13) ("Her decease," he said, ... "would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers."); the lastmentioned case, which Gary E. Tomblason ('An Error in "Usher"', 1981)<sup>394</sup> considers to be an 'error' ('Usher's words "would leave him" should obviously be "would leave me", since Usher is speaking of himself. '),<sup>395</sup> is clearly explicable (and justifiable) in terms of Vološinov's categories. Usher's discourse is, further, reported at length, whether in ID or DR. The narrator, in contrast, "speaks" in DD only in (29) - at the moment of

his most sustained attempt to dominate Usher - and in the reading-aloud of the 'Mad Trist'; as narrated "I", his role in the dialogues with Usher is primarily to listen, and his interpretations are largely kept to himself, conveyed to the reader by the narrating "I" alone.

If the narrator's various modes of reproduction of Usher's discourse are examined chronologically, the following pattern emerges:

(2) DR (the letter); (8) DR ('greeted me'); (10) DR - ID - QDD; (11) DD; (12) DR - ID; (13) DR - QID; (14) DR; (19) DR - ID; (21) DR; (22) DR ('At the request of Usher' ); (23) DR; (27) DD; (39) DD (in addition, the narrator reproduces the text of 'The Haunted Palace' (allegedly Usher's poem) 'very nearly' verbatim (18)).

The narrator's reproduction of Usher's words starts within the mode of DR, i.e. that which implies the greatest degree of narratorial control; Usher's letter is paraphrased ('The writer spoke of acute bodily illness' (2)), and, equally, Usher's first speech-acts are re-written ('Usher ... greeted me' (8); 'he spoke of the object of my visit' (10)). Up to Madeline's entrance in (13), DR remains dominant, but, from (10) to (13), it is interrupted by appearances of all the other modes.

There is only one moment in the text which constitutes an indisputable instance of QDD. In (10), the description of Usher's symptoms is introduced in ID ('It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil'), but shades in the next sentence into QDD ('It displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations.'), remaining in that mode till the end of the paragraph (the first lines of (14), from 'The disease' to 'to bed', describing Madeline's illness, might appear to be QDD, but the subsequent

transition to ID, with the parenthetical insertion of 'as her brother told me' (which implies a shift in point of view), suggests that they are, in fact, in DR, and correspond to the narrator's résumé of Usher's account of the diagnosis). The appearance of QDD in (10) implies that the narrator is, at that specific point, in danger of being taken over by his host's discourse (he admits in the same paragraph that Usher's account of his illness 'bewildered me', thus confessing difficulty in recoding it into his own discourse). However, QDD returns in the last, long sentence of the paragraph (beginning: 'He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses'), only to disappear permanently from the text after that; at the beginning of (11) the narrator reasserts his control over the situation, in a sentence that combines DR (the report of Usher's experience of 'terror') with his own normative comments: 'To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave.'. Usher's own voice then takes over for the remainder of the paragraph, in a substantial piece of DD; but what does not return is the disturbing presence of QDD, with its undermining of the distance between narrator and character.

The above should provide a sufficient example of the way in which the interplay of discursive modes reflects the power-struggle between Usher and his companion. The fact that - at least on the present reading - QDD occurs at only one point testifies to the intensity of the narrator's struggle not to be dominated by Usher's neurotic discourse. In particular, in (19) - the account of the delusional system - the narrator is careful to employ, throughout, either DR ('This opinion, in its general form, was ...') or ID ('he imagined ... he said ... he added'); the insertion of the last-named phrases prevents ID from turning into QDD. Thus, for most of the narrative, he manages to distance himself

from Usher's beliefs. At the end, however, this strategy breaks down, not through the return of QDD, but via the interposition of Usher's own voice, in the longest passage of the latter's DD in the whole text (39). The fact that the entire paragraph, barring two lines of narratorial comment at the end, is in DD testifies to the extent to which the narrating "I" is now prepared to give voice to Usher's discourse; this corresponds to the domination which Usher has, by this stage, achieved over the narrated "I". Indeed, when the narrator's DD takes over again in (40), he effectively reproduces the terms of Usher's discourse in his own voice; Usher's "I tell you that she now stands without the door!" is, in practice, repeated in the narrator's 'without those doors there did stand ... the lady Madeline of Usher'. By the end, Usher may be dead, but he has won the power-struggle, having persuaded the narrator to accept his view of events - even if the latter refuses to see himself as the fellow-'madman' that the dying Usher (at least on one reading) considers him to be.<sup>396</sup>

Discourse analysis of the text, then, confirms both the existence of a continuous power-struggle between Usher and the narrator, and the eventual triumph of Usher's reading of the world. In this context, a comparable role is played, on a smaller scale, by the signifier 'Usher' itself, with its multiple significations. The surname immediately suggests both 'to usher' (to show in, to lead or introduce someone into something) and 'usher' (one who shows; also, an assistant teacher).<sup>397</sup> The verb occurs in 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether' ('the superintendent ushered me into a ... parlor' - M III, 1004), and the noun (in the sense of "teacher") in 'William Wilson' ('One of these was the pulpit of the "classical" usher, one

of the "English and mathematical." - M II, 430). In 'Usher' there is - as Thompson notes<sup>398</sup> - a punning occurrence of the verb in (6): 'The valet now threw open a door and ushered me into the presence of his master.'; that is, the narrator is ushered into the presence of Usher! The submerged repetition of the signifier 'usher' here suggests that the reader's attention should be directed to the verb, on the level of the signified. The narrator is being ushered into an environment and a nexus of relationships, in which he will be confronted with his own repressed desires and fears, emerging in symbolic form; he will, therefore, be ushered into contact with repressed elements of himself, of his own subjectivity. In this sense, not just the servant but Usher himself is an 'usher', ushering the narrator into contact with his own unconscious. Besides, he can be read as a 'master', not only of the servant, but of the narrator. As the latter's potential 'master', 'usher' or teacher, Usher's function is, on one level, that of one who could, indirectly, educate his companion - whose proximity could make him aware of his own splits and repressions; but in that case, the connotation of "teacher" is surely ironic, since in the end the narrator has learned little or nothing. It may be added that the pun on "usher" is covertly revived later on, since its connotations recur in relation to the verbs "admit" and "lead": 'a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me ... into the recesses of his spirit' (15); 'the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way' (16). Here too, through the influence of Usher's mind and his artworks,<sup>399</sup> the narrator is ushered into contact with unconscious material.

In multiple ways, then, the text indicates that the "abnormal" Usher comes to dominate his "normal" guest, colouring and reshaping his perceptions with his idiosyncratic notions of reality. At this point, it



is appropriate to examine the narrator's attitudes after he is freed from Usher's physical presence (with the death of the latter in (40)), and to speculate on his probable view of the events in the House after his return to the non-Usher world. In the last paragraph (41), he flees the House, thus initiating the process of reintegration into "normal" society; the reader does not, however, actually see him return to the wider world, since his last narrated act is to stop in the middle of the causeway crossing the tarn, and watch the House collapse into that same tarn. He is thus last seen outside the House (having fled it in the nick of time), but still inside the Usher domain - a detail which serves to reinforce the impression of his continued subjection (as both narrated and narrating "I") to the influence of the Usher environment. As narrating "I", he still clearly - like his counterpart in 'Ligeia'<sup>400</sup> - believes in the "reality" of his past hallucinations. Indeed, the reader cannot be sure if the House has collapsed in "reality" or only in the narrator's hallucination; but what is important is that he believes it has collapsed. The 'specious totality' (5) of the House collapses into 'fragments' (41); as will be shown in detail below, this is an image of the disintegration of the subject, of those tendencies that the narrator refuses to recognise in himself.<sup>401</sup> Yet at the same time, the text supplies an element of partial reassurance, an image of the "full", "unruptured" subject, in the (full) moon, which seems almost to rush in to fill the empty space left by the House. It is signified in terms of plenitude: 'the full, setting, and blood-red moon ... the entire orb of the satellite'. The moon thus functions, in spite of the context of fear, as a symbol of the "full", "entire", orbicular subject, and points to the ideological reconstitution of himself as subject which the narrator will, no doubt, effect once he has returned to "normal" society.

It may be hypothesised that, back in the non-Usher world, the narrator will contrive to recuperate his disturbing experiences in such a way as not to disturb his self-image as "normal". He will continue to see Usher as "mad" and himself as "sane", and will attribute the bizarre events alternately to either real external causes (miasma, the environment, Usher's influence) or supernatural forces. But at all events, his entire discourse across the text implies that he will seek explanation only in forces outside himself; he will not interpret Usher's cry of "Madman!" as a warning to inspect his own "normality". As Punter stresses, throughout the narrative 'he cannot grasp his own condition':<sup>402</sup> 'What is especially frightening about the development of the relationship between the narrator and Roderick is that Roderick knows he is neurasthenic, whereas the narrator makes confessions of his own susceptibility while maintaining an apparently rational discourse.'<sup>403</sup> The narrator insists on maintaining a rigid demarcation between the "hysterical", "hypochondriacal" Usher - the 'invalid' (20) - and his "normal" self; the recourse to supernatural explanations is itself a means of externalising, and therefore denying, any "unacceptable" tendencies in himself. If Madeline's return is to be read literally (as the narrator himself reads it), then, as Franco Moretti ('The Dialectic of Fear', 1978) says in relation to Stoker's Dracula: 'one need not be afraid of going mad; that is, one need not fear one's own repressions, the splitting of one's own psyche. No, one should be afraid of the monster, of something material, something external.'<sup>404</sup> In 'Usher', the reassuring 'monster' is (for the narrator) the imaginary figure of Madeline.

Given the narrator's evident, if unadmitted, unreliability, several critics have suggested that the entire narrative (or, at least, everything after his entry into the House) may simply be his dream, fantasy

or hallucination; and that Usher and Madeline therefore have no existence within the text except as projections of the narrator's unconscious desires and fears. Thompson argues: 'Since we do not know that anything the narrator has told us is "real", the whole tale and its structures may be the fabrication of the completely deranged mind of the narrator.';<sup>405</sup> Daniel Hoffman (Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, 1972) reads the entire narrative as the narrator's dream;<sup>406</sup> and Jackson goes so far as to claim that Usher and Madeline 'do not exist as independent characters', but 'are generated by the narrator, produced through his trance-like condition as he stares into a dirty mirror image'.<sup>407</sup> It may be argued, however, that such interpretations tend to deprive 'Usher' of a crucial dimension of its signification - the interaction between the self-confessedly "abnormal" Usher and the "normal" narrator, in which much of the text's psychological value lies. Here as with 'The Oval Portrait',<sup>408</sup> the text's cultural reference is unnecessarily narrowed if the separate identity of one of the characters is abolished. What is in question is less an identification of Usher with the narrator (or part of him) than a situation of doubling, in which objective perception and projection interact in the subject's construction of its relation to the other. Punter's reading (as cited above),<sup>409</sup> which stresses both the similarities and the differences between Usher and the narrator, rather than reducing the former to a figure in the latter's dream, has, therefore, been preferred.

'Usher', then, tends to call in question the rigid dividing-line between "normal" and "abnormal", by placing an "abnormal" character in relation with a narrator who refuses to question his own, highly problematic, "normality". That very "normality", it may be concluded, is the product

of deep repressions, and is thus liable to rupture in any subject formed within a repressive culture, not only those labelled as mad. As in 'The Man of the Crowd', what is in question is a refusal to recognise; <sup>410</sup> in both tales, the narrator refuses to admit his own continuity with the "abnormal" subject he observes, in spite of the textual evidence for that continuity. As the narrator of 'The Man of the Crowd' repeats the old man's movements, so the narrator of 'Usher' repeats (and amplifies) Usher's delusions; both, however, insist to the end on seeing themselves as essentially "full", unruptured subjects and respectable citizens, ultimately discontinuous with the criminal and the mad (even if temporarily liable to their fascination or influence).

On this point, it may be interesting briefly to contrast 'Usher' with a text by Baudelaire, the narrative prose-poem 'Mademoiselle Bistouri' (1869) (already mentioned in connection with 'The Man of the Crowd'), <sup>411</sup> which similarly places a "normal" narrator in contact with an "abnormal" other, but with a far greater degree of self-questioning on the narrator's part. In Baudelaire's text, the narrator meets an enigmatic woman on the street; she tells him: "vous êtes médecin" <sup>412</sup> (which he is not), and invites him to her lodging, where she enlarges on her passion for doctors. She appears to be a deranged prostitute. The conversation finally leads nowhere; but during it the narrator admits (parenthetically) to certain "abnormal", obsessive tendencies in himself. Her obsession with doctors transfers itself to him: " - Mais, lui dis-je, suivant à mon tour, moi aussi, mon idée fixe, - pourquoi me crois-tu médecin?" <sup>413</sup> After the encounter, he feels that, in some sense, he has been "cured" by the quasi-surgical intervention of the "lunatic" - that he has been given 'la guérison au bout d'une lame' ('bistouri' means a surgical scalpel). By communicating with her, perhaps, he has taken a step towards

overcoming his own isolation. She, too, is seen not only as an isolated case, but as part of a collective problem, one of the many 'fous et ... folles', the 'monstres innocents' of Paris.<sup>414</sup> What distinguishes this text from 'Usher' (or 'The Man of the Crowd') is, above all, is that 'moi aussi'; neither of Poe's narrators would have applied to themselves so clinical a term as 'idée fixe' in the context of their interaction with an "abnormal" other (the self-confessedly "abnormal" narrators of 'Berenice' and 'Ligeia' are a different case). Nor, in either Poe text, does the narrator admit to having learned anything substantial from the anomalous other (despite, in the case of 'Usher', the "educative" connotations of the protagonist's name!).<sup>415</sup> 'Mademoiselle Bistouri' is, to some extent, modelled on the narrative pattern of 'Usher'; but - without idealising madness - adumbrates, as 'Usher' does not, a more democratic approach to mental illness. In Baudelaire's text, the dividing-line between "normal" and "abnormal" is acknowledged to be relative, not only through objective textual evidence, but through the subjective discourse of a "normal" narrator; in 'Usher', although that divide is objectively subverted, the task of articulating the connexion between the two conditions is left to the reader.

#### iv. The House: Psychological and Sociological Dimensions

The roles of the three main characters having established, analysis will now be concentrated on the symbolic function of the House - the physical space which, for most of the narrative, encompasses their "real" or imagined interactions; it will be examined from the point of view of its psychological and sociological significations - as a metaphor for the subject, but also, in all probability, for the "Southern nation". To take the psychological dimension first, it is a critical commonplace,

accepted by commentators of whatever school, that the House functions in the text as a metaphor for Usher himself, indeed as his double. Thus Thompson argues that there is doubling between 'Roderick and the House' (and also between 'the narrator and the House');<sup>416</sup> Butler ('Usher's Hypochondriasis', 1976) compares the 'peculiar gloom' which afflicts Usher (13) to the similarly 'peculiar' atmosphere surrounding the House (4);<sup>417</sup> while the proliferation of lexical parallels between mansion and owner has been exhaustively documented by Abel ('A Key to the House of Usher', 1949),<sup>418</sup> Maurice Beebe ('The Universe of Roderick Usher', 1956)<sup>419</sup> and Gerhard Hoffmann ('Space and Symbol in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe', 1971).<sup>420</sup> The following examples will suffice:

- 1) the word 'inconsistency' is used to characterise both the House (5) and Usher (9);<sup>421</sup>
- 2) the 'fine tangled web-work' of the fungi that cover the exterior of the House (5) corresponds to Usher's hair, with its 'web-like softness (8);<sup>422</sup>
- 3) Usher's studio is 'lofty' (7), while Usher is characterised by a 'lofty ... ideality' (30) (here there is a parallel between interior and owner).

The metaphoric relation of the House to Usher is, then, evident; it should be noted, above all, how both are marked by 'inconsistency' - that is, neither is a coherent whole. The House, in fact, appears to be a unified whole, but it is liable to collapse at any moment. The narrator observes, before entering, that 'the fabric gave little token of instability' (5); but this appearance of coherence is, as he realises, deceptive, since its exterior reminds him of the 'specious totality of

old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault' (ibid.). Besides, he notices a 'barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building ..., made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn' (ibid.). As Todorov points out,<sup>423</sup> this detail already anticipates the fall of the House at the end, when 'this fissure rapidly widened', and the entire building disintegrates into 'fragments' (41). The 'totality' of the House, is, then, 'specious', spurious, false; it is fissured, traversed by a visible sign of division, and its definitive fragmentation is only a matter of time. The inevitability of the collapse is several times underscored across the tale - through the title (as seen above);<sup>424</sup> through the account of the House's mirror-image in the tarn, which (as Walker notes)<sup>425</sup> already, on the level of visual perception, places the building 'in the pool' which will swallow it (4); and (as will be shown)<sup>426</sup> through the breaking of the hermit's door (32) and the disappearance of his house (34), in the 'Mad Trist'.

Usher, like the House, is presented from the beginning as fissured; the specious totality of his subjectivity is liable at any moment to collapse into fragments. From the narrator's first view of him, he is marked by 'incoherence' (9); among his symptoms, the double voice (ibid.) and, in general terms, the mania/melancholia alternation signify him as quite visibly split. His mental disintegration is referred to as 'the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne' (18) - a tottering which will lead to a fall. The parallel between Usher and the House, between the disintegrating mind and the collapsing building, is thus clearly present on the surface of the text. Many critics have, of course, read the Usher/House relation as paradigmatic of a

general principle of textual "unity"; the question will be discussed in detail in the conclusion to this chapter-part,<sup>427</sup> but it may be noted here that, for instance, Gerhard Hoffmann argues in favour of the 'unity of action of man (sic) and space' in the tale.<sup>428</sup> Those who read 'Usher' in such terms could note that the relation between subject and space here operates, in practice, between a subject and an object both of which are signified as ruptured and "inconsistent"; an analogy between two internally contradictory terms hardly constitutes evidence for any metaphysical, seamless "unity".

The fissured House, then, externalises the disintegrative tendencies within Usher (and, of course, within the narrator, although, as seen above,<sup>429</sup> he refuses to recognise their presence). Poe's text thus confirms, almost to the letter, Freud's position, as expressed in 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis' (1917)<sup>430</sup> that 'the ego is not master in its own house';<sup>431</sup> and (to quote Civilization and its Discontents (1930)) that if its own ego appears to the subject as 'autonomous and unitary', 'such an appearance is deceptive'.<sup>432</sup> The Usher mansion, with its appearance of 'specious totality', corresponds symbolically to the pseudo-coherent mind of which, in the end, the subject is not the undisputed master. In this context, it may now be illuminating to cite a draft prose-poem (never worked up for publication) by Baudelaire, 'Symptômes de Ruine'<sup>433</sup> - a text which visibly bears the marks of 'Usher', and where a building on the verge of collapse comes to symbolise the subject threatened by disintegration. The prose-poem narrates a nightmare in which the speaker imagines himself in a city full of '(b)âtiments immenses' (a phrase which may recall 'the vast house' in 'Usher' (41)); these buildings are traversed by



'fissures'. He fears that the entire city is about to disintegrate, even though nothing has yet happened ('Rien n'a encore croulé.'). The text contains the following sentence, which could serve as an epigraph to 'Usher': 'J'habite pour toujours un bâtiment qui va crouler, un bâtiment travaillé par une maladie secrète.'<sup>434</sup> The image of the fissure points straight back to 'Usher' (Baudelaire's translation renders the signifier by its French cognate);<sup>435</sup> while the terms 'symptômes' and 'maladie', applied to the building(s), recall Usher's 'malady' (2), and suggest that the edifices in the dream are to be read as symbols of the human mind. The fissured building is, then, here too, an image of the ruptured subject, on the edge of destruction; thus Baudelaire's text ends with what appears a clear signification of the potential disintegration of the mind: 'Je vois de si terribles choses en rêve, que je voudrais quelquefois ne plus dormir'.<sup>436</sup>

But if the House of Usher symbolises its owner's problematic subjectivity, it may also be read as a signifier of a society threatened with collapse. On the level of the surface narrative, the tale is, without doubt, located somewhere in the British Isles (as, similarly, the second half of 'Ligeia' takes place in Cornwall).<sup>437</sup> Román Alvarez Rodríguez ('Introduction' to Poe, Great Short Stories, 1984)<sup>438</sup> suggests that 'certain details ... point towards (the tale's setting) being somewhere in Scotland';<sup>439</sup> one may adduce, in favour of this notion, the word 'tarn', and the reference to the 'peasantry' (3), which would certainly be more appropriate to Scotland than England. At all events, the combination of a 'very ancient family' (3), dating back to 'remote feudal times' (22), with the English-language surname Usher, makes a British location the most probable hypothesis. Usher, as an aristocrat and landowner by inheritance, occupies a position of social dominance

which is emphasised at several points in the text; while the narrator is clearly his social equal, the servants and, indeed, the 'medical men' (21) are presented as his inferiors, and the 'peasantry' may be taken to be his tenants. The text employs the lexis of property-ownership to underscore Usher's insertion into the social structure in a position of power; the grounds, or 'domain' (1), are referred to as a 'patrimony', an 'estate' (3), a 'family mansion' (12), and Usher is called their 'proprietor' (2) and 'master' (16). Usher is, thus, the owner of considerable property by patrilineal inheritance; in this structural sense, at least, he is firmly inserted into the patriarchal order.

On the surface, the ideology of aristocracy might seem to remain intact in the text, since no-one openly questions it. Poe's conscious identification with Old World, and Southern, notions of aristocracy has been established above, in relation to 'Philosophy of Furniture' (1840);<sup>440</sup> certainly, his defence, in that text, of the aristocracy as the class most likely to encourage the arts, with its 'legitimate taste' and 'proper feeling' (M II, 496) is paralleled in 'Usher' in the reference to the family's 'peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art' (3). The Usher family is also noted for its 'repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity' (ibid.); the ideological function of the reference to 'charity' is, presumably, to cover up or soften the existence of social inequalities, and thus to naturalise the class structure implicit in the tale. Nonetheless, in practice the presentation of aristocracy in 'Usher' is rather more ambivalent than in the programmatic 'Philosophy of Furniture'.

As seen in Chapter 5, Punter suggests in The Literature of Terror that in Gothic fiction the bourgeoisie typically expressed its ambivalent attitude (fascination mixed with revulsion) towards the aristocracy, its predecessor in power.<sup>441</sup> 'Usher' may be read - given Poe's readership and his objective incorporation into capitalism as professional writer<sup>442</sup> - as expressing some of this ambivalence, in spite of Poe's own pro-aristocratic prejudices. Usher does not correspond to the threateningly unrepressed, Byronic-hedonist model of the aristocrat, as embodied in Prospero in 'The Masque of the Red Death'<sup>443</sup> (there are textual links with Byron,<sup>444</sup> but not in that direction); rather, he represents the introverted, inbred, self-destructive facet of aristocracy. The Usher family has maintained its pure, 'time-honored' stock, without 'collateral issue' ('the entire family lay in the direct line of descent') (3) - but at the cost of inbreeding (if not incest),<sup>445</sup> and consequent debilitation; this process has culminated in the last two diseased, vulnerable siblings, Roderick and Madeline (whose illnesses may, indeed, be partly traceable to inbreeding). Besides, as the fissured subject that he is, traversed by 'incoherence' (9), Usher is hardly an advertisement for the coherence of his own class; rather, the supposedly homogeneous aristocratic family appears in the text as shadowed by incest, madness and death - indeed, the 'nobility of blood' of 'Philosophy of Furniture' (M II, 496), is stained by the the literal blood on Madeline's robes (40). Poe's tale, far from naturalising the concept of aristocracy, may be read as exposing it as historically superseded - even as sounding its death-knell.

Another "aristocracy" than the British has been considered to be signified in 'Usher'; as shown above, again in relation to 'Philosophy of

Furniture', the Southern planter class saw itself, and is frequently seen by historians, as a de facto aristocracy.<sup>446</sup> Harry Levin (The Power of Blackness, 1958), linking 'Usher', via the incest theme, to the work of William Faulkner, argues that 'Poe's work acquires a sociological meaning when it is linked with the culture of the plantation in its feudal pride and its foreboding of doom';<sup>447</sup> while Hervey Allen (Israfil, 1926) also implies a "Southern" interpretation in his suggestion that the House may be a disguised representation of a colonial mansion in the South Carolina woods<sup>448</sup> (although, in contrast, Leslie Fiedler (Love and Death in the American Novel, 1960) denies any link between the incest theme in Poe's work and 'the broader arena of social life in the South').<sup>449</sup>

The "Southern" reading of 'Usher' may be supported by intertextual comparison with certain elements in Twain's Huckleberry Finn (1884). In the episode narrating Huck's stay with the Grangerford family, the Colonel is described in the discourse of Southern "aristocracy":

Col. Grangerford was a gentleman, you see. He was a gentleman all over; and so was his family. He was well born, as the saying is, and that's worth as much in a man as it is in a horse, so the Widow Douglas said, and nobody ever denied that she was of the first aristocracy in our town ...<sup>450</sup>

Usher too - himself 'well born' and 'a gentleman all over' - may be read as, on one level, a Southern planter displaced into a European context. It is, at least, interesting to note that Grangerford is given certain characteristics that may remind the reader of Usher; he has 'the thinnest kind of lips' (Usher has 'lips somewhat thin' (8)), while 'his forehead was high, and his hair ... hung to his shoulders'<sup>451</sup> (Usher's brow shows an 'inordinate expansion', and his 'hair ... had been suffered to grow all unheeded' (ibid.)). The convergence of the

two figures suggests, on the one hand, that the Grangerford stock may have been undermined by Usher-type inbreeding - and, on the other, that Poe's text may contain a critique (albeit unconscious) of Southern "aristocracy" that anticipates that of the overtly anti-Southern Twain.

It is, then, possible to read 'Usher' as (inter alia) a displaced expression of collective white fears of the disintegration of the Southern social fabric, in keeping with the similar readings that critics have proposed for Pym and 'Tarr and Fether'.<sup>452</sup> The 'peculiar' atmosphere (4) could correspond to the Southern way of life, shaped by the "peculiar institution", slavery; the incest, to Southern introversion; the 'specious totality' of the House (5), to the deceptive coherence and stability of a social formation that had, in fact, less than three decades of life remaining, and that had already been threatened by such events as Nat Turner's slave revolt of 1831.<sup>453</sup> The collapse of the House would, then, dramatise social anxieties about the imminent collapse of the slave system.

Levin's hypothesis does, then, gain some weight when the tale is placed in its historical context. It may be asked, however, whether - if this reading is correct - there is any element in the text that symbolises the slaves, corresponding to the blacks on Tsalal in Pym and the inmates in 'Tarr and Fether' (on the "Southern" readings of those narratives). Indeed, if there is any slave-figure in the text (barring the servant, who only intervenes to lead the narrator to Usher's studio (6)), it is surely Madeline, oppressed by reason of her gender and silent throughout; her return could be read as having the additional dimension of symbolising the possibility of black revenge, the terror-

ising of the masters by the oppressed. Her conversion from passive to active, like the inmates' shift in 'Tarr and Fether' from dominated to dominators, would then be a displaced expression of Southern white male fears of slave insurrection. Woman-as-slave is activated in the figure of Madeline, both in her own right and as signifier of other oppressed groups. It is, then, certainly arguable, from a materialist perspective, that among the false homogeneities exposed in 'Usher' may be counted that of the Southern formation. In this case, the House symbolises, not only a subjectivity, but also a social edifice, on the brink of collapse.

v. Artist, Artworks and Text

A further major dimension of the tale must now be considered: its construction of art and the artist. Usher is, like the protagonists of 'The Assigination', 'The Masque of the Red Death', 'The Oval Portrait' and 'Ligeia', inter alia, an instance of the Romantic artist; and here as in those tales, this figure is in practice problematised in the text, emerging as ambivalent and contradictory. The tale also presents a series of artworks in different media, which are described in detail, or quoted in whole or in part: Usher's paintings, his musical compositions and the poem attributed to him, 'The Haunted Palace'; to which should be added the imaginary medieval romance, the 'Mad Trist', and, finally, the House itself. As will be shown, the text of 'Usher' in practice tends to undermine the notion of the "unity" and coherence of the artwork, through the various ironies present in the signification of these specific art-products.

Usher is, quite visibly, an artist within the Romantic tradition; this element is announced as early as the epigraph,<sup>454</sup> which warns the reader to expect a sensitive or marginalised artist-figure along Shelleyan or Byronic lines. The lute image implies, not only Usher's hysteria or melancholia,<sup>455</sup> but also his artistic sensibility; a link is thus constituted between art and mental illness. Béranger's lute image may remind the reader of Shelley's Alastor (1816):<sup>456</sup>

... as a long-forgotten lyre  
 Suspended in the solitary dome  
 Of some mysterious and deserted fane,  
 I wait thy breath, Great Parent ...;<sup>457</sup>

A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings  
 The breath of heaven did wander ...<sup>458</sup>

In Shelley's text, the first quotation refers to the poet-narrator, the second to the poet-protagonist; both serve to constitute the poet as a sensitive, vulnerable figure, and it is in this tradition that Usher should be placed. There are, besides, textual convergences between Poe's tale and the writings, in verse and prose, of Byron, some of which have been noted above (hysteria and hypochondria, and the image of mental darkness).<sup>459</sup> The lute image recalls, not only Shelley, but the Byronic figure of the misunderstood poet, as presented in the passage from Childe Harold (1812-18) (already quoted in Chapter 5)<sup>460</sup> in which Harold compares his poetic sensibility ('that within me which shall tire/Torture and Time') to 'the remember'd tone of a mute lyre'.<sup>461</sup> Further Byronic traits in Usher include his isolation from society, and his incestuous tendencies (albeit repressed), both of which link him to the protagonist of Manfred (1816); Poe's tormented artist-hero can be seen, like Byron's, as a poète maudit, '(f)atal and fated in (his) sufferings'.<sup>462</sup>

There are also important parallels with Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' (1798). Usher, in his isolation, is in effect surrounded by a closed circle, like Coleridge's poet or the walled-in Prospero of 'The Masque of the Red Death';<sup>463</sup> besides, his 'silken hair' which 'floated rather than fell about the face', and the 'miraculous lustre of the eye' (8) point back to the 'floating hair' and 'flashing eyes' of Coleridge's vatic figure,<sup>464</sup> while the narrator's 'startled' and 'awed' reaction (ibid.) corresponds to the 'holy dread' that the bard produces in the onlookers.<sup>465</sup> Again, an analogy is implied between art and madness; there is, besides, an intertextual link, via Coleridge, with Plato's 'Ion',<sup>466</sup> where the poet is seen as (to quote Shelley's translation (1818?)) fired with a 'divine insanity, like the Corybantes, who lose all control over their reason in the enthusiasm of the sacred dance'.<sup>467</sup> However, in Usher's case, as will be seen,<sup>468</sup> the poet's 'insanity' and 'enthusiasm' are not enlisted in the service of any transcendent revelation, but operate, rather, in an all-too-material context of destruction and sadism.

Usher is an artist by both heredity and temperament; as noted above,<sup>469</sup> his artistic practice places him in the line of his ancestors, who have produced 'many works of exalted art' (3) over the centuries. Of this artistic inheritance, the text provides two examples: the earlier Ushers' 'passionate devotion' to 'musical science' (3), which anticipates Roderick's own 'improvisations' (15); and the House itself, as, presumably, the fruit of an ancestor's design.<sup>470</sup> Indeed, if Usher's delusional system has any basis at all in fact, the ancestor in question seems to have been both architect and landscape gardener, since he applied a conscious 'method' to the 'arrangement', not only of the stones of the House, but also of the trees, and to the placing of the House in relation to the tarn (19).



The last of the Ushers is himself repeatedly defined as an artist; his very living-room is called a 'studio' (6). In his features, the Coleridgean eye and hair have already been noted; the 'inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple' (8) is, as has been shown above,<sup>471</sup> in phrenological terms, a sign of 'ideality', the imaginative faculty. The term 'ideality' is, further, twice applied to Usher by the narrator: 'excited and highly distempered ideality' (16); 'lofty and spiritual ideality' (30). One may compare a passage in 'The Drake-Halleck Review' (1836 - H VIII, 275-318) - a text which, as seen in Chapter 5,<sup>472</sup> is concerned with the definition of the 'true poet' (281) - where Poe defines 'the Faculty of Ideality' as 'the sentiment of Poesy ... the sense of the beautiful, of the sublime, and of the mystical' (283) and adds: 'Ideality is indeed the soul of the Poetic Sentiment' (293). Further, Usher's 'Arabesque expression' (8) connects with the spirit of abstraction' present in his paintings (17) and suggests a tendency in him to the aesthetic conversion of reality into abstraction.<sup>473</sup>

The description of Usher's aesthetic activity occupies much of the narrative between the first evening and the announcement of Madeline's death (15-18, 20). Usher appears as, variously, producer, performer and consumer of art. He is a producer of paintings, poetry and music (his musical activity includes both original guitar compositions, or 'wild improvisations' (15), and the arrangement of others' work ('a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber' (16)); he performs on the guitar; and he is an avid consumer of literature (the books cited in (20) are said to have 'formed no small portion' of his 'mental existence'). The narrator, besides, sees him as an artist of considerable talent (the factor of

quality connects him to the painter of 'The Oval Portrait', with his 'high renown' (M II, 665));<sup>474</sup> this is implied by his reference to his friend's 'lofty' imagination (30), and his elevation of Usher's paintings above those of the historical Henry Fuseli (1741-1825):<sup>475</sup> 'For me at least ... there arose out of the pure abstractions which the hypochondriac contrived to throw upon his canvass, an intensity of intolerable awe, no shadow of which felt I ever yet in the contemplation of the certainly glowing yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli.' (16).

In the textual signification of Usher's aesthetic practice and the narrator's reactions to it, three areas of emphasis may be distinguished: art appears as, variously, a means of therapy, of communication and of domination. These three aspects will now be examined in turn. To take the therapeutic dimension first, art is, in fact, an important element in the narrator's attempt to respond to his friend's request for 'some alleviation of his malady' (2):<sup>476</sup> 'I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar.' (15) Art, then, is engaged in to therapeutic ends; however, there is no evidence that the project has much success. In the same paragraph, the narrator confesses to what he perceives as 'the futility of all attempts at cheering' Usher's mind. It does seem that art can provide his host with a momentary escape from his fears and delusions; in his musical performances, for instance, he temporarily displays an 'intense mental collectedness and concentration' (18). However, after Madeline's burial, the project of therapy-through-art seems to have failed altogether, as Usher ceases to show any interest in his former activities: 'His ordinary occupations were neglected or

forgotten.' (24). With the reading of the 'Mad Trist', the narrator tries once again to exploit the therapeutic potential of art, hoping that Usher's 'excitement ... might find relief ... even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read' (30). The effect is, however, ironically counter-productive; the imagined coincidences between text and external world only increase Usher's terror, and the reading is brusquely abandoned. The therapeutic value of art in this text is, it may be concluded, severely limited.

If Usher's art fails to provide therapy, there is no doubt that, nonetheless, it communicates certain contents. The narrator is able, to some extent, to fight back against Usher's attempt to control him by interpreting his artworks, attaching signifieds to them. He finds in all of them the expression of Usher's disturbed mental state: 'An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all.' (16). Usher's music communicates a message, it "speaks" ('his speaking guitar' (15)); presumably, it signifies his melancholia and 'gloom', since that is the theme of the following sentence. The paintings are seen as vehicles of "ideas" ('If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher.' (16)), although the narrator does not dare specify what those ideas are. He does, however, interpret 'The Haunted Palace' quite openly, reading it as evidence of its writer's 'consciousness ... of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne' (18). Indeed, this last instance is a case of active reading on the narrator's part, an attempt to appropriate Usher's text through interpretation. As in Poe's own reading of Fouquē's Undine (1839 — H X, 30-39; cited in Chapter 5),<sup>477</sup> he rescues the text from imprisonment to its surface sense, by finding in it an 'under or mystic current of ...

meaning' (18). Here, the narrator lays claim, as consumer, to participation in the construction of the text's meaning; the power-struggle between him and Usher at this point takes on the dimension of a struggle between producer and consumer for the control of the artwork (as is the case with Poe's aesthetic theories in general).<sup>478</sup> At all events, it emerges from the text of 'Usher' that art-products have a meaning, that they signify something; and that this meaning is not the sole property of their producer.

However, there is a more sinister element in Usher's artistic production; art also functions in the tale as a form of domination, if not sadism. This is, of course, convergent with a certain strain in Poe's aesthetic ideology - with the notion, as expressed in the 1847 Hawthorne review, of writing as manipulation and intimidation of the reader ('the soul of the reader is at the writer's control' - H XIII, 153).<sup>479</sup> What happens, in practice, in the interaction between Usher, his artworks, and the narrator is that to a considerable extent, the artist dominates and disturbs the consumer, by means of the aesthetic activities in which he 'involve[s]' him (16). The narrator's reaction to Usher's poem, for instance, is described in terms of impressionability: 'I was, perhaps, the more forcibly impressed with it ...' (18). This concept of art as "impression" - of the artwork as imposing itself on the consumer - is also present in the Hawthorne review, where poetry is seen as (ideally) producing a 'profound or enduring impression' (H XIII, 152).<sup>480</sup> This process of intimidation through art may be considered to be one of the means by which Usher exercises the "influence" which the narrator notes in (24); one may also compare the mesmeric "influence" (another instance of unequal power-relations); which, in 'Mesmeric Revelation', is signified

via the verb 'impress'.<sup>481</sup>

Indeed, if Usher is to be seen as 'Romantic Artist', it should be remembered that in that tradition art can appear as a form of domination - especially in the poetry of Coleridge. The convergence with 'Kubla Khan' has already been noted;<sup>482</sup> besides, the intimidating effect of Usher's paintings, by means of which 'he arrested and overawed attention' (16), may be compared to the quasi-mesmeric impact of the Ancient Mariner's story on his listener. The Mariner, with his 'glittering eye'<sup>483</sup> and gift of monopolising attention, may be seen as analogous to Poe's poet and mesmerist; and, as Usher does with the narrator, so he too arrests and overawes the Wedding-Guest.<sup>484</sup> Further, Usher's delusional system contains an element of art-as-sadism. The stones of the House, the trees, the entire mansion and domain have, he believes, been collocated, arranged, organised for sadistic purposes; the aim of the ancestral architect was, then, to terrorise and debilitate his descendants.<sup>485</sup> The House itself is thus, for Usher, a colossal artwork whose function is to dominate and ultimately to kill. Usher's ancestor thus becomes, at least in his imagination, a counterpart to the narrator of 'Ligeia' in his role as sadistic interior designer, or to the killer of 'The Black Cat', who constructs a tomb to hide the corpse of his victim - and, above all, to the artist-murderer of 'The Oval Portrait'. It may be concluded that, whether in the figure of Usher, in his artworks or in the content of his delusions, the sadistic connotation of art is never far from the surface of the text.

Usher may thus be inserted into a certain nineteenth-century tradition of art as not only domination (as in Coleridge), but outright sadism; it is, after all, the same Usher who composes and paints, and who buries

his sister alive (or thinks he has done so). One may compare the figure of Cardillac the jeweller in Hoffmann's 'Mademoiselle de Scudery' (1818), who robs and murders the purchasers of the jewels he has made;<sup>486</sup> and, later in the century, des Esseintes, the aesthete-protagonist of Huysmans' A rebours (1884).<sup>487</sup> The latter figure has, as Mario Praz stresses in The Romantic Agony (1930), a marked tendency to 'sadistic fantasies',<sup>488</sup> as in his attempt to turn a young boy into a criminal ('je tâche simplement de préparer un assassin').<sup>489</sup> Huysmans' text, indeed, specifically compares des Esseintes to Usher (in the context of irrational fears): 'il restait, les mains tremblantes, l'oreille au guet, se sentant, ainsi que le désolant Usher, envahi par une transe irraisonnée, par une frayeur sourde';<sup>490</sup> the intertextual link tends to heighten Usher's status as artist-sadist (Praz's observation that Poe's protagonist initiates a certain literary 'cliché' in this sense has been mentioned above).<sup>491</sup>

The sadistic function of art tends, then, in 'Usher' to threaten, almost to overwhelm, its therapeutic and communicative functions. The problematic form in which this text constructs the artist is further evident in its various suggestions of an intimate link between art and mental illness. Usher, as Romantic artist in the tradition of 'Kubla Khan', is presented as someone extreme and "wild", both in his symptoms and his art. If in his manic 'vivacity' he appears 'wild' (30), so too does he play the 'wild air' of the decidedly Romantic composer Weber (16). Both symptoms and artworks are seen as products of the same mental faculty, the 'fancy' - the paintings derive from his 'elaborate fancy' (16), the delusional system from his 'disordered fancy' (19). Usher the artist and Usher the madman are characterised alike by an extremity of emotion and a fervid imagination; hyperaesthesia is a symptom of hysteria,

yet also a state of heightened perception.

Usher's symptoms are also linked to his status as artist via the question of gender roles. As seen above, his liability to hysteria constitutes him as a gender-problematic male in terms of his culture's stereotypes;<sup>492</sup> as Romantic artist, too, he is signified as a hyper(over)sensitive male, and therefore potentially suspect. The androgynous tendency in the Romantic concept of the artist is evident in the public images of Shelley and Byron - Byron for his bisexuality,<sup>493</sup> Shelley for his noted sensitivity (in addition to his open rejection of what he called the 'detestable distinctions' of gender,<sup>494</sup> and the visible evidence of a poem like Laon and Cythna (1817), with its dissolution of male and female stereotypes into an androgynous practice).<sup>495</sup> Margaret Fuller, consciously following on from Shelley's position,<sup>496</sup> viewed the artist's androgyny in a positive light, writing in Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845) (in a passage already quoted in Chapter 1):

Male and female ... are perpetually passing into one another....  
There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman....  
Presently (Nature) will make a female Newton and a male siren.  
Man partakes of the feminine in the Apollo; Woman of the masculine  
as Minerva.<sup>497</sup>

Usher, as an Apollo-like figure, poet and musician, may be considered to '[partake] of the feminine' to a marked extent. However, given Poe's (and the narrator's) culturally determined notions of "normality",<sup>498</sup> Roderick's 'sensitive nervousness' (36) is constituted, to a large extent, as a negative characteristic; both as artist and as hysterical sufferer, he emerges as incompletely coherent with his allotted place in patriarchal culture, and is therefore, on both counts, presented as liable to exclusion from that culture, that is, madness.

In addition, Usher's delusional system resembles certain Romantic conceptions of the universe; if, in 'The Assignment', the Visionary's delusive belief in love beyond the grave is a case of Romantic symbolism taken to the letter,<sup>499</sup> much the same may be said of Usher's animism. His notion of sentience<sup>500</sup> is markedly similar to a certain type of "poetic truth" frequently affirmed by Romantic and post-Romantic writers - with, of course, the difference that Usher believes quite literally in his system. His belief in the animation of the mineral kingdom may be compared to the rhapsodies attributed to the Pedlar in Wordsworth's The Excursion (1798, 1814):<sup>501</sup>

And 'mid the hollow depths of naked crags  
He sate, and even in their fixed lineaments, ...  
He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind ...<sup>502</sup>

The work of Gérard de Nerval contains, disturbingly, examples of animist ideas in the context of, separately, both "poetic truth" and madness.

Thus the sonnet 'Vers dorés' (1845)<sup>503</sup> declares:

Homme, libre penseur! te crois-tu seul pensant  
Dans ce monde où la vie éclate en toute chose?...  
"Tout est sensible!" Et tout sur ton être est puissant....  
Et comme un oeil naissant couvert par ses paupières,  
Un pur esprit s'accroît sous l'écorce des pierres!<sup>504</sup>

Similar ideas are expressed in Aurélia (1855),<sup>505</sup> Nerval's narrative of a journey through madness: 'des voix secrètes sortaient de la plante, de l'arbre, des animaux, des plus humbles insectes ... des combinaisons de cailloux, ... je voyais ressortir des harmonies jusqu'alors inconnues ... "Tout vit, tout agit, tout se correspond"'.<sup>506</sup> These extracts are clearly convergent with each other; but one is from a lyric poem, the other from an avowed record of madness. The notion that 'Tout est sensible', or 'tout vit' runs parallel to Usher's animist beliefs, while both texts refer, specifically, to the animation of stones ('pierres', 'cailloux').



The poet, in Nerval's work as in 'Usher', emerges as poised perilously on the brink of delirium; indeed, in Poe's own work, one may compare the account of Usher's delusional system (19) with a "poetic" passage from Eureka (1848), a text which Poe described as, inter alia, a 'Poem' (Beaver, Science Fiction, p. 209):<sup>507</sup>

All these creatures - all - those whom you term animate, as well as those to which you deny life for no better reason than that you do not behold it in operation - all these creatures have, in a greater or less degree, a capacity for pleasure and for pain... (Beaver, Science Fiction, p. 309).

The notion of sentience, or animation of that which is not 'animate', is here presented in the context of a speculative cosmological fiction, and the reader will therefore receive it in a different register from that of Usher's delusion; nonetheless, the convergence is striking, and points up the closeness of the discourses of Romanticism and psychosis.

The analogy between art and madness in 'Usher' has been noted by various critics, in both idealist and more materialist directions. David Galloway ('Introduction' to Poe, Selected Writings, 1967) argues that the figure of Usher combines 'acute sensitivity' with 'madness', and that his mental disturbance may actually result from 'extreme cultivation of the senses';<sup>508</sup> aesthetic activity can bring on the psychological disintegration of the artist. Gerald W. Garmon ('Roderick Usher: Portrait of the Madman as Artist', 1973) goes so far as to read the text as an allegory of the artist's alienation from society; he sees Usher as 'an artist seeking freedom', whose quest is 'doom[ed] to failure' owing to his heredity and environment,<sup>509</sup> and the House as the concrete symbol of that hostile environment.<sup>510</sup> In an idealist context, Butler ('Usher's Hypochondriasis', 1976), after examining Usher's illness,<sup>511</sup>

emphasises the close relation between his symptoms and his artistic gifts, and concludes that the collapse of the House may represent 'romantic idealism's ultimate triumph', the artist's 'complete union with ideality'.<sup>512</sup> It may be pointed out, against Butler's reading, that the construction of art across the text is, to a large extent, negative - in the breakdown of the therapeutic project, and the sadistic element, as charted above; besides, the progress of Usher's illness, let alone his abandonment of art in the second part, scarcely points in the direction of any transcendental 'triumph'. Rather, both Galloway and Garmon appear to be correct insofar as they suggest a problematic - and dangerous - link between art and madness; in particular, Garmon's reading may be extended so as to construct a parallel between the alienation of the artist (from the dominant mode of production) and that other "alienation" of the mental sufferer (from culture in general). In the context of the objective situation of alienation imposed on writers of the period by the literary market,<sup>513</sup> Usher may to some extent be read as paradigmatic of the alienated artist - although with the proviso that he neither seeks nor needs a market, given his possession of inherited wealth. At all events, in his isolation and mental alienation, he may be seen as a displaced instance of the artist's economic alienation.

Usher's status as artist is enhanced in the text by the detailed attention that the narrator pays to the works he produces; these will now be examined in detail, in the following order: 1) his music; 2) his paintings; 3) the poem 'The Haunted Palace'. To take his music first, the narrator mentions one specific instance of his 'impromptus' (18) on the guitar (apart from the poem, which Usher sings to guitar accompaniment (18)): 'a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the

last waltz of Von Weber' (16). The reference is, in point of fact, as Mabbott shows,<sup>514</sup> to the Last Waltz of K. G. Reissinger (1798-1859), which was copied out by the more famous Karl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) shortly before his death; Poe (and others) thought it was Weber's own composition. This story of its origins, even if historically false, gives the composition the character of an anticipation of death; Usher is thus, as Mabbott argues, 'playing a dirge for himself'<sup>515</sup> - and indeed, as Daniel Hoffman (Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, 1972) further points out, for Madeline too.<sup>516</sup> Through the reproduction and 'amplification' of what he believes to be Weber's elegy for himself, Usher is implicitly predicting his own death (the variations he introduces on the theme effectively "personalise" it, allowing him to appropriate it for his own purposes); he is, besides, placing himself in the role of Romantic artist, melancholy, sensitive and fated to an early death (Weber died at forty). The term 'perversion' connects with Poe's use elsewhere of 'perverse',<sup>517</sup> and thus points indirectly, not only to Usher's distortion (in the narrator's view) of the original melody, but to a self-destructive element in his subjectivity. Indeed, the playing of the waltz may be seen as indirectly hastening Usher's death, since it is one instance among many of his tendency to obsessive brooding on that theme, which itself contributes to his physical and mental decline.

It should also be noted that Usher's musical activity tends towards the breakdown of form. His compositions and arrangements are characterised variously as: 'wild improvisations' (15), 'long improvised dirges' (16), and 'wild fantasias' (18), while in their character of performances, they are seen as 'fantastic' and marked by 'fervid facility' (18). Two factors, then, are dominant: the element of wildness or extravagance,

which implies the undermining of established forms; and the concept of improvisation, which breaks with the notion of a "unique" or "definitive" musical score. These anarchic elements in Usher's music correspond to the disintegrative tendencies in his mind - although his performances are art, not symptoms, and retain a certain organisation thanks to his 'intense mental collectedness and concentration' as he plays (ibid.). Music, for Usher, is clearly a form of temporary and partial therapy, but it brings neither "transcendence" nor "consolation"; rather, it gives aesthetic expression to his obsessions and fears.

Nonetheless, the element of formal experimentation tends to place him in the aesthetic vanguard (it may be noted that Usher's supposed starting-point, the work of Weber, lies in a line of musical development that eventually led to the innovations of Wagner and Mahler). This avant-garde tendency also marks Usher's plastic activity.

Usher's paintings are described in general by the narrator in (16), before a specific example is examined in detail, in the following paragraph. Here, then, as in 'The Oval Portrait', attention is concentrated on one painting out of many; but what differentiates Usher's productions from those presented in that tale (although the latter are signified as 'modern' (M II, 662))<sup>518</sup> is the 'spirit of abstraction' (17) that pervades them all. His paintings are unusual indeed, considering that they belong to a genre that did not yet exist in 1839; they are non-figurative to the point of being, in most cases, impossible to describe, or rather, transcribe into verbal language: 'from these paintings ... I would in vain endeavor to educe more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words' (16). The historically proleptic status of Poe's text, in this respect, has been affirmed by H. Wells

Phillips ('Poe's Usher: Precursor of Abstract Art', 1973):<sup>519</sup> 'Poe ... imposes on Usher's sensibilities ... a concept apparently ahead of his time'.<sup>520</sup> The narrator sees Usher's 'images' as 'vaguenesses' or 'pure abstractions', and contrasts them with the 'too concrete reveries of Fuseli' (16). Indeed, where Fuseli<sup>521</sup> still painted identifiable "themes" with, say, literary reference, Usher's undescribed paintings are, presumably, free of all specific external reference: 'If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher.' (ibid.). His paintings, then, appear to be abstract expressions of mental states. But the precise character of those mental states is, presumably, unknown to either Usher or the narrator. The latter is terrified by the paintings, without being able to explain his fear: 'I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered not why'; they produce an 'intensity of intolerable awe' (16). This discourse of the intolerable and unknowable suggests strongly that the paintings belong to the domain of the uncanny; they deal with unconscious material, and revive unconscious fears in the onlooker.

The one painting that the narrator feels capable of describing (though not of interpreting) is, though 'partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction' (17), evidently a visual expression of unconscious ideas. Usher's picture of an illuminated 'vault or tunnel' has been variously interpreted by critics. It has been seen as a symbol of 'Death' and 'Madness' (Abel, 'A Key to the House of Usher', 1949);<sup>522</sup> of Usher's fear of madness (Symons, The Tell-Tale Heart, 1978);<sup>523</sup> of his 'wide awake and sensitive consciousness' (Gerhard Hoffmann, 'Space and Symbol in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe', 1971);<sup>524</sup> and of his 'internal void', and, more generally, of the 'death and burial of consciousness and

rationality' (Thompson, 'The Face in the Pool', 1973).<sup>525</sup> It has, in addition, been read as a mirror-image of the House (Wasserman, 'The Self, the Mirror, the Other', 1977);<sup>526</sup> an anticipation of Madeline's burial (Gerhard Hoffmann again);<sup>527</sup> a representation of her tomb (Thompson again);<sup>528</sup> and as a symbol of her genitals, with the penetrative light representing an 'act of copulation' (Marsh, 'The Psycho-Sexual Reading of "Usher"', 1972).<sup>529</sup>

The very multiplicity of interpretations - with some critics providing more than one - suggests that, at the very least, the painting's signification in the text is heavily overdetermined. It is possible that all the above readings are correct - in which case, Usher's canvas would contain an image symbolising himself, Madeline and the House all together. However, the crucial elements in its meaning, in the context of the tale as a whole, are those relating to desire and death. The sexual symbolism identified by Marsh seems, indeed, to be present; the painting represents 'the interior of an immensely long and rectangular -vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, ... and... at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth' (17). All this implies a sexual meaning, while also pointing to the repressed, "buried" character of Usher's desire for Madeline; besides, the 'ghastly and inappropriate' light produced by the penetrating rays (ibid.) may correspond to the unconscious sense of guilt provoked by the "inappropriate" desires in question. Further, the vault is closed, with 'no outlet' (ibid.), and, therefore, no entrance; it may thus be seen as representing Madeline's maidenhead (which her brother unconsciously wishes to penetrate).

At the same time, the vault is also, obviously enough, an image of death;

and, while not alien to Usher's own fears of death, it seems above all to be linked to Madeline's death and burial. The painted vault corresponds very closely to Madeline's burial vault, as is indicated on the lexical level; its 'exceeding depth' (17) is paralleled in the 'great depth' of the real vault (22), while the closure of the one (17) is repeated in the hermetic sealing of the other (23). These convergences imply that, through the painting, Usher is giving symbolic expression to his unconscious desire to bury both Madeline and the "female" side of himself that she represents.<sup>530</sup> The fear that the canvas produces in the narrator (as indicated by the adjective 'ghastly' (17)) would then be related to his own collusion in the burial of Madeline, and therefore to fears and desires parallel to those at work in Usher.<sup>531</sup>

Usher's painting, then, on the one hand anticipates the rise of abstract art, and on the other signifies unconscious material; it is thus doubly "difficult", in both form and content, pertaining to a genre that has yet to be invented and symbolising fantasies which no discourse has yet arisen to name. Poe's text, in its anticipation of the future of art, runs curiously parallel to Balzac's 'Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu' (1831), a text already discussed in relation to 'The Oval Portrait';<sup>532</sup> the 'chaos de couleurs, de tons, de nuances indéfinies' which is Frenhofer's 'masterpiece'<sup>533</sup> is, like Usher's paintings, a proto-abstract canvas. In contrast to Usher, however, Balzac's imaginary painter has "discovered" abstract art by accident rather than design; the genuine, but limited character of the parallel points to the remarkably avant-garde status of Usher's art. Even as he slides towards disintegration, he maps out the future path of Western painting; Poe's text thus reveals itself as innovative in aesthetic, as well as psychological terms.

The last of Usher's artworks to be presented in the text, the poem 'The Haunted Palace' is, of course, in reality Poe's own work; it had already been published, in April 1839, before the tale appeared in September of the same year.<sup>534</sup> In the context of 'Usher', the poem can be read as (in Thompson's formula) a 'synecdoche' of the main narrative,<sup>535</sup> or - to use the term applied by Ricardou to 'The Mad Trist' - a mise en abyme.<sup>536</sup> Obviously enough, 'The Haunted Palace' is an extended metaphor, signifying the collapse of a mind into madness. Poe described the poem in those terms in a letter to Rufus W. Griswold (29 May 1841 - 01, 160-61), as presenting 'a mind haunted by phantoms - a disordered brain' (161); the narrator interprets it in similar terms, as expressing Usher's first awareness of 'the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne' (18). It is, as noted above,<sup>537</sup> a song as well as a poem - one of the 'rhymed verbal improvisations' with which Usher accompanies his guitar 'fantasias' (ibid.) - and therefore, presumably, shares in the 'wild', disintegrative character of his music. Given its lexical and thematic connections with the main text, the poem merits close reading.

The poem may be divided into two sections: 1) stanzas I-IV; and 2) V-VI, which correspond respectively to the "past" and "present" of the palace/mind, "before" and "after" its invasion by 'evil things'. The extended metaphor: palace/mind immediately returns the attention to the main text, where the parallel: House/Usher has already been insistently constructed. The palace is, like the House of Usher, a metaphor for the subject; it too begins in a state of 'specious totality', and later enters a state of disintegration, at least as far as its internal organisation is concerned. Unlike the House, it retains its physical integrity. - but it suffers a total transformation.



Across the first section, the poem constructs, through the metaphor of the palace, a model of the "full", "coherent" subject, which is to be violently ruptured in the second part. In its original state, the palace is presented as complete, intact, aesthetically satisfying: 'a fair and stately palace' (1.3), 'a fabric ... fair' (1.8). The adjective 'fair' implies both beauty and lightness, and 'radiant' (1.4) carries further connotations of light; light is opposed to the darkness associated with Usher, and thus, like the moon in the last paragraph,<sup>538</sup> signifies the "unruptured" subject (this connotation is even clearer in the earlier versions of the poem,<sup>539</sup> where the palace is not 'radiant' but 'snow-white',<sup>540</sup> therefore homogeneous, undisturbed). Placed in a 'happy valley' (1.17), the palace clearly stands as a polar opposite to the House of Usher in its 'dreary' domain(1).

But the seeming utopia of the 'old time entombed' (1.40) is not politically innocent; rather, it is rigidly hierarchised. The palace is the possession and residence of a 'king' (1.32): the 'ruler of the realm' (1.24) (in the first two versions, the 'sovereign'),<sup>541</sup> the 'monarch Thought' (1.5). This sovereign is enthroned in what seems absolute, imperial power; the disciplined 'spirits' (1.19) move:

Round about a throne, where sitting,  
(Porphyrogene!)  
In state his glory well befitting,  
The ruler of the realm was seen. (1. 21-24)

'Porphyrogene' means "born to the purple" (according to Mabbott, it derives from the name of the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus);<sup>542</sup> the unusual adjective, further calling the reader's attention through its monopolisation of a line, connotes the 'ruler's' status as legitimate, thus tending to naturalise the institution of monarchy. Within this

empire ('dominion' (1.5); 'realm' (1.24)), subordinate 'spirits' (1.19) play out their roles within a fixed, given hierarchic order:

Spirits moving musically  
To a lute's well-tunēd law,  
Round about a throne ... (1. 19-21);

A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty  
Was but to sing,  
In voices of surpassing beauty,  
The wit and wisdom of their king. (1. 29-32).

The 'law' of this empire is hierarchy, the 'duty' of the king's minions to serve and flatter unquestioningly. The function of art is to perpetuate the social order; the lute's 'well-tunēd law' parallels the allegedly harmonious monarchical system, while the song of the 'Echoes' simply echoes the monarch's view of himself - indeed, it seems that in this kingdom, the function of art is reduced, following Plato's recommendations in The Republic, to the provision of panegyrics to "great men".<sup>543</sup> At the same time, the mind itself is presented as rigidly hierarchised - as in absolute monarchy, the discourse of culturally approved rationality exercises total control over "subordinate" impulses, including the aesthetic one; non-"rational" impulses are either kept under tight rein or totally repressed. This hierarchic view of the mind is also implied in the narrator's interpretive reference to Usher's enthroned 'lofty reason' (18). The monarchist utopia of the first part implies a close relation between an "organised", repressed character-structure and an "organised", hierarchic society.

The 'radiant palace', isolated and dominant in its grounds, may be seen as an image of the illusory autonomous subject. However, the ego is ultimately not master in its own house;<sup>544</sup> nor is the 'monarch Thought'. Even in the first section, there are various ironic references back to

the main text which cast doubt on the permanence of the palace. Its 'fabric ... fair' (1.8) points back to the decayed and fissured 'fabric' of the House (5); while the 'two luminous windows' (1. 18) are ironically matched by the 'vacant eye-like windows' (1), and the 'lute's well-tuned law' is similarly negated by the anarchically over-responsive lute of the epigraph.<sup>545</sup>

The 'spirits' that inhabit the palace, too, suggest Usher's delusive belief in sentient matter.<sup>546</sup> All this suggests that the 'well-tuned' coherence of the palace is illusory; the "unitary" appearance of the ego is founded on repression and internal division. Here, then, the sub-text is called in question by the main text.

Indeed, in the second part the sub-text itself proceeds to destroy its own utopia. The apparently natural and permanent order is ruptured; forces come into play whose existence would not have been suspected on a naïve reading of the first part. The repressed returns; the 'monarch's high estate' is 'assailed' (1.34) by 'evil things' (1.33), which, presumably, rise from the depths. These 'things', or 'vast forms' (1.43), may be seen as unconscious fantasies that irrupt into consciousness as hallucinations, rising from the repressed; the last section would then represent the disintegration of the mind in psychosis, so that there would seem to be a fairly close parallel with the rising of Madeline from the depths of the House,<sup>547</sup> and the invasion of Usher's mind by hallucination. Inside the palace, the new regime replaces the 'spirits' and 'Echoes' by 'vast forms'; the "aesthetic", as conventionally conceived - the 'lute's well-tuned law' - gives way to the ugly or "unaesthetic" ('a hideous throng' (1.47)). Harmony is replaced by a 'discordant melody' (1.44); the paradoxical notion of discord in melody signifies the

dimension of contradiction, which had hitherto been repressed. The illusion of the "harmonious" subject is shattered by the discords of madness.

'The Haunted Palace' may be read, then, as signifying the passage of an imaginary subject from "sanity" to psychosis; the very extremity of the contrast suggests that the original hyperorganised, hierarchised state of "normality" rested on an extreme repression, which in its turn generated a violent return of the repressed, under the pressure of which the subject disintegrated into psychosis. The poem, as mise en abyme, corresponds to the larger history of Usher's disintegration as subject, and the breakdown of the hierarchised aristocratic order he represents; while, at the same time, its logic anticipates the dénouement of the main narrative.

Usher's artworks, then, all parallel elements in the main text, and may all be read as indicators of his impending psychological collapse. This function of mise en abyme also attaches to the inset narrative, the 'Mad Trist' - another fictitious artwork, not attributed to Usher, but described and "quoted" at length. As sub-text, it consists of a fragment of an imaginary medieval prose romance by the equally imaginary Sir Launcelot Canning. The fragment, while internally coherent, is ruptured, made discontinuous, by its mode of insertion into the main text; its three paragraphs (32, 34, 37) are divided from each other by the narrator's interpolated remarks. Thus, the 'Mad Trist' (sub-text) punctures the main narrative (macro-text); forcing the reader to take up two alternate, totally different, narrative threads. The two narratives interact, since the narrator, variously, decides to read the romance in

order to distract Usher (29, 30); makes metatextual comments on the sub-text (30); and "perceives" a series of coincidences between certain sounds represented in the sub-text and others ('real' or "imaginary") in the external world of the main text (33, 35, 36, 38).

The narrative of the sub-text will now be briefly outlined. In (32), the knight Ethelred, drunk, confronts an 'obstinate and malicious' hermit in a forest, with a storm rising. He breaks down the door of the hermit's hut. In (34), Ethelred goes through the door - upon which, hut and hermit disappear, and the knight faces a huge dragon guarding a golden palace. On the wall is a shield, on which are written two lines of verse declaring that it is reserved for the slayer of the dragon. Ethelred goes on to kill the dragon, which dies with a 'horrid' shriek. In (37), Ethelred goes up to the shield, intending to take it; but it falls down on to the floor with a 'terrible ringing sound'. At this point, the reading is broken off.

The 'Mad Trist' has been the object of some critical controversy. Abel ('A Key to the House of Usher', 1949) objects to it as a piece of 'unfunctional trumpery', offering a 'mechanical, not a symbolical, correspondence' with the main narrative;<sup>548</sup> in contrast, Ricardou ('L'histoire dans l'histoire', 1966) presents a detailed analysis, and implicit defence, of its function as mise en abyme of the main text.<sup>549</sup> At all events, as Thompson ('The Face in the Pool', 1973) stresses, the 'meaning of the interpolated story' is one of the cruxes that any reading of 'Usher' has to deal with.<sup>550</sup>

The correspondences between sub-text and main narrative are not limited

to the obvious parallels between the "sounds". Indeed, their multiplicity is already an argument against Abel's view of a purely 'mechanical', analogic relationship; it will here be useful to consider them in detail. The title of the romance itself contains an ironic reference to the main text; Thompson suggests that it implies that both the encounters between Usher and Madeline, and between Usher and the narrator, may be seen as "mad trists".<sup>551</sup> In the first case, it would be a lovers' trist, and the title of the sub-text would thus openly signify that desire which Usher himself cannot admit; in the second, it would be a meeting of two madmen, with the adjective 'mad' referring both forward to Usher's "Madman!" (39) and back to the 'mad hilarity' in Usher's eyes (26). The notion of a "mad trist" between Usher and the narrator contributes to the element of doubling between them, and offers ironic confirmation of what the narrator will not admit, that is, his own psychotic potential.<sup>552</sup> It may further be suggested that there is also an imaginary "mad trist" between the narrator and Madeline, whose "return" objectifies the former's own repressed desires and fears.<sup>553</sup> Within the sub-text, there appear to be two "mad trists" - Ethelred's meetings with, first the hermit, then the dragon (which, Thompson suggests, may be the hermit, Proteus-like transformed).<sup>554</sup> Taken as a composite figure, the hermit-dragon is clearly both persecutor ('the malicious hermit', 'a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor' (34)) and victim (the hermit's door is broken down, the dragon is slain); as such, it may be read as corresponding to Madeline, Usher's victim-persecutor. For Bonaparte, the dragon is the Oedipal father;<sup>555</sup> but given the "masculinisation" of Madeline described above,<sup>556</sup> it may be argued that the hermit-dragon signifies both the Oedipal father and, beneath that figure, the persecuting pre-Oedipal mother. In this case, the sub-text becomes

a symbolic representation of Usher's unconscious fantasies about his sister.

The following close lexical and situational correspondences with the main text may be noted:

'MAD TRIST'

MAIN TEXT

- (32) 'on account of the powerful-  
ness of the wine which he had  
drunken'  
'fearing the rising of the  
tempest'  
'he so cracked, and ripped,  
and tore all asunder'  
'the noise of the dry and  
hollow-sounding wood'
- (34) 'the dragon ... fell before  
him, and gave up his pesty  
breath, with a shriek so horrid  
and harsh ...'  
'pesty breath'
- (37) 'removed the carcass from out  
of the way'  
'the shield ... fell down at his  
feet'  
'a mighty great and terrible  
ringing sound'
- 'that ... guttural utterance,  
which may be observed in the  
lost drunkard' (9)  
'the breath of a rising tempest'  
(25)  
'I saw the mighty walls rushing  
asunder' (40)  
'hollow-sounding enunciation' (9)  
'with a low moaning cry, fell  
heavily inward upon the person  
of her brother' (40)  
'a pestilent ... vapor' (4)  
'bore him to the floor a corpse'  
(40)  
'fell heavily inward' (40)  
'a long tumultuous shouting sound'  
(41)

It is clear enough that there are multiple convergences between inset and main narratives - between Ethelred and Usher, between the dragon and Madeline, and between the hut and the House (besides, the 'palace' -points back to another sub-text, 'The Haunted Palace'). Above all, it should be noted that these convergences, for the most part, point forward, towards the impending dénouement of the main narrative. The collapse of the hermit's door anticipates the collapse of the House, and the "falls" of dragon and shield anticipate those of Madeline and, of course the House. The 'Mad Trist' is, then, a mise en abyme, in the sense of being proleptic. Ricardou goes further, arguing that it indicates the coming end, not only for the reader, but also for the narrator: 'Si le narrateur s'enfuit précipitamment du manoir, c'est qu'il connaît déjà la fin de l'histoire.... c'est en quelque façon sa propre aventure qu'il a lue'; 'l'intégrale destruction ... de la demeure de l'ermite' warns him of the fall of the House.<sup>557</sup> Whether, however, Ricardou is correct on this point may be doubted; there is little evidence that the narrator should, by this stage, be considered as a 'model reader', as a figure parallel to Legrand in Ricardou's reading of 'The Gold-Bug'.<sup>558</sup> If the view of the narrator put forward earlier in this study - that he is, by the end, incapable of "reading" his own hallucinations<sup>559</sup> - is correct, then Ricardou's argument is inappropriate. It is, however, certainly the case that the (alert) reader 'connaît déjà la fin de l'histoire'.

It will also be worthwhile to examine the formal relation of the 'Mad Trist' to the main text, so as to determine to what extent the latter is put in question by its sub-text. Firstly, the interpolation ruptures the linearity of 'Usher', both by interrupting its narrative sequence



and, as shown above, by anticipating its end. As Ricardou points out, 'la mise en abyme conteste l'ordonnance préalable de l'histoire. Prophétie, elle perturbe l'avenir en le découvrant par anticipation.'<sup>560</sup> Thus the "natural", "inevitable" line of chronological narrative is disturbed, and to this extent the mise en abyme tends to denaturalise the writing process. Further, the 'Mad Trist' can be read as a salutary deterrent to any naïve supernaturalist reading of 'Usher'. Ethelred's adventures read as parodic; the unexpected transformations of hermit into dragon and hut into palace may be burlesques of the kind of abrupt, supernatural transformations and transitions found in, say, Hoffmann's 'The Golden Pot' (1813), where the Archivarius Lindhorst metamorphoses into a salamander,<sup>561</sup> or Adalbert von Chamisso's Peter Schlemihl (1813),<sup>562</sup> where the protagonist suddenly encounters the seven-league boots and begins a series of miraculous journeys.<sup>563</sup> Besides, the falling of the shield before the 'champion' Ethelred has time to 'win' it (34) is visibly anticlimactic. One may agree with Thompson's view that 'the "Mad Trist" is made purposefully ludicrous; it reads like a parody', and that it 'destroys the Gothic illusion'.<sup>564</sup> It may be added that the term 'folly', used by the narrator to describe the 'Mad Trist' (30), is also applied by Poe in his 'Preface' to Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque (1840) to refer to German 'pseudo-horror': 'some of the secondary names of German literature have become identified with its folly' (M II, 473).<sup>565</sup> If, then, the 'Mad Trist', with its exaggerated supernaturalism and burlesque element, is a parody of the Gothic, it may function as a warning to the reader not to take at face value the apparently supernatural events of the main text - as an indication that to take Madeline's return literally is as ludicrous as to believe in the metamorphosis of hermit into dragon. Further, the narrator, who

interprets the sounds in the 'Mad Trist' as somehow provoking or mirroring the "supernatural" sounds in the House, may be considered - pace Ricardou - as actually a "bad" reader, as one who supposes there is a magical, immediate correspondence between text and external world; he seeks a relation between the two on the basis not of symbolisation but of synchronicity.

The 'Mad Trist' is, besides, openly signified as a piece of fiction; the narrator refers to it as an 'antique volume' (30), a material object containing a piece of writing described variously as 'the tale' (30), 'the story' (31, 33), 'the narrative' (31,36), written by a 'romancer' (35). This repeated emphasis on its status as fiction, as writing, should equally remind the reader of the fictionality of the macro-text; 'Usher' is to the reader as the 'Mad Trist' is to the narrator, a piece of writing. Thus, once again, naïve readings are warned against.

The "artificial" character of the 'Mad Trist' is also signified through its language, which is in a different register from that of the main text (a difference which, however, disappears from Baudelaire's translation, which makes no attempt to reproduce the archaisms in French).<sup>566</sup>

Here too, the narrator draws attention to the specificity of the discourse of the sub-text; he refers pejoratively to its 'uncouth and unimaginative prolixity' (30). Examined closely, the language of the 'Mad Trist' emerges as simultaneously similar and dissimilar to that of the main text.<sup>567</sup>

Various lexical convergences have already been noted; further, both text and sub-text tend to give lexical priority to the polysyllabic and Latinate, and to cultivate the long complex sentence. The 'Mad Trist', however, employs archaic vocabulary and syntax ('sore' as adverb; 'withal' (34); 'in sooth', 'tarried not' (37)) to a degree which is not paralleled

in the main text (although both use 'asunder' (32, 41), and Usher uses archaic syntax in his final speech - "'Said I not ...?'", "without the door" - (39)). In general, the discourse of the 'Mad Trist' is deliberately and self-consciously archaic; if 'Usher' is written in the language of nineteenth-century "Gothic", the sub-text is written in a pastiche of the language of medieval romance. While the difference between the two discourses points up the 'Mad Trist's' fictional status and warns the reader not to take it at face value, the similarity is also important; it draws attention to the "Gothic", "artificial" quality of the discourse of the main text, by parodying it, and serves to denaturalise that discourse too.

But if the 'Mad Trist', in various ways, calls the main text in question (or at least questions naïve readings of it), it is, equally, itself called in question by the text of 'Usher' as a whole. The main text interrupts, and thus fragments the 'Mad Trist', depriving it of narrative continuity. Further, the reading-process by which the 'Mad Trist' is inserted into the main text is disjointed and interrupted. The narrator reads aloud, to Usher, a fragment of a narrative, which his reading further fragments into three sections. He opens it at random ('I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story ...' (31)), and draws attention to his own rupturing of its continuity: 'I ... paused' (33); 'Here again I paused abruptly' (35). The narrative is then cut off arbitrarily after (37), under the pressure of external events. This whole process ironically tends to subvert Poe's official ideology of reading, as outlined in the 1847 Hawthorne review. There, the demand is made that reading should optimally be a continuous, uninterrupted process: when one reads a brief tale, the text is

perceived as 'unblemished, because undisturbed', since its 'unity' is not 'destroy[ed]' by 'cessation of reading' - 'the author is enabled to carry out his full design without interruption' (H XIII, 153)).

The 'unblemished' text-read-at-a-sitting, it has been argued above, is a model for the "full", "unblemished" subject.<sup>568</sup> However, in 'Usher' that ideological fetish of "unity" is, once again, shattered; the "unity" of the extract is destroyed by a reading-process marked by, precisely, disturbance, repeated cessation of reading and interruption.

The reading-aloud of the 'Mad Trist' presents an ironic antithesis to Poe's own ideological notion of reading as a closed process; the writer's official ideology of art is subverted by the materiality of the text.

The 'Mad Trist', then, on the one hand, offers a series of symbolic correspondences to the main text; and, on the other, tends to denaturalise that text and throw into relief its status as constructed fiction - by interrupting it, by anticipating its end, by offering a "Gothic" parody of the main text's own "Gothicity". In various ways it destroys the illusion of textual continuity, linearity, and homogeneity - in short, that unproblematic "naturalness" which is ideologically perceived as "unity". It may be noted, finally, that the 'Mad Trist' is also interrupted internally, by the two lines of doggerel verse inserted into (34):

Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;  
Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win.

The sub-text within the sub-text is, curiously enough, the only text of any description in the whole of 'Usher' that can lay any claim to unruptured "unity"; it is presented as entire, uninterrupted and "authentic". Both the epigraph and the 'Mad Trist' are extracts from (real or imaginary) larger works; 'The Haunted Palace' is offered by

the narrator as only an approximate transcription of Usher's original ('The verses ... ran very nearly, if not accurately, thus:' (18)); and the main text is interrupted by the sub-texts. Usher's letter, too, is paraphrased by the narrator (2); thus, unless one counts the other books in Usher's library, none of which is actually quoted, the only piece of writing signified in the text which retains its aura intact is, precisely, constituted by these two self-consciously awkward, ugly and mediocre lines of verse! The notion of "unity" is thus, in practice, devalued in the text of 'Usher' by being made applicable only to a sub-sub-text of minimal aesthetic value.

One further artwork signified in the text remains to be discussed; the House itself, which, along with its domain, has been constructed and planned, and is therefore the chief among the 'many works of exalted art' produced by the Usher family (3). In fact, the narrator's reaction to the House is, in the first paragraph, expressed in aesthetic terms; he examines it with the 'contemplation' which, for Poe, the auratic art-object requires.<sup>569</sup> He tries to see the problem of his fear as, perhaps, a purely aesthetic problem, which could be resolved by contemplating the object from a different viewpoint; 'a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture' may, he hopes, remove its fear-producing capacity (1). Thus he perceives the mirror-image, too, in aesthetic terms, as 'remodelled' (ibid.). The lexis - 'scene', 'picture', 'arrangement', 'remodelled' - clearly constitutes the House as artwork. Indeed, the House, as described in (4) and (5), presents certain analogies to the concept of the autonomous artwork, as presented in the 1847 Hawthorne review.<sup>570</sup> The 'peculiar' atmosphere surrounding House and domain is, on one level, the aura of uniqueness that surrounds the art-object; the Usher atmosphere

'has no affinity with the air of heaven' as, similarly, the poem or tale, read at one sitting, is insulated from 'worldly interests' (H XIII, 153). Further, the House parallels Poe's concept of the well-constructed text; if the House exhibits a 'perfect adaptation of parts' (5), in the tale 'there should be no word written of which the tendency ... is not to the one pre-established design' (H XIII, *ibid.*). The 'fabric' of the House appears to be a 'totality', like that of old woodwork preserved 'with no disturbance from the breath of the external air'; similarly, for Poe the tale should aim at 'the immense benefit of totality', and an uninterrupted reading-process preserves 'the idea of the tale' as 'unblemished, because undisturbed' (H XIII, *ibid.*). But, given this analogy, it may be further argued that if the House is fissured, and its totality 'specious' (5), then the same may be said of the apparent, ideological "unity" of the literary text. The art-object may, rather, be a space of contradictory and discontinuous signification; and thus the House-as-artwork is ironically constituted as a totality, only to be reduced to fragments at the end.<sup>571</sup>

Its character as artwork is again focussed in (19), where (in the account of Usher's delusional system) the lexis of 'collocation' and 'arrangement' identifies it as a construct;<sup>572</sup> similarly, in the Hawthorne review, Poe writes: 'A skilful artist has constructed a tale.' (H XIII, *ibid.*), and, in 'The Philosophy of Composition', 'The Raven' is said to have been rigorously 'put together' (H XIV, 195).<sup>573</sup> The House is, then, a made object, in keeping with Poe's general emphasis on art as making. Besides, the dominative aim of Usher's ancestor in designing the House is paralleled in Poe's notion of art as a means of control, as in the Hawthorne review, where he argues that in the case of a successful tale

'the soul of the reader is at the writer's control' (H XIII, 153).<sup>574</sup>  
The House terrifies and intimidates its inmates, as the writer (on Poe's model) intimidates the reader while he/she is "inside" the tale.

As artwork, then, the House is both total (a "unity") and totalitarian (dominative); it thus parallels Poe's ideology of the text. However, it is also, like the text, a construct; what has been made can be unmade, what is put together can be fragmented. The collapse of the House may be seen as symbolising the disintegration of the aura, the death of the autonomous artwork; ultimately, the text of 'Usher' thus subverts Poe's entire ideology of the unitary art-object. If the reading of the 'Mad Trist' ruptures Poe's model of the "unified" reading-process, the collapse of the House does the same for the "unified" text. The 'specious totality' of the artwork is exploded in a climax whose violence should warn the reader against seeking comfort in any notion of the auratic autonomy of art.

The problematisation of art in the text of 'Usher' is not confined to its representation of the artist and of artworks; it also takes on a metaliterary and metatextual dimension. The tale is a self-conscious piece of artifice, a quite visibly made object which (however critically) activates certain very specific literary conventions. Perhaps more than any other of Poe's non-burlesque tales, 'Usher' ostentatiously signifies itself to the reader as "Gothic".<sup>575</sup> As already noted in Chapter 5,<sup>576</sup> the term appears in the text to characterise the architecture of the House: 'I entered the Gothic archway of the hall' (6); on the level of connotation, the signifier 'Gothic' serves to define the entire text as pertaining to the literary genre of that name. Further, Usher's favourite book, the Vigiliae, is printed in 'quarto Gothic' (20);

the text thus signifies another 'Gothic' text, which appears as a simulacrum or mise en abyme of the main text's own Gothicity. On this point, one may compare two other Gothic narratives which also contain references to texts in Gothic type, or the "black letter". In Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1765), the narrative is introduced as (ostensibly) a translation of a book 'printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529';<sup>577</sup> and in Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844), the reader is referred for verification to 'certain black-letter tracts ... preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua'.<sup>578</sup> The 'Mad Trist', signified as a medieval text and, as, materially, an 'antique volume' (30), is, of course, a further "Gothic" subtext. The "Gothic" references in the text of 'Usher', then, have a metatextual function, defining the tale in generic terms.

The isolated castle, as oppressive and disorienting fictional space, is an unmistakable signifier of the "Gothic" in various senses (medieval, fear-producing, disorienting).<sup>579</sup> Examples of the convention in Poe's own work include: the 'family palace' (M II, 21) in his first tale, 'Metzengerstein' (1832) (which Thompson (Poe's Fiction, 1973) reads as a burlesque of the Gothic genre);<sup>580</sup> the castellated abbeys in 'Ligeia' and 'The Masque of the Red Death';<sup>581</sup> and the Apennine 'chateau' in 'The Oval Portrait' (M II, 662).<sup>582</sup> In earlier Gothic fiction, the sinister castle appears in Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (cited above), Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) (centrally) and The Italian (1797) (marginally),<sup>583</sup> Lewis' The Monk (1796) (the "Bleeding Nun" episode at Lindenberg castle),<sup>584</sup> and Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs (1816) (the 'Euphemia' episode at F- castle, mentioned above in relation to 'Ligeia')<sup>585</sup> and 'The Entail' (1817).<sup>586</sup> The last-named text, in particular, has been considered an antecedent of 'Usher' - either



directly or through a summary of it. contained in Walter Scott's 1827 article (cited in Chapter 5 in relation to the grotesque and arabesque) 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition'<sup>587</sup> - by G. R. Gruener ('Notes on the Influence of E. T. A. Hoffmann upon Edgar Allan Poe', 1904),<sup>588</sup> Palmer Cobb (The Influence of E. T. A. Hoffmann on the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe, 1908)<sup>589</sup> and Thompson (Poe's Fiction).<sup>590</sup>

In several aspects, the House of Usher resembles Radcliffe's castle of Udolpho. Both are of enormous size, the 'vast house' of Poe's tale (41) doubling the 'vast, ancient, and dreary' edifice of the earlier novel.<sup>591</sup> Besides, Udolpho is explicitly signified as Gothic (in the 'gothic greatness of its features'),<sup>592</sup> and various characteristics of its dark interior recur in 'Usher'. Radcliffe's text specifies the following details: 'the rich fret-work of the roof'; 'walls, wainscoted with black larch-wood ... scarcely distinguishable from darkness';<sup>593</sup> 'a suite of spacious and ancient apartments, ... hung with tapestry'; 'furniture ... almost as old as the rooms, ... covered with dust, and dropping to pieces'.<sup>594</sup> In 'Usher', the narrator observes 'the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors' (6), and, in Usher's studio, 'the vaulted and fretted ceiling' and 'antique, and tattered' furniture (7). The intertextual relation with the work of the earlier novelist is, then, as evident in 'Usher' as in 'The Oval Portrait', with its explicit reference to 'the fancy of Mrs. Radcliffe' (M II, 662).<sup>595</sup> The interior of the House further resembles those constituted in 'The Entail' and The Castle of Otranto. In Hoffmann's tale, the castle contains 'long, high-ceilinged corridors',<sup>596</sup> 'cold, gloomy apartments', 'walls with heavy panelling' and a ceiling with 'painted and gilded carvings';<sup>597</sup> 'Usher', similarly, presents 'intricate passages' with 'carvings' on the ceilings (6), 'gloomy apartments'

(23) and doors with 'huge antique pannels' (40). The 'phantasmagoric armorial trophies' in the corridor (6) probably derive from the opening of Otranto, where Manfred's son is crushed under an 'enormous helmet',<sup>598</sup> which later reappears in a quasi-phantasmagoric form, with its plumes 'waving backwards and forwards in a tempestuous manner'.<sup>599</sup>

The labyrinthine aspect of the House also refers back to Gothic literary antecedents. In Udolpho, the 'intricacies' of the 'passages and galleries' are perceived as disorienting and menacing;<sup>600</sup> the castle is, in the complexity of its architecture, unmappable for both characters and reader. This is evident in the episode where Emily de St. Aubert, in search of her imprisoned aunt, is pursued by sexually threatening men: 'She perceived, that it was useless to seek Madame Montoni, through the wide extent and intricacies of the castle'.<sup>601</sup> The Castle of Otranto is a similarly bewildering space for the persecuted Matilda, as she flees through a 'long labyrinth of darkness': 'The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern.'<sup>602</sup> The House of Usher too, like Otranto and Udolpho, cannot be mapped; the servant leads the narrator to the studio 'through many dark and intricate passages' (6), and up an unspecified number of 'staircases' (ibid.). The exact topographical relation of Usher's studio to the vault (itself one of 'numerous vaults' (21)) or to the narrator's bedroom remains unknown; all that is known is that the bedroom is directly above the vault (22).<sup>603</sup>

Further, the collapse of the Usher mansion is paralleled in the earlier Gothic literature. Alvarez Rodríguez ('Introduction' to Poe, Great

Short Stories, 1984) compares Otranto, where, at the end, a large part of the building is destroyed by a thunderclap:<sup>604</sup> 'the walls of the castle ... were thrown down with a mighty force'.<sup>605</sup> Closer antecedents exist, in fact, in an episode in The Italian, where the Barōne di Cambrusca is buried under the ruins of part of his castle, which collapses in an earthquake ('"You see that heap of ruins, yonder, on the ground...; the Barōne, they say, was buried under them!";<sup>606</sup> and in another in 'The Entail', where the fall of one of the towers coincides with the death of the owner, whose name is none other than Baron Roderick - and who, like Usher (11), had predicted his own end, indeed 'had foreseen his death to the hour'.<sup>607</sup> In both cases, the death of the owner coincides with the destruction of (part of) his castle - a narrative device which clearly anticipates the end of 'Usher'.

All the above, however, does not mean that 'Usher' should be reduced to a sum of literary conventions. Its terror is - to use Poe's formula in the 'Preface' to Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque (1840) - 'not of Germany, but of the soul' (or the mind) (M II, 413),<sup>608</sup> and the use of "German" or Gothic conventions is both symbolic and self-consciously ironic. Indeed, 'Usher' represents the opposite pole to what Poe, in the 'Preface', called the 'pseudo-horror' of the supernatural Gothic (ibid.). Such narratives as The Monk<sup>609</sup> or Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer (1820)<sup>610</sup> oblige the reader, at least as far as their literal meaning is concerned, to accept their supernatural events as "real"; 'The Entail' belongs to this "merveilleux" tendency (although others of Hoffmann's tales, such as 'The Sandman' (1816)<sup>611</sup> do not, permitting, if not demanding, an "étrange" explanation), since its chief enigmatic event, the return of the ghost of a former steward, is presented throughout as objectively

"happening".<sup>612</sup> In Radcliffe's novels, on the other hand, the apparently supernatural events are explained in concretely physical or mechanical, rather than psychological terms, as in the episode in Udolpho in which, at Château-le-Blanc, what appears to be a ghost later proves to have been a bandit.<sup>613</sup> 'Usher', however, exemplifies neither strategy; rather than providing the reader with explicit interpretations of the events, it forces her/him to supply an explanation through active engagement with the text. Sufficient evidence has been presented above to show that the "étrange" reading does far more justice to the complexities of the tale; indeed, 'Usher' may be considered an exemplary instance of Thompson's model for reading Poe (as outlined in Chapter 1),<sup>614</sup> according to which the text operates on three levels - (apparently) supernatural, psychological and ironic - with the irony directed at the naïve reader who takes the Gothic conventions at face value, rather than interpreting them symbolically (and, further, at the narrator, who becomes a convert to "Gothic" superstitions, and at the conventions themselves, through the burlesque discourse of the 'Mad Trist').<sup>615</sup> It may further be suggested that the marked "Gothicity" of the tale serves to emphasise its character as art-product, as an object that has been constructed in the medium of language; 'Usher' thus comes to signify itself as a piece of writing.

The self-conscious literarity of this tale deserves, in fact, closer attention; it is not simply a question of generic references, but of a pronounced metatextual element observable across the narrative.

'Usher' draws attention to its own textuality in various ways. First, as shown above,<sup>616</sup> it includes a series of sub-texts, the naming or quoting of which serves to emphasise the similarly written, made quality

of the main text. Second, Usher repeatedly engages in relations, of various kinds, with written texts. His books 'for years, had formed no small part of the mental existence of the invalid' (2); to this extent, Usher emerges as textually determined. Apart from his reading, he is represented as listening to a read-aloud text, the 'Mad Trist', and as producing oral texts ('rhymed verbal improvisations' (18)), one of which ('The Haunted Palace') the narrator transcribes and thus converts into a written text. In addition, the whole narrative is, in a sense, determined - here as in 'The Purloined Letter'<sup>617</sup> - by another written text, that is, Usher's letter to the narrator (2) (the materiality of which is underscored by the latter's reference to its 'MS.' (ibid.), that is, manuscript, or writing). Third, the narrator is, conversely, presented in the various interactions with Usher as reader of the letter, co-reader of 'our books' (20), reader-out of the 'Mad Trist', and, in the case of 'The Haunted Palace', both listener and scribe. Reading and writing are, then, repeatedly signified across the text; this characteristic of 'Usher' should alert the reader to the need to confront the narrative itself as a material, produced object, that has to be appropriated through a parallel act of productive interpretation. At the same time, the text's signification of its own textuality may be taken as a further deterrent to superficial and supernatural readings.

This hyper-visible literarity of the text is also evident on the stylistic level. 'Usher' - here resembling 'The Masque of the Red Death', whose self-consciously "poetic" writing has been considered above<sup>618</sup> - is written in a markedly "literary", "artificial" style, which in itself serves further to denaturalise the surface narrative. This style has

been variously received by critics; opinions range from the unqualified praise of James Russell Lowell ('Edgar Allan Poe', 1845),<sup>619</sup> who refers to the 'serene and somber beauty' of the tale, as an example of Poe's 'highly finished, graceful and truly classical writing',<sup>620</sup> to the outright condemnation of Yvor Winters ('Edgar Allan Poe: A Crisis in the History of American Obscurantism', 1937), whose examples of Poe's general 'weakness of detail'<sup>621</sup> and 'exceptionally bad' practice<sup>622</sup> include the first sentence of the fortieth paragraph of 'Usher'.<sup>623</sup> Rather than seeking for universal, normative models of "fine writing", materialist criticism may set itself the task of examining the function of a particular style in context. In the writing of 'Usher', what requires stressing is the marked element of artifice, and its consequent distance from anything resembling the "plain Anglo-Saxon style".

The text contains a remarkable number of polysyllables of Romance or Greek origin. To take an example at random, (15) offers, in ten lines, nineteen such polysyllabic, non-Anglo-Saxon words (excluding determiners, prepositions, etc.): 'ensuing', 'unmentioned', 'period', 'endeavors', 'alleviate', 'melancholy', 'improvisations', 'intimacy', 'admitted', 'unreservedly', 'recesses', 'futility', 'inherent', 'positive', 'quality', 'physical', 'universe', 'unceasing', 'radiation'. Of these, ten are nouns (all of them, in context, abstract or, like 'improvisations', unvisualisable); three are verbs (one active, one passive, one in the infinitive); five are adjectives (including two present participles used adjectivally); and one is an adverb. There is, then, a marked preponderance among the polysyllables of the abstract noun and the adjective, at the expense of the concrete noun and the verb (the paragraph as a whole contains six active verbs, of which two have an abstract

or unvisualisable subject ('intimacy admitted'; 'darkness ... poured')), Lexically, then, the writing of 'Usher' - of which this paragraph is a representative instance - could scarcely be further from the empirical and the immediate. Syntactically, too, the text tends to privilege the long, complex sentence, characterised by parallel subordinate clauses and parentheses, and lengthened by the multiplication of adjectives or abstract nouns; instances are provided by (again in (15)), the sentence: 'And thus ... radiation of gloom.' (which contains two long subordinate clauses), or (in (16)) the sentence: 'From the paintings ... written words.' (which includes five subordinate clauses and one parenthesis). The effect of this kind of writing is to constitute the text of 'Usher' as something "literary" in the extreme; Poe's narrator, certainly, here stands at the opposite pole to Huck Finn! Rather than reproducing the "speaking voice", the text soaks the reader in polysyllables - thus, incidentally, producing an effect of oppression, of "heaviness", which reinforces the element of claustrophobia in the narrative. The discourse of 'Usher' signifies itself, then, as, quite visibly, the product of artifice; here once again, the text openly flaunts its own textuality, removing its language so far from that of 'natural speech' as definitively to denaturalise itself. The effect of this, however, is not, pace Derrida, to remove the text from any signifying relation to structures outside itself, or to obviate any kind of historical or hermeneutic reading (the theoretical debates involved here have been examined at the beginning of this study);<sup>624</sup> but, rather, to make it clear to the alert reader that whatever the text signifies is not to be identified with the surface narrative, which is, in itself, a fiction, something put together out of pre-existing linguistic and literary materials.

At this point, certain general considerations may be advanced in relation to the textual construction of art in 'Usher' - through the signification in the narrative of the artist, the artwork, and the production and consumption of art, and also through the various meta-literary and metatextual references. It may be concluded that the text offers a whole series of diverse perspectives on art which cannot legitimately be reduced to a single or unitary "view". In 'Usher', the artist is both estranged from social "normality", and capable of sadistic manipulation of the other; art is both expression and communication, therapy and domination; the artwork is both plurisignificative and internally ruptured; it can be received in passive contemplation, or appropriated by active interpretation. It may be concluded that the social and psychological functions of art are not predetermined in some absolute way, but dependent on context - on the conscious and unconscious motivations of the artist, and on the mode of appropriation of the consumer. The false homogeneity of art is thus exploded in the text; any attempts to derive a transcendent or idealist model of art from 'Usher' may be considered to be purely ideological. Nonetheless, it does not follow that the tale presents an entirely negative model of art, or that it signifies the activities that constitute "high culture" as involving only domination and destruction.

The sadistic and disintegrative elements in Usher's aesthetic practice are undeniable. Nonetheless, the text also presents art in a more positive light than, say, 'The Assignment', 'The Oval Portrait', or 'Ligeia'. Unlike the artists of those tales, Usher is an aesthetic innovator; whereas the painter of 'The Oval Portrait' works within the established conventions of portraiture, and the interior designers of



'Ligeia' and 'The Assignation' are essentially arrangers and synthesisers, Usher starts out from existing tendencies (as represented by Weber and Fuseli) in order to supersede them.<sup>625</sup> If he resembles any of Poe's protagonists in his artistic practice, it is Prince Prospero, who combines various existing arts into a new kind of multi-media spectacle.<sup>626</sup> As aesthetic innovator in both music and painting, Usher represents the mutation of the Romantic into the Symbolist; and, more generally, human productivity, the capacity to make qualitatively new objects, and thus transform external reality. At the same time, art is repeatedly signified in the tale as a process, a form of material production; Usher is seen at work, on his paintings and his musical and poetic improvisations, and the text as a whole affirms its own status as construct, through its intertextual and metatextual references and its self-conscious use of linguistic artifice. Poe's tale, then, may be read as signifying art as a mode of mental and material labour, an instance of the human transformative capacity. - without (if read from a materialist perspective) promoting the illusion of aesthetic "unity".

#### vi. The Fissure in the Wall

Nonetheless - in spite of the textual evidence advanced above - traditional criticism has, all too frequently, persisted in reading 'Usher' as a textbook instance of "unity", on the levels of both signified and signifier. Thus, on the plane of textual organisation, Abel ('A Key to the House of Usher', 1949) argues that the text 'achieves unity' through 'parallel symbolic suggestion', and so 'produces its intended totality of effect';<sup>627</sup> and Vincent Buranelli (Edgar Allan Poe, 1961) claims that Poe here 'achieves ... as nowhere else' the 'unity of effect' postulated in his theory.<sup>628</sup> Walker, too ('The "Legitimate Sources"

of Terror', 1966), in spite of the largely material, historical character of his analysis, concludes by viewing the tale as exemplary of 'Poe's concept of a unified work of art'.<sup>629</sup> It is assumed, in other words, that the text is a coherent, homogeneous whole, with every detail contributing to one predetermined "effect". On the semantic plane, the concept of "unity" has been used to justify various idealist and mystical readings. Thus Mabbott (1978), taking a "merveilleux"-cum-mystical line, claims: 'The House of Usher has only one soul which has its abode in the mansion and in the members of the family.... Hence, if one dies, all must perish together.'<sup>630</sup> Maurice Beebe ('The Universe of Roderick Usher', 1956), in a curious rationalisation of male sadism, argues that Usher buries Madeline alive as part of a project of 'return to oneness',<sup>631</sup> and that the collapse of the House is, similarly, a 'return to the original unity'.<sup>632</sup> Gerhard Hoffmann ('Space and Symbol in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe', 1971) concludes, in much the same terms, that 'at the end matter and spirit have returned into the totality of being'.<sup>633</sup> The most influential of all such readings is that of Wilbur, in 'The House of Poe' (1959), as discussed above in Chapter 1;<sup>634</sup> his argument is that the final collapse signifies Usher's translation into a unitary realm of 'pure spirituality': 'When the House of Usher disintegrates or dematerializes at the close of the story, it does so because Roderick Usher has become all soul.'<sup>635</sup> The centrality of the notion of "unity" to all these readings is evident from the lexis employed ('one soul', 'oneness', 'totality of being', 'all soul').

Such idealist readings in terms of "unity" may be countered, on both levels. On the syntactic level, it has already been shown that the

continuity of the text is ruptured through the insertion of sub-texts, while its linearity is contested through the use of mises en abyme. It thus becomes more difficult to present it as a homogeneous continuum. A materialist reading cannot, of course, deny the multiplicity of correspondences set up within the text, or the intricacy of the relations of doubling. Yet the emphasis on doubling and splitting (from the mirror-image to the fissure) itself semantically tends against the constitution of "unity". As for the themes of the text, the reading in terms of "return to unity" leans heavily on Poe's Eureka;<sup>636</sup> yet, as has been shown above,<sup>637</sup> the model of the universe constructed in that text is, in practice, not so much unitary as dialectical. Besides, to read 'Usher' in terms of "oneness" or "wholeness" is to obscure the elements of differentiation in the text between male and female, "normal" and "abnormal", as well as the emphasis on contradiction and disintegration in its constitution of the subject. The element of fear, too, tends to disappear, as in Wilbur's conclusion that 'Usher' is 'not really a horror story', but a 'triumphant' idealist manifesto<sup>638</sup> (whereas materialist criticism, rather than denying the textual presence of fear, seeks to explain the uncanny element by returning it to its determinants). Further, as shown above,<sup>639</sup> it seems impossible to admit any model of art deriving from the text other than one based on heterogeneity. Above all, idealist readings tend to underplay and homogenise the role of the narrator, presenting his version of events as perception of the (supernatural or mystical) "truth" and thus eliding his problematic status as representative of "normality".

Against such readings, it may be counter-argued that the tale quite visibly signifies, not a mythical reconstitution of the subject, but its

deconstitution. The text openly presents Usher as a fissured subject, doubled by the fissured House; and male-female relations are exposed as being structured in terms of repression and contradiction. 'Usher' further signifies the possibility of subversion of cultural norms through the emergence of active female sexuality and the objective manifestation of androgyny; thus it undermines the notions of a homogeneous, unproblematic subject and of a similarly "natural", "unified" socio-cultural order. At the same time, the text ruptures the parallel notion of the homogeneous artwork. It remains true that the tale is highly-worked and rigorously constructed; that, in the terms of the 1842 Hawthorne review: 'Every word tells, and there is not a word which does not tell.' (H XI, 112). Every detail tells, but the signifieds that the text communicates are multiple and contradictory, derived as they are from the structures of a culture that is itself based on contradiction.

'Usher' is, perhaps, above all important for its signification, at one and the same time, of the workings of mental illness, and its marginalisation as "other" by a narrator who refuses to admit his own continuity with the "abnormal"; the tale corresponds to that historical moment identified by Foucault<sup>640</sup> in which the mental sufferer is devalued on "moral" grounds. Through its structures of doubling, however, the text in practice undermines the antithesis between "normal" and "abnormal" - a process that is also at work, as has been shown, in 'The Man of the Crowd', 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether', and 'The Purloined Letter' (tales which, respectively, subvert the dividing-lines between respectable and criminal, sane and insane, law and conspiracy). Usher's collapse is also the narrator's, even if the latter refuses to recognise the ties that bind them; given the narrator's "representative"

status, the text thus exposes the fissure in the wall, the disintegrative potential latent in the subject under patriarchy. The building on the edge of collapse<sup>641</sup> is not only Usher's mind, but the character-structure of an entire culture; the fall of the House of Usher is also the fall of the autonomous subject.

## CONCLUSION

It has been shown over the above chapters how Poe's tales (and other writings), in spite of the traditional reading in terms of "unity", in practice lend themselves to diverse and multiple interpretations; and how the narratives are structured on the basis, not of an unproblematic totality, but of reduplication and contradiction. The illusion of the autonomous ego is undermined; subjectivity is shown to be constituted through repression, and continually liable to fragmentation, self-destruction, splitting, doubling and multiplication. The various metonyms and metaphors offered by the texts as mythical images of the "full" subject - the detective, the mesmerist, the artist, the artwork, the interior - are similarly problematic constructs, riven by contradiction. Female sexuality emerges, in tale after tale, from the confines of repression, to affirm itself as a subversive threat to male power; while the culturally-produced antitheses between "normal" and "abnormal", "sane" and "insane", "respectable" and "criminal" are systematically called in question.

The above cluster of interpretations can be considered sufficient evidence for the continuing usefulness and value of Poe's texts in the contemporary world (and also for the theoretical notion, advanced at the beginning of this study, of the overdetermined text).<sup>1</sup> It will, however, be worthwhile at this point to examine certain objections and reservations that critics have raised in relation to Poe's work.

Hostile or lukewarm critics of the traditional school have frequently denounced Poe's writings on normative grounds, whether formal or

ideological. F. R. Leavis' one-line dismissal of Poe's 'melodramatic intensities' (in The Great Tradition (1948)) has already been noted;<sup>2</sup> Yvor Winters ('Edgar Allan Poe: A Crisis in the History of American Obscurantism', 1937), whose strictures on the aesthetic theories<sup>3</sup> and the style of 'Usher'<sup>4</sup> have also been mentioned above, argues that, in general, Poe is a 'bad writer',<sup>5</sup> whose work is characterised by the rejection of 'that vast and solid region ... in which human experience is understood in moral terms';<sup>6</sup> and T.S. Eliot ('From Poe to Valéry', 1949), while more sympathetic to Poe than Leavis or Winters, nonetheless accuses his writings of displaying an 'immature mind playing with ideas'.<sup>7</sup> The ideologically normative character of these criticisms is evident: to reject 'melodrama' (or non-realism) out of hand implies an automatic privileging of realism, and therefore of an art which, in some hands at least, can tend simply to naturalise the surface of things; the notion of 'maturity' implies the kind of unproblematic, linear model of mental ontogenesis whose suppositions are undermined by the non-linear model of Freud's Three Essays;<sup>8</sup> while Winters' notion of the 'moral' is little more than the sum of existing dominant ideologies, as is clear enough from the class and gender prejudice implied in his notorious dismissal of Poe's work as 'an art to delight the soul of a servant girl', unsuitable for 'mature men (sic)'.<sup>9</sup>

From a totally different direction, one may at least hypothesise another kind of objection to Poe's work, coming from the Marxist critical tradition; the virtually total neglect of Poe by historical materialism (Benjamin, Harap and Macherey apart)<sup>10</sup> may derive from, on the one hand, dislike of Poe's own, undeniably conservative opinions (e.g. on democracy,<sup>11</sup> slavery<sup>12</sup> or gender roles),<sup>13</sup> and on the other, suspicion of the non-

realist, Gothic tradition of fiction, seen as estranged from social realities.<sup>14</sup> On the first point, it has been established above, in Chapter 1, that for any but the most vulgar "party-card" Marxism, the cultural value of a writer's work is not necessarily determined by her/his conscious ideology; and, further, that a writer's initial ideological project may be subverted in the letter of the text<sup>15</sup> (the readings here offered of 'Tarr and Fether' and 'The Purloined Letter' are cases in point). On the second point, it may be argued that - as Punter shows in The Literature of Terror (1980)<sup>16</sup> - Gothic texts, if symbolically read, can be viewed as giving displaced expression to fears and anxieties that pertain, quite unequivocally, to the socio-cultural reality from which they may appear to promise unthinking escape (this type of reading has here been applied, in detail, to texts like 'Ligeia' and 'Usher').

Reservations have also been expressed by basically sympathetic critics, over what they see as elements of escapism and repetition in Poe's oeuvre. The first charge may be represented by Barbara Lanati ('Una Ligeia, cento Ligeie', 1978), who concludes her examination of the tales' presentation of madness with the judgment that, for all their psychological penetration, they are in the end escapist. The characters, she argues, are always "other" by virtue of their madness,<sup>17</sup> while the settings tend to be distant in place and time, and therefore remote from the reader's world;<sup>18</sup> the result is that a "reassurance effect" is produced, as 'il racconto si descontestualizza rispetto alla realtà familiare al lettore' ('the tale places itself outside the context of the reader's familiar reality').<sup>19</sup> On the first point, the objection applies only to the "Gothic", and not the urban, "modern" pole of Poe's



fiction; and in any case, the cultural references (to Weber and Fuseli in 'Usher', to Radcliffe in 'The Oval Portrait', to Hugo in 'The Masque of the Red Death') and the use of contemporaneous medical theories (in 'Berenice' and 'Usher') serve, in spite of appearances to the contrary, to anchor most of the Gothic tales in the mid-nineteenth-century universe. As for the notion that the protagonists' madness or strangeness encourages the reader not to connect the tales to his/her own world, it has been shown above that in 'The Man of the Crowd' and 'Usher' the "normal" narrator (who is, by that token, representative of the reader) objectively exposes his own continuity with the "abnormal" other. Lanati admits that her objection is only valid in the case of a naïve reading: 'Una lettura disattenta nei confronti della scrittura ... garantisce la solubilità del discorso' ('A reading which is inattentive in its encounters with the writing ... guarantees the acceptability of the discourse').<sup>20</sup> This is no doubt true, but the naïve, reassuring reading is not the only one permitted by the texts; and it is the function of materialist criticism to encourage, precisely, the kind of attentive reading that refuses to stop at the textual surface, or to take the narrators as reliable.

The question of repetition has been taken up by several critics. Thus, recently, Alberto Avendaño, introducing his Galician translation of some of the tales ('Introducción' to Poe, O Escarabello de Ouro e outros contos, 1985)<sup>21</sup> has concluded: 'Poe é un reincidente, un teimoso repetidor da mesma impresión, da mesma imaxe' ('Poe is a recidivist, an obstinate repeater of the same impression, the same image').<sup>22</sup> To this charge of repetition on the level of surface narrative may be added that of repetition on the level of underlying structure; this

is particularly true of psychological readings. Thus Lanati finds in the tales a repeated symbolic representation of the subject's progress into schizophrenia: 'Ne emergono . . . , sul piano di un'analisi macrostrutturale della produzione, mille favole, un solo discours' ('There emerge from [the tales], on the level of a macrostructural analysis of [Poe's] production, a thousand fables - but only one discours').<sup>23</sup> Similarly, H  l  ne Cixous ('Poe re-lu', 1972) bases her analysis on the notion of a repeated latent structure (the return of woman) across a group of tales;<sup>24</sup> while Marie Bonaparte (Edgar Poe, 1933) actually interrupts her account of 'Morella' to apologise for the repetitive character of her interpretations: 'I must crave the reader's indulgence for the monotony of my theme. Time and again we find the same manifest situation, that of some ideal woman who sickens and dies . . . Always and forever it is the same latent theme: that of Elizabeth Arnold's last agony and death'.<sup>25</sup> The repetitive element in Bonaparte's psychobiographical reading is itself repeated in the more "collectively" oriented analyses of Lanati and Cixous; the Poe canon has thus repeatedly been seen as repeating the same basic structure (however that is defined) in different disguises. It is clear enough that the compulsion to repeat is at work within individual tales, as has been shown for texts as diverse as 'The Man of the Crowd', 'The Purloined Letter' and 'Ligeia'. As for repetition between tales, this element is, in fact, rather more marked on the level of underlying structure than that of surface narrative. To take the latter level first, many of the tales can, certainly, be grouped into clusters of three or more texts exhibiting visible parallels with each other - the detective and mesmeric triads, the three "urban murder tales", the five tales of the active woman. Nonetheless, it has been shown above how each of the individual tales within these groups is, when examined in detail,

significantly different from the others (allowing for the "first-version" relations of 'Morella' to 'Ligeia', and 'Berenice' to 'Usher').<sup>26</sup> As for the repetition of latent themes, this is undeniable; but, as Bonaparte stresses, it is not without its psychological signification: 'the monotonous repetition of the same theme ... enables us to feel how crushingly Poe's soul, his life and work, were dominated by the compulsion to repetition'.<sup>27</sup> If the emphasis is shifted from the individual writer to the subject as collectively determined entity, Bonaparte's notion of the dominance of the compulsion to repeat may be grounded in cultural factors. It is true that the latent content of many of Poe's tales includes, repeatedly, the return of active female desire and the male fear of "feminisation"; but this element of textual repetition may be seen as corresponding to the cultural insistence of gender stereotyping (itself a form of repetition), a structure which obstinately reaffirms itself in the teeth of all attempts at contesting it. Similarly, the repeated element of self-destruction in the tales may be read in the context of the constant, ineluctable reinforcement of the death-drive in the subject by the sadistic structures of the patriarchal order.<sup>28</sup> If repetition is a repeated signified of Poe's work, the responsibility may, to some extent, be laid at the door of the stereotyping pressures of an oppressive and repressive culture.

The notion of repetition as a property both of Poe's texts and of the unconscious leads to a more general proposition: that the oeuvre may be read as (above all) providing a "map" of the vicissitudes of the subject under patriarchy. Fredric Jameson ('Postmodernism', 1984) has recently argued - against deconstructionist and post-structuralist tendencies -

in favour of a materialist 'aesthetic of cognitive mapping', which would permit the reader of a text to use it to orientate her/himself in the social universe that he/she inhabits.<sup>29</sup> Jameson's project refers to aesthetic production, rather than criticism; nonetheless, it can be extended to the reading of Poe's work. Given that Western culture remains, in its basic structure, essentially patriarchal, this body of texts from the 1830s and 1840s can today be appropriated and read as charting the fortunes of subjectivity under the Law of the Father (subject to the specific historical conditions of mid-nineteenth-century capitalism, which are themselves scarcely irrelevant to the present moment). The writings of Poe signify the disintegrative potential in the subject, the pull towards madness and exile from culture; dramatise the disturbing insistence of female sexuality, emerging from the prison-house of repression; and expose the illusory coherence of the "normal" subject as deceptive and specious. The texts analysed in this study constitute a working map of subjectivity under that still-present patriarchal law - in that cultural universe where the "I", continually under threat of collapse, may legitimately declare with Baudelaire: 'J'habite pour toujours un bâtiment qui va crouler'.<sup>30</sup>

THE END.

PRELIMINARY TO THE NOTES

The endnotes that follow are arranged by chapter-part, that is, the sequence of numbering begins afresh with each part (but not section). This system has been adopted in view of the number of notes involved, so as to avoid an excessive inflation in note numbers.

Both in the notes and the bibliography, the titles of periodicals are abbreviated in accordance with the list set out below. The abbreviations derive from the 'Master List of Periodicals in Acronym Order', published in the 1984 MLA International Bibliography of Books and Articles on the Modern Languages and Literatures (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1985), with one exception (NLR, i.e. the generally recognised acronym for New Left Review, a journal not included in the MLA list). All other periodicals cited are listed under their full titles. The abbreviations used are as follows:

<u>AL</u>	<u>American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism and Bibliography</u>
<u>ATQ</u>	<u>American Transcendental Quarterly: A Journal of New England Writers</u>
<u>CE</u>	<u>College English</u>
<u>CL</u>	<u>Comparative Literature</u>
<u>Colóquio</u>	<u>Colóquio/Letras (Lisbon)</u>
<u>Critique</u>	<u>Critique: Revue Générale des Publications Françaises et Étrangères</u>
<u>DeltaES</u>	<u>Delta: Revue du Centre d'Études et de Recherche sur les Écrivains du Sud aux États-Unis (Montpellier)</u>
<u>EA</u>	<u>Études Anglaises: Grande-Bretagne, États-Unis</u>
<u>ES</u>	<u>English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature</u>
<u>Expl</u>	<u>Explicator</u>
<u>HLQ</u>	<u>Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilization</u>
<u>HudR</u>	<u>The Hudson Review</u>
<u>JAmS</u>	<u>Journal of American Studies</u>
<u>KR</u>	<u>The Kenyon Review</u>

<u>MLN</u>	<u>Modern Language Notes</u>
<u>MLR</u>	<u>Modern Language Review</u>
<u>NCF</u>	<u>Nineteenth-Century Fiction</u>
<u>NLR</u>	<u>New Left Review</u>
<u>NYRB</u>	<u>The New York Review of Books</u>
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</u>
<u>PoeS</u>	<u>Poe Studies (Poe Newsletter up to Volume III, No. 2).</u>
<u>Poétique</u>	<u>Poétique: Revue de Théorie et d'Analyse Littéraires</u>
<u>RLC</u>	<u>Revue de Littérature Comparée</u>
<u>SR</u>	<u>Sewanee Review</u>
<u>SSF</u>	<u>Studies in Short Fiction</u>
<u>TM</u>	<u>Temps Modernes</u>
<u>TSE</u>	<u>Tulane Studies in English</u>
<u>TSLL</u>	<u>Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities</u>
<u>UTQ</u>	<u>University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities</u>
<u>YFS</u>	<u>Yale French Studies</u>
<u>ZAA</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik (Leipzig)</u>

NOTES

CHAPTER 1, PART 1

- 1 cf. p. 33 below.
- 2 Pierre Macherey, Pour une théorie de la production littéraire (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1966), trans. G. Wall as A Theory of Literary Production (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) (N.B.: references are to the translation).
- 3 Macherey, op. cit., p. 100.
- 4 Lucien Goldman, Marxisme et sciences humaines (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).
- 5 Goldman, op. cit., pp. 18-19.
- 6 see Macherey, op. cit., pp. 75-77.
- 7 Goldman, op. cit., p. 61.
- 8 cf. Macherey, op. cit., p. 80.
- 9 Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology (London: NLB, 1976).
- 10 Roland Barthes, S/Z (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970, rpt. (Collection Points) 1976).
- 11 Eagleton, op. cit., p. 167; cf. Macherey, loc. cit.
- 12 Barthes, op. cit., p. 14.
- 13 ibid., p. 11.
- 14 ibid., p. 12.
- 15 Jacques Derrida, 'Le facteur de la vérité', Poétique, 21 (1975), 96-147.
- 16 Jacques Lacan, 'Le séminaire sur "La Lettre volée"' (1956), rpt. in Écrits I (Paris: Éditions du Seuil (Collection Points), 1970), pp. 19-53; cf. pp. 49-50 below.
- 17 Derrida, op. cit., p. 138.
- 18 ibid., p. 104.
- 19 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', NLR, 146 (July/August 1984), 53-92.
- 20 Jameson, op. cit., p. 62.
- 21 Derrida, op. cit., p. 114.
- 22 Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, p. 41.
- 23 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (written 1940, published posthumously 1950),



- in Illuminations, trans. H. Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970, rpt. London: Collins (Fontana), 1973), pp. 255-66.
- 24 Benjamin, op. cit., p. 259; cf. Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: Verso, 1981), p. 113.
- 25 Frederick Engels, letter to Margaret Harkness (April 1888), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Literature and Art, trans. various (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), pp. 89-92.
- 26 Engels, op. cit., p. 92.
- 27 see Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, pp. 49-50, 191-94.
- 28 Raymond Williams, 'Marxism, Structuralism and Literary Analysis', NLR, 129 (September/October 1981), 51-66.
- 29 Williams, op. cit., p. 63.
- 30 cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, passim.
- 31 cf. the readings of G. R. Thompson, Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), as discussed below (Chapter 1, Part 3, pp. 43-44).
- 32 Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de linguistique générale (1916), trans. W. Baskin as Course in General Linguistics, intr. Jonathan Culler (London: Collins (Fontana), 1974) (N.B.: references are to the translation).
- 33 see Saussure, op. cit., pp. 65-70, 122-27; Culler, 'Introduction' to Saussure, op. cit., p. xx.
- 34 Saussure, op. cit., p. 69.
- 35 op. cit., p. 66.
- 36 V. N. Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (1930), trans. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973).
- 37 Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (London: O.U.P., 1977).
- 38 see Vološinov, op. cit., pp. 10-11; Williams, op. cit., pp. 35-41.
- 39 see Williams, op. cit., pp. 59-60, 70-71.
- 40 Sigmund Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901), (Pelican Freud Library V) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

N.B.: All references to the works of Freud are, where possible, to the Pelican Freud Library (PFL), trans. various, ed. James Strachey et al., 14 vols. to date (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973 —); the PFL text is the same (with some corrections) as that of The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (SE), trans. various,

ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74). Where a text by Freud is not available in PFL, reference is made to SE.

- 41 see Freud, op. cit., pp. 94-152.
- 42 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 232-33, 239-42, 279 and 291.
- 43 Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Collins (Fontana), 1976).
- 44 cf. Williams, Marxism and Literature, pp. 27-28; Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, p. 61.
- 45 cf. Vološinov, op. cit., p. 82.
- 46 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, passim.
- 47 Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics' (1958), rpt. in Richard and Fernande De George, eds., The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co. (Anchor Books), 1972), pp. 85-122.
- 48 see Vološinov, op. cit., pp. 125-59; cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 763-68.
- 49 see Barthes, S/Z, passim; and cf. pp. 5-6 above.
- 50 Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844) (rpt. in Marx, Early Writings, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton, intr. Lucio Colletti (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 280-400.
- 51 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology: Part One (1846), trans. and ed. C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970; 2nd edn., 1974).
- 52 Marx, op. cit., p. 357.
- 53 Marx and Engels, op. cit., p. 47.
- 54 Ronald Aronson, 'Historical Materialism, Answer to Marxism's Crisis', NLR, 152 (July/August 1985), 74-94.
- 55 Aronson, op. cit., p. 75.
- 56 ibid., p. 88.
- 57 ibid., p. 89.
- 58 Engels, letter to Joseph Bloch (21-22 September 1890), in Marx and Engels, On Literature and Art, p. 57.
- 59 Engels, loc. cit.
- 60 Williams, Keywords, p. 119.
- 61 see Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', passim;

- cf. Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, pp. 43-78.
- 62 Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach' (1845), in Early Writings, pp. 421-23.
- 63 Marx, op. cit., p. 423.
- 64 Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics (1923), trans. R. Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971); see pp. 1-26, 46-82.
- 65 see, e.g., Eagleton, op. cit., pp. 83-90.
- 66 Lukács, op. cit., p. 3; and see *ibid.*, pp. 110-49.
- 67 *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 68 Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man (1964; rpt. London: Sphere, 1972).
- 69 Marcuse, op. cit., pp. 93-95.
- 70 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 333-37.
- 71 cf. Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, pp. 42-52.
- 72 Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1929-35), trans. and ed. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).
- 73 see Gramsci, op. cit., p. 12.
- 74 see Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, pp. 44-53.
- 75 Engels, letter to Walter Borgius (25 January 1894) in Marx and Engels, On Literature and Art, p. 58.
- 76 Engels, loc. cit.
- 77 Engels, letter to Bloch (1890), in Marx and Engels, op. cit., p.57.
- 78 Williams, Keywords, p. 129.
- 79 see Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 47; cf. Williams, Keywords, p. 128 and Marxism and Literature, p. 59.
- 80 cf. Gramsci, op. cit., p. 377.
- 81 Williams, 'Marxism, Structuralism and Literary Analysis', p. 63.
- 82 Engels, letter to Franz Mehring (14 July 1893), in On Literature and Art, pp. 64-69.
- 83 Engels, op. cit., p. 65.
- 84 *ibid.*
- 85 cf. Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, pp. 90-91.

- 86 see Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, pp. 132-33, 190-99.
- 87 *ibid.*, p. 133
- 88 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 343-47.
- 89 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, passim.
- 90 see Lucio Colletti, 'Introduction' to Marx, Early Writings, p. 49.
- 91 Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845), trans. Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Moscow, intr. Eric Hobsbawm (St Albans: Granada (Panther), 1969).
- 92 Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
- 93 Marshall Berman, All That Is Solid Melts Into Air (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982, rpt. London: Verso, 1983).
- 94 Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- 95 cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, pp. 152-54, 176-81 and passim.
- 96 see Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, pp. 322-34.
- 97 *ibid.*, p. 324.
- 98 *ibid.*, p. 328.
- 99 Williams, Keywords, p. 31.
- 100 Colletti, 'Introduction' to Marx, Early Writings, p. 49.
- 101 Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Volume One) (1867), trans. B. Fowkes, intr. Ernest Mandel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).
- 102 Marx, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-244.
- 103 *ibid.*, p. 209.
- 104 *ibid.*, p. 165.
- 105 *ibid.*, p. 164.
- 106 *ibid.*, p. 165.
- 107 *ibid.*, pp. 167-68.
- 108 Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), in On Sexuality (Pelican Freud Library VII) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 39-169.
- 109 Freud, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-68.
- 110 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 601-602.

- 111 cf. pp. 4-8 above.
- 112 see Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, p. 100; Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, pp. 167-68.
- 113 Berman, All That Is Solid, pp. 15-36.
- 114 *ibid.*, p. 13.
- 115 Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism (1935-39), trans. H. Zohn and Q. Hoare (London: NLB, 1973).
- 116 see Benjamin, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-20.
- 117 *ibid.*, p. 116.
- 118 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 494-97.
- 119 see Benjamin, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-69.
- 120 see Benjamin, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-54; 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in Illuminations, pp. 219-53; 'A Small History of Photography' (1931) in One-way Street and Other Writings, trans. E. Jephcott and K. Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 240-57.
- 121 Benjamin, 'A Small History of Photography', p. 250.
- 122 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, pp. 459-60 and 469-71.
- 123 cf. Chapter 1, Part 3, passim.
- 124 cf. Williams, Keywords, pp. 133-36.
- 125 cf. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, pp. 111-49.
- 126 Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Post-Modernism', NLR, 152 (July/August 1985), 60-73.
- 127 Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
- 128 Jacques Lacan, 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je' (1949), rpt. in Écrits 1, pp. 89-97.
- 129 Lacan, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.
- 130 *ibid.*, p. 94.
- 131 *ibid.*, p. 96.
- 132 J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), trans. D. Nicholson-Smith as The Language of Psycho-Analysis (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973) (N.B.: references are to the translation).
- 133 Laplanche and Pontalis, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

- 134 cf. Márcio Peter de Souza Leite and Oscar Cesarotto, Jacques Lacan (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1985), p. 62.
- 135 Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse' (1953), rpt. in Écrits 1, pp. 111-208.
- 136 Lacan, op. cit., p. 134.
- 137 Ibid., p. 155.
- 138 Lacan, 'L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud' (1957), rpt. in Écrits 1, pp. 249-89.
- 139 Lacan, op. cit., p. 284.
- 140 Ibid.
- 141 Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (1930), in Civilization, Society and Religion (Pelican Freud Library XII) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 251-340.
- 142 Freud, op. cit., p. 253.
- 143 Ibid., p. 254.
- 144 Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 46.
- 145 Ibid., p. 47.
- 146 see Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, pp. 11-15.
- 147 cf. pp. 9-11 above.
- 148 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, pp. 469-72.
- 149 cf. p. 21 above.
- 150 see Barthes, S/Z, pp. 205-206.
- 151 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (1817) (London: Dent (Everyman's Library), 1906; new edn., ed. George Watson, 1956).
- 152 Coleridge, op. cit., pp. 173-74.
- 153 Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, p. 92.
- 154 Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, p. 167.
- 155 Ibid., p. 168.
- 156 Ibid., p. 169.
- 157 Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (London: Allen Lane, 1974, rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).
- 158 Hanna Segal, Klein (Fontana Modern Masters) (London: Collins, 1979).

- 159 see note 133 above.
- 160 see Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole', pp. 145-47.
- 161 see *ibid.*, pp. 157-58.
- 162 cf. Leite and Cesarotto, Jacques Lacan, pp. 10, 41-42.
- 163 see Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, pp. xv-xxiii.
- 164 Freud, Three Essays, p. 149n.
- 165 see Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, pp. 285-87.
- 166 Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. xv.
- 167 see *ibid.*, pp. 153-55.
- 168 see Wilhelm Reich, 'Preface' to Third Edition (1942) of The Mass Psychology of Fascism (1933), trans. V. R. Carfagno (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 13-15.
- 169 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 217-22.
- 170 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 717-38.
- 171 see Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) (Pelican Freud Library IV) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976); 'The Unconscious' (1915), in On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis (Pelican Freud Library XI) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 167-210.
- 172 Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1917) (Pelican Freud Library I) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 132.
- 173 see Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, pp. 745-83.
- 174 see Freud, The Ego and the Id (1923), in On Metapsychology, pp. 350-401.
- 175 cf. Richard Wollheim, Freud (Fontana Modern Masters) (London: Collins, 1971), pp. 174-76.
- 176 Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 376.
- 177 Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, p. 413.
- 178 *ibid.*, p. 415.
- 179 see Freud, 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (1924), in On Sexuality, pp. 315-22.
- 180 Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 413.
- 181 *ibid.*, p. 403.
- 182 *ibid.*, p. 79.

- 183 see Freud, 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy ("Little Hans")' (1909), in Case Histories I (Pelican Freud Library VIII) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 169-305.
- 184 see Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 53-60, 109-31.
- 185 Freud, 'Female Sexuality' (1931), in On Sexuality, pp. 371-92.
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- 187 Freud, 'The Taboo of Virginity (Contributions to the Psychology of Love III)' (1918), in On Sexuality, pp. 265-83.
- 188 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 606-608 and 665-68.
- 189 Freud, 'Female Sexuality', p. 374.
- 190 Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis (The "Wolf Man")' (1918), in Case Histories II (Pelican Freud Library IX) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 233-366; cf. The Ego and The Id, pp. 372-73.
- 191 see Freud, "'Wolf Man'", pp. 342-43.
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- 97 *ibid.*, p. 52.
- 98 *ibid.*, p. 128.
- 99 cf. p. 160 above.
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- 146 Dickens, op. cit., pp. 376-77.
- 147 Dickens, 'Thoughts about People', in Sketches by Boz, pp. 215-19.
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- 150 Dickens, op. cit., pp. 215-16.
- 151 cf. p. 146 above.
- 152 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 316-17.
- 153 cf. ibid., p. 316.
- 154 cf. pp. 169-70 above.
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- 159 ibid.
- 160 ibid., p. 133.
- 161 ibid., p. 138.
- 162 ibid., p. 140.
- 163 ibid., p. 136.
- 164 ibid., p. 130.
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cf. pp. 152-54 above.
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- 173 cf. Chapter 1, Part 4, p. 54.
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- 176 cf. pp. 163-65 above.
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- 198 Dickens, 'Thoughts about People', pp. 215-16; cf. p. 173 above.
- 199 see Mazurek, 'Art, Ambiguity, and the Artist', p. 26.
- 200 see Kennedy, 'The Limits of Reason', p. 190.
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- 204 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 84-85.
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- 37 *ibid.*
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- 40 *ibid.*
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- 79 *ibid.*, p. 293.
- 80 Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 138.
- 81 *ibid.*
- 82 Segal, Klein (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 158), p. 20.
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- 95 I am informed by Dr Horst Engel, formerly of the Zoology Department of the Science Faculty of the University of Coimbra, that the notion of a death instinct does not contradict the models of contemporary biology. The Freudian model, which groups together erotic and self-preservative instincts under Eros, and aggressive and self-destructive instincts under Thanatos, accounts for the various instincts recognised by modern biological theory. It may be added that a suicidal tendency has been observed in whales; while the hypothesis of "immortal" tissue in protozoa, advanced by some biologists of Freud's time - and rejected by Freud himself (see Beyond the Pleasure Principle, pp. 318-19) - remains unproven.
- 96 cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, pp. 156-57.
- 97 see Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, pp. 281-94, 306-12.

- 98 see Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 359-61; cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, loc. cit.
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- 100 see *ibid.*, pp. 281-94.
- 101 *ibid.*, p. 291.
- 102 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 111-12.
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- 104 *ibid.*, p. 394.
- 105 Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, p. 80.
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- 107 Mannoni, Freud, p. 159.
- 108 cf. pp. 211-213, 215-16 above.
- 109 There are three texts of IP: A (Graham's Magazine, July 1845); B (The May-Flower for 1846, 1845); C (Works, 1850) (see M III, 1219; Mabbott uses the C text). For the variant in question, see M III, 1224n.
- 110 cf. pp. 294-96 below.
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126 For this term, see Tzvetan Todorov, Poétique (Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?, 2) (Paris: Éditions du Seuil (Collection Points), 1968), p. 67.

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128 Harap, 'Poe and Dostoevsky', p. 274.

129 Symons, The Tell-Tale Heart, p. 211.

130 cf. pp. 245-46 below.

131 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 350-54 and 363-66.

132 De Quincey, 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1827, 1839, 1854), in Collected Writings, XIII, 9-124.

133 see De Quincey, op. cit., pp. 24-35.

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137 see Mabbott (M III, 852n).

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142 cf. pp. 239-42 below.

143 cf. p. 208 above.

144 see Mabbott (M III, 1223n).

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147 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 369-70.

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- 159 cf. p. 241 above.
- 160 cf. pp. 227-28 above.
- 161 cf. pp. 222-24 above.
- 162 see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 26.
- 163 see Mabbott (M III, 847-49).
- 164 see note 27 above.
- 165 see note 28 above.
- 166 cf. pp. 210-11 above.
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- 171 *ibid.*, p. 1034.
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- 173 cf. p. 211 above.



- 174 cf. p. 215 above.
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- 181 Roberta Reeder, "'The Black Cat' as a Study in Repression', PoeS, 7, No. 1 (June 1974), 20-22.
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- 183 Reeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.
- 184 see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 218.
- 185 cf. p. 210 above.
- 186 see Allan Smith, 'The Psychological Context of Three Tales by Poe', p. 282.
- 187 *ibid.*, p. 280.
- 188 Benjamin Rush, Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia: Bradford and Innskeep, 1816), p. 386, quoted in Smith, *loc. cit.*
- 189 Elizabeth Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe - An American Imagination, p. 134 (quoting Isaac Ray, A Treatise on the Mental Jurisprudence of Insanity, 1838).
- 190 Vincent Buranelli, Edgar Allan Poe (see Chapter 2, note 173), p. 75.
- 191 cf. p. 216 above.
- 192 Todorov, Introduction à la littérature fantastique, p. 54.
- 193 see Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 135; Smith, 'Psychological Context', p. 280.
- 194 see Smith, *loc. cit.*
- 195 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 115-16.
- 196 Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 79-80.
- 197 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 76-87.
- 198 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Le Chat Noir' (1853; Nouvelles histoires

extraordinaires, 1857), in Poe, Oeuvres en prose, pp. 290-300.

- 199 Poe, trans, Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 290 ('Familier' does not mean 'familial' in French, but the connotation is still present, through etymology and semantic association; the familial is that which is familiar, on a day-to-day basis, for most people).
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- 201 cf. *ibid.* and Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 755-56.
- 202 Reeder, "'The Black Cat'", p. 20.
- 203 cf. pp. 246-49 above.
- 204 see Frushell, "'An Incarnate Night-Mare'", passim.
- 205 see Smith, 'Psychological Context', pp. 280-81.
- 206 cf. Mabbott (M III, 859n).
- 207 cf. Reeder, "'The Black Cat'", p. 20.
- 208 Reeder, op. cit., p. 21n.
- 209 cf. Smith, op. cit., p. 280.
- 210 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, passim.
- 211 Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, pp. 467-68; cf. pp. 247-48 above.
- 212 cf. *ibid.*
- 213 see Bonaparte, op. cit., pp. 467-72.
- 214 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 685-86.
- 215 cf. *ibid.*, pp. 687-88.
- 216 cf. Bonaparte, op. cit., pp. 467-68.
- 217 cf. pp. 222-24 above.
- 218 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, p. 683.
- 219 cf. p. 250 above.
- 220 cf. p. 236 above.
- 221 cf. Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 474.
- 222 cf. Smith, 'Psychological Context', p. 281.
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- 224 cf. Anderson, 'Demonology in "The Black Cat"', p. 43 (Anderson, however, takes the succubus implication literally).

- 225 Balzac, 'Sarrasine' (1830), in La Comédie Humaine, VI, 79-111.
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- 229 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 598-99.
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- 231 see Mabbott (M II, 1225n); cf. p. 240 above.
- 232 see Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, pp. 215-46.
- 233 Freud, op. cit., p. 233.
- 234 Symons, The Tell-Tale Heart, p. 212.
- 235 cf. Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 480.
- 236 cf. *ibid.*; and pp. 247-48 above.
- 237 cf. Chapter 6, passim.
- 238 cf. Bonaparte, *loc. cit.*
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- 268 The revisions are detailed in full in Mabbott's footnotes to the tale (M III, 723-74).
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- 338 cf. p. 308 above.
- 339 Voltaire, Zadig, p. 10.
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- 341 *ibid.*, p. 63.
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CHAPTER 4, PART 2

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- 29 see Mesmer, *loc. cit.*
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- 32 *ibid.*, pp. 113-14.
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- 34 *ibid.*, p. 108.
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- 40 see *ibid.*, pp. 205-207.
- 41 see Tatar, Spellbound, pp. 26-29.

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- 67 see Buranelli, The Wizard from Vienna, pp. 75-123; for hysteria, cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp.
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- 70 see Stoehr, 'Hawthorne and Mesmerism', pp. 40-44.
- 71 cf. p. 398. above.
- 72 cf. p. 400 above.
- 73 see Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- 74 see Buranelli, The Wizard from Vienna, pp. 189-98; cf. Mabbott (M III, 1024-25).
- 75 Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, p. 201.
- 76 *ibid.*, p. 202.
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- 78 cf. pp. 413-17 below.
- 79 cf. p. 399 above.
- 80 J. E. Fiske, letter to Charles Poyen (22 October 1837) (cited in Poyen, Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England (Boston, 1837), pp. 200-201; quoted in Stoehr, 'Hawthorne and Mesmerism', p. 40).
- 81 The objectives of this thesis do not include the establishment of a definitive Poe canon. However, 'The Philosophy of Animal Magnetism' (see note 4) is attributed to Poe by J. Jackson in his introduction to the text (1928); Jackson argues for Poe's authorship on stylistic grounds, and points out the similarity of the title to various Poe titles (e.g. 'The Philosophy of Composition', 'Philosophy of Furniture') (pp. 6-7). His arguments are convincing (although the text is not mentioned by Mabbott); it may be added that the textual emphasis on the will suggests a possible link with 'Ligeia'. Cf. Falk, 'Poe and the Power of Animal Magnetism', p. 537.
- 82 'The Philosophy of Animal Magnetism', p. 16.
- 83 *ibid.*, p. 20.
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- 85 Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin (1831), in La Comédie Humaine, IX, 11-249.
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- 87 *ibid.*, p. 92; cf. Tatar, Spellbound, p. 174.

- 88 Balzac, Louis Lambert, p. 395; cf. Tatar, loc. cit.
- 89 Balzac, La Fille aux Yeux d'Or (1835), in La Comédie Humaine, V, 255-323.
- 90 Balzac, op. cit., p. 312.
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- 94 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, p.212 and note 38.
- 95 Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, p. 207.
- 96 'The Philosophy of Animal Magnetism', p. 16.
- 97 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 318-22.
- 98 cf. pp. 417-27 below.
- 99 see Tatar, Spellbound, p. 34.
- 100 cf. p. 403 above.
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- 105 William Wakley, editorial, Lancet, August 1838 (quoted in Kaplan, op. cit., p. 48).
- 106 Confessions of a Magnetiser, Being an Exposé of Animal Magnetism, by a Practical Magnetiser (New York, 1845) (quoted in Stoehr, 'Hawthorne and Mesmerism', p. 46).
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- 110 ibid., 50.
- 111 ibid., 128.
- 112 Dickens, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, p. 9.
- 113 ibid., p. 217.

- 114 *ibid.*, pp. 68-69; cf. Kaplan, Dickens and Mesmerism, p. 153, and Chapter 2, pp. 105-106.
- 115 cf. p. 406 above.
- 116 see Balzac, Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes, p. 1012; cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 376-77.
- 117 Balzac, *op. cit.*, p. 962.
- 118 *ibid.*, p. 1026.
- 119 *ibid.*
- 120 *ibid.*, p. 1028.
- 121 cf. p. 401. For this episode, cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, p. and Tatar, Spellbound, p. 178 (Tatar incorrectly says that Léontine breaks the bars of Lucien's 'prison cell', rather than those of the gateway).
- 122 cf. p. 404 above.
- 123 Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, p. 203.
- 124 *ibid.*, p. 171.
- 125 *ibid.*, p. 198.
- 126 *ibid.*, p. 203.
- 127 cf. Tatar, Spellbound, pp. 227-28.
- 128 Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, p. 211.
- 129 *ibid.*, p. 204.
- 130 cf. p. 404 above.
- 131 see Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-209.
- 132 *ibid.*, p. 211.
- 133 *ibid.*, pp. 211-12.
- 134 cf. Tatar, Spellbound, pp. 208-17.
- 135 cf. Chapter 2, p. 81.
- 136 cf. Mabbott (M III, 1024 and n).
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- 139 see Beaver, 'Commentary' to The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe,



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- 82 D. Hoffman, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, pp. 251-52.
- 83 Kane, 'Edgar Allan Poe and Architecture', p. 160.
- 84 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 123.
- 85 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, p. 393 and note 4.
- 86 There are three texts of 'Philosophy of Furniture': A (Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, May 1840); B (Broadway Journal, 3 May 1845); C (Works, 1850) Mabbott prints C (see M II, 495).
- 87 M II, 495n.
- 88 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, p. 303.
- 89 cf. p. 512 above.
- 90 Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, p. 167 (quoted on p. 495 above).
- 91 see Encyclopaedia Britannica (1911), article: 'Phantasmagoria',



- XXI, 346.
- 92 O.E.D., entry: 'Phantasmagoria'.
- 93 cf. p. 492 above.
- 94 Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin, p. 30.
- 95 Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (see Chapter 4, Part 2, note 244), p. 57.
- 96 Hawthorne, 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' (1832) (The Snow Image and Other Twice-Told Tales, 1851), in The Snow Image and Uncollected Tales (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press (Centenary Edition, XI), 1974), pp. 208-31.
- 97 Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 223.
- 98 Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (see Chapter 1, Part 4, note 35), p. 362.
- 99 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 78-79.
- 100 For the various texts of 'Usher', see Chapter 6, Part 2, note 1,
- 101 cf. *ibid.*, pp. 797-98.
- 102 see Mabbott (M II, 411n).
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- 104 see Punter, The Literature of Terror, p. 5.
- 105 *ibid.*, p. 6.
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- 111 John Evelyn, Account of Architects and Architecture (1697), quoted in Thompson, op. cit., p. 69.
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- 113 Hoffmann, The Devil's Elixirs (see Chapter 2, note 99), pp. 128-29.
- 114 Punter, The Literature of Terror, p. 419.
- 115 Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto (1765), in Three Gothic

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- 116 Walpole, 'Preface' to The Castle of Otranto, p. 39.
- 117 cf. Punter, op. cit., pp. 49-53.
- 118 cf. Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 73.
- 119 see A. H. Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 289.
- 120 see D. Hoffman, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, p. 203.
- 121 Thompson, op. cit., pp. 105-106.
- 122 see Quinn, loc. cit.
- 123 see Mabbott (M II, 474n).
- 124 Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition, and particularly on the works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann', Foreign Quarterly Review, I (1827), 60-98.
- 125 Scott, op. cit., p. 72.
- 126 ibid., p. 81.
- 127 cf. p. 530 below.
- 128 Scott, op. cit., pp. 81-82.
- 129 cf. p. 537 below.
- 130 see Thompson, Poe's Fiction, pp. 114-115.
- 131 O.E.D., entry: 'Grotesque'.
- 132 Patricia C. Smith, 'Poe's Arabesque', PoeS, 7, No. 2 (December 1974), 42-45.
- 133 Encyclopaedia Americana (Philadelphia, 1831), quoted in Smith, op. cit., p. 42.
- 134 O.E.D., loc. cit.
- 135 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, p. 445.
- 136 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, p. 328.
- 137 cf. ibid., p. 356.
- 138 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 108.
- 139 Smith, 'Poe's Arabesque', p. 45.
- 140 cf. p. 526 above.
- 141 O.E.D., entry: 'Arabesque'.

- 142 *ibid.*, entry: 'Moresque'.
- 143 *ibid.*, entry: 'Saracenic'.
- 144 Encyclopaedia Americana, quoted in Smith, 'Poe's Arabesque', p. 42; cf. p. 527 above.
- 145 Scott, 'On the Supernatural', p. 81; cf. p. 526 above.
- 146 O.E.D., entry: 'Arabesque',
- 147 Beckford, Vathek, p. 207.
- 148 Balzac, La Peau de Chagrin, p. 26.
- 149 *ibid.*, p. 66.
- 150 cf. p. 492 above.
- 151 Hoffmann, 'The Golden Pot' (1813), trans. Thomas Carlyle, in Tales from Hoffmann, trans. various, ed. J. M. Cohen (London: Bodley Head, 1951), pp. 19-108.
- 152 Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
- 153 *ibid.*, p. 72.
- 154 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, pp. 447-48.
- 155 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 27.
- 156 Friedrich Schlegel, Lectures on Poetry (1800), quoted in Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
- 157 cf. pp. 524-25 above.
- 158 cf. p. 513 above.
- 159 cf. p. 530 above.
- 160 see M II, 321n (for the texts of 'Ligeia', see Chapter 6, Part 1, note 153).
- 161 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 647-48.
- 162 cf. p. 518 above.
- 163 see M II, 157n (for the texts of 'The Assignation', see note 221).
- 164 cf. p. 560 below.
- 165 cf. p. 530 below.
- 166 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 581-615 (passim).
- 167 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 738-41.

- 168 D. Hoffman, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, p. 203.
- 169 Smith, 'Poe's Arabesque', p. 45.
- 170 cf. Chapter 1, Part 1, p. 6; Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 311-12 and 380.
- 171 cf. p. 491 above.
- 172 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, p. 423.
- 173 cf. pp. 494 and 513 above.
- 174 cf. pp. 534-35 above.
- 175 Baudelaire, 'Note' to Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Révélation magnétique' (see Chapter 4, Part 2, note 6), p. 1106.
- 176 Baudelaire, 'Correspondances', (1857), Les Fleurs du Mal, IV.
- 177 Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York: C. Scribner & Sons, 1931, rpt. London: Collins (Fontana), 1961).
- 178 Wilson, op. cit., p. 18.
- 179 Baudelaire, op. cit. (quoted in full).
- 180 Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, p. 140; cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, 154-55.
- 181 cf. p. 538 above.
- 182 Baudelaire, 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe', p. 1073.
- 183 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Philosophie de l'Ameublement' (1852; Histoires grotesques et sérieuses, 1865), in Poe, Oeuvres en prose, pp. 983-90.
- 184 Baudelaire, 'L'Invitation au Voyage' (verse-poem), 15-26; cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, p. 448.
- 185 Baudelaire, 'Correspondances', 14.
- 186 Baudelaire, 'L'Invitation au Voyage' (verse-poem), 27-28.
- 187 Baudelaire, 'L'Invitation au Voyage' (prose-poem), 254.
- 188 cf. p. 515 above.
- 189 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Philosophie de l'Ameublement', p. 985.
- 190 Baudelaire, 'L'Invitation au Voyage' (prose-poem), loc. cit.
- 191 *ibid.*, p. 253.
- 192 *ibid.*, p. 255.
- 193 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Ligeia' (1855 ; Histoires extraordinaires,

- 1856), in Poe, Oeuvres en prose, pp. 253-69 (p. 261).
- 194 Baudelaire, 'La Chambre double', p. 233.
- 195 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Philosophie de l'Ameublement', p. 987.
- 196 Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 234.
- 197 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 985.
- 198 Baudelaire, loc. cit.
- 199 ibid.
- 200 see Huysmans, A rebours, pp. 320-22; cf. Chapter 2, p. 76.
- 201 see Huysmans, op. cit., p. 322; cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, p. 791.
- 202 Huysmans, op. cit., p. 109.
- 203 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, p. 344.
- 204 Huysmans, op. cit., p. 102.
- 205 ibid., p. 95.
- 206 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, p. 328.
- 207 see Huysmans, op. cit., pp. 138-40.
- 208 see ibid., pp. 221-31.
- 209 ibid., p. 138.
- 210 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 81-82.
- 211 Huysmans, op. cit., p. 105.
- 212 ibid., p. 352.
- 213 see ibid., pp. 131-36.
- 214 see ibid., pp. 189-203.
- 215 see ibid., p. 87.
- 216 see ibid., pp. 288, 335.
- 217 see ibid., pp. 186-87.
- 218 see ibid., p. 342.
- 219 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 708-13 and 718-24.
- 220 Huysmans, op. cit., p. 352.
- 221 There are six texts of 'The Assignation' (1834, 1835, 1839, 1840,

1845, 1850) (the title is 'The Visionary' up to 1840); Mabbott uses the 1850 text (see M II, 150).

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- 223 R. P. Benton, 'Is Poe's "The Assingation" A Hoax?', NCF, 18 (1963), 193-97.
- 224 see Benton, op. cit., p. 193.
- 225 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 126.
- 226 Mabbott (M III, 148).
- 227 Edward W. Pitcher, 'Poe's "The Assingation": A Reconsideration', PoeS, 13, No. 1 (June 1980), 1-4.
- 228 Pitcher, op. cit., p. 3.
- 229 see Hoffmann, 'Doge and Dogaressa', p. 308; cf. Mabbott (M II, 149).
- 230 see Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony (see Chapter 3, Part 2, note 61), pp. 63-77.
- 231 Praz, op. cit., p. 72.
- 232 cf. p. 511 above.
- 233 Giuseppe Mazzini, 'Byron and Goethe' (1839), in Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini (London, 1864-70), VI, 61-94, rpt. (extracts) in Andrew Rutherford, ed., Byron: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 330-41 (no translation details given).
- 234 Mazzini, op. cit., pp. 331-32.
- 235 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, pp. 405-406.
- 236 Byron, The Corsair (1814), in Poetical Works.
- 237 Byron, op. cit., I, 25.
- 238 *ibid.*, I, 182.
- 239 *ibid.*, I, 80.
- 240 cf. Chapter 2, p. 100.
- 241 Byron, Manfred (see Chapter 2, note 94), III-IV, 133-34.
- 242 Mazzini, 'Byron and Goethe', p. 333.
- 243 see *ibid.*, p. 332.

- 244 *ibid.*, p. 338.
- 245 see *ibid.*, pp. 338-39.
- 246 *ibid.*, p. 334.
- 247 *ibid.*, p. 332.
- 248 Byron, Don Juan (1819-24) in Poetical Works; cf. pp. 571-72 below.
- 249 Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-18), in Poetical Works.
- 250 Byron, Manfred, II-II, 50-56.
- 251 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, p. 205.
- 252 see Praz, The Romantic Agony, pp. 63-66.
- 253 Byron, Lara (see Chapter 3, Part 2, note 7), I, 315-16, 321-22, 347-48.
- 254 Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, I, VI.
- 255 *ibid.*, IV, CXXXVII.
- 256 Byron, Lara, II, 598-99.
- 257 *ibid.*, I, 382.
- 258 Byron, Manfred, III-IV, 129.
- 259 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, p. 417.
- 260 Byron, *op. cit.*, III-IV, 142, 149.
- 261 Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, CLXIV-CLXV.
- 262 cf. p. 579 below.
- 263 Byron, *op. cit.*, IV, CLXXXV.
- 264 see O.E.D., entry: 'Assination'.
- 265 Byron, Beppo (1818), in Poetical Works.
- 266 Byron, *op. cit.*, XVI.
- 267 Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, I.
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- 269 see M I, 211-15.
- 270 Byron, Don Juan, I, CCXIV.

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- 273 Benton, 'Is Poe's "The Assigination" A Hoax?', pp. 194, 196.
- 274 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, pp. 126-28.
- 275 Benton, op. cit., p. 196.
- 276 Moore, op. cit., p. 516.
- 277 *ibid.*, p. 534.
- 278 *ibid.*, p. 517.
- 279 see Benton, 'Is Poe's "The Assigination" A Hoax?', p. 194.
- 280 Byron, letter to John Murray, 26 April 1817, in Letters and Journals, V, 217-19 (p. 218).
- 281 see Mabbott (M II, 168n).
- 282 Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, LV.
- 283 cf. pp. 494-97 above.
- 284 cf. pp. 552-54 above.
- 285 cf. pp. 502-503 above.
- 286 cf. pp. 527, 535 and 539-40 above.
- 287 cf. p. 529 above.
- 288 cf. p. 535 above.
- 289 Byron, Don Juan, IV, VI.
- 290 *ibid.*, IV, IV.
- 291 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, p. 238.
- 292 cf. *ibid.*, pp. 278-79.
- 293 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, pp. 271-72.
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- 295 Shelley, op. cit., XII, XXII; *ibid.*, XXXVII.



- 296 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 739-41.
- 297 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 289-90.
- 298 see Byron, Manfred, 11-11, 135-39.
- 299 Shelley, Alastor; or The Spirit of Solitude (1816), in Poetical Works (see Chapter 2, note 20).
- 300 Keats, Ode to a Nightingale (1820), in Poetical Works.
- 301 Shelley, op. cit., 366-69.
- 302 Keats, op. cit., VI.
- 303 For Poe and Romanticism, cf. Edmund Wilson, 'Poe at Home and Abroad' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 13), pp. 146-47.
- 304 cf. p. 550 above.
- 305 Pitcher, 'Poe's "The Assniation"', p. 3.
- 306 Wilbur, 'The Poe Mystery Case', p. 26.
- 307 cf. Chapter 2, p. 138 and Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 758-59.
- 308 Pitcher, loc. cit.
- 309 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 130.
- 310 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 272-74, Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 637-40 and 643-54, and Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 694-96.
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- 312 Hawthorne, 'Legends of the Province House' ('Howe's Masquerade', 1838; 'Edward Randolph's Portrait', 1838; 'Lady Eleanore's Mantle', 1838; 'Old Esther Dudley', 1839), in Twice-Told Tales (see Chapter 2, note 55), pp. 239-303.
- 313 Regan, op. cit., p. 296.
- 314 *ibid.*, p. 297.
- 315 Kermit Vanderbilt, 'Art and Nature in "The Masque of the Red Death"', NCF, 22 (1968), 379-89.
- 316 Shakespeare, The Tempest (1612) (C.U.P. (New Shakespeare), 1921, rpt. 1961).
- 317 see Vanderbilt, op. cit., pp. 383-84.
- 318 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, pp. 514-24.
- 319 *ibid.*, p. 518.

- 320 see *ibid.*, pp. 520-21, 523-24.
- 321 Weber, 'Edgar Poe ou le thème de l'horloge' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 97), p. 309.
- 322 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 122.
- 323 J. p. Roppolo, 'Meaning and "The Masque of the Red Death"', TSE, XIII (1963), 59-69, rpt. in Regan, ed., Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 100), pp. 134-45.
- 324 see Roppolo, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
- 325 see *ibid.*, p. 145.
- 326 G. Hoffmann, 'Space and Symbol in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe', (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 39), p. 11.
- 327 Hawthorne, 'Legends of the Province House', p. 253.
- 328 *ibid.*, p. 254.
- 329 *ibid.*, p. 276.
- 330 Regan, 'Hawthorne's "Plagiary"', p. 292.
- 331 Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 283.
- 332 cf. Regan, *op. cit.*, p. 285.
- 333 Mabbott (M II, 677n).
- 334 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 122.
- 335 Shakespeare, The Tempest, I-II, 54-55.
- 336 *ibid.*, IV-I, 120-22.
- 337 see *ibid.*, 139-42.
- 338 *ibid.*, V-I, 1-2.
- 339 see *ibid.*, 118.
- 340 see Vanderbilt, 'Art and Nature', pp. 383-84.
- 341 cf. pp. 575-76 below.
- 342 see Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', 51; cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, p. 458.
- 343 Coleridge, *op. cit.*, 2.
- 344 *ibid.*, 6-7.
- 345 *ibid.*, 1-2.

- 346 *ibid.*, 30.
- 347 Byron, Don Juan, III, XXXIX.
- 348 *ibid.*, XXXIV.
- 349 *ibid.*, LXXVIII.
- 350 *ibid.*, LXIV.
- 351 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 521.
- 352 Byron, *op. cit.*, IV, LXXII.
- 353 *cf.* pp. 507-11 above.
- 354 *cf.* Chapter 5, Part 1, p. 474.
- 355 *cf.* *ibid.*, pp. 458-61.
- 356 *cf.* pp. 571-72 above.
- 357 *cf.* Chapter 1, Part 4, p. 16; and pp. 509-10 above.
- 358 *cf.* pp. 565-66 above.
- 359 *cf.* Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 276-77 and Chapter 6, Part 2, p. 692.
- 360 see Mabbott (M II, 670n). There are three texts of 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842, 1845, 1850) (1842 has 'Mask'); Mabbott uses the 1850 text.
- 361 *cf.* Chapter 2, p. 120.
- 362 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, pp. 523-24.
- 363 *cf.* Chapter 4, Part 2, pp. 419-20.
- 364 *cf.* pp. 519, 523, 530, and 535 above.
- 365 *cf.* p. 565 above.
- 366 see Bonaparte, *op. cit.*, p. 518.
- 367 see G. Hoffmann, 'Space and Symbol', p. 10.
- 368 *cf.* p. 566 above.
- 369 Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV, CLXIV; *cf.* p. 555 above.
- 370 Byron, Don Juan, IV, LXXII; *cf.* p. 572 above.

CHAPTER 6, PART 1

- 1 There are three texts of 'The Oval Portrait': A (Graham's Magazine, April 1842, as 'Life in Death'); B (Broadway Journal, 26 April 1850); C (Works, 1850) (see M II, 662 and n; Mabbott prints the C text, which scarcely varies from B).
- 2 For the revisions, see M II, 662n-66n; Mabbott prints the deleted first paragraph separately (667n).
- 3 Mabbott (M II, 660).
- 4 P. F. Quinn, The French Face of Edgar Poe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957, rpt. 1971).
- 5 Quinn, op. cit., p. 266.
- 6 R. W. Dowell, 'The Ironic History of Poe's "Life in Death": A Literary Skeleton in the Closet', AL, 62 (November 1970), 478-86.
- 7 Dowell, op. cit., p. 482.
- 8 Seymour Gross, 'Poe's Revision of "The Oval Portrait"', MLN, 74 (1959), 16-20.
- 9 Gross, op. cit., p. 18.
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 19.
- 11 see Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 362-63; cf. Chapter 1, Part 2, pp. 36-37.
- 12 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 132.
- 13 see *ibid.*, p. 135.
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 133.
- 15 cf. Chapter 1, Part 3, p. 490; and see *ibid.*, note 102.
- 16 Monique Dubanton, 'L'ovale du portrait: la fonction de l'écriture chez Edgar Poe', Poétique, 37 (1979), 102-110.
- 17 Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 260.
- 18 see Cixous, 'Poe re-lu', pp. 320-23.
- 19 *ibid.*, p. 318.
- 20 *ibid.*, p. 302.
- 21 Dubanton, 'L'ovale du portrait', p. 107.
- 22 see *ibid.*, p. 108.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 102.

- 24 *ibid.*, p. 109.
- 25 see *ibid.*, p. 107.
- 26 cf. pp. 598-99 below.
- 27 see Mabbott (M III, 662n) ('*silentio*' should be '*silenzio*').
- 28 see *ibid.*, 666n.
- 29 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 133.
- 30 *ibid.*, p. 134.
- 31 see *ibid.*, p. 135; cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 499-500 and 530.
- 32 see Thompson, *loc. cit.*
- 33 cf. pp. 595-96 below.
- 34 see Mabbott (M II, 504 and 666n).
- 35 cf. Barthes, S/Z, p. 27.
- 36 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, pp. 459-60.
- 37 Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', pp. 225-26.
- 38 *ibid.*, p. 239.
- 39 *ibid.*, p. 241.
- 40 see O.E.D., entry: 'Contemplation'.
- 41 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Le Portrait ovale' (1855; Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires, 1857), in Poe, Oeuvres en prose, pp. 502-505.
- 42 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, *op. cit.*, pp. 502-503.
- 43 *ibid.*, pp. 502, 505.
- 44 *ibid.*, p. 502.
- 45 cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, pp. 154-55.
- 46 Dubanton, 'L'ovale du portrait', p. 102; cf. pp. 584-85 above.
- 47 Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 340.
- 48 *ibid.*, p. 341.
- 49 John Berger et al., Ways of Seeing (London: B.B.C. and Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1972, rpt. 1979).

- 50 Berger et al., op. cit., pp. 88-89.
- 51 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 558-59.
- 52 Balzac, La Cousine Bette (1846), in La Comédie Humaine, VI, 135-524.
- 53 Balzac, op. cit., p. 323.
- 54 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, pp. 469-70.
- 55 Marx, Capital I, p. 165; cf. Chapter 1, Part 1, p. 19.
- 56 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, pp. 475-77.
- 57 cf. Dubanton, 'L'ovale du portrait', p. 106.
- 58 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, p. 565.
- 59 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 354-55.
- 60 Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) (London: O.U.P., 1966).
- 61 Berger et al., Ways of Seeing, p. 63.
- 62 ibid., p. 55.
- 63 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 262-63.
- 64 William Blake, 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion' (1793), in Poetical Works.
- 65 Blake, op. cit., 192.
- 66 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 789-91.
- 67 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, pp. 450-51.
- 68 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, pp. 475-77.
- 69 Hawthorne, 'The Prophetic Pictures' (1837), in Twice-Told Tales (see Chapter 2 (note 55)), pp. 166-82.
- 70 see Gross, 'Poe's Revision of "The Oval Portrait"', p. 20; P. F. Quinn, The French Face of Edgar Poe, p. 261.
- 71 Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 177.
- 72 ibid., p. 174.
- 73 ibid., p. 167.
- 74 ibid., p. 182.
- 75 ibid., p. 181.

- 76 *ibid.*
- 77 *ibid.*, p. 168.
- 78 *ibid.*
- 79 *ibid.*, p. 176.
- 80 *ibid.*, p. 179.
- 81 *ibid.*
- 82 *ibid.*, p. 178.
- 83 *cf.* p.
- 84 Balzac, 'Sarrasine' (see Chapter 3, Part 2, note 225), p. 96.
- 85 Balzac, 'Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu' (see Chapter 5, Part 1, note 51), p. 407.
- 86 *ibid.*, p. 412.
- 87 *cf.* Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 797-800.
- 88 see Balzac, *op. cit.*, p. 406.
- 89 *ibid.*, pp. 407-408.
- 90 *ibid.*, p. 407.
- 91 *ibid.*, p. 405.
- 92 *ibid.*, p. 410.
- 93 *ibid.*, p. 407.
- 94 *ibid.*, p. 408.
- 95 *ibid.*, p. 406.
- 96 *ibid.*, p. 404-405.
- 97 *ibid.*, p. 410.
- 98 *ibid.*, p. 414.
- 99 *ibid.*
- 100 *cf.* pp. 591-94, 596 above.
- 101 *cf.* pp. 593, 595 above.
- 102 see Freud, 'Female Sexuality' (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 185), passim; *cf.* Chapter 1, Part 1, pp. 28-29.

- 103 Freud, 'The Taboo of Virginity' (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 187), p. 271.
- 104 *ibid.*, p. 274.
- 105 *ibid.*, p. 282.
- 106 Walter Scott, The Bride of Lammermoor (1819) (London: Dent (Everyman's Library), 1906, rpt. 1952).
- 107 Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 323.
- 108 *ibid.*, p. 324.
- 109 *cf.* Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 263-64.
- 110 *cf.* pp. 609-10 below.
- 111 see Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 348-55; *cf.* Chapter 1, Part 1, pp. 36-37.
- 112 Hoffmann, 'The Sandman' (see Chapter 1, Part 4, note 47), p. 87.
- 113 Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 352.
- 114 *cf.* Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 284 and 261.
- 115 see Mabbott (M II, 664n).
- 116 Gross, 'Poe's Revision of "The Oval Portrait"', p. 19.
- 117 *cf.* Chapter 1, Part 2, p. 38.
- 118 *cf.* Chapter 4, Part 1, p. 328.
- 119 *cf.* p. 668 below.
- 120 see Mabbott (M II, 664n).
- 121 *cf.* pp. 656-71 below.
- 122 *cf.* Mabbott (M II, 666n).
- 123 Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (see Chapter 2, note 22), 190-94.
- 124 Baudelaire, 'Le Désir de Peindre' (1863), Le Spleen de Paris, XXXVI, pp. 288-89.
- 125 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Le Portrait ovale', p. 504.
- 126 Baudelaire, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
- 127 *cf.* pp. 656-64 below.
- 128 Baudelaire, *loc. cit.*



- 129 Baudelaire, op.cit., p. 288.
- 130 Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).
- 131 Hardy, op. cit., pp. 283-84.
- 132 *ibid.*, p. 283.
- 133 *ibid.*, p. 305.
- 134 *ibid.*
- 135 For the Poe-Hardy connexion, see F. E. Halliday, Thomas Hardy: His Life and Work (1972, rpt. St Albans: Granada (Panther), 1978), p. 45.
- 136 cf. pp. 584-85 above.
- 137 Heinrich von Kleist, 'The Beggarwoman of Locarno' (1811), in The Marquise of O and Other Stories (see Chapter 4, Part 2, note 194), pp. 214-16.
- 138 Kleist, op. cit., p. 215.
- 139 cf. pp. 673-80 below.
- 140 cf. Chapter 1, Part 4, pp. 68-72.
- 141 cf. *ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
- 142 cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, p. 178.
- 143 Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (see Chapter 1, Part 4, note 91), p. 60.
- 144 *ibid.*, p. 100.
- 145 *ibid.*, p. 85.
- 146 *ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
- 147 *ibid.*, p. 28.
- 148 Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century (see Chapter 1, Part 4, note 96), p. 159.
- 149 *ibid.*, p. 175.
- 150 *ibid.*, p. 146.
- 151 *ibid.*, p. 151.
- 152 *ibid.*, p. 145.
- 153 The texts of 'Ligeia' are: A (American Museum, September 1838);

B (Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, 1840); C (Phantasy-Pieces (unpublished), 1842); D (New World, 15 February 1845); E (Broadway Journal, 27 September 1845); F (copy of the above, with manuscript revision (1848)); G (Works, 1850). Mabbott prints F (see M II, 308n-309n).

- 154 see Mabbott (M I, 323).
- 155 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, p. 556; Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 801-805.
- 156 cf. p. 677 below.
- 157 Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1928) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945, rpt. 1974).
- 158 Woolf, op. cit., pp. 51-52.
- 159 cf. Chapter 1, Part 4, p. 70.
- 160 cf. pp. 671-72 below.
- 161 Margaret Fuller, 'Poe's Tales', New York Daily Tribune, 11 July 1845, rpt. in Carlson, ed., Recognition, pp. 17-18.
- 162 Fuller, op. cit., p. 17.
- 163 cf. p. 632 below.
164. Praz, The Romantic Agony, pp. 199-300.
- 165 *ibid.*, p. 201.
- 166 Matthew Lewis, The Monk (1796) (London: O.U.P. (World's Classics), 1980); see Praz, op. cit., pp. 202-205.
- 167 Prosper Mérimée, 'Carmen' (1845) (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1973); see Praz, op. cit., pp. 206-207.
- 168 Mérimée, op. cit., p. 120.
- 169 *ibid.*, p. 162.
- 170 *ibid.*, p. 120.
- 171 *ibid.*, p. 146.
- 172 *ibid.*, p. 161.
- 173 *ibid.*, p. 162.
174. Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, Undine (1811), trans. Edmund Gosse (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1896, rpt. 1912).
- 175 see Lewis; The Monk, p. 440.
- 176 *ibid.*, p. 89.

- 177 *ibid.*, p. 232.
- 178 *ibid.*, p. 60.
- 179 *ibid.*, p. 232.
- 180 *cf.* pp. 617-18 above.
- 181 *cf.* Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 206-207; Chapter 5, Part 1, p. 477.
- 182 *cf.* Chapter 3, Part 2, p. 207.
- 183 Fouquē, Undine, p. 33.
- 184 *ibid.*, p. 97.
- 185 *ibid.*, p. 201.
- 186 *cf.* Chapter 2, pp. 103-104.
- 187 see Praz, The Romantic Agony, p. 113.
- 188 Hoffmann, The Devil's Elixirs (see Chapter 2, note 99), p. 53.
- 189 *ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
- 190 *ibid.*, p. 66.
- 191 see *ibid.*, pp. 76-79.
- 192 see *ibid.*, p. 269.
- 193 *cf.* Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 571-72.
- 194 Byron, Don Juan (see Chapter 5, Part 2, note 248), II-CXVI.
- 195 *ibid.*, II-CXVII.
- 196 *ibid.*, IV-XLIII.
- 197 *ibid.*, IV-LXXI.
- 198 *cf.* pp. 670-71 above.
- 199 Byron, *op. cit.*, II-CLXII.
- 200 Byron, Heaven and Earth (1823), in Poetical Works.
- 201 Byron, *op. cit.*, I-I, 65-66.
- 202 *ibid.*, I-III, 820.
- 203 Byron, Don Juan, I-XXII.
- 204 Shelley, Zastrozzi: A Romance (1810), in Prose Works, ed. R. H. Shepherd, 2 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), I, 3-111.

- 205 Shelley, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
- 206 *ibid.*, p. 25.
- 207 *ibid.*, p. 28.
- 208 *ibid.*, p. 30.
- 209 *ibid.*, p. 59.
- 210 *ibid.*, p. 64.
- 211 cf. H. N. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle (London: Butterworth (Home University Library), 1913), p. 238.
- 212 Shelley, Laon and Cythna (see Chapter 5, Part 2, note 294), VI-XXXIII.
- 213 *ibid.*, VI-XXXVIII.
- 214 see *ibid.*, VI-XXXIV-XXXIX.
- 215 *ibid.*, IV-XXI.
- 216 *ibid.*, II-XXXIV.
- 217 *ibid.*, II-XXXVI.
- 218 *ibid.*, II-XXXV.
- 219 *ibid.*, V-LI.
- 220 *ibid.*, VI-XXV.
- 221 *ibid.*, VI-XIX.
- 222 Nathaniel Brown, Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979).
- 223 Brown, *op. cit.*, 181; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 181-86.
- 224 cf. p. 612 above.
- 225 Franco Moretti, 'The Dialectic of Fear' (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 223), p. 79; cf. Chapter 1, Part 2, p. 38, and p. 682 below.
- 226 Moretti, *loc. cit.*
- 227 Keats, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' (1820), in Poetical Works.
- 228 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 491-92.
- 229 Keats, Lamia (see Chapter 5, Part 2, note 3), I, 167.
- 230 see *ibid.*, II, 111-41.

- 231 *ibid.*, II, 116.
- 232 *ibid.*, I, 189-90.
- 233 see *ibid.*, I, 244-46.
- 234 *ibid.*, I, 334.
- 235 *ibid.*, I, 290.
- 236 see *ibid.*, I, 286-95.
- 237 *ibid.*, II, 73-74.
- 238 *ibid.*, II, 81.
- 239 see Mabbott (M 1, 90n).
- 240 Keats, *op. cit.*, II, 92.
- 241 Keats, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', VII.
- 242 see *ibid.*, VI.
- 243 *ibid.*, IV.
- 244 *ibid.*, X.
- 245 cf. C. I. Patterson Jr, The Demonic in the Poetry of John Keats (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 1-21, 125-50.
- 246 cf. pp. 658-71 below.
- 247 cf. Chapter 2, p. 59.
- 248 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, pp. 440-41.
- 249 Hawthorne, 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (see Chapter 2, note 49), p. 105; Crews, The Sins of the Fathers (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 220), pp. 117-35.
- 250 Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- 251 *ibid.*, p. 127.
- 252 *ibid.*, p. 93.
- 253 *ibid.*, p. 127.
- 254 *ibid.*
- 255 cf. Chapter 1, Part 4, pp. 53-54.
- 256 cf. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 14), p. 278.

- 257 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, p. 411.
- 258 see Fiedler, *op. cit.*, pp. 414-15.
- 259 see *ibid.*, p. 209.
- 260 Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance (see Chapter 1, Part 4, note 105), p. 52.
- 261 Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
- 262 *ibid.*, p. 33.
- 263 *ibid.*, pp. 106-16.
- 264 *ibid.*, p. 47.
- 267 *ibid.*, p. 15.
- 268 *ibid.*, p. 72.
- 269 *ibid.*, p. 16.
- 270 *ibid.*, p. 102.
- 271 *ibid.*, p. 16.
- 272 *ibid.*, p. 15.
- 273 cf. p. 633 above.
- 274 Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
- 276 *ibid.*, pp. 120-21; cf. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, pp. 208-209.
- 277 Hawthorne, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
- 278 *ibid.*, p. 122.
- 279 cf. Ellen E. Morgan, 'The Veiled Lady: The Secret Love of Miles Coverdale', in C. E. Frazer Clark Jr, ed., Nathaniel Hawthorne Journal 1971 (Washington, D.C.: Microcard Editions, 1971), pp. 169-81.
- 280 see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 100.
- 281 James Schroeter, 'A Misreading of Poe's "Ligeia"', PMLA, 76 (September 1961), 397-406.
- 282 R. P. Basler, 'Poe's "Ligeia"', PMLA, 77 (December 1962), 675.
- 283 Mabbott (M II, 307).
- 284 *ibid.*, 308.

- 285 A. H. Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 270.
- 286 E. H. Davidson, Poe: A Critical Study, p. 77.
- 287 Vincent Buranelli, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 73.
- 288 *ibid.*, p. 139n.
- 289 Muriel West, 'Poe's "Ligeia"', Expl, XXII, No. 2 (October 1963) (no page numbers), item 15.
- 290 Muriel West, 'Poe's "Ligeia" and Isaac D'Israeli', CL, 16 (1964), 19-28.
- 291 see West, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.
- 292 West, 'Poe's "Ligeia"'. .
- 293 *cf.* p. 641 below.
- 294 see Schroeter, 'A Misreading', pp. 397-99.
- 295 *ibid.*, p. 405.
- 296 *ibid.*, p. 402.
- 297 *ibid.*, p. 404.
- 298 Basler, 'The Interpretation of "Ligeia"', p. 51.
- 299 *ibid.*, p. 55.
- 300 see *ibid.*, p. 56.
- 301 see *ibid.*, p. 53.
- 302 see *ibid.*, p. 59.
- 303 see *ibid.*, pp. 59-60.
- 304 *ibid.*, p. 60.
- 305 see *ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
- 306 *ibid.*, p. 56.
- 307 *cf.* Chapter 3, Part 2, p. 279.
- 308 Basler, 'Poe's "Ligeia"', p. 675.
- 309 *cf.* Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 724-28.
- 310 James W. Gargano, 'Poe's "Ligeia": Dream and Destruction', CE, XXIII (February 1962), 337-42.

- 311 Gargano, op. cit., p. 338.
- 312 *ibid.*, p. 341.
- 313 *ibid.*, p. 340.
- 314 D. N. Koster, 'Poe, Romance and Reality', ATQ, 19 (Summer 1973), 8-13.
- 315 Koster, op. cit., p. 9.
- 316 *ibid.*, p. 10.
- 317 *ibid.*
- 318 *ibid.*, p. 11.
- 319 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 81.
- 320 *ibid.*, p. 80.
- 321 *ibid.*, p. 169.
- 322 *ibid.*, p. 119.
- 323 see West, 'Poe's "Ligeia" and Isaac D'Israeli', p. 21.
- 324 *ibid.*, p. 24.
- 325 *ibid.*, p. 28.
- 326 Clark Griffith, 'Poe's "Ligeia" and the English Romantics', UTQ, 24 (October 1954), 8-25.
- 327 see Mabbott (M II, 333n-34n).
- 328 see Griffith, op. cit., p. 25.
- 329 see *ibid.*, pp. 19-21.
- 330 see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 40; cf. *ibid.*, p. 43.
- 331 Bennett, "'The Madness of Art'", p. 3.
- 332 *ibid.*, p. 5.
- 333 *ibid.*
- 334 *ibid.*, p. 1.
- 335 D. H. Lawrence, 'Edgar Allan Poe' (in Studies in Classic American Literature, 1923), rpt. in Carlson, ed., Recognition, pp. 110-26.
- 336 Lawrence, op. cit., p. 114.
- 337 *ibid.*, p. 115.



- 338 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, pp. 224-36.
- 339 cf. p. 584 above.
- 340 Cixous, 'Poe re-lu', p. 316.
- 341 *ibid.*, p. 318.
- 342 *ibid.*, p. 322.
- 343 see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 101.
- 344 Zanger, 'Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge', p. 539.
- 345 see *ibid.*, pp. 542-43.
- 346 cf. pp. 606-607 above.
- 347 cf. pp. 637-38 above.
- 348 Basler, 'The Interpretation of "Ligeia"', p. 62.
- 349 Koster, 'Poe, Romance and Reality', p. 9.
- 350 cf. Chapter 1, Part 1, pp. 4-8.
- 351 cf. pp. 586-89 above.
- 352 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 500-501.
- 353 Charles Maturin, Melmoth The Wanderer (1820) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
- 354 see Maturin, *op. cit.*, pp. 700-703.
- 355 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, p. 564.
- 356 cf. pp. 586-89 above.
- 357 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 78-79.
- 358 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, p. 534.
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- 360 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, p. 740.
- 361 cf. *ibid.*, pp. 740-41.
- 362 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, p. 291.
- 363 cf. Freud, 'The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis' (1924), in On Psychopathology (Pelican Freud Library X) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 221-26 (p. 223).
- 364 cf. pp. 643-44 above.

- 365 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 115-16.
- 366 see Chapter 5, Part 2, note 193.
- 367 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'Ligeia', p. 256.
- 368 Basler, 'The Interpretation of "Ligeia"', p. 65.
- 369 cf. Chapter 2, p. 115.
- 370 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 724-38.
- 371 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, p. 288.
- 372 cf. Freud, 'Schreber' (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 197), pp. 200-205.
- 373 cf. pp. 639-40 above.
- 374 Koster, 'Poe, Romance and Reality', p. 10.
- 375 see Basler, 'The Interpretation of "Ligeia"', pp. 59-60.
- 376 *ibid.*, p. 58.
- 377 cf. Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 81.
- 378 see Koster, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- 379 cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, pp. 188-90, 195-96.
- 380 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 367, 369-71.
- 381 see Mabbott (M II, 331n).
- 382 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 219-20.
- 383 cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, pp. 188-89.
- 384 'The Conqueror Worm' is quoted here from Mabbott's text of 'Ligeia', not the final text of the poem printed in M I.
- 385 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, passim.
- 386 see Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 358-61; cf. Chapter 3, Part 1, pp. 156-57.
- 387 see Freud, *op. cit.*, pp. 362-63; cf. pp. 592-93 above.
- 388 see Freud, *op. cit.*, pp. 361-62.
- 389 cf. pp. 667-68 below.
- 390 see Freud, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-53.
- 391 see *ibid.*, pp. 363-64; cf. Chapter 1, Part 2, pp. 35-38.

- 392 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, pp. 405-406.
- 393 Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, pp. 48-49 (see pp. 617-18 above).
- 394 cf. pp. 628-30 above.
- 395 cf. pp. 634-36 above.
- 396 Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, p. 159 (see pp. 617-18 above).
- 397 Wollstonecraft, op. cit., p. 28 (see p. 617 above).
- 398 cf. pp. 628-30 above.
- 399 Hoffmann, The Devil's Elixirs, p. 53 (see p. 624 above).
- 400 Lewis, The Monk, p. 60 (see p. 623 above).
- 401 Wollstonecraft, loc. cit. (see p. 617 above); cf. Shelley, Laon and Cythna, II-XXXV (see p. 629 above).
- 402 cf. pp. 642-43 above.
- 403 Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 108), pp. 112-13.
- 404 Cixous, 'Poe re-lu', p. 318.
- 405 ibid., p. 311.
- 406 Byron, Don Juan, IV-XLIII (see p. 626 above).
- 407 Keats, Lamia, I, 167 (see p. 630 above).
- 408 This phrase is usually printed with the adjective 'raven' before 'wings'; Mabbott's chosen text (1848), however, is the only one to delete the adjective (see M II, 330n).
- 409 see Byron, Don Juan, II-CXVIX (see p. 625 above).
- 410 see Keats, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', IV (see p. 632 above).
- 411 see Shelley, Laon and Cythna, VI-XXXVIII (see p. 628 above).
- 412 see Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, p. 15 (see p. 634 above).
- 413 Keats, loc. cit. (see p. 632 above).
- 414 see Mérimée, 'Carmen', pp. 120, 162 (see p. 621 above).
- 415 see Byron, Don Juan, II-CXVII (see p. 625 above).
- 416 see Shelley, Zastrozzi, p. 30 (see p. 627 above).
- 417 see Shelley, Laon and Cythna, VI-XXXIII (see p. 628 above).

- 418 see Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, p. 72 (see p. 635 above).
- 419 cf. pp. 592-93 above.
- 420 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 753-55.
- 421 see Mabbott (M II, 332n).
- 422 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, passim.
- 423 cf. p. 656 above.
- 424 cf. Zanger, 'Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge', pp. 538-39 (see pp. 642-43 above).
- 425 cf. Chapter 2, p. 83.
- 426 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, p. 236.
- 427 Hawthorne, 'Rappaccini's Daughter', p. 105 (see p. 633 above).
- 428 cf. p. 610 above.
- 429 see Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 85.
- 430 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 99, 101.
- 431 cf. *ibid.*, p. 99.
- 432 cf. p. 661 above.
- 433 cf. pp. 606-608 above.
- 434 Lewis, The Monk, p. 89 (see p. 622 above).
- 435 *ibid.*, p. 232 (see above, *loc. cit.*).
- 436 Byron, Don Juan, IV-XLIII (see p. 626 above).
- 437 Shelley, Zastrozzi, pp. 30, 59 (see pp. 627-28 above).
- 438 Keats, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', IV (see p. 632 above).
- 439 Hawthorne, 'Rappaccini's Daughter', p. 97 (see p. 633 above).
- 440 Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, pp. 16, 102 (see p. 636 above).
- 441 Byron, Cain (1821), in Poetical Works.
- 442 Byron, *op. cit.*, III-I, 503.
- 443 *ibid.*, 559.
- 444 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, p. 467.
- 445 cf. pp. 626-27 above.
- 446 see Zanger, 'Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge', pp. 538-39;

- cf. pp. 642-43 above.
- 447 Cixous, 'Poe re-lu', p. 318; cf. p. 642 above.
- 448 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, pp. 224-36; cf. above, loc. cit.
- 449 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 735-36.
- 450 see Mabbott (M II, 664n); cf. pp. 609-10 above.
- 451 cf. p. 608 above.
- 452 Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 352; cf. above, loc. cit.
- 453 cf. pp. 664-65 above.
- 454 Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 273.
- 455 cf. pp. 627-28 above.
- 456 cf. pp. 633-36 above.
- 457 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 262-63.
- 458 cf. p. 598 above.
- 459 Bennett, '"The Madness of Art"', p. 5; cf. p. 641 above.
- 460 Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, p. 242.
- 461 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, passim, esp. pp. 538-40.
- 462 cf. p. 619 above.
- 463 Mabbott (M II, 307).
- 464 cf. p. 619 above.
- 465 cf. pp. 640-41 above.
- 466 cf. p. 620 above.
- 467 cf. p. 635 above.
- 468 Mabbott (M II, 335n).
- 469 A. H. Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 213.
- 470 Koster, 'Poe, Romance and Reality', p. 10.
- 471 cf. p. 657 above.
- 472 cf. *ibid.*
- 473 cf. p. 658 above.
- 474 cf. p. 660 above.

- 475 cf. p. 664 above.
- 476 cf. pp. 584-85 above.
- 477 see Mabbott (M II, 221).
- 478 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 168.
- 479 cf. p. 640 above.
- 480 Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 222.
- 481 cf. p. 642 above.
- 482 Bonaparte, loc. cit.
- 483 cf. p. 642 above.
- 484 Cixous, 'Poe re-lu', p. 316.
- 485 cf. pp. 642-43 above.
- 486 see Zanger, 'Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge', pp. 538-39.
- 487 cf. Chapter 2, p. 120.
- 488 Poe's 'Hymn' (1833) (originally titled 'Catholic Hymn') appears in M I, 217-18; it was printed in the first version of 'Morella', and in subsequent texts until its removal in 1842 (see M II, 227-28 and 232n).
- 489 There are 8 texts of 'Morella' (see M II, 224-25 for details); Mabbott prints the 1848 text (copy of the version printed in the Broadway Journal (21 June 1845), with manuscript revisions). The 1842 text, from which the poem was deleted, is that of 1840 (Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque), with manuscript revisions.
- 490 cf. Zanger, op. cit., p. 538.
- 491 cf. pp. 660, 664 above.
- 492 Zanger, loc. cit.
- 493 cf. p. 660 above.
- 494 cf. pp. 664-70 above.
- 495 Thompson, Poe's Fiction, p. 168
- 496 Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweete, 'Poe's Satiric Use of Vampirism in "Berenice"', PoeS, 14, No. 2 (December 1981), 23-24.
- 497 Blythe and Sweete, op. cit., p. 23.
- 498 Baudelaire, 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa Vie et ses Ouvrages' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 3), p. 1035.

- 499 *ibid.*
- 500 *ibid.*, p. 1037.
- 501 Lanati, 'Una Ligeia, cento Ligeie' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 104), p. 49.
- 502 Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 213.
- 503 see *ibid.*, p. 218.
- 504 Cixous, 'Poe re-lu', p. 317.
- 505 Moretti, 'The Dialectic of Fear', p. 79.
- 506 *ibid.*, p. 82.
- 507 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 708-13, 718-24.
- 508 Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 216.
- 509 cf. p. 682 above.
- 510 cf. Chapter 2, p. 106.
- 511 cf. *ibid.*, pp. 107-108.
- 512 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 709-11.
- 513 cf. Chapter 1, Part 1, pp. 29-30; Chapter 6, Part 2, p. 718.
- 514 Mabbott prints 'Berenicé' throughout (except in the title), adding the diaeresis to correspond to the pronunciation of the name in the period (see M II, 219n). However, as this addition is editorial, it has not been followed here.
- 515 cf. p. 677 above.
- 516 cf. Lanati, 'Una Ligeia, cento Ligeie', p. 54.
- 517 Moretti, 'The Dialectic of Fear', p. 82.
- 518 cf. p. 682 above.
- 519 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, pp. 734-36.
- 520 cf. pp. 612-13 above.
- 521 Stoker, Dracula (see Chapter 4, Part 2, note 22), pp. 252-53.
- 522 For the textual history of 'Berenice', see Mabbott (M II, 208); Mabbott prints the text of Works (1850).
- 523 see Mabbott (M II, 217n); the passage was deleted in the Broadway Journal text (5 April 1845).
- 524 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 218.

- 525 cf. p. 682 above.
- 526 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 263-64.
- 527 Baudelaire, 'Edgar Poe, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 4), p. 1054.
- 528 Cortázar, 'El poeta, el narrador y el crítico' (see Chapter 2, note 6), p. 46.

CHAPTER 6, PART 2

- 1 There are 6 texts of 'The Fall of the House of Usher', i.e.: A (Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, September 1839); B (Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, 1840); C (copy of B with manuscript changes, 1842); D (Tales, 1845); E (Rufus Griswold, ed., Prose Writers of America, 1847); F (Works, 1850) (see Mabbott, M II, 396; Mabbott prints D).
- 2 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 276-77; Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 574-75.
- 3 cf. Jean Ricardou, 'L'histoire dans l'histoire' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 73), pp. 712-13; cf. Chapter 1, Part 3, p. 46.
- 4 see Mabbott (M II, 417n).
- 5 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 637-40.
- 6 Darrell Abel, 'A Key to the House of Usher', UTQ, XVIII (January 1949), 176-85.
- 7 Abel, op. cit., p. 185.
- 8 see J. O. Bailey, 'What Happens in "The Fall of the House of Usher"?' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 25), passim.
- 9 Mabbott (M II, 394).
- 10 Todorov, Introduction à la littérature fantastique (see Chapter 1, Part 2, note 2), p. 53.
- 11 I. M. Walker, 'The "Legitimate Sources" of Terror in "The Fall of the House of Usher"', MLR, 61 (1966), 585-92.
- 12 G. R. Thompson, 'The Face in the Pool: Reflections on the Doppelgänger Motif in "The Fall of the House of Usher"', PoeS, 6, No. 1 (June 1973), 16-20.
- 13 see Thompson, Poe's Fiction, pp. 87-97 (NB: reference to Thompson's reading will, for 'Usher', be made to his 1973 article rather than to his book of the same year; the basic argument is the same in both).
- 14 see Walker, 'The "Legitimate Sources" of Terror', pp. 587-89



(he cites Thomas C. Upham, Elements of Mental Philosophy (Portland, 1837)) (see Walker, op. cit., p. 588 and n).

- 15 see Walker, op. cit., p. 591.
- 16 Thompson, 'The Face in the Pool', p. 19.
- 17 see Bailey, 'What Happens ...?', pp. 462-63.
- 18 Thompson, loc. cit.
- 19 see Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (see Chapter 6, Part 1, note 335), pp. 120-24.
- 20 ibid., p. 121.
- 21 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, pp. 237-50.
- 22 see ibid., p. 249.
- 23 Allen Tate, 'Our Cousin, Mr Poe' (1949), rpt. in Essays of Four Decades (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968), pp. 385-400.
- 24 Tate, op. cit., p. 394.
- 25 Mabbott (M II, 395).
- 26 Julian Symons, The Tell-Tale Heart (see Chapter 3, Part 2, note 22), p. 240.
- 27 Cortázar, 'El poeta, el narrador y el crítico' (see Chapter 2, note 6), p. 46.
- 28 John L. Marsh, 'The Psycho-Sexual Reading of "The Fall of the House of Usher"', PoeS, 5, No. 1 (June 1972), 8-9.
- 29 Marsh, op. cit., p. 8.
- 30 see ibid., p. 9.
- 31 Renata R. M. Wasserman, 'The Self, the Mirror, the Other: "The Fall of the House of Usher"', PoeS, 10, No. 2 (December 1977), 33-35.
- 32 Wasserman, op. cit., p. 35.
- 33 Jackson, Fantasy (see Chapter 1, Part 2, note 15), p. 109.
- 34 Gerald M. Garmon, 'Roderick Usher: Portrait of the Madman as an Artist', PoeS, 6, No. 1 (June 1973), 11-14.
- 35 Garmon, op. cit., p. 12.
- 36 cf. p. 697 above.
- 37 Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 385.

- 38 see Mabbott (M II, 421n).
- 39 Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 108), p. 80.
- 40 cf. below, passim.
- 41 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 686-87.
- 42 Thompson, 'The Face in the Pool', p. 16.
- 43 cf. pp. 717-24 below.
- 44 cf. pp. 741-50 below.
- 45 Thompson, loc. cit.
- 46 see Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 249.
- 47 Daniel Hoffman, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, p. 313.
- 48 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, p. 686.
- 49 'Inquisitorum' is Mabbott's emendation from 'Inquisitorium' (all texts) (see M II, 409n).
- 50 see Mabbott (M II, 421n).
- 51 Praz, The Romantic Agony, p. 453n,
- 52 see Marsh, 'The Psycho-Sexual Reading', p. 9.
- 53 cf. pp. 724-25 below.
- 54 cf. pp. 789-91 below.
- 55 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 650-52, 683-84.
- 56 cf. Chapter 2, p. 80.
- 57 Elizabeth Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe - An American Imagination (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 218), p. 115.
- 58 Foucault, Madness and Civilization (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 216), pp. 117-58.
- 59 see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 216.
- 60 cf. p. 695 above.
- 61 David W. Butler, 'Usher's Hypochondriasis: Mental Alienation and Romantic Idealism in Poe's Gothic Tales', AL, 48 (March 1976), 1-12.
- 62 E. Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe, pp. 99-142.

- 63 Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p. 158.
- 64 *ibid.*, p. 132.
- 65 Thomas Willis, Opera omnia (Lyon, 1681), quoted in Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 121 (no page reference given).
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- 67 *ibid.*, p. 125.
- 68 *ibid.*, p. 126.
- 69 O.E.D., entry: 'Animal Spirits'.
- 70 Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
- 71 Willis, Opera omnia, quoted in Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 122 (no page reference given).
- 72 Foucault, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-27.
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- 76 *ibid.*, I-LXXXIII.
- 77 Byron, 'Detached Thoughts' (15 October 1821), in Letters and Journals (see Chapter 2, note 97), IX, 38.
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- 79 *ibid.*, p. 127.
- 80 *ibid.*, p. 125.
- 81 Charles-Gaspard de la Rive, 'Sur un établissement pour la guérison des aliénés' (Bibliothèque britannique, VIII - no date given), quoted in Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 130 (no page reference given).
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- 84 *ibid.*, p. 137.
- 85 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 686-87.
- 86 see Mabbott (M II, 217n).
- 87 E. Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 150n.

- 88 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 137-38.
- 89 Shelley, Julian and Maddalo (written 1818, published 1824), in Poetical Works.
- 90 Shelley, op. cit., 595.
- 91 Willis, Opera omnia, quoted in Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p. 131 (no page reference given).
- 92 Foucault, op. cit., p. 133 (no details given of the source).
- 93 ibid., p. 126.
- 94 ibid., p. 135.
- 95 Robert James, Dictionnaire universel de médecine (French trans., 1746-48; no date given for original), quoted in Foucault, loc. cit. (no page reference given).
- 96 cf. pp. 692-93 above.
- 97 see Foucault, op. cit., p. 137.
- 98 Baudelaire, 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa Vie et ses Ouvrages', p. 1035.
- 99 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 683-84.
- 100 cf. pp. 714-17 below.
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- 102 O.E.D., entry: 'Hysteria'.
- 103 Symons, The Tell-Tale Heart, p. 237.
- 104 Bonaparte, Edgar Poe, p. 241.
- 105 cf. pp. 724-27 below.
- 106 cf. p. 718 below.
- 107 see E. Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe, p. 121.
- 108 Baudelaire, 'Edgar Poe, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres', p. 1058.
- 109 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, 'La Chute de la Maison Usher' (1855; Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires, 1857), in Poe, Oeuvres en Prose, pp. 349-69.
- 110 Poe, trans. Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 364.
- 111 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 299-300.
- 112 Baudelaire, 'Le mauvais Vitrier' (see Chapter 3, Part 2, note 358), p. 239.

- 113 cf. Chapter 4, Part 2, pp. 400-401.
- 114 The 'sic' is Freud's own interpolation.
- 115 Freud, An Autobiographical Study (see Chapter 4, Part 2, note 57), p. 15.
- 116 Coleridge, introduction to 'The Three Graves' (see Chapter 2, note 18), p. 268.
- 117 Byron, letter to R. C. Dallas (21 August 1811), in Letters and Journals, II, 75.
- 118 Collins, The Moonstone (see Chapter 2, note 122), p. 422; cf. Kayman, 'A Responsabilidade Moral' (see Chapter 2, note 127), p. 209n.
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- 127 Feuchtersleben, *loc. cit.*, quoted in Veith, *loc. cit.*
- 128 Jean-Martin Charcot, Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1889), cited in Veith, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
- 129 see Veith, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-73.
- 130 see *ibid.*, pp. 196-97.
- 131 see *ibid.*, p. 166.
- 132 see *ibid.*, p. 194.

- 133 see *ibid.*, p. 167.
- 134 see *ibid.*, p. 202.
- 135 see *ibid.*, pp. 190-91.
- 136 see *ibid.*, pp. 201-203.
- 137 see *ibid.*, p. 195.
- 138 see *ibid.*, pp. 201-202.
- 139 Robert Whytt, Nervous, Hypochondriac or Hysterical Disorders (1764; 3rd edn., Edinburgh: J. Balfour, 1767), quoted in Veith, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
- 140 see Veith, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- 141 *ibid.*, p. 195.
- 142 Foucault, Madness and Civilization, pp. 155-56.
- 143 *ibid.*, p. 157.
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- 145 cf. pp. 717-24 below.
- 146 see Butler, 'Usher's Hypochondriasis', p. 1.
- 147 *ibid.*, p. 10.
- 148 see Veith, Hysteria: The History of a Disease, p. 162.
- 149 see *ibid.*, p. 172.
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- 158 see Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- 159 see Rush, Medical Inquiries, p. 318, quoted in Butler, *loc. cit.*
- 160 cf. p. 695 above.
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- 163 see Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 8n.
- 164 Byron, Journal (Ravenna) (2 February 1821), in Letters and Journals, VIII, 42.
- 165 cf. p. 710 above.
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- 167 Melville, 'Benito Cereno' (see Chapter 2, note 237), p. 264.
- 168 *ibid.*, pp. 224, 238, 264.
- 169 *ibid.*, p. 224.
- 170 *ibid.*, p. 238.
- 171 *ibid.*, p. 239.
- 172 *ibid.*, p. 224.
- 173 Many of these points are noted in Walker, 'The "Legitimate Sources" of Terror', pp. 588-90.
- 174 cf. p. 710 above.
- 175 cf. p. 713 above.
- 176 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 134-37.
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- 178 see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 194.
- 179 see *ibid.*, note 195.
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- 181 Freud, 'Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks' (1909), *ibid.*, pp. 97-102.

- 182 Freud, 'Dora', p. 72.
- 183 *ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
- 184 *ibid.*, p. 156.
- 185 *cf.* pp. 697-700 above.
- 186 *cf.* pp. 742-43 above.
- 187 *cf.* pp. 711-12 above.
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- 189 Freud, 'Frau Emmy von N.', in Freud and Breuer, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-68 (p. 161n).
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- 191 *ibid.*, p. 89.
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- 193 Freud, 'Fräulein Elisabeth von R.', in Freud and Breuer, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-55 (p. 203).
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- 195 *ibid.*, p. 101.
- 196 *cf.* p. 699 above.
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- 203 *ibid.*, p. 199.
- 204 *ibid.*, p. 200.
- 205 *ibid.*, p. 206.
- 206 *cf.* p. 713 above.
- 207 *cf.* p. 710 above.



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- 209 *ibid.*, p. 253.
- 210 *ibid.*, p. 138.
- 211 *ibid.*, p. 155.
- 212 *ibid.*, p. 179.
- 213 *ibid.*, p. 279.
- 214 *cf.* Chapter 2, p. 106.
- 215 Kayman, 'A Responsabilidade Moral', p. 191.
- 216 Collins, *loc. cit.*
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- 220 Shelley, 'Prince Athanase' (written 1817, published 1824), in Poetical Works.
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- 223 *ibid.*, 234-35.
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- 225 see Shelley, Julian and Maddalo (see note 89 above), 424-28.
- 226 Balzac, Louis Lambert (see Chapter 4, Part 2, note 13), p. 438.
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- 229 *cf.* pp. 700-702 above.
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- 231 Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, p. 296.
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- 233 *cf.* Laplanche and Pontalis, *loc. cit.*
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- 235 see Freud, 'Schreber' (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 197), pp. 200-203.

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- 250 *ibid.*, p. 152.
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- 296 cf. pp. 746-50 below.
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- 298 cf. Chapter 1, Part 2, p. 36.
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- 300 cf. p. 724 above.
- 301 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 650-51.
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- 303 cf. Chapter 3, Part 2, pp. 289-90.
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- 310 Lanati, 'Una Ligeia, cento Ligeie' (see Chapter 1, Part 3, note 104), p. 48; cf. Chapter 1, Part 3, p. 49, Chapter 2, p. 120, and Chapter 6, Part 1, p. 682.
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- 313 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 598-99.
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- 320 *ibid.*, p. 74.
- 321 *ibid.*, p. 80.
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- 323 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 669-70.
- 324 see Thompson, 'The Face in the Pool', p. 17.
- 325 see Mabbott (M II, 404n).
- 326 see *ibid.* (M II, 419n).
- 327 cf. pp. 692-93 above.
- 328 cf. pp. 700-702 above.
- 329 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, passim.
- 330 see Thompson, 'The Face in the Pool', p. 17.
- 331 cf. pp. 695-96 above.
- 332 Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- 333 Punter, The Literature of Terror, p. 206.

- 334 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, passim.
- 335 cf. pp. 695-96 above.
- 336 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, pp. 354-55.
- 337 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, p. 660.
- 338 cf. Chapter 4, Part 1, p. 376, and Part 2, pp. 410-11.
- 339 Balzac, Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes (see Chapter 4, Part 1, note 323), p. 1026.
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- 341 cf. Chapter 6, Part 1, pp. 609-11.
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- 352 Shakespeare, *op. cit.*, III-IV, 116-17.
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- 354 Wasserman, 'The Self, the Mirror, the Other', p. 34.
- 355 cf. Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
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- 361 Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 365; cf. Freud, Totem and Taboo (1913), in The Origins of Religion (Pelican Freud Library XIII) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 49-224 (pp. 207-20).
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- 363 cf. Chapter 1, Part 1, pp. 21-22.
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- 368 cf. pp. 745-49 above.
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- 538 cf. p. 770 above.
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- 637 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 87-90.
- 638 Wilbur, loc. cit.
- 639 cf. pp. 825-26 above.

640 cf. p. 713 above.

641 cf. Baudelaire, 'Symptômes de Ruine' (see pp. 777-78 above).

### CONCLUSION

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- 3 cf. Chapter 5, Part 1, p. 472.
- 4 cf. Chapter 6, Part 2, p. 823.
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- 8 cf. Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (see Chapter 1, Part 1, note 108), pp. 88-126.
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- 11 cf. Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 507-10.
- 12 cf. Chapter 2, pp. 124-25.
- 13 cf. Chapter 1, Part 4, pp. 69-70.
- 14 cf. Chapter 1, Part 3, p. 44.
- 15 cf. Chapter 1, Part 1, pp. 4-7.
- 16 cf. Chapter 1, Part 2, p. 38; Chapter 5, Part 2, pp. 510-11.
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NOTE:

1) The bibliography is divided into the following sections:

A) PRIMARY: 1) Works of Poe; 2) Translations of Poe's works;  
3) Other primary texts;

B) SECONDARY: 4) Criticism on Poe's works; 5) Criticism on other  
writers' works/Literary history; 6) Theory and  
History; 7) Miscellaneous.

2) Some texts are included in more than one section. Where this is  
the case, the full reference is generally given at the first  
occurrence in the bibliography, with subsequent reference(s) being  
made in abbreviated form, with the relevant cross-reference. In  
a few cases, however, where the first reference is parenthetical,  
the main reference will be found at the more appropriate place.

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N.B.: For Baudelaire's translations of Poe, the following abbreviations

are used: HE = Histoires extraordinaires (1856); HGS = Histoires grotesques et sérieuses (1865); NHE = Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires (1857).

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