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DESIGNS IN INDETERMINACY: A STUDY OF POE AND MALLARME

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Fred Nichols
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

For my father and mother

. . . the inner idea stamped upon the mass of exterior matter, the indivisible exhibited in diversity.

Plotinus, Ennead III

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INTRODUCTION

> We do not know: we can only guess. And our guesses are guided by the unscientific, the metaphysical (though biologically explicable) faith in laws, in regularities which we uncover--discover.
>
> Karl Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery

I have written the following study in something like the experimental spirit in which it was conceived. These essays do not offer a general or critical introduction to the works of Poe and Mallarmé. They attempt to pose a question: how the acceptance of formal limitations and excessively precise language ends up suggesting the indefinite. My purpose is to make suggestions, and perhaps assumptions, to initiate discussion, rather than to solve the problems raised.

I have long been interested in the linguistic expression of the inexpressible. Augustine, Cusanus and Bruno taught me the rules of silence. And Mallarmé's "attente" before the composition of a purity, left to words the task of both containing and consecrating the truth of the universe. In reading Poe's cosmology, Eureka, I recognized affinities with Mallarmé that I had not known. In this study, I explore these affinities, and I stress the similarity rather than the difference between the two writers.

Efforts toward an essential unity, proferred equivalences between the symmetry of cosmos and poem, a cult of Beauty as sacred mystery, are concerns pervasive in the intellectual landscape of nineteenth

and early twentieth century literature. As many critics have noted, the aesthetic theories of both Poe and Mallarmé address these themes. What interests me, however, is not their vision of an unknowable Beauty, but rather the move toward the indefinite through craft. They endeavor not to represent some dream-dimmed state antithetical to knowledge, but instead to present the movement toward a potential unity. The coalescence into order is a function of how one conceives. Although they both proclaim a longing for Beauty, I wonder whether this is their aim, or whether they impose an aesthetic objective on their work as a cover to veil their limitless ambition to capture the language of the cosmos.

If we attempt to understand their hyperbolic calls for beauty as a screen for a real emphasis on method, we can see a coincidence in the apparent contradiction between a Poe committed to the rationalism of Descartes and a spiritualist in pursuit of a "supernal loveliness." For Poe and Mallarmé, the two poles of art, intuitive and rational, coexist. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe insists that the results of the "analyst," though appearing to have "the whole air of intuition," are "brought about by the very soul and essence of method."

Poe is not the normal aspirer after an infinite, the "romantic" who longs to lose the self and the work in a beyond, vaguely determined, but powerfully felt. He aspires to draw bounds, and he uses the rigors of an atomistic method to hint at the shadowy and intangible realms. The inexpressible idea is in no way synonymous with the language employed. The language is not indefinite, nor "impression-

istic." Aware of the bounds of sense, Poe confines himself to the phenomenal in order to transcend the limits of rational thought. In the terms of Eureka's "philosopher proper" (Valéry's modern poet), Poe's "frenzy takes a very determinate turn."

The design in Eureka, Poe's formation of "the possible attempt at an impossible conception" displays how an abstract idea comes into being through form. As I continued to work through the text, I realized that I had to change my focus from vision to method in the attempt to accomodate my analysis to Poe's concerns. More important, I realized that his method led quite naturally to Mallarmé's poetic.

Neither Mallarmé nor Poe delude themselves into an ideal of poet as "génie" whose mere utterance can count as recreation. As Poe paraphrases the Baron de Bielfeld": "the mind of man can imagine nothing which does not exist:--if it could, it would create not only ideally, but substantially--as do the thoughts of God." Firmly grounded in a Cartesian sense of order and a respect for the self-cognizance of thought, they desire not to create the ideal. They are far too lucid for such a hope. Rather, they attempt to suggest idea, while alternately affirming and denying the possibility. This vacillation becomes part of their evolving exercise of craft.

Theirs is a constructed imprecision, made up of things contradictory to essence: circumscription, a formal measure, an emphasis on the materiality of words and on their necessary alliance with nature's intentions. This led me to what I call the method of indeterminacy. The method itself comprises the fiction that gives

rise to the allusion that is a final harmony.

I realize that in appropriating a term well-known in physics and philosophy, I perhaps give rise to expectations that I cannot fulfill. I use the word with the hope of extending its specificity to literary analysis. I employ indeterminacy to mean the constructive process that leads to the effect of indefiniteness; used in this way, the term connotes not merely a state or property ascribable to language, such as indefiniteness or imprecision, but also presents a process. Particular procedures form the structure of the work, while the objective characterization of irresoluteness gives rise to a kind of order.

Under diverse forms and guises, through a materialization of doubt in lexical and syntactic oscillations, language tends to the spirituality of the most intangible speculation. The pendular movement of contradictory, yet very precise determinations, generates the effect of vagueness. Any imprecision that appears owes its existence not to an imprecision in the use of words, but rather to the excessive qualifications of matter as concrete elements in a defined space.

My analysis claims consistent closure as the strategy necessary to prove the method. Within a fixed frame, the artist presents an amorphous and irresolute space where a group of oscillations shuttle to and fro between notions antithetical as well as complimentary. This uneasy discord is essential to and part of the final accord.

In a language constructed with great respect for bounds, the deliberateness of composition presents itself at every point--"the compound as a general rule," in Poe's words. Yet, despite the tight-

ness of the network, the reader is left with a sharply rendered indistinctness, a tangible presentation of thought's processes. The success of the verbal design depends, finally, upon the suggestion of idea.

This mimicry of an effort at cogitation demands that the reader take part in the formation of a whole. Thus, my emphasis on a close analysis of texts. Besides Eureka, I examine "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage." I also study Mallarmé's Igitur and "Une Dentelle s'abolit." These specific works, which I do not assert as their best, exhibit the artist's pretensions to framing and his possibilities of feigning. The procedure of the game and our involvement in it has to do with how we observe. Linked to the space wherein we can imagine, it takes form as the solving of a problem, an apparently impenetrable mystery or puzzle: for example, Poe's "utmost conceivable expanse of space" or Mallarmé's "nuit d'interrogation et d'absence."

The adventure lies not in the final discovery of an order, but in the journey toward it, the "tending to the formation of the idea designed" (Eureka). Admittedly, each analysis is a subjective approach toward an objectification of the functions related, a search for a basic law that evolves out of the processes of the text. I attempt to show that beyond the discords and assymetries, and the unsettleness, there is a larger unity that coincides with the final effect.

What is observed is, in many ways, dependent upon the observer. I owe a great debt to the work of Kenneth Burke, to his search for the formal patterns that can "awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us." His Rhetoric of Motives.

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CHAPTER ONE

MAKING THE FRAME: THE PLOT OF POE'S EUREKA

> 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 ever green 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.
>
> Edgar Allan Poe, A Review of Drake-Halleck, 1836

"I DESIGN BUT TO SUGGEST"

Poe's labor to combine chosen words to form his preconceived "Art-Product" involves him in compelling repetitions of intent. The designing power presents itself as the fundamental act of poetizing, which is giving a frame to.[1] To "mean to designate," to "take a phrase of limitation," "to design to speak of," carries out "the ultimate design" of Eureka, the totality of effect that Poe claims as fundamental to his poetic. These clear-cut intentions, repeated in plain terms, draw our attention to what the creator proposes to do. Yet, while claiming a desire to communicate, Poe deftly inhibits the understanding. Seemingly apprehensible declarations of intent gradually insinuate themselves into a larger scheme, a fabric of relations largely unintelligible and beyond definite statement.

In Eureka, bearing as it does two subtitles, "A Prose Poem" and "An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe," a correlation is implied between the aesthetics and the metaphysics. The effect created by reading the composition suggests, through the delineation of setting (achieved through iterative declarations of intent), an ultimate unity. Its cosmogony demonstrates an uncommon similarity between the effect produced and the subject matter, an idea and its reification in the text.

Unity of effect requires the proclaimed finitude of ground that characterizes Poe's other enclosed spaces. The substance of Poe's universe, its "oneness," comes to be figured forth through his "in-

tuition" that, as artist, he can draw round it in words. This drive towards enclosure--calls for measure and quantity--and the need to erect boundaries for the purposes of discussion, specify the setting wherein will be observed the subtle, because inarticulated, move toward indeterminacy.

The greatness of Eureka and its centrality for our purposes, lies in the fact that Poe's announcing "I design to speak of" reveals itself as marker for his ability to make matters once articulated, definitively obscure. In "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe writes that "it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes--that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment."[2] To induce a desired effect in the reader requires a conscious and persistant artificing. In Eureka, at least before the lyrical and expansive conclusion, Poe willfully elaborates on man's limitation, the finitude of the human imagination. Unlike the creations of the necessarily absolute God, whose existence Poe readily admits, mortals cannot elicit such reciprocity of cause and effect:

> In Divine constructions the object is either design or object as we choose to regard it--and we may take at any time a cause for an effect, or the converse--so that we can never absolutely decide which is which.[3]

This indeterminacy, here presented as an interchangeability of ends and means,is a sign of infinite spirit. Poe dramatizes man's inability to effect that mutuality necessary to perfection, to completeness of "plot." He contrasts this mutuality of adaptation with human con-

structions where a particular cause has a particular effect, the intent ever distinguished from the consummation:

> 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.
> (p. 66)

What is the nature of this description of God's excellence in design, a design so perfect that intent reflects infinitely upon result? Sober artisan Poe is shrewdly making a comment about the complex design of his prose essay which he claims must ultimately be judged as Poem.

Poe's tacit attempt to create the verbal equivalent of a "perfect consistency" (considered by Poe as the true essence of the universe) results in the quite obvious artfulness of Eureka. The artifices of the "literary histrio" constitute no embarrassment for Poe. His best tales portray the means by which he constructs the effect. 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"[4] are reenacted for the sake of the reader. This reader finds that despite all the trappings of fabrication, an effect has been created whose singular impression defies comprehension, or more precisely, paraphrase. The artificiality of Eureka becomes a linguistic phenomenon, a studied ambiguity that the formal constraints, elaborately detailed, make possible. In declaring that he cannot, and therefore will not express, that he must fail to sound the illimitable depths of

God's ways, Poe ends by mimicking the ineffability of the Godhead within his own compass of ultimate reciprocity.

His contrived restriction to initially "frame the idea of a limited space" (p. 19), to confine himself to a predetermined area, brings to mind the purported analysis of how he wrote "The Raven." The care with which he defines the limits of his poetic endeavor amounts to the choice of a closed chamber:

> For this [the "locale" of the poem] the most natural suggestion might seem to be a forest, or the fields--but 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.[5]

This deliberate "vignetting" becomes the cadre necessary for the ensuing rituals of disarticulation.[6] To achieve a certain impression, in exclusive pursuance of "some amount of suggestiveness--some undercurrent, however indefinite, of meaning,"[7] Poe works to close off the setting to be transformed. In endeavoring to draw firm contours around everything illimitable, everything that is possible, he designs to unlimit language though apparently accepting its bounds.

His real labor of composition is to find "terms" to convey a something perhaps "too shadowy . . . to be re-stated."[8] Eureka begins with the writer's petition for words adequate to his matter:

> What terms shall I find sufficiently simple in their sublimity--sufficiently sublime in their simplicity--for the mere enunciation of my theme?
> (p. 9)

Poe voices his awareness of the poverty of words, the realization

that "words are vague things."[9] In Ligeia, for example, he struggles to embody for the reader just what it was he found so odd in his beloved's eyes. He pits mere word against the imponderable:

> The 'strangeness,' however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the expression. Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we entrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual.[10]

If, as in "Tamerlane," the poet has "no words--alas!--to tell," he dramatizes the temptation to fall into formlessness before that which outstrips his powers of imaging, feeling "The letters--with their meaning--melt/To fantasies--with none."[11]

Words, then, threaten to fail in the attempt to communicate the inexpressible. They deceive us into thinking that we have succeeded where we have not--that we can know the unknowable. Pushed to their limits, however, by a writer who knows how to delimit, words can, perhaps, bring the "soul often to a glimpse of things supernal and eternal--to the very verge of the great secrets."[12] This is Poe's aim. Through the protracted articulation of overreaching, his words promise a way to turn toward "a point in the vague infinity."[13]

In an essay in the Marginalia, those "pencillings" made "because the mind of the reader wishes to unburden itself of a thought,"[14] Poe reveals his concern with human discourse, its limitations and its possibilities. Aware that language when properly employed, can shape and fix our thoughts, Poe writes that the "mere act of inditing tends, in a great degree, to the logicalization of thought."[15] In the same

essay, he continues:

> Whenever, on account of its vagueness, I am dissatisfied with a conception of the brain, I ressort forthwith to the pen, for the purpose of obtaining, its aid, the necessary form, consequence and precision.
>
> How very commonly we hear it remarked, that such and such thoughts are beyond the compass of words! I do not believe that any thought, properly so called, is out of the reach of language. I fancy . . . that where difficulty in expression is experienced, there is, in the intellect which experiences it, a want either of deliberateness or of method. For my own part, I have never had a thought which I could not set down in words with even more distinctness than that with which I conceived it; as I have before observed, the thought is logicalized by the effort at (written) expression.[16]

The belief in the "power of words" to instantiate a concept does not contradict Poe's alternate reassertions of linguistic deficiency. In this essay he makes the significant distinction between these "thoughts, properly so called" and what he calls a "class of fancies," emphasizing that it is the latter alone that defy his expression:

> There is, however, a class of fancies, of exquisite delicacy, which are not thoughts, and to which, as yet, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language.[17]

These "shadows of shadows" (the "unthought-like thoughts" of Eureka) are distinguished from what we can think. They are the impossible conceptions that haunt Poe, the unthinkables that underlie and direct his aesthetic.

When he becomes aware of these "fancies," he experiences an "ecstasy . . . of a character supernal to the human nature . . . a glimpse of the spirit's outer world." His alleged longing to volun-

tarily induce the condition of ecstasy (a being put out of place, un-earthed, so to speak) is localized again in a linguistic bind--the need to make words express the previously inexpressed, and therefore, inconceivable:

> Now, so entire is my faith in the power of words, that, at times, I have believed it possible to embody even the evanescence of fancies such as I have attempted to describe. [18]

His aspiration to embody "psychal impressions" is followed by the necessary restriction: consummation of his intention depends upon the imposition of a frame on the vague and the spiritual. As he insulated action in "The Raven" in order "to bring the mind into a proper frame for the dénouement," [19] Poe now imposes limits on himself with the goal of "inducing or compelling" a certain condition. "In experiments with this end in view," he attempts to summon the unearthly effect through an intentional bracketing of the self from all circumstances external to the desideratum. Nevertheless, Poe concludes, the circumstances favorable for producing the condition "are not the less rare--else had I compelled, already, the Heaven into the Earth." [20] Realizing that the artificial controlling of circumstances favorable to vision, making him, a mortal, momentarily aware of "the Spirit's outer world" is infrequent, if not impossible, he gives utterance at the essay's end to the tension that characterizes Eureka.

To draw the heaven down to the earth is not the point. Rather, he longs to force the all that is of heaven into a bounded space. Poe's universe, his plots, settings and points of vison, are all anthropocentric. His particular kind of musing, only "half-closing"

his eyes in order to then "double the beauty of an actual landscape,"[21] accentuates this necessary interaction of material and immaterial. Unlike those vain "thinkers-that-they-think with whom darkness and depth are synonymous," those deluded into blurring the bounds of the intellectual realm, Poe is aware that "the finest quality of Thought is its self-cognizance" (p. 19). And in thus articulating the restraining "compass of merely written words"[22]--a point beyond which it is impossible to say--he will exploit the human restriction. If what he aims to write lies beyond the compass of words, he will deviously set himself a limit to his making.

The tighter the limits he imposes on his imaginings, the greater the effect of his effort to imagine. As he takes on the admittedly difficult task of encircling the movement of thought as it pursues the unthinkable, using words to frame the limits, he entertains "a suggestive indefiniteness of meaning with the view of bringing about a definiteness of vague and therefore of spiritual effect."[23] Wistfully invoking that shadowy realm "Out of Space--out of Time,"[24] Poe calls himself to his craft. Once the spectral terms have been uttered by the dreamer, the heaven can be drawn into the earth. The artist will allude to the inexpressibly vast only then to wall it in. The vast expanse will progressively shrink to the proportions of his art; the art will alternately swell to the grandeur of the impossible conception.

To force the infinite into the finite medium of words, and yet, within this enclosure, to have that heaven retain its ideal, because measureless character, causes the uneasy shifting in terms that we

note throughout Eureka's pages. An oscillating movement, towards and away from that which no words can convey, directs its rhythms. The linguistic move to enclose a "Cosmogony of the Universe" is the "plot." The determining markers of intent, ostensibly keeping everything "within the limits of the accountable, the real,"[25] become nearly meaningless in the narrative sequence. "Ability or inability to conceive" (p. 13), proclaimed assertions of procedural intent, operate in alternation with considered impossibles. As I suggested, Poe frequently declares the framing to be made. Such a framing (we might say feigning)[26] of the idea of limits, allows him to figure the only heaven of consequence to the writer who has envisioned what "mere" words must act to encase, and through enclosure, move to inform:

> I mean to designate the utmost conceivable expanse of space, with all things, spiritual and material, that can be imagined to exist within the compass of that expanse.
>
> (p. 10)

- 2 -

"THE APPARENT IMPOSSIBILITY IS BRILLIANTLY SUGGESTIVE"

Conscious of the inadequacy of words to come to any conclusive answers about what is incomprehensible to man, Poe writes to James Russell Lowell:

> I have no belief in spirituality. I think the word a mere word. No one has really a conception of spirit. We cannot imagine what is not.[27]

In 1848, four years later, Eureka, considered by Poe as his greatest achievement, is published. Founded on a consistently declared impossibility, the work begins "with that merest of words, 'Infinity' (p. 17), uttered only to be dismissed. The rejection of the word, which "like 'God,' 'spirit,' and some other expressions of which the equivalents exist in nearly all languages" allows him to intimate his design in writing about what he claims to be beyond words. Each one of these "expressions," he explains:

> . . . is by no means the expression of an idea--but of an effort at one. It stands for the possible attempt at an impossible conception. Man needed a term by which to point out the direction of this effort--the cloud behind which lay, forever invisible, the object of this attempt. A word in fine, was demanded, by means of which one human being might put himself in relation at once with another human being and with a certain tendency of the human intellect. Out of this demand arose the word, 'Infinity,'; which is thus the representative but of the thought of a thought.
>
> (p. 17)

While clarifying the terms as mere, mere in their condition of unrelated generality and non-specificity, Poe yet remains certain that they point to an "effort," an "attempt" not to be dismissed. The effort to reach towards the utmost limits of imagining is itself worthy of representation. For this "certain tendency of the human intellect" is recognized as a thirst that "belongs to the immortality of man. . . . It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us--but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above."[28] The adventure lay not in the discovery of an idea, but in the journey toward it. To reconstruct the effort, the "tending to the formation

of the idea designed" (p. 19), ever moving toward some indefinite point, prompts Poe's writing of Eureka. The task devolves first upon a desire to transform the verbal artifact into a means of turning toward that which is "utterly beyond the grasp of the imagination" (p. 27). It then finds further justification in the writer's attempt to communicate the "tendency" of man's mind to his readers. "The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness" (analogous to the poetic effort)[29], far from resulting in a transcendental idealism or a mystic recoiling into the ineffable, emerges for Poe as a need to bring forth and transfer to another mind what lies within his own. To present tangibly those shadowy processes "out of the human analysis . . . beyond the utterance of the human tongue" (p. 20) demands his unique use of words--an unexpected method of inculcation.

In "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Una asks Monos to be more precise, to specify points in the telling, to determine further the time and the place of passage "through the dark Valley and Shadow." The answer given is the "feeling" which Poe works to transform into the structure of Eureka: "In Death we have both learned the propensity of man to define the indefinable."[30] Poe's way of approaching the indefinable is through a portrayal of his effort to circumscribe in words what is not merely infinite, but indeterminate, utterly lacking in precision and strict determination. Knowing that he cannot, in truth, use language to fix what remains unchanging, his language is never an end in itself, but rather a means to a greater awareness, an awareness not intellectual, but "psychal." This directs the operating

principles of the text. By constantly pushing the reader to the "point where only Intuition can aid us" (p. 20), we, with the artist, are enabled to look through the "Many" to the "One" (p. 50), to pass through words to the unseen. The passage from the material to the immaterial, to the "matter without matter" of Eureka's conclusion, gives the work a strongly Neoplatonic cast. The words point towards: "I design but to suggest" is Poe's acceptance of the impossibility of actually embodying in words the immutable idea and the consequent affirmation of his art of allusion.

What he, as creator, can achieve will be shown by his announcing of what he cannot do (for example, "I cannot conceive of Infinity"), and then, by what he will not do:[31]

> In the beginning, let me as distinctly as possible announce--not the theorem which I hope to demonstrate--for, whatever the mathematicians may assert, there is, in this world at least, no such thing as demonstration--but the ruling idea which, throughout this volume, I shall be continually endeavoring to suggest.
>
> (p. 10)

To move us out of "this world" requires another kind of understanding, made possible by a communication that can direct our thoughts toward a space from which reality and even meaning, normally considered, are excluded. To give shape to the "ruling idea" of his own designing, Poe says that he will not demonstrate, but rather aim to show that the conception for which we struggle in a word is something other than the word itself.

Words are entities with an incantatory power to suggest, not to constrict the "true" reality, although one of the ways they are made

to suggest is by feigning delimitation. In "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe makes a significant distinction between an inflated idealism and his poetical mode:

> . . . some amount of suggestiveness--some undercurrent, however indefinite of meaning . . . imparts to a work so much of that richness . . . which we are too fond of confounding with the ideal. It is the excess of suggested meaning--it is the rendering this the upper instead of the undercurrent of the theme--which turns into prose . . . the so-called poetry of the transcendentalists.[32]

Eureka's complexity lies in its allusiveness, in its power to suggest, while ever declaring that it means to be precise. Its theme is that "infinity" so readily negated, but in order to keep it latent, a frame is claimed. Saying that he seeks "more definitive conceptions" and adopts "the more definite expression," allows Poe to achieve his objective. Proscribing determinacy: "Now, distinctness-intelligibility, at all points is a primary feature in my general design" (p. 17), he prepares the reader for a process whereby his own defining statements merge into and become instruments of a more forceful, though tacit, indefining. The suggestivity operates in direct relation to the formal constraints called up, first limiting, only in the end, to enforce the sense of awe before the limitless. Eureka's plot can be seen as the means by which a prose work acts to become a poem.

The "Essay" begins with a preface that consecrates the effort, lifting up the finite and the transitory into a structure sublime in its intimations. Poe first declares that he addresses his words to an exclusive audience, "to those who feel rather than to those who

think--to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities." Making a crucial claim for his act, he offers his "Book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth, constituting it true" (p. 9). As we shall see, the beauty of the language and the truth of the telling rest in an absolutely functional relationship between artistic form and the inner meaning to be sought. The formation is absolutely dependent upon what Poe perceives to be spiritual truth. He writes only because he believes in the essential truth of what he relates, and it is this certainty of eternal meaning that moves him to search for the proper, outward form of expression. To make "Truth" and "Beauty" cohere is the "final design" that will negate his own tenet in "The Poetic Principle": "I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, 'a long poem,' is a flat contradiction of terms."[33] Eureka evolves through strategies of fusion; these strategies are announced in the preface where the seemingly contradictory words, "Truth," "Romance," "Art-Product," remain the steps toward an ultimate claim: "Nevertheless it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead" (p. 9).

The account begins with the "general proposition": "--In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (p. 10). It is based not upon what is, but upon what is not; even the assertions tend only to their own negation. The importance of the negative in Poe's aesthetic is emphasized when he explains that "originality . . . must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the high-

est class demands in its attainment less of invention than negation."[34] Eureka's progress is enclosed by negation; it both begins and ends with proclaimed impossibilities: first, the impossible conception of "infinity" (alluding to man's limitation in contrast with the Godhead) and last, "the utter impossibility of any one soul feeling itself inferior to another" (leading to a final transcendence of limits as all dissolves into "absolute Unity" and man is revealed as indistinguishable from God).

The end of Eureka is shrewdly imbedded in what Poe proposes as a possible beginning:

> It seems to me that, in aiming at this latter effect [individuality of impression] . . . . we require something like a mental gyration on the heel. We need so rapid a revolution of all things about the central point of sight that, while the minutiae vanish altogether, even the more conspicuous objects become blended into one. Among the vanishing minutiae, in a survey of this kind, would be all exclusively terrestrial matters.
>
> (pp. 10-11)

Such a survey, however, a tendency toward unity where distinct objects become inseparable in an undifferentiated blur is not directly announced by Poe as his method. His main argument opens instead with a distinction between two possible means of discussing the thesis, "The Universe":

> We may ascend or descend. Beginning at our own point of view--at the Earth on which we stand--we may pass to the other planets of our system--thence to the Sun--thence to our system considered collectively--and thence, through other systems, indefinitely outwards; or, commencing on high at some point as definite as we can make it or conceive it, we may come down to the habitation of Man.
>
> (p. 16)

Such moves toward and away from distinctness, from what we may or may not know, characterizes the rhythm of the work with its repetitions and reversals. Although here Poe pretends to be considering a choice between a method of induction or deduction, his endeavor is not to choose either. Yet, he continues to elaborate on the possibility of moving from "the known because proximate, gradually onward to the point where all certitude becomes lost in the remote" or a descent from remote realms to earth, claiming that for his "present purpose" he would choose the latter. He then undercuts the ostensible choice, casting what he has said into uncertainty. The paragraph ends with the impossibility of fixing anything definitely:

> --it is clear that a descent to small from great--to the outskirts from the centre (if we could establish a centre)--to the end from the beginning (if we could fancy a beginning) would be the preferable course, but for the difficulty, if not impossibility of presenting, in this course . . . a picture at all comprehensible in regard to such considerations as are involved in quantity. (p. 17)

The vagueness is deliberately structured. Each assertion, once made, is invalidated by the repeated hypothetical "if," causing the idea of establishing a center from which to begin or fancying a beginning from which to make an end highly questionable. Poe suspends the flow of the projected procedure, for one cannot start at a place that cannot be determined. He concludes that in order to make things comprehensible with regard to "quantity"--the defining terms that the reader needs in order to follow his argument--he will adopt the best in both methods. Such a yoking together of two apparently opposing

methods leads to that fluctuation between the multiple and the single, between "iteration in detail" and an indivisible "individuality of impression."

As I earlier indicated, before Poe begins to elaborate his cosmology, he dismisses the possibility of a human conception of infinity. He is even willing to lay down his a priori reason as a general rule:

> . . . as an individual, I may be permitted to say that I cannot conceive Infinity, and am convinced that no human being can.
>
> (p. 18)

The condemnation of "the folly of endeavoring to prove Infinity itself, or even our conception of it, by any such blundering ratiocination as that which is ordinarily employed" (p. 18) introduces his unique way of simulating the Infinite. He declares that "in using the phrase, 'Infinity of Space,'" he does not ask "the reader to entertain the impossible conception of an absolute infinity" (p. 19). He offers, rather, "the possible attempt an an impossible conception," and substitutes the "inconceivable" with the most that we can conceive:

> I refer simply to the 'utmost conceivable expanse' of space--a shadowy and fluctuating domain, now shrinking, now swelling, with the vacillating energies of the imagination.
>
> (p. 19)

In the attempt to delimit "the utmost conceivable expanse" Poe tries to remove that "fog of the mind" which "extending to the very boundaries of the mental domain, shuts out even these boundaries themselves from comprehension" (p. 19). Those who lean to the Infinite, cling-

ing to "the phantom of the idea" fail in their longing "for this impossible conception" only in thinking that there is a chance of "intellectually believing it when conceived" (p. 57). Poe's deliberate imprecisions evince a well-executed design. In endeavoring to manifest an immaterial realm that he professes "the Deity has not designed . . . to be solved" (p. 19), he describes his design: "displaying our ignorance of its awful character in the vacillation of the phraseology with which we endeavor to circumscribe it" (p. 24).

Recognition of the necessarily partial, ever inconclusive character of knowledge, of the impossibility of constructing a univocal representation of the universe, becomes Poe's way of transcending the limitations of rational thought. The initial restrictions ("Let us adopt the more definite expressions"), shrinking language to differentiated constructions, while he asserts impossibility of comprehension ("We know absolutely nothing of the nature or essence of God"), enables him to push knowledge to its utmost bounds. At this point, claiming an intuition "irresistible, although inexpressible" (p. 20), he stretches his language to reach beyond itself.

His endeavor to give a finite frame to what seems to be unlimited, makes his words, having been apparently constricted by pronounced intentions (framed, also, by the scientific lore of others), operate, finally, as an unlimited extension of words, if we could image such immensity. Poe continuously gives us the conceivable something through which the enormity of the effect he has induced can be measured. He

claims impossibility, and the claim itself becomes the means for transcendence: "In fact, while we find it impossible to fancy an end to space, we have no difficulty in picturing to ourselves any one of an infinity of beginnings" (p. 20). This end to space, apparently inconceivable, is the general proposition of his entire discourse, already cited: "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (p. 10). Clearly, the circumscription mimed emphasizes all the more strongly that which is within the announced bounds. And that which is within is nothing less than infinity.

The very frustrations with the limitations of human thought signifies the possibility of transcendence. Freedom to create appears almost always against the background of an artificial limitation. As Poe admits, in words crucial to our reading of Eureka: "The conditions here to be reconciled are difficult indeed--we cannot even comprehend the possibility of their conciliation:--nevertheless, the apparent impossibility is brilliantly suggestive" (p. 23). For Poe, the attempt to write about the unfathomable is all that can be assumed. He will expand on many notions, offer numerous possibilities of approach, and then, in turn, delimit, measure to define, in order to allude to that certain class of "ideas": "soul-reveries rather than conclusions or even considerations of the intellect" (p. 27). The struggle declaimed "against the monomaniac grasping at the infinite" (p. 66) is a scheme to undermine an attempt at "intellectual" understanding:

> The fact is, that, upon the enunciation of any one of that class of terms to which 'Infinity' belongs--the class representing thoughts of thought--he who has a right to say that he thinks at all, feels himself called on, not to entertain a conception, but simply to direct his mental vision toward some given point, in the intellectual firmament, where lies a nebula never to be solved.
>
> (p. 19)

Poe sets the scene for the artist who seeks to render the unformed. Suspending his own mental effort, extended to the "very boundaries of the mental domain" (p. 19), he manifests the endeavor in words. He represents the amorphous, unresolved space within which one is permitted to imagine, directing the reader toward that "given point . . . where lies a nebula" that cannot be solved. Ever tending to the composition of the idea (the framing of the incommensurable), he asks us to limit our assumptions: "Have we any right to infer?" "Have we, or have we not, an analogical right to the inference?" He then answers his own questions. Man has a "right" to infer or to imagine an "infinite extension" or "an interminable succession" of worlds (the earlier purported impossibles) according to his powers of intuition:

> I reply that the 'right,' in a case such as this, depends absolutely upon the hardihood of that imagination which ventures to claim the right. Let me declare, only, that, as an individual, I myself feel impelled to the fancy--without daring to call it more--that there does exist a limitless succession of Universes, more or less similar to that of which we have cognizance--to that of which alone we shall ever have cognizance--at the very least until the return of our particular Universe into Unity.
>
> (p. 57)

He accepts by intuition what he first dismissed by thought, "impelled to the fancy--without daring to call it more," recalling his earlier avoidance of any attempt to analyze what is "strictly spiritual," that which

> . . . lies in a recess impervious to our present understanding--lies involved in a consideration of what now --in our human state is not to be considered--in a consideration of Spirit in itself.
> (p. 23)

From not being able to conceive, he moves to "fancy,," and the known is transformed into the unthinkable. Moving in accord with imaginative energy, through relentless questioning and successive approximations, Poe tries to lead the reader "along this inconceivable road, until we reach its other extremity" (p. 63). There the reader may make that intuitive leap to grasp what he has already envisioned (just as "Kepler guessed--that is to say he imagined . . . by mere dint of Intuition," p. 15).

Once he has forced us to know what we cannot know, Poe reveals a way of apprehension. He adopts what he calls "a more philosophical phraseology," and discloses his method. In contrast to the "vulgar versions of great truths," his language is of "suggestive character" (p. 25).[35] While praising Newton and Laplace for their mathematical ratiocinations, he criticizes their language as too constrictive in demonstration:

> They, as well as all the first class of mathematicians, were mathematicians solely: their intellect, at least, had a firmly pronounced mathematico-physical tone. What lay not distinctly within the domain of Physics, or of Mathematics, seemed to them either Non-Entity or Shadow.
> (p. 25)

A demonstration that "the merely spiritual shadows" are not "the less substantial" (p. 76) demands a structured irresolution, focused on a state of hovering between revelation and concealment. After an attempt to make more distinct his incredible intuition that all atoms constantly "struggle back to this absolutely, this irrelatively, this unconditionally one" (p. 27), he finds that he can only repeat the "tendency to the centre," "the tendency each to each"--mere words that connote a direction toward unity. And reacting to the inadequacy of the words alone, he puts forth a particularly enigmatic series of questions, without possibility of answers (at least not at this point in the plot). The long, inconclusive lecture ends with a proposition indicating his method: "Thus, according to the schools, I prove nothing. So be it:--I design but to suggest--and to convince through the suggestion" (p. 28).

The sustained tentativeness of a movement that aims to suggest, not prove, is thus given shape through alternating questions and assertions, open-ended phrasing and closed involutions, doubtful axioms and certain fantasies. A continual passage of one term into another, a reversal of processes, constitutes the verbal experience. Fact becomes fancy and fancy fact in the mutual adaptation that Poe has declared the singular sign of God's perfect design (completeness in ultimate reciprocity). "Convertibility" of terms and phrases becomes essential to the poetic truth--the style and metaphysics of Eureka:

> . . . the sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended on with an almost blindfold reliance. It is the poetical essence of the Universe--of the Universe which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems. Now symmetry and consistency are convertible terms:--thus Poetry and Truth are one.
>
> (p. 71)

The possibility of synthesis proclaimed in the preface arises out of what was thought to be impossible:

> I say now:--'Behind this seeming impossibility is to be found what I desire.' I do not say 'real impossibility', for invincible faith in my truths assures me that it is a mere difficulty after all. . . .
>
> (p. 32)

The "seeming" antagonism between truth and poetry, intelligible and unintelligible, thinkable and unthinkable, has allowed for a discourse that reveals all contradictions as only apparent. Poe's argument for reciprocity of adaptation has eradicated any meaningful distinction between the two states of materiality or spirituality, so that as his lecture develops, "the Body and the Soul walk hand in hand" (p. 41).

In "aiming less at physical than at metaphysical order" (p. 57), Poe yet discloses that "the full design" involves an awareness of both worlds as mutually interpenetrating. How a finite mind can "comprehend" that which is not comprehended by any limit depends upon Poe's "keeping unbroken that chain of graduated impression by which alone the intellect of man can expect to encompass the grandeurs of which I speak. . ." (p. 57). Before the inexpressible he uses words as the "stepping-stones," a means of passage to what lies

beyond. He directs the reader to make the "unutterable journey" (p. 63) with him: "Let us endeavor to understand;" "Now let us see. . . let us endeavor to comprehend." As he points to a vision sublime: "here let the reader pause with me, for a moment, in contemplation of the miraculous--of the ineffable--of the altogether unimaginable" (p. 26), he expresses hesitation: ". . . but what is it that we are actually called upon to comprehend?" The uncertainty, the enormity of the effort, offers us the "one possible solution":

> --but I go on to say, with unflinching confidence, that, when this difficulty shall be solved, we shall find, wrapped up in the process of solution, the key to the secret at which we aim.
>
> (p. 32)

The attempt to "bring the matter more distinctly before the eye of the Mind" (p. 62) constitutes a spiritual action equivalent to revelation. We see now in aenigma, but this contemplation brings us toward Eureka's conclusion, where the artist "in picturing the capacities of an angel" (p. 61), envisions the future condition of the universe.

Out of the richness of his imagination, prolonged by the desire "to convey" an idea, and the realization that he would "need the tongue of an archangel" (p. 61), Poe gives us language "solely to serve the objects of this spiritual Ether" (p. 74). He has attempted to make us precisely see a point invisible, to keep our attention fixed on a "ruling idea." He is that "philosopher proper" whose

> . . . frenzy takes a very determinate turn--whose genius, to speak more reverentially, has a strongly-pronounced washer-womanish bias, doing every thing

> up by the dozen--enables us to see precisely that point out of sight, at which the revolutionary processes in question do, and of right ought to, come to an end.[36]
>
> (p. 66)

To see through the present multiplicity of matter to its fulfillment in that "Unity" which was its source and is its end comes to be no easy matter. Poe's proliferation of words and their falls into redundancy, have acted against any simple assumption of unity. The considerations he has "forced" upon us and our difficulty in comprehending them have "demonstrated" his earlier proclamation: "The truly ultimate principle is, as we know, the consummation of the complex--that is to say, of the unintelligible" (p. 29). The purported objectivity of discourse has been increasingly diminished by an extended use of metaphorical language. And through a complex reduplication (of measure, distance, those "considerations of quantity"), whereby the word loses determination with each iteration, instead of gaining in certainty, Poe has undermined his intentions of making meaning more distinct, of avoiding chances of misapprehension. What is within the closed setting of intentions, is equivocal:

> In intervals--in distances such as this suggestion forces upon the soul--rather than upon the mind--we find, at length, a fitting climax to all hitherto frivolous considerations of quantity.
>
> (p. 64)

The regard for "quantity" that Poe stressed as necessary for comprehension of his work, now emerges as the instrument of his suggestive power--making an impression not only upon the mind, but "upon the soul."

His ostensible attempt to convey some impression of the physical dimensions of the universe, presenting a series of expanding figures to measure the cosmical distances, destroys all possibility of measure. The excess of "quantity" has itself invalidated the very determination to measure.

Ultimately, his circumscription of what is indefinite results in a seemingly endless circling around what can never be bounded: "a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine." The power of the impossible, the inconceivable, is all that Poe leaves us in his final vision. Such a vision unutterable, the "final design" of that which is neither formed nor form, determines the method of his most successful tales. That design and the way he constructs it will be analyzed in "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage." As we shall see, the fulfillment of the design devolves on Poe's feigning determinacy in order to form indeterminacy.

NOTES

[1] Crucial to Poe's concept of writing is the materiality of construction. The arrangement of words to form a frame (circum + scribere) evolves into a fiction--the creation of figures and the founding of forms. The latin fingere, meaning for form, mold, feign or compose verse is related to Poe's poetic.

[2] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison, 17 vols. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1902), XIV, 198. I use this edition for Poe's critical and theoretical writings. Further note references to this text are cited thus: Works, with volume number and page. For the citation of Poe's poetry and tales, I use the edition of Thomas O. Mabbott, Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), referred to as Collected Works, with volume number and page.

[3] Edgar Allan Poe, Eureka: A Prose Poem, ed. Richard P. Benton (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1973), p. 65. This new edition of the essay contains line numbers, explanatory essay, and bibliographical guide. References to Eureka are to this edition with page numbers cited in the text.

[4] "The Philosophy of Composition," in Works, XIV, 195.

[5] Ibid., p. 195.

[6] "The Oval Portrait," in Collected Works, II, 664: ". . . the peculiarities of the design, of the vignetting, and of the frame."

[7] "The Philosophy of Composition," in Works, XIV, 207.

[8] "The Fall of the House of Usher," in Collected Works, 403.

[9] "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," in Collected Works, II, 612.

[10] "Ligeia," in Collected Works, II, 313.

[11] See "Al Aaraaf, " in Collected Works, I, 104, ll. 124-27:

> A sound of silence on the startled ear
> Which dreamy poets name "the music of the sphere."
> Ours is a world of words: Quiet we call
> "Silence"--which is the merest word of all.

[12] "A Chapter of Suggestions," in Works, XIV, 187.

[13] "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," in Collected Works, II, 612.

[14] "Marginalia," in Works, XVI, 2.

[15] Ibid., p. 87.

[16] Ibid., pp. 87-88.

[17] Ibid., p. 88.

[18] Ibid., p. 89.

[19] "The Philosophy of Composition," Works, XIV, 206.

[20] "Marginalia," in Works, XVI, 89.

[21] "The Island of the Fay," in Collected Works, II, 604.

[22] "The Fall of the House of Usher," Collected Works, II, 405.

[23] "Marginalia," Works, XVI, 28.

[24] "Dream-Land," Collected Works, I, 344, l. 8.

[25] "The Philosophy of Composition," Works, XIV, 206. Poe later adds: "So far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real," p. 207.

[26] The extravagance of his fiction is caused by the ensuing wandering beyond the limits established. In "Longfellow's 'Ballads and Other Poems,'" Poe attempts to resolve the multitude of doctrines on the "essence of all Poesy" into Count Bielfeld's definition: "L'art d'exprimer les pensées par la fiction." Poe then further defines the definition:

> . . . the German terms Dichtkunst, the art of fiction, and Dichten, to feign, which are used for "poetry" and to "make verses," are in full and remarkable accordance. It is nevertheless, in the combination of the two omniprevalent ideas that the novelty and we believe, the force of our proposition is to be found.
>
> Works, XI, 74.

The conjoining of fiction and poetry remains for Poe, as for Mallarmé, "le jeu suprême." The framing act which I suggest equals forming in Poe's aesthetic, ends up informing: determinacy feigned in order to suggest indefiniteness.

[27] A letter to James Russell Lowell, July 2, 1844. See also, "Mesmeric Revelation": "There is no immateriality: it is a mere word. That which is not matter, is not at all." Collected Works, III, 1033.

[28] "The Poetic Principle," Works, XIV, 273.

[29] Ibid., p. 274.

[30] "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Collected Works, II, 609.

[31] I want to emphasize the importance of negation, a via negativa, in Poe's treatment of the spiritual. The negation in words suggests what is substantial in the realms beyond discourse. In "Mesmeric Revelation," for example, he offers the means for the "comprehension" to be further developed in Eureka. He distinguishes between "the ultimate life," which, "being unorganized, is of unlimited comprehension," except for "the volition of God . . . the motion of the unparticled matter." The mode by which "the mind of the rudimental life" can communicate to the immaterial, the matter unparticled, is negation: "You will have a distinct idea of the ultimate body by conceiving it to the entire brain. This it is not, but a conception of this nature will bring you near a comprehension of what it is." Collected Works, III, 1037-38.

[32] "The Philosophy of Composition," Works, XIV, 207-208.

[33] "The Poetic Principle," Works, XIV, 266.

[34] "The Philosophy of Composition," Works, XIV, 203.

[35] The distinction that Poe makes between "philosophical" and "vulgar" language--philosophical involving a fusion of reason and imagination that points toward a process of poetic truth--should be clarified if we consider Mallarmé's distinction between a language called "essentiel" as opposed to that which is "brut ou immédiat."

[36] See Paul Valéry, "Situation de Baudelaire," Variété II (Paris: Gallimard, 1930), p. 142:

> Ainsi, analyse des conditions de la volupté poétique, définition par exhaustion de la poésie absolue,--
> Poe montrait une voie, il enseignait une doctrine très séduisante et très rigoreuse, dans laquelle, une sorte de mathématique et une sorte de mystique s'unissaient. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

THE DESIGN OF THE INDEFINITE EFFECT: "THE DOMAIN OF ARNHEIM" AND "LANDOR'S COTTAGE"

> Art is the particular interrelationship of form and meaning, in which form becomes the symbol of meaning.
>
> Paul Frankel, Gothic Architecture

> It is not a question of what we see in a certain perspective, but of the perspective itself.
>
> Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth

> Even the spiritual vision, is it not at all points arrested by the continuous golden walls of the universe? --the walls of the myriads of shining bodies that mere number has appeared to blend into unity.
>
> Edgar Allan Poe, "The Power of Words"

THE EMBODIMENT OF VISION

> The ways of God in Nature, as in Providence, are not our ways; nor are the models that we frame any way commensurate to the vastness, profoundity, and unsearchableness of his works, which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democratis.
>
> Joseph Glanville, Essays on Several Important Subjects, Epigraph to "A Descent into the Maelstrom"

The artificer of Eureka constructs a frame, fabricated in the attempt to adumbrate a non-linguistic domain. Material symmetry, a formal beauty, comes to be equivalent to truth. Poe's frequent claims for consistency, simplicity and totality, and the iteration of certain words to delimit these claims, encompass the "ruling idea" of the text. As we saw, that "idea" has been shown to be the continual drive toward a state of final unity through matter. The materiality of such a vision--the emphasis on making and combining material forms--must be stressed. Poe's "matter unparticled . . . indivisible" signifies the way that Poe uses words as a means to attain a non-material effect. Eureka's progress evolves through the deliberate patternings of the phenomenal world and what we can know, to hint at the inconceivable, spiritual realms beyond our reach. The effect is a device for deliberate artistic creation, shifting the artist's attention from vision to craftsmanship.

Poe's detailed description of the genesis and annihilation of the universe, from its uncertain beginnings to its end in unity, directs

how he means certain of his tales to be read. In Eureka's plot, a single, unified primordial particle, created by God, is divided and radiated through his design into a limited area of infinite space. Impelled by the desire for unity, a finite number of atoms move toward an ineffable, irrelative and common center. In Poe's words:

> . . . in all circumstances--at all points--in all directions--by all modes of approach--in all relations and through all conditions--they struggle back to this absolutely, this irrelatively, this unconditionally one. (p. 27)

The movement of all things back to a center that cannot be specified operates as a major force in the structuring of his prose. He uses words to make an indefiniteness; through a negotiation of their individual distinctions, they are leveled into non-specificity. Unity, the law operating in the physical world, directs Poe's aesthetic. The metaphysical problem presented in Eureka becomes for the skilled writer a linguistic one--the aesthetic realization of the nature of the universe.

Joseph Lynen, in The Design of the Present, makes a significant connection between Poe's diction and his metaphysic. He suggests:

> . . . the curiously blurred effect of the diction in Poe's verse . . . the behavior of his words is a natural consequence of his metaphysics. There is an intentional effect of vagueness, which serves to render a very precise visual image, just as a misty seascape by Turner presents a precise visual image. Such vagueness, which both Poe's aesthetic and his subject matter demanded, must be distinguished from vagueness resulting from Poe's failure to use language effectively.[1]

Lynen emphasizes Poe's intentional vagueness, that deliberate imprecision which grows out of a strange mélange of idealism and materialism. He is speaking of Poe's verse, but I hope to show that the presentation of "words in the act of merging and as already so indistinct that their meanings have faded, blurred,"[2] is applicable to the prose as well. The creation of "indefinitiveness" demands a rigorous labor of form, a transmutation of the material world, through the selection and coordination of elements of visual experience into an image undetermined in its effect.

Lynen's comparison of Poe's very precise effect of vagueness to a seascape by Turner is instructive. The most successful tales achieve their effect through an elaborate pictorialism, a seemingly accurate presentation of a closed setting or locale.[3] Poe's desire to create figures susceptible of suggesting the existence of a more perfect figure ends in a pictorial necessity, the exact configuration of diverse elements to form a unique tableau. If the arrangement of details is successful, a picture will be achieved as emodiment of a poetic idea.

The movement toward unity and the obligation that "his words appear to enact the movement toward unity,"[4] is essential to the narrative design. This effect recalls the self-directed turn proposed in Eureka:

> He who from the top of Aetna casts his eyes leisurely around, is affected chiefly by the extent and diversity of the scene. Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its oneness.
>
> (p. 10)

A gyration that might enable the mind "to receive and perceive an individual impression" (p. 10), reflects Poe's aim: to illustrate a labor whose goal is the disarticulation of carefully delineated images. As Lynen contends, and the point is significant: The "intentional effect of vagueness" does, nevertheless, render "a very precise experience." We remember that in Eureka the narrator tried to make us see a point invisible, to convey some precise idea about the unfathomable. As the "philosopher proper," he showed how the indefinite can take "a very determinate turn." The paradoxical structure results in an indefinite effect. We cannot apperceive the moment of limitlessness until we have seen enforced the frame of human limitations.

In Eureka, Poe found that speculation about eternity or infinitude deludes the understanding. Since it is a cause of imprecision in language, such speculation ends by using words to veil misapprehension. He commenced that discourse within a declaimed "limited sphere of space." Though he means to "designate the utmost conceivable expanse of space," the "all" that he wants us to imagine must "be imagined to exist within the compass of that expanse." Within these limits both artist and reader are allowed to imagine. Yet the permission is fraught with difficulties. Poe points us toward the only way we might imagine the immensity of which he speaks. Through the confines erected, we become aware of the limits to our perceptual grasp. Our perplexity in not being able to comprehend what apparently has been delineated for us step by step ends by activating the imagination. We are finally forced beyond the narrow confines of the understanding and into what

Poe calls "intuition." The central linguistic maneuver of certain tales parallels the project of Eureka, enabling the "mind to take in, as if from afar and at one glance, a distinct conception of the individual Universe" (p. 17). To image the shape of sublimity comes to be the suggestion of the measureless through an artful exploitation of measure.

In the tales to be analyzed, we will consider how Poe uses words to build up an edifice, seen in terms of picturing, or setting up contours to structure the desired effect. The emphasis on material design, on creation as analogous to combining the elements of matter (words) so skillfully that they evoke a single impression, involves Poe in the insistence on his capacity to impose form, to frame. Georges Poulet in Les métamorphoses du cercle contends that Poe sees the imagination as the universe itself, continuously expanding and contracting within its immense but limited sphere: "D'une cosmologie l'on passe à une poétique. C'est une poétique de la limitation."[5] Essential to his method is the depiction of what happens within the circumscribed character of thought.[6] Poulet continues:

> . . . le milieu mental et cependant universel, où se dilatant, se contractant, multipliant l'interaction des forces interns, une sphère se forme, qui est 'une sphère d'action.'[7]

The poem or tale exists within this circumscribed space. The shaping, and the rhythms that threaten to unshape, operate "à l'intérieur de ses limites."[8]

The imagery of a fixed spatial setting or locale accentuates a fundamental plot: the drawing together of words to reveal that ultimate reciprocity characteristic of God's perfection. The mutuality of adaptation, evidence of God's well-made cosmos, is clarified in Poe's instruction to the writer of tales:

> In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.[9]

The exploitation of verbal scene-painting--ut pictura poesis, as is painting so is poetry--implied as concrete analogue to the writer's exploitation of the verbal medium, has a function both thematic and organic in Poe's fiction. Poe manipulates objects into a stylized setting or "décor" to adequately picture an idea, or as Spitzer writes, "to form patterns of intellectual design."[10] The theme of his narrative is implied in the arrangement and reminds the reader of:

> . . . that infinite perfection which the true artist bears ever in mind--that unattainable goal to which his eyes are always directed, but of the possibility of attaining which he endeavors, if wise, to cheat himself into the belief.[11]

When Poe contrasts the perfect plots of God to the constructions of a "finite intelligence," he makes us aware of what the true artist can achieve within the limited space which is the only "legitimate sphere of action."[12] As we shall see, his choice of the "landscape-

garden" as most befitting the Muse grows out of his earlier aesthetic theory. The skillful display of art within bounds cannot but bring to mind "that infinite perfection which the true artist bears ever in mind." Such a disclaimer of ability to attain the goal acts itself as a narrative strategy that frames the work. It acts against and reflects upon what the artist comprehends as his task, and through such comprehension fabricates the plot:

> But the greatest involution of incident will not result in plot; which, properly defined, is that in which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole. It may be described as a building so dependently constructed, that to change the position of a single brick is to overthrow the entire fabric.[13]

Words, then, have a telic function; they are "stepping-stones" on the way to final design. Every word employed leads to "a certain single effect to be wrought."[14] The writer, as a painter, must select elements with constant attention to tone, outline and color. The use of words as diverse colors taken from a palette, mixed in order to evoke a reaction, reveals itself in Poe's rumination on his method: "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions of which the heart, the intellect or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, which one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" The theme is consequently the method used to carry out a design. The plot and its execution should appear to be coterminous; their conjunction forms the theme: "The idea of the tale, its thesis, has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed--an end absolutely demanded."[15] Since the design is verbal, and the correct method alone can present the main idea of

a tale (its fiction), Poe emphasizes composition. Out of singularly diverse knowables, elements considered separately are joined together to weave a "fabric" or network of relations suggestive of an integral whole.[16]

Poe's design of "unity of impression" demands a structure unique in its cumulative effort to achieve a totality. When we consider his redundancy, it becomes clear that he has devised a graduated use of words toward the creation of vagueness.[17] Tautology, a fault in grammar emerges as a necessary part of his intent, a device for indefiniteness of effect.

The intentional exclusivity of artistic design in Poe's work results in the singularity of impression he desires: "There are no external or extrinsic influences."[18] In The Conception of Beauty in Shelley, Keats and Poe, Solomon F. Gingerich connects enclosure to the consequent accomodation of language to idea:

> The most astonishing thing about this conception of beauty is its extraordinary exclusiveness. In fact, we gain a clearer view of Poe's idea of beauty by summing up, not what it includes, but what it omits.[19]

This is a typical response to the artist as ancestor to "fin-de-siècle" poetry, the late-in-coming Parnassian commitment to a static, stylized beauty, emptied of "worldly" concerns. Much of what Gingerich says is applicable to Poe's language which involves a "narrowing of the field of consciousness with reference to this world."[20] But here we must be cautious. Poe often uses romantic clichés such as an ineffable, not to be expressed "supernal Beauty" to screen a real

emphasis on method. If the pictorial elements of many of the tales and poems seem the attempt to delineate the "idea of the Beautiful," the configuration of these elements acts even more forcefully to convey what the "idea" of poetic language is.

To capture the language of the cosmos, the attempt of Eureka, as well as Poe's later tales, involves an unresolved tension between a pragmatic, rational artisan and a mystic who has arrived at mysticism through his art--through his deliberate pushing of language to its limits. This conflicting tendency of Poe's language and method[21] makes it difficult to remain long in accord with Gingerich's conclusion: "Poe's concept of poetry and of beauty is an extraordinarily restricted one."[22] He limits Poe's doctrine of "singleness" of effect without realizing that the effect is a unity ever involved in diversity. The ultimate complexity of relation described in Eureka is expansive as well as constrictive, a beauty expressive of totality and truth, and an art in accord with what he calls "nature's general intention."[23] Poe's "concept" is not restricted, but the limits he enforces on his craft to somehow encompass such a concept operate under great restraint.

Although critics have noted the importance of circumscription of space in Poe's tales, I know of no analysis which examines how such a circumscription produces a desired verbal effect. In returning to the notion of enclosed space, the consistent closure essential to Poe's aesthetic, I will connect this framing directly to a basic stylistic technique: the announcing of bounds from without allows the words within to play out the fiction of the limitless.

The "stress upon construction," that absorption in language and style which W.C. Williams clearly recognized as Poe's "impulse . . . to get from sentiment to form;" his "insistence . . . upon method, in opposition to a nameless rapture over nature,"[24] brings us closer to understanding Poe's aesthetic than any interpretation of an "idea of beauty." In "The Poetic Principle," for example, Poe sets up man's longing to comprehend a something non-verbal, " the supernal Loveliness." To embody the vision and yet have that presentation retain its effect of unknowability (sublimity) on the reader would seem to be the goal of the poet. The goal is not an impossible one, despite Poe's declarations to the contrary. His notion of beauty leads to a poetic of limitation, that poetic which compels method. For Kant (revealing his decided preference of Nature to art), the sublime cannot exist within the linguistic artifact. Inherently measureless, once constrained by form, it exists no longer. Poe, however, closer to Burke than to Kant, does not designate the term beauty as inferior to the sublime. Rather, that "Beauty" claimed as necessary sphere of the poem "must be understood as inclusive of the Sublime."[25]

An infinite forced into the finite medium of words (impelling, we remember, "the Heaven into the Earth"), the result affects a measurelessness. Poe's words will assemble into a shape, and within the carefully measured limits of the tale, cohere to produce an "artificial infinite."[26]

His recognition of the necessity of isolation for the artifact

to affect the reader's mind as in indefinite world offers a suggestive interpretation of the word dichten, meaning as Poe explains in "The Poetic Principle," to feign or make verses. He then defines the term Dichtkunst as the art of fiction or poetry and decides that "in the combination of the two omniprevalent ideas" lies "the novelty" of his proposition.[27] What comprises the "essence" of poetry remains complex. "Dichten" also means to make tight, shut in, pack or seal. And Poe's method demands a closed system of interacting functions. The elements of construction are fitted to one another into a tightly knit structure "from which no component atom can be removed, and in which none of the component atoms can be displaced, without ruin to the whole."[28] In "The Power of Words," Agathos warns that "as no thought can perish, so no act is without infinite result."[29]

Within the fixity of the frame, under demands for consistency and claims for completedness which, to Poe's mind, is perfect beauty, a curious shaping of indeterminacy ensues. This is the way that Poe allows language to house the infinite. Artifact is made inclusive of the sublime. Through rigorous technique, the concept of beauty, the circumscribed structure, can also act to enclose. Form is so filled with theme, "that unity of effect which to the artist is worth all the allegory in the world,"[30] that the content itself creates an infinitely reflexive world where cause reflects upon effect, means upon ends and vice versa.

Through an increase in linguistic entropy (particularly illustrated in later poems), a process tending toward diffusion and final collapse is carried out in alternation with the form-making process.

The collapse toward a state of absolute closure ("the final ingathering" of Eureka), dissolves all differentiation between form and content, exposing the framing of a vacancy and the arbitrariness of such a frame. The dialectic that Poe's prose reveals is an unstable move to erect limits to space, and in turn, to break through the limits to the anterior, undifferentiated "One." As we turn to a discussion of "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage," we should bear in mind that Poe defines "the Poetry of words" as "the Rhythmical Creation of Beauty. Beyond the limits of Beauty its province does not extend."[31]

- 2 -

MAN-MADE GARDEN AS SOUL OF POETRY

> The mathematics afford no more absolute demonstrations, than the sentiment of his Art yields to the artist. He not only believes, but positively knows, that such and such apparently arbitrary arrangements of matter, or form, constitute, and alone, constitute, the true Beauty.
>
> Poe, "The Landscape Garden," 1842

In "The Domain of Arnheim" (1846)[32] and "Landor's Cottage" (1849), designated as "A Pendant to the Domain of Arnheim," framing to create a unity works itself out in human terms, confined to the artistic creation of the landscape-garden.[33] Poe greatly valued both tales, and it is significant that "The Domain of Arnheim" was written before Eureka and "Landor's Cottage" afterwards. In a late letter to Maria Clem, Poe wrote: "I have no desire to live since I have done 'Eureka.' I could accomplish nothing more."[34] I choose to take the self-proclaimed

words of Eureka's significance to Poe's life and thought seriously. Since I do not see this statement as yet another exaggerated pose, in the remainder of this essay I will attempt to illustrate how "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage," assessed together, mark the maturation of his thought and expression, the materialization of his theories on composition and indefiniteness of effect.

The writer's attempt to match his own artistry with the underlying scheme of Deity manifests itself not through depiction of vastness, for as in Eureka, the narrator of both tales finds wide and undetermined prospects unpleasing to the fancy and consequently inhibitive of the ability to imagine. As Poe writes, citing M. Le Baron de Bielfeld:

> Imagination is, possibly in man, a lesser degree of the creative power in God. What the Deity imagines, is, but was not before. What man imagines, is, but was also. The mind of man cannot imagine what is not.[35]

What man, "the constructor," imagines with existent things is a measure of his art.

Just as Eureka's cosmic voyager did not stare at stars in their infinitude, the earthly wanderer narrates no moments of awe in regarding an ocean wracked by storm, the grandeur of mountains looming in a distance. He chooses for subject a setting qualified by its bounds (striking in conception they must be)--the landscape-garden (treatises on "improving" the capabilities of natural landscape were popular at the time)[36] --and creates within limits something new and unexpected. Within this nexus of artificed unity, the poet composes

for the reader that "limited realm of his authority . . . the circumscribed Eden of his dreams."[37] The image of a whole portrayed within the compass of what man can imagine is symbolic of perfection. In Landscape into Art, Kenneth Clark indicates that "Paradise" is the Persian term for "a walled enclosure."[38] This is Poe's memory of the Eden to be reformed as befits his idea.

Poe regards space as the basic perceptual framework through which he thinks and remakes the world. As I suggested in my discussion of Eureka, the imagination is representation, a structuration in a metaphorical space (bounded through words and given a shape) of what is essentially non-spatial, and conversely, a miming in words of that unlimited extent non-verbal. The walls of foliage, overhanging vines and lush, grassy slopes demarcate the invented enclosure within which the poet locates his words. All contingent elements are removed from the area devised in accordance with certain principles of artificial landscape gardening.

The recognition that a garden-scene may or should resemble a picture or be reminiscent of some particular landscape painting took its rise in 18th century England and led to the development of manifold theories of the "picturesque." The term gained in importance, and ambiguity, as works on the theory and practice of landscape gardening became more popular. Samuel Monk relates the painter's landscape and gardening perfection to poetry. He is cogent in a realm of often perplexing critical activity, and his words will serve us well:

> This habit of seeking in nature scenes suitable both to the poet and to the painter, fortified as it was by the aesthetic of ut pictura poesis, dominated England until well into the nineteenth century, and finally created an aesthetic of its own--the picturesque.[39]

The idea of "poetical painting," the proposition that "a good poet ought to give us such a landscape, as a painter could copy after,"[40] emerged in America through the art theories and criticism of the Hudson River School.[41] Although Poe attacked the group's separation of form and content in art (the argument that painterly technique should be subordinated to the moral "meaning" of a canvas), he accorded with the notion that paintings should not be mere imitations, but compositions--the reorganization of nature's diverse forms into a new and harmonious whole.

If Poe's creation of beauty is formal, its forming remains, nevertheless, at the service of an indefinite conception. In his essay on Longfellow, his "Ballads and Other Poems," Poe announces that he will resolve the multitude of existent doctrines on what the essence of poetry is into "the definition now proposed." The definition defines his own ends:

> We do nothing more than present tangibly the vague clouds of the world's idea. We recognize the idea itself floating, unsettled, indefinite, in every attempt which has yet been made to circumscribe the conception of 'Poesy' in words.[42]

The really expert passages in the tales under consideration are those figurally devised; those which aim at a "tangible" presentation of ineffable "soul" or "sentiment." The poetic principle is expressed

in the prose of "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage." The extreme formalism of both tales is purposeful. Pattern and design remain essential to the order of the landscape narrative, but the ambiguity created through the studied composition of words and phrases renders not a specific locale or scene, but rather a vague feeling of process, the very essence of which is combination. In "The Domain of Arnheim," confirming the choice of artificial landscape-gardening over the natural which "seeks to recall the original beauty of the country," Poe appeals to painting as exemplum:

> . . . no such combination of scenery exists in nature as the painter of genius may produce. No such paradises are to be found in reality as have glowed on the canvass of Claude.[43]

When Poe uses the word pittoresque in "Landor's Cottage," he introduces the word in a strictly specialized meaning, "in the true sense of the Italian term" (LC, 1330). It is not applied to anything considered fit to make a picture appealing to the eye, but has the narrower implication of actually resembling art. He is careful to derive it from pittore, a painter, rather than from pittura, a picture, thinking of scenes or groups of objects composed by man and dependent on techniques of composition and disposition.

In the landscape sketches, Poe uses pictorial operations to point to "the idea of the Beautiful," a sense of perfection and harmony. The gardener's capacity to judge of forms, colors and combinations of visible objects offers itself as analogue to the poet's:

> The Poetic Sentiment . . . may develop itself in various modes--in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance,--and very especially in Music,--and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden.[44]

The capacity to combine is related to the "compound faculty," the single most important operation of the picturesque.[45] Man's creativity is limited to his making combinations of material forms, of

> . . . the most combinable things hitherto uncombined; the compound as a general rule, partaking (in character) of sublimity or beauty, in the ratio of the respective sublimity or beauty of the things combined. . . .[46]

The imagination reveals itself in the artistical adjustment and amplification of Nature's "données":

> The range of Imagination is therefore, unlimited. Its materials extend throughout the Universe. Even out of deformities it fabricates that Beauty which is at once its sole object and its inevitable test.[47]

In "The Domain of Arnheim" as in "Landor's Cottage," Poe attempts to word-paint a carefully arranged landscape for the reader. An expansion of the earlier, wholly theoretical "Landscape Garden," it does more than state Poe's artistic creed. Ellison, Poe's builder of the marvelous domain, delivers the background as to why the creation of the landscape-garden, by its realization of God's designs in the very substance of the material world, fulfils "the poetic sentiment in man" (DA, 1272). Then, the narrator takes over to reveal how words, just as distinct objects and complex visual images in a configured landscape reenact the creative process--how from known and perhaps

dissimilar things a unique harmony is made:

> While the component parts may defy, individually, the highest skill of the artist, the arrangement of these parts will always be susceptible of improvement. In short, no position can be attained on the wide surface of the natural earth, from which an artistical eye, looking steadily, will not find matter of offence in what is termed the 'composition' of the landscape.
> (DA, 1272)

To "compose" a natural landscape to bring out its "capabilities," involves a modification of elements in accord with a prior design.

Moving from theories of the landscape-gardener to the fabrication of the landscape-poet (an exchange achieved through the gradual passage of the blessed poetician of landscape, Ellison, into the narrator/writer), Poe designates that peculiar kind of beauty, appealing to the eye and suitable for painting. It is imparted through the "creation of novel moods of purely physical loveliness" (DA, 1271). Ellison's learned thoughts on the artist as material adapter of an intuited perfection--communicated, for the most part, through the narrator's commentary--reveal that movement back and forth between material and ideal noted in Eureka and in Poe's literary criticism. The "materialism" in Ellison's "ethical speculations" (DA, 1271), reflects the possibility of a more than human handiwork "by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time."[48] If, as Blake says, "eternity is in love with the productions of time," Poe narrows the stance to concentrate on how Ellison's "artifice of eternity" is adapted to "the eyes which were to behold it on earth" (DA, 1272).

Ellison's observations of the defects and incongruities of observed nature and the artist's function to compose and correct,

comes from the perspective of one, who like the narrator of Eureka, has envisioned a more perfect realm of which his posited "exaltation of the landscape" is still only a reflection of "the mortal or human point of view." His own adaptations of matter placed in a larger frame, relative to "the wide landscape-gardens of the hemispheres," forces his non-reliance on the seen and its imitation. Instead, he keeps in mind that "point distant from the earth's surface, although not beyond the limits of its atmosphere" (DA, 1274). He sees through the imagination; or, as Poe writes in the Marginalia: "Art . . . I should call it the reproduction of what the senses perceive in nature through the veil of the soul."[49] Yet, how he views, the particular kind of perception and orientation toward a point in a spatial sense, determines the meditation--what, finally, he will apprehend.

The realm of imagination designated in Eureka as "a shadowy and fluctuating domain" concurs with the picturesque option. Picturing a landscape in order to display its abrupt transitions and surprising turns of prospect and concealment, excites the mind and "leads the eye a wanton kind of chace," writes Hogarth.[50] If sublimity fosters the uniformity of a single, striking effect, the picturesque creates a harmony through a constant variation of particulars. Sir Uvedale Price, in An Essay on the Picturesque, establishes "curiosity" as its central effect, which mixing with either of the other qualities, "corrects the languor of beauty, or the tension of sublimity."[51] It engages the view in sudden shifts, inducing a strong exertion of comprehension. One's view moves to and fro between extremes--a sun suddenly fallen into shade, an obscuring mist dissolved by sight of

sun. Poe's love of the chiaroscuro, his use of graduated lights and shades and the pursuit of the "excessively outré" and "bizarre" generate those settings that appear impressively vivid and yet remain indefinite. The arabesque figures in the tapestries of "Ligeia," the mazes woven of unreal and fluttering forms, though sharply outlined, enforce the phantasmagoric effect.[52]

Poe's unexpected beauty is delimited by no nominal aesthetic category,[53] as established notions of the sublime and the beautiful. In his "Review of N.P. Willis," Poe again draws attention to a beauty that can override distinctions, a beauty that arises out of the imagination's power of creative conjoining:

> From novel arrangements of old forms which present themselves to it, it selects only such as are harmonious--the result, of course, is beauty itself--using the term in its most extended sense, and as inclusive of the sublime.[54]

This all-encompassing beauty clearly manifests itself in most of Poe's compositions. The predominant choice of garden, cottage, house or chamber as presentation on earth of "the Beauty above," remains that of the limited vista, not of indefinite extent. And when Poe does choose to treat the sea, the standard image of sublimity, he measures points on the apparently boundless, much as he marks the points on his formal landscapes. As Robert L. Carringer writes in "Circumscription of Space and the Form of Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym: "In both 'Ms. Found in a Bottle' and 'A Descent into the Maelstrom,' in a reversal of all conventional associations, Poe manages to have his narrator delimited by space on the ocean."[55] The indefinite extent he effects

is one of his own making, quite contrary to any preconceived attribution to space.

A dynamic quality, Poe's beauty moves to alternately legislate harmony and to dissolve it, transforming the literal into the fantastic, the general into the unique and the uncommon into the prosaic. Its oscillations make it impossible to draw bounds between seeming opposites. Such an activation of indeterminacy is suggestive. If the minute particulars selected by the artist attain to a harmony, it is a gradual attainment. The unity arises out of sudden variation and irregularity (to vary Dr. Johnson's phrasing, a "concatenation" with "abruption"). Poe uses the picturesque, in its alternating appropriation of characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful, to preserve this apparently inconclusive process. The process brings the reader closer to understanding Poe's "exquisite beauty" that must have "some strangeness in the proportion."[56] It also strengthens the "intricacy" that Price specifies as "that disposition of objects, which, by a partial and uncertain concealment, excites and nourishes curiosity."[57] The effort to surprise the mind of the reader into activity underlies much of Poe's technique.

An atmosphere within which objects move to perpetually alter themselves, forcing a recognition of their protean-like ability to transform, fuse with and be transformed, results from clearly developed theories of composition. "The Philosophy of Furniture," Poe's manifesto of art, illustrates how through correct breadth of treatment distinct objects in a scene can be united into a whole. A symbolism of design, very nearly a symbolist program for the interior designer,

it establishes the meaningful medium as an interpenetration of both a spiritual and material reality.[58] A perpetually reinstated effort, the dialectic takes many forms. Atypical words are put into a relationship of equation. These words, not metaphysically validated in their union, are placed in contrast and synthesis: "the soul of the apartment is the carpet;" "the sprituality of a British boudoir;"[59] "Never was a more lovely thought than that of the astral lamp." But most important, Poe assesses the correspondance between the arts:

> 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; and very nearly the same laws by which we decide on the higher merits of a painting, suffice for decision on the adjustment of a chamber.
>
> (PF, 497)

Poe sees the possibility, or rather the necessity, of applying rules of painting to landscape-garden, to a room and its arrangement of furniture; it is not difficult to apply the same technical rules, which amount to a philosophy, to the verbal artifact. He does, and such an application will become more specific in our analysis of "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage." In this essay, Poe's instructions for the adjustment of a chamber and the negotiation of its objects emphasizes the necessity for an interplay of contrasts:

> Very often the eye is offended by their inartistical arrangement. Straight lines are too prevalent--too uninterruptedly continued--or clumsily interrupted at right angles. If curved lines occur, they are repeated into unpleasant uniformity. By undue precision, the appearance of many a fine apartment is utterly spoiled.
>
> (PF, 497)

He also warns against "a continuous, flat, colorless, unrelieved surface" (PF, 500). He prefers a generation of complexity and contrast against a clearly defined background. A recognizable ground must be intelligible, for a want of form causes ugliness:

> As for those antique floor-cloths still occasionally seen in the dwellings of the rabble--cloths of huge, sprawling, and radiating devices, stripe-interspersed, and glorious with all hues, among which no ground is intelligible--these are but the wicked invention of a race. . . .
>
> (PF, 498)

The "picturesque may be great or small" (serving either the sublime or the beautiful), but its achievement depends upon "the character of boundaries . . . it is various and intricate rather than uniform and is indifferently gay or grave." [60]

As the picturesque is the quality that executes the passage between contradictions and maintains its continuous fluctuations to create novelty, Poe's language acts to turn the expected touches of the picturesque (the contrived bounds of his endeavor) into an involuted prose texture that enforces his technique. To move from beauty and its bounds to sublimity and back again demands a reformation of language in the image of idea. And Poe makes his narrative accord with principles of indeterminacy through a special use of the picturesque tradition. In Eureka, he exploited the language of science to persuade the reader to be receptive to what is, in its nature, beyond the proof and demonstrations of science. In "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage" repeated terms of current aesthetic theory (partaking of the verbiage of essays on both landscape-garden and painting) end by involving the reader, once again, in a consideration of imagings quite

different from what the narrator claims he represents.

In these tales picturesque jargon is used as a pretext, framing what will act to transcend it. Poe does not use the world of landscape-gardening and the aspects of nature as subject matter. Rather, he uses these elements to symbolize the role of the artist in creation of the effective tale. He chooses the defined span wherein he will not only relate the principles of the picturesque, but will boldly adapt the very style of his writing to its deviations. The technicalities of painting and gardening control the vision in both the tales, but the language is the most predominate thing shown. Its distortions and inventions are what informs. Crucial to our reading is the fact that the technique seems to evolve not out of a reality external to itself, but is implicit in the telling by an artful narrator who manipulates the reader's apprehension.

In my discussion of "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage," both ostensible reportings of observed phenomena in the customary mode, I shall argue that we might see Poe's use of the picturesque as itself covertly reinforcing the indeterminacy he creates in language (its bewildering variations, discords and identities, and conflation of opposites). If landscape is the locus of the picturesque, language reveals itself to be the locus of indeterminacy.

The question asked in our consideration of the tales is: What is the single effect or progression of effect aimed at in each work? I maintain that the indeterminacy in technique achieves the "definiteness of vague and therefore of spiritual effect"--the enclosing, or

paradoxical as it may seem, the defining (designing) of indefiniteness. In the river journey to Arnheim, infoliating as a hortus conclusus, Poe works to close in the indefinite. On the road to Landor's Cottage ("all roads are . . . works of art," LC, 1329), he laboriously marks it out.

- 3 -

THE RIVER JOURNEY TO ARNHEIM

> Intricacy in form . . . leads the eye a wanton kind of chace, and from the pleasure that gives the mind, intitles it to the name of beautiful. . . .
>
> William Hogarth, The Analysis of Beauty

> Fair river! in thy bright, clear flow
> Of crystal, wandering water,
> Thou art an emblem of the glow
> Of beauty--the unhidden heart--
> The playful maziness of art. . . .
>
> Poe, "To the River--"

The narrator of "The Domain of Arnheim" carries his reader through a carefully constructed and what seems to be an infinitely varied river route, the chosen "line of Beauty" signifying transformation. If a love of pursuit is implanted in our natures, if, as Hogarth writes, "the active mind is ever bent to be employ'd," [61] the artist, through a deliberate formal intricacy should do what he can to play upon this human instinct. This is the mood, expecting, and perhaps enjoying, a restless "kind of chace" in which we should approach the text. The free play of the mind upon the forms presented is induced

by participation in the patterns articulated. The many contrivances employed to "lead the reader on" are functional. Kenneth Burke puts it concisely: ". . . we know that many purely formal patterns can readily awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us. . . . Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation regardless of the subject matter."[62] To grasp the trend of the form--to alternately follow the riverway and be caught still in its compass--is to consider language as a continually evolving and devolving process.

Poe's method of composition in "The Domain of Arnheim" results from an intention to lead the eye, to strike the imagination with the force of a painting. The world of the tale appears as a complicated tissue of terms and events in which connections of different kinds alternate, overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole. As the viewer of a sharply marked, skewed landscape must allow his eye to move gradually across a scene, taking in the separate elements before feeling a harmony, Poe's reader is asked to participate in a particular kind of contemplation. A series of graduated steps toward vision demonstrate the novel context of our experience. Instead of a continuous prospect, Poe consistently breaks up surfaces and seeks constant and unexpected change, a disposition of colors, shapes and tints, disruptions that force a frequent readjustment of view. Poe, the cryptographer, studiously deciphering the workings of nature, presents words as things, as concrete entities of an observable nature. Yet, painting nature in the sense of visible reality turns into a probing of the internal laws of the very structure of nature, a move from matter to being.

The tale's significance to mind, its meaning, is inseparable from the graphic presentation of a select setting. Ellison, the landscape poet, devises an earthly paradise, a ground that will convey "the sentiment of spiritual interference," as if the "Almighty design" were "one step depressed" and "brought into something like harmony or consistency with the sense of human art" (DA, 1276). The garden must somehow "assume the air of an intermediate or secondary nature--a nature which is not God, nor an emanation from God, but which still is nature in the sense of the handiwork of the angels that hover between man and God" (DA, 1276). The depiction of a pendulation between finite particularity and the infinite requires a unique geographical locale. After four years of searching, Ellison finds the delimited view appropriate to his endeavor.

The panoramic prospect offered from atop a mountain is not what he is after. The feeling of "extent" and "distance" that grandeur affords "is at war with the sentiment and with the sense of seclusion" (DA, 1278). The enclosed setting positions itself as hovering, a being intermediate: it is closed to the world, yet on a "spot not far from a populous city." The geographical "givens" of Arnheim, just where this spot of earth is, remain vague. Its force lies in the imaginative quality of the site, a quality enhanced by its indefiniteness: "It is, of course, needless to say where was the locality" (DA, 1278). A suspended world, undetermined in space, Arnheim decrees its state as non-locale, rejecting definition in bearing an arbitrary name.

For the observing narrator, communication of "the embodiment of a vision such as this" is no easy matter. His strategy, like that of

the "philosopher proper" of Eureka (who distinguishes obscurity of expression from expression of the obscure) is first to claim incapacity before the indescribable, and then, to suggest the possibility of a unifying discourse:

> I despair of conveying to the reader any distinct conception of the marvels which my friend did actually accomplish. I wish to describe, but am disheartened by the difficulty of description, and hesitate between detail and generality. Perhaps, the better course will be to unite the two in their extremes. (DA, 1277)

The attempt to present accurately the "character" of the scene, its genius loci,[63] demands a difficult devotion held in abeyance between minuteness of detail and absolute generalization. Confronted by the uncomprehended interdependency of variety and uniformity, symmetry and irregularity, a "thought of nature" modified to "a weird symmetry, a thrilling uniformity, a wizard propriety" (DA, 1279), he will adapt his style to the site.

The idea of an effective harmony, dialectical in nature, directs our reading of the journey to the indistinct domain. The oscillation perpetuated moves us through disruption to a consistency. This complex manifestation of an essential connection signifies a formal correlative to Poe's semantic design. A. N. Whitehead's observation in Process and Reality is to the point:

> The right chaos, and the right vagueness, are jointly required for any effective harmony. . . . Thus chaos is not to be identified with evil; for harmony requires the due coordination of chaos, vagueness, narrowness, and width.[64]

Determination of how contiguous elements, alternately disposed, enter into a coherence, involves us in a consideration of disjunction as the linguistic approach to total identification. We are drawn into a world of things and movements, the heterogeneity of the labyrinth treated as a way into a kind of restored synthesis.

The river journey itself, sharply delineated, yet purposely vague, demonstrates the complexity of translating vision into an articulated and structured experience. In an uncertain atmosphere where limitation and infinite play tensely coincide, the spectator's eye wanders to and fro between many different points of interest, while his mind moves to associate diversities into coherence. Such an oscillatory prose appeals to the act of intuition embedded in language. How we move to perceive is more important than what we actually perceive (the tending toward in Eureka). And the not always being able to see ("enwrapt in an exquisite sense of the strange," DA, 1279), is necessary to the illusion of the incommensurable that the narrator turned poet aims to create.

The choice of a river scene whose torsions force us to continually change our perspective offers a perfect setting for an imaging of indeterminacy. Of all things water can take the most various shapes. Here, the river incarnates what in Eureka Poe termed "the fluctuating principle," endemic to man's present condition of complexity and heterogeneity.[65] A middle ground, whose variability forms the foundation of the entire passage to Arnheim, it operates to simultaneously define sharply and blend imperceptibly the other components of the tableau. As a force of delineation as well as liquefaction, the river has

etched a channel through hard granite so clearly that the "sharpness of outline . . . delighted while it bewildered the eye" (DA, 1279).

The "voyager," "visiter," "guest," or "observer" (the narrator's identity is strictly limited to these four general terms) travels on a stream bordered by steep ravines which circumscribe his view: "The stream took a thousand turns," and the windings "became more frequent and intricate, and seemed often as if returning in upon themselves, so that the voyager had lost all idea of direction" (DA, 1279).[66] Our orientation toward a given point in the spatial sense makes it possible to assume a vantage point in the sense of a mental perspective. Conversely, our disorientation in space makes for a confusion in comprehension, the "loss of direction" that becomes the essential factor in our meditation.

The approach to another reality both proximate to worldly art and beyond it, is couched in the most prosaic of beginnings: "The usual approach to Arnheim was by the river." The voyage is rendered in a highly formal recitation. The "I," who expressed amaze or curiosity in listening to Ellison's theories, cedes now to impersonal depiction. With the objectivity of a medieval jongleur, he reports his experience as a general fact, stylized and distant from a felt present.[67] What follows is a paratactic tracing of vision and obstruction, extent and closure. The nearly mechanical oscillation between subjective vision, what "seems," and the purported objective reality, what is "seen," is stressed in repetition until the problem, to see or not to see, acquires the status of a precarious and ambiguous internal logic.

If we note the time verbs of seeing are placed in relation to terms of appearance in the sense of illusion, we come close to an apprehension of the complexity of Poe's technique of vision. We cite one example here: "The stream took a thousand turns, so that at no moment could its gleaming surface be seen for a greater distance than a furlong. At every instant the vessel seemed imprisoned within an enchanted circle. . ." (DA, 1279). Poe manipulates our view on the periphery of the described spectacle. Through words, he fixes the point beyond which words cannot go. Carried to the very limits of sight, not seeing is the accomodation of self to the flux and reflux of imaginative contemplation, allowing for a mediation between time and eternity. In "The Island of the Fay," for example, the narrator curiously chooses to doze as he contemplates the scene before him: "I felt that thus only should I look upon it--such was the character of phantasm which it wore."[68]

The uneasy conjunction of seeing and seeming suggests further similarly disposed, and hence momentary, polarities encountered in the text. At another point in the journey to Arnheim, what begins as a description of a circular, reflecting basin ends in a marvelous reaction of duplication:

> This basin was of great depth, but so transparent was the water that the bottom, which seemed to consist of a thick mass of small round alabaster pebbles, was distinctly visible by glimpses--that is to say, whenever the eye could permit itself not to see, far down in the inverted heaven, the duplicate blooming of the hills.
>
> (DA, 1280)

Through a complete mutuality of influence, what seems is put forward as certainty in contrast to a non-substantial, but paradoxically, more easily seen world where hills bloom in the transparent depths. In such an "inverted heaven" terms for sight and insight are resolved into sameness. And as the vessel moves yet further into the circular basin, the sides of the hills, forming "a drapery of the most gorgeous flower-blossoms," through proximity with the watery site, are transformed into "a sea of odorous and fluctuating color." The forms of the normal world dematerialized, an amphibious nature imposes itself.[69] Altitude and depth, earth and water are no longer seen as conflicting, but rather as complimentary presentations of phenomena which can be described only through such determined alternations.

This is a rigidly circumscribed journey through a tightly embroidered nature, a complex weave of density and light, containment and expansion. Poe sets up the narrative so that the coincidence of circumscription and extent is always present. The two following examples exemplify the necessary rhetoric of paradox: ". . . as the eye traced upward the myriad-tinted slope, form its sharp junction with the water to its vague termination amid the folds of over-hanging cloud" (DA, 1280); ". . . the full orb of the declining sun . . . forms the sole termination of an otherwise limitless vista" (DA, 1280). A bound is always declared, although its very dependency on its own contradiction embodies the principle of indeterminacy.[70]

The approach to Arnheim moves through a dynamic of claustration. The circumscription--a movement into and through a variety of enclo-

sures deliberately designed as circular--begins at the phantasmal hour, Poe's preferred time of vision: "As the evening approached, the channel grew more narrow; the banks more and more precipitous; and these latter were clothed in richer, more profuse, and more sombre foliage" (DA, 1279). The successively reiterated "more," a verbal densification, adds to the deepening gloom. A maximum equivalence between diverse elements is maintained through the parallel structure of each clause, elevating the article, "the," into a predominant, annunciatory posiition. Its repetition temporarily converts a descriptive phrase into the language of liturgy. Literally and symbolically "walled in," we move "between shores," and as the water increases in transparency, the voyager is increasingly encircled by its windings. The "walls of the ravine . . . inclined so much toward each other as . . . to shut out the light of day, while the long plume-like moss which depended densely from the intertwining shrubberies overhead, gave the whole chasm an air of funereal gloom" (DA, 1279). Bracketing the experience of infolding involves precisely this designation of a privileged realm for a secretum iter that ranges beyond the bounds of possibility. Descriptio becomes an act of consecration, giving the reported experience the quality of a solemn and ceremonial observance.

This circularity encloses all elements in the scene in a close unity of purpose, a mutual conspiracy, absolute in the sense that it involves nothing beyond itself and its own endless continuance. Its chief effect is redundance. Although the circularity is broken up

along the riverway by multiple angles and sharp turns, certain repetitions establish the centripetal pattern. "At every instant the vessel seemed imprisoned within an enchanted circle." Descending still further, the vessel enters "a circular basin," follows along the wall "in an infinity of curves," later to leave the "gentle and extensive curve" of this body of water for "a rapid descent into a vast amphitheatre entirely begirt with purple mountains, whose bases are laved by a gleaming river throughout the full extent of their circuit." The figural circuit both determines and monitors a succession of views, a look inward to a center, in the same way as the "belt walk" of the English garden commanded a series of limited points of view around the cultivated space.[71]

Moving habitual discourse into a sacred, uneigentliche mode generates paradox: to carry out a journey involves a commitment to stasis, and to enlist a perception depends upon obstruction. What Poe means, despite the deceptive mimicry of progression, implicit in the notion of a journey, is a slow building up of inertia. If we had to find an analogue for the properties of this river, whose every action contains conversion into immobility, we might look to the waters that Poe describes in "Silence: A Fable," which ". . . flow not onwards to the sea, but palpitate . . . with a tumultuous and convulsive motion."[72]

The object of this discourse being "supremeness," and claiming the perfection intrinsic to a completeness, alleged process is revealed as a succession of static states. In fact, all processes, repeated within the narrative, form a closed system. Within bounds a curious un-

moving oscillation of forces infinite perpetuates itself. Repeatability as the approach to complete identification, a state suggestive of an ultimate unity, is nowhere as marked as in the beginnings and ceasings of each paragraph. The sense of enclosure and circuitousness is equivalenced in the paragraph design. This signifies the most obvious structural means of echoing the wreath-like nature of the landscape.

Reading each paragraph, you have the sense of entering, winding though a series of varied scenes, and then, ending up in the same place. There is no real change from paragraph to paragraph, although a dynamic of difference is announced within each. The first and last sentence of each paragraph both frame and fix the "action." The equivalence achieved between them is a larger instance of the accord maintained throughout between individual words and phrases, where differences in meaning are subordinated to the forms of identification construed. Such an accord depends on all elements articulated being brought into parity. Controlled in terms of overture and closure, this is an architectural method that in first opening out, always closes in. The opening sentences begin:

> The usual approach to Arnheim was by the river
>
> Having threaded the mazes of this channel for some hours
>
> The visiter, shooting suddenly into this bay from out the gloom
>
> These things are observed during the canoe's gradual approach
>
> But here the voyager quits the vessel which has borne him so far

> The boat, nevertheless, glides magically into the winding channel
>
> Floating gently onward, but with a velocity slightly augmented, the voyager

The key words indicate activity, changes in direction or speed, apparently moving toward a something new. The last sentence which acts as an emphatic refrain arrests the motion put forth. Functionally different, its determining words generally express impeded activity and a space delimited and impenetrable:

> The crystal water welled up against the clean granite . . . with a sharpness of outline that delighted while it bewildered the eye.
>
> . . . it became, indeed, difficult not to fancy a panoramic cataract of rubies, sapphires, opals and golden onyxes, rolling silently out of the sky.
>
> . . . the full orb of the declining sun . . . forms the sole termination of an otherwise limitless vista seen through another chasm-like rift in the hills.
>
> Farther back within the domain, the vision is impeded by an impenetrable screen of foliage.
>
> Down this new opening the eye cannot penetrate very far, for the stream, accompanied by the wall still bends to the left, until both are swallowed up by the leaves.
>
> Lofty hills . . . covered with vegetation in wild luxuriance still shut in the scene.
>
> (We here omit the last sentence of the tale, eleven lines in length and extremely involuted. It operates according to entirely different constraints.)

Words and their echos control our reading as elements of the scene form an artificial or fictitious viewing. Through the ordination of expositions and results, the parallelism of thought and syntax at all points weaken the specificity of individual terms and pronounce the pattern.

The reader, along with the voyager, is literally held within the circle language has wrought. Looking again at the terminus of each paragraph, we are made to sense that each distinct section is merely a restatement of the previous, operating quite as strictly as the "refrain" whose qualities Poe explains in "The Philosophy of Composition":

> As commonly used, the refrain, or burden, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone--both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity--of repetition.[73]

Since the prose draws its unity of effect out of successive impressions of particular resonances and reduplications, we must be aware of these inventive concretions. Through repetition they acquire an intensity far exceeding that of the less frequent words presented. The lexical issue is primary. Through repetition of certain privileged categories and the number and kinds of procedures used to put these categories into relief, we are enabled to detect a design coincident with the effect. In the four and a half pages that comprise the entire journey to Arnheim, we find these oft-repeated nouns:

> wall(s)(12x); water(8x); stream(s)(6x); gate(5x); canoe(5x); vessel(5x); bank(5x); hills(4x); river(4x); channel(3x); boat(3x); vista(2x); scene(2x); plateau(2x); domain(2x); chasm(2x); chasm-like(2x); sides(2x); slope (2x)

The words are primarily connected to the means of voyage, the bounds through which it takes place and through which things are seen or hidden. The river, portent of a poised and ideal world, acts in analogy and contrast with many words in the passage.

The problem of beginning and ceasing is the problem of assigning temporal limits to a process of change measured against a continuum. How words that mean motion coalesce to form stasis involves strictly observed procedures. What gives the terminal an effect of the endless, and the everchanging, the effect of constancy? Poe's skill in handling the time element so that a sequence of perceptions seem to assemble into a single, still setting (brought to a maximum materialization in the tale's ending), depends first upon a dramatization of persistency. The word, "still," iterated throughout the action, fixes a world where everything prevails.

Although the narrator marks out changes in time along the route, "in the early morning," "during the forenoon," "as the evening approached," "for some hours," "every moment," and designates a progress, "slowly," or "suddenly," the terms of changing time are yet endowed with the specifications of continuity. It is not that there is a lack of verbs, though the substantive accumulations are heavy. However, the precise quality of the verbs determine the modes of intensification worked out:

> passed, subsided, merged, grew, increased, became, flowed, enwrapt, sloped, descend, lies, reposes, disappears, swings, advance, floated, maintained, proceeds, arise, prevails, extends, impeded, vanishes, swallowed up, shut in, barred by, falls into, glides between, begirt

The mechanism of how things appear and disappear, augment and dissolve underlies the deceptive nature of the narrative progress. Things appear and disappear, wax and wane, proceed and prevail. The points

of vanishing are markers for the way an appearance of progression can merely fade away. To cite a few examples: "a declining sun rolling silently out of the sky"; "the larger vessel disappears"; "until lost in the distance to the westward"; "its chasm-like appearance vanishes"; "until both are swallowed up by the leaves"; "and is thus hidden from sight." Of course, these vanishings are antithetical to those rarer moments when things are "more distinctly seen" or "distinctly visible."

If there is predication, it is kept so slight as to be almost non-existent. All ends by subsiding, slowing down in abeyance. The motion, the flow through the ravine or within the basin is muted by adverbs that convey infinitesimal slightness, "a gentle but accelerated velocity," "a gentle movement," "a velocity slightly augmented," a process so steady that it is hardly detected. Indeed, movement is so minute that the canoe, now termed a "fairy bark," is itself brought into suspension: it "lies apparently motionless in the middle of the lake." The ambiguity of the diction, its indifference, focuses on this condition of hesitation. Just as Arnheim's buildings (Arnheim itself being one knows not where) are literally suspended "as if by miracle in mid air," terms for process and repose, equibalanced, cancel each other out.

Within the basin, the earlier mentioned "enchanted circle," the vessel is confined by "insuperable and impenetrable walls of foliage, a roof of ultra-marine satin," but the vessel has "no floor." And bounded on the sides by grassy slopes, rocky walls and precipitous granite cliffs, with dense foliage and overhanging moss, there is

always the water, that one spot of insubstantiality which holds everything between presence and absence, revelation and cocealment. Most important, in the beginning of the journey, the frozen moment sets itself up: ". . . the keel balancing itself with admirable nicety on that of a phantom bark, which, by some accident having been turned upside down, floated in constant company with the substantial one, for the purpose of sustaining it" (DA, 1279). This moment of balanced contrast is echoed at the terminus.

Poe makes absolutely unmistakable to the reader the necessary interaction between the phantasmal and the definite. The irresolution of this exchange maintained through the operations of language allows for no real change. The way a scene can thus be frozen, a reduction of dynamics to statics, exemplifies the operative principle of the following three-sentence paragraph:

> These things are observed during the canoe's gradual approach to what I have called the gate of the vista. On drawing nearer to this, however, its chasm-like appearance vanishes; a new outlet from the bay is discovered to the left--in which direction the wall is also seen to sweep, still following the general course of the stream. Down this new opening the eye cannot penetrate very far, for the stream, accompanied by the wall, still bends to the left, until both are swallowed up by the leaves.
> (DA, 1282)

The paragraph moves from a casual plain-spoken one sentence recapitulation of observation and approach to the vanishing that accompanies the appearance, the obstruction of a promised aperture. If we divide the paragraph into what we see as its points of progress, it becomes clear that there is very little change in the action:

1) the canoe approaches what is termed the gate of the vista

2) what appeared as gate is, upon closer observation, not any longer chasm-like and the change in appearance announces a new outlet

3) the new opening is not really an opening, for the eye cannot penetrate very far

4) the wall still accompanies the stream, bends with it to the left and both move out of view

In moving through the riverway, we simultaneously move between walls. An indetermined, middle ground qualifies the presentation of words. A one-directional process, "to the left," propositions turn upon themselves in an oscillatory, rather than genuinely ambiguous manner. The absence of a seeing subject and the prevalence of the passive voice contribute to weakening our sense of onward movement. In this way, it is easy to see how Poe takes motion in space and duration and collapses them into one.[74]

By process of repetition, therefore, the disjunctive parts can be made conjunctive. Once a flow has been broken up into its components, into elements that apparently destroy the indivisibility and non-interruptedness connected with the idea of motion, these parts realign themselves through a rhythmic and syntactic regularity into the state of alternating and nondisparate figures. Once the pattern of repetition is grasped, distinct particles assimilate themselves into the pattern, enforced by alternating, but similarly arranged lines and paragraphs.

A linguistic ambivalence accompanies the undermined shifts and

changes in observation in the passage under consideration. The arbitrary nature of naming, of using any term to describe a scene, suggested by "what I have called the gate of the vista," might refer us back to another, earlier act of terming: "The canoe steadily proceeds, and the rocky gate of the vista is approached." Deliberately directing attention to the act at this point calls into question the accuracy of a previously unproblematic observation. It also recalls an admission the narrator makes when he begins his journey: "The channel now became a gorge--although the term is somewhat inapplicable, and I employ it merely because the language has no word which better represents the most striking--not the most distinctive--feature of the scene" (DA, 1279). The equivocation manifest in what appears at first glance the most common of terms, accomodates the communication to the indistinct and uncertain world of illusion.[75]

The final paragraph of the text begins with a use of words as mere approximations, emphasizing recognition of the limits of language, of the fact that "words are vague things." As the voyager nears the Paradise of Arnheim, a term is revealed to be totally arbitrary while making no difference to the climactic effect. The translinguistic, the unsaid, carries the most weight. "The voyager . . . finds his progress apparently barred by a gigantic gate"; he then corrects the terminology, "or rather door of burnished gold." In the next sentence, however, he writes: "This gate is inserted in the lofty wall. . . ."

The paragraph presents a cluster of repetitions with which we are now familiar. A maximum correlation and hence a finishedness is sustained by the symmetrical placement of ideas. A short look at the

progression of the lines preliminary to the sudden view of Arnheim is instructive:

> . . .floating. . . the voyager . . . finds his progress apparently barred . . . the now fast-sinking sun . . . it is seen that the main body of the water still sweeps in a gentle and extensive curve to the left, the wall following it as before, while a stream . . . diverging from the principle one, makes its way . . . under the door, and is thus hidden from sight. The canoe falls into the lesser channel and approaches the gate.
>
> (DA, 1282)

The preestablished patterns still apply: a flow and its disruption, a tangle of extension and closure. But then, the barred spaces, the obstructions fall away: "Meantime the whole Paradise of Arnheim bursts upon the view." Ceasing to be the domain, the artificial paradise claims its priority as sublime. After the fractured view, the sight truncated and circumscribed by sharp turns and chasm-like limits, the intermittent opens out. The "wings" of the gateway to Arnheim which has been cut into the massive wall of the river channel, "are slowly and musically expanded," into an unconditional harmonization.

The final descent made, now comes the "upspringing" of Arnheim. A hymn of adoration, this revelation of the whole is a brilliant demonstration of a visionary landscape that is constructed part by part. I cite the entire passage:

> Meantime the whole Paradise of Arnheim bursts upon the view. There is a gush of entrancing melody; there is an oppressive sense of strange sweet odor;--there is a dream-like intermingling to the eye of tall slender Eastern trees--bosky shrubberies--flocks of golden and crimson birds--lily-fringed lakes--meadows of violets,

> tulips, poppies, hyacinths and tuberoses--long intertangled lines of silver streamlets--and upspringing confusedly from amid all a mass of semi-Gothic, semi-Saracenic architecture, sustaining itself as if by miracle in mid air; glittering in the red sunlight with a hundred oriels, minarets, and pinnacles; and seeming the phantom handiwork, conjointly, of the Sylphs, of the Fairies, of the Genii, and of the Gnomes.
> (DA, 1283)

Poe's language of the sacred obeys the demands of copia, not limits. Its overt expansion, the nearly breathless cataloguing of images operate as signal of the revealed sublime (though enclosed, we remember, by a Claude-like "circuit of purple mountains"). The technique of enumeration, alliteration (for example: the sibilant "sense of strange sweet odor"; "long intertangled lines of silver streamlets"); repetition ("There is . . . there is . . . there is"); and rhyme ("melody," "bosky," "lily," "conjointly," "violets," "streamlets," "minarets," at points of particular emphasis) lend a rhythmic progression to the lines.

A resonant incantation, primitive in its diction and exotic in its choice of images,means to overwhelm the reader with the hypnotic effect of harmonized sense and sound. To illustrate the enumerative style as indicative of the revealed truth that is coincident with absolute beauty, identifiable in much of Poe's work, I quote from an earlier, briefly experienced moment of vision in the river journey to Arnheim:

> The impressions wrought on the observer were those of richness, warmth, color, quietude, uniformity, softness, delicacy, daintiness, voluptuousness, and a miraculous extremeness of culture that suggested dreams of a new race of fairies, laborious, tasteful, magnificent, and fastidious. . . .
> (DA, 1280)

Another measureless meditation where seemingly any word or if possible, all words, could be used. They do not really mean; they suggest, much in the way an abstract painting might be made of a multitude of colors to create an effect of no color which surpasses the quality of each color. Here, the overabundance of words, the over-saying, creates an atmosphere of amaze before the indescribable, mirroring that which cannot be contained in any single word. The resultant vagueness levels matter, motion and force into the object of the design, to give a sign of "spiritual interference."

More central to our analysis is the fact that the landscape finally does become a still-life. The praise is so general, and its generality so protracted, that the concrete particulars, are accumulated to a point of final stasis. One could hardly imagine a scene, or rather, sentence, with less action. After the triple, "there is," the entire sentence is made up of gerunds, the verbs made into nouns: "upspringing," "sustaining," "glittering," "seeming." The muted predications noted throughout our analysis are now totally negated. The force is made through the substantive excess, stringing out words as successive stills in a motion revealed to be a series of motionless states. The scene maintains itself "as if by miracle in mid air," and refutes a world of change and impermanence.

The total coherence, the infinite play of mirror imagery is Poe's design. And if an accelerated staccato sounds like a legato, it merely reenacts the unity of effect on the mind, which reflects the symmetry of the universe. From the uninterrupted continuum, we can get a sense of sublimity, a sense that appeals to our "poetical

. . . truthful . . . symmetrical, instinct." The absolute coherence attained here operates through what Poe described in Eureka as "that omniprevalent law of laws, the law of periodicity." The phrase has not escaped the tyranny of time. Beginning with "There is," and ending with "seeming," it merely adapts itself to this tyranny by treating duration's flow as an apparently endless succession of nominatives at an accelerated tempo. The dash contributes to the on-going beat.

The tale ends with the concept of "seeming"; all that has been "seen" subsumed into this final fantasy. By the very nature of its generalization, the representation is almost devoid of content, well described in another context by Northrop Frye, "a universe in which everything is potentially identical with everything else."[76] The tendency toward equivalence of all referents has designated every formal device employed. Edmund Burke, believing that an infinite could be reflected through art, emphasized that the business of poetry, in contrast to painting, is to display the effect words can have on the mind of the reader. His explanation of the two means to the artificial infinite stresses the interdependence of the artful and the deceptive in language:

> Succession; which is requisite that the parts may be continued so long, and in such a direction, as by their frequent impulses on the sense to impress the imagination with an idea of their progress beyond their actual limits. Uniformity; because if the figures of the parts should be changed, the imagination at every change finds a check; you are presented at every alternation with the termination of one idea,

> and the beginning of another; by which means it becomes impossible to continue that uninterrupted progress, which alone can stamp on bounded objects the character of infinity.[77]

Through proximity and repetition, the components of Poe's setting construct a landscape new in its perspective, a verbal context where "even the most conspicuous objects become blended into one" (Eureka, pp. 10-11). The reiterated structures that design the river journey and the final break into an enumeration affect our minds through a contrived "universelle analogie";[78] we are left with a glimpse of the illusion words can perpetrate. In Ellison's domain, Poe relies on artifice and angelic handiwork. In "Landor's Cottage," he makes a fiction of what at first glance seems a common landscape description, and we marvel even more at what language can effect.

- 4 -

THE ROAD TO LANDOR'S COTTAGE

> The principles of the poetic sentiment lie deep within the immortal nature of man, and have little necessary reference to the worldly circumstances around him. The poet in Arcady, is in Kamschatka, the poet still.
>
> Poe, "American Poetry," 1845

> A true artist should put a generous deceit on the spectators, and effect the noblest designs by easy methods. Designs that are vast only by their dimensions, are always the sign of a common and low imagination. No work of art can be great, but as it deceives; to be otherwise is the prerogative of nature only.
>
> Edmund Burke, Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful

Four months before his death, Poe published his final landscape sketch, "Landor's Cottage." He is reported to have said to Mrs. Whitman that "he intended writing a pendant to 'The Domain of Arnheim' in which the most charming effects should be attained by artistic combinations of familiar and unvalued materials."[79] More than the idyllic word-painting which he claims it to be, "Landor's Cottage" records a properly verbal expression of his unique idea of the poetic. The descriptive language he fashions becomes an exercise in obscurity: the most prosaic of subjects turns into the enigmatic; the most precise terms are rendered imprecise.

The tale exemplies concerns similar to those in "The Domain of Arnheim": the writer as a conscious colorist, formulating his reactions in a pictorial vocabulary; a landscape framed as if a painted picture; a delight in tracing the formal patterns of a landscape for the reader. The final effect, however, is different; its tone is playful, its motive artfully deceptive. The emphasis is not on a miracle "handiwork" approached through a vehicle of irreality, but the supposedly casual report of an overland hike, a "saunter" which suggests a Thoreau turned Southern ironist: "At all events, with my knapsack for a pillow, and my hound as a sentry, a bivouac in the open air was just the thing which would have amused me. I sauntered on, therefore, quite at ease--Ponto taking charge of my gun. . ." (LC, 1329). "Landor's Cottage" is by no means the straightforward landscape description it poses as; caprice predominates as the writer in the guise of an objective observer stretches language to the most extreme verisimilitude,

so extreme as to lay bare the "power of words" to not say.

Poe deliberately enfeebles the promised embodiment of vision, and the subtle undermining of a claim to merely "give, in detail, a picture . . . as I found it" entails an excessive exaggeration of what language can do, and emerges as an antic demonstration of its potential for ambiguity. The description of tulips congregating, the rolling hills and luxuriant grassy floors, bows finally to the inconsequence of such description. The most ordinary terms become questionable, doutful in validity as the work unfolds. Words fail to capture an experience, as local color and claims for representational accuracy disassociate themselves from an intelligible context. As the most ordinary terms and elements of the picturesque are reiterated and rendered in the most meticulous manner, they end up serving Poe's conception; they create a preposterous effect of premeditated vagueness.

Such conscious art brings us to the question of Poe's intent. W. C. William's words provide a way of entry:

> One feels that in the actual composition of his tales there must have been for him, as they embody it in fact, a fascination other than the topical one. The impulse that made him write them, that made him enjoy writing them--cannot have been the puerile one of amazement, but a deeper, logical enjoyment, in keeping with his own seriousness: it is that of PROVING even the most preposterous of his inventions plausible--that BY HIS METHOD he makes them WORK. . . . And by the very extreme of their play, by so much the more do they hold up the actuality of that which he conceives.[80]

Our concern is with Poe's "method." All the effort, all the struggle devolves upon the writing. He shows his skill at composition by his utilization and manipulation of words beyond their expected and rea-

sonable limits. The failure to communicate what we have been led to expect is his narrative purpose, suggests no failure in art, but rather proves the presence of a highly self-conscious inventor whose product results from an excess of art.

While he deliberately creates the illusion of a grasping of space and the reality of everything he depicts, the narrator allows something less visual, less tangible and more conceptual to present itself. The drama consists of an accurate over-enumeration of numbers, measures and shapes, coalescing into a design so obscure that it evades an immediate and all-encompassing interpretation. Through excessive precision and an overemphatic use of the specialized vocabulary of contemporary aesthetic theorists, Poe builds up an imprecision. Critics have given slight attention to "Landor's Cottage." If the tale has been dismissed as an overwritten, and not very enchanting, landscape description, or as an opportune journalistic enterprise, such is the result of failing to see Poe's delight in making faults expressive, letting "the real business of composition show."[81] In his own words about the composition of "The Raven," he is

> . . . letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought--at the true purposes seized only at the last moment--at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view. . . .[82]

Maintaining an aesthetic detachment, he mimics himself and his act of writing, consistently undermining his own proposed aims through techniques of semantic breakdown and irresolution. Such a motley writing, consisting of misused italics, oddly placed dashes, and more significant, a primitive grossness of diction, captures the indeterminacy which,

for Poe, presents the order of the universe.

Considerations of how a writer can make indistinct what by virtue of usual expectations should localize a place or set a limit to an expanse brings us to the contradiction between description and invention, mere representation and transformation. Edmund Burke's emphasis on poetry, chosen as an art superior to painting, focuses on the verbalization of uncertainty. Since poetry has a greater effect on the imagination than painterly imitation, he counseled a move away from verbal description, "merely as naked description," toward a verbal obscurity. A well-executed indefiniteness in engaging the attention of the reflective judgement, can result in a certain, desired disposition of the "soul" as it moves to apprehend, only to find it cannot comprehend:[83]

> But let it be considered, that hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea.[84]

Poe, striving always for a novel effect and enjoying the display of craft, deliberately lets us perceive the bounds. He chooses for subject a "little domain" (LC, 1334), apparently the familiar approach through the Hudson River Valley to his Fordham Cottage. How he makes of "a little idea," the most indistinct of things conceivable, exemplifies his skill in turning the visible into the imaginary. Walls, slopes, hills and banks demarcate the bounds, but in spite of such outlines, the move toward the boundless reveals itself.

The landscape, at first glance, may be divided up into discrete pictures readily apprehensible to the eye, but the blurring of a series of topographical descriptions through verbal deviations away from sense, ultimately makes these descriptions ungraspable by the mind. The disposition of objects in language, is not, after all, a painting; words can operate to delineate imprecision, to design the potentially undesigned. Poe's surface allegiance to the real and the local, what a painter could depict, is subverted by the verbal ambiguities that inhibit a clear, unproblematic "tracing" of the scene. We might put it this way: the picturesque is that attitude involving man in a direct and active relationship with the natural scenery through which he travels, anticipating, examining and recreating what he sees; the grounding of indeterminacy in language, the means by which matter is manifested to mind, calls up the pressures and pleasures of a critical and comprehensive contemplation. This "pedestrian tour" (LC, 1328) elicits a play of mind, turning the reader not only into spectator, but into a thinker as well. In asking us to "conceive," to get an "idea of the picture," he wants to convey, Poe demands a difficult attention. What strikes the mind with all its force is the verbal encounter with a landscape. At the service of a language of deception, these natural forms monitor effects on the imagination that transcend what painting can provide--marking out an uncertain process, rather than picturing a stasis.

The tale opens with an unnamed narrator who glibly reports a loss of direction on a winding road. This report introduces us to a fundamental indecision which will, in the course of the narrative, weaken

any attempt at direct presentation:

> During a pedestrian tour last summer, through one or two of the river counties of New York, I found myself, as the day declined, somewhat embarrassed about the road I was pursuing. The land undulated very remarkably; and my path, for the last hour, had wound about and about so confusedly, in its effort to keep in the valleys, that I no longer knew in what direction lay the sweet village of B--, where I had determined to stop for the night.
>
> (LC, 1328)

The typical convolutions of the landscape of the picturesque are introduced. Yet more than this simple description, what really hits us is the presence of a very personal narrator. Making his language conform to a method of indirection, he relates his observations with a negligent prolixity that gives doubt its full play and disruptive weight. His delineation of inexactitude depends for its effect upon the tension between the highly unspecific style which the narrator exhibits and the highly specific subject matter he claims to narrate. The stylistic idiosyncrasies reduce even the entertaining vagaries of picturesque imagery to the status of accessories to his technique. The seemingly haphazard mixture of conventional matter and unexpected form leads to a recognition of the superiority of a fiction.

The reduction of descriptive strategies into absurdity is carried out by a narrative voice of pervasive indifference, sustained by the nearly comic inexactness. His emphatic unconcern strikes us from the first page: "A smoky mist, resembling that of the Indian summer, envelopped all things, and, of course, added to my uncertainty. Not that I cared much about the matter" (LC, 1328). This neutrality, the fact that nothing really makes any difference, effects a perceptual per-

plexity and bewilderment quite equal to what any mist might provoke. His indifferent manner informs the method, punctuation and grammar of each sentence: "The sun had scarcely shone--strictly speaking--during the day, which, nevertheless, had been unpleasantly warm." This statement really says nothing. What are we to infer from the irrelevant "strictly speaking"? And the italicized "shone" points to yet another trifling with literary habit. What we are made to "see" is no longer a meaningful representation of anything. Such apparently inconsequential and unnecessary accretions occur throughout and sets up each word as a factor of undetermination. We might see this toying with individual words, as with objects or numbers to be broken up and recombined, as a decomposition of determinacy. The concept is an important one. It is graphically rendered through the excess of dashes, and reinforced by the great number of particles of speech that keep the words separate, hold them suspended and incoherent within a phrase in decomposition.

Each verbalization will settle into a combination that does not quite render the reality it sets out to depict, materializing instead, the imaginative process, in Poe's words, "the chemistry of the intellect."[85] Through the vacillations of the narrator, Poe confronts the reader with units of words which he must try to bring together into a whole, to comprehend. He induces our step by step participation in such an exercise.[86]

Pursuing a middle course, the narrator will leave everything uttered, undecided. An inessential interaction, contrary effects are brought together only to make any effort at distinction impossible.

Each condition wavers; not definitely possessing either of two opposite qualities, conditions cancel one another, and a certain picture of reality is dissolved. I cite some instances of this vagueness, this imprecise precision, which comes of unnecessary verbiage:

> . . . through one or two . . . before sunset, or even before dark . . . overgrown undergrowth . . . somewhat more abruptly . . . a building of some kind . . . the sun was about descending . . . Suddenly, therefore . . . reflected more or less upon all objects . . varied from fifty to one hundred and fifty, or perhaps two hundred . . . a height of some ninety feet . . . more or less high . . . scarcely less beautiful, although infinitely less majestic . . . with more than Arabian perfumes . . . little more space than just enough . . . here and there . . . each and all . . . more or less precipitous . . . only here and there . . . almost entirely clothed . . . a peninsula which was very nearly an island . . . I mean, merely . . . and I do not mean . . . The point of view . . . was not altogether, although it was nearly . . . to one or two . . . I did not remain very long . . . although long enough.

Through these pronounced contrivances, words are made to fail.[87] That the strange play he sustains remains always within the alleged intent to depict a scene in a conventional manner adds to the desired effect.

One of the predominant ways such obscuration operates is through the teller's reiterated attempts at communication, his drawing attention to the language of description at every point: "thus gradually as I describe it" (LC, 1330); "as I have mentioned"; "One of these I have already spoken of"; "as I have already described" (LC, 1331); "the vegetation hitherto mentioned" (LC, 1332); "I have spoken of the two openings into the vale (LC, 1333); "the 'depression' (already des-

cribed)" (LC, 1334); "I have described the brook;" "Its two general directions, as I have said"; "I will therefore describe it" (LC, 1335) and so on. Every registration of the landscape is interrupted by a shaping presence who in referring back to a previous act of depcition seems to establish clarity. However, this formation of points of reference only makes comprehension more questionable. The frequently stressed concern with accuracy of presentation, with consistency of delineation, only makes the telling more vague. The linguistic moves toward and away from explicitness are often set in motion by a confrontation with the equivocalness of applying terms to what is nonverbal. In "Landor's Cottage," even more than in Eureka, Poe demonstrates what he means by "mere enunciation."

As he begins his desultory tracking through the countryside, the narrator has difficulty deciding "whether the numerous little glades that led hither and thither were intended to be paths at all." He leaves this doubt unresolved, and following "one of the most promising of them," he comes upon what he calls "an unquestionable carriage-track." This is indeed "a world of words" ("Al Aaraaf"), and the following implies that the conception for which we struggle is often far different from the mere word: "The road, however, except in being open through the wood--if wood be not too weighty a name for such an assemblage of light trees--and except in the particulars of evident wheel-tracks--bore no resemblance to any road I had before seen" (LC, 1329). The conditional terms of the sentence frustrate the reader's desire to coalesce its components into a steady visuali-

zation of this highly problematic road that opens into a more dubious gathering of "light trees," given the perhaps "too weighty" name of "wood."

Throughout the journey roads succeed upon roads; they wind through various vales and eminences, slight elevations and declivities more or less high. The narrator's overstressed attentiveness to exact shapes and distances produce a monotony. We can cite a passage at random, since the technical play is essentially similar from one description to the next:

> The little vale into which I thus peered down from under the fog-canopy, could not have been more than four hundred yards long; while in breadth it varied from fifty to one hundred and fifty, or perhaps two hundred. It was most narrow at its northern extremity, opening out as it tended southwardly, but with no very precise regularity. . . . The slopes which encompassed the vale could not fairly be called hills, unless at their northern face. Here a precipitous ledge of granite arose to a height of some ninety feet; and, as I have mentioned, the valley at this point was not more than fifty feet wide; but as the visiter proceeded southwardly from this cliff, he found on his right hand and on his left, declivities at once less high, less precipitous, and less rocky. All, in a word, sloped and softened to the south; and yet the whole vale was engirdled by eminences, more or less high, except at two points. One of these I have already spoken of. . . . Here, generally, the slopes were nothing more than gentle inclinations, extending from east to west about one hundred and fifty yards. . . . As regards vegetation, as well as in respect to everything else, the scene softened and sloped to the south.
>
> (LC, 1331-32)

Not knowing how a slope could be called a hill only at its northern face, why a hill has been distinguished from a slope, a slope from an eminence, we realize that the appellations are a series of approxima-

tions, contextually irrelevant and moving toward a never-reached point of significance. The narrator qualifies each designation to such a degree that it resists organization into a meaningful representation. This resistance to specificity is best effected by his deceptive accentuation of his verbalization. He describes a ledge, measures a prescribed point in the valley, which he says "I have mentioned." He has not. Nor has he "already spoken of" one of the points where eminences, neither high nor low, circumscribe the valley. The reader looks for the promised clarification and does not find the clarity he has been led to expect. First, an illusion of certainty is projected, and then, we are disoriented, forced to stop and ask: "But what does it all mean"?

By imposing limits to his expression, he allows for increasing generalization. Both tautology and contradiction operate in this passage: statements are decomposed and restricted (by such shifters as "while," "or," "but," "unless," "yet," "except") and then made simultaneously all-inclusive. The notion of being "engirdled" and encompassed" recalls the idea of a perfect "domain." The idea motivates yet other markers for wholeness, and they are strengthened through redundance: "All, in a word, sloped and softened to the south"; ". . . the whole vale"; "generally"; ". . . as well as in respect to everything else, the scene softened and sloped to the south."

The landscape into which we enter, a realm of "no very precise regularity," is characterized by the gentle indifference of one who ostensibly depends on an entire aesthetic tradition for his framework.[88] Making certain that we know he utilizes popular theories, the narrator

describes a spot whose "capabilities" have been realized:

> Not a single impediment lay in the wheel-route--not even a chip or dead twig. The stones that once obstructed the way had been carefully placed--not thrown--along the sides of the lane, so as to define its boundaries at bottom with a kind of half-precise, half-negligent, and wholly picturesque definition.
>
> (LC, 1329)

The indefinite definition characteristic of the picturesque motivates this rendering--a composite of contrasts, a careful insouciance. As he ruminates on the scene, he points out that "all that seemed to have been done, might have been done here--with such natural 'capabilities' (as they have it in books on Landscape Gardening)--with very little labor and expense." And his consideration that "all roads, in the ordinary sense, are works of art" accords well with Gilpin's remarks on his tour of the Wye: "The picturesque eye also, in quest of beauty, finds it in almost every incident, and under every appearance of nature. Her works, and all her works, must ever, in some degree, be beautiful."[89] The narrator's idea of beauty is far more exclusive and not "ordinary" in any sense. This road suggests something beyond even a "mere excess of art manifested."

He situates himself on "one of the blossomy stones," and in wonder, "gazes up and down this fairy-like avenue for half an hour or more" (LC, 1330). Yet he distinguishes himself from those popular seekers after "picturesqueness" (Poe coins the term). All of nature's products do not in themselves excite his admiration. Instead, the "character of the art" strikes him: the fact that "an artist, and

one with a most scrupulous eye for form, had superintended all these arrangements" (LC, 1330). The narrator thus challenges the basic assumptions of current gardenist technique while dispensing with the romanticizers of nature. His imagined artist favors the artificial over the natural style. Improving nature through rigorous composition, he reveals nature artificed, everything held balanced between extremes:

> The greatest care had been taken to preserve a due medium between the neat and graceful on the one hand, and the pittoresque, in the true sense of the Italian term, on the other. . . . Everywhere was variety in uniformity. It was a piece of 'composition,' in which the most fastidiously critical taste could scarcely have suggested an emendation.
>
> (LC, 1330)

This purifying art presents itself to his eyes throughout the walk along the serpentine path. It never loses its singularity as artifact: "Its character did not undergo any material change" (LC, 1330). What we might see as the "as if" quality of the landscape, its being a world remade, is revealed by the way the narrator chooses to portray what he observes and the kinds of comparisons he evokes to communicate the experience.

The disjunction of the sentence structure mimes the mind's act of perception. The devices used to describe the unsettled and pending landscape depend upon a technique of graduated steps toward communication.[90] The syntax recreates this process. The perception, at each moment broken, a succession of disparate and changing views render the experience of one who perceives a scene revealed by degrees:

> As it came fully into view--thus gradually as I describe it--piece by piece, here a tree, there a glimpse of water, and here again the summit of a chimney, I could scarcely help fancying that the whole was one of the ingenious illusions sometimes exhibited under the name of "vanishing pictures."
>
> (LC, 1330)

As often as the narrator obstructs our comprehension, he acts to involve us in his process of conceiving--the arrangements of the parts of a scene to suggest an imagined and synthetic creation.

The narrator's art composes what he sees into art. It is not the landscape that matters, but its value as matter to be transformed through all the possibilities of linguistic illusion and ambivalence. A natural spectacle is transformed into artistic emblem, and the work itself accords with the context of a corrected nature. The "as if," hypothetical, a strategy for his exploitation of words that appear to coalesce as "ingenious illusions," a series of "vanishing pictures," occurs frequently in the discourse. To cite one example:

> By the time . . . the fog had thoroughly disappeared, the sun had made its way down behind the gentle hills, and thence, as if with a slight chassez to the south, had come again fully into sight. . . . Suddenly, therefore--and as if by the hand of magic--this whole valley and everything in it became brilliantly visible.
>
> (LC, 1330-31)

This verbalization of nature proceeds as fancifully as would a carefully staged act of magic. And as I have indicated, the narrator's tricks of illusion, his adroitness in deception, mimic an art of trompe l'oeil. His description of the scene offers the terms for its methodical

derealization:

> The first coup d'oeil, as the sun slid into the position described, impressed me very much as I have been impressed when a boy, by the concluding scene of some well-arranged theatrical spectacle or melodrama. Not even the monstrosity of color was wanting; for the sunlight came out through the chasm, tinted all orange and purple; while the vivid green of the grass in the valley was reflected more or less upon all objects, from the curtain of vapor that still hung overhead as if loth to take its total departure from a scene so enchantingly beautiful.
>
> (LC, 1331)

The landscape is compounded of both vague impressions of general scope and the sharply defined, yet elusive details of that prospect. Denaturation of natural elements converts observation into diction. Through a hyperbolic, overly ornamented style, the narrator encases a living object in the written word.[91] In his pictorialization, vegetation is luxurious, exotic and perfumed; multicolored flowers and all types of trees are given sentience.[92] His description of a tulip tree demonstrates an uncommon and arcane choice of words. He names, and hence elevates the tree into the linguistic. His deliberate use of the correct Latin name is overly technical within the context of normal picturesque description: "It was a triple stemmed tulip-tree--the Liriodendron Tulipiferum--one of the natural order of magnolias." And continuing to accentuate artificiality, he explains: "Nothing can surpass in beauty the form, or the glossy, vivid green of the leaves of the tulip tree . . . they were full eight inches wide; but their glory was altogether eclipsed by the gorgeous splendor of the profuse blossoms." Then, with an exclamation, he brings the rather

fantastical objects before the mind's eye:

> Conceive, closely congregated, a million of the largest and most resplendent tulips! Only thus can the reader get any idea of the picture I would convey. . . . The innumerable blossoms, mingling with those of other trees scarcely less beautiful, although infinitely less majestic, filled the valley with more than Arabian perfumes.
>
> (LC, 133)

The earth is covered with a "grass . . . deliciously soft, thick, velvety, and miraculously green; and he adds, "It was hard to conceive how all this beauty had been attained."

As he approaches the cottage, the studied ambiguities continue, making it equally difficult for the reader to get a sense "of the picture" he claims to want to convey. Vagueness functions in conjunction with the direct clues to an atmosphere of illusion; natural objects are turned into the inorganic, and all blends into the enigmatic effect: The rivulet's crystalline waters ("No crystal could be clearer than its waters") are bounded by banks of "emerald grass," and these banks "rounded; rather than sloped, off into the clear heaven below; and so clear was this heaven, so perfectly, at times, did it reflect all objects above it, that where the true bank ended and where the mimic one commenced, it was a point of no little difficulty to determine." As in "The Domain of Arnheim," he uses the watery site as signal for a suspended world:

> The trout, and some other varieties of fish, with which this pond seemed to be almost inconveniently crowded, had all the appearance of veritable flying-fish. It was almost impossible to believe that they were not absolutely suspended in the air.
>
> (LC, 1333)

A grotesque imagining, this vision is so extravagant and so long-winded, that what began as common kinds of fish end by appearing other-worldly.

His first sight of the cottage is no clearer than the preceding observations. On one hand, he observes that "this house, like the infernal terrace seen by Vathek, "était d'une architecture inconnue dans les annales de la terre," but undermines such an idea. He explains:

> I mean, merely, that its tout ensemble struck me with the keenest sense of combined novelty and propriety--in a word, of poetry--(for, than, in the words just employed, I could scarcely give, of poetry in the abstract, a more rigorous definition)--and I do not mean that the merely outré was perceptible in any respect.
>
> (LC, 1335)

And here we have the real aim of the entire landscape sketch. Picturesque language has been exploited as a means to allude to an act of poetization. The combinatorial power of his words which give a "rigorous definition" of a whole whose effect is indefinite links his linguistic creation to the divine. Following the minutely detailed description of the cottage of Mr. Landor (nearly five pages which we shall not discuss; very similar in structure to "The Philosophy of Furniture"), the entire narrative ends with this one sentence paragraph:

> It is not the purpose of this work to do more than give, in detail, a picture of Mr. Landor's residence --as I found it.
>
> (LC, 1340)

An abrupt termination to what seemed to be a never-ending series of measures, colors and forms joining to construct a picture. He has described the "marvellous effect" of the cottage as dependent upon "its artistic arrangement as a picture," emphasizing: "I could have fancied, while I looked at it, that some eminent landscape-painter had built it with his brush" (LC, 1335). Yet, despite such seeming deference to a picturesque tableau, the last sentence sounds a false note. At the conclusion, Poe slyly enjoins the reader to look back at the patterns formed by his words. The verbal trickery defies such a declaration of intent. We might substitute the word "found" by "framed," or in keeping with Poe's own "jeu suprême," substitute: "--as I feigned it."

NOTES

[1] Joseph Lynen, The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), p. 264.

[2] Ibid., p. 262.

[3] For useful studies on the pictorial propensity in Poe, see Nina Baym, "The Function of Poe's Pictorialism," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 65 (Winter 1966), 46-54; Leo Spitzer, "A Reinterpretation of the 'Fall of the House of Usher,'" 4 (Fall 1952), 351-63; N. Bryllion Fagin, The Histrionic Mr. Poe (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), pp. 176-82; Edward H. Davidson, Poe: A Ciritcal Study (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 76-80.

[4] Lynen, p. 267.

[5] Georges Poulet, Les métamorphoses du cercle (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1961), pp. 271-296. This remark appears on p. 294 of Poulet's study to which I am indebted.

[6] The depiction of a milieu where thought turns in upon itself and is presented in the process of doing so, looks forward to Mallarmé's "la Pensée qui se pense," an act embodied in the prose rhythms of Igitur, particularly. For Poe, it is a matter of discovering how to employ images that illustrate a progression of "effect," which appears to parallel the mind's movement as it thinks (or to be more precise, fancies) the unthinkable. In Eureka, the inconceivables are designated as "thoughts of thought" (p. 19). See also "Marginalia," in Works, XVI, 88: ". . . and for absolute thought, there is demanded time's endurance"; and "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" in Collected Works, II, 615: "But there seemed to have sprung up in the brain, that of which no words could convey to the merely human intelligence even an indistinct conception. Let me term it a mental pendulous pulsation."

[7] Poulet, p. 294.

[8] Ibid., p. 295.

[9] "Tale-Writing--Nathaniel Hawthorne," Works, XIII, 153.

[10] In "A Reinterpretation of the 'Fall of the House of Usher,'" p. 362, esp., Spitzer confirms Poe's ritual of the picturesque: how objects join to visualize an idea.

[11] "Bulwer-Lytton's Night and Morning," Works, X, 117.

[12] "'Twice-Told Tales' of Hawthorne," in Works, XI, 109.

[13] "Bulwer-Lytton's Night and Morning," in Works, X, 116-117.

[14] "Tale-Writing--Nathaniel Hawthorne," in Works, XIII, 153.

[15] Ibid.

[16] See Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), for an excellent discussion of Poe's symbolist method and the patternment aspect of his language. See, esp., p. 56: "Once we refuse to contemplate a separate reality 'meant by' the word, meaning becomes an activity that generates a pattern." Also see Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, ed. J. B. Carroll (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1956), p. 258: "Because of the systematic, configurative nature of higher mind, the 'patternment' aspect of language always overides and controls the 'lexation' or name-giving aspect. . . . Sentences, not words, are the essence of speech, just as equations and functions, and not bare numbers, are the real meat of mathematics.

[17] See Poe's note in Eureka, p. 39: "'Limited sphere'--A sphere is necessarily limited. I prefer tautology to a chance of misconception." An excuse for redundancy that clarifies nothing.

[18] "'Twice-Told Tales' of Hawthorne," in Works, XI, 108.

[19] Solomon F. Gingerich, The Conception of Beauty in Shelley, Keats and Poe (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1932), p. 190.

[20] Roman Ingarden, "The Aeshetic Experience and the Aesthetic Object," in Readings in Existential Phenomenology, Nathaniel Lawrence and David O'Conner, eds. (New Jersey: Englewood Cliff, 1967), pp. 310-11. See Fredric Jameson, The Prison House of Language (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 88. He uses Husserl's bracketing to explain the art-work that "systematically refuses content . . . translating all such proposed content back into projections of the form." Much of what Jameson says applies to Poe's language, which, in separating itself from the world of experience, points to its structures and their effects in order to form its own set of consistent forms and relations.

[21] For a fuller discussion of the conflict between reason and feeling, see Allen Tate, "The Angelic Imagination: Poe and the Power of Words," Kenyon Review, 14 (Summer 1952), 455-475. See also Edward H. Davidson, Poe: A Critical Study. He sees Poe as a transitional figure between 18th century rationalistic epistemology and 19th and 20th century philosophy of aesthetics and symbolism. Poe's attempt to solve the dualism within a unity mark his later works.

[22] Gingerich, p. 189.

[23] Works, XIII, 113. See also Works, XI, 278-79: "The higher order of genius should and will combine the original with that which is natural . . . in the artistic sense, which has reference to the general intention of Nature."

[24] See, esp., William Carlos William's essay on Poe, in In the American Grain (New York: New Directions, 1933), pp. 216-233. In his opinion, Poe is neither wistful romantic seeking some vague Arcadia, nor "Macabre genius," nor transcendentalist who subverts form to a moral content. For example, p. 221: ". . . to detach a 'method' from the smear of common usage--it is the work of nine tenths of his criticism. He struck to lay low the 'niaiseries' of form and content with which his world abounded. . . . He sought by stress upon construction. . . . . It is the very sense of a beginning, as it is the impulse which drove him to the character of all his tales; to get from sentiment to form. . . ."

[25] "Longfellow's 'Ballads and Other Poems,'" Works, XI, 77. In 1763, Hugh Blair wrote: "The sublime is the offspring of nature, not of art." Poe might have responded, "Beauty is the offspring of art, not of nature." And we should have no doubt which child he prefers. His Eden is rigorously constructed for the "eyes which were to behold it on earth." See "The Domain of Arnheim," in Collected Works, III, 1271-1272.

[26] I use Edmund Burke's term, explained in his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, 1757, James T. Boulton, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), Part II, Sec. IX, pp. 74-76. Poe's attempt to "stamp on bounded objects the character of infinity," results in his technique of indeterminacy.

[27] "Longfellow's 'Ballads and Other Poems,'" in Works, XI, 74.

[28] "A Chapter of Suggestions," in Works, XIV, 188. In "The Power of Words," Collected Works, III, 1213, Poe emphasizes the importance of reciprocity of cause and effect: "Let me endeavor, my Oinos, to lead you, step by step, to the conception I intend. You are well aware that, as no thought can perish, so no act is without infinite result."

[29] Collected Works, III, 1213.

[30] For Poe, the theme is inseparable from plot, and the plot is the correct method that achieves the "preconceived effect." His theme

arises out of the main intention, "perfection of plot," instead of being imposed from without onto the narrative framework, what he sees as the fault of allegory. Such an external embellishment destroys the story. As Poe writes in "Tale-Writing--Nathaniel Hawthorne," in Works, XIII, 148: "One thing is clear, that if allegory ever establishes a fact, it is by dint of overturning a fiction. Where the suggested meaning runs through the obvious one in a very profound under-current, so as never to interfere with the upper one without our own volition, so as never to show itself unless called to the surface, there only, for the proper uses of fictitious narrative, is it available at all." See Burton R. Pollin, "Undine in the Works of Poe," Studies in Romanticism, 14 (Winter 1975), 59-74, for a penetrating discussion of Undine as the properly handled allegory, particulary, pp. 68-69.

[31] "Longfellow's "Ballads and Other Poems," in Works, XI, 75.

[32] "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage" are designated As DA and LC, with page numbers, within the text. References are to the edition of Thomas Ollive Mabbott, Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. III.

[33] In a note to his introduction of "Landor's Cottage," p. 1328, Mabbott quotes Susan Archer Talley Weiss, Home Life of Poe (1907), p. 198: Poe set great store by "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage," and it may well be that it was in similar quiet stories that he hoped that "in prose he might yet surpass what he had already accomplished," as Mrs. Weiss records in Scribner's for March 1878. In his introduction to "The Domain of Arnheim," p. 1266, Mabbott writes: "This tale is an expansion of 'The Landscape Garden' of 1842. Poe set great store by it, and wrote to Helen Whitman on October 18, 1848, 'Meantime I enclose . . . 'The Domain of Arnheim' which happens to be at hand, and which, moreover, expresses much of my soul.' On the copy of the New York Columbian Magazine Poe sent to Mrs. Whitman he wrote, 'This story contains more of myself and of my inhrent tastes and habits of thought than anything I have written.'"

[34] The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, John W. Ostrom, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1948), II, 452. This letter, dated 7 July, 1849, was written after Poe had completed "Landor's Cottage," and three months before his death. "Landor's Cottage" was completed, according to Mabbott, about January 21, 1849. Eureka was first published in June, 1848.

[35] "Review of N.P. Willis, in Works, XII, 37. See Margaret Alterton, Origin of Poe's Critical Theory (Iowa City, 1925), for a discussion of the importance of the antithesis between human imagination and God's creation to Poe's mind and art.

[36] For extremely useful treatments of Poe's landscape fiction, see, Robert D. Jacobs, "Poe's Earthly Paradise," American Quarterly,

12 (Fall 1960), 405-13; Jeffrey A. Hess, "Sources and Aesthetics of Poe's Landscape Fiction," American Quarterly, 22 (1970), 177-189; Joel R. Kehler, "New Light on the Genesis and Progress of Poe's Landscape Fiction," American Literature, 47 (1975), 173-183. Both Jacobs and Hess discuss Poe's possible debt to the contemporary landscape theorist, Andrew Jackson Downing, whose Treatise on Landscape Gardening appeared in 184. More to the point of our discussion, although I do not agree with its conclusions, is Hess' attempt to illustrate how Poe's "Domain of Arnheim" borrowed extensively from Thomas Cole's series of paintings, The Voyage of Life.

[37] "A Review of Drake-Halleck," in Works, XI, 192.

[38] Kenneth Clark, Landscape into Art (London: John Murray, 1949), p. 6.

[39] Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England (New York: MLA, 1935), p. 203.

[40] Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Harold F. Harding, ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), p. 181.

[41] Donald A. Ringe in "Painting as Poem in the Hudson River Aesthetic," American Quarterly, 22 (1970), 71-83, analyzes "associationist" philosophy and the importance of "suggestion," as well as problems of form and content in the aesthetic theory of the Hudson River School. The discussion of Bryant, Allston, Archibald Alison and Dugald Stewart offers an interesting contrast and comparison to Poe's verbal pictorialism.

[42] "Longfellow's 'Ballads and Other Poems,'" Works, XI, 73.

[43] "The Domain of Arnheim," Collected Works, III, 1272.

[44] "The Poetic Principle," Works, XIV, 274.

[45] According to Dugald Stewart, the function of the compound faculty is "to make a selection of qualities and of circumstances from a variety of different objects, and by combining and disposing these, to form a new creation of its own." The quotation is from Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, cited in the survey by Walter John Hipple, Jr., The Beautiful, The Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), p. 295. Poe's concept of originality focuses on this novel conjoining of disparate elements: ". . . the true invention is elaborate. There is no greater mistake than the supposition that a true originality is a mere matter of impulse or inspiration. To originate is carefully, patiently, and understandingly to combine," "Peter Snook," in Works, XIV, 73. W. C. Williams stresses Poe's emphasis on compo-

sition as the key to Poe's reformation of language. In this connection, see also, Valéry on Mallarmé, Variété II (Paris: Gallimard, 1930), p. 162: "Le premier mouvement de sa recherche fut nécessairement pour définir et pour produire la plus exquise et la plus parfaite beauté. Le voici d'abord, qui détermine et qui sépare les éléments les plus précieux. Il s'étudie à les assembler."

[46] "Review of N.P. Willis, in Works, XII, 38.

[47] Ibid.

[48] "The Poetic Principle," in Works, XIV, 273-74.

[49] "Marginalia," in Works, XVI, 164.

[50] See William Hogarth, The Analysis of Beauty, 1753. The edition I use is a reproduction from a copy in the possession of the Scolar Press, 1971, pp. 24-25: "The eye," he asserts, "has enjoyment in winding walks, and serpentine rivers, and all sorts of objects, whose forms . . . are composed principally of what, I call, the waving and serpentine lines." This intricacy of form gratifies "this love of pursuit, merely as pursuit," which "is implanted in our natures." The recognition that a work of art is excellent in the measure that it excites the mind and demands an intellectual effort by viewer or reader was prevalent in Poe's day. In a review of Poe's Tales, at their time of publication, in The American Whig Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science, Vol. II, 3 (Sept. 1845), the reviewer writes: "Their effect is to surprise the mind into activity, and to make it attend, with a curious delight, to the unraveling of abstruse points of evidence, through the exercise of the most piercing and patient analysis."

[51] Sir Uvedale Price, An Essay on the Picturesque, As Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful, and on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape (London, 1810), I, 88-89.

[52] See Poe's "Peter Snook," in Works, XIV, 89: "'Peter Snook' is a Flemish home-piece of the highest order, its merits lying in its chiaroscuro--in that blending of light and shade and shadow, where nothing is too distinct, yet where the idea is fully conveyed."

[53] In the Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, Part III, Sec. XXVI, p. 124, Edmund Burke writes:

> Sublime objects are vast in their dimensions; beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases

> loves the right line, and when it deviates, makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid and even massive.

These distinctions are germane to my argument. Poe is after a beauty, but seen more as a process that neutralizes difference. The beauty of a specific locale, for example, operates through alternation between the categories and characteristics that Burke has delineated.

[54] "Review of N. P. Willis," in Works, XII, 38.

[55] Robert L. Carringer, "Circumscription of Space and the Form of Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym," PMLA, 3 (May 1974), 506-18. The quotation is on p. 508. Carringer discusses circumscription in connection with the desire for disaster that characterizes the typical Poe protagonist.

[56] "Ligeia," in Collected Works, II, 311-312: "'There is no exquisite beauty,' says Bacon, Lord Verulam, speaking truly of all the forms and genera of beauty, 'without some strangeness in the proportion.'"

[57] Price, An Essay on the Picturesque, I, 49.

[58] On the complex matter of interior design and landscape aesthetics in Poe's tales, these works are particularly relevant: Cleanth Brooks, "Edgar Allan Poe as Interior Decorator," Ventures 8 (1968), 41-46; Alvin Rosenfeld, "Description in Poe's 'Landor's Cottage,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 4 (Spring 1967), 264-66; and Kermit Vanderbilt, "Art and Nature in 'The Masque of the Red Death,'" Nineteenth Century Fiction, 22 (1968), 379-89.

[59] "The Philosophy of Furniture," in Collected Works, II, 497, 500 and 499. The italics are mine with the exception of "boudoir."

[60] Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, p. 211.

[61] Hogarth, The Analysis of Beauty, p. 24. According to Hogarth, the line of beauty pervades everything beautiful, in art and nature. In landscape, its grand objects are roads and rivers.

[62] Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 58.

[63] In "The Island of the Fay," in Collected Works, II, 600, Poe writes of "the genius of the scene." The epigraph to the tale reads: "Nullus enim locus sine genio est." Mabbott explains that this is a slight misquote from Servius' Commentary on Vergil's Aeneid, v. 95.

Mabbott also directs the reader to Burton Pollin's find that Poe's form is precisely that of Victor Hugo in his Notre-Dame de Paris, Book VII, Chap. V. See Pollin, Discoveries in Poe (Notre-Dame: Univ. of Notre-Dame Press, 1970), p. 22.

64 Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 171. The notion of a play between analogy and contiguity, the timeless and a temporal progression or "scandement" will be further developed in my essay on Mallarmé's Igitur, where the Hegelian categorical intermediate state is treated as "le mensonge exploré de l'infini."

65 Poe's preference for aquatic imagery, the still, but limitlessly reflective tarn of Usher, the whirlpools, lakes and rivulets of other tales, amounts to a symbolization of transformation. In "Eleonora," Collected Works, II, 639, out from "encircled domain, there crept a narrow and deep river. . . winding stealthily about in mazy courses." And in "Morning on the Wissahiccon," Collected Works, III, 863, Poe praises the American scene and the picturesqueness of a humble rivulet: "River scenery has, unquestionably, within itself, all the main elements of beauty, and time out of mind, has been the favorite theme of the poet."

66 Very similar to the language used to describe the childhood school in "William Wilson," Collected Works, II, 429: "There really was no end to its windings. . . . Then the lateral branches were innumerable--inconceivable--and so returning in upon themselves, that . . . during the five years of my residence here, I was never able to ascertain with precision, in what remote locality lay the little sleeping apartment assigned to myself."

67 The jongleur, anonymous transmitter of inherited traditions, gives himself up as poet to the task of realizing the potency of the spoken word: he communicates through movable clusters of words, or formulas, an immovable and unchanging perception of reality. As depersonalized as he must be, he nevertheless uses language to great effect, in order to move the audience. The notion of unintentional transmitter is consequently undercut by certain structural markers that indicate a purposeful artistry.

Joseph Frank in Critical Inquiry, 5 (Winter 1978), 287, discusses Genette's work on the relation between a text and its narrator. Translating from Genette's Figures II (Paris: Seuil, 1969), p. 66, Frank develops Genette's distinction between recit and discours, which parallels a distinction between text and narrator--whether or not the presence of a locutor is grammatically indicated. For Genette, recit, unlike discours, "is a particular mode, set apart, defined by a certain number of exclusions and restrictive conditions (avoidance of the first person, etc.)." If recit establishes itself as the "pure form of objective narration" and discours as the "pure form of subjective narration," it would be illuminating to apply the distinction and its narrative demands to Poe's use of or elimination of the narrator as the shaping subject of a tale.

[68] "The Island of the Fay," in Collected Works, II, 604.

[69] Cf. The reality of a "paysage amphibie" in Proust's conception of beauty, "une espèce de fondu." See esp., A la recherche du temps perdu, P. Clarac and A. Ferré, eds. (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), I, 835: ". . . il m'était arrivé, grace à un effet du soleil . . . de regarder avec joie une zone bleue et fluide sans avoir si elle appartenait à la mer ou au ciel." The "dream-like intermingling" which concludes "The Domain of Arnheim" is echoed in many of Poe's tales.

[70] Given Poe's fascination with the "physical power of words," his preoccupation with vitality as the principle of the universe, and his atomistic penchant, I want to emphasize that the domain of physics seems to lend much to an understanding of his theories on the imaginative process. His description of division and dynamism in the elements: "Is not every word an impulse on the air?" matter being but the extension of thought which is motion in "Mesmeric Revelation," brings us to the equivalence between his "science," faulty as it might be, and his treatment of words. If the real essence of the universe appears as vacillation, matter and mind being one in the total design--the "absolute reciprocity of adaptation which is the idiosyncracy of the Divine Art"--indeterminacy is its parallel in human language.

I quote from Heisenberg and Collingwood. The following citations are, I think, relevant to Poe's attempts to "physicalize" language and to enforce bounds on any conception:

> In quantum theory the uncertainty relation put a definite limite on the accuracy with which positions and momenta, or time and energy, can be measured simultaneously. Since an infinitely sharp boundary means an infinite accuracy with respect to position in space and time, the momenta or energies must be completely undetermined, or in fact arbitrarily high momenta and energies must occur with overwhelming probability.
> (Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science, New York: Harper and Row, 1958, p. 162)

In The Idea of Nature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 153-54, R. G. Collingwood writes that Einstein's universe is "a sphere of which the centre is nowhere, the circumference everywhere." Contradistinct to Pascal, all possible paths along which matter can travel are curved paths, "so that they are infinite in the sense of returning infinitely upon themselves, though finite in the sense of being confined within a determinate volume which is the volume of the universe."

[71] On this topic see Ronald Paulson, Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), p. 22: "Of course in any garden one object may

be seen from different places, but the English in the eighteenth century show more awareness of the device, write about it, and tend to arrange walks around lakes and in many cases around the garden itself, constructing what came to be known as a pictorial circuit or perimeter belt," and p. 27: the circuit "is a paradigm of the eighteenth century's realization that how something looks, what sort of response it gets, depends on the point of view from which it is seen, and so implicitly by whom it is seen."

[72] "Silence: A Fable," in Collected Works, II, 195.

[73] "The Philosophy of Composition," in Works, XIV, 199.

[74] See Eureka, p. 64: ". . . the considerations through which, in this Essay, we have proceeded step by step, enable us clearly and immediately to perceive that Space and Duration are one."

[75] In "The Domain of Arnheim," Ellison is quoted as saying: "What is said about detecting and bringing into practice nice relations of size, proportion, and color, is one of those mere vaguenesses of speech which serve to veil inaccuracy of thought," p. 1275. Poe's concern with the relationship between words and thought occurs throughout his work. In "The Descent into the Maelstrom," what to term the whirlpool presents a problem with naming. Called the "Moskoe-ström," a rejection of "Maelström," it emphasizes the sailor's rejection of efforts to define. His substitution of "Moskoe-strom" is significant. It is not a definition, but a reference to the place of vortex. Its significance is that it signifies nothing. After pointing out in a catalogue all the islands in the area, the sailor concludes: "These are the true names of the places --but why it has been thought necessary to name them at all, is more than either your or I can understand," Collected Works, II, 579.

[76] Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 124.

[77] Edmund Burke, Philosophical Enquiry, Part II, Sec. IX, p. 74.

[78] See Baudelaire's poem, "Correspondances": "Les parfums, les couleurs, et les sons se répondent." And relative to the serial effect, whereby ordinary objects are absorbed into a unity, see Mallarmé, "L'après-midi d'un faune": the "sonore, vaine et monotone ligne."

[79] See Mabbott, Collected Works, III, 1326. He refers to a letter of Mrs. Whitman to George W. Eveleth, December 15, 1864.

[80] William Carlos Williams, In the American Grain, p. 230.

[81] Ibid., p. 231.

[82] "The Philosophy of Composition," in Works, XIV, 194-95.

[83] This activity on the mind, inducing a disposition of the soul, amounts to Kant's definition of the sublime, particularly, the "mathematically sublime," which stirs up the faculty of cognition. The object that occasions the sublime in Poe is the language itself. Word after word is presented to the reader; in themselves clear and unambiguous, they coalesce into a complex network that strains our imagination. We move successively from word to word, apprehending each, but if we try to bring them together--Kant's aesthetic comprehension-- we experience a sense of limits before the unfathomable. In "The Analytic of the Sublime," cited in Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment (Part One of the Critique of Judgment), James Creed Meredith, trans. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), pp. 99, Kant writes:

> To take in a quantum intuitively in the imagination . . . involves two operations of this faculty: apprehension (apprehensio) and comprehension (comprehensio aesthetica). Apprehension presents no difficulty: for this process can be carried on ad infinitum but with the advance of apprehension comprehension becomes more difficult at every step and soon attains its maximum, and this is the aesthetically greates fundamental measure for the estimation of magnitude.

[84] Burke, Philosophical Enquiry, Part I, Sect. IV, p. 89.

[85] "Review of N.P. Willis," in Works, XII, 38-39:

> The pure Imagination chooses, from either beauty or deformity, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined; the compound, as a general rule. . . . But, as often analogously happens in physical chemistry, so not unfrequently does it occur in this chemistry of the intellect, that the admixture of two elements will result in a something that shall have nothing of the quality of one of them--or even nothing of the qualities of either.

[86] The natural details are elements which the reader rethinks and reconstitutes. The words of Tobias Danzig in Number: The Language of Science (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 205, are instructive: "Fiction is a form in search of an interpretation.

[87] Poe confesses the necessity of emptying words of denotative content--any content contrary to the "absolute irrelation" allusive of the Divine. Speaking of the composition of "The Raven": "Had I been able, in the subsequent composition, to construct more vigorous stanzas, I would without scruple, have purposely enfeebled them, so as not to interfere with the climacteric effect." This is cited in "The Philosophy of Composition," in Works, XIV, 203.

[88] See Jeffrey A. Hess, "Sources and Aesthetics of Poe's Landscape Fiction," p. 179: "Poe is specifically referring to the American writer, Andrew Jackson Downing, whose own influential Treatise on Landscape Gardening was published in 1841, a year before the appearance of 'The Domain of Arnheim.'" I agree with Hess' contention that in alluding to this work Poe is challenging it.

[89] William Gilpin, Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, and Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of the Year 1770, London, 1782.

[90] In Eureka, Poe attempted "keeping unbroken that train of graduated impression by which alone the mind can comprehend. . . ." Of course, the mind's not being able to comprehend is the effect desired. Nevertheless, Poe's remarks on the dash in the "Marginalia," Works, XVI, 131, reveal that this puncuation is part of his art of presenting those difficult to grasp ideas--a language of successive approximations.

> . . . this point represents a second thought--an emendation. In using it just above I exemplified its use. The words "an emendation" are, speaking with reference to grammatical construction, put in apposition with the words "a second thought." Having written these latter words, I reflected whether it would not be possible to render their meaning more distinct by certain other words. Now, instead of erasing the phrase, "a second thought," which is of some use--which partially conveys the idea intended--which advances me a step toward my full purpose--I suffer it to remain, and merely put a dash between it and the phrase "an emendation." The dash gives the reader a choice between two, or among three or more expressions. . . . It stands, in general, for these words--"or to make my meaning more distinct."

Apparent faults in grammar, verboseness and tautology are means to accomplishing his design, a design made up of such half-formed steps to the singular impression. As Poe admits in his Preface to Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque: "I think it best becomes me to say, therefore, that if I have sinned, I have deliberately sinned."

[91] Cf. "The City in the Sea," in Collected Works, I, 201, ll. 20-24:

> Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers--
> Up many and many a marvelous shrine
> Whose wreathed friezes intertwine
> The viol, the violet, and the vine.

92

In his essay on the poems of William Cullen Bryant in Works, IX, 292, Poe writes: "Happily to endow inanimate nature with sentience and a capability of action is one of the severest tests of the poet."

CHAPTER THREE

COSMOLOGY AND POETIC: FROM EUREKA TO MALLARME'S DESIGN

> La phrase du poète: la phrase primitive, univers joué et mimé.
>
> Aimé Césaire, Poésie et connaissance

> To look upwards from any existence, material or immaterial, to its design, is, perhaps, the most direct, and the most unerring method of attaining a just notion of the nature of the existence itself.
>
> Poe, "A Review of Drake-Halleck"

> J'avais, à la faveur d'une grande sensibilité, compris la corrélation intime de la Poésie avec l'Univers, et, pour qu'elle fût pure, concu le dessein de la sortir du Rêve et du Hasard et de la juxtaposer à la conception de l'Univers.
>
> Mallarmé, Letter to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam

The notion of a necessary cosmic design that ends in an equation between a symmetry in the universe and perfection of poetic form, underlies much of Poe's verbal play. What was sublime in theory, is in practice mimicry, a display that calls attention to the limitations of human invention. This paradox is necessary, for the "poetical essence of the universe" can only be manifested through a curious polarity. As we have seen, Poe's predetermined indefiniteness of effect depends upon the tension held between his voiced framing that delimits written expression (demonstration) and the "suggestive indefinitiveness of meaning" that acts to unlimit the language (suggestion). The movement between clarity and obscurity, between statements made and unmade, composes a method both complex and frivolous. To "design but to suggest" declares a position in suspension between extremes. Poe's dissimulation of discursive devices which signify their own processes to the point of parody, communicates a seriousness of intent, that "undercurrent, however indefinite of meaning."

That this meaning remain difficult to grasp, that it be kept undetermined and far from obvious, is crucial to Poe's fiction and the key to his theory, or more precisely, his "philosophy of composition." The apparent contradiction between an essential coherence and its manifestation in incoherence becomes central to Poe's strategy. In Eureka he has warned the reader to fix his attention on "the idea of the utmost possible Relation as the Omnipotent design, and on the precautions taken to accomplish it through difference of form" (p. 53).

In the works we have analyzed, Poe proposes to circumscribe the vague "idea" of poetry in words, but he acts to invalidate the bounds and calls into question his attempt. The apparent incoherencies demonstrate the limitations and inadequacies of language. Yet the demonstration itself exploits the limits to point to an indeterminate domain.

Attempting to invest words with a "poetic" sense beyond common usage demands Poe's expressive failure, a failure deliberate and veiled in jest. But Mallarmé adopted Poe as an austere "maître." Poe's game, like Dante's love, is "sublimed to heavenly mood." In a letter of 1864 to Henri Cazalis, Mallarmé declared: "Toutefois, plus j'irai, plus je serai fidèle à ces sévères idées que m'a léguées mon grand maître Edgar Poe."[1] And when Mallarmé wrote "L'Ouverture ancienne d'Hérodiade," "le cher supplice,"[2] the work of his "Rêve et d'élection,"[3] Poe emerged as the ideal against which he measured his perfected dream of beauty: "Il me faudra trois ou quatre hivers encore, pour achever cette oeuvre, mais j'aurai enfin ce que je rêve, écrire un Poème digne de Poe et que les siens ne surpasseront pas."[4] For Mallarmé, this beauty "n'a qu'une expression parfaite, la Poësie,"[5] an answer to Poe's dictum that "Beauty . . . is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem."[6]

Poe's vision of a divine unity on earth that necessitates the indefiniteness basic to "the true musical expression" was earlier stressed by Baudelaire:

> Il lui sera donné de conquérir l'admiration des gens qui pensent par son amour du Beau, par sa connaissance des conditions harmoniques de la beauté, par la poésie profonde et plaintive, ouvragée néanmoins, transparente et correcte comme un bijou de cristal,--par son admirable style, pur et bizarre. . . .--et dont la plus légère intention sert à pousser doucement le lecteur vers un but voulu. . . .[7]

Mallarmé first described "L'Ouverture ancienne" as "l'ouverture musicale."[8] The fusion of music and poetry moved him toward the invention of a language "d'une pureté que l'homme n'a pas atteinte et n'atteindra peut-être jamais."[9] His description of the new poetic reveals a profound coincidence with Poe's aim of using each word to serve a total impression, non-linguistic in its harmony:

> . . . j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots: Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.
>
> Le vers ne doit donc pas, là, se composer de mots; mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation.[10]

We recall Poe's definition of the "poetry of words as the Rhythmical Creation of Beauty." And Mallarmé's fabrication of beauty, "l'harmonie surnaturelle" in the "Ouverture" depends on a complex verbal arrangement of ever-deepening symmetry:

> Ajoute, pour plus de terreur, que toutes ces impressions se suivent comme dans une symphonie, et que je suis souvent des journées entières à me demander si celle-ci peut accompagner celle-là, quelle est leur parenté et leur effet. . . .[11]

Through the interplay of correspondences and contrasts, each image evoked must be modified and transformed through artful combinations until it undergoes a kind of alchemical change, conveying like Poe's Arnheim, "the sentiment of spiritual interference." And like Poe, Mallarmé admits that man's imagination cannot create substantially. His creativity is limited to existent things; through skillful selection and combination, he can, however, construct a novel atmosphere. As Mallarmé writes: "Les choses existent. Nous n'avons pas à les créer. Nous n'avons qu'à en saisir les rapports; . . . ce sont ces rapports qui forment les vers."[12] Words will interlock, visually and rhythmically, to form a configuration of nearly disembodied relations, those "impressions extra-terrestres, et nécessairement harmonieuses."[13]

Much critical debate has ensued regarding the influence of Poe's aesthetic theory on Mallarmé's practice of poetry.[14] An even more thorny question of influence concerns Mallarmé's translations of Poe's poetry. His translation was itself a defiance of Baudelaire's well-known injunction: "Une traduction de poésie aussi sombres, aussi concentrées, peut être un rêve caressant, mais ne peut être qu'un rêve."[15] Having ostensibly learned English "pour mieux lire Poe,"[16] Mallarmé makes the translation process a commentary on his method. In L'Oeuvre poétique de Stephane Mallarmé, Emilie Noulet explains:

> Or, traduire Poe, pour Mallarmé, c'est réfléchir à une méthode raisonnée de création qu'il adopte et adapte à la mesure de ses propres moyens, et c'est prendre des habitudes de langage mi-choisies, mi-adventices, surgies à son insu, ou s'affrontent et risquent de se nuire les génies respectifs des langues française et anglaise.[17]

Mallarmé's transformation and sytemization of Poe's remarks concerning artistic indirection, and the importance of his translations in achieving this end, raise questions as to how much his syntax was in fact influenced by his study of English. An attempt to prove influence is always a dubious undertaking. Suffice it to say that Mallarmé's effort to first write a poeme "digne de Poe," and then, to translate his poetry reveals a sustained interest in English words. Les Mots anglais, situated midway between linguistics and poetry, reveals Mallarmé's confrontation with a second language as a deliberation on that fundamental and hidden range between word and thought--an intermediate realm which inhabits all discourse. In Crise de vers, Mallarmé sees in the failure of the données of language to show forth idea, one of the foundations of poetry which "philosophiquement rémunère la défaut des langues, complément supérieur" (O.C. 364).

Through the conjunction of the linguistic forms of English and French, Mallarmé discovers the expressive potential of words, a force that discloses a substratum of effect proper to the "génie de la langue," and perhaps transcending both. Noulet points to the act of translating English as a disarticulation of linguistic givens to develop an expression simultaneously suggestive and elusive:

> En examinant de près l'influence des traductions de Mallarmé sur son propre style, il semble qu'on puisse affirmer que le charme du traduit a agi fortement sur lui. Il lui parût comme étant suprêment poëtique et propre à créer ces resonances mystérieuses qu'il cherchait et à contribuer à differencier la langue écrite

> du langage usuel. Il a essayé, sans déroger au génie essentiellement latin, de donner au français ce gout de patrie perdue de la poésie étrangère, et d'imiter cette démarche brisée et harmonieuse que la souplesse de la syntaxe anglaise permet à la poésie anglaise.[18]

Language becomes incantation. It exemplifies beauty in obscurity. Poe's ideal of a mysterious beauty, revealed in "The Domain of Arnheim," for example, as an alternately broken and fluid movement is central to Mallarmé's poetic:

> Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poëme qui est faite de deviner peu à peu: le suggérer, voilà le rêve. C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole: évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d'âme, ou, inversement, choisir un objet et en dégager un état d'âme, par une série de déchiffrements. (O.C. 869)

To decipher a pattern, a harmony in the apparent fragmentation and dispersal of elements, is to work through a complexity of forms to seize essence, to gain, finally, a "vue très--une de l'Univers."[19] Like Poe, Mallarmé uses terms of science as a metaphor for poetry, and he sees in scientific method a confirmation of language: "DE LA SCIENCE.--La Science ayant dans le Langage trouvé une confirmation d'elle-même, doit maintenant devenir une CONFIRMATION du Langage" (O.C. 852). In "Dernière Visite à Mallarmé," Valéry writes:

> Il est extrêmement remarquable qu'il [Mallarmé] soit arrivé, par l'étude approfondie de son art, et sans connaissances scientifiques, à une conception si abstraite et si proche des spéculations les plus elevées de certaines sciences. Il ne parlait jamais, d'ailleurs, de ses idées que par figures.[20]

My concern is to clarify the common thought patterns and linguistic aims of both Mallarmé and Poe through textual analysis. Having gained the benefit of an ironic detachment, quite unlike his youthful struggle with the "cher supplice" Hérodiade, Mallarmé writes in his Notes of 1869: "Toute méthode est une fiction, et bonne pour la démonstration" (O.C. 851). I shall take Poe's method as a fiction valid for the demonstration and interpretation of Mallarmé's texts.

Mallarmé's "jeu suprême" consists of an equivalence between a philosophy of the universe and formation of the poem. In the remainder of this essay I deal with the consequences of that equivalence.

- 2 -

> . . . l'explication orphique de la Terre, qui est le seul devoir du poète et le jeu littéraire par excellence.
>
> Mallarmé, Letter to Verlaine

In the aesthetician's metaphysic, Eureka, Poe equates the "sense of the symmetrical" with the "poetical essence of the universe." The criterion of inner truth is a formal consistency. Discussing Laplace's Nebular Theory, he writes: "It is by far too beautiful, indeed, not to possess Truth as its essentiality--and here, I am profoundly serious in what I say" (p. 45). Symmetry is truth, and it is also poetical, therefore "Poetry and Truth are one." Connecting truth with the technical side of writing, he explains: "By truth . . . we mean that perfection which is the result only of the strictest proportion

and adaptation in all the poetical requisites."[21] The syntactical structure, the armature of the poem, serves to disclose an inner and unspoken harmony:

> . . . through the attainment of a truth, we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience, at once, the true poetical effect--but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.[22]

On one side, Poe equates truth with the objective, formal order ("the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest"); and on the other, he makes absolute harmony correspond to "the true poetical effect." The dual convergence, the fact that, as Dupin says in "The Purloined Letter": "The material world abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial,"[23] makes everything seen a passage to the unseen, the devices of metrical art a link to the unsounding harmony of the increate.

It is only through the intense contemplation of phenomenal appearances that one might attain an intuitive grasp of essence. The transmutation from matter to the "matter no more" of Eureka accomplishes itself through "the fluctuating principle." Through the oscillation between two diametrically opposed processes (attraction and repulsion), the two forces held in balance will one day yield to the tendency toward the centre, making the "return into One." The final effect is one of convergence and rediscovered unity. In the rhythms of dispersal and convergence lies the Law. The ideal state of "Simplicity" is both starting point and end, the sole assumption in the theory Poe advances

and the very method of thought:

> He who, divesting himself of prejudice, shall have the rare courage to think absolutely for himself, cannot fail to arrive, in the end, at the condensation of laws into Law--cannot fail of reaching the conclusion that each law of Nature is dependent at all points upon all other laws, and that all are but consequences of one primary exercise of the Divine Volition. (p. 46)

What Poe calls "the Cloud-Land of Metaphysics," becomes in Mallarmé's work, the site for what Valéry calls, "le spectacle idéal de la création du langage."[24] And in a profoundly moving essay on Mallarmé, he writes:

> Le passage du songe à la parole occupa cette vie infiniment simple de toutes les combinaisons d'une intelligence étrangement déliée. Il vécut pour effectuer en soi des transformations admirables. Il ne voyait à l'univers d'autre destinée concevable que d'être finalement exprimé.[25]

In Mallarmé's own words:

> Tout l'acte disponible, à jamais et seulement, reste de saisir les rapports, entre temps, rares ou multipliés; d'après quelque état intérieur et que l'on veuille à son gré étendre, simplifier le monde.
>
> A l'égal de créer: la notion d'un objet, échappant, qui fait défaut. (O.C. 647)

The objective of poetic language is to realize a possible logic of relations existing beneath the disorder of the material universe--a conjunction between a pure and potential word and the complex weave that is the poem. The spatial field across which the poet casts his words becomes an integral part of the poem itself:

> L'armature intellectuelle du poëme se dissimule et tient--a lieu--dans l'espace qui isole les strophes et parmi le blanc du papier: significatif silence qu'il n'est pas moins beau de composer, que les vers. (O.C. 872)

Mallarmé notes the connection between the construction of a still center ("étant ce qui ne se dit pas du discours," O.C. 386) and those "merveilleuse dentelles," the threads which the poet weaves out of the cosmic web, at the center of which he saw himself:

> . . . je venais de jeter le plan de mon oeuvre entier, après avoir trouvé la clef de moi-même, clef de voûte, ou centre, si tu veux, pour ne pas brouiller de métaphores --centre de moi-même . . . où je me tiens comme une araignée sacrée, sur les principaux fils déjà sortis de mon esprit, et à l'aide desquels je tisserai aux points de rencontre de merveilleuses dentelles, que je devine, et qui existent déjà dans le sein de la Beauté.[26]

As poet, he conjures objects only to disembody them. He constructs an elaborate network of intertwined figures, which in giving a form to what was once vacant space, does not abolish it. In "La Dernière Mode" Mallarmé accentuates further the equivalence between the "dentelles," the threads of Idea, and the fusion of intuitive inception and the art-labor:

> . . . une langue, loin de livrer au hasard sa formation, est composée à l'égal d'un merveilleux ouvrage de broderie ou de dentelle; pas un fil de l'idée qui se perde, celui-ci se cache mais pour reparaître un peu plus loin uni à celui-là; tous s'assemblent en un dessin, complex ou simple, idéal, et que retient à jamais . . . l'instinct d'harmonie que, grande ou jeune, on a en soi. (O.C. 828)

We recall Poe's statement in Eureka: ". . . the sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended upon with an almost blindfold

reliance" (p. 71).

In this whole figure, parts are intrinsically related to each other. The system where "le langage se réfléchissant" (851) favors a "mise en rapport" of all particulars. The unity in diversity of Eureka, the peculiar and abrupt changeableness in concord of the picturesque, is, in Mallarmé's web, rendered as a design both broken and circular. The sinuous variations of the arabesque makes it impossible to distinguish figure from ground. This ingenious obscurity brings to mind Poe's preference for the chiaroscuro: "An outline frequently stirs the spirit more pleasantly than the most elaborate picture."[27] The figural outlines contain and are in a sense identical with the undefined and formless. When Mallarmé declares: "Evoquer, dans une ombre exprès, l'objet tu, par des mots allusifs, jamais directs, se réduisant à du silence égal, comporte tentative proche de créer. . ." (O.C. 400), he asserts a method and carries out Poe's conditional expression: "If ever mortal painted an idea. . . ."[28] The pattern is made up of "des sineuses et mobiles variations de l'Idée" (O.C. 648).

Mallarmé's discovery of "le Beau" was the revelation of an ontological reality--the order of the universe--and the laws of poetry were to be coterminous with this design. For Mallarmé, the fabrication of words to inform what is yet vacant space evolves between the absences, at the intersection of being and non-being, finite and infinite. The "toiles d'araignées qui tremblent au haut des grandes croisées" ("Frisson d'hiver") offer an analogy with the alternating movement back

and forth between opposing determinations, a wavering constellation that engenders a totality. The "toile d'araignée" is linked to the man-made "dentelle" in its artistry, and, in turn, the verbal construct seems necessitated by the very laws of nature: "Le chant jaillit de source innée: antérieure à un concept" (O.C. 858). The reciprocity of center and circumference, and more to the point, the reciprocal coherence of unformed and form, nature and art, is assured. Contradiction is superseded by relationships and intervals:

> . . . l'ambiguïté de quelques figures belles, aux intersections. La totale arabesque, qui les relie, a de vertigineuses sautes en un effroi que reconnue; et d'anxieux accords. . . . Chiffration melodique tue, de ces motifs qui composent une logique, avec nos fibres. (O.C. 647-648. I underline)

In this ambiguity lies the inner logic of cosmology and poetic. For both Mallarmé and Poe, an artful display of the structures of language functions as the expression of a hidden order, "quelque suprême moule" (O.C. 333), in Mallarmé's words. As we saw, Poe presents multiple oscillations in paradox (the alternation between attraction and repulsion, concentration and dispersion stated in Eureka and mimed in his tales) in order to enable "the mind to take in, as if . . . at one glance, a distinct conception of the individual Universe." The final coherence out of apparent incoherence projects unity as "the source of the phenomenon." The verbal representation is first, a demonstration of the sensations of contingency, and second, an invitation to the reader to grasp the ideal system that the visible body of contradictions have momentarily concealed. Through a deliberate vacilla-

tion in language Poe intends to move the reader to the very limits of comprehension before the sudden and direct apprehension of "the science of Relation in the abstract--of absolute Relation--of Relation considered solely in itself" (p. 38).

Mallarmé also moves the reader to perceive that truth beneath the surface of phenomena, the complex relations through which must be realized an "intuitif accord": "Résumer d'un regard" ("La Nénuphar blanc," O.C. 286). In verbal figurations so complex, our intuition must aid reason. In La Distance intérieure, Poulet writes:

> Chaque poème de Mallarmé est . . . agencé pour être finalement lu sans arrêt, par un même coup d'oeil et une seule opération de la pensée; comme le sont les démonstrations cartésiennes où l'esprit par un vol prompt atteint aussitôt jusque dans ses conclusions une intuition primitive.[29]

The language demonstrates a fiction of indeterminacy, a mimicry of chance, in order to communicate that truth which strikes one "comme une obligation de qui dechaîna l'Infini" (O.C. 648). The true poetical effect strikes the reader with a harmony that did not first appear, leading him to perceive "une extraordinaire appropriation de la structure, limpide, aux primitives foudres de la logique" (O.C. 386). Like Poe, Mallarmé shapes a style in accord with forms of indeterminacy "à retrouver un ordre mystérieux" (O.C. 916). Order is discovered at the utmost limits of apparent disjunction. An unexpected unity reveals itself through calculated fragmentation of form. J.-P. Richard explains: "L'apparent non-sens ouvrira des lors le chemin d'un sens. Ici encore, c'est en allant au bout des choses, en aiguisant au maximum l'incohérence, que l'on se donnera le plus de chances de reconstruire un

monde cohérent."[30]

The mystique of a total verbal expression of the universe involves the artist in a conscious dissimulation. What J.-P. Richard describes as "la loi d'ambiguïté"[31] and "l'inégalité analogique"[32] are Mallarmé's strategies to exemplify the inner machinery of the universe. The exemplification partakes of that "convertibility" of terms and phrases that was essential to the poetic truth of Eureka. The verbal deviations play at contingency and give an illusion of randomness. Through apparent chance, "dans un acte où le hasard est en jeu" (O.C. 441), a pattern reveals itself: the words point to a deeper level of connection between things, underlying not just the maintenance of disparates, but their transformations from one to the other. Mallarmé's supreme gesture, "le coup de dés," seems to be the image of chance, objectified, but it meanwhile affirms the power of spirit, as told in the beginning of Scene IV, "Le Coup de Dés":

> Bref dans un acte où le hasard est en jeu, c'est toujours le hasard qui accomplit sa propre Idée en s'affirmant ou se niant. Devant son existence la négation et l'affirmation viennent échouer. Il contient l'Absurde--l'implique, mais à l'état latent et l'empêche d'exister: ce qui permet à l'Infini d'être.
> (O.C. 441)

"La Poésie, proche l'idée" (O.C. 381). Complete unity can only be stated as an unrest of incompatables, the suspense between a yes and a no. Yet spirit triumphs in the "rythmique suspense," oscillating from one perspective to the other, "penché de l'un ou l'autre bord" (O.C. 461).

inspiration
suppression et loi

Mallarmé, Le "Livre"

Mallarmé's two tiered notion of reality and its dual manifestations of homogeneity and distinction, directs us again to Poe's cosmology. The two mutually opposed forces of gravity and diffusion both originate in unity and are held equipoised until the return to unity:

> For the effectual and thorough completion of the general design, we thus see the necessity for a repulsion of limited capacity--a separative something which, on withdrawal of the diffusive Volition, shall at the same time allow the approach, and forbid the junction, of the atoms; suffering them infinitely to approximate, while denying them positive contact.
> (p. 23)

In this state of hesitation and point of balanced, yet undulant, contrast, where particles move endlessly toward each other ("tending toward formation"), a distinct "something" permits atoms to coalesce with one another, yet at the same time prevents a total coalition "up to a certain epoch." The elements are kept separate by the repulsive influence, which Poe alternately designates "now as heat, now as magnetism, now as electricity." He attributes "vitality, consciousness and Thought" to "this strictly spiritual principle" (p. 24). An analysis of Mallarmé's language, approached from this tendency, yields evidence of the extremes of fluctuation in his technique. J.-P. Richard suggests that this point of poised scintillations, alternation held in a "simul-

tanéité discontinue" comprises Mallarmé's sortilège":

> Et même si diverse significations sont émises actuellement ensemble, elles resteront d'une certaine façon distinctes: cette distinction dans le simultané constituant peut-être tout le mystère de la poésie mallarméenne. . . .[33]

In "Le Mystère dans les Lettres," Mallarmé describes the separation of individual words which enter into rhythmic polyvalence, through the evocation of the diamond's refractive and dispersive powers:

> Les mots, d'eux-mêmes, s'exaltent à mainte facette reconnue la plus rare ou valant pour l'esprit, centre de suspense vibratoire; qui les perçoit indépendamment de la suite ordinaire, projetés, en parois de grotte, tant que dure leur mobilité ou principe, étant ce qui ne se dit pas du discours: prompts tous, avant extinction, à une réciprocité de feux distante ou présentée de biais comme contingence.[34]
>
> (O.C. 386)

The underlying rhythms of dispersal and convergence that delineate the linguistic space--"la plus grande dispersion" and "les sens d'une tension capable de rassembler l'infinie diversité"[35]--form the two poles of Poe's universe. All of matter can be described through the antitheses of the following lexicon:

gravitation	electricity
attraction	repulsion
homogeneity	heterogeneity
simplicity	complexity

And Poe explains:

> The former is the body; the latter the soul; the one is the material; the other the spiritual, principle of the

> Universe. No other principles exist. All phaenomena are referable to one, or to the other, or to both combined . . . attraction and repulsion are the sole properties through which we perceive the Universe . . . we are fully justified in assuming that attraction and repulsion are matter:--there being no conceivable case in which we may not employ the term "matter" and the terms "attraction" and "repulsion" taken together, as equivalent, and therefore, convertible, expressions in Logic.
>
> (p. 24)

Equality is the general law. The idea of a balancing force in nature is in accord with the principles of gravitation and repulsion. The two seemingly opposed categories are reciprocal reflections of one another.

We shall consider this floating unity-in-duality as one of Poe's systematic techniques helpful in providing the terms for an analysis of Mallarmé's method. In both Igitur and "Une Dentelle s'abolit," Mallarmé will attempt to seize truth materially by a language that mimes these two tendencies, leading to fluctuations within the text between convergence and diffusion.[36] Guy Delfel writes of "la technique relationelle et la technique négative" in Mallarmé's work, agreeing with J.-P. Richard that the force of dispersion, "la technique négative est elle, plus personnelle, plus directement mallarméene."[37] In Les Mots anglais, Mallarmé extracts from the splitting of the letter W the sense of oscillation:

> Les sens d'osciller (celui-ci semblerait dü au dédoublement vague de la lettre, puis de flotter, etc.; d'eau et d'humidié; d'évanouissement et de caprice; alors, de faiblesse, de charme et d'imagination) se fondent en une étonnante diversité.
>
> (O.C. 119)

The spiritual principle, linked to caprice, to imagination, and to thought's rhythms, informs the pages of Igitur. The coherence of the story is disclosed through this process of dispersal, "cet emploi à nu de la pensée" (O.C. 455).

The cosmic syntax of Mallarmé objectifies "l'Idée," treating it, in the words of Julia Kristeva, as "polymorphe: rythme, danse, pluralité numérique."[38] As Mallarmé argues:

> Le Langage est le développement du Verbe, son idée, dans l'Etre, le Temps devenu son mode: cela à travers les phases de l'Idée et du Temps en l'Etre, c'est-à-dire selon la Vie et l'Esprit."
>
> (O.C. 854)

Translated into Poe's corresponding terms for order: "The Body and the Soul walk hand in hand." In this spectacle of coupling, "Pyrotechnique non moins que métaphysique, ce point de vue" (O.C. 655), lies the law that governs the material universe and forms the basis of a language called "essentiel" in contrast to "brut ou immédiat" (O.C. 368).

NOTES

1 Stéphane Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), ed. Henri Mondor and J.-P. Richard (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp.103-4. In the same letter, he encloses his poem L'Azur and writes to Cazalis: L'effet produit, sans une dissonance, sans une fioriture, même adorable, qui distrait, -- voilà ce que je cherche."

2 Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.200.

3 Ibid., p.208.

4 Ibid., p.207.

5 Ibid., p.243.

6 Poe, "The Poetic Principle."

7 Charles Baudelaire, "Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses oeuvres," Oeuvres en prose, traduction par Charles Baudelaire; texte établi et annoté par Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951), p.1045.

8 Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.161.

9 Ibid., p.242.

10 Ibid., p.137.

11 Ibid., p.161. Mallarmé also writes to Cazalis: "je me jetais en maniaque désespéré sur une insaissible Ouverture de mon poème qui chante en moi, mais que je ne puis noter." (p.180) Mallarmé's desire to create "un chant verbal" finds an antecedent in much of Poe's critical writings. In "The Poetic Principle," for example, Poe writes: "There can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the evident field for poetic development."

12 Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry

(Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p.871. All quotations are taken from this text, called O.C. in parentheses giving page numbers.

13 Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.195. Mallarmé will later call this verbal magic "Transposition." In his essay, Crise de vers he explains:

> Décadente, Mystique, les Ecoles se déclarant ou étiquetées en hâte par notre presse d'information, adoptent, comme rencontre, le point d'un Idéalisme qui (pareillement aux fugues, aux sonates) refuse les matériaux naturels et, comme brutale, une pensée exacte les ordonnant; pour ne garder rien que la suggestion. Instituer une relation entre les images exacte, et que s'en détâche un tiers aspect fusible et clair présenté à la divination. (O.C., pp.365-66)

14 Arthur Symons, T.S. Eliot, and Valéry, in particular, asserted Poe's authority as founding father of French Symbolism. The most complete summary in English of the influence of Poe's thought and poetry on Mallarmé is: John Chiari, Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé; The Growth of a Myth (New York: Gordian Press, 1970). Concerning questions of influence, the following studies are helpful:

C.P. Cambriaire, The Influence of E.A. Poe (New York: Stechert, 1927); L. Lemonnier, Edgar Poe et la critique française (Paris: PUF, 1928) and Les Traducteurs d'Edgar Poe en France (Paris: PUF, 1928); L. Seylaz, Edgar Poe et les premiers Symbolistes français (Lausanne: La Concorde, 1923); Patrick F. Quinn, The French Face of Poe (Southern Illinois University Press, 1957); Camille Mauclair, Le Génie d'Edgar Poe: La légende et la vérité, la méthode, la pensée, l'influence en France (Paris: Albin Michel, 1925). And particularly enlightening: T.S. Eliot, "Note sur Mallarmé et Poe," Nouvelle Revue Française, 27 (1926), pp. 524-26; "From Poe to Valéry," Hudson Review, 2 (August 1949), pp. 327-42; and Paul Valéry, "Situation de Baudelaire," Variété II (Paris: Gallimard, 1930), pp.121-55.

15 Baudelaire, Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires, traduction et introduction, quoted in Henri Mondor, Vie de Mallarmé (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), p.320.

16 Mondor, Vie de Mallarmé, p.73.

17

Emilie Noulet, L'Oeuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé (Genève: Droz, 1940), p.152. In my opinion, Noulet's remarks on Mallarmé's translations of Poe are quite convincing; and her analyses of individual poems of both writers in which she demonstrates the parallels remain the most discerning. In L'Expression littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé (Paris: Droz, 1947), Jacques Scherer attacks Mallarmé's translations of Poe and dismisses completely the influence of English on Mallarmé's syntax, pp.19-33. A consideration of Mallarmé's translations of Poe is instructive. The obscurity of his translations is of a very different kind than the original and the fact that the translations are in prose and not in verse both reveals Mallarmé's skill in making prose poetic and points to his later experiments in fusing poetry with prose. For a good discussion of Mallarmé's final aesthetic and the poème-critique see Norman Paxton, The Development of Mallarmé's Prose Style (Genève: Droz, 1968), pp.95-105.

18

Emilie Noulet, L'Oeuvre poetique de Stéphane Mallarmé, p. 154.

19

Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.249. This letter concerning the creation of the Poem defines the sources, the operation and the ends of the creative process -- the construction of a cosmos: "...le reste de mon corps oublié, sauf la main qui écrit et ce coeur qui vit, mon ébauche se fait -- se fait --. Je suis véritablement décomposé, et dire qu'il faut cela pour avoir une vue très -- une de l'Univers."

20

Paul Valéry, "Dernière Visite à Mallarmé," Variété II (Paris: Gallimard, 1930), p.180. We should not forget that Eureka had profoundly influenced Valéry. See "Au sujet d'Eureka," Variété I (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). W.C. Williams, in my opinion, Poe's best critic, writes of Poe's language in a manner similar to Valéry on Mallarmé's: "...a sense of play, as with objects, or numerals which he has in the original, dissociated, that is, from other literary habit; separate words which he feels and turns about as if he fitted them to his design with some sense of their individual quality...." In The American Grain, p.221. And more to the point: "With Poe words are figures; an old language truly, but one from which he carried over only the most elemental qualities to his new purpose; which was, to find a way to tell his soul," p.221.

21

Poe, "Longfellow's 'Voices of the Night,'" Works, X, pp.72-3.

[22] Poe, "The Poetic Principle," Works, XIV, p.290.

[23] Poe, Collected Works, III, p.989.

[24] Valéry, "Le Coup de Dés," Variété II, p.171.

[25] Valéry, "Stéphane Mallarmé," Variété II, p.165.

[26] Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.225.

[27] Poe, "Longfellow's Ballads and Other Poems," Works, XI, p.84.

[28] Poe, Collected Works, II, p.405.

[29] Quoted in J.-P. Richard, L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé (Paris: Seuil, 1961), p.556.

[30] Ibid., p.549. For an excellent discussion of Mallarmé's intentional, formal obscurity as means to poetic effect, see Jean Cohen, "L'Obscurité de Mallarmé," Revue d'Esthétique, 15 (1962), p.67: "... il est indiscutable que l'obscurité est voulue. Mieux encore, à ses yeux, la création poétique se confond à la limite avec l'obscurcissement volontaire."

[31] J.-P. Richard, L'Univers imaginaire, p.552.

[32] Ibid., p.551.

[33] Ibid., p.554.

[34] In his essay following his translations of Poe's poems, Mallarmé describes his work in terms of its prism-like powers: "Ainsi presque pas un des vingt morceaux qui ne soit en son mode un chef-d'oeuvre unique, et ne produise sous une de ses facettes, éclatante de feux spéciaux, ce qui toujours fut pour Poe, ou fulgurant, ou translucide, pur comme le diamant, la poésie." (O.C., p.228)

35
Maurice Blanchot, Le Livre à venir (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), pp.285-86.

36
Julia Kristeva in La révolution du langage poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.230, discusses "le déplacement et la condensation" termed thus by Freud and continues to develop the opposition between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic: "ces processus primaires (pré-syntaxiques) ont pu être décrits comme sélection et combinaison (substitution et contexture, métaphore et métonymie, similarité et contiguité) par R. Jacobson.... La condensation (la métaphore) résulte de la surdétermination, tandis que le déplacement (la métonymie) résulte d'une censure." Her discussion of Mallarmé's Igitur remains the most searching exploration of the language of the text as process.

37
Guy Delfel, L'Esthétique de Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Flammarion, 1951), p.150. Blanchot in L'Espace littéraire (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p.325, elucidates the dual character of Mallarmé's language by grounding it in equivocalness: "...l'entrelacement du oui et du non, le flux et le reflux de l'ambiguité essentielle."

38
Kristeva, La révolution du langage poétique, p.537.

CHAPTER FOUR

IGITUR OR THE GAME OF THE "SYNTAXER"

> The forms of thought are, in the first instance, displayed and stored in human language.
>
> Hegel, The Science of Logic

Il y a à Versailles des boiseries à rinceaux, jolis à faire pleurer; des coquilles, des enroulements, des courbes, des reprises de motifs. Telle m'apparâit d'abord la phrase que je jette sur le papier, en un dessin sommaire, que je synthétise. Si l'on obéit à l'invitation de ce grand espace blanc laissé à dessein au haut de la page comme pour séparer de tout, le déjà lu ailleurs, si l'on arrive avec une âme vierge, neuve, on s'aperçoit alors que je suis profondément et scrupuleusement syntaxier, que mon écriture est dépourvue d'obscurité, que ma phrase est ce qu'elle doit être et être pour toujours.

Mallarmé, Conversation with Maurice Guillemot, 1887

FOR DECOR: THOUGHT AND IMAGE

. . . quelque mise en scène spirituelle exacte

Mallarmé, Preface to Un Coup de Dés

> Avec véracité, qu'est-ce, les Lettres, que cette mentale poursuite, menée, en tant que le discours, afin de définir ou de faire, à l'égard de soi-même, preuve que le spectacle répond à une imaginative compréhension, il est vrai, dans l'espoir de s'y mirer.
>
> Mallarmé, La Musique dans les Lettres

Igitur is the story of the transmutation of idea into spectacle. Staged within a circumscribed space, it employs the horrific props of a tale by Poe, yet with the added solemnity of a Cartesian cogito gone awry. Wings beat, an ominous plumage of the night takes flight, a clock sounds, and a pendulum marks out the phantasmal space. Mallarmé sets the limits to his dream through a "mise en scéne" ou "dramatisation spéculative."[1] Igitur's divisions are five sharply defined settings:

1. Le Minuit
2. Il quitte la chambre et se perd dans les escaliers
3. Vie d'Igitur (schême)
4. Le Coup de Dés (Au tombeau)
5. Il se couche au tombeau

Within these sites Mallarmé selects and arranges objects to exteriorize his spiritual descent "au fond des choses" (434). The Gestalt of the tale manifests Mallarmé's non-representational absolute; his idea is shown forth in sensible form.

The chamber, a remarkable figure of enclosure, displays icons in patterns that orchestrate the moments in the drama. Timeworn and musty, the atmosphere is surrounded by obscurity, "une présence de Minuit" (436). The first part of the story, "Le Minuit," is a hymn to Midnight. The repetitions of "Minuit" frame the action and make the theatre: "Certainement subsiste une présence de Minuit"; "Révélateur du Minuit"; "ce Minuit demeure la présence"; "C'est le rêve pur d'un Minuit"; "ce Minuit évoque son ombre finie et nulle par ces mots"; "la parole qui absolut Minuit." What is within the room is purged of certainty and held in suspense, fluctuation and shadow. The very presentation of things prompts their vanishing. Housed in an alternately radiant and opaque context, the decor seems to defy our attempts to order what we view. The setting, a "miroitement de l'obscurité" (436), reinforces the uncertainty of the narrative.

Within "une mouvante limite" (435), appear infinite relationships. Mallarmé stages Igitur in a space that challenges objectification: "Ceci devait avoir lieu dans les combinaisons de l'Infini vis-à-vis de l'Absolu" (434). The whole is a mirrored world, an ensemble of reflexivity. In this interior landscape of unsettled reciprocity, light and darkness combine capriciously and the "diamant de minuit," the image of convergence and irradiation, signifies the combination. The symbiosis of qualities distinct by their natures makes the refrangent quality of a prose that reads as poetry. In Crise de vers, Mallarmé writes: "Similitude entre les vers, et vieilles proportions, une régularité durera, parce que l'acte poétique consiste à voir

soudain qu'une idée se fractionne en un nombre de motifs égaux par valeur et à les grouper" (O.C. 365). The composition of Igitur demonstrates the relational character of Mallarmé's language. Points of relation permeate the text, and these points are moments outside the flow of discourse. Distinct from the narrative and elevated from it, these points of equivalence open into an arrangement. Varying motifs of polarization cohere in a constellation of words (one of Mallarmé's favored images), within which a prism-like division of forms proliferate into a unity.

There is a principle of cohesion in the complex structure, woven of ever-shifting, surface reflections. The principle organizes the work to disclose its "balancier caché" (440). Thus to discover the internal organization is to rise out of limitedness to that "vue très --une de l'Univers." All parts of the context determine each other. And meaning is embodied in these reciprocal determinations. Mallarmé's challenge to the reader is analogous to his conception of the poet's activity:

> En vue qu'une attirance supérieure comme d'un vide, nous avons droit, le tirant de nous par l'ennui à l'égard des choses si elles s'établissaient solides et prépondérantes--éperdument les détache jusqu'à s'en remplir et aussi les douer de resplendissement, à travers l'espace vacant, en des fêtes à volonté et solitaires.
>
> (O.C. 647)

Envisioning "la lecture comme une pratique désespérée (O.C. 647), he dares the reader, the déchiffreur," to unravel the mystery, "mystère . . . le context évolutif de l'Idée" (O.C. 653). The

mind alone can grasp the logic of this verbal play, its hidden equilibrium--"La totale arabesque."

Mallarmé's vision, looking through the many to the One (a diamond-like absorption of differing reflections into a focus) draws diverse impressions together in such a way that the reader, in a kind of intellectual exercise, realizes that ideal architecture which the apparent ambiguities have momentarily concealed. The site of the work, composed of a multitude of seemingly irreconcilable influences, exists, ultimately, as an embodiment of order. As the epigraph to Igitur makes clear, the fiction shows the reader the way toward perceiving: "Ce conte s'addresse à l'Intelligence du lecteur qui met les choses en scène, elle-même" (433). And this attempt to recognize an order brings us closer to Mallarmé's conception of authentic poetizing: "Instituer une relation entre les images, et que s'en détache un tiers aspect fusible et clair présenté à la divination" (O.C. 365). The reader's task, then, is a reconstruction of the objects articulated by reflecting upon their polarity and their overlap in analogy, their distinctness and their combination. The apprehension of relationships between the forms should lead to the recognition of an idea:

> . . . une extraordinaire appropriation de la structure, limpide, aux primitives foudres de la logique. Un balbutiement, qui semble la phrase, ici refoulé dans l'emploi d'incidents multiplie, se compose et s'enlève en quelque équilibre supérieur, à balancement prévu d' inversions.
>
> (O.C. 386)

The work unfolds as the uneasy coincidence of unspoken thought, the internalized sound in the mind, with the contingent body of

expression (thought and text, idea coming to being in time). Holding in one hand "une lueur," in the other, "un volume" (Scolies to Igitur, 449), Mallarmé, through his hesitant hero's meditation, investigates the generation of a language that will convey an ideal realm. The opposition between the pure potentiality of vision, "la pensée en un luminaire," and manifest reality, "la parole humain en le grimoire" (Scolies, 442), is a source of the succession of contradictions in the narrative. Through equivalence in structure, the two options reveal themselves as equal in their opposition:

> . . . l'étoile nacrée de leur nébuleuse science tenue d'une main, et à l'étincelle d'or du fermoir héraldique de leur volume, dans l'autre; le volume de leurs nuits. (437)

> Elle [la conscience de soi] se présente également dans l'une et dans l'autre face des parois luisantes et séculaires ne gardant d'elle que d'une main la clarté opaline de sa science et de l'autre son volume, le volume de ses nuits, maintenant fermé: du passé et de l'avenir que parvenue au pinacle de moi. (438)

The concrete and finite volume confronts a nebulous science, and the conflict engenders two chains of characteristics which recur together throughout the text: human history, the past consciousness of the race and the words of his ancestors, and, on the other hand, his creative imagination ("moi projeté absolu"), the composed dream. The language functions in tension, "en suspens" between thought and image. Equilibrium must be maintained to allow words to remain poised as if unrealized. Ideal through such a held oscillation, "l'Etre et l'Idée auront trouvé ce paradis,"[2] as Mallarmé confides in a letter written

during the metaphysical crisis that culminated in Igitur.[3]

On the preceding page, both passages claim the point of conjunction as "la conscience de soi." The dual extremities of duration, and the anterior and posterior (lueur and volume) are synthesized "au pinacle de moi." In the course of the narrative, the consciousness of advancing into the future appears identical to that of falling back into the past. Both are absorbed into a single moment, the "point de jonction de son futur et de son passé devenus identiques" (Scolies, 448). But to arrive at this point, the hero must move through incessant vacillations, a movement back and forth between two determinations, acting out the incoherence of a reality that is fraught with contradictions. These determinations are separated and then brought to equivalence. Such is the drama of Igitur: "dédoublée par l'équivoque exploré" (437). The movement is itself a paradigm for the fundamental polarisation in the writer's mind. He is:

> faite d'une double
> identité
> équation ou idée
> si ceci est cela
> cela est ceci[4]
> (O.C. 429)

Mallarmé feigns a scission ("à tort scindés en deux," O.C. 429), and institutes the equations by which we understand the story: "Tout le mystère est là: établir les identités secrètes par un deux à deux qui ronge et use les objets, au nom d'une centrale pureté."[5] I will attempt to clarify the equation made between the hero's inner movement, his own path toward knowing, and its verbal transmission. The transcen-

dent truths of his self-reflection, "la clarté opaline de sa science," unfold in the properties of material extension and then sound in time (prolongement de bruit/battement/frottement/frôlement/scandement) to emerge the cadenced and pendular "pattes arachnéenes de soupçon (Scolies, 446). Since the linguistic expression is a metaphor for a latent drama of thought, we respond to its formation as emblematic syntax of essence. We are led to recognize the idea through form, a law of equivalence through an imitation of assymetry. The equation functions, however, as inconclusively as the swing of the pendulum or the vision of the dual panels, "à la fois ouvertes et fermés" (Scolies, 450).

- 2 -

THE MIND'S SCANSION AND THE SPECTACLE OF FORM

> Let it be so; yet at the very least it is certain that it seems to me that I see light, hear noises, and feel heat. This much cannot be false, and it is this, properly considered, which in my nature is called perceiving, and that, again speaking precisely, is nothing else but thinking.
>
> Descartes, Meditation II[6]

> Dans le "langage" expliquer le Langage, dans son jeu par rapport à l'Esprit, le démontrer, sans tirer de conclusions absolues (de l'Esprit).
>
> Mallarmé, Notes, 1869

> . . . the thought is logicalized by the effort at (written) expression.
>
> Poe, Marginalia, 1846

Igitur's subject is the activity of thought, "un rythme, ou mouvement de la pensée" (O.C. 328), in language. In Eureka, we remember, Poe correlated cogitation to linguistic display. Announcing the very bounds of thought as his subject, "a shadowy and fluctuating domain," he employs a particular language to represent that realm: "displaying our ignorance of its awful character in the vacillation of the phraseology with which we endeavor to circumscribe it." In the brief synopsis preceding his tale, Mallarmé writes: "Nécessaire --extrait l'Idée. Folie utile" (434). This exigent madness is demanded of the reader. The perception of an idea through composition turns on an equivalence between narrative and mind, transcription and

thought, syntax and spirit.

A text transcribed in remembrance of the Logos manifests the relationship between language and logic, a convergence of a composite nature:

> Quel pivot, j'entends, dans ces contrastes, à l'intelligibilité? il faut une garantie--
> La Syntaxe--
> (O.C. 385)

Mallarmé's concern with the ultimate condition of language determines the narrative structure. Igitur is a marvel of arrangement. While it allows elaborations and digressions, it presents a systematic outline of movement. We should consider the text as the literal transcription of a mind moving toward its absolute, as well as an attempt to determine the location of consciousness "dans un acte où le hasard est en jeu" (441). How much of a game this is to Mallarmé remains questionable. The story turns on the act of writing; it takes that endeavor as its explicit object.

In the logic of the ensemble lies the ground plan or essential structure to which the narrative conforms. The self recollected and recreated in the otherness of the verbal effect, exists as a diagram of forces. "Le moi impur" shattered, the contingent executed, the mind can be revealed, through writing, wholly as form, a syntax that is the substance of the absolute and universal idea. At least, this is Mallarmé's objective, an objective that thrives on its own impossibility. Operating through that "undoubling" which we have discussed (the alternating determination from one point to the other and back again) the story projects itself as an exploration of equivocality.

In the section to be analyzed, "Il quitte la chambre et se perd dans les escaliers" (pp. 436-39), the linguistic construct reflects upon the mind as it engenders words. Threads of words spun out of the mind's glow ("la scintillation mentale," O.C. 489) extend "leurs lignes dures dans l'absence d'atmosphère" (441). The mind remains the still and silent hub of the hesitancy and oscillation formally depicted throughout the narrative. As we noted, out of the primary antagonism between "le livre" (the words of the ancestors) and "la bougie" (the virtual light of the mind) grows a series of echoes: the polarization between movement and stillness, obscurity and light, doubt and certainty, falling and taking flight. The points where these oppositions pose themselves in a totality are the points of crossing that act as source and organizing principle of the prose. The seeming antagonisms open up into a communication that reveals all contradictions as parts of a supreme matrix.

Mallarmé endows knowing with the figures of sensation while he internalizes the "givens" of existence. Igitur, an inmate of the night, "aux yeux nuls pareils au miroir" sees "un vague frémissement de pensée" as he hears the beat, the rhythms of his own recollection that emerge as one with the act of transcription: "le scandement de ma mesure dont la réminiscence me revint prolongée par le bruit dans le corridor du temps" (439). As Mallarmé writes in the Scolies: "le bruit de son propre coeur, explication du bruit devenu distinct: c'était elle-même qui scandait sa mesure" (447).

The movement forward and back, "vis-à-vis, devant et derrière" in the flux and reflux of Igitur's thoughts constitute the curious

"double-determination"[7] of our section. The narration begins with the zigzagging which appears to block the narrative:

> L'ombre disparue en l'obscurité, la Nuit resta avec une douteuse perception de pendule qui va s'éteindre et expirer en lui; mais à ce qui luit et va, expirant en soi, s'éteindre, elle se voit qui le porte encore; donc, c'est d'elle que, nul doute, était le battement ouï, dont le bruit total et dénué à jamais tomba en son passé. (436)

This first, one-sentence paragraph is broken up by a series of repetitions that impede the narrative flow. This "underscoring" through repetition is one of Mallarmé's strategies in complicating the linearity[8] of the sentence. Each repetition of the word en takes us further into Igitur's descent into the regions of a thought coiled back upon itself: "en l'obscurité/en lui/en soi/en son passé." Mallarmé renders the rhythms of thinking through the rhythms of a language, broken up and doubled back, and subverts the linearity we expect. This subversion through repetition appears a disjunctive euphony. The sentence is atomized, broken down into its parts, and these parts are used in varying positions to fabricate a suggestivity: ". . . l'omniprésente Ligne espacée de tout point à tout autre pour instituer l'idée" (O.C. 648).

Repetition transforms narrative linearity into a circular movement interrupted by abrupt deviations. We learn of what endures by fits and starts. This discontinuity, the stylistic disjunction in repetition, causes the hiatus in the phrase sought by Mallarmé: "Tout devient suspens, disposition fragmentaire avec alternance et vis-à-vis, concourant au rythme total" (O.C. 367). Suspending words in their oscillations,

Mallarmé multiplies perspectives or points of view to attain an ideal and efficient conjunction. In the paragraph that I am considering, there is a locus of concentration, a complex balancing of identifications and inversions of word-pairs:

> qui/va/s'éteindre et/expirer/en lui;/mais à ce
> qui/luit/et va/expirant/en soi,/s'éteindre

Every word used has its echo. Repetition is reinforced through alliteration and the joining of lui and luit in rhyme. The only word that is not doubled is soi, although the words following it produce its equivalent in sound, "elle se voit. . . ."

The image of the pendulum signals the words' progress in the paragraph: its striking is equal in suggestivity to the actual progression of the sentence, dismembered in cadence. Out of the alternation of what disappears, "L'ombre disparue" and what remains, "la Nuit resta," is born the certitude of equivocal things: the "douteuse perception de pendule" turns into "nul doute," and later, "nul doute," turns into "doute nul." The pendulum summons up the acceleration of that "either-or" mental oscillation that qualifies every syntactic maneuver in the section. The first sentence emphasizes sight, disparue, perception de pendule (douteuse), se voit, and ends with the sensation of hearing (donc . . . nul doute). Sound, le battement ouï . . . le bruit total et dénué à jamais, overtakes perception as the controlling element of the paragraph, only to itself expire at the paragraph's end: à jamais tomba en son passé.

Mallarmé devotes the second paragraph to a clarification of doubt. He materializes the concept of ambivalence. The high incidence of relative pronouns and intermediate marks of punctuation break up the sentence. Yet, what appears as fragmentation is, in fact, composition. Unmitigated succession fragments itself into a polyvalent simultaneity; every word finally resolves itself into a concrete pattern, a pattern that we can see as a general configuration of alternation. Again, the decomposition accelerates the previously noted pendular motion. The introductory phrase of the sentence suggests oscillation:

> D'un côté si l'équivoque cessa, une motion de l'autre, dure. . . .

A dualistic obsession, a "double heurt qui n'atteint plus ou pas sa notion," underlies the unstable, hammer-like rhythms, and enforces the attenuation of normative concatenation. As in the first paragraph, we note the alternation between what ceases and what continues, what appears and disappears. And its segmentation and consequent assymetries invent a sudden and surprising coalescence. As in Un Coup de Dés, "selon telle obliquité par telle déclivité" (O.C. 477), the oblique movement traces a pattern:

> D'un côté//si l'équivoque cessa//une motion de l'autre, dure,//marquée . . . par un double heurt,//qui n'atteint plus// ou pas encore sa notion// . . . l'équivoque//ou sa cessation//comme si// la chute totale// . . . le choc unique// des portes de tombeau// . . . l'incertitude . . . de la tournure affirmative,//prolongée par la réminiscence// . . . du heurt//en laquelle se confonde la clarté// . . . une vision de la chute interrompue//de panneaux,//comme si// . . . doué du movement suspendu,//le retournât sur soi// . . . indéfiniment fuyante,//si une oppression progressive,// . . .

l'évasion certaine//en un intervalle,//la cessation;//où,
. . . le heurt// . . . rien en effet ne fut plus ouï//que
le battement d'ailes// . . . heurté// dans son lourd somme//
par la clarté//et prolongeant sa fuite indéfinie.
(O.C. 436-437)

Here, the unachieved is given full play. Doubt calls itself into question. Each element, once articulated, calls forth its negation: l'incertitude arises out of la tournure affirmative; a chute totale becomes a chute interrompue; motion moves into cessation; un double heurt emerges le choc unique; and in the general uncertainty, action, even if indéfiniment fuyante can be une oppression progressive. Finally, these two notions, progressive oppression and indefinite flight, are joined in the final phrase, prolongeant sa fuite indéfinie.

If the prose emphasizes a dispersion through its fluctuations, it is, nevertheless an organized falling asunder. The measured splitting-in-two results in a synchronization of division. In addition, the lexical repetitions of this paragraph illustrate how words repeated with subtle variations make up a well-articulated whole:

si//comme si//comme si//si
l'équivoque//l'équivoque
cessa//sa cessation//la cessation
un double heurt//du heurt en laquelle
se confonde//le heurt//et qu'elles se
confondirent//heurt
la chute totale//la chute interrompue
l'hôte sans retour//quelque hôte effrayé
elle devait être indéfiniment fuyante//
prolongeant sa fuite indéfinie
en somme//son lourd somme
se confond la clarté//par la clarté

The iterated si//comme si//comme si//si stresses the play of distinction

and convergence. This designation of the fiction, of art's paradoxical dissimulation, is given precedence in Un Coup de Dés, capitalized and framing two pages:

COMME SI
.....
COMME SI
(O.C. 466-467)

That proliferation which plays at being poetry results from the sentence's partitioning. This articulation challenges the continuity that is the norm of prose:

> Le vers par flèches jeté moins avec succession que presque simultanément pour l'idée, réduit la durée à une division spirituelle propre au sujet: diffère de la phrase au développement temporaire, dont la prose joue, le dissimulant, selon mille tours.
> (O.C. 654)[9]

The prose dissembles; its temporal development, enclosed, retarded, and broken down by patterns of repetition, elevates the word in contradistinction to the line. Excessive fragmentation is necessary for the words of prose to appear as the irradiations of Mallarmé's verse, to achieve that quality of "refringence" he values, "irradiant, par un jeu direct, du principe littéraire même" (O.C. 542).

Within the limits of the sentence form, Mallarmé amplifies both its resonant suggestivity and its powers of expansion. Before continuing my analysis, I note another device that further helps to achieve this goal of poetizing prose. Mallarmé annihilates the distinction between sentence and paragraph. Of the eleven paragraphs in the section, only

four contain more than one full stop, the conclusive pause with which a complete sentence usually closes. And three of the four paragraphs that have more than one point of closure end in question marks, thus also remaining inconclusive until the paragraph end. Obliterating the period as a practical unit of punctuation infinitizes the possible beats of the sentence until its termination. Each lexical item, both compressed and expanded, presents itself to us all at once, functioning as many reinforced flashes, held and concentrated glimmers of thoughts, or, in Mallarmé's words, "de subdivisions prismatiques de l'Idée" (O.C. 455).

In this context reverberating with shocks, jolts, beats and falls, the whole and the parts act interdependently. Every word is reflected in and related to another in its concreteness, as form and substance: choc, heurt, chute, heure, for example. Words gain in force with each repetition and create the circular syntax that the spiraling effect accentuates. The figure of the spiral, "le retournât sur soi en la spirale vertigineuse conséquente" (437), comments on the verbal process, just as the pendulum's image, embedded in a paragraph, marks its oscillatory motion. Mallarmé directs our reading with tactical precision.

The lexical hints toward comprehension continue. In the eleven paragraphs of the section, the phonetic equivalences between words ending in ment are also semantic. I list them as they appear:

> battement, frôlement, probablement, mouvement, indéfiniment, battement, halètement, frottement, prolongement, prolongement, également, parfaitement, travestissement, (chuchotement), frôlement, scandement, frôlement, frôlement, volètement, scandement, réellement.

The consistency of these sounds is a measure that endures in spite of the surface variations. In the interaction of nouns physical in their designation and those less definite adverbs, the obvious and the phantasmal lose their distinctions. Words such as beating, breathing, touching and brushing seem to be both an extension of the body's workings and the thought's thinking. Through words, Igitur turns his life into sound, and the sensation of the sound is a mode of his thought. The attempt to give a sense of thought's rhythms in language leads to a method of versification: "tel rythmes immédiats de pensée ordonnant une prosodie" (O.C. 1576). The word's simulation of life's pulsations, an artful scansion, is the source of Mallarmé's syntactic simulation of indeterminacy, the process that constructs indefiniteness. Mallarmé's syntax enacts Poe's paradox: through an excess of measure the artist can effect a measurelessness.

The act of giving form to the formless, a limit to the limitless, is no more than a spectacle; the scandement is a travestissement. Yet, despite its conscious misrepresentation (the proper presentation or Darstellung), Igitur clarifies Mallarmé's concept of the poetic activity. If the desire to mark a measure of cogitation through the battement of the heart, or more precisely, the pen, seems extravagant, we should not forget Mallarmé's reasons for writing Igitur.

He conceived this posthumously published fiction as a necessity. In a letter of 1869 to Henri Cazalis, he explained that the story was the formal exorcism necessary for his continued creation:

> C'est un conte, par lequel je veux terrasser le vieux monstre de l'Impuissance, son sujet, du reste, afin de me cloîtrer dans mon grand labeur déjà réétudié. S'il est fait, je suis guéri. Similia similibus.[10]

The activity of self-opposition, the force of negation contained in Igitur's descent, is an activity of the self. During the years preceding the composition of Igitur, Mallarmé declared that it was only through his own agony and subsequent "death," that he, depersonalized, could be remade as "une aptitude qu'a l'univers spirituel à se voir et à se developper, à travers ce qui fut moi."[11] Projected beyond his "apparition terrestre," he becomes "ce solitaire habituel de sa propre Pureté."[12] Mallarmé dreamed of the creation of "l'oeuvre pure." The construction of this tale was his way of explaining that dream, "pour que mon rêve se soit expliqué" (439).

Throughout the tale, Mallarmé suggests an analogy for the creator's self-positioning between the interstices of a feigned and voluntary duration: the spider extends his being, casts himself into vacant space to discharge the thread, "du heurt en laquelle se confonde la clarté." The thread reappears as "trame," "dentelle," or "le fil arachnéen." The spider's shuttlings symbolize the movement of consciousness, half latent and half imminent in the act of writing. This act of lurching construction is utlimately more meaningful than a too perfect symmetry. In this space, words take "l'initiative" due to the "heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés" (O.C. 366). Mallarmé graphically parallels the spider's operations of extension and recoil and those of the spurious poet, Igitur:

> . . . telles, à présent, se voyant pour qu'elle
> se voie, elle, pure, l'Ombre, ayant sa dernière
> forme qu'elle foule, derrière elle, couchée et
> étendue, et puis, devant elle, en un puits, l'
> étendue de couches d'ombre, rendue à la nuit pure.
> (437)

> Tandis que devant et derrière se prolonge le men-
> songe exploré de l'infini, ténèbres de toutes mes
> apparitions réunies, à présent que le temps a
> cessé et ne les divise plus, retombées en un lourd
> somme.
> (438)

"Doué du mouvement suspendu," he continuously retraces his steps in order to reform, to cast out filaments of imaginings, what he calls the "ténèbres de toutes mes apparitions réunies." The process of falling back into the point of origin, to recollect the self and then remake, an impulse which rises up, reflects itself and recoils again, materializes in a series of words beginning with the morpheme re. These words amplify the recapitulatory nature of this progress:

> l'hôte sans retour
> la réminiscence du vide sepulcral
> le retournât sur soi en la spirale
>
> qui remuait ses ailes par hasard
> de recueillir toute sa poussière séculaire
> que nul soupçon n'en remontât le fil arachnéen
> et se reconnût en la foule de ses apparitions
>
> en vain, réminiscence d'un mensonge
> l'ouverture de doute nul répercutée par le prolongement
>
> toutes mes apparitions réunies
> retombées en un lourd somme
>
> rentrer en mon Ombre incréée et antérieure
>
> représenté par l'une d'elles
> à jamais équivalentes, ma réflexion

j'aime à réfléchir maintenant

Son heurt redevient chancelant
dont la réminiscence me revint prolongée par le bruit

This structural system of repetition embodies the stages of spirit. In Igitur, Mallarmé's formal concerns endeavor to delineate the points of this progress. Each repetition, for example, coincident with the spiraling effect, takes us further toward inwardness. In this respect, Igitur can be viewed as a highly personal, poetic analogue of Hegel's progress to infinity. It is likely that Mallarmé was introduced to Hegel's work through Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and particularly, through Eugène Lefébure, in 1866. A letter of 1866 to Villiers attests to Mallarmé's discovery of "le Titan de l'Esprit Humain, Hegel" (O.C. 491):

> Quand paraîtra Le Traité des Pierres précieuses? . . . Quant à Hegel je suis vraiment heureux que vous ayez accordé quelque attention à ce miraculeux génie. . . .[13]

Igitur's method depicts a schematization of the forms implicit in the act of thought. Hegel's alternating determinations (transitions between Determinate Being and Infinity) and his belief that spirit is necessarily embodied, are keys to Mallarmé's enterprise. The spirit unfolds in time, and Mallarmé's construction of its progress, as Hegel's, depends upon the technique of repetition with its connotations of reflection, recollection and recreation.[14] I quote from Hegel's The Science of Logic:

> This repetition of repetition ad infinitum is the sole business, function and product of the absolutely pure synthesis; it is itself empty, pure absolute repetition itself.[15]

> The progress to infinity is, consequently, only the perpetual repetition of one and the same content, one and the same tedious alternation of this finite and infinite.[16]

Through repetition, then, the motif of interiorization establishes itself as one with its material embodiment. Infinity is itself a counterpart of changing and determinate elements. External contingencies, extension and time, "le scandement de ma mesure," conform to the clock's striking, and yet design the circular drama. As we have seen, Mallarmé's diction demonstrates the tendency of linearity to turn back on itself. In this way, the image of the progress to infinity[17] appears as a conjunction of space and time.

The ultimate shape of self, being possessed of its ultimate form, manifests itself in the mirror motif. The reflexivity of the mirror accords with the technique of subverting the line into a circle. A victim of the reflexive gesture, Igitur perceives the self in its negation, "devenue son propre sépulcre" (Scolies, 447). As the story of his recollection continues, he pushes himself to the limits of a self-mirroring which passes into self-denial ("jusqu'à une pureté inouïe," 441):

> . . . recueillir toute sa poussière séculaire en son sépulcre pour se mirer en un soi propre, et que nul soupçon n'en remontât le fil arachnéen--pour que l'ombre dernière se mirât en son propre soi.
> (437)

The simulation of a mind in absolute recoil upon itself composes not only the theme but the technique of Igitur. As I have said, Mallarmé designs every individual structure to be perceived as a whole. The mirror, receptacle for the mind turned in upon itself, presents the domain of the idea.

In the act of internalization, thought and its formal revelation appear as equal and converging qualities. The limits residing in the earlier, contrasting determinations momentarily annihilated, Igitur experiences the symmetry of the construction of his dream:

> A vrai dire, dans cette inquiétante et belle symétrie de la construction de mon rêve, laquelle des deux ouvertures prendre, puisqu'il n'y a plus de futur représenté par l'une d'elles? Ne sont-elles pas toutes deux, à jamais équivalentes, ma réflexion?
> (438)

A new section of the drama begins with a stage direction:

> (chuchotement)
>
> En effet, la première venue ressemble à la spirale précédente: même bruit scandé,--et même frôlement: mais comme tout a abouti, rien ne peut plus m'effrayer: mon effroi qui avait pris les devants sous la forme d'un oiseau est bien loin: n'a-t-il pas été remplacé par l'apparition de ce que j'avais été? et que j'aime à réfléchir maintenant, afin de dégager mon rêve de ce costume.
> (438)

Following the whisperings, Igitur again posits difference and division. He mimics his earlier movements, recounts them, and again transcends them. The counterfeit of previously enacted durations, "même bruit scandé,--et même frôlement," the "mais" ushers in the variations on the theme. A simulated re-presentation, this recognition of a resem-

blance delimits the fiction as the spiral endlessly circumscribes itself. Techniques of contradiction and accord generate the equivocation that preceded the alleged moment of equivalence and certainty. Measure, the spiral and duality, the dream and its reflection recur:

> Son heurt redevient chancelant comme avant d'avoir la perception de soi: c'était le scandement de ma mesure dont la réminiscence me revint prolongée par le bruit dans le corridor du temps de la porte de mon sépulcre, et par l'hallucination: et, de même qu'elle a été réellement fermée, de même elle doit s'ouvrir maintenant pour que mon rêve se soit expliqué.
> (439)

Mallarmé's description of the action of thought not only echoes the tone of Hegel's meditations in the Logic, but in its necessary interaction with a prior moment of transcendence, it reproduces the vicissitudes of Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness (thought and the incompatibles through which it operates). In Igitur, just as the scandement and its sound are not expressible without their complements in silence, the rêve, hallucination, apparition, this section reaches full development thought its interaction with the previous sections.

This particular transcription lives only as recapitulation, an act in retrospection. The creator, now negated, operates through a final dramatization. His personal duration or measure having run its course, the phantom shape conserves the sensible, external limits, yet only as a reminiscence of what was, a remembered measure:

> Ce scandement n'était-il pas le bruit du progrès de mon personnage?

> C'était le scandement de ma mesure dont la réminiscence me revint prolongée par le bruit dans le corridor du temps.
>
> (439)

Divested of Igitur's personality, the work assumes its autonomous existence. In surpassing him, it thus complies (even within its own determinations) with the exigency of the absolute. Igitur watches his own character sublate; the shape separates itself from his personality, "ma dernière figure, séparée de mon personnage par une fraise arachnéene et qui ne se connaît pas." No longer able to hear the body's progress, "le bruit du progrès de mon personnage," he notes his eclipsed investigations, "l'apparition de ce que j'avais été." Seeing himself in "le buste de velours," and conscious of "un personnage dont la pensée n'a pas conscience de lui-même," he follows the emblem of a past self, "le ventre velu d'un hôte inférieur de moi, dont la lueur a heurté le doute" (439). Detached from his role as arachnoid creator (the dream removed from its costume), his spinnings become self-subsistent, as he notes: ". . . je n'ouïs même plus . . . le bruit de son progrès." Each stage in this drama has brought us toward a notion of being as centered on itself. Here, the relationships of language present themselves as inwardly articulated.

The equation of apparent inequalities move across the page. Thoughts unraveled into manifestation, return, reeling, for an instant, a jolt "comme avant d'avoir la perception de soi," but with a difference. The word's scansion moves through its pastness into a time "dénué de toute signification que de présence" (435), and with each reading, will extend itself through time. This follows Mallarmé's

dictum at the beginning of Igitur: "faire le présent absolu des choses" (435). In 1880, eleven years after writing Igitur, Mallarmé wrote to Verlaine: "à côté de mon travail personnel qui je crois sera anonyme, le Texte y parlant de lui-même et sans voix d'auteur" (O.C. 663).[18]

His own role become nothingness, Igitur has achieved dissolution to realize his will in and as its object. The final paragraph of our section lacks the involutions and uncertain transformations of the previous ones.

> L'heure a sonné pour moi de partir, la pureté de la glace s'établira, sans ce personnage, vision de moi--mais il emportera la lumière!--la nuit! Sur les meubles vacants, le Rêve a agonisé en cette fiole de verre, pureté, qui renferme la substance du Néant. (439)

Mallarmé has made a principle of order absolute, yet he still conceives of it as unfolding in the terms of a temporal sequence: "L'heure a sonné pour moi de partir." Both thought and word are carried away by the ego in its vanishing: "il emportera la lumière!--la nuit!" The paragraph ends with images of enclosure, first the empty mirror, and then, the image of the glass flask that delimits the Dream. A frame that is both purity and its contradiction, container and the contained, constitutes the final exteriorization of nothing.

Igitur's conclusion dramatizes the sacrifice of self and clarifies the narrative. "Il ferme le livre--souffle la bougie,--de son souffle qui contenait le hasard" (442). Both the thought and the word forgotten, he lays on the tomb and feigns the sacrifice that will determine

infinity: "(La fiole vide, folie, tout ce qui reste du chateau?) Le Néant parti, reste le chateau de la pureté" (443).

For Poe, the poem, rendered according to the prescripts of beauty, enclosed the sublime: the artifact was made to include the infinite. Mallarmé ends Igitur with a determination sublime in its suggestivity. As he explains in the Scolies: "l'Infini est enfin fixé (442).

Throughout Mallarmé's work, notions of emptiness and the unactualized recur, yet always within prescribed limits. The idea is in the form, and it presents itself in consistent closure: "le pur vase d'aucun breuvage" ("Surgi de la croupe et du bond," O.C. 74); the "joyau intact sous le désastre" (O.C. 302), and Igitur's "joyau nul de reverie" (435). In the prose poem, "Le Nénuphar blanc," Mallarmé's "idéale fleur," the flower never to be seen, envelops with its hollow whiteness, "un rien," and "fait de songes intacts, du bonheur qui n'aura pas lieu" (O.C. 286), it dramatizes the special quality of a circumscribed vacancy.

Within these necessary limits, and perhaps because of them, the perfection of craft and the suggestion of the idea appear as coterminous. Poe's "Rhythmical Creation of Beauty" is, for Mallarmé, the fact of nature, transposed by "le jeu de la parole" into "la notion pure" (368).

> Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix
> relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose
> d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève,
> idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets.
> (O.C. 368)

Hegel's "pure being" is indistinguishable from "nothing." Mallarmé has made nothing, purity, conform to the exigencies of a final form. In Un Coup de Dés he carries to an extreme the construct which circumscribes. The words designate the trickery of art, its necessity, and its final triumph.

faux manoir
tout de suite
évaporé en brumes
qui imposa
une borne à l'infini 19
(O.C. 471)

NOTES

1
Julia Kristeva, Le révolution du langage poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.537. The preface to Igitur ou la folie d'Elbehnon by Dr. Edmond Bonniot, compiled from unedited documents of Mallarmé informs us that Mallarmé envisioned the story as a drama: "La notion de Drame se présente tout naturellement à l'esprit de l'auteur. Le Héros dégage l'Hymne qui est en lui et le confronte à l'Idée qui est le théâtre, objet d'extériorisation." (O.C., p.427)

2
Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.243.

3
Igitur was written between 1867-1870. These years were the most harrowing of Mallarmé's life. Unable to write the poem that would conform to the exigencies of the Idea, he faced "le vide papier que la blancheur défend" ("Brise marine," o.c., p.38). And confronting Nothingness, "le néant," he wrote to Cazalis in 1866:

> Malheureusement, en creusant le vers à ce point, j'ai rencontré deux abîmes, que me désespèrent. L'un est le néant, auquel je suis arrivé sans connaître le Bouddhisme et je suis encore trop désolé pour pouvoir croire même à ma poésie et me remettre au travail. (Correspondance, p.207)

See Guy Michaud, Mallarmé: L'Homme et l'oeuvre (Paris: Hatier-Boivin, 1953), p.49: "Dès ce moment, l'expérience poétique se confond pour lui avec l'expérience métaphysique."

4
Bonniot includes in his preface to Igitur two pages of notes by Mallarmé, written after the work. He renders these notes as follows:

Le Drame est causé par le Mystère de ce

qui suit -- l'Identité (Idée) Soi --

du Théâtre et du Héros à travers l'Hymne

nature et homme vie	opération
cité	
cité et vie = patrie	-- le Héros dégage -- l'hymne
	(maternel) qui le crée, et se restitue

au Théâtre que c'était --

mais à quel état apparaît-il mal au début?

du Mystère où cet hymne était enfoui

Le Drame est en le mystère

de l'équation suivante — faite d'une double identité

que théâtre — équation ou idée

est — si ceci est cela / cela est ceci

le développement du héros ou héros — à tort scindés en deux

le résumé du théâtre

comme Idée et hymne

d'où Théâtre = idée

héros = hymne

et cela forme un tout — et on en tire pour racheter cette scission

Drame ou Mystère — Mystère

rentrant l'un en l'autre — Théâtre / Drame / Idée

aussi — Héros / mime — Hymne / danse

The domain of art, for Mallarmé, is here conceived as the Hegelian Darstellung, the manifestation of the Idea which the dramatisation embodies in sensuous form.

5 Mallarmé, Propos sur la poésie, ed. H. Mondor (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1953), p.174.

6 René Descartes, Méditation II, in Discourse on Method and Meditations, trans, J. Lafleur (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1960), p.86.

7 This is Hegel's term in The Science of Logic, used to designate becoming, "the resultant equilibrium of coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be."

Trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen Unwin, 1969), pp.105-6. To comprehend the movement of "becoming" is to understand that any two seemingly opposed categories are both one-sided abstractions from a concreteness of which they are merely partial aspects. This is the heart of Hegel's Logic and the meaning of Mallarmé's Igitur.

8 See the excellent article by J. Hillis Miller, "Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line," Critical Inquiry (Autumn 1976), p.69: "The image of the line cannot...be detached from the problem of repetition. Repetition might be defined as anything which happens to the line to trouble or even to confound its straight-forward linearity: returnings, knottings, recrossings, crinklings to and fro, suspensions, interruptions, fictionalizings."

9 The following demonstrates Mallarmé's fascination with the transmission of thought into language and the feint induced by the prose which demands to be read as poetry, which fragments itself into an irradiance:

> La fiction affleurera et se dissipera, vite, d'après la mobilité de l'écrit, autour des arrêts fragmentaires d'une phrase capitale dès le titre introduite et continuée. Tout se passe, par raccourci, en hypothèse; on évite le récit. Ajouter que de cet emploi à nu de la pensée avec retraits, prolongements, fuites, ou son dessin même, résulte, pour qui veut lire à haute voix, une partition. (O.C., p.455)

10 Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.313.

11 Ibid., p.242.

12 Ibid., p.240.

13 Ibid., p.231. For a further discussion of Mallarmé's rapport with Hegel, see Jean-Pierre Richard, L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, particularly pp.231-34. A. Vera's translations of Hegel were available to Mallarmé: Logique. Traduite pour la première fois et accompagnée d'une introduction et d'un commentaire perpétuel par A. Vera (Ladrange, 1859); Le Hegelianisme et la Philosophie (Paris, 1863); Philosophie de la Nature de Hegel (Paris, 1863-1866), 3 vols.; Philosophie de l'esprit de Hegel (Paris, 1867-1869), 2 vols.

Vera's Logique, particularly the "Introduction du Traducteur," expresses concern similar to those of Mallarmé's correspondence of the 1860's. I cite one example here:

> ...saisir ces idées pures, universelles et absolues, et les saisir par la pensée pure, par la pensée qui s'est affranchie de tout élément contingent, relatif et sensible, c'est là l'objet de la logique, ou, pour mieux dire, la logique est l'ensemble, l'unité de ces idées, elle est l'idée logique, l'idée qui n'est pas encore descendue dans la nature, dans les déterminations et les rapports de l'espace, du temps, du mouvement, de la matière, etc.... (p.110)

Mallarmé's injunction "saisir les rapports," and his equivalence between the filiation of "dentelles" and the intersecting forms of language, combined in an ensemble, "la totale arabesque," accord with Vera's words, in more than just content.

14

The German word "Erinnerung" (recollection) permits Hegel a significant play on words. For Mallarmé, recollection and authentic creation are one. The movement of idea through thought is rendered in language through modes of formal repetition.

Hegel's internalized sound in the mind is called Erinnerung; the materialization Einbildungskraft, the image universal. The complete fusion of the Word with its representation is the Gedachtnis, verbal memory. Throughout Igitur Mallarmé offers a triadic pattern of elucidating the Work: the glimmer of mind, his recollection or inward-turning, finds realization in the parole humaine, and their conjunction achieves the Work, a fixing of infinity. (Transposition of parole into écriture.)

To recollect, to gather in, is Igitur's way toward essence. Knowing, "erinnert" sich, "inwardizes" itself out of being.

15

Hegel, The Science of Logic, p.97.

16

Ibid., p.142. See also, p.143: "This transition from one to the other and back again constitutes the external realization of the Notion."

17

See Hegel, The Science of Logic, p.149, esp., "The image of the progress to infinity is the straight line, at the two limits of which alone the infinite is, and always only is where the line -- which is determinate being -- is not, and which goes out beyond to

this negation of its determinate being, that is, to the indeterminate; the image of true infinity, bent back into itself, becomes the circle, the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without beginning and end."

18
In 1869, with Igitur nearly completed, Mallarmé wrote to Cazalis:

> Ma pensée, occupée par la plénitude de l'Univers et distendue, perdait sa fonction normale; j'ai senti des symptômes très inquiétants causés par le seul acte d'écrire et l'hystérie allait commencer à troubler ma parole. (Correspondance, p.299)

This letter should be read as evidence of the metaphysical struggle that resulted in Igitur's story, and as clues to the poetic it explores.

19
Robert Greer Cohn in Mallarmé's Un Coup de Dés: An Exegesis (New Haven: Yale French Studies Publication, 1949), p.86, writes on the image "faux manoir": "It too will fade (cf. Igitur's château and the Chute de la Maison d'Usher of Poe)."

CHAPTER FIVE

"UNE DENTELLE S'ABOLIT": THE TOTAL ARABESQUE

> . . . l'hymne, harmonie et joie, comme pur ensemble groupé dans quelque circonstance fulgurante, des relations entre tout.
>
> Le silence y demeure, précieux, et des signes évocatoires succèdent, pour l'esprit, à tout littérairement aboli.
>
> Mallarmé, "Le Livre, instrument spirituel"

In the alternating rhythms of dispersal and convergence--therein lies the Law. So have we described Poe's presentation in Eureka and so understood Mallarmé's constructive process, his emphasis on combination to lead to a non-linguistic effect. "Cette visée, je la dis Transposition--Structure une autre" (O.C. 366). An intricate figuration of verbal interactions contains the Idea. We recall Mallarmé's injunctions to the reader of Igitur: "Nécessaire--extrait l'Idée. Folie utile"; "(Creuser tout cela)" (O.C. 434).

The concept of law refers to what is empirically available, those functional relations that are accessible to the reader's observation. In following Igitur's dialectic of decor, we found the apprehension of form to be coincident with the discovery of idea. The poetic concept is thus a relational and systemic one; it demands that we observe functions as they interrelate within a frame. In the rigorously circumscribed sonnet, "Une Dentelle s'abolit," the effect arises out of a complex of pure relations between lines of force (those lines present in Mallarmé's image of the "toile d'araignée" or the "merveilleux ouvrage de broderie ou de dentelle").

The sonnet form which Mallarmé uses, fourteen lines divided into eight and six, with rhymes repeated in regular intervals, is a definite figure whose bounds remain unchanged despite the continuous syntactic transformations. Mallarmé's discovery of beauty was that of a conjunction between the sensuous and the ideal, a formation in accord with an intuited order of the universe. "Une Dentelle s'abolit"

depends upon a convergence between the potentiality of language and an achieved poetic construct--words joined "aux points de rencontre," at the intersection of opposing determinations. The "full design" of Poe's Eureka, "the tendency to One," here manifests itself as a mechanism for poetic creation. The sonnet presents an inner teleology; all parts exist for the sake of embodying a whole. In Poe's words: "a sphere of atoms" that exhibit "a satisfiable tendency to union" (p. 40).

The logic of this verbal play exists in the sonnet as an embodiment of absolute beauty's order, a filiation of its symmetries, displaying "le fils de ces rapports qui forment les vers" (O.C. 871). I shall deal with particular formal aspects of the lexical system. The sonnet sets forth a unique and observable pattern: the tension between indeterminate and determinate being posited in the oscillation between the indefinite article and the definite. "Une Dentelle s'abolit" reduces the game of "double-determination," or more precisely, the dual polarity of Eureka to the play enacted between the functions of the two classes of articles. The fluctuations observed in Igitur, the unity in opposition that defines its poetic, are confined to the oscillation of these morphemes.[1] The apparently free and mutual interactions between these lines of force determine the pattern. Due to the totalizing power of the indefinite article Un(e) as it builds in the course of the poem, the distinction between these two opposing determinations is transcended.

Mallarmé was undoubtedly aware of the implicit and explicit connotation of definite as opposed to indefinite articles. Origi-

nating in a demonstrative pronoun, the definite article carries with it the tendency to direct, to define a statement with particularization, an excess of materiality quite opposed to his longing to transform what is given into the potentiality of the as yet unthought: ". . . l'objet tu, par des mots allusifs, jamais directs, se réduisant à du silence égal, comporte tentative proche de créer" (O.C. 400). Or the axiom in "Toute l'âme résumée": "Le sens trop précis rature/Ta vague littérature" (O.C. 73). Opposed to the momentary realization indicated by the definite article, the purely virtual and undifferentiated world of the indefinite offers a means of understanding Mallarmé's poetic.

The truth of the text consists in its becoming One, the becoming which, at the same time that it reveals difference, reduces and suppresses it. The indefinite article, "Une," drawn from the noun of the number One, is chief protagonist in the poetic impulse toward the final harmony of the original condition of unity. In the progression toward a perfect symmetry, the text folds back into itself, its end reproducing the beginning (as each stanza imbricates itself in the other), and recalls Poe's declaration in Eureka: "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (p. 10). Mallarmé's vision of an anterior unity, opposed to the diversity of the sensible world, or, more precisely, to the sensuous element in language, determines the method of the poem.

True clarity resides in the singular, the sign of absolute coalition. And each stanza exists as a further reiteration of one

and the same content, repeating the idea initiated in the first line: "Une dentelle s'abolit." In contrast to plural categories, we note the preponderance of morphemes of singularity, which dominate through diffusion and establish semantic equations between different lexical items: "Une dentelle," "un blasphème," "une guirlande," "une mandore," and the "unanime" which introduces the second stanza and amplifies the motif of singularity. Through successive repetitions, the presence of a category of oneness promotes itself as bearer of meaning in the sonnet. The perpetual process toward a unity, fuses to the infinite a finite rendering, so that, as Mallarmé prefigured in Igitur, ". . . l'Infini est enfin fixé" (O.C. 442).

- 2 -

The poem begins with the description of an intricate spectacle:

> Une dentelle s'abolit
> Dans le doute du Jeu suprême
> A n'entr'ouvrir comme un blasphème
> Qu'absence éternelle de lit

Abstract and vague, "Une dentelle," a lace, suggests a fragility nearing insubstantiality, a diffuseness that will be exploited in the next quatrain. Here, the indefinite article signals a lack of determinedness,[2] something unknowable or as yet unknown. The verb "abolit" designates that negation which announces the creation of new relations implicit in language.[3] A lace disintegrates and annihilates itself in order to consecrate the poem to what Poe

described in Eureka as a "diffusion from Unity," which forces "the originally and therefore normally One into the abnormal condition of Many" (p. 21).

This line's inexactness is momentarily undermined by its successor. Hinge-like, the preposition "Dans" connects the two lines and conducts us directly from "Une dentelle" to a rejection of the indefinite: "Dans le doute du Jeu suprême." These words delimit the vague space, initially without any qualifying attribute, and fix a complexity in contrast to the former state of extreme simplicity. Significantly, the change from the indefinite to the definite article is marked by the use of the capital "J" in "Jeu," the only capitalized word in the sonnet. One way to interpret the action is that this is a white lace curtain, disappearing in the rays of dawn ("le Jeu suprême" being God's ever-renewed game of creation and annihilation, the capricious design of divine volition in Poe's Eureka). Yet, if we allow the shift from indefinite to definite its due weight, we can move beyond this reading. Through the surrounding context, "Une dentelle" becomes more than a lace disappearing at dawn. The action is linked to the writer.

The evanescent form of an indefinite extent emerges bound to the distinct action signaled in "le doute du Jeu suprême." Sense can be made of the game only if we associate it with the other words in the stanza. Although "Une dentelle" suggests a privileged indeterminacy of pure space (note the connection with an infinite enforced by the rhyme of "dentelle" with "éternelle" in the last line), the

"Jeu suprême" appears as something other than divine. We know from Mallarmé's writing that he intends an equivalence between "le jeu," "le doute," and the poetic act.

> . . . ce jeu insensé d'écrire, s'arroger en vertu d'un doute--la goutte d'encre apparentée à la nuit sublime--quelque devoir de tout recréer.
>
> (O.C. 481)

Founded on doubt, both a folly and a necessity, the act of human creation is the ground of the sonnet.[4]

The last two lines of the stanza further define the qualities of the game. In its conditional disappearing, a dentelle acts "A n'entr'ouvrir comme un blasphème/Qu'absence éternelle de lit." The supreme game simultaneously appears a transgression, a rapport accentuated by the assonance of "suprême" with "blasphème."[5] Consider the striking equation of Jeu/Blasphème in "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe," which concludes: "Aux noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur." "Blasphème" is capitalized and implicitly connected to the "Jeu" of writing "aux noirs vols." Mallarmé perceives the poet's creation as a spurious one. The poet fragments a formless, purely potential ground, the white page, with "sa goutte, au fond, de ténèbres relative à ce que quelque chose soit" (O.C. 370).[6]

In this stanza, the initial binary opposition of indefinite (Une dentelle) and definite (le doute) is for the moment counteracted, synthesized, in the complex suggestivity of the sequence: "A n'entr'ouvrir comme un blasphème." While "entr'ouvrir" literally depicts lace curtains as they separate in the dawn air, the essential

qualification "comme un blasphème" links "Une dentelle" to the particular poetic game ("la goutte d'encre"). The stanza's first two lines marked out the passage from essence to existence: that is to say, the Une of indeterminacy refuted by yet another uncertainty, "le doute du Jeu suprême." The third movement, signified by "un blasphème," reveals the dynamic of the entire sonnet. A continual movement of alternating passage of one term into another (une→le →un) and back again, their mutual reflections proceeding in balance from point to point, constitutes the poetic experience. The two component counter-powers, presented in the self-renewing opposition between indefinite and definite article, interpenetrate each other to generate a higher third that includes both the former.[7] The antagonism between simplicity and complexity, conjunction and divergence, appear as a series of coordinate parts of one process toward a unity regained. With the progress of the text, the une appears more definitive through exteriorization in its own contradiction. This exteriorization, accomplished through difference in form, presents "the poetical essence of the universe" as ordained in the pages of Eureka, ". . . forcing the originally and therefore normally One into the abnormal condition of Many. An action of this character implies reaction. A diffusion from Unity involves a tendency to return to Unity" (p. 21).

Poe's reciprocity of adaptation that eradicates any fixed distinction between the states of spirituality and materiality helps us better understand the design of this sonnet. The convertibility which subjugates all elements in the poem into oneness is intended by Mallarmé, as confirmed in the stanza's last line: "Qu'absence

éternelle de lit." For although there has been an opening into what was closed, this separation does not manifest existence. Instead, it leads to absence and discloses only the idea of a non-present bed. The language and its provocative "entr'ouvrement" determines only a return to vacancy, further dematerializing the object signified.

The second stanza intensifies one moment of the poetic act, the atomization of denotation to embody essence:

> Cet unanime blanc conflit
> D'une guirlande avec la même,
> Enfui contre la vitre blême
> Flotte plus qu'il n'ensevelit.

A positive quality has been given to the created absence. The dentelle/jeu suprême/blasphême segmentation of the inventive play has delimited the verbal space to reveal nothing except the void. Here we see a source for the reciprocal shifts in the designation of the indefinite and definite article iterated throughout the poem. That process whereby the definite article is neutralized into shapelessness and the essence of oneness becomes particularized is itself momentary. This radical alternation Valéry calls "le jeu suprême de la transmutation des idées."[8] Nothing can be certain except the apotheosis of an ambiguity.

The first line "unanime," evolved from the latin unanimus fuses unus (one) + animus (spirit) and concretizes the poem's central tendency. In this uncertain half-light, this is a singularly qualified "conflit." A "conflit" of conformity, of unresolved

identities and alternations, it remains monotone. To create with words the condition of a lack of words remains the aim of this stanza, an aim that affirms itself in the context of an ever-deepening Un(e) sequence. The coupling of "une guirlande avec la même" (a simultaneous rustling against the pale window) presents the never-definitive aspect of existence evoked in "Flotte plus qu'il n'ensevelit."[9]

The sonnet's dominant way to tend toward the One is through a dispersal which acts to join. In this stanza, in particular, the theme of conjunction manifests itself. In three lines, for example, we have: "unanime . . . conflit/D'une . . ./ . . . contre," each word contains a variation on the theme of one, whether as indefinite article (une) or indefinite pronoun (on). This confluence of two distinct forms points to the colligation of the poem's concluding tercet: nul (l'un)/on. The very indeterminedness of the indefinite article constitutes its definitiveness. The pure and abstract has being present within it. In L'Expression littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé, Jacques Scherer notes:

> Cette valeur définie latente de l'article indéfini est à rapprocher de l'emploi étendu du pronom indéfini "un," inspiré du latin.[10]

The notion of a uniform conflict of two identical garlands signifies a vague undoubling, as of one folded cloth ("au fond de l'unanime pli," in "Autre Eventail," O.C. 58). The apparent duality in the undoubling or opening into two ("entr'ouvrir") reveals itself

to be a counterfeit of contradiction, merely duplicating the originally unfied image. This renewed "dédoublement" (in the suggested diffusion of the dawn's rays) plays out the fiction of the indeterminate, this existence "à-demi" to be shown forth in words:

> . . . d'existences étageant leur vacuité en tant qu'une monotonie énorme . . . mainte indécise flottaison d'idée désertant les hasards comme des branches. (O.C. 289)

Consequently, in this poem, the division into a coalescence suggests the possibility of writing words that no longer oppose the ideal of a primary whiteness. Such a dissolution of corporeality through the aid of matter, refers us back to the spirit's manifestation in Eureka, described as "Matter without Matter" (p. 75). In the second stanza, the definite article, la, is, in its turn, deprived of its usual function. Joined to the word for sameness, "la même," it directs our attention to the preceding, equally undetermined object, "une guirlande," and its particularizing force is neutralized. The article is also audibly neutralized, reduced to a rhythmic redundancy: "guirlande . . . la . . ./ . . . la . . .". And thus, Mallarmé wrote in Igitur: "je profère la parole pour la replonger dans son inanité" (O.C. 451).

The first tercet exemplifies the suggestion that words through a disintegration of differential emphasis, can indeed "Flotte plus qu'il n'ensevelit":

> Mais chez qui du rêve se dore
> Tristement dort une mandore
> Au creux néant musicien

With the conjunction "Mais," Mallarmé turns the sonnet back upon itself and accelerates the drive to realize a harmony of univocal sound. We should read this tercet as a phonetic materialization of absence. When we take out of the second line the calembour "ment dort" that repeats the rhymed word, "mandore," the ment, dort, mandore, acts truly as "un solitaire tacite concert" to illustrate that "La Poésie, proche l'idée, est Musique, par excellence" (O.C. 380-381). The assonance and alliteration harmonically reflect upon the "unanime blanc conflit" of the preceding quatrain.

The involution of words disappearing one into the other, this carefully modulated sonority, is controlled by the presence of une, followed by mandore. The musical instrument, round like a belly and apparently full of being, sustains all its power of negation. A "creux néant," this mandore, a well-formed box around the null, refers emptiness back upon itself. The literal meaning of "creux néant" makes only a minimal contribution to its force. Yet, in its relation to "abolit," "un blasphème," "Qu'absence," and "conflit," to all those notions of negativity which have come forth as fertile, this hollow is also pregnant with something more than what it first signifies.

The joining of mandore and musician is emphasized by the sequence dore/dort . . . dore, and the two converge into one. The move from mandore to musician and their final yoking leads to the presence of a poet in this spectral space. An identity of subject and object (musician and mandore/poet and poem) is expressed. "Musicienne du silence" ("Sainte," O.C. 53), he has toiled "tristement" to affirm

the ultimate possibility of the word, to move the linguistic into silence: "significatif silence qu'il n'est pas moins beau de composer, que les vers" (O.C. 872-873).

The last tercet carries further the undoubling that leads to unity:

> Telle que vers quelque fenêtre
> Selon nul ventre que le sien,
> Filial on aurait pu naître.

I have alluded to the crossing over and coupling of terms for object and those for subject mirrored in the turn of nul (which can be read as l'un) into the on of the concluding line. We have been prepared to read this nul as a phonetic inversion of l'un, whose graphemic and phonetic structure l(e) + un externally realizes the power of the indefinite. The equivocal Un(e) is a determining presence. The one, l'un, convergence of definite and indefinite, applies to the poem as subject. The distinction between subject and object, he who writes and what he writes, has been pulverized through their reciprocal transformations. The nul/on combination might further signify no/one (not the one), stressing the de-personalization and anonymity that Mallarmé sought in order to match his own artistry with the ultimate model, the universe. "Filial" calls to mind "ce pli de sombre dentelle que retient l'infini" (O.C. 370), the thread made up of "les principaux fils déjà sortis" out of a poet's spirit, as spider-like, he attempts to create the work that arises out of "nul ventre que le sien."[11]

Further indices of indeterminacy present themselves in this stanza. We attend to "quelque fenêtre" as opposed to "la vitre

blême" of the second stanza. And, "naître" is homonym of "n'être" (an equivalence underlined by the first line "fe/nêtre"). Referring to the lines from the poem, "Les Fenêtres," we note the interaction of death and rebirth:[12]

> Je me mire et me vois ange! et je meurs, et j'aime
> --Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité--
> A renaître, portant mon rêve en diadème,
> Au ciel antérieur où fleurit la Beauté!

Again, we hover between being and non-being, creation and its negation. In the suspension marked by the undoing of the poet as subject, we realize both the potentiality and the limitations of construction contained in the conditional verb "aurait pu naître," setting in motion, even as the poem ends, the doubt, the irresolution.

In this game, the Un(e) dissimulates. The "sonnet nul et se réfléchissant de toutes les façons"[13] demonstrates how Oneness, posing as uncertainty can become definitive. Mallarmé's art "consacré aux fictions, sa virtualité" (O.C. 368), has endowed the indefinite article with the only power to signify in the poem. The diverse elements conform to compose a medium that serves the principle of unity. And the undefined has played out its role in the moment's fiction. This feigning, is for Mallarmé, the substance of all poetry. "Je chanterai en désespéré," he wrote in 1866, "devant le Rien qui est la vérité, ces glorieux mensonges!"[14]

These "glorious lies" designate the fiction that Mallarmé equates with his method. "Toute méthode est une fiction, et bonne pour la démonstration." Thus, paradoxically, he puts forward the de-

monstrations of craft as the means to what cannot be demonstrated--the indefiniteness of effect he values, as did his "maître Poe." In Eureka, Poe makes language "serve the objects of this spiritual Ether." He willfully exhibits discourse in all its vicissitudes to allude to ultimate harmony. We recall his declaration: "I design but to suggest--and to convince through the suggestion."

The doctrine of effect presents itself as a device that can retain the conception. A question remains: are we, as readers, left with a singular impression of the inexpressible, that "soul of Poesy," or merely with evidence of a technical cleverness that falls short of the desired revelation? I have suggested that the composition of their language, by operating according to clearly seen strategies of indeterminacy does, in fact, reveal that instinct for symmetry claimed by both writers as inherent in our minds. The fabrication of doubt through an inexorable verbal dialectic leads to our certain "sense" of a coherent design. The logic, then, is both concealed and implied in the fiction.

NOTES

1

See Harald Weinrich, "The Textual Function of the French Article," Literary Style: A Symposium, ed. Seymour Chatman (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.221-34. In dealing with the binary opposition between the functions of the definite and indefinite articles, he stresses "the principle of mutual determination by context" and sees the articles as "indexes and signals which can be considered as sign-posts of the discourse." (p.224) This article came to my attention after my preliminary work on Une Dentelle, and it should be consulted for further work on the article in French.

2

See Otto Jesperson, The Philosophy of Grammar (London: George A. Unwin, 1924), p.113 particularly:

> ...in most cases where we use the "indefinite" article we have really something very definite in our mind, and "indefinite" in the grammatical sense practically means nothing but what shall not (not yet) be named.

See also Weinrich's comment that the "definite article directs the audience's attention toward pre-information and the indefinite article toward post-information." (p.226)

3

The word "abolie" begins "L'Ouverture ancienne d'Hérodiade": "Abolie, et son aile affreuse dans les larmes/Du bassin, aboli qui mire les alarmes" and recurs in Un Coup de Dés and the "Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore" of the sonnet "Ses purs ongles." See Hegel's "negitivät," a productive dissolution: "...the content of the Notion...posited as external, as falling asunder." (The Science of Logic, p.143)

4

See Igitur, o.c., p.442: "...cette folie était nécessaire." And in the Scolies to this work, p.450, he emphasizes the deceit of art, a game made up of appearances:

> Autre gaminerie.
> Il dit: je ne peux faire ceci sérieusement...

5

Whatever our orientation, the creation of the poem implies an inverted mirroring of God's creation, Hegel's "die verkehrte Welt." See Mallarmé's "Quant au livre," o.c., p.370.

> Tu remarquas, on n'écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l'alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s'indique, ébauche ou interrompu; l'homme poursuit noir sur blanc.

6
L'après-midi d'un faune expresses the equation made between "le doute" and "la goutte" of ink: "Mon doute, amas de nuit ancienne" (o.c., p.50).

7
That which was representative of essence, the subject, "Une dentelle," gives rise to the negative of the infinite, "le doute" of the poet, to reemerge finally in "un blasphème" ("dentelle" and "doute" joined). I also refer the reader to Hegel's Logic:

> This progress makes its appearance wherever relative determinations are pressed to the point of opposition, with the result that although they are in an inseparable unity, each is credited with a self-subsistent determinate being over against the other. The progress, is consequently, a contradiction which is not resolved but is always only enunciated as present.

8
Paul Valéry, "Dernière visite à Mallarmé," Variété II (Paris: Gallimard, 1930), pp.183-84.

9
Negativity's movement is seen as the liquifying, the dissolving force. See Mallarmé's translation of Poe's The Raven: "Et de la soie incertaine et triste bruissement en chaque rideau purpural me traversait" (o.c., p.190).

10
Jacques Scherer, L'Expression littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1947). See also Scherer, Grammaire de Mallarmé (Paris: Nizet, 1977), pp.101-2: "C'est donc délibérément qu'il a enrobé d'imprécision une pensée qui, dans le fond, reste précise."

11
For Mallarmé, the work must be inborn, revealing, "l'instinct d'harmonie que, grande ou jeune, on a en soi" ("La Dernière Mode," o.c., p.828).

12
See Robert Greer Cohn's excellent discussion of the naître/n'être equation, or, in his words, the "not birth." Toward the Poems of Mallarmé (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), pp.214-15.

[13] Mallarmé, Propos sur la poésie, ed. by H. Mondor (Monaco, 1953), p.99.

[14] Mallarmé, Correspondance (1862-1871), p.208.

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