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Title	Verisimilitude and Poe's Stories
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Citation	大阪外大英米研究. 1962, 3, p. 71-91
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/98944
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Verisimilitude and Poe's Stories

Tadao Katayama

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Ms. Found in a Bottle, which was submitted by Poe in October 1833 to the prize contest sponsored by the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*, was one of a group of six stories entitled *The Tales of the Folio Club*, and was chosen out of the six rather for the originality of conception and its length than for the superior merit in its execution. It was a work which marked an epoch in his literary life in that it brought an obscure writer "out of the *penumbra* into the full light of day."[1] As was justly and succinctly remarked by the three judges on the committee, J. P. Kennedy, J. H. B. Latrobe and J. H. Miller, the tone of this narrative was "eminently distinguished by a wild, vigorous and poetical imagination."[2] This remark is also true of *Metzengerstein* (1832), the first of his published prose writings. Even if one concedes as true Poe's assertion that they are psychological "allegory" treating of "the terror of the soul,"[3] the fact remains that they are conspicuous in the lack of those devices for verisimilitude which characterize his later work of "allegory." In fact, the governing principle of his early prose work would seem to be summarized in that declaration of his credo that "the ludicrous (is to be) heightened into the grotesque; the fearful colored into the horrible; the witty exaggerated into the burlesque; the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical."[4] This conviction of his was materialized in *Loss of Breath*,

Metzengerstein, *The Duc de L'Omellette*, and *Ms. Found in a Bottle*[*] (*Morella* affording a more palpable example of this class), in which the grotesque, the horrible, the burlesque, the strange and mystical were the dominant tones of each story in the order given above.

It was, however, not long after the appearance of these stories that a new element began to make its presence felt—the element of verisimilitude. *A Descent into the Maelström* is a case in point. Put to print for the first time in 1841, this story stirred up a dispute among scholars as to the possible date of its composition. The reason is that J. H. B. Latrobe who was on the committee for the prize contest of the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* reminisced in his old age that the story formed one of *The Tales of the Folio Club*. Some scholars see in this the old man's lapse of memory, while others are of the opinion that the story as we know it now must have been something quite different from the original one, if it ever existed. I would side with the former opinion from the internal evidence of verisimilitude, but in view of the fact that Poe was an inveterate reviser, the latter contention could hold its own with equal persuasive force. Be that as it may, it is an undeniable fact that the two stories *Ms. Found in a Bottle*[**] and *A Descent into the Maelström* usually classed under the heading of "Pseudo-Scientific Stories," are sharply divided by the presence of the writer's devices for verisimilitude.

True, the former is not wanting in the minuteness of detail which goes far towards the creation of verisimilitude

*All the above stories were contained in *The Tales of the Folio Club*.

**Poe was probably influenced by Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner* in the description of the ghostly Spanish ship and her crew.

in the latter, but the incongruous blending of the real and the fantastic as a result of each of them claiming a separate and independent domain fails to beget in the former the tone of verisimilitude which is an inffalible hallmark of his later work.

I think it is in this feature of disjunction, rather than in a trick of literary style emphasized by Gruener* that his indebtedness to Hoffmann is to be recognized. This assertion is made on the ground that Poe was first introduced to the German writer chiefly through Carlyle's *German Romance* where Hoffmann was represented by *The Golden Pot*, which is characterized, as many of his writings are, by the above-mentioned disjunction. Poe apparently outgrew his master's influence by the time he wrote *A Descent into the Maelström* in 1940.

That Poe had long cherished a special interest in this question of verisimilitude is evident from his review of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, in which he tried to expound the secret of the strong appeal the fiction had to the reading public in terms of the writer's skilful use of verisimilitude ascribed by Poe to the faculty of "identification." This was as early as January 1836. It was, however, in his review of Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* that Peo first defined his own stand on this point. In this essay, first printed in 1842, his manifesto of the short-

*"the peculiar habit of the author in conversational dialogue of beginning a sentence with one or more words, inserting thereupon the word of saying, by itself or with others, and then repeating the opening words before proceeding with the rest of the sentences." (*Notes on the Influence af E. T. A. Hoffmann on Edgar Allan Poe*, PMLA, XII, p. 18, March, 1904)

story writing, verisimiltude, ranked along with unity of effect and proper length as one of the essential elements of fictitious narrative, is described as "the most vitally important point in fiction."[5]

In the preface to the *Poems* published in 1831, Poe, under the influence of Coleridge, identified the object of literature with pleasure. According to him poetry has for its object an indefinite pleasure. And "for the purposes of poetry it is quite sufficient that a thing is possible—or at least that the improbability be not offensively glaring."[6] On the other hand, in romance where the object is a definite pleasure derived by means of definite images, it is necessary that a thing should have an air of reality.[7] Hence the importance attached to verisimilitude. To be real in his case, however, does not always mean the kind of realism that will satisfy naturalistically-minded readers. This is partly due to the setting of his stories. But Poesque "realism" is there. Says G. B. Shaw, "His houses are haunted houses, his woods enchanted woods, and he makes them so real that reality itself cannot sustain the comparison."[8]

This verisimilitude Poe used at times for the sake of hoaxing, catering to the craze of the day, as he did in *Von Kempelen and his Discovery*. But more often the art was employed for the satisfaction of the intellect, both on the part of writer and reader, and the excitement of the heart, which Poe considered to be the objects of prose writings.

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Poe's stories have been divided into classes from the viewpoint of topic or structure. The more notable examples are the divisions made in the edition of Stedman and Woodberry

from topics, and those made by C. A. Smith from structural types. The following is a tentative classification on the basis of Poe's treatment of verisimilitude in relation to the reader's credence.

1. *The stories in which there was no need of devising anything to elicit the reader's credence.*

These are the kind of stories excluding the majority of Poe's phantasy pieces. In other words, they are chiefly represented by his "tales of ratiocination."

As for verisimilitude, in one of the representative works of this kind, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, plausibility was so high that it deceived the French critics and was regarded as a true story. It is on record that in England *The Narrative of Arthur Gorden Pym* was once taken as "sober, historical truth"[9] by the editor of a magazine.

In *The Gold-Bug* the kind of close attention Poe paid to reality will be gathered from the way he changed the elevation of the telescope from forty-one to twenty-one degrees in the description of the hero's attempt at locating what proved to be a human skull.

Needless to say, it was not the photographic kind of reality which Poe aimed at. It was reality so chosen or modified as would fit in well with the whole effect of the story. To cite an example, in the foregoing story the trees of his choice were the huge tulip-trees with "funereal plumes of Spanish moss waving eerily like the canopy of a catafalque."[10] No better tree could have been chosen to set a grinning skull among the gloomy labyrinth of its branches. As for the "high rugged country behind Sullivan's Island" it was transplanted from the scenery of the Ragged Mountains to suit the tone of the story.

To make everything fitting and alive—that was his potent

magic of verisimilitude.

2. *The stories of phantasy in which there was need of devising something whereby the reader's credence could be elicited in some way.*

That Poe tried to construct plausible fact on the basis of something by which the reader's credence could be elicited in any way in stories of phantasy is evidenced from his reviews of Richard Adams Locke,[11] who invited Poe's criticism of plagiarism with the publication of the *Discoveries in the Moon* about three weeks after he contributed *Hans Pfaall's Journey to the Moon* in the *Southern Literary Messenger* for June 1835.

Poe writes how he had his interest aroused in the possibility of future lunar investigation by reading an American edition of Sir John Herschell's *Treatise on Astronomy*. At last he decided to give free rein to it by depicting his day-dream about the scenery of the moon. He goes on to say how he saw that the chief interest of such a story must depend upon the reader's yielding his credence in some measure as to details of actual fact. This convinced him of the necessity of supposing a telescope of extraordinary power. After conversations with some of his friends he came to the conclusion that the optical difficulties of constructing a telescope of his conception were so great and so commonly understood that it would be in vain to give verisimiltude to any fiction having the telescope as a basis. Thus in *Hans Pfaall's Journey to the Moon* as we have it now, he confesses that he used half plausible, half bantering style without trying to impart such close verisimilitude as really to deceive.

In *A Descent into the Maelström* the counterpart of the telescope in this rejected version would seem to be pseudo-physical principle attributed by him to Archimedes that "a

cylinder swimming in a vortex offered more resistance to its suction and was drawn in with greater difficulty than an equally bulky body, of any form whatever." And he did not forget to add a note, "See Archimedes *De Incidentibus in Fluide*—lib. 2." to make the reader's belief doubly sure.

Mesmerism, with its rich stores of probable wonders to the people of the eighteen-forties, was another vehicle employed by Poe for the same purpose. *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar* is a notable example in which the most truth-like representation is used to depict the impossible. In spite of the utter disbelief later professed by the writer himself,[12] the story was republished as a statement of facts in the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* as well as some German and French journals. In England the reaction was about the same. The editor of a London weekly, *The Popular Record of Modern Science*, commented, to Poe's amused interest, on its "internal evidence of authenticity."[13] Elizabeth B. Browning, whom Poe once called "the world's greatest poetess," communicated that the story threw people into "dreadful doubts" as to "whether it can be true." She concluded, without doubt to his satisfaction, that "the certain thing in the tale in question is the power of making horrible improbabilities seem near & familiar."[14] Though *The Power of Words*, *Some Words with a Mummy*, etc. might appear to be *tours de force* to modern readers, James A. Harrison would seem to be right when he says "how few read *The Power of Words* or *Eiros and Charmion* with any feeling of the absolute baselessness of the physical theories on which they rest."[15] We must bear in mind that those were the days when "a grave professor of mathematics in a Virginia College"[16] fell an easy prey to the hoaxes of Lock's *Discoveries in the Moon*. The reader's insatiable curiosity and comparative

ignorance were his stock in trade when Poe could count on his credence in his treatment of pseudo-scientific stories.

3. *The stories in which there was no devising of a thing by which the reader's credence could be elicited will be subdivid into the following two classes.*

A. *The stories into which was introduced the tone of banter.*

One notable example of this type is to be found in *Hans Pfaall's Journey to the Moon*, of which brief mention was made in connection with Poe's article on J. A. Locke. Here the prevailing tone is that of half plausible and half bantering. Readers will note that the hero's name suggests "Fall," that he is a mender of bellows by occupation, and that the Burgomaster's name is Mynheer Superbus Von Underduk, or Mr. Arrogance Von Underduck. Pfaal significantly starts on April lst in a balloon "manufactured entirely of dirty newspapers" whose shape is "a huge fool's cap turned upside down." Such passages as "ten thousand pipes descended simultaneously from the corners of ten thousand mouths" or "under the very noses of the people, or rather at some distance above their noses, was the identical thing in question" stand out in too conspicuous a manner to escape our notice. Poe's concluding remark in the note given at the end of the story would not be like putting a fifth wheel to a coach. He puts emphasis on the design which is "original, in asmuch as regards the attempt at verisimilitude, in the application of scientific principles" (so far as the whimsical nature of the subject could permit), to the actual passage between the earth and the moon." From this we may gather that in *Hans Pfaall* it was not more difficult to elicit the reader's credence than in *A Descent into the Maelström*, but that it was a new experiment

to Poe, for, as he says, "one of his chief aims has been the widest diversity of subject, thought, & especially tone & manner of handling."[17]

An example for this kind of writing Poe found in Defoe's *A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal*. In the light of modern scholorship Poe was apparently wrong in detecting a tone of banter in this account of apparition, but one thing is certain, and that is he learned the art of creating verisimilitude.

B. *The stories of phantasy in which much was left to the reader's imagination, no credence being claimed or anticipated by the writer.*

An article on Robert M. Bird's *Sheppard Lee* contributed by Poe to the *Southern Literary Messenger* for September 1836 will provide a clue to his view regarding this type of fiction.

In this novel the hero undergoes various metempsychoses, in the course of which he "very awkwardly partially loses, and partially does not lose, this identity at each transmigration."[18] Poe takes exception to such a treatment in this kind of fiction, and suggests two alternatives. One is to handle the whole story in a jocular manner, and the other is to solve various absurdities by means of dreams, the latter being the method adopted in *Sheppard Lee*. According to his view, however, the author ought to know better than to repay us for our fruitless efforts to solve incongruities in the fiction with the disclosure that the whole matter was a dream. His conclusion is that the important thing is to avoid "that directness of expression which we have noticed in 'Sheppard Lee' and thus leave much to the imagination." This is to write "as if the author were firmly impressed with the truth, yet astonished at the immensity of the wonders he relates, and for

which, professedly, he neither claims nor anticipates credence."[19] As an artist clad in a garment of a more refined texture, he writes:

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my senses reject their own evidence, yet, mad am I not — and very surely do I not dream.

A little further on, describing the singular phenomenon of a black cat's figure impressed upon the white surface of the wall with a rope around its neck, the narrator calls in the aid of scientific knowledge to explain away the wonder, which satisfies his reason without solving his sense of wonder. And when "the hideous beast" buried alive in the depth of the wall emerges to confront the narrator with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, no explanation is given of the wonder, but certainly much is left to the reader's imagination. *

It is to be noted that in this kind of writing where the reader's credence is not to be gained through positive means, Poe is subtly trying to elicit it by means of the negative method of leaving much to the reader's imagination, calling in support all kinds of technical devices to impart verisimilitude, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The kind of writing in which full use was made of the negative method is allegory.

Writing about allegory Poe declares that "in defence of

*See page 79 of this paper and the present writer's *"Poe and Allegory,"* Anglo-American Studies, Vol. 1.

allegory (however, or for whatever object, employed) there is scarcely one respectable word to be said," because it does vital injury to the most important point in fiction — that of earnestness or verisimilitude. In spite of this attack on allegory, he held that in the otherwise flawless work there was "always a certain hardness or nakedness which repells the artistical eye"[20] unless it has, among other things, some "under-current" of meaning which gives a work of art a certain "richness." Since in Poe's terminology the kind of writing with the "upper-current" and "under-current" of meaning is allegory, he would be censured for his self-contradiction. But this vacillation or rather this inclination toward allegory in spite of himself was but the logical outcome of his interest in "the terror of soul," or the drama of the conflicting struggles going on in the soul.

According to his view the finest example of this kind of prose romance was De la Motte Fouqué's *Undine*,[21] which he expressly designated under the name of "a poem." To apply the same yardstick, *Black Cat*, *William Wilson*, *Ligeia* and other stories in this vein might better be called poems.

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The element considered essential by Poe as well as the technical devices employed by him for the creation of the illusion of reality are nothing but a set of cold, lifeless facts as given below. But, as every reader knows, once they were under his command to be blended in his mystic crucible with ingredients of his wild and fertile imagination, everything was transmuted into something vivid, beautiful and strange.

A. *Identification as the essential element of verisimilitude.*

Commenting on *Robinson Crusoe* an English critic says:

Here to use a phrase applied by Bruntière to Balzac, Defoe displays a power··· the power to make alive. This power to make alive is not to be explained by emphasis upon Defoe's command of convincing datails or by any other stock phrase of criticism.[22]

He thinks highly of Defoe's ability "to make alive," and yet he dare not commit himself as to the possible source of his magic power. Poe, writing way back in 1836, identified it with Defoe's use of verisimilitude, and stressed that the general public failed to recognize the kind of genius which was exercised in its creation. In this genius he saw Defoe's power of identification.* Poe is something of a psychologist in saying that this faculty is "that dominion exercised by volition over imagination which enables the mind to lose its own in a fictitious individuality." And he added that "this includes, in a very great degree, the power of abstraction."[23]

On this pet subject of his he talked more at length at the opening pargaraphs of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. The gist of his argument is that the truly imaginative are never otherwise than analytic. And he emphasizes that the skilful analyst is distinguished by his knowledge of what to observe. Naturally there are gradations in this power. In *The Purloined*

*In the *Oxford English Dictionary* the earliest known instance of this word used in this sense is recorded under date of 1857. Poe's use antedates it by twenty-one years.

Letter the hero outwits the thief, who is mathematician and poet—that is, both analytical and imaginative— by identifying himself with the latter. The writer who had this faculty developed in the highest degree was Shakespeare. The Bard, according to Poe, was endowed with his marvelous power of identification with humanity at large, and thus wrote of Hamlet "as if Hamlet he were."[24]

Today when it is known that the existence of "Ur-Hamlet" in which the hero pretends madness imposed on Shakespeare, writing in its tradition, the necessity of making his hero feign madness, this contention of Poe's seems outdated, and it may well be that his thinking was but an echo of Coleridge's "our myriad-minded Shakespeare." Be that as it may, Poe was no doubt indebted to the study of this aspect of Defoe and Shakespeare for the creation of the atmosphere of verisimilitude in his writing.

To illustrate, with what convincing reality is depicted in *A Descent into the Maelström* the decrease of terror succeeded by the abandonment of hope, the growing interest in the race of the different objects toward the horrible inner edge of the whirl, the new hope which makes the heart beat more heavily when he makes the discovery which was to save his life; and in *The Cask of Amontillado* the subtle and compelling delineation of the mental process of the two protagonists where Montresor, a sober, cold-blooded, implacable fiend of revenge in full possesion of his faculties inveigles Fortunato, an unsuspecting, intoxicated victim, taking advantage of the latter's inordinate pride in his connoisseurship in wine, his ill-concealed sense of jealousy of his rival, and Montresor's cunning solicitude for his "friend's" health.

A penetrating judgement of this aspect of Poe's genius was

passed by Dostoievsky when he pronounced that Poe "places his hero in a most extraordinary outward or psychological situation, and, then, describes the inner state of the person with marvellous acumen and amazing realism."[25]

This faculty of identification was not solely confined to the description of his characters. Its domain covered a far wider region, its sway extending over inanimate objects.

An example will be taken from that perennially popular story, *The Gold-Bug*. The bug is so consistent with the tone of the fiction that we hardly suspect the beetle was the child of his imagination and observation plus analysis. Great indeed is our wonder and pleasure at our discovery that the bug is a synthesis of two different kinds of beetles which he must have come across on his rambles among the dunes of Sullivan's Island where he spent about a year as a private soldier of an artillery battery temporarily stationed at Fort Moultrie on the island. It is now known that one of the beetles chosen by Poe was *Alaus Oculatus*, which had "a background of black, thickly spotted with white, and its very large prothorax was provided with two oval, eye-like black spots edged with white that gave it a decidedly piratical and skull-like appearance." The other called *Callichroma* had "black antennae sometimes measuring over two inches in length, while the head and prominent prothorax were glittering with fiery gold sometimes shot with iridescent green. The fore-wings were satiny green, and, when opened, discovered the full-gold of the abdomen beneath."[26] To this combination Poe gave another master-stroke in the form of a long black mark at the bottom, making the resemblance to the death's head the more remarkable.

B. *The technical devices used for verisimilitude will be divided into the following.*

1. *The art of playing on the reader's psychology.*

Poe was confident that in a short prose narrative requiring from a half hour to one or two hours in its persusal the soul of the reader was at the control of the writer. He may have identified himself with the reader in an effort to create verisimilitude. One of the psychological devices he used in eliciting the reader's suspention of disbelief was that of forcefully or subtlly eliciting the reader's belief in something dubious or nonexistent.

In *Von Kempelen*, over and above the art Poe used for inventing the *Diary of Sir Humphrey Davy*, he tried to make the ground more solid by playing on the reader's psychology. He writes:

Although a little technical, I cannot refrain from appending two passages from the "Diary," with one of Sir Humphrey's equations. (As we have not the algebraic signs necessary, and as the "Diary" is to be found at the Athenaeum Library, we omit here a small portion of Mr. Poe's manuscript. —ED.)

In describing "Mad Trist" in the *Fall of the House of Usher*, another invention of Poe, he writes as if the reader must be familiar with the book, "I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story…"

He is a little bolder at the opening passages of *Mesmeric Revelation*:

Whatever doubt may still envelop the rationale of mesmerism, its startling facts are now almost universally admitted. Of these latter, those who doubt are your mere doubters by profession—an unprofitable and disreputable tribe.

In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* the narrator is — and the reader is supposed to be — astonished at the uncanny skill of Dupin's fathoming his thought. The links of the chain of his guessing are arbitrary, permitting of many other alternatives but in the course of reading we are sort of hypnotized and succumb to the illusion as if those given by Dupin were the sole, correct guesses.

The preface to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantacket* affords another example of an elaborate device in this vein. Pym, the professed writer of the story, says that his neglect of keeping a journal during a greater portion of the time of his voyage rendered it impossible for him to write from mere memory a record so minute and connected as to give the appearance of the true, and that the incidents he would narrate are of so marvelous a nature that he could hardly expect belief among the readers. These considerations led him to let Poe, who has evinced a great interest in his making public a full account of what he experienced, write in his own words a narrative of the earlier part of his adventures. This was published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, "under the garb of fiction." Since, however, this was taken to be a true account, the author is now ready to give the facts fully convinced and assured of the public belief in them.

This is subtle and elaborate, and in his day was not such a palpable hoax as it might appear to sophisticated modern readers.

2. *The art of giving the effects of actuality by the description of minute details.*

In this respect Poe was apparently a most devout and faithful student of Defoe, whose *Memoirs of a Cavalier* was so plausibly written that it deceived Lord Chatham into taking it

for an authentic narrative. That this is the case with *Robinson Crusoe* and *Mrs. Veal* is too well known to cite critical comment. From the latter Poe seems to have learned the art of imparting verisimilitude by giving minuteness of detail upon points which have no immediate connection with the general story. Full use was made of this in the majority of "allegories," including *William Wilson*, *Black Cat* and so on.

Examples abound throughout his works of the use of circumstantial detail. Here will be given a brief specimen from *Von Kempelen*.

In the story mention is made of the *Diary of Sir Humphrey Davy*. The publisher's address of this invention is given as Cottle and Munroe, London, and the number of the pages is 150. To add plausibility he writes "it will be seen at pp. 53 and 82" that the illustrious English chemist not only anticipated Kempelen in the idea of transmutation but made considerable progress experimentally in the very identical analysis made by the hero of the fiction. Further on, Poe puts one of jumbled sentences "At page 13, for example, near the middle," of which he gives the reader the corrected version. This is in the tradition of Defoe, through and through, and no mistake.

It will not be out of place to say a word about his method of leaving much to the imagination which on the surface is in apparent contradiction to the device mentioned above. This was used at times in depicting horror. For instance, in *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the narrator in his horror of the impending death by being burnt alive thinks of killing himself by jumping into the well. He rushes to the brink and stares into the interior illumined down to its inmost recesses from the enkindled roof. Poe writes:

Yet for a wild moment did my spirit refuse to comprehend the meaning of what I saw. At length it forced—it wrested its way into my soul—it burned itself upon shuddering reason. Oh, for a voice to speak ! oh horror ! oh, any horror but this !

In a highly critical comment on the above, R. L. Stevenson writes that Poe "knows no more about the pit than you or I do. It is pure imposture, a piece of audacious, impudent thimblerigging; and yet even with such bugs as these he does manage to frighten us — His imagination is a willing horse — But — he has killed it under him by over-riding."[27] This is a criticism which would have Poe curl his lip. He has not ridden down the horse of his imagination. He is only obeying the dictate of his analytical power for the sake of a better effect, which had the last say in his writings.

3. *The device of keeping the under-current of meaning deep underneath.*

This is a device used only in allegory. In Chapter 2 mention was made of what existed behind his conflicting ideas on allegory. He was both repelled and attracted, but the pull was more powerful in that his interest was in depicting "the horror of the soul." The result was the compromise in which "the suggested meaning runs through the obvious one in a very profound under-current, so as never to interfere with the upper current without our own volition, so as never to show itself unless called to the surface." Thus his "allegory" was more of symbolical writing which was devoid of illustration of immaterial, and where the main conception sprang from the author's brain.

A cursory glance will be given of the way he put the

theory into practice.

In *The Black Cat* Poe writes:

During the former (by day) the creature left me no moment alone; and in the latter (by night), I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight —— an incarnate Nightmare that I had no power to shake off —— incumbent eternally upon my heart!

Here is an intimation that the Black Cat stands for Conscience. The concluding sentence reveals something more. It reads:

Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman.*

Now it is clear that by the beast he symbolizes two immaterial things —— Conscience and the Imp of the Perverse. The latter was, according to Poe, an inimical force to the self in that it embodied "a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgement, to violate that which is Law, merely because we understand it to be such."

Poe admitted that this kind of writing was the product of Imagination, not of Fancy. But he did not seem to have agreed with Coleridge who made a distinction between allegory, which was spoken consciously, and symbolical writings, which

*To make clear the intention of making some physical object emblematical of a certain immaterial object at the end of a work was a favorite device with Poe. See *William Wilson*, *The Raven*.

presumed no disjunction of faculties. For commenting on Dickens' use of the raven in *Barnaby Rudge* he says:

> The raven's croakings might have been prophetically heard in the course of the drama. Its character might have performed, in regard to that of the idiot, much the same part as does, in music, the accompaniment in respect to the air. Each might have been disinct. Each might have differed remarkably from the other. Yet between them there might have been wrought an analogical resemblance, and although each might have existed apart they might have formed together a whole which would have been imperfect in the absence of either.[28]

It seems to me that in "allegory" Poe was not only succesful in keeping the under-current of meaning hidden, but he approached a symbolical writing with no disjunction of faculties.

1. James A. Harrison, *Life of Edgar A. Poe* (Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.), p. 101.
2. Arthur H. Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.), p. 203.
3. Ibid. p. 289.
4. John Ostrom, ed., *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe* (Harvard University Press), Vol. 1, pp. 57, 58.
5. John H. Ingram, ed., *The Works of E. A. Poe* (A. & C. Black), Vol. IV, p. 226.
6. Letters, Vol. II, p. 331.
7. Works, Vol. III, p. 318.
8. George Bernard Shaw, *Pen Portraits And Reviews* (Constable & Co.), p. 225.
9. Mary E. Phillips, *Edgar Allan Poe The Man*, (The John C. Winston Co.) Vol. II, p. 1022.
10. *Letters*, Vol. II, p. 329.
11. Hervey Allen, *Israfel, The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (Farrar & Rinehart, Inc.), p. 178
12. Works, Vol. IV, pp 485-490.
13. Letters, Vol. II, p. 337.
14. Works, Vol. III, p. 406.
15. Letters, Vol. II, p. 320.
16. James. A. Harrison, op. cit., p. 196.
17. Ibid. p. 197.
18. Letters, Vol. II, p. 329.
19. Works, Vol. IV, p. 286.
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