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A History of the Poe-Controversy in Periodical Literature of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

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Poe's death called a horror story of rabies

Doctor says writer didn't die a drunk

NEW YORK—Edgar Allan Poe didn't die drunk in a Baltimore gutter, according to the first scientific study of the writer's final days. The telltale facts suggest rabies instead.

Dr. R. Michael Benitez, who practices medicine a mere block from the writer's grave, says it's true that Poe was seen in a bar on Lombard Street on an election day sexy in October 1849, delirious and possibly wearing somebody else's soiled clothes. But Poe wasn't drunk.

"I think Poe is much maligned in that respect," said Benitez, an assistant professor at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

He describes Poe's last days in a medical horror story as dramatic as the writer's most gruesome tales.

The author of "The Raven" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" entered the hospital comatose, but by the next day was perspiring heavily, hallucinating and shouting at imaginary companions. The day after that, he seemed better but couldn't remember falling ill. On his fourth day at Washington College Hospital, Poe again grew confused and belligerent, then quited down and died.

That's a classic case of rabies.

Edgar Allan Poe, famed for his macabre stories, died in a hospital, not in the gutter, at age 40.

said Benitez, whose diagnosis appears in the September issue of the Maryland Medical Journal. And there are other clues, too.

During the brief period when he was calm and awake, Poe refused alcohol and could drink water only with great difficulty.

Rabies victims frequently exhibit hydrophobia, or fear of water, because it's painful for them to swallow.

Although there's no evidence that a rabid animal bit Poe in the days before he died, that doesn't cast much doubt on Benitez's theory. About a quarter of rabies victims can't remember being bitten at all. And once a person is infected, the symptoms of rabies can take up to a year to appear.

But once the symptoms do show up, rabies is a swift and brutal killer. Most patients die within a few days.

Poe "had all the features of encephalitic rabies," said Dr. Henry Wilde, who frequently treats rabies at Chulalongkorn University Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand.

Although it has been well-established that Poe died in the hospital, legend has it he succumbed in the gutter, a victim of his debauched ways. The legend may have been fostered by his doctor, who in later years became a temperance advocate and changed his writings to make them less about drunkenness.

Poe scholars welcomed the diagnosis as the first scientifically valid assessment of Poe's death.

Whatever the facts, Poe almost certainly didn't die of alcohol poisoning or withdrawal, said Jeff Jerome, curator of the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum in Baltimore.

The writer was so sensitive to alcohol that a glass of wine would make him violently ill for days. Poe may have had problems with alcohol as a younger man, Jerome said, but by the time of his death at 40 the author almost always stayed clear of the bottle.
A HISTORY OF THE POE-CONTROVERSY IN PERIODICAL LITERATURE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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VITA

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After completing her secondary education at St. Vincent Academy, she entered the community of Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Dubuque, Iowa, in 1931. She continued her studies in Dubuque, and in the following years during the summer attended De Paul University, Chicago, St. Ambrose College, Davenport, Siena College, Memphis, Clarke College, Dubuque, and Catholic University. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree, with a major in English, from Clarke College in August, 1945. Since that time she has earned additional hours in various subject areas at St. Norbert College, West De Pere, Mundelein College, Chicago, and De Paul University, Chicago. From 1951 to 1955 she has done graduate work in English at Loyola University in Chicago.

The writer has taught in elementary and secondary schools of Midwestern states from Tennessee to Minnesota, and in South Dakota. At present she is teaching at Our Lady of Peace High School, St. Paul, Minnesota.
PREFACE

The original plan of this thesis was a history of the critical controversy persisting about the personal reputation of Edgar Allan Poe from 1849 to the present. The study was to have included a survey of the early influences as they are presented in contemporary textbooks of American literature for secondary schools and colleges. The proposed outline proved too ambitious; it had to be restricted both as to time and to choice of literary form. The present paper, therefore, is concerned with a recording of the controversy from 1849 to the "Virginia Edition" of Poe in 1902, and it deals chiefly with periodical literature of the nineteenth century. Cross references in footnotes are drawn from the general reading prepared for the original project because they are further illustrative of the intensity and longevity of the conflict.

Very special thanks are due to Dr. Nicholas Joost and to Professor James J. Young for their interest and helpfulness in this study.
INTRODUCTION

A Poe-bibliographer made the observation in 1933 that the animus still rampant among critics of Poe was of such "fever pitch" that it astounded him. He asserted that he could name, offhand, "a dozen men, important Poe students, who are most delightful persons to meet," but who, if he were to put them together in one room and to mention the name of Poe, "certainly would kill each other."¹ Mr. Heartman's graphic appraisal of the situation in Poe circles seems applicable to the entire controversy from the time of the poet's death till the present, for the provocative name of Poe registers all the way from Griswold's Satan to Baudelaire's God, from critics' duelling ground to writers' Mecca.

The lugubrious portrait of "Israfel in Motley" was propagandized in the second half of the nineteenth century largely through the periodical literature of the day. The controversy that raged among the critics of the new magazine era gave rise to the Poe legend that persists in critical and in popular opinion to the present time.

Ironically enough, it was Poe himself who had helped popularize the literary form through which he gained much of his posthumous notoriety. He had brought phenomenal success to the literary magazines he served as editor, contributor, or adviser.² Being an avid reader of foreign journals, he had

² For discussion of services offered gratis to the Southern Literary Messenger, see David Jackson, "Four of Poe's Critiques in the Baltimore Newspapers," MLN, L, April, 1935, 251-256.
See also J. Tom Miles, "Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature and Its
proposed improved literary standards for American journals; he had also struggled, though fruitlessly, to finance a magazine of his own. His zeal for the literary review was such that he has since been designated as the founder of the modern magazine. 3

But as editor and critic, Poe with his "phial of prussic-acid," 4 had seared the sensibilities of "little writers," dealt harshly with new novelists and litterateurs, and generally won enemies who bided their time for revenge. His death was the signal for their onslaught—which touched off one of the bitterest controversies in the history of literature. It is with the first half of this dramatic conflict, as it was waged in periodical literature at home and abroad, that the present thesis is concerned.

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3 Agnes M. Bondurant, Poe's Richmond, Richmond, 1942, 189.

Note: Henry Seidel Canby, Classic Americans, New York, 1931, 268, says Poe should be thought of as a magazine writer, and the editorial of the revived Southern Literary Messenger, I, January, 1939, 3, claims that it was through the magazine that the obscure 'Mr. Poe' ascended "the tower from which 'the great Poe' light has since shone for the world."

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CHAPTER I

BEGINNING OF CONFLICT

It was the obituary in the New York Tribune of October 9, 1849,\(^1\) that gave initial impetus to the posthumous reputation of Edgar Allan Poe. Rev. Rufus W. Griswold, at the request of Horace Greeley, Tribune editor, composed the article and signed it "Ludwig." The notice began:

Edgar Allan Poe is dead. He died in Baltimore the day before yesterday. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. . . . [H]e had few or no friends; and the regrets for his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art has lost one of its most brilliant but erratic stars.

A disparaging sketch of the poet's life followed, wherein "Ludwig" cited the "Raven" as a symbol of the poet himself and theorized that it was probably "a reflexion and an echo of his own history. He was that bird's

\[--\text{unhappy Master,}\]
\[\text{Whom unmerciful disaster}\]
\[\text{Followed fast and followed faster,}\]
\[\text{Till his songs the burden bore--}\]
\[\text{Till the dirges of his hope, the}\]
\[\text{Melancholy burden bore,}\]
\[\text{Of 'Nevermore,' of 'Nevermore.'}\]

Griswold then proceeded to inform the reading public that Poe's "harsh experience had deprived him of all faith, [sic] in man or woman," that his was a "naturally unamiable character," and that "he regarded society as composed altogether of villains." After ascribing to Poe through analogy to

\[^{1}\text{ "Death of Edgar A. Poe," New York Tribune, October 9, 1849, ed. page.}\]
Bulwer-Lytton's villain in *The Caxtons* the obnoxious traits of "gnawing envy," "cold repellent cynicism," passions that "vented themselves in sneers," lack of "moral susceptibility . . . little or nothing of the true point of honor," "morbid and excessive ambition," "the hard wish to succeed--not shine, not serve--succeed, that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self conceit," Griswold concluded that the figure of the poet could be traced "in the draperies of his imagination." 2

The "Ludwig Article" excited several immediate protests by the deceased poet's friends and fellow journalists. An unsigned article in the October 15 issue of the *Richmond Republican* expressed disapproval of the "unjust and distorted" view of the poet's character. 3 N. P. Willis 4 in the *Home Journal* of October 20 and Henry R. Hirst in the same week's number of the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* registered their opinions of the acrimonious obituary. In the *Quaker City*, 5 also of October 20, George Lippard warmly defended the poet against the slurs of Griswold. Lambert Wilmer, 6 in more

2 Ibid.

3 At the end of the Republican clipping in the Valentine Museum collection there is a notation in pencil to the effect that the article was written by Miss Susan Talley, October 10, 1849.

4 N. P. Willis, when an "elegant young editor of the *American Monthly Magazine,*" had been a victim of Poe's satire on nosology. But he held no grudge for the deceased poet. See Kenneth L. Daughrity, "Poe's 'Quiz on Willis,'" *AL, V,* March, 1933, 55-56.

5 Poe had criticized favorably the young novelist's first efforts. In 1849 Lippard rendered Poe financial aid when the wretched poet came to his office. The novelist wrote kindly of the malicious man in *Quaker City.* See Joseph Jackson, "George Lippard: Misunderstood Man of Letters," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography,* LIX, October, 1935, 376-391.

vigorous language, denounced the "slanderous and malicious" biographer for his "hypocritical canting" and promised further remarks on the subject when the "skulking author" should acknowledge authorship of the "malignant publication."

In November, John R. Thompson, 7 editor of the Southern Literary Messenger, one of the periodicals to which Poe had brought prestige, did not deny that "this gifted child of genius" had many and sad infirmities, but he proposed "in charity the mantle of forgetfulness" for them. 8 He included in his article Longfellow's tribute, in which the "Frogpondian" whom Poe had harassed with charges of plagiarism, assigned "the harshness of his criticisms" to nothing "but the irritation of a sensitive nature, chafed by some indefinite sense of wrong." 9

But the friends of Poe were not left in possession of the field. As a critic, Poe had made many and bitter enemies. Charles F. Briggs, 10 with whom he had dealt impishly in The Literati, declared in the December issue of Holden's Dollar Magazine that it would be a long while, if ever, before the naked character of the sad poet would be exposed to public gaze. When would

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7 "The Late Edgar Allan Poe," SIM, XV, November, 1849, 694-697.
8 Ibid., 694.
9 Ibid., 696.
anyone be found bold enough, Briggs wanted to know, "to incur the risk of an imputation of evil motives," by making such a revelation as the task demanded.

The poet was "altogether a strange and a fearful being, and a true history of his life would be more startling than any of the grotesque romances which he was so fond of inventing." 11

With the publication of the first two Poe volumes 12 in January of 1850, Griswold stirred up further turmoil on the part of the press. In the first volume there were prefatory essays by N. P. Willis—in which Griswold had inserted part of the "Ludwig Article"—by James Russell Lowell, 13 and by Griswold. Reviews of the two books burst into print. George Ripley, 14 in the New York Tribune of January 17, basing his impressions of Poe's character on the notices, parroted his description of the deceased poet as a man who "[u]nhappily . . . had no earnestness of character, no sincerity of conviction, no faith in human excellence, no devotion to a high purpose. . . . He regarded

11 Ibid., 765.


13 Lowell's tribute to Poe in Graham's Magazine, 1845, (XVII, 49-53) was somewhat curtailed in the Griswold publication. Earlier, Lowell had declared: "We are reading the thoughts of a man who thinks for himself, and says what he thinks, and knows what he is talking about." (50) But later he too had experienced the smart of Poe's "phial of prussic acid." Whether he intended the article as Griswold printed it in Works, is cause for conjecture. Quinn, Poe, 660, suggests it may have been tampered with. But the "Three-fifths of him genius and two-fifths sheer fudge," in Fable for Critics, 1848, indicates Lowell's disapproval of Poe's "mud-slinging."

14 Review of the Griswold publications; reprint in Littell's Living Age, XXV, April, 1850, 77-78. Article has no title.
the world as an enormous humbug, and in revenge, would repay it in kind."\(^{15}\)

Lewis Gaylord Clark\(^{16}\) seized the chance to release his pent-up wrath of six years' duration and administered belated punishment to Poe in the February issue of the *Knickerbocker* magazine.\(^{17}\) "He was very much like RICHARD SAVAGE," wrote Clark, "as that author is presented in the pages of JOHNSON, but he had few of the apologies which could be urged by the English vagabond. He was ... destitute of moral or religious principle."\(^{18}\)

It was George Graham\(^{19}\) who next took up the cudgel in defense of the dead poet and wrote with a considerable display of heat in his own magazine of March, 1850, that Griswold's estimate of Poe was "unfair and untrue. It must have been made in a moment of spleen, written out and laid aside, and handed to the printer, when his death was announced, with a sort of chuckle." Graham castigated the article as "an immortal infamy ... the fancy sketch of a

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 77.

\(^{16}\) Clark of the *Knickerbocker* had rejected in 1843, an anonymous article on "Our Magazine Literature" which was the composition of Poe (almost certainly). It finally was printed in the *New World*, March 11, 1843. In it Poe wrote of Clark, "Mr. Lewis Clark has made a considerable noise in the literary world, but how he has made it, would be difficult for his best friends to explain." In *Godsey's Magazine*, September, 1846, Poe attacked Clark for replying to his remarks about Briggs in the *Literati*; Clark "is noticeable for nothing in the world except for the markedness by which he is noticeable for nothing." See Herman E. Spivey, "Poe and Lewis Gaylord Clark," *PMIA*, LIV, December, 1939, 1124-1132.

\(^{17}\) "Literary Notices," *Knickerbocker*, XXXV, February, 1850, 163-164.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 163.

\(^{19}\) "The Late Edgar Allan Poe," *Graham Magazine*, XXXVI, March, 1850, 221-226.

Note: Graham's belated interest in the editor he underpaid and whose faith he violated by repeatedly breaking his promises to help him purchase his magazine, rings insincere in the estimate of the author of this thesis. Perhaps the fervent defense is meant more as a rap at Griswold who had incurred Graham's disfavor by lack of respect to another editor of his, Mr. Peterson.
perverted, jaundiced vision." He denounced the 'Caxton' parallel as dastardly and false; he further declared that in his function as critic, Poe had put to death the literary reputation of some of Griswold's friends, and that their ghosts were crying out for reprisal long desired but deferred. Literature with Poe was religion, and he, its high-priest, who "with a whip of scorpions scourged the money-changers from the temple." Nor did Graham consider the literary executor competent to dissect one "whose nature eludes the rude grasp of a mind so warped and uncongenial." To the false charges contained in Griswold's "breach of trust," the editor declared he had known the defamed poet intimately for several years, knew "all his hopes, his fears, and little annoyances of life, as well as his high-hearted struggle with adverse fate"; yet he found him "always the same polished gentleman . . . the devoted husband--frugal in his personal expenses--punctual and unwearied in his industry--and the soul of honor, in all his transactions." Poe's former employer added, "This, of course, was in his better days, and by them we judge the man. But even after his habits had changed, there was no literary man to whom I would more readily advance money for labor to be done." Poe's love for his wife "was a sort of rapturous worship of the spirit of beauty which he felt was fading before his eyes." Mr. Graham explained at length the terrible poverty of the poet, the frustration attending his inability to provide for immediate necessities, the desperation of the human being whose heels "gaunt famine" dogged, so that he

20 Ibid., 224.
21 Ibid., 225.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
yielded in such moments to the "one glass" of wine that made him a madman. 24

The spirited defense ended with a suggestion that Mr. Griswold review his criticism of Mr. Poe because it would not bear the scrutiny of time, and it was even now regarded as "an ill-judged and misplaced calumny upon that gifted Son of Genius." 25

George W. Peck, 26 evidently incensed by the Knickerbocker judgment of Poe, came to the front with his vindication in the March number of the American Whig Review. Placed significantly on the page opposite the beginning of Peck's article, was an anonymous thirty-line poem entitled "Judge Not Lest Ye Be Judged," which reminded readers that

We know not, and we ne'er may know
Another's joy, another's woe:
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . And who that lives,
But owes far more than he forgives?
Forbear thou, then, in virtue strong,
To frown on those a frown may wrong.
Alone shall God a just decree
Award to them,--to them, and thee. 27

From the tone of Peck's defense one suspects that he may have been the author of "Judge Not." In his lengthy essay he declared in the words of his chosen philosopher, Von Dencken, that the vigor of men with "infirmities of temper,"--like Milton, Dante, and Shakespeare--lives on and is immortal;

"[T]heir weakness has passed away along with the weakness of ten thousand other

24 Ibid., 226.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 300.
men. They may have carried many souls upward to elevations which those souls, by their own powers, could never have reached . . . while they, by reason of innate weakness, were ever falling into vices and crimes which would have otherwise absorbed their whole being.

Peck trusted that Poe had gone upward "since he held his face upward while here, through much oppression and depression"; he judged him from his writings to be a "pure-minded gentleman." He countered Clark's indictment of Poe's being "destitute of moral or religious principle" with a tribute to the "lofty" aspiration of the poet's "Hymn" to the Virgin Mary and concluded his article with a quotation of the poem in full.

March must have been a stormy month that year in literary circles. John M. Daniel fairly signed the paper in the Southern Literary Messenger with his abuse of "the mighty triumvirate of patrons" who had presented their notices in the recently published Poe volumes:

The works of Edgar Allan Poe are introduced to the world by three accredited worldlings—or as the public would have us say [sic] no less than three celestial steeds of the recognized Pegasean pedigree are harnessed to drag the caput mortuum of the unfortunate Poe into the light of public favour. Mr. Rufus Griswold had seen the poor 'fellow.' Mr. N. P. Willis had also seen and pitied the man. . . . Mr. James Russell Lowell had found his sable sympathies sufficiently extensive to take in the distressed master of the Raven, in spite of his colour and birth-place. . . . The three felt quite pitifully sentimental at his dog's death; and with the utmost condescension they hearkened to the clink of the publisher's silver, and agreed to erect a monument to the deceased genius, in the shape of Memoir and Essay preliminary to his works.

The "triumvirate's" composition was "the rawest, the baldest, the most offensive

28 Ibid., 302-303.
29 Ibid., 303.
30 Ibid., 315.
and the most impudent humbug that has ever been palmed upon an unsuspecting moon-calf of a world." Daniel satirized Griswold as "the great Apollo of our literary heavens," and Mr. Lowell belonged to "a minute species of literary insect, which is plentifully produced by the soil and climate of Boston." Mr. Willis was the "man milliner of our literature." "These three horny-eyed dunces would be patrons and vouchers of the greatest literary genius of the day."

Following the diatribe on Poe's fellow critics, Daniel set forth the biographical account of the poet's life as Griswold had written it, and added an intimation of his own about a scandal, which, "if true, throws a dark shade upon the quarrel, [with Miss Paterson] and a very ugly light upon Poe's character. We shall not insert it, because it is one of those relations, which we think ... should never be recorded." A lengthy but vague footnote theorized as to the viciousness of "heteroclital sins." And so the writer registered Poe's name in hell.

Daniel's vilification of the poet's character did not pass unchallenged. On March 20 in the Home Journal it was assailed as a "frightful caricature," an indictment of "cruel misrepresentations" by a correspondent who had known Poe and who signed the reply "Richmond." In April, Sartain's

32 Ibid., 173-174.

33 Ibid., 176. This slander was repeated by biographers in England as well as in America, and Griswold incorporated it in his Memoir. J. H. Ingram, deeming it "a dastardly attack on the dead," demanded, "Who wrote this article? ... Was not this miscalled [by Griswold] 'defender' then, Griswold himself, or someone acting under his inspiration?" See William McCrillis Griswold, ed., Passages from the Correspondence and Other Papers of Rufus W. Griswold, with notes and comments by W. M. Griswold, Cambridge, Mass., 1898, 263.

34 "Estimates of Edgar A. Poe," Home Journal, Saturday, March 30, 1850, ed. page. The quotations are found in Quinn, Poe, 667.
Union Magazine\textsuperscript{35} approved and reprinted Willis's October 20, 1849, defense in the Home Journal, at the same time announcing the sale of Poe's works "for the benefit of the estimable lady mentioned in Mr. Willis's sketch." But it was John Neal\textsuperscript{36} in the Portland Daily Advertiser of April 26, who flayed Griswold as the "executioner" that made such travesty on the reputation entrusted to him.\textsuperscript{37} Neal had never met Poe but had corresponded with him and read his poems; from this contact he attested his belief that he was by nature, of a just and generous temper, thwarted, baffled, and self-harnessed by his own wilfulness to the most unbecoming drudgery; \textsuperscript{[sic]} and that he went about for whole years, with his hood wings rumpled, soiled and quenched ... like sumptuous banners trailed along the crowded thoroughfares of life, in a March drizzle.

The poet's champion was convinced "that he was a very honest fellow, and very sincere," though he could not do justice to those he disliked, or to anybody "over-cuddled by monthlies, or over-slobbered by the weeklies; while his reverend biographer would seem to be incapable of doing justice to anybody else." Neal accounted Griswold "wholly unfitted for the solemn duty he had undertaken so rashly"; he was a Radamanthus "laboring to be very perpendicular, ostentatiously upright," in his judgment of the arraigned poet.\textsuperscript{38} The acrid retort to the obituary was contested by William Wallace, who though not naming

\textsuperscript{35} Editorial, "Book Notices," Sartain's Union Magazine, VI, April, 1850, 311-312.

\textsuperscript{36} "Edgar Allan Poe," Portland Daily Advertiser, April 26, 1850, second page. (Pages are not numbered.)

\textsuperscript{37} Maria Clemm, "To the Reader," The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Rufus W. Griswold, New York, 1850, I, page preceding preface, affirmed of her son-in-law that "he many times expressed a gratification of such an opportunity of decidedly and unequivocally certifying his respect for the literary judgment and integrity of Mr. Griswold, with whom his personal relations, on account of some unhappy misunderstanding, had for years been interrupted."

\textsuperscript{38} Daily Advertiser, April 26, 2.
the executor in his defense of him, delineated Poe's character portrait in the framework of the "Ludwig Article."

It was fast becoming apparent that the sparring of the critics was in earnest. The conflict was assuming proportions, and Griswold, now on the defensive, seemed stung into a further move, one which initiated a warfare among the literati that would persist through a century and longer. The literary executor published his incriminating Memoir of the deceased poet.
CHAPTER II

WARFARE AMONG THE LITERATI OFFICIALLY DECLARED

The Memoir of September, 1850, which was announced in the New York Tribune, reviewed in the Literary World, and published in the International Monthly Magazine,¹ indicated the determination of the Rev. R. W. Griswold to maintain his ground in the conflict he had unwittingly instigated. Inappropriately affixed to the third volume² of the works Poe had bequeathed his executor, the provocative essay provided all the artillery necessary for a long and bitter war. The Preface to the biographical sketch explained that Edgar A. Poe "had long been in the habit of expressing a desire" that Griswold should be his editor, and that the "hastily written" obituary had been done at the "request of the Editor of 'The Tribune.'"³ Then, in aggrieved, and at the same time hostile tones, Griswold directed his reply at defenders Graham and Neal:

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² Edgar Allan Poe, The Literati: Some Honest Opinions about Authorial Merits and Demerits, with Occasional Words of Personality, together with Marginalia, Suggestions, and Essays, ed. Rufus W. Griswold, New York, 1850. The publisher was J. S. Redfield.

³ John W. Roberston, M. D., Edgar A. Poe, A Psychopathic Study, New York, 1923, 173-174, suggests that Greeley may have helped to compose the obituary; he was very capable of doing so, and was content to publish it.

See also Joy Bayless, Rufus Wilmot Griswold: Poe's Literary Executor, Nashville, 1943, in regard to the Horace Greeley attitude.
unconsidered and imperfect, but as every one who knew its subject readily perceived, very kind article, was vehemently attacked. . . . George Graham, in a sophomorical and trashy . . . letter, denounced it as the 'fancied sketch of a jaundiced vision,' an 'immortal infamy' . . . . a 'breach of trust.' . . . [T]his silly and ambitious person, while represented as entertaining a friendship really passionate in its tenderness for the poor author, (of whom in four years of his extreme poverty he had not purchased for his magazine a single line), is made to say that within half a year he had not seen so noticeable an article.4

Griswold questioned the veracity of Graham on this last point because the Notice had appeared in 'The Tribune,' 'The Home Journal,' and 'in three of the daily papers in his own city, and in 'The Saturday Evening Post,' of which he was or had been himself one of the chief proprietors and editors!' The angry biographer then directed a shot at John Neal:

Mr. JOHN NEAL, too, who never had even the slightest personal acquaintance with POE in his life, rushes from a sleep which the public had trusted was eternal, to declare . . . that I am a 'calumniator.' . . . Both these writers . . . assume . . . there was a long, intense, and implacable enmity betwixt Poe and myself, which disqualified me for the office of biographer.5

Following this outburst, the executor printed letters he had received from the poet—letters that made him a groveling recipient of Griswold favors, letters of regret over interrupted friendship, of humble gratitude to a generous benefactor.

In the Memoir the "self-appointed biographer" proceeded to outline for the world at large the unholy career of the deceased poet. In the course of the narration he specified that at the University at Charlottesville Poe had led a "very dissipated life," that he was known "as the wildest and most reckless student of his class"; he would have been graduated with highest honors,

4 Literati, preface, i.
5 Ibid.
had not his "gambling, intemperance, and other vices, induced his expulsion from the university"; his allowance of money at Charlottesville had been "liberal, but he quitted the place very much in debt." At St. Petersburg Poe had to be rescued from a "drunken debauch"; at West Point he proved invulnerable to discipline and was "cashiered." Borrowing the new scandal from "the writer of the elegium" in the Southern Literary Messenger of the previous March, Griswold asserted that "according to Poe's own statement" he had ridiculed the marriage of his elderly patron with the youthful Miss Paterson, and had a quarrel with her; "but a different story,* scarcely suitable for repetition here, was told by the friends of the other party." The footnote repeated in toto Daniel's pedantic paragraph on "heteroclital sins" and committed to obscurity what the particular scandal was supposed to be—to the confusion of subsequent biographers.6 Griswold proceeded with a recital of editors' griefs over their unstable employee, his suspension for a "week of brutish drunkenness," with his eventual dismissal from the Messenger, his separation from Burton because of "unreliability," his release by Graham for the same "infirmities" that had necessitated his discharge by White and Burton; the poet's "more than common destitution" incurred through "habits of frequent intoxication and his inattention to the means of support."7 With evident relish the narrator elaborated on the broken engagement with Mrs. Sarah Whitman after which Poe went "reeling through the streets . . . and in the evening— that should have been the evening before the bridal—in his drunkenness he committed at her house such outrages as made necessary a summons of the police." As for the poet's

6 *Ibid.*, Memoir, ix, x, xi.
plagiarisms, they were "scarcely paralleled for their audacity in literary history." 8

In describing Poe's last days, Griswold assumed that a convivial gathering at a tavern in Baltimore caused the wretched man to forget the resolutions made at Richmond two months earlier, and "reduced him to such a state as is commonly induced only by a long-continued intoxication; after a night of insanity and exposure, he was carried to a hospital and there died." Such was the "melancholy history." In self-justification the literary executor reminded readers that the Southern Literary Messenger "defender" had been "compelled to admit that the blemishes in his [Poe's] life were effects of character rather than circumstances." 9 Yielding to an irresistible urge to point out the moral of the story, the reverend biographer preached the natural evil effects of such a dissipated life and concluded with the Caxton story he had inserted in the obituary sketch. This final touch was doubtless intended to forestall any recriminations, but it produced very opposite results.

With his Memoir Griswold had "fired the shot heard round the world." E. A. Duyckinck, 10 editor of the Literary World, reviewed in the September 21 issue, The Literati: some honest Opinions about Authorial Merits and Demerits, with occasional Words of Personality; together with Marginalia, Suggestions, and Essays, [sic] and declared tersely the "reverend Executor's" "honest Opinions" [sic] to be "about as false as they well can be, and the 'words of

8 Ibid., xxx, xxxii.

9 Ibid., xxx, xxxix.

10 "Review," Literary World, VII, September 21, 1850, 228-229. The article is unsigned but Evert A. Duyckinck was editor of the journal.
Personality' by no means 'occasional.'" "Are these honest opinions," he demanded, "printed literatim et verbatim, as written by Poe, or have they undergone editorial revisal?" The irate editor challenged Griswold's motives in publishing the caustic criticisms that Poe had repudiated long before his death. "And why," he wanted to know, "is the work carefully purged of any unhandsome references to Dr. Griswold?" Roused by unfair criticism found of himself in the Literati, Duyckinck further judged that as executor to Poe, Dr. Griswold had "played usher to a man of talent without principle" and added for the benefit of the publisher of the book, "It is a peculiarity of Mr. Redfield that he is not afraid to publish books."12

In the Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post for September 21, an anonymous writer remonstrated with the "literary executor" for his exposé of the deceased poet's faults. "It is absolutely horrible . . . with what cool deliberateness he charges upon Mr. Poe the basest and most dishonorable actions." Griswold was a "prosecuting attorney . . . a judge . . . pronouncing the

11 Ibid., 228.

sentence of death."\(^{13}\) John R. Thompson, who had appeared on the defensive side in November, 1849, temporized his opinion in the September issue of the Richmond Whig; the Memoir was truthful, he conceded, and if Griswold had withheld the "hard things" he had to say of Poe's character it would have been "as palpable a departure from an honest estimate of the poet, as a direct misstatement of any of his qualities."\(^{14}\) Yet eight years later Thompson was to characterize the violent Edinburgh Review essay, which was but repeating in more vicious terminology the data of the Memoir, as "one of the most truculent and unwarrantable attacks upon the dead that the records of literature can furnish."\(^{15}\)

The month following the publication of the Memoir, L. G. Clark\(^ {16}\) of the Knickerbocker returned to the front. Seizing upon the assaults in the Griswold biography, he reworded them without losing their flavor. "According to the authentic records of this volume," he stated in one charge, "we find Poe abusing and leaving a generous patron, for refusing to honor drafts which had

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\(^{13}\) Cf. Quinn, Poe, 677, and Campbell, Mind of Poe, 79. The writer of the protest was probably the editor of the Post, Henry Peterson.

\(^{14}\) Quotation found in Campbell, Mind of Poe, 79.

\(^{14a}\) Chivers, Life of Poe, 22, denounces men like Thompson and Graham: "[V]ery well do I know that Buzzards must have somewhere to roost... I allude now... to those... dispicable [sic] souls who pretend to defend the still more basic principle of wishing the world to believe that they are what they are not nor ever were—the faithful Apostles of his greatness."

\(^{15}\) John R. Thompson, The Genius and Character of Edgar Allan Poe, J. H. Whitty and J. H. Rindfleisch, Richmond, 1929, 5. Thompson compares with Dr. Johnson (\(^ {40}\)):\"[H]e lacked sympathy... A wayward impulse made neglectful of the inexorable duties of life.\" He also added that "envy, most despicable trait of the literary pretender, was no part of his nature."

\(^{16}\) "Literary Notices," Knickerbocker, XXXVI, October, 1850, 370-372.
been given to pay losses at the gaming-table." Going along with his reverend friend, Clark editorialized: "His is a melancholy history, but it is not without its lessons, which rightfully regarded, may prove salutary to the young, the impulsive, and the gifted."17

John Savage18 in the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, accepted the Memoir version of the poet's life but protested the venom with which it was recounted: "He is in the grave. Let him lie so... Let us judge his works. . . . We . . . would wish our readers not to rattle his bones, but read his books. . . . Let us end with a verse of our own:

'Tho all spleen's arrows straight he hurl'd
At mankind's breast, to you
A cry--in common with the world--
Priez pour le malheureux.'19

In England the Westminster Review20 for January, 1852, published a notice of Poe's works, placing his name first in the list of contemporary American authors. The reviewer suggested that Poe's genius would be more readily conceded "now that the grave has closed over his follies... [H]is memoir presents such a sad picture of a tempest-tossed life so fatally wrecked

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17 Ibid., 370,372.

18 "Edgar Allan Poe," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review. XXXVII, December, 1850, 512-514; XXXVIII, January, 1851, 56-69; February, 1851, 162-172. The story ran in three months' issues; the article is unsigned.

19 Ibid., 172.

20 "Contemporary Literature of America," Westminster Review, LVII, January, 1852, 305-308. The article has been attributed by many persons to Viswold although he denied its authorship. See Today: A Boston Literary Journal, 1, May 1, 1852, 288, wherein a "striking similarity of style" between Viswold's International Magazine and the Westminster Review articles is noted by the Boston editor.
at last, as must fill his very enemies with pity, but no longer with prejudice or scorn." Poe was "aesthetically deficient, which, with more serious deficiencies of a moral nature, effectually dried up the fountains of inspiration, and blighted with falsehood his ablest efforts... According to the company he was thrown into, his personal character was alternately that of a seraph or a brute."²¹

Charles Chauncey Burr,²² editor of The Nineteenth Century, answered in February, 1852, the habitual charge that Poe was "without heart." He expressed his belief that the poet had been "in the core of his heart, a grateful, single-minded, loving kind of man... a very gentle, thoughtful, scrupulously refined, and modest kind of man," who with his faults and many weaknesses, also possessed "a congregation of virtues which made him loved as well as admired by those who knew him best."²³ Burr incorporated within his article the letters of Poe to Mrs. Clemm describing his wretchedness, his poverty, and illness. The editor apologized to the woman for the necessity of laying bare "the agonies of a heart overflowing with kindness, gratitude and faith," but he felt that such revelations as Poe had made to his mother-in-law would best depict the true situation.²⁴

In March, 1852, there strode to the scene of conflict the sensational

²¹ Ibid., 306.
²³ Ibid., 21.
²⁴ Burr had proved a friend in need in 1849 while the poet was in Philadelphia. See Poe's letter to Mrs. Clemm in Nineteenth Century, V, 30-31.
French prophet of Edgar Poe, Charles Baudelaire.25 The excited Parnassian had discovered in the American his alter ego, his source of inspiration, his thoughts—already—expressed. He immediately published his sentiments in a lengthy article that ran in the March and April numbers of Revue de Paris.26 Baudelaire introduced Poe to fellow Parisians as the martyr-poet who had been stifled to death in the alien atmosphere of America. Quoting Alfred de Vigny as having proved that "la place du poète n'est... dans une republique," he added his own "persuasion que la que Etats-Unis fuerunt pour Poe une vaste cage, un grand etablissement, et qu'il fit toute sa vie de sinistres efforts pour chapper a l'influence de cette atmosphere antipathique."27 The Frenchman had harsh words for a system in which he concluded a writer must condescend to the plebian taste "trop au-dessus du vulgaire," and live under the pressure of magazine dead-lines. "Le temps et l'argent," he expostulated, condemning the

25 G. W. Stonier, "The Case of Poe," New Statesman and Nation, XXIV, August 29, 1942, 113, claims it was while Baudelaire was in a tavern drinking whiskey and reading Punch that he became interested in Poe, and the "legend of Poe the Great" was conceived.


27 Ibid., VI, 139.

Note: Other critics have since expressed similar ideas: J. S. Wilson, "The Young Man Poe," Virginia Quarterly Review, II, April, 1926, 238-239, writes that when the three Weird Sisters were mixing a "hell-broth," the third one, "malignant enough," added "the provincialism, the toadyism, the puerility of American literary standards, and the snobbery and cant of American social life of Poe's environment."

George Sampson, "The Misfortunes of Poe," The Bookman, LXIX, January, 1926, 199, asserts: "If ever a person should not have been born in the United States of America it was Edgar Allan Poe. All his instincts were European. .. Nowhere was he so truly alien as in the land of his birth."

T. S. Eliot, From Poe to Valery, New York, 1948, 9, declares that Poe was a kind of displaced European, that no other writer of eminence had drawn so little from his native roots.
materialism that suffocated genius. At the conclusion of his biographical sketch in the April issue of Revue de Paris, Baudelaire advised other poets to pray as he did to his idol who "intercedera pour vous." Poe's twin star effectually opened new lands of literary conquest for the poet by overriding the opprobrium that embalmed his name, and by pointing out his literary merits to all who would listen. Though he accepted the Memoir biography as authentic, its narrator was for him the "cur" who had committed "une immortelle infamie."

In London, Tait's Magazine for April, 1852, commented on "the American

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28 Ibid., 141.

28a C. H. Moore, "The Case of Poe and His Critics," The Dial, XLVII, November, 1909, 368, declares, "The Americans have not poetic heads. It was Poe's misfortune that he, the most sensitive ... of the children of genius, had to be dropped into ... the domain of the Dollar."

See also Charles Baudelaire, Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires par Edgard Poe, Traduction de Charles Baudelaire, VI, of Œuvres Complètes, Paris, n.d., II; he condemned Poe's country as "cette cohue de vendeurs et acheteurs, ce sans nom, ce monstre sans tete, ce deporte derriere l'Ocean, Etat!"

29 Revue de Paris, VII, April, 1852, 110.

29a Ludwig Lewisohn, The Story of American Literature, New York, 1932, 157-158, sees Poe's herald as a "psychical, and physical masochist with the mentality of a monk of the dark ages who records in his diaries his determination to let no morning pass without praying for the intercession of his father, his sister and Edgar Allan Poe."


30 In "The Satanic Streak in Poe's Genius," Current Literature, XLVIII, January, 1910, 93-96, the anonymous critic sums up Baudelaire as "the archpriest of literary diabolism," and his hero, Poe, as the "poet of hell."

celebrity's life and writings as being "sufficiently eccentric to render interesting a sketch of the former and a brief estimate of the latter." The Griswold pattern of character delineation was followed, but without the vituperative tone of the more aggressive literary reviewers. Quoting the clergymen's descriptive account—"He walked the streets in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayer—never for himself, for he felt... that he was already damned"—the critic wondered and regretted that "so much intellectual power should coexist with so much moral weakness. In his character there existed at once strongest common-sense and wretchedest folly; it was steeped at once in depravity and poetry."33

Roused by Tait's and Westminster's repetition of the poet's "night of frenzy" at Mrs. Whitman's—with the necessity of a police summons—W. A. Pabodie, who had been one of the opponents of the Whitman-Poe alliance, was nevertheless constrained to remonstrate. In a letter to the New York Tribune, June 2, 1852,34 he testified: "I am authorized to say, not only from my personal knowledge but also from the statements of ALL who were conversant with the affair, that there exists not a shadow of a foundation for the stories above alluded to." He also declared, "Mr. Poe's friends have no desire to palliate his faults, nor to conceal the fact of his intemperance—a vice... never habitual to him... With the single exception of this fault... his conduct, during the period of my acquaintance with him, was invariably that of

32 Reprint in Littell's Living Age, XXXIII, May, 1852, 422-424.

33 Ibid., 424.

34 The New York Tribune, Monday, June 7, 1852, 6. The letter was written June 2.
a man of honor and a gentleman." Pabodie ventured to suggest that Griswold had not actually intended to give so mistaken an impression of the poet, and that now, in possession of the facts of the case, he would do what he could "to remove an undeserved stigma from the memory of the departed." Angered at the reprimand of the prominent Providence lawyer, Griswold countered with threats of disclosures embarrassing to the distinguished Whitman family and of even viler revelations of Poe's character if the "reputable person" did not immediately modify his statements in another letter to the Tribune. But Pabodie retracted nothing; instead, he wrote Griswold, reaffirming his previous declarations and adding that he himself had been present in the Whitman house on the night in question—which, incidentally, was not the evening before the "intended bridal"—and that "there was no noise, no disturbance, no outrage." Griswold may have admitted defeat; at least, he ceased hostilities on the point, for at this time his own domestic tragedies were getting public attention, and charges of bribery in the matter of his divorce had begun to assail him in print. It was a bitter affliction for a man of such literary and social prestige.

35 Ibid.

See also Sarah Whitman's denial of this charge in her letters to Mrs. Hewitt on the subject, in Stanley T. Williams, "New Letters about Poe," Yale Review, XIV, July, 1925, 755-773.

37 Ten years after his first wife's death Griswold "gave his name" to Charlotte Myers in 1845, ignorant of the fact she had no right to marry. Out of deference to the unfortunate woman's family he attempted to maintain the outward semblance of a marriage for seven years, but Charlotte would not cooperate in the subterfuge. In 1852, Griswold obtained a divorce without divulging the real reason for it, and he was charged with bribery. Meantime his eldest daughter by the first marriage was alienated from him by the Myers family. When Griswold remarried in 1855, an organized calumny led by Mrs. Ellet (Poe's evil
In October of 1852, the Poe-scandal assumed an interesting variant. Under the title, "A Great Man Self-Wrecked," devised colorful theories about Poe's early life. The young man had been sent to college "amply provided with money"; at Charlottesville were to be found hard drinkers, daring gamblers, dissolute and extravagant students, but Poe was "more wild and desperate than they all." Despite promises of reform, when his companions tempted and wine allured . . . he embraced the filthy siren, and so fell. Instead of coming home from the university with honors, he was summarily expelled." An account of the alleged St. Petersburg incident was followed by a fictionalized version of Poe's return to the United States: "The first to greet him on his landing was his old patron, the merchant. . . . But he took the wanderer to his arms, and led him back to the quiet home he had quitted.

genius also), and by his brother-in-law and a friend, publicized his "bigamy," and local papers carried reports of an "unparalleled history of villainy by a clergyman." His wife and friends were harassed for three years with anonymous derogatory notes. The campaign broke his health and brought on his early death. See Rufus W. Griswold, Statement of the Relations of Rufus W. Griswold, Philadelphia, 1856, and Bayless, Griswold, I, 144-152, 224-230, 251.


39 Ibid., 362.

39a Quinn, Poe, 110, quotes a letter from Poe to Mr. Allan with an itemized account of initial expenses at the university. For board, classes, room rent, bed, and furniture, $148 had to be paid in advance. That amount did not allow for fuel, laundry, and the servant which every respectable young man was expected to have. The minimum expenses for a year came to $350. But Allan sent his foster-son to college with $110. That Poe understated rather than exaggerated the financial demands is seen from the list of requirements as stated by Philip A. Bruce, History of the University of Virginia, New York, 1920, II, 78-79. It has been suggested that Poe gambled partly, perhaps, in an effort to meet his immediate needs. But the gamble was always a loss.
After failure at West Point, Poe returned to the home of his foster-father, "and was again received with open arms." Mr. Allan later, however, was compelled to dismiss his protege because of a mysterious scandal connected with the second Mrs. Allan. Repeatedly Poe "forfeited the respect of employers and the sympathy of friends, through his devotion to the accursed bottle!" He became a "confirmed drunkard, with only now and then a fitful hour... to throw off on paper the vagaries" of his imagination. The writer emphasized the authenticity of his narrative with "READER,—What you have read is no fiction. Not a single circumstance here related, not a solitary event here recorded, but happened to EDGAR ALLAN POE, one of the most popular and imaginative of our writers."41

In March of 1853, the National Magazine42 carried an unsigned article stating that it was difficult "to write satisfactorily" of Poe because so much was unsatisfactory in his life. The Memoir theme was repeated, but with apparent sympathy for the underpaid author; if he had sinned before, he was being punished for it now, for "What worse punishment can he have had than that of being a poor author?"43 The critic judged past memoirs of the poet "singularly superficial... cruel, needlessly cruel. We dissect the dead... to detect the cause of their disease, that it may be a lesson, a warning to us."

40 Ibid., 363.
Cf. this version with the Memoir, Literati, x: "His meeting with Mr. Allan was not very cordial, but that gentleman declared himself willing to serve him in any way that should seem judicious."

41 Ibid., 363-364.


43 Ibid., 195.
It was his theory that the instability in Poe's early family life and later the poverty through which he anguished were at least partly responsible for his drinking. Then he conjectured:

But the real key of the mystery is after all to be found in his peculiar temperament, and in the analytical turn of his mind, which seems to have utterly lacked the moral sense. . . . [H]e seems to have never had any practical knowledge of morality. He was an intellect, not a man; he had a brain, but not a heart. . . . Con-science seems seldom to have spoken to him. . . . The radical depravity of a simply analytical mind, and the misfortunes of a broken life made Poe sometimes a drunkard. That he was not a confirmed drunkard is testified by all his friends and acquaint-ances, and proved by the excellence and bulk of his writings.  

The diagnostician volunteered further that Poe was so nervous of temperament and frail of physique "that what would hardly exhilarate another man made him frantic. A single glass of wine would intoxicate him; he has even been known to have been intoxicated by strong coffee"!—An amazing statement for the critic who would write so harshly of Poe later.—The article was concluded with a poem the writer had composed at the time of Poe's death, the last three lines of which were

Let us forget the path he trod,
And leave him now,
With his Maker—God!  

Literary reviews' treatment of Poe's character proved so sensational that a British editor in prefacing a volume of his poems regretted printing a history of the infirmities "universally attributed" to him, and hinted that it was difficult to secure "details of the better part of Edgar's life." He queried, "[H]ave they not in America, as here, a rule at Cemeteries [sic] that

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44 Ibid., 197-198.
'no dogs are admitted?' Chamber's Journal of February, 1853, retorted vigorously:

Very recently, his poems alone have been republished in England, with a brief prefatory essay, in which . . . the moral of his life is obviously mistaken. . . . Mental philosophy will scarcely enable us to account for the consistency of a fine sense of the beautiful, both in physics and in morals, with an extreme practical demoralization. . . . [N]ever, we believe, was genius allied to vice in its grosser forms more apparent than in the career of Edgar Allan Poe.47

The usual biographical details reminded the reader that Mr. Allan's kindness was repaid "with insults and ingratitude of the worst description"; there were "continued periods of dissipation, intervals of sobriety," and after Virginia's death, Poe became "desperately depraved, reckless, and mad."

Relative to the Mrs. Whitman-episode, it was "in a fit of almost incomprehensible brutality," that Poe performed in her home. There followed the inevitable reminder about the moral of this melancholy history; "the wild license with which men like Poe sported with the responsibilities of life," had done Satan's work. The "poor inebriate's" poems were "pauses in a lawless life"; his "genius was necessarily infected by the depravity of his life"; it vindicated itself by a protest of beauty against the "frenzied excesses of a vicious life."48

By February of '54, editor George Graham49 was again in the front lines of the conflict. He offered the suggestion that the dead man might have a right

47 Reprint in Littell's Living Age, XXXIII, April, 1853, 157.
48 Ibid., 158, 159, 161.
to privacy in his failings and that they had no connection whatsoever with his works nor were they reflected in them. With authors whose destructive doctrines could contaminate readers, it was permissible to publish their dangerous traits, but in the case of Poe, such treatment was the "mere impertinence of prying."

Then Graham made his key statement: "For mentioning his vices at all . . . much less for dwelling on them pertinaciously and almost malignantly, there can be no earthly apology or justification."\(^{50}\) Especially did the editor note that other poets' failings were not the usual obsession of journalists. He recalled for his readers that Sheridan had been a cheat and swindler, Burns a seducer and a sot. "Poor Poe, however, was a critic as well as a poet and a genius, and living he had reviewed many, who reviewed him when dead. . . . \(^{51}\) He was rarely, if ever deliberately, or of malice . . . unjust or ill-natured." Graham added that Poe was never a hardened offender; his passionate remorse testified against that: "His whole life in fact seems to have been a succession of struggles at self-reformation and re-establishment." The editor explained that to a temperament like the poet's, temptations were excessively strong—almost irresistible. "In nothing was he moderate"; not in his passions, in penitence, nor in his agonies. "His resentments were rage, his love adoration, his repentance self-

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 219.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 220.

Note: Earlier contemporary estimates are interesting. J. E. Dow, editor of The Index, Alexandria, D. C., I, September 25, 1841, 3, wrote: "Graham's main editor, Edgar A. Poe . . . is the severest critic, the best writer, and the most unassuming little fellow in the United States." See also Lewis Chase, "A New Poe Letter," AL, VI, March, 1931, 66-69.

A contributor to the Talisman and Odd Fellow's Magazine, September, 1846, I, 105, berated Poe as "the tomahawk man," and "the Comanche of literature." See Killis Campbell, "Contemporary Opinion of Poe," PMLA, XXXVI, June, 1921, 152.
abasement, his sorrow utter despondency and wretchedness." Graham described 
Poe's poverty and the necessity of his overworked nature's seeking escape in 
wine— which was "literally the cup of frenzy" for him. His wife adored him; 
his mother-in-law was unwearied in her love and praise of him. Such affection 
"is the truest, as it is the best of epitaphs." Jealousy was not to be thought 
of in his critical attacks, except perhaps, in the case of Longfellow; yet, even 
here it was not really jealousy, only the critic's disposition to ferret out 
plagiaries, because this idiosyncracy was suited to his scrutinizing, analytical 
mind. 

The following month an hysterical pronouncement by the Rev. George 
Gilfillan under the pseudonym "Apollodorus," appeared in the Critic, London 
Literary Journal. The clergyman concurred with Cowper that "'poets are a very 
worthless, wicked set of people', . . . and . . . Edgar Poe . . . was probably 
the most worthless and wicked of all his fraternity." A character delineation 
was then in order:

He was no more a gentleman than he was a saint. His heart was as 
rotten as his conduct was infamous. . . . He had absolutely no virtue 
or good quality, unless you call remorse a virtue, and despair a

52 Ibid., 220.
53 Ibid., 220-221.
54 Ibid., 221-222.
54a Chivers blames Graham as doing a greater injury than "the most 
inveterate maligner" for apologizing for Poe's charges of plagiarism without 
investigation. His "very lame Eulogy [sic] which defends Longfellow at the 
expense of Poe" is "thereby damning him [Poe] with faint praise." (Life of Poe, 
98.)

55 Reprints in Littell's Living Age, LXI, April, 1854, 166-171; SLH, 
XX, April, 1854, 249-253. The article was also published in George Gilfillan, 
A Third Gallery of Portraits, Edinburgh, 1854, 374-388.
grace... He showed himself... a cool, calculating, deliberate blackguard... Poe had not one spark of genuine tenderness, unless it were for his wife, whose heart, nevertheless, and constitution, he broke—hurrying her to a premature grave, that he might write 'Annabel Lee' and 'The Raven'... One might call him one of the Gaderene swine, filled with a devil... but none could deny that he was a 'swine of genius.'"56

Continuing the diatribe, "Apolloodorus" vociferated, "Poe was as licentious as he was intemperate... he tempted the devil." He designated the poet as a "demoniac, 'exceeding fierce, and dwelling among tombs'... He died, as he had lived, a raving, cursing, self-condemned, conscious cross between the fiend and the genius." With peculiar Christian fierceness for a clergyman, Mr. Gilfillan uttered a prayer for his "Mephistopheles": "Lord, why didst thou make this man in vain?... [H]is errors have received the reward that was meet; and we cannot but say, ere we close, Peace even to the well-nigh putrid dust of Edgar Poe."57

In March of 1856, the London Athenaeum reviewed Wilkie Collins' After Dark and indulged in personalities by comparing Collins and Poe: "The difference in the quality of character between the two men makes itself felt in their works, for it is the personal character that gives permanence to the works of genius."58

The North American Review, "that 'magnanimous cabal' which encircled Boston, 'the little Athens' of the mid-nineteenth century,"59 presented for its

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56 "Edgar Poe," Living Age, LXXI, 166.
57 Ibid., 171.
58 Review of After Dark by Wilkie Collins, Athenaeum, No. 1479, March 1, 1856, 260.
In vain do we look in his case for any unusual temptations or peculiarity of position, which might extenuate, if they could not justify his gross immoralities, his ingratitude to his guardian, and the Ishmaelitish position which he so long held with the world.

The reason offered that Poe produced so little impression on his own times was that "people were nothing to him." The fact that he had so few friends at the time of his death led to an inquiry of his social qualities, and the general response was:

He was irascible, cynical, suspicious, supercilious, envious, and untruthful. Whereupon Mr. N. P. Willis ... affirmed 'there was goodness in Edgar A. Poe,' which affirmation ... bears ... the bitterest irony.

The "one oasis" in Poe's dark history was his "gentle home-character." But even here it was the inherent goodness of the gentle women who never hurt or angered him that was the basis of his apparent goodness; they could testify that he was good because they never had occasion to know him otherwise. Poe possessed "in its most virulent form, the cant of genius," that is, the claim to

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60 North American Review, LXXXVIII, October, 1856, 427-455; review. The article is unsigned but Samuel Allibone in A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors Living and Deceased, Philadelphia, 1870, II, 1615, names Mrs. E. Vale Smith as author. A correspondent of the Cosmopolitan Art Journal, I, June, 1857, 112, refers to the harm that "Mrs. Smith's article" had done; the editor points out that it is not the composition of Mrs. Oakes Smith who had written earlier a "discriminating critique."

61 Ibid., 450-451.

62 Ibid., 452-453.
exemption "from the ordinary rules of morality." And in conclusion the critic decided, "We find in him great mental power, but no mental health. . . . Rather than remember all, we should choose to forget all that he has ever written."63

In reply to "that venerable and excellent Quarterly," the North American Review, Mr. L. A. Godey,64 editor of The Lady's Book, wrote the Knickerbocker in January, 1857, to say that he was "not to be counted in among those in Philadelphia to whom the late Edgar A. Poe proved faithless, in his business and literary intercourse." Poe's conduct toward that gentleman "was in all respects honorable and unblameworthy."65

A Canadian journal66 saw in Poe, "the eccentric and wayward child of genius," a "writer of whom, if America may not be proud, it is only because the strange moral obliquity of the man, [sic] has steeled the hearts of his countrymen against that pride."67 Poe was the Charles Lamb of America in his affectation of seriousness in dealing with a jest, and that sober and deliberate purpose of laughing in his sleeve at the literary lies he successfully palmed upon the most credulous of publics." The writer felt that the poet had been "coarsely anatomised" by individuals too eager to darken his life-picture. "For this there can be no excuse 'for he has not spent his genius' in the cause of vice."68

63 Ibid., 454-455.
64 The Knickerbocker, XLIX, January, 1857, 106, Editor's Table.
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 103.
68 Ibid., 104.
The Cosmopolitan Art Journal\textsuperscript{69} began agitation for a "proper monument to the memory of the man who did so much for American Literature," and in March, 1857, expressed satisfaction with the response. The New York Times had endorsed the movement and called for the formation of an Association; \textsuperscript{sic} all proceeded favorably. "But a writer in the 'North American Review,' devoting an article to Mr. Poe, rejuvenated the grossest history of the man, and in a most cold, unfeeling manner, denied the propriety of any monument to his memory. . . . It does not seem decent . . . to treasure up a hate, which would even deny the dead poet a grave-stone." The editor quoted a letter from another magazine which proffered financial aid and made the comment, "Let no mockery of the cold, heartless pietist deter us from prosecuting this matter."\textsuperscript{70}

W. Moy Thomas\textsuperscript{71} in a letter to the editor of The Train, April, 1857, was the first Englishman to weigh the Griswold Memoir critically. He proposed "to say a few words upon what has already been said on the subject" of the life and character of Edgar Poe. Admitting he was not a Poe enthusiast, he confessed to curiosity aroused by rumors of "the reputed wild and dissolute life" of the Transatlantic genius.

Knowing as I did, how tenderly modern biography deals with the departed, I was curious, I say, to learn what honest tongue had dared to tell these unpalatable truths. . . . What man, within a few months after his [Poe's] decease, had been brave enough to paint the author of 'The Raven' as a liar, a libertine, a drunkard, a

\textsuperscript{69} The Cosmopolitan Art Journal, I, March, 1857, 83. There is no title and the article is unsigned.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} "Edgar Allan Poe," The Train, III, April, 1857.
slanderer, and a coward? He presented himself to my mind, I confess, as a problem no less wonderful than Poe himself.72

In modern Mark-Anthony style, Mr. Thomas subtly satirized Griswold's sense of responsibility and natural hesitancy in undertaking the task of serving as Poe's executor. The "Christian Clergyman" was officially appointed by Poe himself to edit his works. Griswold expressed clearly his reluctance to perform the task: he was a very busy man; one can appreciate his position and repugnance in fulfilling his function. Following the publication of the Memoir "were not the poet's most ecstatic friends all silent?" Did not that fact establish consent to the picture as the biographer presented it? "Did not the Memoir reproduce the portrait of the Reverend Editor and Executor till all the world has seen and knows it at first sight?"73 Then with sudden change of tone, the writer expostulated:

God forbid that I should be in haste to say that Mr. Griswold has done wilful injustice to the memory of Poe. . . . That a man may 'love beauty only,' and become a glorious devil, large in heart and brain; that he may attain the highest culture, yet be in daily life the vilest—is a fact of which, if true, few men, I hope, would desire to multiply the proofs.74

Thomas averred, "Now it is right that English readers should know what even

72 Ibid., 194.
Note: Students of the Griswold biography will concur fully with Mr. Thomas's observation. "Rufe Gris," as Horace Greeley affectionately dubbed his erratic but talented friend, committed many literary indiscretions and harbored many personal animosities in his stormy career. The Poe-controversy which he aroused "was only one episode in his busy life," declares Bayless, Griswold, 210.

H. L. Mencken, Shock of Recognition, ed. Edmund Wilson, New York, 1943, 1210, categorizes him as "that almost fabulous ass--a Baptist minister turned taster of the beautiful." He says Griswold was the typical American critic of those days.

73 Ibid., 195.
74 Ibid., 195-196.
American readers appear to have forgotten"—that in 1849 there were prompt defenses, the Memoir was repudiated, that other kinds of characterizations were given. He pointed out the ungenerous assertions of the Memoir and added grimly that the Reverend Rufus Griswold was "not without a reverend counterpart on this side of the Atlantic." 75

The June number of _Cosmopolitan_ 76 announced its progress with plans for the Poe monument and named the members of the "Monument Association." It also avowed its refusal to have any part with the "cold, scalpel-like crusade of the 'North American Review.' We feel that the great American public looks upon these notices of the dead with aversion and disgust. ... Let these critics whose pens are dipped in gall be brought into the light, and show themselves pure, ere they dare to cover the grave of Edgar Allan Poe with infamy." 77

The effects of the _North American Review_ essay were lamented by a South Carolina correspondent in the same number of the _Journal_; his appeals for monument funds made in several magazines had met with little encouragement, and he attributed the apathetic response to "Mrs. Smith's" caustic article "which has had considerable influence in turning readers' minds." 78

75 Ibid., 197. This comment probably refers to Gilfillan and Boyd.

76 _The Cosmopolitan Art Journal_, I, June, 1857, 112.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid. See page 31 n. 60 of thesis for reference to supposed author of _North American Review_ article.

Cf. James Branch Cabell in _Let Me Lie_, New York, 1947, 131, for part of the cause of southern apathy to a monument. Cabell states that Richmond disapproved of Poe "because he did not adhere to the code customary among the well bred. He was ... 'tacky.'" The author elucidates the meaning of 'tacky' in Richmond vernacular as being "fargone," "decayed." He adds that "in Virginia there is no word more significant, or more deadly, than is 'tacky.'"

Allen Tate, _The Forlorn Demon_, Chicago, 1953, 83, supplements this
Also in June, a London clergyman, A. K. H. Boyd, 79 in Fraser's Magazine reprimanded James Hannay for his flippant handling of Poe's biography in the preface to his 1853 edition of the poems. It was not customary for Englishmen to produce such supercilious accounts, the writer declared. The clergyman's own characterization of the poet was astonishing:

We must go back to the days of the early dramatists . . . before we shall find in the history of literature any parallel to the wild and morbid genius, and the reckless and miserable life and death of Edgar Allan Poe. Never was there a sadder story than that of his wasted opportunities, his drunken degradation, his despairing efforts to reform, his gradual sinking into lower and lower depths of profligacy and misery . . . his utter lack of truth and honour . . . his inordinate vanity, and insane folly. 80

Boyd inserted an extenuating feature into the picture and enlarged upon Willis's comment on the poet's drinking:

[T]hose who knew Poe best were witnesses of a more amiable aspect of his character. . . . We are told by Mr. Willis that the slightest indulgence in intoxicating liquor was sufficient to convert Poe into a thorough blackguard. 81

The clergyman then professed that Poe was not "a responsible agent." He was also "morally insane." 82 Mr. Allan's "extraordinary forbearance" with his protege could not continue indefinitely; therefore, after the second-Mrs. Allan affair, his patience was finally exhausted who "had repeatedly forgiven every

version with, "A gentleman and a Southerner, he was not quite, perhaps, a Southern gentleman."


80 Ibid., 684.

81 Ibid., 686.

82 Ibid.
possible form of recklessness, debauchery, and insolence." With a certain amount of smugness the Englishman remarked of the Poe-English bout that had been carried on in the press in 1846: "We have some curious specimens of the tone in which literary criticism is conducted in America in a controversy into which Poe got at this time with a certain Dr. Dunn English." Boyd repeated a few sample phrases that an American paper was guilty of printing. He pronounced that the poet "was bad and wretched throughout. . . . He was not fit to be his own master." Most startling of all was the conviction that "He starved his wife and broke her heart. He estranged his friends . . . foully slandered his best benefactors . . . had no faith in man or woman." He also had "no sympathy, no honour, no truth." In fact, his was "an utterly evil heart, and a career of guilt, misery, and despair."

Russell's Magazine in November, 1857, carried an unsigned article by

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83 Ibid., 687.
84 Ibid., 689.
84a In the Literati Poe had "used up" Dr. English. That gentleman retaliated publicly, and Poe answered the attack in the New York Mirror, the Philadelphia Spirit of the Times, and Godey's Magazine. Boyd quoted as a sample of American criticism Poe's denunciation in the Mirror of English's attacks as "oozing from the filthy lips of which a lie is the only natural language!" (689)


Hervey Allen, Israel, The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe, New York, II, 709-710, states that Mrs. Ellet, the malevolent member of the "female literati," furnished English with the ammunition for his cruel assaults. See also Bayless, Griswold, 112-113.

85 "Edgar Allan Poe," Fraser's, LV, 690.
86 Ibid., 700.
James W. Davidson, a South Carolina teacher who, after a cursory phrenological study of the poet, related that "His was the restless, wild want of a soul not understood." He proceeded to trace with bold strokes his portrait of the arraigned poet:

His character was positive. . . . He is said to have had 'a fatal faculty of making enemies.' He secured more and more bitter enemies than any other American author has ever dared to tell. And, if there is any one thing the exposition of which a man will not forgive it is—the truth. . . . Poe allowed to quackery and stupidity no mercy; and now, his victims and their adherents, though they shrunk to silence during his lifetime, have rallied like cowards to blurt their bravado over his too-early—but to them how timely!—grave.

Davidson took to task the writer of the North American Review sketch with his "University of Maryland" account and the roll call of persons the poet had "offended." He asserted that these "bruited insinuations against Poe, now, show only the character of his accusers—only an atrocious malignity of heart." He added, "If Poe's frailties must be thus dwelt upon, in God's name, let them be sealed with the sanction of truth." Davidson quoted a "gentleman of New York City, a scholar and a litterateur, as widely known as American literature itself, who knew Poe personally:

'I honestly regard the calumnies, to which you allude, as unqualified falsehoods. . . . In his later days he was a sick lion, and the donkeys came and kicked him—him at whose faintest roar they had formerly fled in terror.'

88 Ibid., 161.
89 Ibid., 169.
90 Ibid., 171.
91 Ibid., 172.
The vindication in Russell's Magazine may not have been noticed across the Atlantic. At any rate, in the following spring the Edinburgh Review printed a scurrilous account that savored of the London ministers' tirades. The article began:

Edgar Allan Poe was incontestably one of the most worthless persons of whom we have any record in the world of letters. Many authors have been as idle, many as improvident; some as drunken and dissipated; and a few, perhaps, as treacherous and ungrateful. Poe was the sum total of all the vices of which genius was capable. "He was, as we have said, a blackguard of undeniable mark." Fortune had been bountiful to him, "[b]ut he defied his good Genius. There was a perpetual strife between him and virtue, in which virtue never was triumphant." And then the critic specified:

He outraged his benefactor, he deceived his friends, he sacrificed his love,—he became a beggar,—a vagabond,—the slanderer of a woman,—the delirious drunken pauper of a common hospital,—hated by some—despised by others—and avoided by all respectable men. . . . [T]he biography of Poe has satisfied us that the lowest abyss of moral imbecility and disrepute was never attained until he came, and stood forth a warning to the times to come. 93

After this outburst the essayist admitted having pondered the palliative facts as presented in Willis's and Lowell's notices, "but the weight of evidence on the darker side proved overwhelming." 94 The scribe repeated the Griswold sketch including Daniel's "dark story" and could not forbear editorializing that future authors would do well to study the moral of the situation of Poe's 'melancholy history.'

92 Edinburgh Review, CVII, April, 1858, Article V, 419-442. The article is unsigned and has no title.

93 Ibid., 420.

94 Ibid., 421.
The Edinburgh essay closed with the reflection that, "Fortunately for Edgar Poe, his personal history will be less read, and will be more short-lived than his fictions, which will probably pass into many hands, unaccompanied by the narrative of his personal exploits." The writer who had executed this portrait almost twenty years from the time of the poet's death could yet express the notion that such a picture would pass into obscurity! The prediction proved an idle one. So romantic a story was certain to be perpetuated and its controversial subject to supply critics and biographers for decades to come with topics for conjecture and dissension.

Meantime, Mrs. Sarah Whitman, one of Poe's women friends, was preparing a defense of the poet that was intended to counteract the errors rampant in critical and popular opinion. It was the first lengthy vindication to appear and was acclaimed as representative of the sentiments of Poe's closest friends and admirers.

95 Ibid., 442.
CHAPTER III

CRITICAL DISSENSION CONTINUED

Sarah Whitman's essay, *Edgar Poe and His Critics*, was published in 1860—after Griswold's death. In a letter to Mrs. Clemm, Mrs. Whitman wrote of her work that, "It is not... in any way intended as a literal and special refutation of Dr. Griswold's fabulous stories, but simply as a plea for a suspense of judgment." The author outlined for her friend the preface of her work, stating:

Dr. Griswold's 'Memoir of Edgar Poe' has been extensively read and circulated; its perverted facts and baseless assumptions have been adopted into every subsequent memoir and notice of the poet, and have been translated into many languages. For ten years this great wrong to the dead has passed unchallenged and unrebuked.

Mrs. Whitman's essay recreated another portrait of Poe, "not as a lonely genius wandering forlorn in an alien and uncomprehending world—'out of space, out of time'—but rather as a man in a considerable degree created by his

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2 As members of the literati, Mrs. Whitman and "Greeley's Friday" (Griswold) had been old friends. In December, 1849, believing Griswold to be Poe's friend as well as hers, Sarah wrote him a letter explaining her broken engagement to Poe; she also described the Obituary as an "eloquent sketch" but took exception to some of its statements, saying that she herself deemed the poet's disposition "more gentle & [sic] gracious" than the clergyman esteemed it. See H. P. Vincent, "A Sarah Helen Whitman Letter about Edgar Allan Poe," *AL*, XIII, May, 1941, 162-167.
age and in no small measure an expression of it."\(^{5}\)

In 1860, echoes of the calumnies that Mrs. Whitman had observed to be "still going the rounds of foreign periodicals and ... still being republished at home," were to be found in an early collection of American biographies, where the poet was described as a "being full of misery, all beaten out upon his own anvil ... [a]lternately a seraph and a brute,—an inspired poet and a groveling sensualist,—a prophet and a drunkard."\(^{6}\) In contradistinction to such hyperboles was the dispassionate appraisal that appeared in 1862 in *The Sixpenny Magazine*.\(^{7}\) The writer stated that soon after Poe's death his mother-in-law had beseeched her to "tell the truth about Eddie ... tell the world how great and good he was." She predicted, "They will defame him—I know they will."\(^{8}\) During the poet's lifetime the writer had occasionally visited the Poe home, and she spoke in admiration of its "taste, gentility, and cleanliness"; Mrs. Clemm she saw as "a sort of universal Providence for her strange children"; and the poverty she had witnessed was extreme:

> I saw the sufferer (Virginia) with such heartache as the poor feel for the poor. There was no clothing on the bed, which was only straw, but a snow white spread and sheets. The weather was cold. ... She lay on the straw bed, wrapped in her husband's great-coat, with a large tortoise shell cat on her bosom. ... The coat and

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7 "The Reminiscences of Edgar Poe," *The Sixpenny Magazine* (A Miscellany for All Classes and All Seasons), IV, no month, 1862, 471-474. The article is unsigned, but Hervey Allen, *Israfel*, II, 710, names Mrs. Gove Nichols as author; he also gives the magazine number as February, 1863.

the cat were the sufferer's only means of warmth, except as her husband held her hands, and her mother her feet. 9

Concluding her impressions of Poe—of his vanity, his refinement and scholarliness, the writer added:

Poor Poe! If the scribblers who have snapped like curs at his remains, had seen him as his friends saw him, in his dire necessity and his great temptation, they would have been worse than they deem him to have written as they have concerning a man of whom they really knew next to nothing.

Resquiescat in pace! 10

That the notion of Poe as habitual drunkard had been effectually implanted, however, was evidenced in such transatlantic periodicals as the London *Athenaeum*, which in 1862 commented that "Edgar Poe's stories seem all of them to have been written under the inspiration of gin-and-water." 11 The continued prevalence of that theory was emphasized in an American bookseller's catalogue in 1864, wherein the author of a satire addressed Poe:

King Alcohol through you once ruled our realm  
Of Literature, you staggered at its helm; 12

But Sarah Whitman's defense was being circulated, and for the most part, during the first half of the sixties, the Poe-War of the literati ceded preeminence to the Civil War of the States. Toward the end of the decade, other writers who had known Poe and were possibly spurred on by Mrs. Whitman's book, began to enter the arena of the magazine world. *Beadle's Monthly*, February,

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9 Ibid., 473.

10 Ibid., 474.


1867, printed an article by Mrs. Cakes Smith, one of the women members of the literati. Despite her sincere devotion to Griswold—the "literary mid-wife of female poets"—who had sponsored her literary cause, and her remembrance of the caustic criticism meted to her husband and to herself by Poe, Mrs. Smith openly opposed the reports circulated about the poet because of Griswold's characterization of him. She attested, "I do not believe one tittle of what is said about the moral obliquities of Edgar Poe." And then declaring she had known the poet well in society, she added,

"The very appearance of the man gave the lie to these slanders. . . . I am convinced he was not habitually addicted to any kind of intoxicating drink, and am well persuaded that a very little might excite nearly to madness a brain of such volume and delicacy of fiber."

Mrs. Smith recalled Poe's "Mephistophelean smile" and "Ancient Mariner-hold" on listeners to his poems—which he was accustomed to read at social and literary gatherings; such was the poet's aestheticism, thought Mrs. Smith, that it seemed to be incompatible with the mortal necessities of eating and drinking; also, "He had no aptitude for the life of the debauchee . . . he was too delicate, too refined." The writer was little inclined to waste charitable sentiments on the memory of Mr. Allan; she berated him for his "denuding" the youthful Edgar by first indulging him and then casting him off defenseless. For this reason she objected to including "Allan" as part of Poe's name.

Mrs. Smith had, also, a very unusual theory to advance relative to the

13 "Edgar Allan Poe," in "Autobiographic Notes," Beadle's Monthly, III, February, 1867, 147-156. The article is signed Mrs. E. O. Smith. This is the writer referred to on page 31, n. 60 of thesis. On page 147 of Beadle's Mrs. Smith states, "I had written a critique upon Mr. Poe, published in the United States Magazine."

14 Ibid., 147.
At the instigation of a woman, who considered herself injured by him, he was cruelly beaten, blow upon blow, by a ruffian who knew of no better mode of avenging supposed injuries. It is well known that a brain fever followed; his friends hurried him away, and he reached his native city only to breathe his last. 15

Mrs. Smith's impression of Poe's would-be murder was promptly rectified in the March issue of Beadle's Monthly. 16 Dr. Snodgrass, the poet's close friend through all the years of his magazine labors, considered it necessary to present the details in their unpleasant reality—as much as he or anyone else could ascertain them. He had been sent for, testified the doctor, and had gone to a "drinking saloon" where he found his friend "stupefied by liquor and so altered from the neatly-dressed and vivacious gentleman" he was accustomed to seeing that he could scarcely recognize the man. A relative of Poe's had also been summoned to the tavern, but he refused to take the unfortunate man to his home because in his "besotted condition" he would be rude and vulgar. So the two rescuers took him to the hospital. 17

In the same periodical several letters to the editor corrected Mrs. Smith's article. They were friendly, however, as was the report of Dr. Snodgrass. The April number of the journal published comments by the daughter of Lambert Wilmer on the previous month's articles by Mrs. Smith and Dr. Snodgrass. 18 Miss Wilmer had evidently but recently come upon a reprint of

15 Ibid., 156.
17 Ibid., 285.
George Gilfillan's article of 1856, and she was astounded at its scurrility.19

Her father, she declared, had known the poet intimately for more than twelve years, and his estimation of a person's character was not to be contemned, as his judgment was remarkably shrewd. Lambert Wilmer's daughter attested,

Mr. Wilmer has often and solemnly averred, and has left a written statement to the effect that, during this period of twelve years, he never knew Poe to be intoxicated, or to be guilty of any immorality of conduct. In fact his behaviour was remarkably precise, and his conversation singularly pure and correct in its nature. It is certain that, whatever Mr. Poe may have become in his last years, his natural character, and that which he manifested during the longest portion of his life, had in it nothing beastly or degraded.20

Miss Wilmer added that biographers had created a new Edgar Allan Poe, and that the tendency of Poe readers was to confuse his tales with his personal character, supposing that he wrote in a frenzy, "instead of in deliberate, calm, and methodical manner."21 It was plain that the daughter seconded the opinion her father had expressed in his 1849 reply to the Obituary.

19 The notorious "Apollodorus" article in the London Critic (reprint in Littell's Living Age, LXXI, 166-171, and in Southern Literary Messenger, IX, 249-253) was published also in George Gilfillan, A Third Gallery of Portraits, Edinburgh, 1854, 374-388. It is said that Gilfillan retracted in the Southern Literary Messenger his denunciation of Poe, but the article cannot be located.


20a Margaret's father had been known, however, to express concern over Poe's condition during his poverty-striken period following the Graham disappointment in regard to the proposed magazine: "Edgar A. Poe ... has become one of the strangest of our literati," Wilmer wrote the poet's Tennessee friend, John Tomlin. "[H]e is not a teetotaller by any means, and I fear he is going headlong to destruction, moral, physical, and intellectual." Bayless, Griswold, 71-72; Griswold, Passages from Correspondence, 143-144.

21 Ibid.
For the New Year number of the Northern Monthly, T. Cottrell Clark, wrote an eulogy of N. P. Willis in which he based his intense appreciation of the man particularly upon his "vindication of one who has been more shamefully maligned and slandered than any other writer that can be named." Clark asserted, "I can say this from personal knowledge of Mr. Poe, who was associated with myself in the editorial conduct of my own paper." There followed the solemn declaration: "For Mr. Willis's manly vindication of the unfortunate, I honor him." The critic next quoted a letter of Willis to his "copartner," Mr. Morris, written in October, 1858. It stated that, "In our harassing and exhausting days of 'daily' editorship, Poe for a long time was our assistant—the constant and industrious occupant of a desk in our office." Following this testimonial was a tribute to Poe's willingness to do the miscellaneous jobs of the day on the Evening Mirror, and that, after having been chief editor of several monthlies. "WE LOVED THE MAN for the entireness of the fidelity with which he served us," the letter continued. "When he left us, we were very reluctant to part with him; but we could not object—he was to take the lead in another periodical." Willis's explanation of his friend's poverty rested on the fact that his style was too much above the popular level to draw a decent wage, so that he "was always in pecuniary difficulties, and, with his sick wife, frequently in want of the most necessary necessities of life." Clark then avowed, "Mr. Willis's generous testimony is freely confirmed by other publishers."

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23 Ibid., 236.
24 Ibid., 236-237.
25 Ibid., 308.
Mr. T. C. Clark's vindication was hailed by Captain Mayne Reid in *Onward*, April, 1869, as being that of a man "who knew Edgar Allan Poe perhaps better than any other individual ever honored with the poet's acquaintance."

The captain, who had resided with Poe in Philadelphia, had known him "as well as one man may know another, after an intimate and almost daily association" of two years. Reid protested the common views of his friend as a blackguard and a monster; he had no desire to depict the maligned poet "as a model of what man ought to be"; but he wanted him recognized as a human being "no worse and no better than most other men." Poe was not, as his slanderers represented him, a rake:

I have been his companion in one or two of his wildest frolics, and can certify that they never went beyond the innocent mirth in which we all indulge when Bacchus gets the better of us. With him, the jolly god sometimes played fantastic tricks—to the stealing away his brain, and sometimes too, his hat.

While acknowledging this as one of Poe's failings, I can speak truly of its not being habitual; only occasional, and drawn out by some accidental circumstance—now disappointment, now a convivial gathering.

Like Graham and Snodgrass, Reid observed that the effects of "a single glass" were sufficient to render the poet irresponsible for his actions, "or the disposal of his hat." The captain then declared, "I have chronicled all the poet's crimes, all that I ever knew him to be guilty of, and, indeed all that can be alleged against him." Concerning Poe's industry, Reid ratified the Willis testimony:

26 "A Dead Man Defended," *Onward*, I, April, 1869, 305. The spelling of Clark, in the footnote, with an "e" affixed, differs from that in the above-mentioned *Northern Monthly*.

27 Ibid., 308.

28 Ibid.
I have known him to be for a whole month closeted in his own house all the time hard at work with his pen, poorly paid, and hard driven to keep the wolf from his slightly-fastened door; [sic] intruded on only by a few select friends who always found him, what they knew him to be, a generous host . . . in short, a respectable gentleman.29

The captain prophecied that, with further evidence forthcoming, the verdict for Poe's defamer would be "that, in the list of literary men, there has been no such spiteful biographer as Dr. Rufus Griswold, and never such a victim of posthumous spite as poor Edgar Allan Poe."30

Harper's31 of June, 1872, reminded readers that Griswold had failed to substantiate his assertion that Poe's poverty during his wife's illness was due to his "old failing." A footnote added that "The Raven brought Poe the munificent sum of ten dollars!" also, that the poet "was content with two dollars per page!" when contributing to the Southern Literary Messenger. Harper's went so far as to repeat Mrs. Clemm's assertion that a single cup of coffee was enough to intoxicate Edgar Poe, so sensitive was his nervous organization.32 The critic reversed Wesley's terse summing up of the fate of Butler--"He asked for bread, and he received a stone"--stating that in Poe's case, the hungry author may have asked for bread--but he certainly received no stone. Whereupon the writer of the article related how the stone for a monument had been destroyed in an accident on the day previous to that of the proposed

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 567.
J. H. Ingram, who was to be the enthusiastic, if not altogether reliable, author of "a full and faithful life of Edgar Allan Poe," pronounced in Temple Bar, June, 1874, that on his side of the Atlantic, except for Baudelaire in France and Moy Thomas in England, "the reverend gentleman's sol-disant biography" had gone unrefuted for twenty-four years. It was time the public be made aware of the "untrustworthiness of the 'Memoir.'" Ingram proceeded to contest Griswold's "inaccuracies" of biography with theories of his own on some points, and with corroborative evidence as to the fallaciousness of other data. In order to verify Poe's university status, for instance, Ingram quoted an authoritative testimonial to his scholastic standing and the denial of his expulsion. He cited such feats as the seven-and-one-half-mile swim against tide as "a wonderful performance for a dissolute youth." This champion of Poe's honor explained the youth's Byronic plan to aid the Greeks against the Turks as an "act of chivalry" which was arrested because of an irregularity in his passport. Griswold's story of the St. Petersburg episode had not been sustained by the reverend gentleman when a denial of it had appeared in print after the

33 Ibid., 568.

33a H. L. Mencken, Prejudices, First Series, New York, 1919, 217, remarks with irony of the stone, that one day one of the well-to-do relatives of Poe ordered a belated monument. The stone-cutter was preparing to haul it to the churchyard when a runaway goods-van smashed into his stoneyard and broke the stone to bits. "Thereafter," continues Mencken, "the Poes seemed to have forgotten Cousin Edgar."


36 Ibid., 375.
publication of the "Memoir"—which was equivalent to a proof that it was false.37

As for the assertions made of Poe's irregularity on the Messenger, the owner, Mr. White, had died before the charges got into print, so he could not disprove them—as he surely would have wished to do. Ingram then repeated Mr. Willis's report concerning Poe's fidelity on the New York Mirror, much as T. C. Clark had done in the Northern Monthly six months earlier. He added as his conviction, that consumption, brought on by long suffering, constant and harassing literary labor, and most of all by want, had been the cause of the poet's death. His final attack on Griswold's lack of integrity was directed at his having incorporated Daniel's second-Mrs. Allan calumny in his Memoir, with the assumption that the biographer was guilty either of open plagiarism or of being himself the author of the fiendish slander.38 Six years later Ingram commemorated his repugnance for the literary executor by further exposures of his "inaccuracies" in the biography he compiled of the poet. But the traditional errors continued rampant both at home and abroad.39

37 Ibid., 377.

38 Ibid., 387.

39 In the year following Ingram's Temple Bar refutation of Griswold allegations, Henry Curwen, in Sorrow and Songs: Studies of Literary Struggle, London, 1875, 93-160, devoted considerable space to the old legends, with emphasis on drink. He waxed histrionic in describing the poet's "frenzied night" at Sarah Whitman's house: With the memory of his promise of eternal fidelity to Virginia suddenly before him, "I shall not marry, I may not marry," went surging through his brain, as a chorus, all day long... till... irresistibly urged forward," he went to Sarah's home town, determined to break their engagement. He adopted the means employed in a popular foreign drama. "After walking in his cowardice for hours in the streets outside, he reeled into the lady's drawing-room—drunk! The disillusion was brutal but effective." (156-157) Curwen dealt similarly with the poet in another volume: Wrecked Lives or Men Who Have Failed, New York, 1880.
Robert Louis Stevenson, reviewing Ingram's biography in The Academy, January, 1875, displayed little sympathy for Poe or his sponsor, Baudelaire, declaring, "There is a duty to the living more important than any charity to the dead." He believed that in Poe's works, in his portrait, and in the facts of his life "as now most favorably told," there could be detected "a certain jarring note, a taint of something or other that we do not care to dwell upon or find a name for." Stevenson felt that "when all is said, it is not in the power of man to make Poe altogether sympathetic." But neither had he cared for Griswold's biographical sketch; nor did he like the executor's name: it was just the type Poe might have coined in morbid fancy.

The Nation magazine, two months later, styled the first Poe-biographer a "self-appointed foster-father of all new-born American genius," and contrasting Ingram's biography with that by Richard Stoddard, declared that the British writer apparently regarded himself as restorer of a reputation that he had considered Poe's countrymen dedicated to tarnishing.

[Ingram] whitewashes him [Poe] so completely that his American friends would hardly know him. He contemptuously ignores every story that tends to the discredit of his hero, and loses no opportunity to manifest his sense of American worthiness of so great a fortune as to be the birthplace of his Magnus Apollo.

The anonymous critic insisted that the poet had received in his native country all the acclaim an ordinate ambition could desire:

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41 Ibid., 1.
42 "Book Reviews," The Nation, XX, March 25, 1875, 208-209. Article unsigned.
43 Ibid., 208.
He had plenty of work if he would do it, plenty of friends whom he took no pains to keep. He quarrelled with everyone who had a less indiscriminate admiration of him than Mr. Ingram has; [sic] was adopted by a wealthy man, whose money he wasted at wine and cards. ... He attacked every literary man of eminence greater than his own with virulent and senseless abuse, and though poor, had that sublime contempt for earning money which Mr. Ingram would call philosophic, perhaps, but which common-sense people in America call shiftlessness.44

The reviewer thoroughly resented Ingram's aspersions on America as the home of the misunderstood and ill-appreciated genius!

Generally speaking, however, the advent of Ingram's Life of Poe seemed to herald a new target in the literati's warfare; if Griswold's exaggerations had drawn censure on him before, he was inundated in it now. The defamed was becoming almost as much the center of controversy as was the defamed. Critics everywhere who were not pummeling Poe were chastising Griswold.45

In Baltimore, June, 1875, Southern Magazine46 voiced satisfaction that Ingram had produced a new biography of Poe, for "[n]ever in the history of literature has such a memoir been affixed to an author's works, and also allowed to persist in print up to the present time."47 The writer felt assured that Ingram would rectify the errors in his book in the succeeding edition: working from England was a disadvantage. Southern then enumerated a list of grievances against the ignominious Memoir and proceeded to refute charge after charge with

44 Ibid., 209.

45 Charles Briggs said of the censorship accorded his reverend friend, "Such a shower of abuse fell upon the head of Dr. Griswold ... that no one has since had the courage" to write a true biography of Poe. Cf. "The Personality of Poe," The Independent, XXIX, December 13, 1877, 1.

46 Southern Magazine, XVI, June, 1875, 640-650. Article is signed only by the initials, W. H. B., and has no title but "Review."

47 Ibid., 640.
Ingram's corrections and theories. It quoted the written statement of Mr. William Wertenbaker, Secretary of the Faculty at the University of Virginia that "at no time did he [Poe] fall under the censure of the faculty. He was not at that time addicted to drinking, but [he] had an ungovernable passion for card-playing." Of the quixotic trip to Greece, Mr. Wertenbaker maintained there was no more authority for that story than for the one of Poe's expulsion from the University. Concerning West Point's having cashiered the obstreperous youth, the sentence of court martial specified solely "absence from parade." John Daniel, the anonymous author of the 1850 lampooning in the Messenger, came in for a share of the Baltimore magazine's contempt for Griswold, especially on the score of the second-Mrs. Allan slander and of the "gross and gratuitous

48 Ibid., 642. See also Charles W. Kent, ed., The Unveiling of the Bust of Edgar Allan Poe, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1899, 20: "He never even came under any kind of official censure"; 22: "Edgar Allan Poe was not expelled, nor dismissed, nor suspended, nor required to withdraw, nor disciplined in any way whatsoever, at the University of Virginia . . . [like Hawthorne] he may have been guilty of a hundred things the faculty never heard of . . . but it is too late now to expel him.


50 Carlisle Allan, "Cadet Edgar Allan Poe, U. S. A.," American Mercury, XXIX, August, 1933, 453, explains what Poe did to get himself discharged from West Point because the discipline was unendurable: he was absent from reveille and evening parade two days and from all class formations twelve days. The court held him guilty on two charges: absence from parade, and refusal to attend church and recitations on January 23 and January 25 respectively. See also James S. Wilson, "Poe at the University of Virginia," Alumni Bulletin, University of Virginia, XVI, April, 1933, 163-168.
insult" to the committee that had named Poe in 1833 a prize winner for his "MS Found in a Bottle." Daniel, taking his cue from Griswold's biographic account had gone so far as to write of the contest judges, "Of course, they did not read them [the manuscripts]. But while chatting over the wine at the meeting, one of them was attracted by the beautiful chirography." And so Poe had won the short story contest. Because of his handwriting! The reviewer challenged the "trustworthiness" of both Griswold and Daniel for this offense.

Southern Magazine supplanted the Memoir assertion of Poe's dismissal from the Messenger in 1837 for drunkenness by the statement that he had found "more lucrative employment on the staff of the New York Quarterly Review." The testimony of William Gowan, who had boarded with Poe's family for eight months and who pronounced him abstemious and courteous during that time, was next quoted. The idyllic family life at Fordham gave the lie to the Rev. Mr. Gilfillan's vicious assertion that Poe killed his wife to have a subject for "The Raven." "It is said," added the writer grimly, "that 'corruptio optimi pessima'; it would seem that if a clergyman ever renounces, in any case, justice

51 Southern Magazine, XVI, 644.

52 Quinn, Poe, 259, repeats the reasons White gave to his new editor for dismissing Poe from the Messenger. They were: irregular habits at that period and disagreement about acceptability of articles. White admitted his inferiority to Poe on the subject of criticism. Poe's own reasons are found in his August 15, 1840, letter to William Poe: excessive drudgery, insufficient pecuniary compensation, and although he was well-meaning, White was "illiterate and vulgar."

53 At Fordham, Poe was a familiar figure on the Jesuits' college grounds "where he loved to roam," and he was on terms "of closest intimacy" with all the fathers, says Thomas Gaffney Toaffe, A History of St. John's College, Fordham, New York, New York, 1891, 100-101. The Jesuit musician, Father Ducet, later president of the college, testified of Poe at Fordham, that he was "extremely refined . . . a gentleman by nature and instinct." Toaffe adds, (101) that the priest "always indignantly denied the statement that Poe looked like one
mercy, and truth, he is capable of a vileness of malignity quite unattainable by laymen."

The critic presented his theory of Poe's death because he felt that, when Ingram's memoir had gone to press, the true circumstances were not known. He explained that in Baltimore at election time it was not uncommon for ruffians to seize strangers and carry them off to dens, called "coops," where they were confined, maltreated, and forced to vote according to the captors' wishes. If they refused, they "were drugged to stupefaction, and then carried around and 'voted' at various wards. Poe was thus 'cooped' and drugged, taken to vote at eleven different wards, and then turned adrift in a dying condition. When he recovered his senses, he was in the Washington University Hospital, where he died."

Southern deplored the continued condemnation of Poe "as if he were a moral pariah," and even his admirers' accepting the "catalogue of easily-disproved calumnies" and remaining content with lamenting the moral obliquities of "erratic genius." The writer reproached that "faithful chronicler,"

worn out by dissipation and excess. "The unfortunate poet had one weakness which amounted almost to a malady, but against which he fought manfully and well."

54 Southern Magazine, XVI, 648.
55 Ibid., 649.
55a Dr. J. J. Moran, physician to Poe in October, 1849, wrote in his later years an interesting account of the poet's last hours, but it differed sharply from the one in his letter to Mrs. Clemm written the month following Poe's death. See John J. Moran, M. D., A Defense of Edgar Allan Poe; Life, Character and Dying Declarations of the Poet, Washington, D. C., 1885, 55-65, and also George H. Woodberry, Edgar Allan Poe, Boston, 1895, 344-345, n. 345. See also T. C. Duncan Eaves, "Poe's Last Visit to Philadelphia," AL, XXVI, March, 1954, 45-51, for a well-documented article on the conflicting accounts of Poe's death.
Allibone, who devoted in his Dictionary of Authors "seven of his vast pages to a puff [of Longfellow], and did not take the small pains" to examine published refutations of Griswold's slanders. "The fact is," concluded the reviewer, "it is this detestable cant of hypocrisy that has given these slanders their virulence of contagion." 56

Despite the efforts of critics like the author of the lengthy essay in Southern Magazine, the weird reputation still so widely accorded the poet was responsible for stirring up a new trend in the analysis of his character. One of the progenitors in the psychoanalytic tradition of examining the personality of Poe came next on the scene of literary warfare. Francis Garry Fairfield 57 proffered in Scribner's Monthly an explanation of the madness of

56 Ibid., 650.


Note: Philip Young, "The Earlier Psychologists and Poe," AL, XXIII, January, 1951, 442-454, traces the development of the former school of thought.
"the mad man of letters." After taking cognizance of all known factors in Poe's personality, Mr. Fairfield settled, in highly technical language, for a case of cerebral epilepsy for the poet. But as the New York Tribune observed, Mr. Fairfield's faux pas lay in publicizing his theory on the eve of the dedication of the Poe monument in Baltimore. He could not expect to go unpunished, and so Mrs. Whitman's letter from Providence to the Editor of the Tribune was printed:

Sir: Mr. F. G. Fairfield ... who has spent ... ten years among spiritual mediums in the cause of science, having demonstrated they are all more or less afflicted with epileptic mania, has recently turned his genius to poets and men of inspirational genius, and finds that they too, from Ezekiel to Aeschylus, from Aeschylus to Coleridge, are all mad as March hares. If there is method in their madness, there is also madness in their method.

Mrs. Whitman then added that Mr. Fairfield had confessed to personal experience of the malady—and that he intimated "habitual lying" was one of the most trustworthy exponents of the illness." Fairfield's critic took him to task for reducing the author of "The Raven" to a mental study, and for basing his "chronic mendacity" on the report of Mrs. Clemm that the poem had been composed

58 Ibid., 697.

59 The New York Daily Tribune, October 13, 1875, 4, editorial comment.

60 Ibid., 2. "Poe, Critic, and Hobby: A Reply to Mr. Fairfield. Certain Hard Facts Which Have Been Overlooked in the Search for an Epileptic Suicide."

61 Mrs. Whitman's observation about spiritualism is worthy of note. A peculiar bond among the literati was the enthusiasm for spiritual seances. Griswold had held meetings in his rooms in New York. Horace Greeley was a believer in the cult and invited to his home the medium, Mrs. Fish; such persons as James Fenimore Cooper and William Cullen Bryant were among those who attended the seances though the Tribune did not reveal whether they were believers. Mrs. Whitman maintained a medium at her home. See the accounts in Yale Review, XIV, July, 1925, 755, 772-773; Bayless, Griswold, 203-204; Quinn and Hart, Letters, 19.
in a single "evening's incubation." Mrs. Whitman further reprimanded the author of "The Mad Man of Letters" for styling "Ulalume" an exhibition of the last stages of mental decrepitude and decay. "Thus sang he and died," she juxtaposed to "[T]hus sang he, then wrote 'Eureka,' 'The Bells,' 'Annabel Lee,' and others of his most remarkable poems." Greatly incensed, this Nemesis of Poe's contrasted Fairfield's "alien tone" with the appraisal meted "Ulalume" by the British Quarterly of the preceding July and Boston Radical of April, 1871. "Yet Fairfield calls it 'epileptic egotism,'" she remonstrated. "If this piece of amateur surgery is a specimen of 'honest war,' one must needs borrow Aesop's lantern to find out its honesty." And about the "Reply" the Tribune commented, "Whether there was method in the madness, or madness in the method, one thing is certain: in regard to the 'hard facts' of that mysterious career, Mr. Fairfield's critic knows whereof she speaks." Had it been the custom of nineteenth-century journalists to file libels as often as occasion seemed to warrant, the history of periodical criticism might be considerably altered. That such legal procedure was not routine is a contributing factor to the intensity with which the controversy continued to rage among the literati. Even at the time of the 1875 ceremonies in honor of Poe, dissension and rancor were at "fever pitch" among critics. The dedication, however, marked an outward recognition of the poet that more or less conformed to a growing demand in America and to foreign importunity.


63 Ibid., 4.

64 To Henry James this enthusiasm for Poe was "the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection," writes F. O. Matthiessen in "Poe," Sewanee Review, LIV, April, 1946, 175.
CHAPTER IV

CONTROVERSY UNABATED BY CLOSE OF CENTURY

The dedication of the Poe monument in Baltimore, 1875, created a stir in literary circles. Innumerable letters were addressed to the Poe Memorial Association; they voiced varying reactions to the occasion, with the margin of opinion in favor of the poet’s being heralded universally as a man of American letters.\(^1\)

William Cullen Bryant, who had refused to assist in raising funds for a monument to the person of whose personal character he had heard "too much to be able to join in paying especial honor to his memory," declined to be present at the unveiling of the statue. However, he consented to write the following circumspect inscription for the shaft:

To Edgar Allan Poe, Author of the Raven and of other Poems, and of various works of Fiction, distinguished alike for originality in the conception, skill in word-painting, and power over the mind of the reader, The Public School Teachers of Baltimore, admirers of his genius, have erected this monument.\(^2\)

Stephane Mallarme,\(^3\) French translator and "high priest" of the

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\(^1\) Representative of this group is John Greenleaf Whittier, who commented in a letter to Sara Rice, November 9, 1875, "The extraordinary genius of Edgar Allan Poe is now acknowledged the world over." The facsimile of the letter is in Sara Sigourney Rice, Edgar Allan Poe, A Memorial Volume, Baltimore, 1877, (73-74).

\(^2\) Ibid., (75-76).

\(^3\) For Poe's influence on Mallarme and role in French symbolism, see French, Poe in Foreign Lands, 5-10; Mansell Jones, "Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarme: A Problem of Literary Judgement," MLR, XXXIX, July, 1944, 236-246; Eliot, Poe to Valery, 5, 23, 32. Eliot writes of the French enthusiasm for Poe: "We must
American poet composed a sonnet for the ceremony.

Le Tombeau D'Edgar Poe

Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change,
Le Poète suscite avec un glaive nu
Son siècle expuvante de n'avoir pas connu
Que la mort triomphant dans cette voix étrange!

Eux, comme un vil sursant d'hydre oyant jadis l'ange
Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu
Proclamèrent très haute le sortilège bu
Dans le flot sans honneur de quelque noir mélange

Du sol et de la rue hostiles, ô grief!
Si notre idée avec ne sculpte un bas-relief
Dont la tombe de Poe éblouissante s'orne
Calme bloc ici-bas chu d'un désastre obscur
Que ce granit du moins monterà jamais sa borne
Aux noirs vols de Blasphème épars dans le futur. 1

Apparently the only person worthy of note 5 who was observed at the dedication was Walt Whitman of whom the Washington Star, November 16, 1875, stated:

Being in Washington on a visit at the time, 'the old gray' went over to Baltimore, and though ill from paralysis, consented to hobble up and silently take a seat on the platform, but refused to make any speech, saying, 'I have felt a strong impulse to come over and be here to-day, myself in memory of Poe, [sic] which I have obeyed, but first take into account that none of these poets knew the English language very well." (20) He adds that the French writers were geniuses themselves and that they read into the poems of Poe what was not really there.


Note: But Gardner Davies, Les "Tombeaux" de Mallarme, Paris, 1950, 89, states that though Mallarme recorded in his "bibliographie de ses Poesies, il y fut récité, en l'érection d'un monument de Poe, à Baltimore," nevertheless, "[t]elle avait été peut-être l'intention première, mais il est évident que le poème fut écrit en réalité plusieurs mois après le cérémonie du novembre 1875."

5 According to H. L. Mencken, "All the other persons were Baltimore nobodies—chiefly schoolmistresses and preachers." See Prejudices, I, 248.
not the slightest impulse to make a speech, which my dear friends, must also be obeyed.  

Dr. John J. Moran, however, recorded the name of another poet who seems to have been at the ceremony. He noted after the crowd's departure from the scene of the dedication, the "touching sight [of a] venerable form clothed in black . . . leaning upon the base of the shaft, apparently in deep devotion." It was Father Abram J. Ryan, the southern priest poet. The sight so impressed the doctor that he commemorated it with a poem.  

The fact that there was now a memorial, testifying to a creditable number of persons' accepting Edgar Poe as a writer of tales and poems, did not alter the gruesome picture many critics had of his personal character. George Lathrop wrote in *Scribner's* five months after the dedication,  

> This passionate search for the beautiful . . . guided by no North Star of faith . . . is the very thing which drove him into such whirlpools of physical horror and ignoble wallowings in decay; [sic] because it issued from interior discord. . . . [H]is brain had a rift of ruin in at the start.  

William Gill's new Poe-biography in 1877, castigating the first  

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7 Moran, *Defense of Poe*, 79.  

8 Mencken says derisively of the memorial: "The myth that there is a monument to Edgar Allan Poe in Baltimore is widely believed; there are even persons who, stopping off in Baltimore to eat oysters, go to look at it." All it actually is, "is an absurd statue in one of the more obscure parks, showing Poe drunk, and a cheap and hideous tombstone in the corner of a Presbyterian churchyard." He adds that a committee of "Baltimore schoolmarm" collected "about $1,000. It took the dear girls ten long years to raise the money. . . . During all this time not a single American author of position gave the project any aid." (Prejudices, I, 247-248.)  


10 Ibid., 803.
defamer, Rufus Griswold, as Poe's Iago and commenting on the changes made in Poe's letters as spots "'doctored' by the doctor,"¹¹ brought Charles Briggs,¹² warrior-friend of the deceased "Grand Turk" of anthologists, to the front again. Briggs covered the entire front page and more of the Protestant weekly, Independent, "the Largest Religious Newspaper in the World," with an essay on Poe's personality. Many people would give much, Briggs was sure, to have known a genius--"but the author of 'The Raven' was not a pleasant person to know well." He was certain that Poe himself would have laughed scornfully at the contest over his personal character, for to him the point "was a matter of perfect indifference." The admirers who would defend him against the "ghoulish outrages" of Dr. Griswold, knew nothing of the man except through his published writings. If the doctor had not been restrained by a foolish delicacy, he might have given some startling evidences of the utter contempt the poet entertained for persons who imagined they were passionately beloved by him. He wrote "tender, tear-bedabbled letters" to women, with the intention of sending his wife or mother-in-law to them to get a loan of fifty dollars! Respecting Poe's condition when intoxicated, Briggs pronounced,

He must have been a terror to his wife and aunt; and she had on several occasions been compelled to call for help to prevent his committing violence upon the unresisting and helpless creature whom he is represented as loving so tenderly.¹³

Three months after Briggs' final lengthy attack on the character of


¹³ Ibid., 1.
his ancient enemy, Mrs. Weiss, the Susan Archer Talley who in her youth had idolized the poet, composed for *Scribner's* her reminiscences of the man she had known thirty years before. She recalled that though she had heard in her home and in society, rumors of his weakness, "Poe was pre-eminently a gentleman." Mrs. Weiss contributed an interesting variant of the John Daniel-Edgar Poe relations, claiming that the misunderstanding over Poe's engagement to Mrs. Shelton and Poe's consequent fury were terminated in a "friendship which lasted while they lived." Relative to the poet's revived devotion to his first sweetheart, Susan concluded, "*The Stylus*, (for the *Stylus*, his own proposed magazine) he must have, at whatever cost or sacrifice. Hence the affair with Mrs. Shelton."—Which statement disposed of one of Poe's most ardent of posthumous sweethearts.

Mrs. Weiss considered that Poe had been heroic in marrying "the child" Virginia for the girl's security and her mother's happiness. She had heard

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Note: James H. Whitty does not consider Mrs. Weiss' reminiscences reliable. The above assertion is partial evidence of the accuracy of his observation. See pages 8-9 of thesis for John Daniel's treatment of the person Mrs. Weiss thinks was his friend. See also Quinn, *Poe*, 571, and Woodberry, *Poe*, II, 273-414, concerning a supposed duel.


17 Perhaps it is Mrs. Weiss' statement that is responsible for the following conclusions: Oscar Cargill, *Intellectual America*, New York, 1941, 179, speaks of the girl as Poe's "sexless child-wife Virginia (with whom his life must have been a horror)."

Frederich Drew Bond, "The Problem of Poe," *The Open Court*, XXXVII, April, 1923, 219, calls the romance a "myth," and in referring to Fannie Osgood's declaration that Poe's wife begged her to be good to him (Griswold, *Passages from Correspondence*, 256) says, "[T]his marriage with Virginia was the ruination of Poe as man and citizen." Bond wonders how Virginia could encourage other
the match repeatedly ascribed to Mrs. Clemm. Mrs. Weiss averred that it was
the poet's declaration that he missed in his marriage to Virginia "a certain
intellectual and spiritual sympathy necessary to perfect happiness in such an
union. It was this need which so often impelled him to 'those many romantic
little episodes' of which Mrs. Osgood speaks."19

In the fashion of literary women of the nineteenth century, Susan
dipped into a description of the poet's eyes of "crystalline clearness and
transparency," of his broad forehead, etc.: 

I had at this time no knowledge of phrenology; but now, in recalling
this peculiar shape, I cannot deny that in Poe what were called the
intellectual and animal portions of the head were remarkably devel-
oped, while in the moral regions there was as marked a deficiency. Espe-
ially there was a slight depression instead of fullness of
outline where the organs of veneration and firmness are located by
phrenologists.20

Mrs. Weiss' tenure of memory is amazing—especially since phrenology is an
afterthought to her earlier observations.

women "to be good" to her husband if their marriage wasn't a platonic sort of
affair. He bases other men's hatred of Poe on the fact that he was true to
Virginia even though he loved other women.

H. L. Mencken, "The Mystery of Poe," The Nation, CXXII, March, 1926,
290, says Poe's marriage was pathological; Virginia was "next door to an idiot."

A contemporary opinion of the poet's devotion to Virginia, however, is
described by Annie Richmond's brother in a letter of October 2, 1848. See
Frederick W. Coburn, "Poe As Seen by the Brother of Annie," The New England
Quarterly, XVI, September, 1943, 471.

18 The vacillating Mrs. Lewis, "Stella," was probably the perpetrator
of the rumors that Susan A. T. Weiss heard. Julia Moore Smith, "A New Light of
Poe?" SLN, I, September, 1939, 575-581, bases her assumption that Mrs. Clemm was
the conniving feline influence of Poe's life, on the latter her father received
from Mrs. Lewis, September 29, 1858, in which that lady declared of the poet's
mother-in-law, "I believe that she was the black cat of his life. And that she
at last strangled him to death." [sic] (576)

20 Ibid., 711.
The chronicler also recorded that before Poe's last departure from Richmond in 1849 he showed her a letter just received from "his friend, Dr. Griswold," in which the doctor consented, at the request of Edgar, to become his literary executor in the event of his sudden death. "It will be observed," continued Mrs. Weiss, "that this incident is a contradiction of his [Griswold's] statement that previous to Poe's death he had no intimation of the latter's intention of appointing him as literary executor."21 Susan likewise remembered that "Poe had made himself popular in Richmond... His death cast a universal gloom over the city." She related that the artist, Mr. Sully, described to her the poet's generous and ungrudging assistance to him in school days and the disdain of Mr. Allan for his foster-son. Mrs. Weiss repeated further "facts asserted by venerable ladies of Richmond," about John Allan's harshness;22 she insisted that, "[I]n the picture presented us by Dr. Griswold

21 Ibid., 714.

Note: The actual appointment of Griswold as Poe's executor is a controversial subject. Many writers believe there is no foundation for the theory despite Mrs. Clemm's notice "To the Reader," prefacing the first volume of Griswold's edition of Poe's works. Bayless, Griswold, 167, states that Mrs. Clemm informed Griswold, October 20, 1849, that it was Poe's wish he edit his writings, but on December 13, 1853, she denied the statement to Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers. Mrs. Weiss' reliability on the question is doubtful. Horace B. Williams, Literary Criticism and Other Papers, Philadelphia, 1856, 233, writes: "There was nothing in the private relations of the parties to render it at all probable that Poe should have left a request that Dr. Griswold would be the editor of his writings; but he knew the generous spirit and admirable capacity of the person whose regard he invoked, and felt assured that he would do in the best manner what probably no other would do at all."

22 It has been said that John Allan resented his foster-son's reproachful presence in his home; Mr. Allan's promiscuity was known in Richmond circles. Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America, 178, attributes Poe's "abnormal chastity" to reaction against Mr. Allan's repeated infidelities to his wife, the foster-mother the boy loved so dearly. James Southall Wilson suggests that Poe's mentally afflicted sister, Rosaline, was the offspring of his beautiful actress-mother and John Allan, the "sedate libertine... talking sedate piety." See Wilson, "The Young Man Poe," Virginia Quarterly Review, II, 241, 252.
... I cannot recognize a trait of the gentle, grateful, warm-hearted man whom I saw amid his friends." With a final plea for allowance for his faults, Poe's fervent apologist concluded:

He was ever the sport of an adverse fortune. Born in penury, reared in affluence, treated at one time with pernicious indulgence and then literally turned into the streets, a beggar and an outcast, deserted by those who had formerly courted him, maliciously calumniated, smarting always under a sense of wrong and injustice,—what wonder that this bright, warm, and naturally generous and genial nature should have become embittered?23

Edmund C. Stedman,24 in 1880, published in Scribner's an article that designated Griswold's "eloquent malice" as the testimony of an ignoble nature. But Time had avenged the wrong.25 The critic reflected that Poe was not a man of immoral habits: as an artist he must love the ideal; he was not a libertine; he reverenced woman; his works were "almost too spiritual"; nor was he undevotional: he felt the spark of divine fire within him. Finally, Poe was not an habitual drunkard. The conviviality of his guardian's household, his own drugging in infancy, were responsible for the taint he fought manfully. The foster-son had not been trained to self support, and he was hampered by the "lack of self control inherent in Celtic and Southern natures."26

The London Athenaeum of July, 1880, exemplified the influence that periodical literature had attained by the mid-nineteenth century. Joseph Gostwick27 declared that the Griswold Memoir of 1849 had been constantly

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25 Ibid., 122.
26 Ibid., 122-123.
27 Athenaeum, No. 2752, July 2nd, 1880, 109. Article has no title.
repeated, and that he, when compiling his *Handbook of American Literature*, twenty-five years earlier, had included the biographical data "accepted as authoritative," but not fully trusting such "inspecifics," had punctuated his statements with "It is said's," "We are told's," etc. The same issue of the journal hailed Ingram's biography of Poe as "an adequate response to the venomous accusations of Griswold, the slime of whose words is now wiped off forever." [sic]²⁸

About the same time William Minto,²⁹ in the *Fortnightly Review*, introduced his article on Edgar Allan Poe with the quotation: 

"A DISSOLUTE, fantastic writer, died at Baltimore in consequence of fits of intoxication."

Minto followed this text with, "Such is the summary of Poe's career in a popular American encyclopaedia, and it represents very fairly the general conception of the man which has been current since his death on both sides of the Atlantic." [sic]³⁰ The critic then observed that "the truth has not had a chance in the competition for public favor." The tendency to confuse Poe's writings with his character not only preserved but magnified the "malignant myth" originated in the Griswold biography. Mr. Minto affirmed, "It is much more true that Poe worked himself to death than that he drank himself to death." Actually, the poet was "an intellectual voluptary," and his too-conscientious reviews made his victims uncomfortable, a feature never healthy for the critic.³¹

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²⁸ Ibid., 109.


³⁰ Ibid., 690.

³¹ Ibid., 694-695.
Clergyman-author T. W. Higginson, commenting in *Nation*, 1880, on the recent biographies of Poe, stated that the subject's "vices, quarrels, desperate straits, attempted suicides, ardent and sometimes simultaneous love-affairs—all . . . afford great resources for the biographer, [and he should be] grateful for a subject who did not dwell in decencies for ever." [sic] He added:

It is almost amusing to see how each new memoir . . . while denouncing the obvious malice of Griswold, ends by re-establishing almost all the damaging facts which Griswold left only half-proved. If Poe fared ill at the hands of his enemy, he has fared worse, on the whole, at those of his friends.33

Mr. Higginson dogmatized that it was impossible "to throw any glamour of personal honor about a sentimentalist who was remorselessly torturing two women's hearts at the same time." He confessed he had never thought "so ill" of Poe as he did after reading Ingram's biography of him. Nor was he any more favorably impressed with the "inferior work of Mr. Gill."34

But Poe histories were beginning to emerge rather frequently from printers' shops these years. In 1882, Eugene Didier35 offered another chronicle of the poet's life. Obviously influenced by the Mrs. Ellet campaign against Griswold in the fifties, Didier categorized the notorious Memoir as the work of a man who was saved only by his early death from the penitentiary for "bigamy."36 Three years later, upon the publication of a biography by George

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32 "Recent Works on Edgar Poe," *Nation*, XXXI, November 18, 360-361.
33 Ibid., 360.
34 Ibid., 361.
36 Ibid., 127.
Woodberry, Nation\(^37\) drew up an interesting line of biographical successions. "Among Poe's chroniclers, Stoddard follows Griswold, and Ingram pursues Stoddard, and Gill goes upon the trail of Ingram, and now Woodberry winds up the chase."\(^3\)

A few months later Atlantic Monthly\(^39\) stated the position that many critics have since maintained—that Woodberry was Poe's most painstaking and accurate of biographers. Atlantic noted from the tone of Mr. Woodberry's work that he brought to his task no partiality for his subject; but Poe had "suffered at the hands of biased biographers,"—that is, those who "whitewashed" him; he had proved his own worst enemy, in that he had rarely told the truth about himself; and Mr. Woodberry had shown "lawyer-like acumen in threading the mazes of a confused and contradictory career."\(^4\)

Poet Father John B. Tabb was at variance with the critics who insisted on maintaining old fictions and who evolved an evil monster out of a weak man. In Harper's,\(^41\) Tabb published a poem, "Poe's Critics," in which he noted that much adverse criticism had created in a romantic age unlooked-for reactions:

A certain tyrant, to disgrace
The more a rebel's resting-place,
Compelled the people every one
To hurl, in passing there, a stone,
Which done, behold, the pile became
A monument to keep the name.

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\(^{37}\) Nation, XL, February 19, 1885, 157-158. Review unsigned.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 157.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 706.

And thus it is with Edgar Poe;
Each passing critic has his throw,
Nor sees, defeating his intent,
How lofty grows the monument.

One of the interesting reversals in attitude over a long period of years was that of Richard Stoddard, who in 1853 had pleaded eloquently for forbearance in judging a man so sensitive that he was "known to have been intoxicated by strong coffee." Stoddard now, in 1889, composed an utterly scathing biographical sketch of Poe for *Lippincott's Monthly*. "Some men are born great, others achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them," he quoted. "The most conspicuous example among these last was the late Edgar Allan Poe. It was my good--or bad--fortune to come in contact with this unfortunate gentleman in my twenty-first year." Poe was declaimed by his chameleon-like critic to be without honor; he was "a curious compound of the charlatan and the courtly gentleman." Mr. James Hanny, that sound-hearted but hot-headed Scot, had "honored" Stoddard by comparing him "to the curs of Constantinople, which are not admitted to the cemeteries where the followers of the Prophet slumber under the protection of their white turbans." Then, whereas Gill had named Griswold Poe's Iago, Stoddard reversed the tables and made Poe Iago. "Griswold, who was greatly maligned, was the life-long friend of Edgar Allan. Another friend was Horace Greeley; others were Charles F. Briggs, Thomas Dunn English ... most kindly disposed towards this unkindly

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person, who loved no one, not even himself.\textsuperscript{46} Stoddard had transferred to the other camp! 

In March of the same year, Poe's old friend, John Sartain, contributed to Lippincott his reminiscences of the poet. It was a forty-year stretch of memory for the former Philadelphia editor, and whether his account has much merit has been questioned.\textsuperscript{47} Sartain \textsuperscript{48} narrated that when his friend had come to his office shortly before his death he was in very great distress and apparently laboring under the effects of a recent nightmare. Sartain stated among other things that Poe had told him he had been in Moyamensing Prison for "the drop too much." It was the old man's colorful reflections that gave rise to the theory that Poe in Philadelphia was "completely insane."\textsuperscript{49}

A former associate of Poe's who had been alienated from him for many years was now to write his reminiscences. The hostility between Edgar Poe and Thomas D. English had developed into one of the most notorious animosities in literary history.\textsuperscript{50} As was observed in Fraser's Magazine in an 1857 article,  

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., III.  
\textsuperscript{46a} For Horace Greeley's esteem of Edgar Poe, see Griswold, \textit{Passages}, 248-249, and "Greeley's Estimate of Poe," \textit{Autograph Album}, I, December, 1933, 14-16.  
\textsuperscript{47} See Roberston, \textit{Poe, A Psychopathic Study}, 189.  

Hervey Allen, \textit{Israfel}, II, 709, comments: "It was the English controversy more than any other, which tarnished Poe's good name. . . . The failings of Poe were trumpeted, and reprinted in a chain of little newspapers and magazines."
the two men had exchanged discourtesies in the Evening Mirror, and a political satire by English had been published serially. In the novel, Poe was metaphorically designated as Marmaduke Hammerhead and accused of various atrocities, among them the inveterate habit of calling others an ass, of name-calling Carlyle a "watermelon," Emerson, a "squash," ad infinitum. Hammerhead himself was "a most drunken monster," in the estimation of the author. This diatribe, of course, did not get by with the equally strong-worded Poe. It all ended in a libel suit—from which the poet won a badly needed $225.51 As editor of the John Donkey, English berated Poe month after month with such comments on inebriety as: "Poe is reported to have secured A Nice Job, employed to furnish the railing for the new railroad over Broadway. He was seen going up the street a few days ago, apparently laying out the road." In one issue the "literary Titmouse" set Poe up as the "People's candidate for the Vice-Presidency of the State of Slander" on the ground that he was a "very sober and sensible critic."52

But the lapse of years had diminished the bitterness of T. D. English's quarrel with Poe, and although he began his article for Independent53 with, "The disposition among those who knew Poe is to keep silent," he proceeded to take Woodberry to task for the "misstatements" in his biography of the poet,


nd branded them either as "willful and deliberate as well as malicious," or
their author as creator of charges "without any basis." "Mr. Woodberry blows
out and cold in the same breath," averred English, and added that his condemna-

tion of Poe strongly approached the brutal. With the following important

declaration, Poe's once most vociferous of enemies rebuked the scholarly

tographer for one of the accusations he termed totally false:

Mr. Woodberry charges boldly that Poe was an opium eater, and Mr.
Ingram makes the same statement, but more obscurely. ... Had Poe
the opium habit when I knew him, I should, both as a physician and
a man of observation, have discovered it during his frequent visits
to my rooms, my visits at his house and our meetings elsewhere. I
saw no signs of it, and believe the charge to have been a baseless
slander. 54

his testimony, coming as it did from a doctor and articulate foe, was a potent
 antidote for the old fiction of drug addiction. Continuing his article in the
 November fifth issue of Independent, 55 English explained Poe's intemperance on
the score of poverty's driving him to seek relief in alcohol—and attributed
is poverty to the writer's being underpaid. "But," added English, "while his
casional lapses from sobriety may be readily excused, his constant mendacity
and deceit are capable of only one explanation. The intellectual faculties of
overbalanced the rest, and the animal faculties dwarfed the moral." 56 Mr.
glish cited as an example of the poet's lack of principle the "good joke" Poe
played on Griswold and then regaled his friends with when he palmed off on
an unsuspecting anthologist a derogatory review of his Poets and Poetry of
rica and accepted the fee for it before Griswold could read and discover its

54 Ibid., 2.
55 Ibid., November 5, 4-5.
56 Ibid., 4.
impertinence. English could never forget this piece of roguery, and at the time of the 1891 account, it was the chief complaint he registered against the man he had once battered ruthlessly with the taunt of drunkard.

Two new contestants joined in the literary warfare in 1893, both allying themselves with the Poe forces. Esme Stuart, in The Nineteenth Century, decided that "[t]he John Bull section of society" had settled the matter in the United States of what Poe was most to be admired for, "by pointing to the manner of his death, which proved to them that his literary work was worthless." In appraising the nineteenth century for its reception of Poe and his French brothers, Mr. Stuart concluded that it was not a period to be extolled for its dreams, but a materialistic age, one noted for its common sense and material progress. In the Dial, John Burroughs concurred with the British critic, Edmund W. Gosse, in his opinion that failure to include Poe's works in the list of ten best American books was indeed "extraordinary and sinister."  

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57 Bayless, Griswold, 70, declares that the anthologist was not the dupe Poe considered him. He paid for the unpleasant review because he felt the critic's name might help his book—even if what he said was not courteous. He was not altogether pleased when he read the criticism, but rather than have Poe think he had withheld publication he gave it to the Boston Miscellany, which printed it, November, 1842.


59 Ibid., 80.

60 "Mr. Gosse's Puzzle over Poe," The Dial, XV, October, 1893, 214-215.

61 Ibid., 214.
Early in 1894, Richard Stoddard was back on the scene with an article in *Independent* on the social life of Poe contemporaries. The devastating Mrs. Osgood, Stoddard revealed, had proved a source of rancor between Poe and Griswold, for the poet was enamored of her "or fancied he was, which with him was the same thing. . . . But Poe had a rival in her affections in Dr. Griswold, whom she transformed for the moment into an impassioned poet."63

Also in 1894, George Woodberry felt called upon to come to the defense of Rufus Griswold—the defamer-turned defamed. In *Century Magazine* he wrote:

No piece of biography in the annals of literature has so unenviable a reputation as the Memoir which Dr. Rufus W. Griswold, acting as Poe's literary executor, prefixed to the first complete edition of his works. Its authenticity has been attacked from the time of its appearance. . . . At the same time very little of its substance has ever been invalidated.65

Woodberry next quoted critic J. C. Derby as writing that Griswold deserved gratitude for the task of publishing Poe, and that he had received no compensation; he cited publisher J. S. Redfield's declaration that certain critics had done great injustice to Griswold for his trouble. Then Woodberry continued, "It is fashionable nowadays to throw mud at Griswold. Knowing, as I did, both of the men, and knowing, also, how assiduously Griswold labored to say everything he could in the biography in Poe's favor, it is very annoying to read these things." Woodberry also claimed that in fairness to the biographer,
one must acknowledge that the characterization he gave Poe "has uniformly prevailed in tradition in the best-informed literary circles in this country." He declared that in undertaking his task of committing the subject's personality to paper, he had investigated the charges of forgery, etc., and was convinced Griswold's documents were genuine, and that the errors were traceable to Poe's own falsehoods. "Far from blackening Poe's character," insisted the Griswold defender, "he might easily have made a worse use of his opportunity had he been actuated by malice." Woodberry quoted as evidence of Poe's drinking habit, the letter of T. W. White to his young editor in 1835, advising him to "separate [himself] from the bottle, and bottle-companions, for ever," and Poe's statement in a letter to Kennedy in 1836: "I have since then [receiving a letter from Kennedy] fought the enemy manfully." Mr. Woodberry was obviously convinced of Poe's moral degradation. He had concluded his biography with such declarations as, "He ate opium and drank liquor," and "In imagination, as in action, his was an evil genius. . . . The pitiful justice of Poe's fate, the dark immortality of his fame, were accomplished." 

*The Nation* asserted it found Woodberry's introductory Memoir to the new edition of Poe's works censorious, contemptuous, without tolerance, and replete with unimportant but depreciatory facts. It was a difficult task, of course,
to write of Poe's unfortunate and unlovely actual life; by contrast to his brilliant literary achievement, the facts were pitifully sordid and squalid. Professor Woodberry's fault was not that he was guilty of deliberate disparagement, but that he was lacking in mercy, and a biographer ought to be more objective. Two weeks later William McChilliss Griswold, son of the reverend anthologist, replied to the May 2 review in Nation with a letter to the editor. In treating of Poe's character, he emphasized that the poet's worst faults were not drunkenness and irritable temper, but "utter lack of honor." William Griswold cited as evidence of dishonor the disparaging criticism Poe had written of his father's book and for which he brazenly collected a fee—the same incident that Thomas D. English had found the most unpardonable of all Poe's failings. Evidently Poe's type of humor, for he had considered hoodwinking the anthological czar a clever trick, did not coincide with other critics' ideas of humor, and it caused him to be marked down as untruthful.

Since the controversy over Poe's reputation amounted virtually to a war among the literati, it was to be expected that many critics and nearly all his biographers should be at times targets of malediction. As Rufus Griswold had come in for his share of anathema from critics, Professor Woodberry was now earning some restrained but unfavorable comment for his unsympathetic attitude in handling the facts of Poe's biography. The Outlook, recalling Woodberry's earlier Memoir with its aloofness, coldness, and lack of sympathy that "jarred"

71 Ibid.

72 "Poe's Moral Nature," Nation, LX, May 16, 1895, 381-382. William M. Griswold was editor of his father's correspondence, as previously noted in this thesis.

readers, noted that the professor in the new edition of Poe maintained his old attitude: He "is exact, he is truthful, and he is distinctly critical in his attitude toward the poet." But the reviewer added that sympathetic insight was, perhaps, the only key to a man's nature. Goethe had said that "without sympathy, true criticism is impossible." Contrasting Woodberry's attitude with that of his collaborator, Edmund C. Stedman, Outlook pointed out the latter biographer's "judicious, clear, and sympathetic" manner. "Mr. Stedman has achieved a rare distinction among those who have treated of Poe, in that he has so well preserved his poise." The reviewer stated succinctly what seems to be an accurate picture of Poe criticism, and concluded with his personal opinion:

Most critics and biographers have either made Poe a saint, or submersed him completely in the mud of his own vices. Poe was not a saint in any sense of the word, nor on the other hand, was he an unreclaimed and irreclaimable sinner. He had terrible and pathetic weaknesses; he limited and finally destroyed his own life by them; but he also had fine qualities and great gifts.

A letter from Thomas H. Lane, the man to whom Poe had ceded his half interest in the Broadway Journal in 1846, was published in Independent in 1896. It was addressed to Thomas D. English and recalled to that gentleman how excited Poe had been accustomed to become when he was drunk, how angry with him. "I could add much to the slime which has flowed over his memory," wrote Lane,

74 Edgar Allan Poe, (Romances of Death; Old-World Romances), eds., Edmund C. Stedman and George E. Woodberry, with "Memoir" by George E. Woodberry, and Introduction by Edmund C. Stedman, New York, 1894.


76 See Kenneth Rede, "Poe Notes: From An Investigator's Notebook," AL, V, March, 1933, 49-51, who furnishes information on this subject that other biographers fail to give.

"but will not. . . . His wants were largely in excess of his ability to procure what they demanded, and, no doubt . . . drove him to submerge his troubles in that which made his manhood disappear." The poet was continually "on the rack of poverty." "It is not difficult to be decently gentle and agreeable in prosperity," admitted Lane, "but to face smilingly the aggravations of want is not possible to many natures, and surely was not to his." 78

As the end of the century approached, fewer magazine articles appeared by writers who had known Edgar Poe personally. The newer critics gathered their data from predecessors—and the cudgels of opposing factions were passed on to a new generation and into a new century. Before the nineteenth century's close, however, a decided landmark in the recognition of Poe as poet and writer of tales—he was infrequently mentioned as a critic—was reached. In the year 1897 the Poe Memorial Association was founded, and on the fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death, October 7, 1899, at the Public Hall of the University of Virginia, "with brilliant ceremonies" the bronze bust by George Julian Zolnay was unveiled. The Poe-cult was becoming a fixture in American literature—although it would be another ten years before the poet's name would be shouldered into New York's Hall of Fame. 79 However, the fact that Samuel Allibone contrived in his 1899 edition of Dictionary of English Literature 80 to embalm the "sad

78 Ibid.

79 The Baltimore Sun, October 11, 1905, writing of Poe's rejection to the Hall of Fame, concluded an editorial, "Poe's Critic," with, "Were Poe alive he would rather remain outside New York's Hall of Fame than be inside with the mediocrities there assembled." Article found in E. A. Poe Scrapbook, Newberry Library, Chicago; it is unsigned.

80 Dictionary, II, 1614. This reference has been previously cited in thesis.
story of the deplorable fruits of transgression," seemed to warrant sculptor Zolnay's remark that Poe "was more sinned against than sinning." In 1900 Independent observed that the movement to efface from the memory of the University of Virginia's most famous alumnus "the slanders of Griswold and others" was making headway, and that Tennyson's belief that Poe "was the most original genius that America had produced" set a seal upon his fame.

In 1901, shortly before the appearance of the Virginia edition of Poe the Forum reflected that the first defamer's "spiteful and vicious" Memoir had set the fashion in critical thinking and had been blindly adhered to for many years, and that defenders in going to the opposite extreme had done just as much harm as the defamers: proximity to Poe's lifetime had distorted the picture. The writer, counting off the charges of gross immorality, habitual drunkenness, ingratitude, scoffing, and acting the libertine, countered with his reminder that Poe had inherited from his parents, stage people, a lack of self-control; he was reared in a household where "liberal potations seem to have been encouraged"; he fought the inherited tendency and childhood example all through his mature years "until at last he yielded and sank down in utter despair." As for the morality of Poe's works, they were "as chaste as an icicle."

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81 Letter to the Poe Memorial Association: Executive Committee, Poe Memorial; quoted in Kent, Unveiling of the Bust of Edgar Allan Poe, 78.


84 Ibid., 501-502.
The Academy proclaims that the author with the gift of arabesquing his own life had no predecessor and no authentic successor—except perhaps, in the Stevenson of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The London journal tended to confuse the author and his tales: "To consider Poe is to consider his tales, to consider the tales is to consider Poe." The spirit of Poe's work was Celtic: the Celtic temperament would go far to explain Poe's weakness and strength; his brilliant caprice, his pride and passion, his literary quarrels, his lack of robust moral stamina, his ready enslavement to alcohol. Persisting in making nationality answerable for erratic tendencies, the British critic dogmatized that "Celtic visionariness, with its lack of hold on earth," was responsible for Poe's Shelley-likeness. He was obsessed with haunting beauty that belongs to the "world of an opium-eater."

In 1902 Professor James A. Harrison published his scholarly and painstaking work known as the Virginia Edition of Poe. It was a landmark in the history of Poe criticism and was hailed as the fairest biography yet to appear. A reviewer for Outlook, labeling his article significantly, "The Real Poe," stated that Professor Harrison was sympathetic—mindful of Goethe's requisite for true criticism—that he had examined the Poe texts for themselves.

85 "A Dreamer of Things Impossible," The Academy, LXI, September, 1901, 263-264. Article unsigned.

86 Ibid., 263.

87 Ibid.


89 "The Real Poe," The Outlook, LXXII, November 8, 1902, 581-582. Article unsigned.
not merely quoted them as Griswold had arranged them; that he did his own collating: he told facts—unvarnished—but understandingly.90 A similar opinion was expressed the following month by another reviewer for the same magazine.91 And so, with the advent of Professor Harrison's detailed work, the long and bitter controversy that had laid bare the naïveté and petty differences of critics in an era that was articulate if not always artistic, left the nineteenth century behind.

90 Ibid., 581.
91 Ibid., December 20, 1902, 947-948.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The potency of nineteenth-century journalism in shaping popular and critical opinion of the character of Edgar Allan Poe can scarcely be overestimated. Newspapers and literary magazines with their firecracker articles were the earliest battleground of critics; the cannonading was then taken up by anthologies and biographies. In 1895 Andrew Lang, in Letters to Dead Authors, addressed Poe:

"As a literary people," you wrote, "we are one vast perambulating humbug." After that declaration of war you died, and left your reputation to the vanities yet writhing beneath your scorn. They are writhing and writing still.

And so are critics "writing still," more than another half-century later, as if fascinated with the "problem" of the poet's enigmatic character or with sharing in the role of controversialist.

F. O. Matthiessen has said of the persistence of the controversy:

Concerning none of our other major nineteenth-century authors has there been anything like the critical disagreement that still rages around Edgar Allan Poe. . . . The controversy . . . about the facts of his life has been almost as violent ever since Baudelaire visualized him as the young aristocrat, 'le Byron égaré dans un mauvais monde,' while the reverend Rufus Griswold pointed to his career as a satanic example and warning.

Henry Seidel Canby has classified Poe as one of those unfortunate men

1 Andrew Lang, "To Edgar Allan Poe," Letters to Dead Authors, New York, 1895, 113.

2 "Poe," Sewanee Review, LIV, 175.
touched with greatness who make legends, and who, "having contradictions in themselves . . . induce contradictions in others." Indeed, the present trend in the controversy seems to be a preoccupation with the "contradictions"--a conspicuous departure from the nineteenth-century denunciation of the poet's "amorality" to a twentieth-century obsession with his abnormality. Walter Taylor, comparing the two eras of criticism, declares that whereas Poe was formerly labeled a demon and consigned to perdition by men "of rock-bound respectability," now he is labeled as a case and consigned to a psychopathic ward by men with a smattering of complexes and neuroses. The mass of writing in this latter vein, however, even as the moralizing of the former century, presupposes an acceptance, whether conscious or unconscious, of the early Griswold fabrications!

In the present century a number of writers are responsible for perpetuating the dope theme, despite the fact, as Arthur Hobson Quinn has pointed out, that evidence of drug addiction cannot be found. Jeanette Mark in 1925 published her convictions in a book entitled Genius and Disaster: Studies in Drugs and Genius; as late as 1953 American Mercury printed an article after the old pattern and referred to "Edgar's excessive love for


5 Quinn, Poe, 693.

6 Jeanette Mark, Genius and Disaster: Studies in Drugs and Genius, New York, 1925.

7 Ethel Wacks, "There Are Two Sides to Every Story," American Mercury, LXXVII, October, 1953, 67.
liquor and opium." A recent poem, "Charles Baudelaire," likewise makes the claim of drug domination in Poe's life.

This that he shared alone with Edgar Poe,

The opium trance on one who rode the wave

Of Hell's wrath to the last: this vertigo

Built high a song to daunt the stupid brave. 8

The alcoholism in Poe's brief career has continued to receive exaggerated attention at the hands of many writers: Newman Flower, with a sensational title makes the poet "the most interesting sinner in literature"; 9 Dorothy Dow's fictionized biography is charged with super-Byronic flavor and a sake-to-drink-whenever-things-get-dull effect; 10 Albert Parry postulates that American Bohemianism began with the tragic Poe; 11 dramatic productions like Plumes in the Dust, 12 help preserve the story. A 1953 anthology of Great poems 13 makes the statement that Poe as an editor "could no longer exist without stimulants," and asserts unnecessarily, if also inaccurately, "For every friend he made he lost two. He fluttered for a while in literary dovecots among the female poets' of the day, a bedraggled raven among the twitterers." 14

8 John Gould Fletcher, "Charles Baudelaire," Poetry, LXXXIV, August, 1951, 279.


10 Dorothy Dow, Dark Glory, New York, 1931.


12 Sophia Treadwell, Plumes in the Dust, New York, 1936.


14 Ibid., 287.
In the Lawrence and Krutch tradition of psychoanalyzing the poet, Philip Lindsay has published (1953) a biography entitled *The Haunted Man: A Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe*. That Poe was a dipsomaniac, an opium addict, Lindsay insists. From his Freudian point of view he sees the poet's devotion to the memory of his deceased mother and foster-mother and his love for the frail Virginia as an urge to necrophilia, his yearning to belong to a family, a symbol of obsession with incest, and his frenzy during his wife's illnesses, ambivalence. Illustrative of the dissension within the "abnormality" camp itself is the criticism of Lindsay's episodic book. As opposed to N. B. Fagin's objection to the preposterous "repetition of romantic exaggerations," New Republic, reviewing the book, affirms that Poe was absolutely concerned with the disintegration processes of his own psyche; his language is "a Freudian censor; he is Joyce going the other way." As to Poe's whole character the battle remains indecisive. Sputterings of the old quarrel may be heard in various quarters. In 1927 Alfred Noyes and James B. Whitty exchanged opinions brusquely across the Atlantic. Two decades later the uninhibited Yvor Winters, emulating, perhaps, W. C. Brownell

15 Philip Lindsay, *The Haunted Man: A Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe*, London, 1953. This biography is hald, crude; some of its assertions are unauthentic, and what is true is twisted into Freudian grotesqueness.

16 N. Bryllion Fagin, "Dean of Symbolists," SRL, XXXVII, September 4, 1951, 16-17.


before him, expressed little praise for scholars who waste scholarship and time on Poe. He inveighed against the "American specialists in Poe, [who] exhibit a kind of bucolic innocence which at times simply paralyzes comment; they appear not to have the vaguest idea of the kind of devilment with which they are dealing." V. S. Pritchett as representative of present-day Poe-opponents sounds rather heated on the subject. Agreeing with Lawrence who averred that Poe blasphemed against the Holy Ghost within him because he never laughed, Pritchett in 1949 compiled choice phrases to hurl at the "electric, positive neurotic, wilful madman," in one extraordinary epitaph: "Poe the alcoholic, Poe the incestuous, Poe the unconscious homo-sexual, Poe the Irishman, the Southerner, the derelict, Poe isolated in American life and ruined by the odeur de magazine." And this despite the efforts of careful modern scholars to point up the fallacies in the old pattern!

The disintegration theme in the controversy is not to be neglected. Sponsored by a host of Lawrence and Krutch disciples, it has even been commemorated in a ballet-biography presented by the Columbia Theatre Associates of Columbia University. Interpretative dancing and scenery are designed to portray the gradual disintegration of the poet; settings become increasingly fragmentary.

19 Brownell, American Prose Masters, 1218, decried the Poe-cult, built as it was, on the "people's imagining him something quite other than the reality."


21 Lawrence, Studies in American Literature, 107.

as the dance progresses, and the final scene is presented on a bare stage.  

What Campbell, Quinn, Hutcherson, and Tate, along with other present-century critics, have attempted to disprove, what Fagin, Braddy, and other would-be defenders have ferreted out—all discussion still adds up to a continuation of the long-lived contest. It seems as if Charles Heartman's inelegant pronunciation in 1936 might be applicable even in the current decade—that Poe-critics, however agreeable in other circumstances, "would certainly kill each other" if the topic of Poe were approached in their gathering.

The effects of the controversy are still reflected in the divergent chronicles found in students' textbooks of American literature. As typical of two opposing lines of thought in the present decade may be cited the essays in The United States in Literature of 1952, and in the 1952 edition of Adventures in American Literature. The former states:

Poe's supernatural tales were not, as some believe, the products of a disordered mind, or of a mind stimulated by drink and drugs. Horror stories—'Gothic tales' as they were then called—were all the rage in Poe's day, and he wrote them to satisfy a definite demand. But Poe's supernatural stories have been remembered, while others of his day have been forgotten. The reason is simply that he had a well-worked-out formula for writing them, and he used it with great skill and imagination, while most other authors were satisfied with less effective methods.

The biographical sketch in the other textbook refers sympathetically to the poet's talent and his weakness, but reiterates the early Griswold version of his university career and adult life. Of the year at Charlottesville, it states, "He spent a wild year there, for he moved in a set with whom drinking

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and gambling were fashionable, and Poe never did anything by halves";25 and then it continues:

When he lost twenty-five hundred dollars in a card game, he was taken out of the University and put into Mr. Allan's business. That didn't work either. He . . . didn't like his job. He ran away.26 Later he enlisted as a soldier under an assumed name. Mr. Allan rescued him from that and had him appointed to West Point,27 but Poe was dismissed within a year. Thereafter he had to go it alone.

And this sentence follows: "The rest of the story is not pretty."28 Such contrasting evaluations are merely a continuation of what is to be found throughout a century's elapse of time—with the romantic account holding a heavy margin, as far as school textbooks are concerned.

And so, bringing the controversy to a modern position among critics, there is the belief of Charles Walcutt, who after citing Professor H. H. Clark's repudiation of Krutch's and Roberston's theories in his Major American Poets in 1936, declares that "Poe's present status . . . is that of a sane and rational individual—a Platonist with a sharply analytical mind," and that "the sole dissenting voice is that of Yvor Winters."29 But there is also N. B. Fagin posing his problem in 1949:

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26 See the March 19, 1827, letter in the Valentine Collection, (Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia) for the reasons Poe left the Allan home. In the letter to his foster-father, Poe makes accusations which that gentleman did not, and probably could not, refute.

27 Quinn, Poe, 136-137, prints the letter Mr. Allan wrote as a "recommendation" to West Point; its surly tone belies the above statement. A further discussion applicable to the above quotation can be found in Laura Benet's Young Edgar Allan Poe, New York, 1941.

28 Inglis, et al., Adventures in American Literature, 505.

Was Poe Griswold's scoundrel or Baudelaire's saint, one of the holy army of martyrs? Was he Lavriere's congenital degenerate or Hanns Heinz Ewer's dreamer 'beautiful in body and mind'? Was he the satanic genius, the poet of hell, who like Lucifer, fell from sheer intellectual pride, or was he a great spiritual writer?30

The author of this study, after considering objectively a representative portion of more than a century's accumulation of diverse opinion, believes that the portrait of Edgar Poe's character has been much overdrawn. She believes also that the controversy is by no means settled in the minds of many persons. The widely publicized fictions in early popular and literary magazines struck roots in the romantic imagination of the period and they have persisted in critical as well as popular belief to the present. The picture is difficult to get into focus. But as this author views the portrait, she finds in Poe a hyper-sensitive, nervous—at times erratic—individual who may have enjoyed being somewhat unorthodox and who could on occasion be melodramatic. But the man was not Bohemian in the sense of living "out of space, out of time," and he was not as Fagin's "histrionic Mr. Poe," striving for a tragic tone. There was too much of real tragedy in his brief life.

Spoiled in childhood and deprived of wholesome parental guidance, Edgar Poe was ill prepared to face the rigors of life after his eviction from the Allan home. Insecurity and bitterness at his fate played havoc with his artistic temperament. Continued deprivation of home life and affection nurtured a rebellious disposition and a cynicism that found outlet in the "phial of prussic acid." Unable to endure any occupation but that of his own inclination—writing, impatient of submission to less talented editors of magazines, and

frustrated in financing the literary journal of his dreams, Poe resorted at intervals to drinking. Unfortunately for him, "one glass" of the heady vintage was sufficient to make him conspicuous. Hence the reputation he won.

He was generally in extreme penury—writing being a notoriously non-lucrative profession. And in Poe's aesthetic and married life, poverty was sheer tragedy. If his letters to women of means and his pleas for aid sound like drivel, an understanding of the need impelling them makes them less obnoxious. After the death of his wife, Poe could scarcely be held accountable for the neuroticism that dogged his days to the bitter end. Something snapped within him; he had not been able with his writer's fee to avert domestic disaster; he was not by nature or training emotionally prepared to meet any crisis, much less the fatal loss of one who was family to him. Perhaps this destitution accounts for his simultaneous Platonic affairs with literary women, the so-called sweethearts—of whom he gained posthumously not a few.

Edgar Poe's personal history reads like a tragedy—wherein the protagonist struggles and loses. His fate is comparable to that of many another writer except for the romantic survival of its story with colorful details and fantastic interpretations that go on and on. In tracing the amazing controversy about him to its originator, one may conclude in the language of "Ulalume" that October ninth of the "Ludwig Article" proved the poet's prophetic

... night in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year,
and that it was in his own "ghoul-haunted woodland" that the plumes of his Psyche were weighted down "Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust." That dust warring critics have stirred in such clouds that it has not cleared through more than a century. One might even say that the war is cyclic—with a present
decade writer like Lindsay denouncing the malice of Griswold, and then out-
Griswolding that biographer himself.

And that is where the interested spectator finds the contest at present: unsettled, perplexing, with the belligerents of this generation still ready to "kill one another" at the mention of the name of Edgar Allan Poe. Thus thoroughly did nineteenth-century journalism prove the truth of Poe's early observation that the magazine would become "the most influential of all the departments of Letters."
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The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Gabriella Magrath, B.V.M. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

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James F. Young
Signature of Adviser