

The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe







NORTHWEST BANCORPORATION and its 49 affiliated banks in Minnesota are proud to be associated with the University of Minnesota, the University Foundation and the Minnesota Opera Company in an extraordinary Bicentennial project, *The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe*.

It is our wish that this book will provide patrons attending the World Premiere of Minnesota composer Dominick Argento's opera with a keener understanding of the life and times of Edgar Allan Poe, his influence on the arts, and insights into themes developed in the opera.

Articles by a distinguished group of contributors, an extensive selection of photographs, drawings and paintings, and the complete text of the libretto by Charles Nolte comprise the commemorative book. We present it with pleasure to all who made this important occasion possible.



Henry T. Rutledge  
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COMMEMORATING THE WORLD PREMIERE  
OF

*The Voyage  
of Edgar Allan Poe*

AN OPERA IN TWO ACTS BY DOMINICK ARGENTO

*Commissioned by the University of Minnesota and  
sponsored by the University of Minnesota Foundation*

PRESENTED BY THE MINNESOTA OPERA COMPANY  
I.A. O'SHAUGHNESSY AUDITORIUM, COLLEGE OF SAINT CATHERINE,  
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA \* APRIL 24, 1976

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*Edgar Allan Poe. Statue by Sir Moses Ezekiel in Wyman Park, Baltimore. Inscription : Edgar Allan Poe, January 1809 – October 1849.*

*(Photo by David J. Speer)*

## *Dreaming Dreams*

### *No Mortal Ever Dared To Dream Before*



#### **RICHARD LACK**

*Richard Lack, who designed the cover, is a native of Minneapolis. He studied painting with the eminent Boston painter, R. H. Ives Gammell, in the French atelier tradition. He is founder and director of Atelier Lack, Inc., in Minneapolis, a studio school of fine arts with a program based on the apprentice system of the old masters. Lack has had numerous one-man shows and exhibited widely throughout the country, winning many awards. His portrait commissions include several done for former ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy of Hyannisport, Massachusetts. He is the region's foremost exponent of classical realism and is listed in Who's Who in American Art, Who's Who in International Art and Antiques, and the International Biography.*





## How the Opera Came to Be

*The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe* has been commissioned by the University of Minnesota in commemoration of America's Bicentennial. The project began in late 1973 when Dominick Argento, Professor in the University's Department of Music, petitioned for a short leave to write a chamber opera. The College of Liberal Arts committee that reviews applications for leaves suggested that this modest project should be expanded. Roy Schuessler, then chairman of the University's Department of Music, and Frank Sorauf, Dean of CLA, agreed with this suggestion and determined that this should be a major Bicentennial project for the University. Acting Academic Vice President Harold Chase brought the proposal to Elmer L. Andersen, then Chairman of the Board of Regents, and the Regents commissioned the University's first opera.

The University Foundation accepted the responsibility for obtaining funds to finance copying and printing of the score and libretto. Northwest Bancorporation underwrote this phase of the commission.

Early in this process the Minnesota Opera Company was contacted, and arrangements were made for the Opera Company to present this new work during its 1975-76 season. The Minnesota Opera Company is an appropriate choice to present the premiere of this opera because of its national reputation for the performance of new operas and because it has premiered two other Argento works: *The Masque of Angels* in its 1963-64 season and *Postcard from Morocco* in 1971.

Another early participant was Charles M. Nolte, Professor in the Department of Theatre Arts, who agreed to write this libretto. H. Wesley Balk, Associate Professor in Theatre Arts, was selected to be stage director.

The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, renowned Minnesota musical organization, is taking part in *The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe* under direction of Philip Brunelle, Music Director of the Minnesota Opera Company. Sets and costumes have been designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch, noted theatrical designer who was a lifelong colleague of the late Sir Tyrone Guthrie.

The University of Minnesota has provided further practical support for the production. Thomas Lancaster, Associate Professor in the Music Department, selected 20 members of the University's Chamber Singers to sing in the opera chorus. They have practiced three times each week during winter quarter as part of their regular class schedule. A similar activity has been organized by James Bakkom, former Property Master and Artist in Residence at the Guthrie Theatre, who is supervising creation of props for the opera in his University Theatre Arts class in set design.

Dr. Argento has been a member of the Minnesota music faculty for 18 years. He previously has composed seven operas and numerous other compositions, including the song cycle *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1975. Dr. Argento selected Edgar Allan Poe as subject for this opera because the colorful elements of Poe's life and his role as a giant in American literature during our country's first century offered strong materials from which to create an operatic work. He has focused on the legend of evil that has been attached to both Poe the man and Poe the creative writer. The composer asks us to discard many of the facile images of Poe as a neurotic and intemperate romantic. However, in rebuilding an image of Poe's genius, we are asked to concentrate on the relationship of a man to his own character in its darker as well as its more humane dimensions.







# From a Composer's Journal



by Dominick Argento

The following passages are taken from a diary I kept during the composition of "The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe." The diary was never meant to be published; it was intended to serve as a personal record of the compositional experience and as a reminder in later years of how the work progressed from idea to reality — something I am always unable to recall with earlier pieces of mine.

In November of 1975 I read portions of the journal to an audience of National Opera Association members. Some of them urged me to make the diary available. I have agreed to do so, providing the text appears exactly as first written, faults and all, without altering or polishing it. If an occasional remark seems somewhat self-congratulatory (as others may seem self-critical) I can only defend their inclusion by admitting that I want the diary to reflect my thoughts and moods at the time the entries were composed. Modesty might suggest discreet editing, but doing so would falsify the account and diminish what little value these remarks may possess as an accurate record. The deleted sections and omissions are portions I consider to be of no interest to anyone but myself, or are of a purely private nature beyond the scope of this present purpose.

*January 13, 1974*

Sometime before Christmas, Frank Sorauf (Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota) broached the idea of the University commissioning an opera for the Bicentennial. Almost two years ago, in Florence, I came upon Thornton Wilder's "Heaven's My Destination" and felt strongly it would make an ideal Bicentennial work if a commission ever materialized. I continued to think about it believing it might just be a gentle, American "Wozzeck" sort of work. My only doubt centered on the necessarily naturalistic treatment the novel would demand . . . This past Monday or Tuesday — still worrying about the realistic element — it occurred to me that perhaps something could be done with the Tales of E. A. Poe, something fantastic and nonrealistic. The idea developed like this:

- 1) Maybe several short tales related around a single theme;
- 2) that brought to mind "Tales of Hoffmann;"
- 3) perhaps a frame around the Tales with Poe himself a character;
- 4) reading Poe's biography, I discovered the mysterious manner of his death: boarding a steamer at Richmond, he was found unconscious in a gutter in Baltimore one week later and died shortly thereafter — the intervening six or seven days (aboard the steamer) have never been accounted for;
- 5) within that framework (the mysterious voyage) several tales could be worked — all of it treated fancifully and fictionally: a possible title: "The Murder of Edgar Allan Poe."

I'll meet with Charles Nolte next Friday to get his reaction: his play about Strindberg is somewhat like the scheme I have in mind.

*January 18*

Lunched today with Nolte and explained my ideas about a Poe opera. He is fascinated by the locale — the packet-boat — and the possible variety of characters, especially Poe himself. His enthusiasm confirms my own conviction. He will begin "thinking" about it.

*January 24*

Been reading much Poe and criticism and becoming increasingly enthused about the possibilities. The important thing now is that the libretto be just right.



February 9

Duality should operate on several levels, if it doesn't confuse matters: The characters, so far, are

Poe (tenor)  
Griswold (baritone)  
Virginia (soprano)  
Annie (mezzo)  
Narrator (bass?)

Annie is a composite of all the women Poe courted (Sarah, Elmira, Helen, Frances, etc.). Perhaps her name should be Helen. Each real character equates with one of Poe's fictional creations:

Poe — Roderick Usher  
Virginia — Madelaine Usher (sister)  
Griswold — William Wilson (Imp of the Perverse)  
Annie/Helen — Ligeia  
Narrator — Captain Hardy/Dupin?

Furthermore, Poe = Griswold

Virginia = Annie

Too fancy???

Also, I wonder whether any Tales should appear complete? Or only characters and incidents from them? I hope I can begin to discuss this next week with Nolte. Left to myself, ideas merely continue to float around in air.

February 19

Charles to lunch yesterday. We had a first lengthy talk — or monologue — on the opera. I gave him five typed pages of notes and suggestions. All of them seemingly acceptable to him.

May 5

Almost two month lapse here. I'm definitely not the diarist type. Yesterday the "Woolf" cycle was completed. Despite my feeling at the outset on March 27 that I would compose slowly and stretch it out, the eight songs were completed in just over five weeks, and — I think, now at least — they are the best vocal writing I've done. Probably because the text is the best I've ever worked with: each song was sketched out in two or three days with only one or two false starts among the collection. I think this is because the mood in each excerpt is so pure and clear, private and simple. How ideal for opera, but I don't imagine V. W. would have plotted well enough for anything of that length.

I must see that the Poe libretto concludes on an 'emotional' note — don't exactly know what I mean, though. It seems to me that the best quality in "Letters," "Postcard" and now "Woolf" is the emotional impact they carry; it seems my strongest point. And when I think over the ends of "Mask of Night," "Bravo Mozart!" and especially "Ring of Time" I see it is part of my ritual to go for poignant conclusions, usually pianissimo.

May 27

Tomorrow I send "Woolf" songs to Boosey & Hawkes and on to Janet Baker. I wonder if she will 'react' to them. I notice this diary says nothing about the composition of that diary! On May 15th, N.E.A. renewed the grant for my own libretto of the Chekhov monologue. Since Charles still needs the summer to write the Poe text, I'll start the monodrama next. It is strange, though, to be writing a piece with no performance or occasion in mind. Frankly, I wish I were starting the Poe: the idea of beginning in September with only 12 months for a full-length piece is a bit tight.

October 3

At the rate things are entered in this diary, this little volume could last a lifetime. The previous entry speaks about the completion of the song cycle. I began the N.E.A. monodrama sometime after that (end of June?) and finished it in vocal score last week — not a word is written here. The timing was just right: tomorrow I meet with Nolte to see his efforts on the Poe opera. I can't imagine what he'll have. He's been slower than I expected. Luckily, the Chekhov has kept me occupied. The monodrama has turned out well, I think. It was a very concentrated two or three months of work and, as a result, seems very tight to me — compact and rich, highly organized and yet free-ranging. Certainly the best crack at characterization I've made. Probably as a result of coming fresh from "Woolf." As much as I think the Chekhov works (now titled "A Water Bird Talk"), I hope to make the Poe still freer, more adventurous — but can I? Does one really have any control over these things? Just two weeks ago, approaching the end of the monodrama, I decided to dawdle over the ending — try out various things. But instead, the last ten minutes or so were sketched out effortlessly in a single day. So effortlessly that I thought it wouldn't stand and I spent a week trying to improve on it, only to find that the original idea worked best. (Verdi's: "Art without spontaneity is lifeless.") Perhaps now, with a libretto in sight, this notebook will gather less dust.

October 7

Saturday last, at 3 p.m., Charles read to me Act I of the Poe opera (and snippets of Act II). A great disappointment, leaving me much depressed. By today I had hoped to be starting the music: as it is, we are starting the libretto again tomorrow! His first act — (odd, that he went ahead and wrote without the conferences we had discussed: he indicated he would show me trial scenes and several possible scenarios — instead Act I was *fait accompli*); as long as “Götterdämmerung” and twice as gloomy. All metaphysical talk and rhetoric — Poe on stage continuously, forever singing arias, and I think I counted half-a-dozen duets for Poe and Griswold. During the past 48 hours I’ve been trying to salvage something from the text. Certain scenes are fine, but I’ve recast the whole scenario and emphasis.

After doing this, I consulted the five or six pages of notes I gave Charles months ago: I see that my re-working agrees 100% with those notes, making me wonder if Charles ever looked at them. Still, I think something may yet come of this, but this is my first time playing the role Puccini always played with his librettists. Charles comes tomorrow and we will go over my new 10 pages of notes. I’ve set up seven scenes and sketched out roughly what goes on in each. I feel strange telling a teacher of playwrighting how to construct a drama, but, where libretti are concerned, I have some experience, and I do know my own strengths (what I *can* set to music and what I can’t). No doubt Charles will accept my views, but will he bring about what I *mean*? This subject, above most others, means walking a very fine line between the serious and the melodramatic, the imaginative and the silly, the profound and the pompous.

October 8

Charles here between 4 and 6 p.m. I spent this morning and early afternoon reviewing and refining my notes for Charles. As I did so, my enthusiasm was revived — the shape and tone are back where I want them without too much violence to Charles’ script, although more than half was discarded. Keeping the spine of six of his scenes, it is possible to alter the tone and — like V. Woolf — I saw the fin again, out in the distant sea — far out, but at least it *is* the fish I hoped to net.

It occurred to me during the revisions that I might have done the libretto myself. I *am* pleased with the monodrama, but I lack the confidence to tackle anything as ambitious as ‘Poe.’ And yet, in the revising, I could see the entire ‘Poe’ very clearly — but perhaps this is only because I had Charles’ first draft to build on, as I had the Chekhov to build on. I feel that Act I will work very well. Act II remains a question mark. Perhaps it will have to undergo a transformation similar to Act I.



### **CHARLES NOLTE, Librettist**

*Charles Nolte was born in Duluth, Minnesota, and moved to the Twin Cities in the 1930s. He received his bachelor’s degree in 1947 from Yale University and his master’s in 1963 and Ph.D. in 1965 from the University of Minnesota.*

*For eight years after college graduation Nolte was a professional actor in New York City and appeared in many Broadway productions. He had the title role in Billy Budd, was Wilhe Keith in The Caine Mutiny Courtmartial, Silius in Antony and Cleopatra and Payne in Mister Roberts. He last appeared as an actor in New York in 1965 in his own drama Do Not Pass Go, produced at the Cherry Lane Theatre. He has also performed in London, Munich, Stockholm, and many other cities in the United States, appearing with Henry Fonda, Katharine Cornell, Sir Godfrey Tearle, Judith Anderson, and Christopher Plummer among others.*

*In Hollywood from 1953 to 1955 and then in Europe for the next seven years Nolte was in numerous film and television productions, including Under Ten Flags, Ten Seconds to Hell, Armored Command, The Day Lincoln was Shot, and The Caine Mutiny Courtmartial. While abroad, he began his playwrighting career.*

*Since his return to Minneapolis in 1962 Nolte has been teaching at the University of Minnesota, currently as Professor in the Department of Theatre Arts leading seminars in playwrighting, directing, and theater history. Also, he has continued to act, write, and direct in the Twin Cities and elsewhere. Among his recent local productions are The Little Foxes and the University, Twelfth Night at the Children’s Theatre Company and his own adaptation of The Three Sisters at Theatre in the Round.*

*Nolte has directed all of his own plays in the Twin Cities area, and several have been seen in other cities in the United States and Europe. These include Do Not Pass Go, End of Ramadan, The Boarding House, Sea Change, Sister Heeno’s Warm Elbow, The Summer People, Bacchae ’65 and A Night at the Black Pig.*

*The libretto for The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe represents the author’s first experience in the opera field.*



October 31

On the 13th (Sunday) Charles brought the revised Act I much, much improved except for the finale, which he is re-doing. (Strange: Although he incorporated most of my suggestions, he ignored my ideas for this finale. But his is equally good, although I need some changes).

It is still too long. I've cut almost one-fifth (on my own). In any case, I began the music on October 14: Columbus Day — an auspicious time to launch this 'voyage of discovery,' I hope.

So far, about ten minutes of music. In the first six minutes, only percussion is used: the next four minutes uses only strings and a few woodwind touches. I want to save the full orchestra for the arrival of the ship. Also, at this point, I want to pause and think about both libretto and score a bit more.

The music must have a point of view — instrumental colors, motifs, etc., not fully thought out yet. (Griswold is about to arrive on stage and I think the problem now arises for individual music).

The libretto still bothers me. Is it only a fanciful biography of Poe? Somehow, the fantastic element isn't as strong as I envisioned and Poe's works (the tales, poems) are peripheral rather than central. I must look at it again for variety and a certain amount of madness. It seems too sane, too logical. Perhaps I must read it to some outsiders for reaction: I keep comparing it to the imaginary script I long ago concocted (the fin) and find the present script wanting. But it is very difficult to say where the discrepancy lies. Rather like pieces of music I imagine before writing them: the 'ideal' is so much richer and freer than the final result. Putting anything down on paper somehow impoverishes the mental picture. Maybe this has always been so. I will suspend judgment until Charles brings Act II.

November 15

Scene II virtually done.

Yesterday's workout was extremely productive. I could barely write fast enough to catch all the ideas. It took 16 hours to copy out my scribbles of yesterday morning. It also produced a sleepless night (ideas churning) and a slightly feverish condition — at least a headache.

Gradually, the piece is coming into focus: it is turning into the work I hoped it would be. Griswold certainly is a fascinating character: Poe, being the tenor, has less character, but better tunes.

December 15

One month since the last entry. At that time, I thought the 'Quintet' was practically finished, but it nagged at me for another two weeks and became finally a 'Septet' with chorus, intentionally modeled on the "Lucia" Sextet — very grand scale. It ought to be fine, but it was a lot of work.

Yesterday I almost completed Scene III (the quarrel with Allan) — a week's work. It is a mad gallop and rises to a nice climax, *alla quintetto*, for Poe's declaration. It has a whirlwind pace and should run about three minutes. Another deliberate model are those breathless trios in "Aida" and "Trovatore."

About 10 days ago, Bob Moore said "I hope your opera is a romantic one." Without thinking about it, I said it will be my middle Verdi opera alla "Rigoletto" or, really "Trovatore," which it most resembles in its darkness (night eternal), melodrama, *terribilità*. After saying this, I realized that that had been my intention from the outset, though never articulated. 'Poe' is so very 1849, it *has* to be Verdi. (Before actually realizing this, the early part of Scene II — the 'melodrama' of Mrs. Poe's death — I set as almost a parody of Donizetti-Bellini-early Verdi. Yesterday was the three-month mark since I started composing: I must be just about in the middle of Act I. Exactly on schedule.

December 24

Finished the Rowboat scene this morning — a week's work for six minutes of music. I think it ought to be enchanting. Really a trio, quite simple and tender for Poe and Virginia, and quietly ominous for Griswold. I hope it comes off as understated as I wish: I was going to avoid any climax (to contrast the bracketing scenes) but I couldn't resist just one 'forte' measure where it flashes by in a long sweeping crescendo-decrescendo. The orchestration is better than I hoped — nice woodwind and harp touches — no brass save horns — and mostly low strings for the boat-rocking effect. The character of Virginia comes out clearly (to me).

I only wish Act II libretto were finished . . . it worries me that I've come this far without a clearer notion of events in Act II. It must not, in any event, be a letdown or weakening. And I still want a lump-in-the-throat welling up of sympathy for the pitiful life Poe had. That, after all, is the point of dragging on stage the grotesque episodes of his biography. It must *account* for him.

January 20, 1975

Charles just left. Last Friday he brought two thirds of Act II. Good things in it, but all wrong for my purposes: the first three or four scenes were all gloom. All the following ones were peaks. I spent the weekend — in the same low spirits I had after seeing the first act draft — trying to salvage the work. This entailed doing a new

finale to Act I, which I hope will be a great improvement, and rearranging Act II material. The second death of Virginia came as an inspiration and ought to be a most thrilling scene, carrying the ‘Resurrection’ beyond being a mere ‘coup de theatre.’

Also, I had to weed out more metaphysical chatter: The difficulty for a dramatist-turned-librettist . . . is realizing how unimportant words are, how dull rational dialogue is in opera. In any case, I believe the scenario is right now for Act II, *only* it must not run on too long.

I am in the middle of the Wedding Scene now. It got off to a good start last week.

*February 5*

Just put finishing touches on the Wedding Scene. What a lot of hard work it has been! Most of January was spent on it . . . it runs 60 pages for 10 minutes of music. I hope the hard effort doesn’t show — that it doesn’t emerge as lifeless or belabored.

The next brief scene must be short and unmusical — recitative with piano and percussion most likely — to set the ground for the finale.

*February 28*

I stop in the middle of a section that is going very well this morning to enter a few words of apology for whatever doubts I’ve had about Nolte’s libretto. Often in Act I, I’ve ignored his arrangement to improvise something better, only to return in the end to his original version. After finding the musical solution for it, I discover it is really superior to my own makeshift. The section that is going so well is Poe’s ‘Boston Lecture’ in the finale — I think the big lyric statement here caps the scene (and Act) emotionally. Thank heavens we expanded it to allow the tune!

The only problem Act I poses anymore is the drinking ensemble and — more especially — how to end when Virginia appears. The close is the most difficult matter — no grand guignol, but still very exciting and thrilling. Perhaps by mid-March I’ll finish: a precise five months for the first Act.

*March 22*

I put the finishing touches to Act I this morning. The finale was more difficult than I thought: I don’t believe I’ve ever worked so hard and intensely before. I also believe it may be the most thrilling scene I’ve ever tried . . .

*March 25*

Charles brought the last two scenes yesterday. Actually, three of four scenes — a completely unexpected and unwelcome cemetery scene. And as per pattern, I was completely dejected — not at all what I expected or wanted. And, again, per pattern, with some juggling around, re- or de-emphasis, I found an order to make it possible, but it requires recasting half of the Act, particularly the opening. This, I’m afraid, means a delay beginning the Act II music. Charles came this morning to hear my reaction and, obliging as ever, he will re-cast it as I like. He agrees that my tightening does improve things. It also cuts more philosophical chatter and emphasizes the Orpheus-Eurydice myth in the background.

*April 21*

Almost a month since the last entry. A month of serious doubts about the work. A hard time getting started on the second act and a depressed feeling that Act I wasn’t as good as I thought it was earlier. No doubt the two matters are one, really. Several days ago, (after almost three weeks niggling at Poe’s ‘Dream Aria’) when the aria began to fall into place, the first Act began to look better again. And when I played through it last week, all my earlier enthusiasm was restored.

*May 4*

Friday, Charles brought the revised second act. I am now content with it and will probably follow it closely. The overall shape and structure are fine now, I think: interesting, varied, several clear levels of meaning. Still no title. “The ———— Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe.” Or perhaps omit the blank (left for an appropriate adjective).

*May 23*

Finally, (I think) decided on a title: “The Voyage of Edgar Poe.” Discarding the adjective before voyage and dropping the middle name. The trial scene is pretty well sketched out. Another day or so should finish it. It seems to be more interesting musically than I thought it would. The idea dropped in Griswold’s Arioso — the major/minor sequence for ‘anima/nemesis’ gave the clue for the rest of the scene. So, perhaps I will have about two weeks of work on Virginia’s Death Scene before leaving for Europe — if we go at all.



## MORELLA

*Some preliminary sketches by Tanya Moiseiwitsch*

*May 27*

Trial scene is finished: 19' 30" to this point. Now I feel well into the second act. My main concern is to find something interesting for the Auction Scene. The two scenes with Virginia — death and resurrection — don't bother me at all; those I know I can handle. But the Auction Scene is quite different from anything I've tried before. I'd like it to be both grotesque and comic-burlesque and bizarre. I wish I didn't have to compose it in our Florence apartment — *con sordino*, closed windows (to avoid irritating the neighbors) in summertime: it obviously is going to require banging and thumping. I ought to skip it until we return to Minneapolis, but I can never quite do that: I need to approach works in order, scene by scene to get the proper flow. Even song cycles get composed that way.

*July 13*

(Sunday afternoon on the terrace of via dei Bardi 58)

Today begins the second month of our Florentine summer. It has been idyllic, very social and pleasant, and yet — contrary to my apprehension — very productive: except as far as this diary is concerned. I am clearly *not* a diarist. (This and the remaining excerpts are written on loose sheets of paper: the diary had been forgotten back in the U.S.) During the past month I've often thought I must not let this Italian sojourn interrupt the Poe journal after it is already three quarters complete. But given the choice of spending a few minutes at the desk or the piano, the latter always wins . . . The opera itself is becoming an obsession. Since arriving, I've done

Virginia's death scene, partially sketched out before leaving the States, but greatly elaborated here. I suspect it will be the loveliest scene in the work: being in Florence where we once saw "Eurydice" and "Dafne" (two of the earliest operas, written at the beginning of the 17th century in Florence) reminded me of the echo choruses and so the choral lament for Virginia uses the device . . .

The Auction — now half finished — was the single scene that most worried me. It ought to be grotesque and wild — not my strongest suits, I fear. I'm compromising by trying it burlesque and strange and somewhat broadly parodistic, but it may be the wrong track. I just don't know. It's turned into a little *divertissement*, like Act Two of the Nutcracker — with curious vignettes of the various women. The hard part comes just now where the scene must be transformed into a wild hallucination.

Despite my vow to Charles, I *am* asking for one more change — the pivotal scene where Poe stabs Griswold. At present, Griswold receives the blows, welcomes them and continues to speak as though nothing happened. I really think, as in "William Wilson," Poe must *see* that in stabbing Griswold, he is killing himself. Hence, Griswold must be transformed into a blood-covered image of Poe himself, face-to-face with himself before the blackout.

July 15

I must record here two oddities: after the usual arguments about astrology, ESP, etc., with Renata, and my usual skeptical replies . . . Yesterday morning, waiting for friends on the terrace of the Lungarno Hotel, I walked to the river's edge thinking of Virginia's resurrection aria: "Where gold and silver fish swim through the river of silence" . . . Looking down into the Arno, I saw a whole school of goldfish, large ones (six or seven inches), chasing one another and cavorting. I've never seen gold fish in rivers, nor have my friends.

That same afternoon, I added a footnote to the vocal score of "Poe" to attribute the text of "The Dying Rosebud's Lament" to its authoress, Mrs. Frances Sargent Osgood, and suddenly saw my own unusual name leap out at me: Frances *argento* sgood. A simple cryptographic device Poe knew of — transposing the first letter of a word to the tail of the preceding one. Signs and symbols, as John Olon would say, but good or bad?

August 1

Except for a few finishing touches, the Auction Scene is done: the hardest bit of composing I've ever done. Grueling work, and all to create a sense of chaos. A few days ago I sketched out a truly chaotic scene, a *la Berio's* "Sinfonia" — frantic tempo, some talking, some *sprechstimme*, several different arias, Yankee Doodle (in a madhouse scene, Poe refers to the bizarre orchestra playing Yankee Doodle in different keys and tempi at one time) and the kitchen sink. The next day I threw it all out. I would truly like to do something outrageous like that, but I always have second thoughts and doubts after trying it. Somehow, it's too easy to create that kind of musical mud. I invariably give it up and find a musical solution. As Mozart wrote to his father of "Abduction:" "Even when depicting terrible scenes, the music must still remain music, not mere noise."

August 24

The first real rain in 70 days here.

The Resurrection Scene was finished last week. It took perhaps two weeks, being essentially a recitative for Poe and Griswold, the aria for V. and concluding recitativo for the men. I hope V's aria will be the emotional high spot of the opera. It is the demonstration of Poe's unholy inspiration and poignant use of his only love story (Eleonora). And it should be perfect for Carolyn. Work was accomplished even though Nolte and a friend visited for a few days, followed by the Brunelles for three nights.

The trial scene is resumed and should go quickly once I get a decent idea for it . . . The important thing will be Poe's defense aria. I must admit here to a great sense of weariness — it has been unrelenting work since last October 15th — 10 months, day after day of 12 or more hours with only occasional breaks of three or four days. Does it show in the music, I wonder??

September 6

(Our 21st wedding anniversary).

The rains last mentioned have remained these past two weeks. It seems that earlier in this diary (I don't have the book here) I wrote that the end of "A Water Bird Talk" came all in a rush — much faster than I expected it to take. The same thing has happened with "Poe." The 10th scene (what I've always regarded as the real finale) went very rapidly — not even two weeks and I could easily finish the last scene (Épilogue) in 24 hours if I had to. I wonder if this acceleration toward the end is simply a matter of being so saturated with the material; ideas come so easily, or is it a subconscious wish to bring a long labor to an end?

I think the scene (Trial) works well. Poe's defense is an interesting, almost free-form aria, held together by a two-bar refrain (like "Nevermore").

By Thursday, when Tanya (Moiseiwitsch, the designer) arrives, it ought to be finished, but no doubt I will tinker with the music until I deliver it to the copyist at the end of this month.



In two hours, Tanya arrives from London. The opera was finished yesterday, right on schedule, although I've altered a few minor things today and will no doubt continue to do so until we leave.

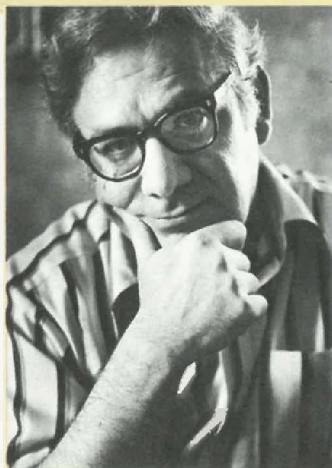
As usual, with an opera at this stage, there is little sense of satisfaction. I write 'finished;' but, of course, there is still the orchestration to do — months of tedious manual and eyestraining work; since the orchestration is already 'set' in mind and clearly marked in the vocal score, this is routine labor. 'Finished' doesn't mean anything until the dress rehearsals are done. Only then, just prior to the premiere, does the work seem to be completely out of my hands and truly finished.

Also, per usual, after drawing the final double-bar, my thoughts go immediately to all the ideas that never found their way into the work. Those tantalizing possibilities that existed when the work was in the planning stage and early days. Those ideas remain homeless (or perhaps they find homes in later works?) and now I begin to reconsider the options I had. But without discarding some of them, some of their replacements would never have occurred and, in many cases, these second thoughts turned out better than expected.

On balance, What do I think of the work at this moment? It is far and away the most ambitious thing I've done; it is fairly close to what I planned it to be (the fin); Verdian, lyric, exciting, imaginative and interesting (to me, naturally), *rich*, in short, which is what I've always wanted for it. I suppose it is less fantastic, less strange than I had hoped. Or am I discovering that many of the fanciful things I can contemplate, I simply can't entertain in composition.

September 15

Played as much as I could of the opera for Tanya yesterday at Rood's Palazzaccio. I'm sure it was very difficult for her to gain any true impression from my banging and howling. Still her initial comment will always remain my favorite remark about the work, perhaps for sentimental reasons: "What a pity Tony (Sir Tyrone Guthrie, with whom Tanya frequently, and I occasionally, worked) is dead. He would have loved it."



(Photo by Judy Olausen)

### **DOMINICK ARGENTO** *Composer*

*Dominick Argento was born in York, Pennsylvania, in 1927 and received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. After graduation from Peabody Argento received a Fulbright fellowship to study in Italy with Luigi Dallapiccola. He later was awarded two Guggenheim fellowships to continue his music education in Italy. It was during his time in Italy that he composed his first full-length opera Colonel Jonathan the Saint.*

*After his Fulbright fellowship Argento started teaching theory and composition at the Hampton Institute in Virginia and was music director at the Hilltop Opera in Baltimore, where John Olson-Scrymgeour, his frequent collaborator, was stage director.*

*In 1957 Argento obtained his Ph.D. from the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester. During his doctoral studies he also served as opera coach and taught theory and composition.*

*Since 1958 he has been with the University of Minnesota's Department of Music and is now Professor of Composition and History of Opera. The University commissioned the composer in 1975 and gave him a year's leave of absence to write an opera for the Minnesota Opera Company as a Bicentennial project. The result was The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe, the most ambitious undertaking of Argento's career.*

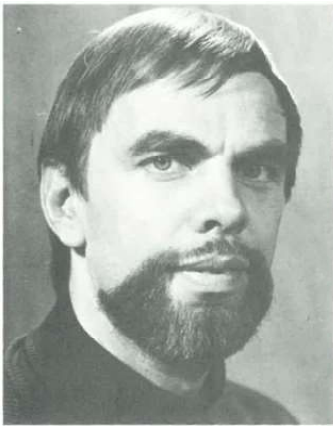
*Over the past 20 years he has written operas, ballets, orchestral compositions, and works for voice and orchestra. His operas include two commissioned by the Minnesota Opera Company. The Masque of Angels, its inaugural work in 1963, and Postcard from Morocco, performed in 1972 and nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for music the following year. Both received wide acclaim through performances here and by companies elsewhere.*

*Additional commissioned works include those for the Minnesota Orchestra on the occasion of its 70th anniversary, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Civic Orchestra of Minneapolis, Luther Theological Seminary, the Schubert Club, and the Guthrie Theater. For Guthrie he wrote The Shoemakers' Holiday and, in addition, composed incidental music for several other productions. The Schubert Club commission resulted in Argento's song cycle for soprano and piano, From the Diary of Virginia Woolf, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1975.*

*The composer received the Minnesota State Arts Council award and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1974, and in May, 1976, he will receive an award from the American Academy and the National Institute of Arts and Letters in recognition of his creative work in music and an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from York College in Pennsylvania.*

*Argento is married to singer Carolyn Bailey, who has introduced many of his compositions.*





### **H. WESLEY BALK Stage Director**

*H. Wesley Balk was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1932, was raised in Bagley, Minnesota, and received his B.S. and B.A. degrees from Bemidji State College. After receiving a Ph.D. in directing from Yale School of Drama, Balk studied opera direction in Germany as a Fulbright scholar.*

*Upon returning in 1964, he joined the Minnesota Opera Company. During the following years he directed more than 30 of the company's productions, including ones that he was instrumental in creating, such as Oedipus and the Sphinx, Faust Counter Faust and The Business of Good Government. In addition, he translated several works for company productions and wrote and narrated operatic lecture-demonstrations for the company.*

*Balk is Associate Professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Theatre Arts, and there, besides teaching, he has created many experimental theater pieces including an adaptation of Glasner's 365 Days, which was published by the University of Minnesota Press.*

*Balk has also served as director for the New York City Opera, the Santa Fe Opera, the Washington Opera Society, the Houston Grand Opera, the San Francisco Spring Opera, the Kansas City Lyric Theater, and others. His past summers have been spent as director of the Aspen Music Festival opera training program and at Wolf Trap Farm Park as teacher and director. Currently Balk is writing a book Training the Singer-Actor.*



### **TANYA MOISEIWITSCH Designer**

*Tanya Moiseiwitsch was born in London. A life-long colleague of the late Sir Tyrone Guthrie, she has worked primarily in classical repertory theaters, serving as resident designer for the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, the Stratford National Theatre of Canada, the Covent Garden Opera in London, and the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, England, where she now lives.*

*Her many works at the Guthrie in Minneapolis include The House of Atreus, St. Joan and Volpone, for which Argento wrote the incidental music, and The Shoemakers' Holiday, Argento's ballad-opera commissioned by and presented at the Theater in 1966 and later done at the Crucible Theatre.*

*Currently Moiseiwitsch is designing Verdi's Rigoletto for the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. In the past the most notable opera she designed was Benjamin Britten's Peter Grimes, done at Covent Garden and later at the Metropolitan, both directed by Sir Tyrone. She also designed Britten's The Beggar's Opera at the Aldeburgh Festival, Antony Hopkins' Lady Rohesia and Mozart's Don Giovanni for the Sadler's Wells in London, and Rossini's The Barber of Seville for the Phoenix Opera Company and later presented at the Brighton Festival, that being Sir Tyrone's last production.*

*Recently Moiseiwitsch has worked at the National Theatre of Great Britain, designing John Dexter's productions of Phaedra Britannica and The Misanthrope, with the latter winning her a Tony Award nomination for sets and costumes when it played at the St. James Theater in New York.*



### **PHILIP C. BRUNELLE Music director**

*Philip C. Brunelle graduated from the University of Minnesota and was solo pianist and percussionist with the Minnesota Orchestra for six years. As a recipient of a Martha Baird Rockefeller grant in 1968, Brunelle studied opera conducting and coaching with Maestro George Schick at the Metropolitan Opera.*

*Since that time he has been affiliated with the Minnesota Opera Company as music director. As such, he has conducted all of the company's American and world premieres and its Mozart and Rossini repertoire. He orchestrated its two versions of Sousa's El Capitan (one has been published by G. Schirmer) and its touring production of Thomson's Mother of Us All.*

*Brunelle is also music director for Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis and the Plymouth music series. There he has presented a wide variety of works, including the world premiere of Argento's Jonah and the Whale. He also serves as a music editor for Editions Salabert of Paris, France.*

*Through the years he has conducted the Kansas City Lyric Opera, Lake George Opera Festival, Wolf Trap Summer Music Festival, San Francisco Spring Opera, and Houston Summer Opera.*

*In 1975 Brunelle received a Bush Foundation summer fellowship and worked with leading opera companies in England, The Netherlands, and Sweden.*



# Minnesota Opera Company

The Minnesota Opera Company was founded in 1963. It was then known as the Center Opera Company, a project of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. From its beginnings the Company has focused on opera as total music theater in which dramatic and musical elements are given equal attention. The Company has devoted special attention to the performance of new operas, offering 14 world premieres since its inception.

In addition to three Argento productions, the Minnesota Opera Company has premiered Erick Stokes' *Horspfa!*, Paul and Martha Boesing's *The Wanderer*, Yale Marshall's *Oedipus and the Sphinx* and *Business of Good Government*, two operas by Conrad Susa: *Transformations* and *Black River*, John Gessner's *Faust Counter Faust*; *Gulliver* by Blackwood-Kaplan-Lewin, and two operas produced by the Company's artistic staff headed by H. Wesley Balk and Philip Brunelle: *Newest Opera in the World* and *Gallimaufry*.

The Minnesota Opera is a resident repertory company, currently consisting of seven members of the core ensemble and an administrative staff of seven people headed by Charles Fullmer. The Company offers its singers a contract of up to 26 weeks, one of the few American opera companies providing such a length of employment in a milieu which stresses both dramatic and musical elements. Guest singers periodically supplement the core ensemble, and there has been an internship program for students of opera during the past two seasons. The students are offered operatic roles and receive coaching in singing and acting.

Minnesota Opera Company also has offered highly-praised productions from the traditional repertoire, including *Don Giovanni*, *Magic Flute*, and *The Barber of Seville*. Its revivals of less frequently performed works have included Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*, Werner Egk's *Seventeen Days and Four Minutes*, Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring*, and Carl Orff's *The Wise Woman and the King*.

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*Daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe, November 1848*  
Poe Foundation, Inc

## *The Defamation of Edgar Allan Poe*

*By Peggy Robbins*

*His reputation as a drunken, drug-addicted madman has endured for well over a century  
— just as his first biographer had hoped.*

The reputation of no other American literary figure has been dragged through as much mud as that of Edgar Allan Poe. Generation after generation of American children studying Poe's works in classrooms have thrilled to the beauty, melody, and romance of his poetry . . . They have been enthralled by his mystic stories, only to be promptly confused by brief biographical estimates of the man himself as a moral degenerate whose literary creations were largely dictated by his neuroses. . . .

The person most responsible for the denigration of Poe's reputation is his first biographer, the Reverend Rufus Wilmot Griswold. Griswold in 1837 was licensed as a Baptist clergyman at the age of 22, but in 1841, when his and Poe's paths first crossed, he was doing editorial work in Philadelphia and in particular planning an anthology, *The Poets and Poetry of America*. He had tried his hand unsuccessfully at creative writing, but he had a well-developed sense of publicity that aided him in profiting from the work of others. Poe, 32 years old in 1841 and near the peak of his writing career, offered Griswold several poems for the anthology and suggested several other poets who were worthy of recognition. Griswold ignored the suggestions; he accepted for publication, but paid nothing for, three of Poe's poems: "The Coliseum," "The Haunted Palace," and "The Sleeper."

The anthology was published in April 1842, and in November Poe wrote a review of it for the *Boston Miscellany*; he was mostly favorable, but criticized the inclusion of poets who were "too mediocre to entitle them to particular notice." Griswold ignored Poe's several statements of approval and praise and was furious about this one line of criticism, whereupon Poe wrote a friend that, actually, "Griswold's Book of Poetry . . . is a most outrageous humbug. . . ."

Poe and Griswold managed a sort of on-and-off friendliness, but both had suspicious natures and caustic tongues, and ill feeling between them tended to grow. James Russell Lowell learned in a letter from a friend that Griswold was telling “shocking bad stories” about Poe, stories “which Poe’s whole demeanor contradicts.” Then on January 28, 1843 the Philadelphia *Saturday Museum* carried a review of *The Poets and Poetry of America* which included scorching criticism of Griswold as both writer and anthologist. The review was unsigned, and there were heated differences of literary opinion concerning its authorship; though it was never proved that Poe wrote it, Griswold thought he had and never ceased to be vindictive about it.

Strangely, at one time Poe asked Griswold to be his literary executor in the event of his sudden death, and Griswold agreed, even though there were protests against the decision from several quarters. George Graham, who knew both Poe and Griswold well, wrote that the latter had become consumed with “old prejudices and old enmities,” that he was not “competent to act as his judge,” and that Poe’s “whole nature . . . eludes the rude grasp of a mind so warped and uncongenial as Mr. Griswold’s.”

But Griswold did not wait until he was acting as Poe’s literary executor to start venting his rancor. Two days after Poe’s death, Griswold, writing under the name “Ludwig,” published in the *New York Tribune* an account of the poet’s death and career which began this way:

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. The poet was known, personally or by reputation in all this country; he had readers in England, and in several of the states of Continental Europe; but he 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.

The narrative of Poe’s life which followed was filled with errors, half-truths, and very destructive statements: Poe’s “harsh experience had deprived him of all faith, in man or woman,” and the poet had “no moral susceptibility . . . and little or nothing of the true point of honor.”

Griswold’s article was widely republished, with incalculable damage to Poe’s reputation. He later expanded it into his “Memoir” of Poe, in which he elaborated on his previous charges and for which he fabricated some new ones, presenting a man totally destitute of honor. This “Memoir” was published in every complete edition of Poe’s works for over half a century after his death; although there were several writers who after extensive research published proof that “Griswold was without doubt an extraordinarily vindictive critical cutthroat,” the “Memoir,” written by “Poe’s authorized biographer,” continued to carry weight with the reading public. Indeed, a few literary figures, writing about Poe’s character, even added some fanciful embellishments of their own to Griswold’s creations. The accumulated mass of rumor, conjecture, and interpretation based far more upon imagination than fact obscured the true character of Edgar Allan Poe.

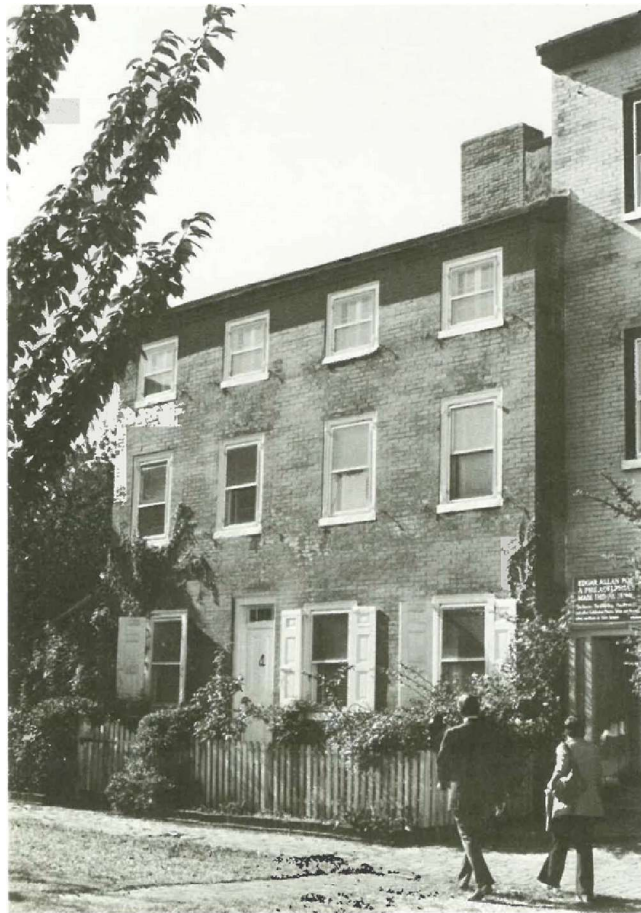
Griswold accomplished what a contemporary called “Poe’s execution” in part by radically altering letters he had received from his subject. There is positive proof that he did this because both the originals and the altered versions which he published are extant today. . . . There is also evidence that Griswold went so far as to invent entire letters.

With these forgeries Griswold cleverly established himself as a credible Poe biographer before he went on to slander the writer. He wrote that it was “commonly understood and believed” that Poe “had criminal relations with his Mother in Law.” No such thing had been understood or believed to any extent — not until Rufus Griswold put it on paper.

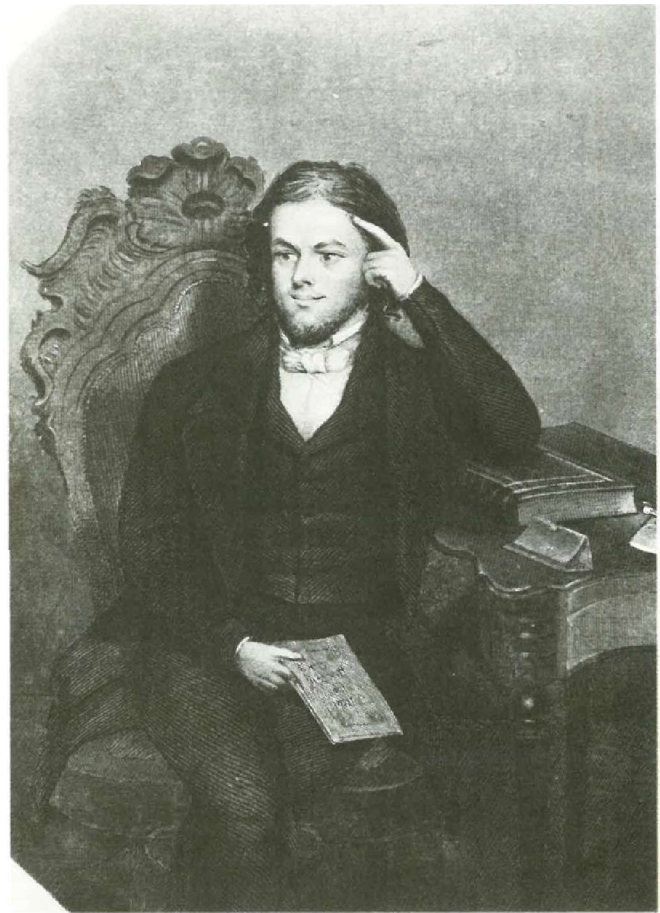
Griswold recorded that Poe had been expelled from the University of Virginia for drinking and gambling, a false statement that was still finding its way into Poe biographies a century later. Poe was a student at the university for the term extending from February 14 to December 15, 1826. Only 17 at the time, he had an excellent scholastic record, and there is no mention in the school’s records of any kind of disciplinary action concerning him. He did not return to the university because John Allan, the prosperous merchant and “benefactor” in whose house he had been raised, refused to allow him to do so. Allan had provided only meagerly for him during 1826, giving him neither a decent allowance nor the minimum to cover the school’s charges, and refused to pay his debts. . . .

Griswold wrote that Poe was an army deserter and that he had been kicked out of West Point because of his bad character. Both these allegations are false. A very unhappy boy, in May 1827 Poe enlisted in the United States Army as a private, at first using the name Edgar A. Perry. In April 1829, by then a sergeant major, he was released when he hired a substitute to complete his five-year enlistment term. As Edgar Poe he carried with him glowing recommendations from his officers and the post commander, including one which said, “Edgar Poe has been exemplary in his deportment, prompt and faithful in the discharge of his duties, and is highly worthy of confidence,” and another stating, “His habits are good and entirely free from drinking.”





*Poe's Home in Philadelphia, 1838-1844*  
*Here is where he wrote The Raven, The Bells, The Murders in the Rue Morgue and The Gold Bug.*  
*Photo by David J. Speer*



*Rufus W. Griswold*  
*Painted by J. B. Read. Engraved by G. Parker.*  
*Library of Congress*

It was with these and several other recommendations from friends and congressmen that Poe entered West Point in the summer of 1830. But he had financial problems at the Academy, which, he said, was “no place for a poor man.” He wrote John Allan: “You sent me to W. Point like a beggar. The same difficulties are threatening me as before at Charlottesville — and I must resign.” But he found he could not resign without Allan’s written permission, and this his benefactor refused to send. So Poe, by his own admission, neglected his studies and duties — mostly he sat in his room writing poetry when he was supposed to be on the parade ground drilling with a gun — until he was court-martialed. Found guilty of the charges of “Gross neglect of Duty” and “Disobedience of Orders,” — he was dismissed; he left the Academy in February 1831. However unpraiseworthy the young man’s conduct during this period may be considered, it bore little similarity to the way it was later pictured.

Although there is no question that Poe drank periodically during the latter years of his life, the assertions that he was a confirmed alcoholic and an opium addict — “a madman constantly and heavily under the influence of liquor and drugs” — are absurd. That is readily realized by noting the extraordinarily large number of poems, stories, articles, essays, and literary criticisms he produced. Such a collection of works could come only from the pen of a writer who, at least during long and major periods of his creative life, labored hard, regularly, and with the clear thinking hardly possible under drugged conditions. Poe was eccentric; on occasion — many occasions — he exhibited a tendency toward instability; during his prolonged struggle for literary recognition and against poverty he had such periods of mental depression as often characterize a high-strung, sensitive, creative individual; but he was not a drunken madman.

There is direct testimony that Poe was not a drug addict. Dr. Thomas Dunn English, a Philadelphia physician and poet who knew Poe well, did not like him, and finally had an open and ugly break with him, wrote some years after his death, “Had Poe the opium habit . . . 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 be a baseless slander. . . .”



Writers have gleaned sensational copy from the fact that Poe's first cousin became his "child-bride," but few have gone on to tell that the life-long romance between them is one of the most beautiful, though sad, stories in the history of American literary figures. It was an era when marriage between cousins was not uncommon and when many girls married young. Poe was 27 and his first cousin Virginia Eliza Clemm was not quite 14 when they married. The sweet, cheerful, delicate Virginia was indeed a child bride — but that does not mean she remained one throughout the marriage. She had adored Edgar all her life and continued to do so, and his deep devotion to her is beyond question.

There is no denying the charges that Poe was a failure financially and that at times while his wife was ill with consumption he could not even buy food for her. It is true that he seldom had any money, that he was forever in debt, and that he was constantly appealing to friends and relatives for loans. However, this sad state of Poe's affairs should be viewed in historical perspective: At the time he was struggling to make ends meet, no American author of consequence had yet succeeded in making a living exclusively from creative writing. They all had independent means or part-time, well-paying occupations that allowed for leisure hours that could be spent in writing. Repeatedly during his adult life Poe struggled to establish a magazine of his own, but never successfully. The most remarkable aspect of his existence is that he was able, in a short life seldom free from anxiety and trouble, to emerge as the only writer in the English language who was at once foremost in literary criticism, supreme in the short story, and destined to be immortal in poetry.

Edgar Poe's life began in Boston on January 19, 1809; it was there that his parents, the beautiful English actress Elizabeth Arnold Poe and American actor David Poe, Jr., were engaged for the winter theater season. Elizabeth Poe continued her stage appearances until two weeks before Edgar's birth since her husband's fiery temper and periods of drunkenness had affected his acting career and the family's financial situation. David Poe, a talented actor, was a member of a highly respected Baltimore clan of Revolutionary patriots, but his relatives did not approve of his profession; his resentment of their attitude added to his emotional stress.

After the Boston season the Poes moved on for engagements in New York and other cities, but before Edgar was a year old his father played for the last time and sometime in 1810 disappeared, leaving no further trace in history.

In July 1810 Elizabeth Poe moved with Edgar and his older brother William Henry to Richmond, Virginia. There she charmed theater-goers until December, when she gave birth to her third child, Rosalie. Although Elizabeth made many stage appearances after that, she never recovered her strength, and on December 8, 1811 she died of tuberculosis in a cold, dingy theatrical boardinghouse room in Richmond.

Shortly before she died, her father-in-law, David Poe, Sr., who still lived in Baltimore, had sent for William Henry. And on the day of Elizabeth's death, Mrs. William MacKenzie, a Richmond matron, wrapped up little Rosalie and carried her to the MacKenzie home, into which she was adopted. Mrs. John Allan, a young, socially prominent merchant's wife who had no children, led little Edgar, a handsome but delicately-featured, sensitive child not quite 3, from the boardinghouse to the Allan home above the store of Ellis & Allan, General Merchants.

John Allan, 31 at the time, not only bought and sold the usual items — tobacco, grain, tea, coffee, cloth, wines, liquors — but dealt in real estate, chartered ships, and acted as an agent in the hiring of slaves and horses. In addition to having a sizable income, he was heir to the fortune of an uncle who had been a leading Richmond merchant since before the Revolution.

Although Edgar Poe became known as John Allan's "adopted son," and his foster father's name was added to his own, there was never any legal or formal adoption. . . . Edgar and Frances Allan came to love each other, and he called her "Mama," although he seems not to have had for her what he called "the purely ideal love of my soul" which he was to have for his two other mother figures. John Allan, a stern man whose face bore a perpetually disapproving look, probably showed little affection for the sensitive child, but he provided the material things the boy needed. . . .

In 1815, when John and Frances Allan went to Europe to establish a branch store in England, they took the 6-year-old Edgar with them. For five years, while the Allans traveled about, he lived most of the time in English boarding schools. In September 1818 John Allan wrote to his uncle in Richmond, "Edgar is growing wonderfully and enjoys a good reputation and is both able and willing to receive instruction."

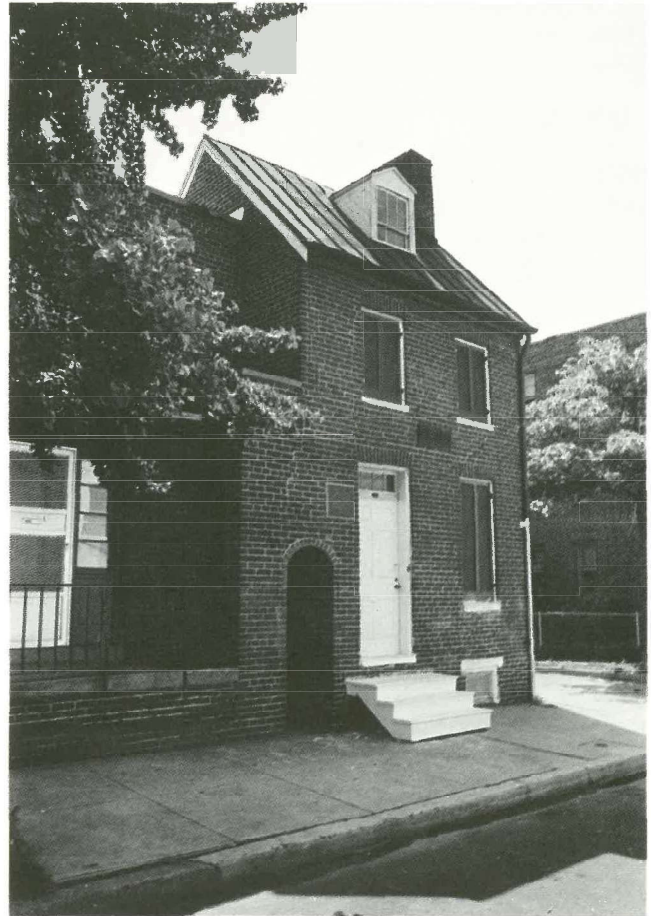
After the Allans and Edgar returned to Richmond in August 1820, the boy attended school in the city for five years. Thomas Ellis, the son of Allan's partner, wrote later about Edgar, "He was very beautiful, yet brave and manly for one so young." Other classmates recalled that Poe led the students in all his studies, and particularly excelled in Latin and French. They said that he at 15 and 16 was a fine physical specimen; a swift runner, graceful fencer, and fair boxer, he ably represented his school in competitions. One hot June day he swam over seven miles in the James River against the tide. Yet, the same classmates said he was never really popular with the sons of Richmond's aristocratic families and had few close friends. . . .





*John Allan, stepfather of Edgar Allan Poe*

*Poe Foundation, Inc.*



*Poe House in Baltimore*

*Poe lived in this two and a half story row house from 1832 to 1835. Here he courted his cousin, Virginia Clemm, and wrote his only play, Poltitan.*

*Photo by David J. Speer*

During 1824 the tension between Edgar and “Pa” Allan erupted, and the two never got along thereafter except for short periods. They had nothing in common — Allan could not understand a boy so interested in poetry, and Edgar was disgusted with Allan’s flagrant infidelities. In November 1824 Allan wrote that Edgar “seems quite miserable, sulky & ill-tempered. . . . The boy possesses not a Spark of affection for us, not a particle of gratitude for all my care and kindness towards him.”

Allan’s uncle died, making Allan one of Richmond’s richest men. He moved his family into a mansion and hired a private tutor to help get Edgar ready to enter the University of Virginia. The youth was very conscious of his insecurity in the Allan household, and he knew Allan’s intention was to get him out of Richmond. . . .

When Poe returned to Richmond after leaving the University of Virginia, Frances Allan made weak, unsuccessful attempts to effect a reconciliation between her husband and foster son. Allan called the boy a “wastrel” and reproached him for “eating the bread of idleness,” but refused to help him find employment. After a bitter argument Edgar fled from the Allan home, wrote John Allan that he had resolved to “leave your house and endeavor to find some place in this wide world where I will be treated — *not as you have treated me,*” and pleaded that his trunks and a little money be sent to him. Allan sent nothing except a cold, condemning note; he filed both Edgar’s letter and a neat copy of his reply among his business papers, as if it were only a business matter. Young Poe nearly starved before he joined the army a few months later. . . .

From Fortress Monroe, Poe on March 10 began a letter to John Allan, “My dear Pa,” and concluded, “Yours affectionately” — his foster father was helping him obtain a discharge from the army. Further, Allan had promised to give his formal permission for the boy to go to West Point, and to write a letter of recommendation that he be given an appointment to the Academy.

John Allan kept his promise, but his letter to Secretary of War John Eaton was cold and harsh: “Frankly, Sir, I do declare that he is no relation to me whatever; that I have many in whom I have taken an active interest . . . with no other feeling than that, every man is my care.”

In 1827, while Poe was in the army, his first volume of poems, a forty-page pamphlet, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* “by a Bostonian,” was published by a Boston printer. In his introduction Poe said that he had “endeavored to expose the folly of even *risking* the best feelings of the heart at the shrine of ambition.”

Throughout his career Poe was to delve deeply into various aspects of beauty, which he worshipped; love, for which he had an enormous capacity; pride, of which he had so much; and death, with which he had a consummate preoccupation — and he had something of all of them in “Tamerlane,” which in its first form ran 406 lines.

Few copies of the volume sold, but Poe was not discouraged. He was published and he knew that writing was to be the real business of his life. . . .

During the remaining years of Poe’s life he kept body and soul together, sometimes just barely, by small payments from various magazines for his literary criticisms (it was as a scholarly critic that he made his first definite impression upon the public), by scant reward for his stories and poems, and by periodic work as a salaried editor. . . .

The poet went to Baltimore in 1831 and tried unsuccessfully to get a salaried job, so his struggle to subsist continued. His stories — for two years he had been working on several fiction pieces, writing and revising — and poems were being published, but he was getting no pay for them. . . .

In October 1835 Poe moved his widowed aunt, 45-year-old Maria Poe Clemm, and her 13-year-old daughter, Virginia Eliza, from Baltimore to live with him. The three moved into a Richmond boardinghouse. Poe’s salary as an editor of the *Messenger* paid for their food and lodging and left one dollar a week for all other expenses.

For some years before, the Clemm home in Baltimore had been Poe’s port in a storm, and he had many times been given food and shelter for extended periods by his aunt in spite of her poverty. . . .

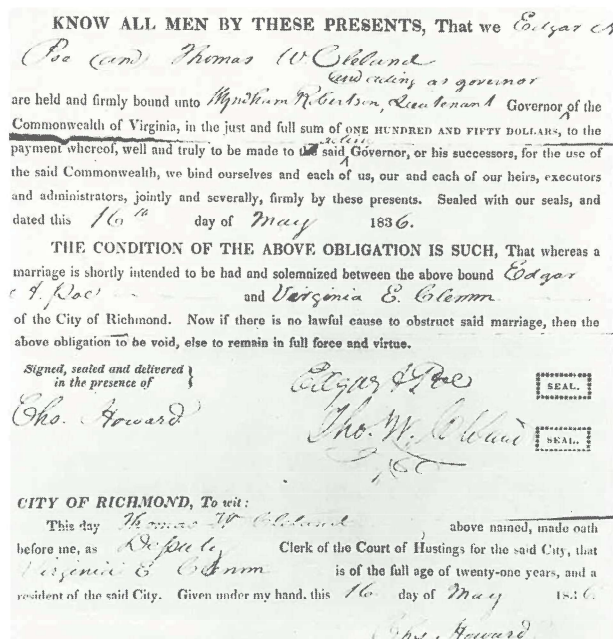
Edgar called his Aunt Maria “Muddy” and Virginia “Sissy”; the Clemms called him “Eddy.” The three were a devoted family, and Maria was his much-loved mother the rest of his life. Virginia, who idolized him from the day she first saw him, had become by 1835 the girl he wanted to love as a wife. A petite, graceful girl with an air of refinement, she had pale ivory skin, large glowing eyes, and raven hair. She was an accomplished musician, and she adored singing for her Eddy. . . .

On May 16, 1836, three months before Virginia’s 14th birthday, she and Edgar were married in the Richmond boardinghouse by a Presbyterian minister. The union was a romantic success that inspired some of the most exquisite poetry ever to enrich the English language. The wolf knocked periodically on the door as the Poes



Poe Honeymoon Home in Greenwich Village, New York City  
First home for Poe and his young bride was in this rooming house at 137 Waverly Place. They came here in 1837.

Photo by Ivan Burg



Copy of marriage bond between Poe and Virginia Clemm  
Poe Foundation, Inc.



and Mrs. Clemm moved from city to city, with Poe giving up or being fired from one editorial job after another, and losing what little cash he acquired in magazine ventures, but the love endured. The Irish novelist Mayne Reid said the Poe cottage was filled with more love than any place he had ever entered, and that Virginia was “a lady angelically beautiful in person and not less beautiful in spirit.”

But tragedy struck in 1842. At Edgar’s request, Virginia was playing the harp and singing for visitors, when suddenly she began hemorrhaging from a ruptured blood vessel in her throat. Doctors determined that she had consumption, and she spent the rest of her life in dying. During her short periods of improvement, Poe was happy and cheerful, but with each relapse, he despaired and drank for relief. He once said he was “fighting the greatest of conflicts — the struggle for sanity.”

Through it all Poe continued to write prolifically. In 1843 he won a \$100 best-story prize for “The Gold Bug,” which was reprinted over and over both in Europe and this country. Late in 1844 he sold “The Raven,” on which he had been working intermittently for 10 years, for \$10. It has since repeatedly been called the most perfectly constructed poem ever created. He had become an internationally famous poet — but he was still a poor one.

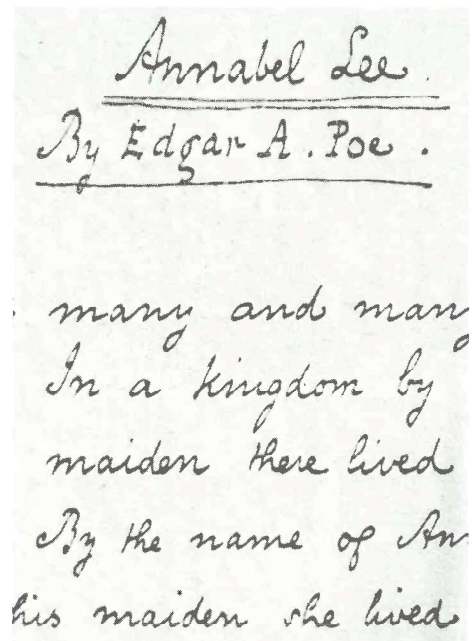
Of Poe’s attitude toward Virginia as she worsened, George Graham wrote, “His love for his wife was a sort of rapturous worship of the spirit of beauty which he felt was fading before his eyes. I have seen him hovering around her when she was ill, with all the fond fear and tender anxiety of a mother for her firstborn, her slightest cough causing in him a shudder, a heart-chill that was visible.”

Virginia Poe died on January 30, 1847, when she was 24, in the rented cottage at Fordham, New York, which the Poes and Mrs. Clemm had occupied since the previous June. She was buried in the vault belonging to the owners of the cottage, but years later her body was moved to Baltimore to rest beside the husband she adored. He survived her only two years and eight months; during much of that time he was very ill.

Poe collapsed after Virginia’s death and was nursed a long time by Muddy Clemm. . . . He had for years been the object of the affections of a number of women, mostly literary figures, but there is no evidence that his response had been more than platonic — at least until after his wife’s death. During the last two years of his life he was romantically involved with a series of wealthy widows in various cities. To what extent his expressions of undying love for them were sincere, no one knows. But it may be noted that, with Maria’s help, he more than once had two such “affairs” going at the same time, and that some of the ladies sponsored the lecture tour by which he tried to become solvent. He was making plans to marry when he died; his last love was Elmira Royster Shelton, his first sweetheart, by then a wealthy Richmond widow.



*Poe Cottage in Fordham, New York City  
This was Poe’s home during the final three years of his life, 1846 to 1849.  
Virginia died here in 1847 of consumption.  
Photo by Iwan Burg*



*Opening lines of “Annabel Lee” in Poe’s hand.  
Poe Foundation, Inc.*



Edgar Allan Poe's final burial place, Westminster Church, Baltimore.  
Photo by David J. Speer



Detail from Poe Tomb in Baltimore  
Photo by David J. Speer

Edgar Allan Poe's movements during the last days of his life are unclear. After two successful lectures in Richmond in September 1849, he reportedly left the city early on September 27th on a boat for a one-day trip to Baltimore. Elmira Shelton later wrote Mrs. Clemm that, the night before his departure, Poe "was very sad, and complained of being quite sick . . . he had considerable fever." Although there has been much conjecture as to his possible whereabouts for the next several days, there is no sure trace of him until he was found on the afternoon of October 3d, lying semiconscious on a Baltimore street, either drunk or very sick, or both. He was taken to the Washington College Hospital, where he went into a violent delirium. Early on the morning of October 7 he quieted, breathed a short prayer, "God help my poor soul," and died. The 40-year-old poet was buried in Baltimore's Presbyterian Cemetery in the lot that belonged to his grandfather.

After Poe's death, two of his most beautiful poems, "The Bells" and "Annabel Lee," were published for the first time. Several claimants for the honor of being the poet's inspiration for the latter surfaced, but they had to retract their claims when friends reported that Poe had said his wife Virginia was his subject when he wrote:

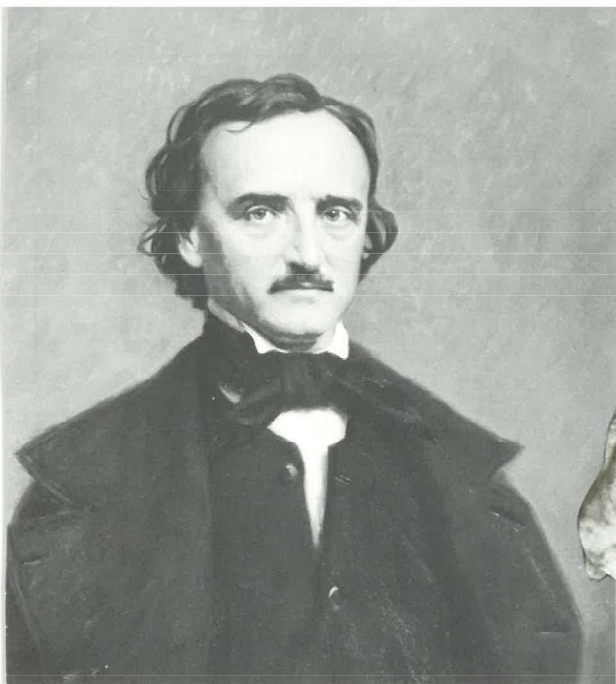
*For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling — my darling — my life and my bride,  
In the sepulchre there by the sea,  
In her tomb by the sounding sea.*



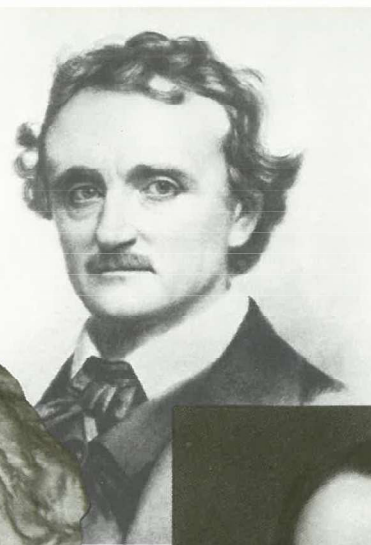
### **PEGGY ROBBINS**

*Peggy Robbins is a frequent contributor to publications of The Early American Society and the National Historical Society, both headquartered in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. She is best known for her articles concerning the Mississippi River and river boats. Entitled "Footlights on the River," they appeared in Early American Life magazine. She is married to Vick Robbins, a professional flood control expert with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.*

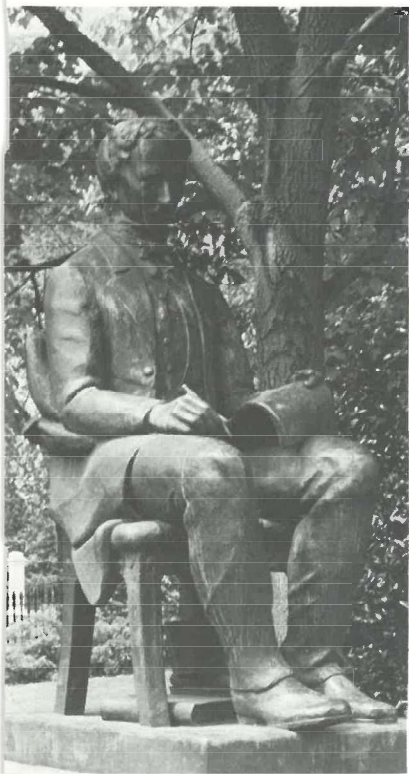




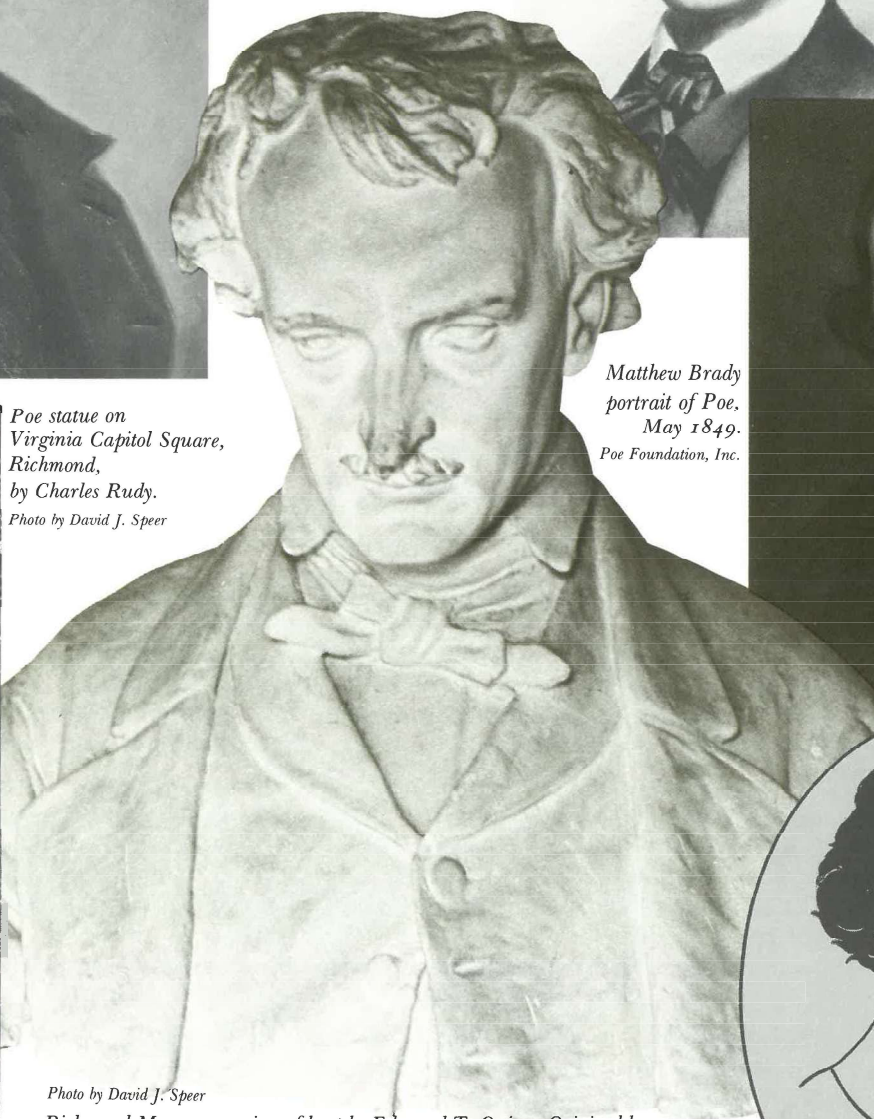
Thomas C. Corner's  
1934 portrait of Poe  
Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore



Crayon drawing of Poe  
by J. F. Fisher  
after a Daguerreotype  
of 1849.  
The Valentine Museum,  
Richmond



Poe statue on  
Virginia Capitol Square,  
Richmond,  
by Charles Rudy.  
Photo by David J. Speer



Matthew Brady  
portrait of Poe.  
May 1849.  
Poe Foundation, Inc.

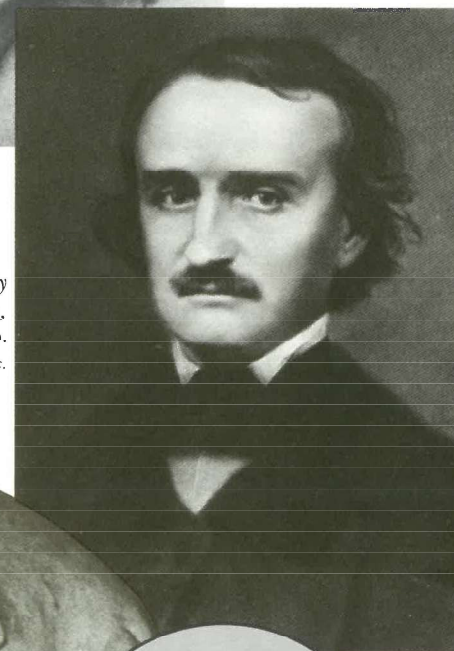
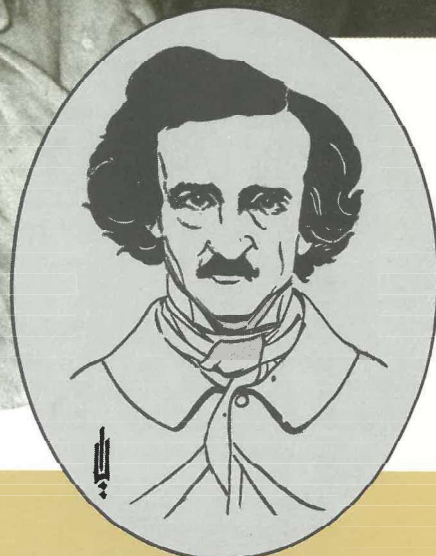


Photo by David J. Speer

Richmond Museum version of bust by Edmund T. Quinn. Original bronze  
unveiled at Fordham Cottage during Poe Centenary January 19, 1909.




Drawing of Poe by  
Aubrey Beardsley.

Edgar A. Poe  
Facsimile of Poe's signature.

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 19, 1809, and died in Baltimore, Maryland, on October 7, 1849. As in the cases of Hawthorne and James, no brief biographical note can do justice to the deep ramifications of Poe's importance and influence. Among other countless biographical studies two are to be recommended: Hervey Allen's *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York, 1926), the fullest and most readable of the biographies, and Arthur Hobson Quinn's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, the definitive scholarly work on the biographical side, but naive critically. The most reliable edition of Poe is *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe (The Virginia Edition)*, edited by James A. Harrison (17 vols., New York, 1902). A convenient edition of the poetry and the prose works, exclusive of the criticism, is the one-volume *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by Hervey Allen (New York, 1938).

The House of Fiction,  
Gordon and Tate. New York:  
Scribner's, 1950.





# Poe's Influence on Music

The overlapping of the boundaries of various kinds of artistic expression was a significant development in the last century. There was a vital interaction among writers and musicians in particular. A good portion of the critical writings of Edgar Poe, for example, was devoted to the relationship of poetry and music. He said, "There can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music . . . we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development." He expressed concern for sound and the significance of similar sounds, discussed the use of refrain and meter, revealed his choice of sonorous vowels and the most easily produced consonants, and explored the indefinability of true music and its mystic, dramatic power. Poe referred knowledgeably to instruments, compositions, composers, pitch, tone, and many musical terms. The value he placed on music was evident when he said, "For my own part, I would much rather have written the best song of a nation than its noblest epic," and also, "We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an early harp are stricken notes which cannot have been unfamiliar to the angels."

In turn, musicians responded to Poe, for there is no other writer so widely represented in musical works. In *Music and Edgar Allan Poe: A Bibliographical Study* by May Garrettson Evans (1939) are listed 252 musical settings of Poe's works — 219 devoted to poetry, the rest to prose. Just five poems — "Annabel Lee," "Eldorado," "The Bells," "The Raven," and "To Helen," and in that order — account for 115 of these 219, and by 1939, 80 per cent of Poe's poems had been set to music. Most of these were by English-speaking composers, but there were those by French, German, Russian, Lithuanian, Austrian, Belgian, Italian and Rumanian musicians.

The first setting published was "The Raven" in 1850, less than eight months after Poe's death. This unaccompanied air by an editor of a New York monthly musical magazine was followed by sixteen other versions that had performers throughout the world singing, "Jamais plus," "Nimmermehr," "Kolokola," and "Bubbolini." Poe's themes were treated musically just as diversely — as songs, chants, choruses, cantatas, recitations, operas, piano solos, chamber music, symphonic poems, incidental music, and ballets.

The most prolific interpreter of Poe's works was the English composer Josef Holbrooke. "With very little recognition and very great assurance and energy," William W. Austin wrote, "he progressed from songs and chamber music through mammoth orchestral poems and choruses . . . He thought he had found that which we know Debussy sought: the musical equivalent of the tales and poems of Poe; at least ten of Holbrooke's large works are based on Poe. But the one piece that achieved any considerable popularity was the orchestral *Variations on 'Three Blind Mice'*."

Although Debussy devoted half of his life, to the point of obsession, to Poe, not one of his contemplated projects was fully realized. In attempts at composing two operas based on "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Devil in the Belfry," Debussy consumed twenty-seven years of his life, presumably as he searched for new orchestral effects for "Usher" and experimented with choral effects for "Devil." A letter to his publisher







## To Helen

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
 Like those Nicéan barks of yore,  
 That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,  
 The weary, way-worn wanderer bore  
 To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,  
 Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,  
 Thy Naiad airs have brought me home  
 To the glory that was Greece  
 And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche  
 How statue-like I see thee stand,  
 The agate lamp within thy hand!  
 Ah, Psyche, from the regions which  
 Are Holy Land!

Jacques Durand in 1909, typical of those he wrote during those years, said, "I have got into the way of thinking of nothing else but Roderick Usher and *The Devil in the Belfry* . . . I fall asleep with them, and I awake either to the gloomy sadness of the former or the sneers of the latter." Of Poe, he said in another letter, "Although dead, this figure exercises an almost agonizing tyranny over me. I forget the normal rules of courtesy and close myself up like a brute beast in the house of Usher unless I am keeping company with the Devil in the Belfry." Gatti-Casazza, former impresario of the New York Metropolitan Opera Company, paid Debussy to secure first performances of both operas. But despite the many years of living with them and actually identifying with Roderick, Debussy completed only a libretto and twenty-one pages of music for "Usher" and just some libretto notes and three pages of music for "Devil."

Maeterlinck, who wrote the original drama on which the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Debussy is based, said, "Edgar Poe has exerted over my work, as over all others of my generation, a great, profound and lasting influence. I owe to him the birth in my work of a sense of mystery and the passion for the beyond."

Rachmaninoff often said his own favorite composition was *The Bells*, written in Rome in 1913. This was his largest single instrumental work, a grandiose hybrid, part choral symphony, part dramatic cantata, and strongly Wagnerian. Its first performance in Moscow in 1914 received great praise. Subsequently, it was translated into German and from German into English.

Ravel's two art idols were Poe and Mozart. He claimed Poe to be his model composer and said Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* led him to abandon the formlessness of the early French impressionists in favor of a return to the classic standards. At a lecture in Houston in 1928 the composer said, "The aesthetic of Edgar Allan Poe, your great American, has been of singular importance to me."

Two other familiar composers listed in *Music and Edgar Allan Poe* are John Philip Sousa, who wrote a song "Annabel Lee," and Edward A. MacDowell, who had an unfinished manuscript, only thirteen measures, for "Eldorado," written for four-part men's chorus. More than a hundred composers believed Poe's poems and prose would well serve as a basis for their musical efforts. Perhaps it was the dominant musical quality of Poe's writings that instigated this shared belief. However, there is a question as to whether the musical compositions were equal to the writings themselves, which possessed an innate melody, harmony, and rhythm difficult to duplicate or enhance when set to music.

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# Passage à la Poe

“. . . How each visitor shall confess  
the sad valley's restlessness . . .”

Edgar Allan Poe  
from “The Valley of Unrest”

Elusive day forever yields its light  
shadow by lengthening shadow into night  
as petals blacken on the velvet rose  
and the white, fleeting feet of beauty pass  
over the mortal grass without repose.

What always is lies elsewhere. Beauty's rhyme  
sets echoes ringing beyond space and time.  
The pilgrim's journey is his beating heart  
marking the tempo of his pulse and song  
in formal measures. Time and space become  
a future entered and a going from,  
a throbbing movement, restless pendulum  
swung between grief and gladness all life long.  
In his recurrent sorrow he must keep  
mourning the beauty he would wake from sleep,

from death-like sleep, a silence deep and dark,  
earth-bound as seeds bind flowers when the spark  
of vivid, darting movement pales in death.  
Mourning, the poet makes of grief a song  
and wakes his love with music, beauty's breath.

—Sister Ellen Murphy



## **SISTER ELLEN MURPHY**

*Sister Ellen Murphy is a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, a community of religious women, founded in France in the seventeenth century, four of whom journeyed up the Mississippi from St. Louis aboard the steamer St. Paul, arriving in St. Paul in November, 1851, to establish schools and hospitals at the request of Bishop Cretin.*

*Before entering the community of the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul, Ellen Murphy spent her childhood on a homestead farm in North Dakota, attending a one-room rural school where she did much drawing and painting and writing of poetry and where she dreamed of becoming an artist.*

*In the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Sister Ellen has spent her years teaching in the Community's schools at various levels. She is at present a member of the Education Department at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, a college founded in 1906 by the Sisters of St. Joseph for the education of women. Sister Ellen's poetry has been published in America and Commonweal, weekly reviews of public affairs, literature and the arts. Body of Time, a selection of her poems, made up the content of North Central Publishing Company's Christmas book in 1971.*



# America in the Era of Poe

By John Howe

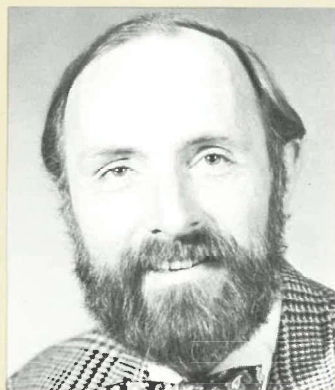
By the middle of the 19th century, America was an infant republic no longer. Stretching in full dimension from coast to coast, its people numbering 30 million, its factories and farms, its mines and mills pouring out the continent's wealth, the United States had become what its Founders 75 years before could scarcely have imagined (or most of them even have wished), a nation of truly imperial size.

Not yet ready to thrust outward across the surrounding oceans, though that would come within the experience of many then living, the American people directed their energies inward, over the prairies and mountains of the vast interior and into the burgeoning cities — New York, Baltimore, Cincinnati, St. Louis — that grew almost beyond imagining. "Go Ahead!" was the slogan Americans used and it fitted their circumstances aptly enough, for change seemed the only constant in how they lived.

Immigrants — Irish and German, but British and Scandinavian, too — clogged the eastern cities, some of them finding their way west to open the land or build railroads and canals, but many more staying behind to provide labor for America's mushrooming factories. In the South, black slaves, their servitude a blasphemy that abolitionists angrily decried, grew the cotton that filled New England's mills. Westward across the Ohio and the Missouri, then back toward the east from California's golden land, in one of the greatest folk movements of all time, roamed the restless people, leaving old lives behind, occupying the land, growing crops and grazing cattle, building new towns — and relentlessly pushing aside the Indians who stood in the way.

Equality! Opportunity! Progress! These were the themes of exuberant, democratic Americans. Belief in their reality carried farther than reality itself, but where the two seemed farthest apart reformers in abundance rushed forward to set things aright. Women's rights, prisons, temperance, public education, religion: every cause had its champions.

Within a decade this bounding, boundless land would be torn in two, its people North and South at each other's throats — at least in part, over the issue of whether blacks as well as whites should be free. But that lay ahead; in 1850 the last of the great sectional "compromises," fashioned by Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, once again postponed the reckoning. For the moment America's Manifest Destiny seemed abundantly clear — to grow and build, to overspread and possess the continent, to develop with God's blessing the great experiment of liberty and self-government. "Christianity, rational philosophy, and constitutional liberty," intoned the Chief Justice of Kentucky in 1843, "are rolling their united and resistless tide over the earth. . . . Doubtless there may be partial revulsions. But the great movement will . . . be progressive, until the millennial sun shall rise in all the effulgence of Universal day!" In time, Americans would come to understand the dangers of such a vision. But in 1850, for most Americans at least, that vision's promises seemed much more real.



## JOHN HOWE

*John Howe is Professor of History and also serves as Associate Dean for the Social Sciences in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. He received his Ph.D. from Yale University in 1963. During the years of his doctoral studies and subsequent teaching assignments he has won several fellowships and grants. The latest of these were a Guggenheim Fellowship and an American Philosophical Society Faculty Research Grant from 1971 to 1972.*

*Howe is the author of several books and articles in the field of American history. His latest book is From the Revolution Through the Age of Jackson: Innocence and Empire in the Young Republic (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973).*





Virginia Clemm Poe  
Drawing by A. G. Learned  
Poe Foundation, Inc.

Ever with thee I wish to  
    roam—  
    Dearest, my life is thine.  
Give me a cottage for my  
    home  
    And a rich old cypress vine,  
Removed from the world with  
    its sin and care  
    And the tattling of many  
    tongues.  
Love alone shall guide when  
    we are there—  
    Love shall heal my  
    weakened lungs;  
And O, the tranquil hours  
    we'll spend,  
    Never wishing that others  
    may see!  
Perfect ease we'll enjoy with-  
    out thinking to lend  
    Ourselves to the world and  
    its glee—  
Ever peaceful and blissful  
    we'll be.

### Untitled Valentine Poem to Edgar Allan Poe from his Wife, 1846

*For Valentine's Day, 1846, less than a year from the end of her life from tuberculosis on January 30, 1847, Virginia Elizabeth Poe, then twenty-two years of age, wrote a poem to her husband. There is a sort of a supreme irony transcending the pathos that this girl, sick, dying, of limited education, should submit her love in a format in which her husband would come to be regarded as technically the supreme master of all American literature.*



# Poe's Long Voyage Home

By J. C. Levenson

As one of the literary lights of New York in the mid-1840s, Edgar Poe was admired for his poetry and his remarkable stories and respected for his learned and passionately analytic critical writing. He was also envied and feared. An active journalist and editor, he was in the thick of one literary battle after another. There was no time for him to gather laurels and become a personage. His reputation while he was alive tended to rise and fall with the day-to-day tides of controversy. After he died it should have been different. What he was — his enduring character — ought then to have depended mainly on his work. No longer obscured by the dust of literary skirmishing, his stature should have been easily distinguished from that of his more forgettable contemporaries. But Poe the man who died in 1849 did not for a long time become Poe the vital presence in American literary history. He had his devotees, to be sure, but his general audience was little concerned with his most serious work. He had energized such popular forms as the mystery story and the fantastic (pseudoscientific) voyage, but these slipped rapidly towards sensationalism and reflected dubious glory on their first inventor. As a major artist affecting major artists, he fared poorly. Emerson regarded him as “the jingle-man,” while Henry James and T. S. Eliot made remarks about “primitive” or “arrested” development that resounded much louder than the qualifications they later added. The story of Poe in America is all the unhappier when seen in contrast with that of Poe on the international scene. In Europe he was not merely a figure of respected achievement, but he took his place almost at once as a major generative force in European literature, a vital innovator who helped the leading artists of successive generations find their own lines of originality. It was a long time before Poe the international figure made his way back to his native land.

The story begins in Paris in 1845. The first translation of a Poe story — “The Gold-Bug” — came out in that year when, in America, he was at a peak of recognition. Being translated was a further recognition, which Poe naturally enjoyed. Of course it did nothing for his perennial money problems since there was no international copyright protection on transatlantic exchanges. The next tale translated offered him still thinner pleasure, if indeed he ever learned of it at all. In June 1846, a newspaper version of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” came out with no mention of the fact that Poe was the author. Another newspaper version, with a different title in French, came out in October of the same year. This one was by E. D. Forgues, who was to be an active translator and critical interpreter of Poe's work, but this time he, too, printed the tale with no mention of its original author. A strange farce was then acted out. Forgues, who had flailed out with charges of plagiarism in his time, now found himself accused. He defended himself by naming Poe as the true originator. Obviously, he felt that the age condoned piracy as distinguished somehow from plagiarism, and when the accusing paper did not print his explanation, he indignantly brought suit. He lost in court, but the trial is taken to have done some good at least in giving publicity to Poe at the start of his French career.

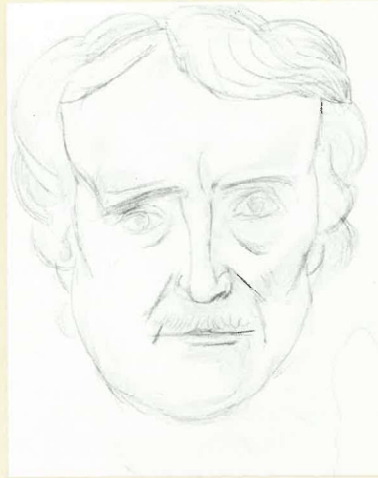
The distant skirmishing of Paris furnished an ironic counterpoint to much more painful events in New York. In the year or so from first translation to ineffectual lawsuit, Poe at home had begun his downward slump. Near-indigence, alcoholism, and the agony of watching his wife Virginia sink towards an early death were all causes, and so was the monomania on the subject of plagiarism that often surfaced in his fiercer literary controversies. He had already made the mistake, in 1845 when things were going well, of impugning Longfellow, whose pre-eminence among American poets he acknowledged and whose place in the hearts of his countrymen he should have guessed; Longfellow kept a dignified silence while Poe lost sympathy in the literary world that he would some day need. In June, 1846, he took on an infinitely smaller literary figure, and the critical flogging he administered to Thomas Dunn English, including a charge of plagiarism, triggered a violent response. English traduced Poe with respect to money, morals, and literature, and Poe in turn replied to the charge of forgery by suing the New York *Mirror* for libel. Eventually he won his suit, but silent dignity might have been a better tactic. The publicity did not make his name as in France, but tarnished it, and by the time he was awarded his \$225 in damages in early 1847, the succor came too late — Virginia Poe was dead.

Poe often misjudged the effects on himself and others of his critical bellicosity. Almost at the very moment when he was making the error of traducing Longfellow, he was making the even greater error of renewing relations with a man he had once critically flogged, Rufus Griswold. Griswold, with a show of magnanimity, invited Poe to appear in his forthcoming anthology *Prose Writers of America*, and Poe, accepting the magnanimity at face value, spontaneously apologized for his earlier harshness and moved towards reconciliation. He put more and more trust in Griswold, who in fact harbored a malignant hatred for him. In the end he made this secret enemy his literary executor, putting his posthumous reputation in the hands of an obsessed schemer who began his campaign of lies, imputations, and outright forgeries before Poe's body was cold in the ground and who would not be exposed till some ninety years had passed. For other writers life might be said to imitate art; for Poe there was the morbid irony that life-after-death seemed to imitate one of his dark tales of obsession passing itself off as reason.





Traylor miniature portrait of Poe.  
Poe Foundation, Inc.



Henri Matisse pencil drawing of Poe for  
Le Tombeau de E.A.P.  
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Cone Collection



Portrait of Poe by Edouard Manet, etching in the Lucas  
Collection on loan from the Maryland Institute to The  
Baltimore Museum of Art.

Fortunately, however, the “imp of the perverse” was not the only motif from fiction that manifested itself in Poe’s posthumous career. Once again there was a transatlantic contrast. While Griswold was first ensnaring and then maligning Poe, Charles Baudelaire in Paris was first discovering Poe and then dedicating his life religiously to the service of this American genius. The discovery itself was like one of Poe’s tales of doubles or of the transmigration of soul. “I felt a singular excitement,” he later recalled. “Since his complete works were not collected in one volume until after his death, I took the trouble of looking up Americans who were living in Paris so that I might borrow files of the magazines which Poe had edited. And then — believe me or not as you like — I found poems and stories I had thought about, but in a confused, vague, and disordered way, and which Poe had been able to treat perfectly.”<sup>1</sup> The feeling became stronger and stronger till he was sure that on his very first reading of Poe he discovered “not only certain subjects that I had dreamed about but *Sentences* that I had thought of and that he had written down twenty years before.” Intuitively he was as close to Poe as those most intimate friends who also knew Griswold’s malice for what it was. He had little to go on except his instinctive response, but his response to Griswold went to the heart of the matter: “This pedagogue-vampire defamed his friend at length in a long, dull, and vicious essay, printed at the beginning of the posthumous edition of his works. Can it be that America has no ordinance prohibiting dogs from entering cemeteries?” Although Poe in America might be going into eclipse, in France he was coming before the public.

Baudelaire seized upon what he called the *demon* of the perverse as the key to Poe’s fiction, the theme that united modern scientific interest in psychic aberration with inherited religious truths about man’s capacity for evil. Paradoxically, Poe became for him an obsession just the opposite of aberration. Committing himself to translate the American’s work, he labored some four hours at the task day after day for almost twenty years. Translating Poe became almost a religious exercise for him; it was a principle of order in a life well known for its disorder, not to say its flamboyant dissoluteness. He dedicated his first volume of *Histoires extraordinaires* to Mrs. Maria Clemm, Virginia Poe’s mother, who in her maternal guardian role became a saving force in Poe’s life during his most erratic and self-destructive years. Baudelaire, too, needed a saving force, and not just an ideal substitute for the actual mother by whom he felt himself rejected. Poe figured in his hopes, first of all, for needed income, such as the five volumes of translations might be expected to produce. Also, when *Les Fleurs du mal* was coming before the public prosecutor and Baudelaire’s notorious private life seemed to confirm the case for censorship, he seems to have thought that his work with Poe might stand as testimony to his sound literary character. The dead poet could not quite serve the living thus. Baudelaire relived some of the unsuccesses of his hero as well as his imaginative exploits. But the later poet, despite the morbid logic in which his life was caught, was able to serve the earlier. He launched Poe on a journey towards his present recognition that would continue, despite reverses, from age to age.

In France, said Remy de Gourmont, “all modern literature, especially what we call *symboliste*, is *baudelairienne*,” and the statement of Baudelaire’s importance still does not seem exaggerated. With such an advocate, such a translator, Poe was certain to have both direct and indirect influence on the important writers of succeeding generations. Sometimes among the poets the influence became a quantum leap of inspiration. Steéphane Mallarmé started from a somewhat different Poe from Baudelaire’s and put his emphasis on the imaginative otherworld the poet creates beyond the laws of common sense reality. A generation later Paul Valéry shifted the focus yet again and concentrated on the imaginative act and the rational discipline it requires. The great tradition of modern French poetry was a Poe tradition, but the bypaths of his influence are not just poetic, not



just French. Edouard Manet worked from the daguerrotype of Poe to a portrait. His two portraits of Baudelaire are better known, in which he captured first the dandy who controlled the surfaces of life and later the man matured by knowledge and suffering; behind those portraits lay his study of Poe in which he caught both qualities at once, the meticulousness and the depth. In music, Claude Debussy touched the Poe tradition when he set poems of Baudelaire and Verlaine to music and turned a Maeterlinck play into an opera; he thought of going behind all these writers and, for a while at least, contemplated doing a Poe opera. Not only in other arts but also in other countries, Poe's presence was more and more felt. It was generally accepted that Dostoevsky, although his critical praise for Poe was distinctly measured, was deeply affected by the crimes and punishments of tales like "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." Strindberg, estranged from Sweden as much as if he were a character in a Poe story, explored dreams and psychic duels and aberration with a sense that the American was a presiding figure for his own generation. On one occasion Strindberg even toyed with the notion of transmigration of souls, as if Poe had been reborn in him.<sup>2</sup>

In our own time there is Vladimir Nabokov, who traverses a path from Russia through Germany, France, and England and becomes, ultimately, decisively American. Professor Daniel Hoffman, playing the Auguste Dupin of literary detection, traces the antiworlds of *Lolita*, *Ada*, *Pale Fire* back to the fictive world of the tales and poems and pronounces Nabokov "a confirmed, nay, an obsessional, reader — or should I say devotee, or enchantee — of Edgar Poe."<sup>3</sup>

With Nabokov the great circle course of Poe's journey towards the center of American literature is complete, but it is not the only route. Poe's French heirs did their best to elicit an American response. Mallarmé was instrumental in the movement to dedicate a Poe Memorial, and to the ceremony of 1875 he contributed his famous sonnet "At the Tomb of Edgar Poe." Of American poets only Whitman attended, and he was too broken in health to play a creative part in the event. Later, Valéry was instrumental in getting T. S. Eliot to reread Poe and search out — unenthusiastically — his "importance." Evidently there had to be receptivity at home as well as pressure from abroad. The growth of receptivity was confirmed by two poets who, as it happened, were renewing the Whitman tradition in twentieth-century America. William Carlos Williams celebrated Poe for his scorn of plagiarizers and followers of the European past, and he declared in *In the American Grain* (1925) that Poe was great because "he turned his back and faced inland, to originality, with the identical gesture of a Daniel Boone." Hart Crane in *The Bridge* (1930) offered an intense glimpse of Poe as a tragic hero whose explorations "in the back forks of the chasms of the brain" were deeply connected to his agonized struggle to survive in the chasms of the modern city. But it was not till after the Second World War that an American poet gave a really new turn to the discussion of Poe as distinct from a brief suggestion. Allen Tate, though he entitled his first essay on the subject "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," did not put his main emphasis on the local roots of Poe's imagination. And though he was a devoted student of Valéry and Eliot, he did not simply bring home a French Poe whose Southernness or Americanness would be irrelevant. If France influenced Tate's reconsideration, it was through Jacques Maritain's criticism of Descartes as the fount of the modern separation of head and heart, thought and sense. Maritain's critique of European cultural history helped Tate see what Poe meant to him in American cultural history — not apart from Europe, but a part of Europe. When Poe's present force could be felt in such a context, Griswold's perfidy, life's actual griefs and pains, and the man's own failings could be set aside. The dust of old skirmishes settled at last, and in his full dignity and poignancy, an American Poe emerged for discerning eyes.

1. For Baudelaire I use the translations of Patrick Quinn, whose book *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (1957) includes a full and fascinating examination of the Poe-Baudelaire relationship.
2. Carl Anderson, examining the Scandinavian response to Poe in his *Poe in Northlight* (1973), cites the memoir of Johan Mortensen in which the incident is recounted.
3. Hoffman's defiantly personal book *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (1972) is scholarly as well as free-wheeling, reflective as well as clever.

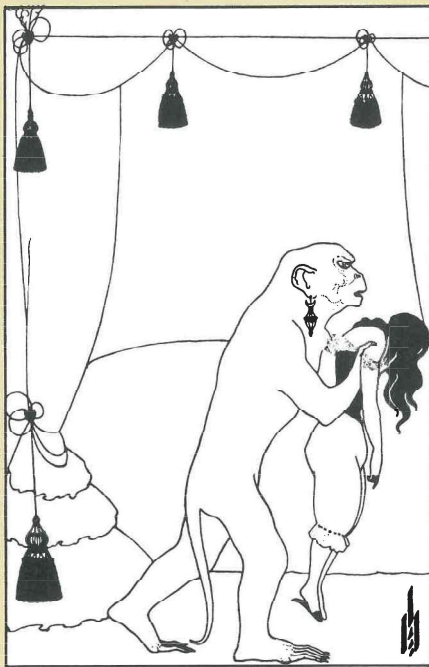
Copyright 1976 J. C. Levenson



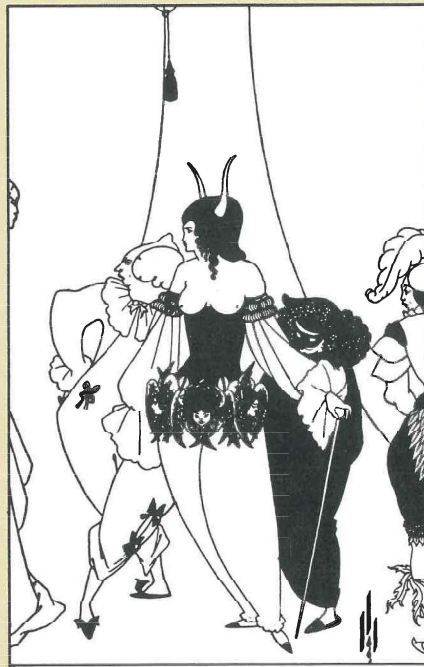
### J. C. LEVENSON

*J. C. Levenson is Edgar Allan Poe Professor of English at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Born in Boston and educated at Harvard, he taught at the University of Minnesota from 1954 to 1967. He is author of The Mind and Art of Henry Adams and introductory essays in critical biography for the Virginia Edition of The Works of Stephen Crane, as well as numerous articles on American literature and cultural history. While living in Minneapolis he engaged in various civic activities and was on the Board of the Center Arts Council of the Walker Art Center when they sponsored the first performances of what has since become the Minnesota Opera Company.*

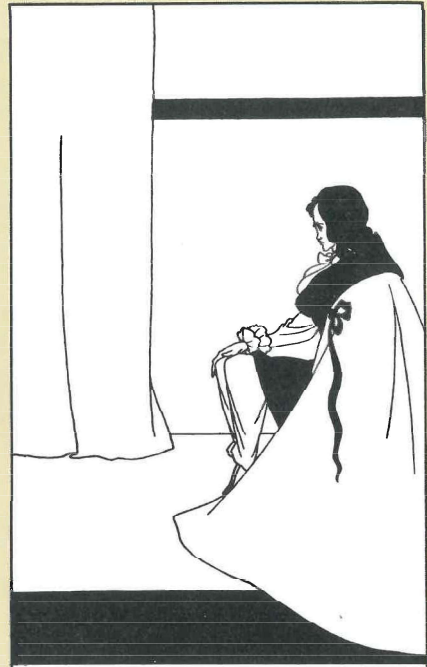




**THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE**



**THE MASK OF THE RED DEATH**



**THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER**

*Illustrations for the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe Drawn by Aubrey Beardsley*

**AUBREY VINCENT BEARDSLEY**, the noted English artist, was born in Brighton in 1872. At age 11, he appeared in public as an "infant musical phenomenon." His short, stormy career as an artist began at age 19 and lasted but seven years, ending in death in 1898. He had an unswerving tendency toward the fantastic, ignoring proportion and perspective. His freedom from convention evoked much protest from art critics. An ornamentalist rather than an illustrator, his works exerted much influence upon 20th century art. Beardsley's posters for the Avenue Theatre and for Mr. Fisher Unwin were among the first of the modern cult of that art. The illustrations reproduced here are taken from a Library of Congress copy of a limited edition of 250 volumes published by Herbert S. Stone & Company in Chicago in 1901. They were created by Beardsley in 1895 and 1896. As with most of his work, these were done with pen in stark, black and white contrast.



**JOHN D. MacDONALD**

John D. MacDonald was born in Sharon, Pennsylvania, and raised in Utica, New York. He took his bachelor's degree at Syracuse University and a master's degree in business administration at Harvard. With his wife, Dorothy Prentiss MacDonald, a painter whose work has been exhibited in many galleries, he lives in Sarasota, Florida, in a colony of 60 writers. At present, he is vice chairman of the Board of Trustees at New College in Sarasota, Florida.

One of the most versatile and successful authors in America, MacDonald began his writing career in 1945, when his wife had published for him a short story he had mailed to her instead of a letter during his Army service. After a slow start he began publishing in the magazine field. His stories have appeared in Ladies' Home Journal, McCall's, Good Housekeeping, Redbook, Cosmopolitan, and many other magazines. In 1950 he wrote his first novel. Today, 62 books later, he is one of the consistent bestsellers in paperback history. Several of his books have been made into motion pictures and television dramas.

Critics regard John D. MacDonald as "a first-rate craftsman" and "one of the finest storytellers around." The New York Times has called him "the John O'Hara of the crime suspense story" and his novels on the contemporary American scene command equal respect. In 1964, he introduced his only series character –

Travis McGee. There are now 15 entries in this bestselling series. The New York Times Book Review recently had this to say about Travis McGee: "One of the anticipatory things, come vacation time, is nosing around the paperbacks in the airport shop or the local drugstore, and getting aboard Travis McGee's houseboat. All those girls! All that philosophy! All that action! Jane Austen, Dickens, Tolstoy – that's for retirement. For vacation give me ol' Travis any time."



# A Very Personal Debt

By John D. MacDonald

"The mental features discoursed of as the analytical are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. We appreciate them only in their effects. We know of them, among other things, that they are always to their possessor, when inordinately possessed, a source of the liveliest enjoyment."

I first read those extraordinary opening sentences of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" some forty-seven years ago. Then, as now, the compelling word is "enjoyment."

We take relish in solving problems. Poe found a bright pleasure in constructing and posing his puzzles. It is fashionable to think of his as a shadowed brooding talent, purveyor of a murky twisted art.

To me, when I was twelve, his stories were fun. Reading them over this past week, I can see now, from the writer's point of view, that they were fun for him as well. When one takes joy and satisfaction from the labors of composition, the flavor is unmistakable.

It is Poe's enthusiasm which carries the reader along with him through the lengthy explanation of the basics of cryptography in "The Gold-Bug." It is his passion for intellectual games which makes Dupin's mind-reading feat in the early pages of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" almost believable. In the same story Poe took the dirty glee of a Halloween child in the act of stuffing a body up a chimney.

One could make a case for proclaiming Poe the father of all deduction, sire to all fictional detectives, from Holmes to Poirot and Nero Wolfe. But deduction was alive and well in stories and legends far predating Poe's work. Man has always been the monkey which piles up the stones, mounts to the top with stick in hand and knocks down the banana. From the wisdom of Solomon to the intrigue of the Arabian Nights there has been a relish for problems, a human pleasure in solution.

What Poe did was take this most basic pleasure and invent a new vehicle for it. He achieved his plausibility by using the greatest care in achieving realism through accuracy in all detail. This plausibility, so intricately achieved, lent more dimension and believability to his characters. (One cannot believe in a real person in an improbable room.)

And he spoke with his own music, his own sound. He would construct very solid and stately sentences and paragraphs, yet so embellished with subordinate clauses and sensual textures that perhaps his style could be termed gothic-baroque:

"During the whole of a dull, dark and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher."

Yet he had the skill and sense to know when and how to change the rhythm for maximum effect. As in this sentence from "The Tell-Tale Heart:" "I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him." Finally he devised a detective-protagonist and gifted him with deductive skills, "inordinately possessed," and involved him in several cases.

Contemporary writers who have never read Poe, and regretably they are legion, are influenced by him because Poe set standards which subsequent mystery fiction had to meet in some regard, greater or smaller, or fail of publication. Plausibility through realistic treatment of detail. Joy and accuracy in the posing and solution of dreadful problems. Texture and sensory images through development of a personal style. And a hero with a veritable lust for the truth.

I admit to a more direct and specific influence through that intensive early exposure when I was most vulnerable to the joy of pure story, to total personal involvement. It was General Lasalle who caught *my* arm just as I fell, fainting, into the abyss.

The most lasting effect, I think, has been the joy. I take my relish in finding the solution to the problem I have set myself, in finding the precise word, in building a fictional place as familiar as any of the places of the earth where I have been, in giving life to people of my own invention, making them so real they refuse to permit me to involve them in actions they would not commit, to give them words they would not say.

I must believe that Poe had these same excitements, these same satisfactions, and that alone at his work table he, too, as I have done, laughed aloud with great pleasure on those rare days when the words and the dreams fit together with a magic precision.

"Once upon a  
midnight dreary . . ."

"Mine are  
stormier,  
wilder, and  
more weird;  
they are  
more  
horrible;



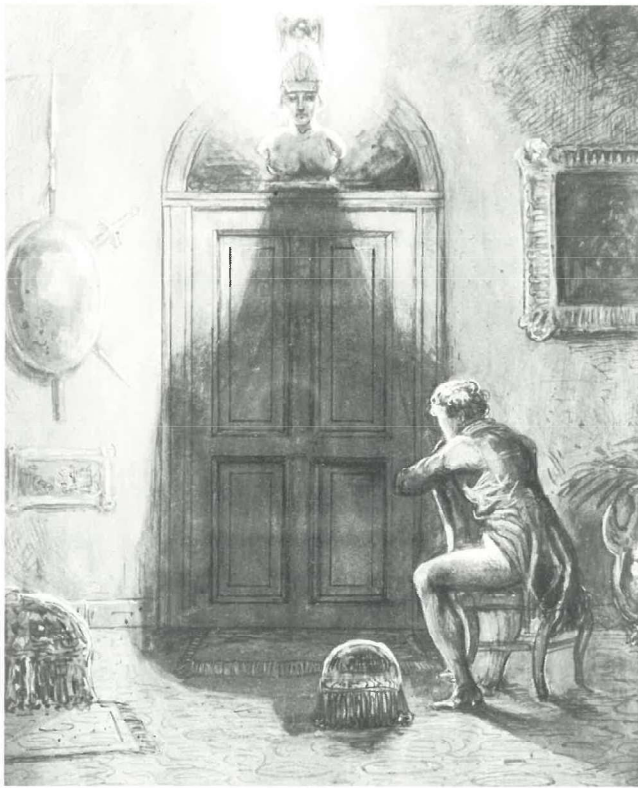
I have reproduced mentality and phantasm. . . . I feel that Poe would have said that I had been faithful to his idea of the 'Raven,' for I have followed his meaning so close as to be merged with his individuality." In these words James Carling described in his pamphlet, *The Scientific and Poetical Works of the Last of the Hereditary Bards and Skalds* (Chicago, 1884), a series of drawings he was doing to illustrate Edgar Allan Poe's poem, "The Raven," a few years before Carling's death in 1887. Some of these brooding, melancholic, and romantic drawings are reproduced for this commemorative book on Poe.

The drawings are now displayed in the Edgar Allan Poe Museum, which is run by the Poe Foundation of Richmond, Virginia. They were purchased from the Carling family in 1937, but the story of how the drawings came to light after 50 years of oblivion needs repeating, for the drawings were found in St. Paul, Minnesota.

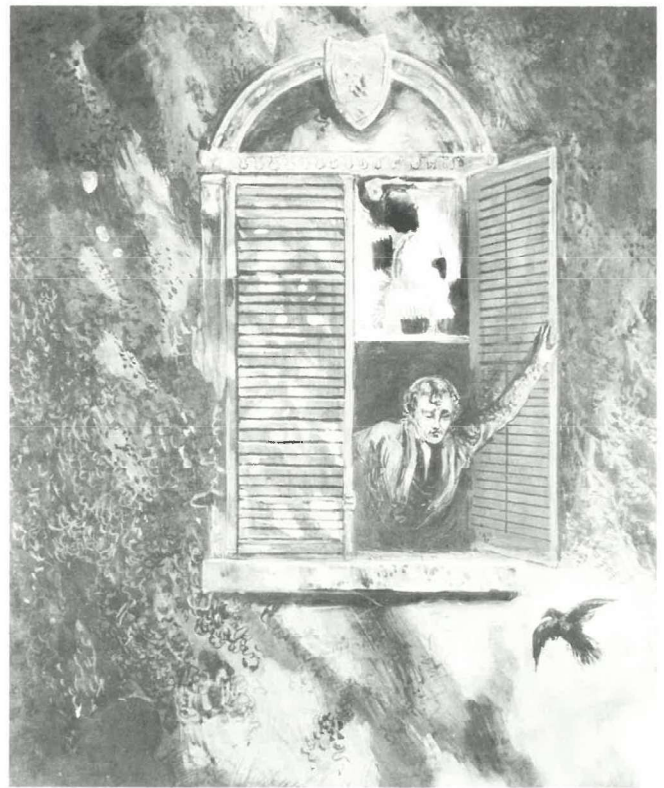
James Carling and his brother Henry, born in England in the middle 19th century in apparently poor circumstances, left home at young ages and eventually arrived in the United States, where they travelled around the country as itinerant artists. James at one point joined a travelling vaudeville show and was billed as "The Fastest Drawer in the World." By 1881, he and his brother Henry had a studio together in Chicago. It was between 1881 and his death in 1887 that James undertook to illustrate each line, not including refrains, of Poe's poem. He never finished all the illustrations.

Living long after his brother, Henry Carling came in time to settle in St. Paul, where he had a studio and established a reputation as a painter of pastels and of portraits. Around 1930, according to a story in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch Sunday Magazine* section of May 2, 1937, by George Scheer, Henry gave a studio tea. Among his own paintings, to the surprise and comment of his visitors, he also hung several of James' "Raven" illustrations, after having had them among his deceased brother's effects for almost fifty years. Henry died in 1932, and his daughter then sold her Uncle James' "Raven" pictures to the Poe Foundation.





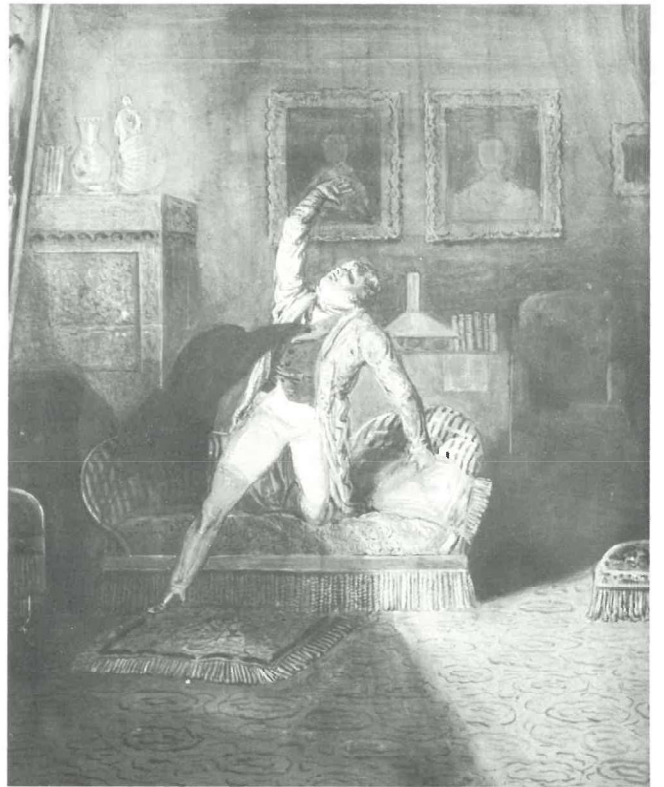
*"Back in the chamber turning, . . ."*



*"Open here I flung my shutter, . . ."*



*"Perched, and sat, and nothing more."*



*"Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"*

*From the original illustrations by James Carling for The Raven by Edgar Allan Poe at the Poe Museum, Richmond, Va.  
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John Fichette	Rory Lohberg	Douglas Oaks
Hans Gilgen	Stan Markum	James Paterson
Mike Jung	Robert Menne	Calvin Salo
Claude Lambertz	Klaus Mitterhauser	Dan Violet
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They are being aided by students from vocational technical institutes in Farmington, Brooklyn Center, Eden Prairie, Minneapolis, St. Paul and White Bear Lake.

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