CHAPTER IV

INFLUENCE OF OTHER POETS ON POE

Poe proposed a theory of the universe, which would reconcile the conflicting epistemologies that appear by imitation or by direct reference in his works. This effort at a synthesis was his 'Eureka' which he presented in lectures during the last year of his life, but published only after his death. W. K. Wimsatt's remark that 'Poe's ideas are Kantian and Coleridgean aesthetic......." is no more adequate than John Paul Pritchard's assertion that Poe's 'final definition of art............. is substantially Aristotle's doctrine of mimesis or artistic imitation'.

A young man of feeling like the late John Keats he announced not to engage himself with metaphysical subtleties in the manner of a philosopher. His 'Letter to B.' shows that he had a well defined concept of the purpose of poetry and nature of poetry. He arrived at his idea of priority of aesthetic value very early in his career. His general attitude was

common among romantic poets, but as he began to justify it, his difference from most of his contemporaries emerged; for his emphasis on **expressive form** was relatively uncommon in America, though it was familiar enough in Europe- M. H. Abrams in his 'The Mirror and the Lamp' has described the development of the concept of the lyric as a poetic form in British criticism, but has then gone on to show that this expressive theory, which exalted music as the pure expression of feeling reached an extreme among the German Fresh Romantiker. There is possibility that Poe had learned something concrete about German aesthetics from his reading of British journals. It is believed that Poe's interest in German literature might have been aroused by George Blaetterman, professor of modern languages at the University of Virginia and a native of Germany.

The subject which has attracted the attention of scholars for many years has been the nature and extent of Poe's borrowings from other critics. Coleridge has been considered a major influence. Poe appropriated almost exactly Coleridge's distinction between poetry and science in his 'Letter to Mr. B.,' though he claimed to dispute the authority of both Wordsworth and Coleridge, yet he expresses his admiration for Coleridge's 'towering intellect' and "gigantic power." The grounds of his disagreement with Wordsworth were
made very clear, but the only charge he brought against Coleridge was that the critic "goes wrong by reason of his very profundity....." This reminds us of Rousseau's indictment of reason and Poe's affinity with Keats. Keats had written letters to Richard Woodhouse condemning Wordsworth and Coleridge for philosophizing instead of being content with feeling.

Before the review of Drake and Halleck, Poe had made little attempt to use a psychological approach in his criticism, although he had the example of Coleridge and more, remotely Kames, Blair and Alison before him. Nor had he attempted to express a metaphysical basis for his theories even though Coleridge his chief guide had applied both philosophical and religious principles to poetry. In this review however Poe did both, possibly because he wished to be a critic rather than a book reviewer. Poe began by attempting, as Coleridge had in Chapter XIV of the Biographia Literaria, to formulate a definition of poetry, taking poetry as Coleridge had, in its larger sense as embracing all genres of art. Then, still following Coleridge's method, Poe undertook to define poetry in psychological terms; but unlike Coleridge, who focussed on the creative mind of the poet, his power of reconciling opposites, Poe focused upon poetic feeling, which he claimed could be described distinctly enough "for all purposes of practical analysis."
The concluding paragraph of Poe’s ‘Letter to B.’ begins with a close paraphrase of a statement in chapter XIV of Biographia Literaria: “A poem in my opinion is opposed to a work of science by having, for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth…….” Then Poe omits the second half of Coleridge’s sentence, which distinguishes the poem from other pleasure giving literary forms and substitutes it with a distinction of his own, which is crucial to our understanding of Poe. His substitution (terminology) provides clues to his assumptions about the way the mind works in perceiving beauty; he says “A poem.......... is opposed.......... to romance, by having for its object an indefinite instead of a definite pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with indefinite sensations, to which end music is essential, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music then combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music without idea is simply music; the idea without music is prose from its very definitiveness.”

Poe’s preposition in this passage is simple, poetry being in metrical form, should not attempt to express clear and definite ideas but should be limited in its aim to some sort of vague pleasure. Romance is a highly imaginative prose narrative written in America by Hawthorne. Simms, and Poe
Coleridge referred to the romance and the novel, but Poe omitted the novel, probably because he thought that the romance differed from the poems only because it was in prose, whereas the novel was so different that it was not worth consideration. Poe used the term "sensation" in reference to what is felt from the perceptible images of both the romance and the poem. The term is not a synonym for feeling or emotion but it stands for the aesthetic response that justifies the usage. Both Poe and Coleridge had distinguished poetry from science on grounds of purpose. Poetry was different from prose fiction because it was fine art, metrical form like music, created indefinite feelings which modified the ideas derived from a perception of real objects or of a representation of real objects.

Poe never forgot the Kamesian dictum that emotions resembled their causes, poetry as a fine art raised the peculiar feeling of taste, which previous authority had established as different from ordinary sensation. Feelings are like their causes therefore the indefinite pleasure of taste must arise from indefinite sensations caused by metrical form, Poe thought he had caught Coleridge in an obvious error. Poetry was different from prose because it was directed exclusively at the taste, and thus Poe asserts that music is essential to the pleasurable effect of poetry. Coleridge has distinguished the pleasure of a poem from that of prose fiction not in kind but in
degree. The poem being an organized whole demanded close attention to its parts not merely as isolated elements but in their relatedness to each other in a total construct. Coleridge in chapter XVIII argues that metrical form was not essential to the pleasurable effect of poetry, but was only a conditional pleasure dependent upon thought and expression. Coleridge agreed with the traditional commonplace that meter stimulated feeling, but he was not prepared to admit that this intensified feeling necessarily blurred out perceptions. Instead, he wrote, "it tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings, and of the attention." Coleridge believed that meter is the proper form of a poem, because metrical form is essentially poetic, but because poetry implies "an excited state of the feelings and faculties" and meter helps provide this excitement. Coleridge always urged, and Poe denied, that though the immediate object of a poem is pleasure, its ultimate object ought to be truth, "either moral or intellectual."

It is obvious that Coleridge attributed value to poetry not because it was a fine art and aroused the peculiar pleasure of taste, but because, "beauty is a way of approaching the true and the good; it is a way of rendering truth realizable to the total mind........." The difference between Poe and Coleridge is fundamental, Edgar Poe in the
“Letter to Mr. B.......” and in all his subsequent criticism argued that poetry as a fine art appealed only to the sense of beauty, that metrical form was essential to this appeal and that it had nothing to do with sensual gratification or passion directed toward an object. Poe later in his career said that poetry was the “handmaiden but of taste,” establishing his return to the premises of the analysts of taste—— that there was a separate faculty for the recognition of beauty and that the operation of the reason in its pre Kantian definition as the power of analysis was foreign to, and even destructive to a certain extent of aesthetic feeling.

The end of art, as Poe conceived it was pleasure, and in poetry pleasure could only be communicated through beauty, which according to him became its essential and exclusive province. The need to justify poets and the existence of poetry was taken up by theorists of poetry enthusiastically in the English Romantic era. Surrendering up traditional definitions of poetry as a mirror of truth, or as an art for achieving effects on an audience, concurred in referring poetry to the motives, emotions and imagination of the individual poet.

The traditional scheme underlying many 18th

3. Walter Jackson Bate: Prefaces to Criticism (Garden City 1959) p.161
century discussions of the relation of poetry to other discourse may be summarized as, poetry is truth which is ornamented by fiction and figures in order to delight and move the reader; the representation of truth and nothing but truth, is non-poetry; the use of deceptive or in-appropriate ornament is bad poetry. For Wordsworth and Wordsworthians on the other hand, poetry was the overflow or expression of feeling in an integral and naturally figurative language; the representation of act unmodified by feelings is non-poetry, the stimulated or conventional expression of feeling is bad poetry. If poetry is not "obviously the spontaneous outburst of the poet’s inmost feeling ‘then it is not poetry at all according to John Keble.' If poetry is the overflow of the poet’s feeling or is expression for its own sake above all, if poetry is soliloquy or as Shelley said, is the product of a poet singing 'to cheer his own solitude with sweet sounds.........,' it would seem that communication becomes inadvertent, and the audience merely an eaves-dropper.” When the utilitarians attacked poetry for being outmoded luxury trade or a functionless vestige of a primitive mentality, they rudely posed a charge to which the romantic apologists, by the nature of their premises were peculiarly vulnerable.

In dealing with the problem about the use of poetry, the theories of poetic value can be divided broadly into
two distinguishable classes. First poetry has intrinsic value. It is to be estimated by the literary critic solely as poetry, as an end in itself without reference to its possible effects on the thought, feeling or conduct of its readers. Secondly poetry has intrinsic as well as extrinsic value, as a means to moral and social effects beyond itself. The two cannot be separated by the critic in estimating its poetic worth.

The first preposition is the common element in the diversified formulations of art for art’s sake. Various tendencies in German Criticism of the later 18th century converged towards this point of view. The analogy between a work of art and a natural organism opened the possibility that its end might be considered as simply the existence of the whole, as Goethe put it, ‘a work of art must be developed out of itself and regarded in itself.’ The hetero-cosmic analogy originally was developed to free a poem from conformity to the laws of this world by envisioning it as its own end. As early as 1782 Karl Philipp Moritz writing ‘On the Formative Imitation of the Beautiful;’ claimed that a work of art is a microcosm parallel in its structure to that of nature, and like that ‘a self sufficient whole,’ and beautiful is so far as ‘it has no need to be useful.’ Utility is superfluous, accidental and can neither increase nor diminish beauty; thus needs no end, no purpose, existence in itself, but has its entire value, and the end of its
existence is itself. For the energy of the artist creates for itself its own world, in which nothing isolated has a place, but every thing is after its own fashion a self-sufficient whole.\textsuperscript{4}

In Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement the propensity is to separate the faculties of knowing, willing and feeling and therefore to isolate from each other the realms of truth, goodness and beauty. Beauty is purposiveness perceived in an object 'apart from the representations of an end; and the observation of beauty is entirely 'contemplative,' 'disinterested,' indifferent to the reality of the object and free from any representation of its utility.\textsuperscript{5}

In the course of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, French writers followed by the English, responded defiantly to the indifference or hostility of a utilitarian society by working their elements into the formula of l'art pour l'art. All the poets of the anti-utilitarian group announced that the value of a work of art is co-terminous with itself. The end of a poem is not to instruct, nor even to please. The end of a poem is simply to exist, or to be beautiful; and all art, as Wilde said, is quite useless.

The second proposition, which had been held


48-49.
with few exceptions by critics from the ancient Greeks through the 18th century, denies that the judgment of poetic value ought to be severed from the consideration of poetic effects on the reader. In England it continued to be affirmed by poets and critics right through the romantic period. If the English romanticist ‘is a priest of art,’ as Hoxie N. Fairchild has remarked, "he remains a parish priest with a cure of souls." 6 Keats in his worship of beauty and his almost priestly consecration to his art, as well as in the character of many of his poems came closest to the theory and practice of later proponents of art for the sake of art. He declared in his letters that the poet’s approach to good and evil ends only ‘in speculation; he admonished Shelley that if we regard purpose as the God of poetry then an artist must serve Mammon, and he derogated Wordsworth’s compositions on the ground that we hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us. 7 But his other comments made it clear that Keats objected to the manner in which Shelley and Wordsworth sought their moral and social effects, rather than to the inclusion of these effects in the judgement of poetic greatness. For Keats the opposition between utility and beauty like that between beauty and truth seems to have


been one more aspect of the division against himself which was resolved only by his premature death. He is the first great poet to exhibit that peculiarly modern malady,........ a conscious and persistent conflict between the requirements of social responsibility and of aesthetic detachment.

If the early 19th century writers made the traditional claim that valid art has a use beyond beauty, it was with an important and characteristic difference. Earlier critics had defined poems as a delightful way of changing the readers mind, primarily as a way of expressing his own, the product effects human betterment, but only by expressing, hence evoking, those states of feeling and imagination which are the essential conditions of human happiness, moral, decision and conduct.

To Plato poetry had been bad because it aroused the emotions, and to Aristotle, poetry had been good because it purged the emotions. To the Wordsworthians, poetry, was great because it strengthens and refines emotions, and they believed that is was among the greatest of goods.

Shelley’s defence of poetry was the most elaborately reasoned and most impressive of all romantic statements of the moral value of poetry, Shelly wanted to unite the functions of a poet and a reformer. While still very young
Shelley had insisted that poetical beauty ought to be subordinate to the inculcated moral and that poetry ought to be a pleasing vehicle for useful and momentous instructions. The preface to his longer poems, however, show a mounting depreciation of teaching by moral preposition until, in the preface to Prometheus Unbound, he says flatly, "Didactic poetry is my abhorrence," however he also acknowledges that he has not given up his passion for reforming the world.

Poe began his poetic career on that far edge of romanticism wherein the chief danger is the assumption that reality is not simply the illusion of the single perceiving mind and this is quite evident from the ten poems in the Tamerlane volume of 1827. He began with a very private self as 'subject' and steadily, in subsequent revisions and editions, extracted the confessional air and employed those standard generalizations which might concern Poe or any other being. It becomes apparent from these poems that it is not the expression of conventional romantic anguish but that he is assuming God in a rather unusual way, his poems reveal the cry of the prophet or the despairing psalmist. He calls upon his God, he cries in pain; he shrieks with joy as though receiving an illumination; he proceeds through a set of religious experiences such as—the lost self, the dark night of the soul, the dying the rebirth. He is already his own vision-maker and
law-giver. He becomes his own seer and writer of apocalypses as Shelley had done in the romantic period, he both renounced and made a religion. But what Shelley had done violently, Poe was already doing easily and passively: he assumes the religious guise of the wounded seer and prophet, for the world and its anguish are greater than he can bear, therefore, he ends by renouncing the world and seeking a belief in some other world and in some other deity even if he becomes his own God.

This mood of a poet who is his own God and prophet marks all poems of Poe, it becomes a salient feature of Poe's creativity. He feels he is innocent and wronged an outcast. From outside he creates his own heaven and hell. Shelley's influence is very clearly visible in his 'Al-Aaraaf' in which his myth making reaches great heights and finds fullest expression. Poe's combination of mystical world-weariness, the visionary set apart from ordinary mortals owes to Shelley. The sense of unreality, the two opposite poles of human destiny i.e. fear and hope, the solitary superior spirit among the many, searching futilely for love and truth all mark the works of Poe.

Poe's debt to Byron is widely discussed by Killis Campbell and he believes that Tamerlane and early poems express Poe's early Byronic attitude of renouncing mere beauty
and undertaking the quest for truth, it also considers a theme always haunting the romantic mind—— a study in potential failure, the operation of the law of diminishing poetic returns.

What is interesting about Byron’s attitude is its hyperconsciousness; he recognizes the perverseness in his heroes and wants his readers to recognize it as well. Byron also speaks about the motiveless behaviour which is later developed in Poes works. However there is a difference between Byron’s treatment of the self fascinated, alienated hero and the treatment one finds in Poe. Byron favors the third-person for narrative purposes and keeps the protagonists of his tales at a distance. He normally employs the first person only in dramatic characterization and in short lyrics etc first person becomes a traditional persona. The use of the third person enable the poet to frame his character,—— to generalize about his behavior and also to judge it. Byron situates his protagonists in such a way that we see them in interpersonal and social contexts, loving, fighting, dying, by illuminating them in his way from different sides, Byron revitalizes his hero, while at the same time keeping him, as it were on center stage. Poe by contrast stresses the consciousness of his hero. We do not see the speaker so much as we hear him; he is a presence and a voice but not in the
Byronic sense a figure. As a result, we lack the sort of perspective that Byron provides e.g. in Tamerlane we experience Tamerlane’s world with and as Tamerlane experiences it, and feel the victimization he feels — the result is a work that, if it looks back to Byron in certain ways, looks forward as well to the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, but the difference between the two monologists is that Browning seems capable of slipping into an infinite variety of masks while Poe tries on very few.

The nearest relative of Poe’s Tamerlane is Byron’s Manfred. Both men are at home in the wilderness, especially in the mountainous. Tamerlane grows up in mountains heights and it is to the mountains that Manfred repairs when, near the end of Act I, he has sunk into hopelessness. But the experience the two men undergo are not at all identical. Manfred wants to kill himself but Tamerlane has no such impulse. Manfred yearns to forget but Tamerlane yearns to remember. In Manfred Byron presents two characters, a vocational hunter and an existential one, a man in quest of game and a man in quest of meaning in life. Poe joins the first role to the second, fashioning a character who is both a hunter in a practical sense, like Byrons Chamois Hunter, and a man on the ontological heights. Poe at the same time modifies the second role, for Tamerlane does not ascend in
order to find oblivion ——— at this point in his life he has no notion there is anything he might want to escape. In Byron’s poem there is a real test of powers, on the one hand the powers of Manfred which enable him to command many spirits, and on the other, the demonic powers that array themselves against him in an attempt to quell his rebellious spirit. But, like Shelley’s Prometheus, he is simply too defiant to be beaten down, he is held by fate that makes him continue living but does not determine the nature of his being, which is his own proud creation. Tamerlane however is radically bound, nature is working through both body and mind that has furnished the direction. It is not merely the obligation to live that is forced upon Tamerlane, there is no alternative for him but to do as the higher power dictates, to be as it ordains he must be.

There is nothing very dramatic in Poe’s verses, however the confrontation of Manfred is a dramatic moment, we want to see how defiant this hero really is. But there is no real struggle in it, by having Tamerlane speak to a virtual auditor Poe gives his hero a certain vocal palpability, but he never develops a conflict between the transgressor’s point of view and that of the holy man, thus Tamerlane’s story is merely a confession, and does not show that Tamerlane ever had a chance to alter the pattern of his life. Tamerlane is the victim of
not his free will but of his servile will, it is the story of a victimizer who becomes a victim.

The poem "stanzas" is Poe's attempt to lift certain features of Tamerlane's plight to a higher and more universal plane as Byron had already done in his epigraph in "The Islands." Poe's "Alone" is again a statement of the troubled vision of the Tamerlane figure echoing the Byronic sentiments as expressed in Manfred already. Similarly "The Dream" and "To ---" later titled "Song" is a faint echo of Byronic weariness and longing, he recalls a continuous dream of childhood where he revelled with imaginary beings, "of mine own thought." The defiant Byronic figure becomes a weeper of the 1849 "A Dream Within A Dream," The illusion with illusion theme implicit in the early visionary poems of 1827-31 becomes insistent in the last poems, not only in the context of the romantic convention, but also of Poe's own poetry.

"The Lake" the final poem of the volume has been regarded as one of the two best of the short "Fugitive Verses." A significant piece it brings out the themes of the volume— both the upper current of visionary dreaming and the under current of the circumscribed powers of the poet — to an appropriate resolution. The ill demon of the imagination triumphs over itself by creating out of its own
adversity a doubly visionary poem. It describes the Lake of the Dismal Swamp in Virginia, whose waters are poisonous, and is based on a local legend of the ghosts of two lovers who roam its shores. But it probably owes much to two poems by Thomas Moore: “A Ballad: The Lake of the Dismal Swmap and “I Wish I Was By That Dim Lake,” The speaker of Poe’s poem, the solitary visionary spirit responds more actively to the sinister element in Moore’s fashion.

The poems of the 1829 Al-Aaraaf volume darken the visionary experience even more. Al-Aaraaf is a star, where the spirits of poetic imaginings have a temporary existence in a region between hell and heaven. Thomas Moore’s Lalla Rookh (1817) —— the “Preliminary Discourse” provides a further gloss on Poe’s poem which happens to be Poes favorite works with George Sale’s translation of the Koran (1734) “Al-Aaraaf” itself balances, with more overt tension than the Tamerlane poems, the benign with the apocalyptic —— moving from the drowsy landscape of the spirits of flowers, nymphs, and music floating upon the air —— to a vision of the God-ordained destruction of earth —— to a vision of the final destruction as the star extinguishes.

Poe’s major themes involve loss, lost joy, lost love, lost purity and lost visionary experience of youth. The loss
motif is coupled with desire for unworldly dreaming as a refuge from pain, dull reality, or the dimming of the inner vision with scorn for one's own worldly pride and ambition, with an indefinite sense of some higher truth and purity residing beyond this world in the realm of the far stars. Poe's combination of mystical world-weariness in the figure of one of superior but dark vision in the early poems is blatantly Byronic and owes much to Shelley. The early poems are an apprenticeship imitation of pessimistic romantic poetry, a compendium of conventions drawn from the poetry of mutability in the 18th century from Wordsworth despite all Poe's ridicule of him, from Moore, from Shelley and from Byron and Keats.

In order to explore the intellectual and philosophical poetic temper of the 19th century in America, one should go to Poe, Whitman and Emily Dickenson who form the record of the American poetic sensibility in the 19th century as they are very similar though at first consideration they look quite different. Poe and Whitman were very similar in their search for a unitary theory of the universe of man and God Poe was never touched by the profound reaches of the Puritan mind in quest of its own private center, as was Emily Dickenson. Despite the influences of German transcendental thought and idealistic philosophy, Poe unlike Whitman, always remained half
rationalist and half organicist which amounts to a return to the Middle Ages, but he was also a citizen of his age keenly aware of the fracture which Cartesian logic and Lockean psychology had made in man’s conception of himself and of his world. In its way Poe’s problem was very much like that of Henry Adams or of Wallace Stevens: that of seeing unity in diversity, of conceiving the design behind the apparent chaos of associating matter and mind. Davidson affirms that “Poe was not strictly speaking a “philosopher” any more than Henry Adams and Wallace Stevens were to be. Yet he regarded his world and employed his art “philosophically”; that is, his poems, short stories, and certain critical pronouncements were projections of the mind and the imagination toward a metaphysical order and were attempts to phrase not the “why” but the “what” of man, his mind, and his world. The poem, the short story, the novel like Pym became the symbolic enactment of man’s search for logic and meaning.”

Davidson emphasizes that the Romantic mind wore itself out or even destroyed its own imaginative powers and contended themselves, with their private meditations, resulting from the ‘Romantic agony’—— a frustration and terror a poet realizes when he knows that he has nothing more to

say or when he realizes that his poetic rhetoric fails to express what his imagination envisions. Poe like every other romantic minded poet sees everything from within, and he even sees the universe as a kind of opaque mirror of itself resulting in the production of autobiographical narrative e.g. his Arthur Gordon Pym and The Raven. In some respects Poe might be called the formulator of the theme: the subject of his poetry and of a great deal of his stories, is the chronicle of the Consciousness of a hypersensitive youth. Poe’s development was limited to how far Poe could project or enlarge his own personality, or his imaginative selfhood. His sense of self was however, perilously close to an exclusive narcissism, he could continually invent imaginative protagonists of himself who would do what, imaginatively needed doing in the poem or short story, and all the while leave him safe and untouched.

One of the major themes in Poe’s whole creation is his longing for the mother, for a kind of female night-shape, who is never there and will never come. This mother image was, more importantly one of the psychic projections of Poe’s own inner world; the lost mother was a means of his acting out a number of themes which lay deep in his imaginative consciousness. This longing was coupled with a fear of the dark and of the night. The child Marcel in Proust’s Swann’s Way suffered excruciatingly in the dark, but he could
at least hear the voices below stairs, and for the rest of his life Poe heard, over and over again, the voices, of his imagination out of the dark and terrifying night of his childhood. In that strange blending of visions, which were to possess him for a lifetime, Poe saw a mother-image cast in the dark night of fear and death. Writes Davidson, "This night-shape was always young, a beautiful woman arrayed in the filmy dress of marriage or the funeral: the nightgown or wedding dress easily shifted into grave clothes, and the innocent white of the bride was the pallor of death on the cheek. The early lyric, 'I saw thee on thy bridal day,' was with very little change in metaphor, a version of Irene in "The Sleeper." In Poe the child became the man; and the mother who never came in the dark of the night grew into the demon lover, the poltergeist, who was to haunt him in all his poetry and in many of his short stories."9

Poe suffered a deep feeling of displacement when after being reared as a gentleman found himself suddenly cast away by the family when he returned to Richmond, it was indeed one of the harshest blow that life could inflict upon him—— it split Poe's life in two. Yet like other outcasts, Poe enjoyed his special condition; he reveled in regions of sighs & solitude. "He developed early a capacity for introspection, and these private meditations, coupled with the power of self

expression, induced Poe to speculate on his own mind as outside of, or, as functioning apart from the world of men and reality. In that separation Poe sought, ultimately, the deepest meanings of his own existence—— yet this speculation was going on all the while that Poe was setting up a number of barriers or defences against final self-revelation. The feeling of isolation or the sense of personal loneliness can actually become means of insight into the nature of the self and the world. They can become not philosophies, but philosophic attitudes. Kierkgaard, whose mind was contemporary with and much like Poe’s, put on his mask of the “either/or” whereby he could play the trifler in public and hold his mind in suspense and ready for speculation in the deepest privacy. Poe was similarly the histrio, the shaper of masks for the self and a teller of lies in order to conceal the cracks in a histrio’s facade.¹⁰

The impact of nineteenth century ‘Waldens and brother-hoods of men’ was quite perceptible in Poe, from the generation Poe learnt to express himself both in privacy of his own mind, and in the community of his fellowmen. He belonged to the age of Hawthorne and Melville the distinguished citizens who tried to solve a question central to the modern world: if man is a mind, he cannot live in a mindless or mechanistic world. Either he must be mechanistic man existing

¹⁰Ibid.: p. 49.
in a mechanical universe, or he must see himself as a mind living in a world which also functions according to some intelligence. The solution Poe reached at, had a validity until the impact of evolutionary and Pragmatic thought. The solution though not permanent had wide reaching effects as had solutions of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Poe considered to be almost a touchstone for romantic mind, sought the answer to the epistemological dilemma—— does man as mind live in a mindless universe? He realized that the quest had to be under gone alone, if it reached its goal in privacy, it might then turn outward towards the world. But as Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus, Mill’s Autobiography, New man’s Apologia and Arnold’s poetry conveys, the social message could come only after a private regeneration. The private self was first mirror for the world and then the world could be seen as it truly was — a universe of mind which somehow was like the private self as a mind. The romantic quest was an act of destruction or renunciation: the real world was abandoned or reduced to the conditions imposed by the self as mind; then only could reality or world assume its being and this needed a double activity of intellectual making and reshaping. However Edgar Allan Poe never came out of the first stage: the young mind’s private indulgence in solitude, and in terror and dream became the habit of a lifetime,— the visions of the dying or dead
girl-mother, then the youth’s private longing for solitude, finally the literary capital which could be made from the terror of self-consciousness and the dark night of the seeking mind—these became the major imaginative enterprises of a lifetime.

The split between the inner self and the outer world, was never complete in Poe: the mind which employed itself in the discursive journey of self-exploration was never quite the total enterprise. There was another side of his mind which, remained apart from the activity of the other. While one side was engaged in an imaginative destruction of reality chiefly in the poetry and in select group of tales, the other half of the mind was attempting to make sense of reality and put to logic back together, this side functioned in the tales of ratiocination, in the criticism and in the philosophic prose poem ‘Eureka.’ The mind was split between, on the one hand, its delight in and on the other, its consciousness that the world was untouched all the time. This fracture or dualism in Poe was psychological as well as philosophical: it was part of the major stream of intellectual and artistic life, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century. It was Cartesian dualism which left to future generations the problem of a split world: the question of subject and its object, the artist and his material, the “I” and the universe. However romantic psychology and epistemology were, in great measure, an
attempt to bridge this gap and to resolve this split. Philosophically, the question pertained to the relationship between the mind and the world: One question is rationalism or mechanism, the other idealism or organicism. The answer which a writer or artist makes, instinctively or logically determines the kind of art he will produce. On the one hand he may be Alexander Pope; on the other, Coleridge, Poe or Wallace Stevens. Poe attempted a solution to the said dualism within unity. Subject and object, mind and matter, the artist and the world ought to exist in some functional and apprehensible design. Melville believed that has he permitted his own mind to shape the world in terms of his own private vision, the world of sensible reality is annihilated, thus to render only the individual attitude towards the world would mean a retreat into introspection and loss of communication with the world.

Poe began where Melville had left as he was more daring, if Melville rejected the substantial world because it was a mass of unyielding, unknowable stuff, Poe early abandoned any organic conception which his basic monism told him ought to exist. He had several methods of resolving the problem of a dualism within the One, he could abandon the world of substance and retire into the loneliness of the single perceiving self or he could make the sensible world unite with the perceiving mind or self, but Poe was too much of a
rationalist and permitted only an epistemological separation between the mind and reality; he sent his imagination on a series of journeys, which were means and acts of conquest, of the mind over the material world.

As a literary critic Poe found it necessary to assume that each event had its rationale, not only in terms of its existence but also in terms of his purpose, the final cause of an event determined its mode of being. Thus, in his criticism he was prone to examine an artistic event not only for its immediate cause but also for its place in the scheme of things. Poe thought that an artwork constructed by men, was thought by Poe to follow the order of nature in so far as it exhibited design, a rational plan to implement a preconceived end. But art was, not nature; it was artificial made by man, and had its final cause and its own mode of being, humans could imitate the divine artist by recognizing the purpose of art and by developing a design that too would carry out this purpose. He set out to justify art according to the mimetic concept of Aristotle. Poe believed the poetic feeling to be an innate human need. In this Poe’s orientation was towards romantic transcendentalism, particularly its Platonic elements. Poe was not guided solely by the aesthetic ideal of the Enlightenment if he would have been, he would have assumed that the end of art was to create a formal imitation of the order of the universe, and
unquestionably this ideal appears in Poe’s aesthetics; but in terms of value Poe thought that art must attempt to convey the soul’s vision of beauty, for man could not duplicate the Great Design; he could only attempt to reproduce the effect that an intuitive perception of perfect order would stimulate. This Platonic concept is conspicuous in Shelley’s poetry resulting in Poe’s approval of Shelley.

Poe says in the thirteenth Marginalia, “Were I called upon to define, very briefly, the term ‘Art,’ I should call it ‘the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul.’ The mere imitation, however accurate, of what is in Nature entitles no man to the sacred name of Artist.” The idea which Coleridge took from the Introductory Lectures of Aesthetics of Jean Paul Richter the German critic, and made it the basic foundation of his aesthetic doctrine, the distinction, that is, between fancy which combines and imagination which creates is often combated by Poe. Between the two, he says, there is no difference, not “even a difference of degree.” The Fancy as nearly creates as the imagination, novel conceptions are merely unusual combinations. The mind of man can imagine nothing which does not exist: if it could, it would create not only ideally, but also substantially as do the thoughts of God. But fancy and imagination cannot be considered to be one. The creating mind can, according to Poe himself,
manifest itself in a work of art with greater or lesser intensity and with a different disposition. Hence there exist imagination and fancy each of which gives to the work a distinctive coloration and rouses in the soul of the reader a different impression. From novel arrangements of old forms which present themselves to Imagination, it selects only such as are harmonious, thus resulting in beauty itself— the term 'beauty' used in the most extended sense, and as inclusive of the sublime. It is this thorough harmony of an imaginative work which so often causes it to be undervalued by the undiscriminating. We are compelled to think and ask why is it that these combinations have never been imagined before? When the combination is rare, the result then appertains to fancy, and though it is less beautiful than a purely harmonious effect it generally pleases the majority. But fancy which delights in novelty and unexpectedness and is wanting in proportion insisting in seductive errors changes to 'fantasy' or 'caprice'. The result is therefore abnormal, and to a healthy mind affords less of pleasure than of pain through its incoherence. When fantasy proceeds a step farther and seeks not only disproportionate but incongruous elements the effect is more pleasurable from its greater positiveness and makes us laugh changing it into humour.
Poe believed that the principle that impels the poet is the aspiration towards supernal beauty, that supernal beauty which illuminates and kindles his soul, thus the effect that a work of art must produce is the pure elevation of soul itself, an excitement of the soul independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the heart, or of truth which is the satisfaction of the reason. Thus the true great work of art must not be passionate, as passion in its common meaning is vulgar and coarse revealing the weakness and imperfections of human nature. Poetry and passion are discordant—the latter intoxicates the heart, the former exciting it, elevates the soul. According to Poe the objective necessity of dispassion in a work of art supports the mind, any strong mental emotion stimulates all the mental faculties such as grief arouses the imagination, thus the excited fancy triumphs, the grief is subdued, chastened and is no longer grief. In this mood we are poetic and the poem written at this point of time will be poetic in the exact ratio of its dispassion, thus according to Poe Elegiac poems should either assume the character of sweet melancholy, or dwell purely on the moral or physical beauty of the departed or utter the notes of triumph which he says he tried in some verses of ‘Lenore’ Shelley’s ‘Adonais’ must have inspired him to compose his ‘Lenore.’ Poe follows the aesthetic doctrines of Shelley and Coleridge that after violent emotions
of 'sorrow' the mind demands amusement, and can find it in employment alone. The communicativeness of our Nature leads us to describe our own sorrows; in the endeavor to describe them, intellectual activity is exerted, and from intellectual activity there results a pleasure, which gradually associates with the painful subject of the description.

As did Coleridge reproduce in England the manifold German soul to the perfect likeness of the first German Romantics, however he preserved certain national traits, and his curious and complex temperament of philosopher, poet, social reformer and theologian exercised a great influence upon Shelley and other younger poets. Shelley in turn gave an altogether different and new interpretation which was free of every established system or doctrine possessing the capacity to hide from the mind of the listener or reader every doctrinal materiality from the splendid images, profundity of thoughts and the melody of sounds. Poe was the crier of the new message in America, he tried to liberate his country from the old English literary tradition, and Poe tried to reanimate aesthetic doctrines with new ideas, new explanations and adaptations of previously known concepts. The Biographia Literaria of Coleridge is the center, round which he moves, from there he extracts his materials leaving on each the stamp of his own intellect moving towards the impact and
search for the poetic effect. In Shelley Poe admired his ideality and richness of the images of beauty and besides this he most admired, his independence of every law and his abandonment to song. Poe was a great admirer of Tennyson and Keats as well for their preference and adherence of poetic forms and the absence of philosophic intention or social preoccupation.

Poe was amongst the first critics who desired to institute a positive criticism of works of art proceeding from the effect produced on the spirit of the reader, but he could not work out the principles. He by instilling new concepts, by renewing old ideas and tampering them by his own intellect prepared in America the revival of English poetry which was prevalent in England a long time ago. Although Poe did not possess the vast turbid mentality of Coleridge nor did he had a throbbing heart of Shelley but like both of them he broke the chains of old traditions and developed his own singular individuality in a country at a time when an official school reigned uncontested.