CHAPTER-II

POE'S POETICS

The tendency has been to produce a set of principles, which would parallel the new imaginative writing, whenever a new kind of literature is produced. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Poe and later Eliot are some examples of poets whose creations satisfy perfectly their critical theories. The Romantic Theory of Poetry continued to form the basis of most of the modern theories.

The theory that poetry was engendered in emotion and specifically in religious emotion was proposed as early as 1704. It is said that religion at first produced poetry, as a cause produces its effect. The wonders of religion naturally threw them upon great passion, passion in its turn threw them upon Harmony and Figurative language. A similar theory was propounded by Steele in his fifty first Guardian paper, he said that the first poets were found at the altar usually mixed with the ancient doctrine of divine inspiration, and with the Longinian concepts of the importance of passions. This theory had considerable vogue throughout the latter part of 18th century.
Lucretius attributed the origin of poetry and the other arts, as distinct from language, to later non-expressive modes of activity. The Lucretion theory that language began as a spontaneous expression of feeling was bound sometime to merge with the concurrent belief that the first celebrated form of language was poetic, into the doctrine that poetry preceded prose because poetry is the natural expression of feeling. Early poetry, said William Duff in his Essay On Original Genesis” (1767), ‘being the effusion of a glowing fancy and an impassioned heart, will be perfectly natural and Original; and, the poetic genius of the uncultivated ages of the world’ acknowledges no law ‘excepting its own spontaneous impulse, which it obeys without control.’

According to Adam Ferguson, “the primitive poet’ delivers the emotions of the heart in words suggested by the heart; for he knows no other”. The enthusiasm, vehemence, and fire of the products of uncultivated ages, is the soul of poetry.

Their scattered material were to become part and parcel of romantic theory, and were to reappear not only in Wordsworth’s doctrine that all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of feelings but also in the basic theory of critics who had no inclination toward cultural primitivism or even were specifically

antiprimitivistic in their thinking. According to Sir William Jones, original and native poetry may be defined 'to be the language of the violent passions, expressed in exact measure, with strong accents and significant words.

As the vehicle of an emotional state of mind, poetry is opposed not to prose, but to unemotional assertions of fact or in short science. Prose is the language of intelligence, poetry of emotion. Poetry originated in primitive utterances of passion which through organic causes, were naturally rhythmic and figurative.

We may notice that there are a limited number of assertions about poetry that may be termed as the romantic complex of ideas about poetry. Wordsworth believed that the earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passions excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men feeling powerfully their language was daring and figurative. Coleridge believed that poetry, as the instinctive utterance of feeling, must have seemed to early man a more natural and less remarkable language than prose, it was the language of passion and emotions which they themselves spoke and heard in moments of joy, exultation, indignation etc.

Though romantic critics disagreed violently on the merits of primitive poetry, most of them accepted the hypothesis that it had its inception in passionate utterances... rather than, as Aristotle had assumed, in an instinct for imitation. Poetry is competent to express emotions chiefly by its resources of figures of speech and rhythm by means of which words naturally embody and convey through meaning and sound (music) the feelings of the poet.

The poetry that was written in America during the period beginning with the arrival of the first colonists and ending about the time of the Revolution was crude and imitative, with little artistic merit. It was not until the war of 1812 that poets like William Cullen Bryant appeared on the scene. The next poet of enduring reputation was Edgar Allan Poe who is by many considered the greatest poet America has yet produced. Certainly no American poetry equalled the melodic charm of his better works. Such poems as 'The Haunted Palace' and Ulalume clearly exemplify his melancholy mysticism and his gift for almost magical melody.

One of the advantages of studying Poe is that his achievement plays havoc with the pet distinctions that are often made between criticism and creation, Classicism and Romanticism. His critical and creative ability claim equal
recognition. His criticism helps explain both his poetry and fiction. In all phases of his work, imagination and reason collaborate in so curious and complex a fashion that at one moment he seems to be a classically minded romanticist, at another a romantically inclined classicist.

It is also specially worth remarking that for one who was generally regarded as iconoclastic poet, judgement was in its main outlines strikingly in accordance with the general judgement of the Victorian age. Keats, Shelley, and Coleridge he admired but he thought Tennyson "the noblest who ever lived — not because the impressions he produces are, at all times, the most profound — not because the practical excitement which he introduces is, at all times the most intense — but because it is, at all times the most ethereal — in other words the most elevating and the most pure. "No poet is so little of the earth, earthy."

From his critical writings, which include over 400 separate pieces mostly book reviews and notices, may be drawn an aesthetics that combines the spirit of Aristotle with the spirit of Coleridge. In many of his poems there exists a peculiar contrast or tension between their rationally predicted structure and total effect, on the one hand, and their weirdly imaginative subject matter and imagery on the other, or in the clarity and
economy of their wording versus the Vague nadirs and zeniths of their emotive overtones, as they aspire or expire, in Walter Pater’s phrase toward ‘the condition of music.’

His conception of what a good poem should be is set forth in his lecture ‘The Poetic Principle’ although not written until near the end of his life and first published posthumously. All the points he made in this influential statement tie up with this conclusion, one way or the other his rejection of what he called the heresy of the didactic, his refusal to reconcile the obstinate oils of poetry and Truth, his opposition to the long poem, his notion that poetry achieves supernal beauty in its pure form, that is when it approaches the condition of music and so on. A poet like Tennyson becomes the supreme exemplification of his theory.

The need to justify the existence of poets and the reading of poetry becomes acute in times of strain. The English Romantic era was the time when theorists of poetry, 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 century discussions of the relation of poetry to other discourse
may be summarised 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 ornaments is bad poetry. For Wordsworth and Wordsworthians on the other hand poetry was the overflow and expression of feelings is an integral and naturally figurative language; the representation of fact 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 poets' in most feeling then it is not poetry at all according to John Keble.

Poetry for Poe was "a passion rather than a purpose," and he thought about it considerably more often than he persisted in it. Poe believed that pure poetry consisted in artistical passionless expression—that melodious rhythmical creation of Beauty which is only to be seen by the couched eyes of the serene and unperturbed soul.

Poetry he declared ought rather to be written in moonbeams than in sunshine. This he firmly believed and this he contended was the divine love of Angels in Heaven. Certain of his theories, that linked its scope to a particular vein of material, prevented him from playing with it the tricks that he played with his art of narrative. He did not drag it, as he dragged his storytelling
in pursuit of his critical admiration. Limiting it to the expression of a single aspect of himself, he was content to wait for the moments when that aspect was his, and, when they did not come, to do no more than to revise what he had already written. Consequently, his poetry, inspite of his preference for it, bulks little in his work, and is almost overshadowed by the volume of his poetic theory.

An art work, constructed by man, 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. That art did have a place in the universal design was not to be doubted, because God had given man faculties for the production and the appreciation of art. Art could not duplicate nature as it was "artificial," but the human could imitate the divine artist, by recognizing the purpose of art and by developing a design, that would carry out this purpose. Poe thought that art must attempt to convey the soul's vision of beauty.

The important points of his theory of poetry are being outlined in his own words extracted from critical works.

Poe protested against the error of supposing didacticism to be a motive of poetry. He speaks in the Poetic Principle of a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated but one which, in the brief period has already endured, may be said
to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other elements combined.

"I allude to the heresy of the Didactic. It has been assumed tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, would inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetic merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans, especially, have patronised this happy idea; and we Bostonians very especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically, wanting in the true Poetic Dignity and Force, but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified, more supremely noble, than this very poem—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake."

Poe confined his attack on didacticism to a mode of expression. He did not identify didacticism with truth. And he declared that taste, the sense of the beautiful, "holds intimate relations with the intellect and the moral sense;" he even insisted

on the healthiness of true genius, denying that it could exist without the harmonious development of the whole human personality. It is not an accident that Emerson R. Marks, in one of the best and most recent evaluations of Poe's aesthetic principles finds him much closer to Arnold than to Wilde.

It is true that the moralists among those who rallied to Poe's attack on "the heresy of the didactic" sometimes carelessly assume that he was out to divorce art from morality, but the truth is that he was quite as much opposed to an appeal to the passions in poetry as he was to the poets setting up as a teacher or a moralist. He believed that in the contemplation of Beauty, alone is excitement of the soul or the pleasurable element attained, which is recognised as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is easily distinguished, from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from passion which is the excitement of the Heart. He believed that teaching demands a bare, severe style; the ornaments proper to poetry could only interfere with the adequate expression of truth. Truth, he said, demands precision, and Passion a homeliness........ which are absolutely antagonistic to that beauty which, he maintained, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. He is even himself a moralist in the narrower sense when he exclaims: "For, in regard to Passion, alas! Its tendency is to degrade rather than elevate the Soul." Poetry, he says, "tranquilizes the soul. With the
heart it has nothing to do.” He told that “a pure poem is one that is wholly destitute of a particle of passion,” it was on this basis that he argues that Tennyson was one of the greatest poets who ever lived.

The Poetic Principle was published in 1850 after Poe’s death. Eight years earlier, in a review of Longfellow’s Ballads, he had very ingeniously suggested how didacticism, once an accidental under current had come to be considered essential to poetry.

Mankind have seemed to define poesy in a thousand ways and in a thousand conflicting definitions, but the war is only one of words. Induction is as well applicable to this subject as to the most palpable and utilitarian; and by its sober processes we find that, in respect to compositions which have been really received as poems, the imaginative, or more popularly, the creative portion alone have insured them to be so received. Yet these works, on account of these portions, having once been so received and so named, it has happened naturally and inevitably that other portions totally unpoetic have not only come to be regarded as ex statu poetic. And this is a species of gross error which, scarcely could have made its way into any less intangible topic. Infact, that licence, which appertains to the Muse herself, it has been thought decorous if not sagacious, to indulge,
in all examinations of her character. 5

When he wrote that in the Poetic Principle, he had not yet written the most valuable sentence in "Eureka." "A perfect consistency is no other than an absolute truth." "He perceived only that poetry had nothing to do with the truth of novelists and teachers." The first element "of poetry was the thirst for supernal beauty—a beauty which is not afforded to the soul by any existing collocation of the earth's forms......... a beauty which perhaps, no possible combination of those forms would fully produce." Those two negations show that he was on the way to discovery, but he had not yet seen that this beauty was itself the quality of a kind of truth, the truth of art, "an absolute truth with a perfect consistency." He had not yet distinguished between the truth of moral and the truth of art. Supernal beauty had not been recognised by him as the invariable companion of the only truth that is above argument. He did not reject moral truth altogether, but generously allowed it its humble place in poetry, its importance as of a colour or a note of music with a higher end to serve.

"Beauty" he says is the sole legitimate province of a poem. And by beauty he means that intense and pure elevation of soul......... not of intellect, or of heart......... which is

5. Ibid. p. 119.
experienced in consequence of contemplating the beautiful.

It will be seen how forcefully Edgar Poe enacts it into his ars poetica the division of the sensibility assumed by the facultative, psychology which lingered on from the 18th century. Here he develops the consequences of the distinction he had made at the end of his earliest poetic manifesto, fifteen years before, the Letter to Mr. “B” prefacing his first volume of Poems (1831).

“A poem in my opinion is opposed to a work of science by having, for its immediate object an indefinite instead of a definite pleasure, being poem only so for this object is attained........”

Edgar Poe in his essay the Poetic Principle presents his ideas very shortly before his death. He does not follow the line of thought which “Eureka” had thrown open. He is more polite to the truth of logic but he does not call poetry by any name that would show, he had seen the trend of his own thinking, and recognised poetry as truth of a different kind.

“With as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would, never the less, limit in some measure its modes of inculcation. I would limit or enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of truth
are severe; she has no sympathy with the myrtle. All that which is so indispensable in Song, is precisely all that with which she has nothing to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox to wreathe her in gems and flowers. In enforcing truth we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood, which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind indeed who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthful and poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who inspite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.  

One shall run the risk of being considered theory mad, if one points out that he protests against the attempted reconciliation not of poetry and truth, but of lyrical and logical truth, of the concrete and the abstract or as and Croce puts it, of intuition and conception.

"Poetry and Truth are one," did not become entirely clear to him until he wrote Eureka, he had long been inclining towards this position. "The highest genius is but the loftiest moral nobility." Even when he was most extreme, he did

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6. Ibid.: p. 121.
not deny the legitimacy of a “didactic moral” as “the under
current of a poetical theme.” In his heart he must always have
been at least relatively clear on the difference between what
Patrick Quinn calls “the truth of logic and fact,” and “the truth of
insight and imagination;” it was the first, not the second, that he
thought foreign to poetry. It is true that Poe once remarked that
“even out of deformities the imagination fabricates that Beauty
which is at once its sole object and its inevitable test.” Poe never
opposed morality; he was simply interested to show that
literature is one thing and morality another. If this distinction is
blurred both suffer. He wanted truth and he wanted goodness in
his writings, but because they were literature not sermons, he
wanted them to be implicit not explicit.

However Edgar Poe sums up the result of his
thinking in the following two paragraphs: “To recapitulate then:
I would define, in brief, the poetry of words as the Rhythmical
Creation of Beauty. Its sole arbiter is Taste with the Intellect or
with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless
incidentally, it has no concern whatsoever either with Duty or
with Truth.”

“A few words, however in explanation. That
pleasure, which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and
the most intense is derived, I maintain from the contemplation of
the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognise as the Poetic sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the Heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least most readily attainable in the poem. It by no means follows however, that the incitement of Passion, or the Precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work, but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem."

Poe’s theories however, did not stop at a definition of poetry. Spending much of his time in reviewing bad poets, and learning continually from his own works in prose, he buried himself in many consideration of craftsmanship. Baudelaire says, that Poe’s poetics was sufficiently detailed. It was no collection of vague theories, but had a practiced influence on
what he did. He says, "un poète qui prétend que son poème a été composé d’après son poétique." One of his beliefs that has been most discussed is concerned with length. He held that a long poem does not exist, and that books of this appearance are really collections of independent lyrics. He supported this theorem in an ingenious and irrefutable manner. He writes in one of the Marginalia: "—— to appreciate thoroughly the work of what we call genius is to possess all the genius by which the work was produced." It perceives that the work of art has a mental rather than a physical existence, it is collaboration between artist and student, and it exists only so long as this collaboration lasts. He writes in the Poetic Principle.

“I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitments are, through a psychical necessity, transient. That degree of excitement, which would entitle a poem to be so, called at all cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags —— fails—— a revulsion ensues——— and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.”

He continues: “There are, no doubt, many who have found difficulty in reconciling the critical dictum that the
Paradise Lost, is to be devoutly admired throughout with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work in fact, is to be regarded as poetical only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If to preserve its unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of true poetry there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical pre-judgement can force us to admire it but upon completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book (that is to say commencing with the second) we shall be surprised, at now finding that admirable, which we had before condemned—that damnable, which we had previously so much admired. It follows from all this that the ultimate aggregate or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun is a nullity: and this is precisely the fact."

There was no change in the concept of poetry although Poe preferred Milton’s Comus to his other works. His play Politan was also in verse, He was against the form of a closet drama. Edd Windfield Parks in his Lecture ‘Poe on Poetry’ delivered at Mercer University on February 11 and 12, 1964 in Eugene Dorothy Blaunt Lamar Memorial Lecture says: “Yet it was
not the concept of Poetry, and with that a confusion of genres. Although he preferred Comus to Milton's other works and his own nearly completed play Politan was in verse, he was convinced that there should be no such genre as a closet drama.\(^7\)

There is a commonly accepted distinction between lyrical and other poems, which appears on examination to be merely a rough qualitative division that counts short poems lyrical. In the light of this distinction it has been suggested that Poe's arguments against a long poem were prompted by the fact that he was a lyrical, and short breathed poet himself. His opinion had a broaden foundation. There is no passage in his critical works that goes to prove that he had not, recognised the lyrical nature of all art.

"Poe's aesthetic principles removed poetry beyond history or science and allotted it only to an 'Eden' which artist or true lover of beauty can know. So far, in fact, did he remove it from the world of cause and effect that only in the destruction of that substantive world could the artist, or poet find his center and thereby build his imaginative vision of reality. Only that special endowment of originality gave man the power to penetrate the actual world and create ever anew, each time the

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7. Edd Windfield Parks:” Edgar Allan Poe As Literary Critic; (Atlanta) University of Georgia Press, Athens Printed in U.S.A. Foos and Davis Atlanta.
poem was written or the work of art was made, something other than what the object or idea once was, not because the object or idea changes the mind nor because the imagination subjectively makes the thing into its own image, but because the imagination is able to make something wholly new: the poem, the painting, the sculpture, the musical composition never existed before.

A poem is therefore the imagination's report on that explanation and comprehension: it becomes a symbolic construct of unity. The poem is a report by the imagination, but it is not what the imagination perceived, words and language are man's reminders of his failure ever to make his own cognition real.

Poe in his Philosophy of Composition says that poetic language can operate so effectively in the midway of cognition that the ultimate and farthest range of poetry is a potential worldlessness: it was at this stage of music or the ideal fusion of words and sounds that mere verbalised meaning would be of no consequence. Poetry would no longer be a thing or a sense experience but a unique dream in which the poetic imagination engaged itself differently each time a poem was written.

"Poe attempted a blend of eighteenth century rationalistic epistemology and nineteenth century Coleridgean ontology. Knowledge and being—these he sought to merge into a final construct which would be art or the expression of, the imagination. He found most to his liking Coleridge’s profound insight into the dual nature of the imagination and especially the activity of the imagination in the act of poetic or artistic creation. But he tried to go farther than Coleridge by setting up the imagination-in-process of the mind journey along which the imagination could move from the illusion that is, this sensible world to the fuller perception that is the truer reality beyond. Language was one of man’s ways of making that journey; and though the language problem might never be solved, Poe continued his experiments, as we may now see, in his later poetry, in his short stories, in Arthur Gordon Pym, and in his philosophic criticism. They were all stages in a design which meant for Poe a struggle to reach a unitary vision, not necessarily of the absolute, but of some comprehensible system wherein everything, prose and verse, real and unreal, mind and substance, some how cohered. The poetry of his later years, to which we may now turn, is one of the major expressions of that hope and that vision."

Indefiniteness implies music. This is another

basic proposition of Poe's artistic creed, for he believes that music is the most indefinite of arts, and therefore that poetry can catch some of this quality by being infused with music.

For him, it is in music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—— the creation of Supernal Beauty. It may be indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained in fact. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes, which can not have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of poetry with music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the poetic development.

Vincent Buranelli says, "Poe puts the stages of poetry in the same ratio with music. Just as music finds its lowest level with programme music and ascends by degrees to the highest level where it enters an artistic universe of pure form—— just so does poetry, rise from the definite imagery of the open eye to the indefinite impressions filtered "through the veil of the soul." Appropriately, several composers have been inspired by Poe to set their verses to music and Ravel and Debussy have testified to his influence on their composition. " Edgar Allan Poe," wrote Debussy, "had the most original imagination in the world; he struck an entirely new note. I shall have to find its equivalent in
music.”

Poetry differs from music by using ideas, and from prose by using music. Poe, naturally, does not mean that poetry presents clear ideas to be judged as true or false. He means that, for all his talk about indefiniteness and its flight of the imagination, poetry is knowledge. It is an insight into something objective—the eternal beauty that the poet wants to unveil as far as he can by means of his poetry, Buranelli in his review of Poe’s Joseph Rodman Drake, defines the love of poetry as “the sentiment of Intellectual Happiness here, and the hope of a higher Intellectual Happiness here-after.” Poetry is one result of “the unconquerable desire—to know.” From this thought sprang a more intellectualistic handling of poetry than romanticism had ever produced.

According to Poe poetry like all art, is partly intuition and partly hard work. He thinks that the poet should be able to explain the way his poem came into being. “It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition……… that the work proceeded step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.” Through his

Philosophy of Composition he takes us into his workshop to show us how The Raven was conceived and executed. He begins by talking of length. He stands for brevity in poetry, for the poem that can be read in a single sitting. He calls the long poem a contradiction in terms since its object, the elevation of the soul, can not be expected, he argues also that unity fails. The epics of Homer and Milton he categorises as successions of short poems divided by spaces that are prose but presented in poetic form.

His poetry has little room for outside influences. True, he begins as a romantic poet who has avidly studied Byron and Moore, imitating their subjects, styles, rhythm lines; nor did he ever cease to read the poets of his time or to profit from his readings. The salient fact is that Poe quickly moves on from romanticism to new forms of poetry arising from deep inside his own personality. He probes his subconscious by way of dream and dreamlike states during which he hovered between sleep and wakefulness, ravished by beauties never present to him at any other time. Catching sight of strange visions and hearing strange harmonies, he is able to suggest them in words that is why he can write astounding poems the like of which had never before been known.

Not until Ezra Pound's early essays like 'A Few Don'ts For Imagists' did anyone attend with such clarity and
precision to the craft of verse. Poe on poetic principles makes a lot of good sense. "How sensible, eminently sensible is his advice," says Daniel Hoffman, "How useful to any young writer struggling to manage his material the—— language."

"Perfection of rhyme is attainable only in the combination of the two elements, Equality and unexpected-ness. But as evil cannot exist without good, so unexpected-ness must arise from expectedness. We do not contend for mere arbitrariness of rhyme. In the first place we must have equidistant or regularly recurring rhymes, not arbitrarily, but with an eye to the greatest amount of unexpected-ness........ and Poe goes on, in this entry in his Marginalia, to discuss the advantage of an interior rhyme that does not recur at regular multiples of the number of syllables within the lines to rhyme so regularised." 11

Throughout all Poe’s writings on Poetry blows a refreshing wind of sense. He defines the object of art, and that done refuse to let detail obstruct the distant vision. Details are all important, but he insists on seeing them as details, as means, not ends, and will not allow the flying dust of argument to blind him to the purpose in relation to which they

are worth discussion. He writes of refrains of internal rhymes and triplicate rhyme, of the vivid effect that can be wrought by the use of rhyme at unexpected places, and in all this, never for a moment allows himself to generalise without a view to practice. He upholds legitimate liberties, because these are a help to the making of beauty. He condemns illegitimate licence, because it is a help to the vanity of the incompetent. He says, “Few things have a greater tendency than inversion to render verse feeble and ineffective.” In most cases where a line spoken of as forcible, the force may be referred to directness of expression. A vast majority of the passages, which have become household, through frequent quotations, owe their popularity either to this directness, or, in general, to the scorn of ‘poetic licence’. In short, as regards verbal construction, the more prosaic a poetical style is, the better.

In ‘The Rationale of Verse’ Poe attacks the teachers of versification, “Versification” says Poe, “is the art of dragging words into lines of correspondent length, so as to produce harmony by the regular attention of syllables differing in quantity.”

He also discusses synaeresis, he says, “Blending is the plain English for synaeresis, but there should be no blending; neither is an anapaest ever employed for an iambus,
or a dactyl for a trochee,” He pointed out that “there was no absolute necessity for adhering to the precise number of syllables, provided the time required for the whole foot was preserved inviolate.” He objects to the practice the writing silv'ry, am'rous, flow'ring, in order to comply with the arbitrary demands of a fantastic scheme.

Poe criticizes the practice of grammatical inversion in poetry. He says, “such things, in general, serve only to betray the versifier’s poverty of resources and when an inversion of this kind occurs we may say to ourselves, ‘Here the poet lacked the skill to make out his line without destroying the natural or colloquial order of the words.” Now and then, however we must refer to the error not to the deficiency of skill, but to something far more defensible........ to an idea that such things belong to the essence of poetry........ that it needs them to distinguish it form prose...... the, true artist will avail himself of no license whatever...... as regards verbal construction—the more prosaic a poetical style is, the better.”

Poe’s critical writings are reflections of a poet who has applied rigorous analysis to each of the component parts of his craft: he argues persuasively for unity of structure, natural order of language and urges the advantage of

unexpectedness in rhyme of an organic adaptability of meter to mood. All of these technical points are, I think, universally valid. Poe never stops praising indefiniteness as the handmaiden of beauty, whether in poetry, in music or in thought. The Philosophy of Composition is Edgar Poe’s analytical description of how to transfer from himself to me, to you, to others, those symptoms, those sufferings, those haunted joys, which form the subject matter of his poem. Therefore Poe’s concentration upon himself as craftsman is not mere vanity, or an aberrant infatuation with his own verbal resources. He must attend to the use of the power tools, which shape his poetry, for it is the power, as much as the craft that he wants to be sure of wielding.

Poe has perhaps been the subject of more discussion than any other American writer has and much of his reputation rests on his poetry. In a poetic imaginative subject .......... fancy and feeling ought to have first place, one would think, but in Poe the mathematical spirit, geometric rectitude and cold analysis have dispossessed them. This incessant preoccupation with pure reality gives Edgar Poe more of his power, and the resolute and patient application of these methods, which seem anti artistic at first glance, brings the strange and startling results that we are going to study.

Poe achieves unity or totality of effect by
seeking and determining in advance the maximum possible effect to be produced, according to the circumstances, it may be work, situation an event that contains the greatest possible amount of interest or intensity of emotion. Says Poe, "I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect. Keeping originality always in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with, so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself in the first place, 'of the innumerable effects or impressions of which the heart, the intellect, or the soul is susceptible, what one shall, on the present occasion select? Having chosen a novel first, and secondly, a vivid effect. I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the conserve or by peculiarity both of incident and tone—afterwards looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event or tone as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would—that is to say, who could—detail step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am much at a loss to say—but perhaps the authorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any other cause. Most writers—poets especially—prefer having it
understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought—at the true purposes seized only at the last moment—at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view—at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable—at their cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions, the tackle of scenes—shifting—the step ladders and demon-traps—the cock's feathers the red paint and the black patches, which in ninety nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio.

I am aware on the other hand, that the case is by no means common in which an author is at all in condition to retrace the steps by which his conclusions have been attained. In general, suggestions, having arisen pell-mell, are pursued and forgotten in a similar manner.

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with the repugnance alluded to, nor at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions; and, since the interest of an analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considered a desideratum, is quite
independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analysed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the modus operandi by which one of my own works was put together.”

Once this point is found, he does not take his eyes from it; he moves away from it and chooses the swiftest and most direct route for reaching it from another given point which we will call the point of departure. His entire task, consists of systematically removing all the obstacles separating him from his goal and causing him to detour or merely to show his pace. He proceeds by successive eliminations, allowing only the absolutely necessary distance to exist between the point of departure and the point of destination so that he can cover the distance in a single prodigious and thundering leap.

The Raven he claimed in The Philosophy of Composition was composed ‘with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.’ He says, “It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition ——that the work proceeded step by step to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.”

‘This celebration of the role of precision’ says, Charval ‘Logic, mathematics, and common sense in poetry, this denigration of ‘fine frenzy’ ‘ecstatic intuition’; and accident was in part a journalist’s attempt at a rapprochement with the common reader to whom he had once denied any capacity for the understanding of poetry. Poe was investing the poet with qualities that the reader admired, and divesting him of those that set him apart from the non literary person,’15

His major effort to narrow the gap between poet and reader was his analysis of The Raven in the Philosophy of Composition. This essay caters upon the American appetite for the inside story of how something is done, and makes the reader feel that he can do it too. In a sense, it deflates the romantic poet, who Poe was sure, would shudder at this “peep behind the scenes,” at this “exposure of the backstage gadgets which constitute the properties of the literary histrio.”

The poetic laws which Poe stresses in this essay are those most readily comprehended by the common reader. He insists on brevity, on a poem’s suitability for a reading at a “single sitting.” He believes that if a literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be “content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of expression”—— for, if

more than one sitting is required, the affairs of the world interfere and every thing like totality is destroyed. But says Poe that since, no poet can dispense with anything that may advance his design, but it remains to judge whether there is any advantage in doing so to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Poe at once rejects the idea, according to him a long poem is merely a succession of brief ones—— that is to say of brief poetical effects. Says Poe, " It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is only in as much as it intensely excites, by elevating the soul; and all intense excitements are through a physical necessity, brief—."

"It appears evident, then, says Poe, "that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art — the limit of a single sitting—— and that, although in certain classes of pure composition, such as Robinson Crusoe (demanding no unity), this limit may be advantageously over passed, it can never properly be over passed in a poem. Within this limit the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit—— in other words, to the degree of the true, poetical effect which it is capable of including; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect—— this, with one proviso—— that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all.
'Holding in view these considerations, as well as that degree of excitement which I deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical taste, I reached at once what I conceived the proper length for my intended poem——a length of about one hundred lives. It is, in fact, a hundred and eight'.

'My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work universally appreciable——the point, I mean that beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. A few words, however, in elucidation of my real meaning, which, some of my friends have evinced a disposition to misrepresent. That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect——they refer, in short just to that intense and pure elevation of soul——not of intellect, or of heart——upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful." Now I designate Beauty as the province of the poem merely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes——that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their
attainment——no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the purpose for elevation alluded to, is most readily attained in the poem. Now, the object passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable to a certain extent in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose. Truth in fact demands a precision, and Passion a homeliness which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. It by no means follows from anything here said that passion, or even truth, may not be introduced, and even profitably introduced into a poem — for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the general effect, as do discords in music, by contrast——but the true artist will always continue, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem.'

'Regarding, them, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the tone of its highest manifestation —— and all experience has shown that this tone is one of sadness. Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the next legitimate of all the poetical tones.'

Poe's poem will address itself to the highest manifestation of poetry, supreme province, Beauty, rendered in a Melancholy Tone, and it will accomplish excitation of the reader's sensitive soul in the space of a single sitting i.e. within a hundred lines. And now Poe confesses.

"The length, the province, and the tone being thus determined, I betook myself to ordinary induction with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a keynote in the construction of the poem—some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects—or more properly points, in the theatrical sense——I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the refrain. The universality of its employment sufficed to assure of its intrinsic value, and spared me the necessity of submitting it to analysis. I considered it, however, with regard to its susceptibility of improvement, and soon saw it to be a primitive——condition. As commonly used, the refrain or burden, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone——both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deducted solely from the sense of identity——of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so heighten the effect, by adhering in general to monotone of sound, while I continually varied of that thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously
novel effects, by the variation of the application—— of the refrain
—— the refrain remaining, for the most part unvaried.

These points being settled, I next thought of the nature of my refrain. Since its application was to be repeatedly varied, it was clear that the refrain itself must be brief, for there would have been an insurmountable difficulty in frequent variations of application in any sentence of length. In proportion to the brevity of the sentence would, of course, be the facility of variation. This led me at once to a single word as the best refrain.

The question now arose as to the character of the word. Having made up my mind to a refrain, the division of the poem into stanzas was, of course corollary, the refrain forming the close of each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous, and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt, and these considerations inevitably lead me to the long 'O' as the most sonorous vowel in connection with 'R' as the most productive consonant.

The sound of the refrain being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible, keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to over
look the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself.

The next desecration was a pretext for the continuous use of the one word "nevermore." In observing the difficulty which I at once found in inventing a sufficiently plausible reason for its continuous repetition. ¹⁷

Now Edgar Poe was struck with a difficulty he must contrive a circumstance making suitable the continued repetition of the sonorous word, "Nevermore" in a context of continually altered meaning. How will he do this? His solution as we all know, is absolutely inspired.

'I did not fail to perceive that this difficulty arose solely from the presumption that the word was to be so continuously or monotonously spoken by a human being—I did not fail to perceive, in short, that the difficulty lay in the reconciliation of this monotony with the exercise of reason on the part of the creature repeating the word. Here then, immediately arose the idea of a non-reasoning creature capable of speech and very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself but was superseded forthwith by a Raven as equally capable of speech and infinitely more in keeping with the intended tone. ¹⁸


¹⁸. Ibid.
At first Poe thought of a parrot, but then, reminding himself of the melancholy tone, the notion of a Raven supervened. And now the solution of each problem leads to the next problem demanding a solution. Now having settled upon Beauty as subject, Melancholy as tone, ‘Nevermore’ as refrain, 100+ lines as length, and Raven as speaker—now he must ask himself, of all melancholy topics, what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy? ‘Death’ was the obvious reply. Poe says, ‘when I asked is this most melancholy of topics, most poetical?——the answer, here also, is obvious——’, when it most closely allies to itself to Beauty: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world——and equally it is beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.’

This conclusion, so irresistibly arrived at, points out, as the most poetical poems of Edgar Poe——Lenore, Annabel Lee, Ulalume, For Annie, And now all he has to do is set in motion, by a mechanically and mathematically precise, process, all those elements already mentioned, to which is added a bereaved lover.

‘I had now to combine the two ideas of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word “Nevermore,” I had to combine these,
bearing in mind my design of varying at every turn the application of the word repeated, but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending, that is to say, that effect of the variation of application, I saw, that I could make the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore"—that I could make this first query a common place one, the second less so, the third still less, and so on, until at length the lover started from his original nonchalance by the melancholy character of the word itself, by its frequent repetition and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it, it is at length excited to superstition and wildly propounds queries of a far different character—queries whose solution he has passionately at heart—propounds them half, in superstition and half in that species of despair, which delights in self torture—propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demonic character of the bird (which reason assures him is merely repeating a lesson learned by note), but because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modelling his questions as to receive from the expected "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrows. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me, or more strictly, thus forced upon me, in the progress
of construction, I first established in my mind the climax, or concluding query—— that query to which “Nevermore” should be in the last place an answer—— that query in reply to which this word “Nevermore” should involve the almost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.”

Here then the poem may be said to have its beginning at the end, where all works of art should begin—— and Poe maintains he wrote the antepenultimate stanza first, so that he might work backwards from his climax as well as set out the metrical arrangement and rhyme scheme.

‘I composed this stanza, at this point, first, that, by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover and secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza, as well as graduate the stanza, which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect. Had I been able in the subsequent composition to construct more vigorous stanzas I should without scruple have purposely enfeebled them so as not to interfere with the climateric effect.”

And now Edgar Poe after taking us into his

19. Ibid.
workshop speaks about versification: 'And here I may as well say a few words of the versification. My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected in versification is one of the most un-accountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere rhythm, it is still clear that the possible varieties of nature of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite, and yet, for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing. The fact is that originality (unless in mind of very unusual force) is by no means a matter as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general to found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation.

Of course, I pretend to no originality in either the rhythms or metre of "The Raven." The former is trochaic the latter is octametre acatelectic, alternating with heptametre catalectic repeated in the refrain of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrametre catalectic. Less pedantically—the feet employed throughout (trochees) consist of a long syllable followed by a short; the first line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet, the second of seven and a half, the fifth the same, the sixth three and a half. Now each of these lines taken individually has been employed before, and what originality the "Raven" has, is in their combination into stanza, nothing even
remotely approaching this combination is aided by other unusual and some all together novel effects, arising from an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration."²¹

Poe was much occupied with the detailed problems of versification. Woodberry says, 'One reads at successive stages of his career, the same old stanzas, in new versions——. The changes are minute and almost innumerable ———but in every instance the alternation is judicious——they grow out of rudeness into perfection. And Poe in his criticism of other is equally occupied with technical details. He scans the whole stanzas record pages of good and bad verses, lists scores of bad rhymes and concerns himself largely with minute items of workmanship."²²

Poe proceeds further and lets the reader know how he solved the problem of bringing the Lover and the Bird together.

"The next point to be considered was the mode of bringing together the lover and Raven———-and the first branch of this consideration was locale. For this the most natural suggestion might seem to be a forest, or the fields———-but it has always appeared to me that a close circumscription of space

²¹ Ibid.: p.270.
²² W.L Werner: Poe's Theories and Practice in Poetic Technique, American Literature II-1930.
is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident—it has the force of a frame to a picture it has indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place.

I determined, then, to place the lover in his chamber—in a chamber rendered sacred to him by memories of her who had frequented it. The room is represented as richly furnished—this is mere pursuance of the ideas I have already explained on the subject of Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis.

The locale being, thus determined, I had now to introduce the bird—and the thought of introducing him through the window was inevitable. The idea of making the lover suppose, in the first instance, that the flapping of the wings of the bird against the shutter is a tapping at the door, originated in a wish to increase, by prolonging the readers curiosity and in a desire to admit the incidental effect arising from the lover throwing open the door, finding all dark, and thence adopting the half-fancy that it was the spirit of his mistress that knocked.

I made the night tempestuous, first to account for the Raven's seeking admission, and secondly, for the effect of contrast with the (physical) serenity within the chamber.
I made the bird alight on the Bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage — it being understood that the bust was absolutely suggested by the bird — the bust of Pallas being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover and secondly for the sonorousness of the word Pallas itself. 23

The white bust of Pallas and the Raven are juxtaposed in a composite symbol he denying the poetic vision which she symbolises. The meaning is enforced when the poet implicitly transforms the raven into a bird of prey, and himself Prometheus: "Take thy beak from out my heart." The raven like the condor, like the vulture of "To Science" as a forbiddner of the poetic function. The symbols take their force not from any intrinsic power the words have, but from the firmness of the psychological narrative, that persuades us of the raven's being and meaning in the poet's mind before it becomes a convincing symbol. What he forbids is not primarily an abstract idea but a yearning of the poet's heart.

Once the lover and the bird are brought together and the bird when questioned answers with its customary word Nevermore. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word "Nevermore" — a word which finds

immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again started by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore". The student now guesses the state of the case, but is impelled, as I have before explained, by the human search of self torture, and in part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as may bring him, the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "Nevermore."  

The human thirst for self torture —- the luxury of sorrow: These are the themes of "The Raven," these and not merely the poets' plot to excite the soul of a reader by the contemplation of Beauty. Even as he gives his game away, though, Edgar Poe still has his eye on the coiled springs and levers of his mechanism. The man is a demonic master mechanic of his watchmaker world:

'But in subjects so handled, however skillfully or with however vivid an array of incident, there is always a certain hardness or nakedness, which repels the artistical eye. Two things are invariably required—— first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and secondly, some amount of suggestiveness——, some undercurrent, however, indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, especial, which imparts to

a work of art so much of that richness—which are too fond of confounding with the ideal.  

And not until the last stanza, says Poe, does he give the reader cause 'to seek a moral in all that has previously been narrated.' 'It is not until the very last line of the very last stanza that the intention of making (The Raven) emblematical of Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance is permitted distinctly to be seen.'

Daniel Hoffman in his Rationale of Verse writes: 'A philosophy of composition indeed, an arspoetica for a haunted sublunar mime of the unavoidable motions rehearsed by his own soul and imposed by his mind upon my soul, your soul, our souls——. The artist's unassuageable need is to project upon the rest of mankind the terrors and the losses, the sorrows and insatiate longings of his own soul. Even then, he does not cease to suffer; but his anguished days and self tortured nights are made more bearable—— just a bit more bearable—— by his satisfaction at the successful exercise of skills upon the intractable materials—— the circumstance and necessities—— provided by his own soul——.

But even Poe cannot dwell continually in

25. Ibid.
self torture or luxuriate endlessly in never ending sorrow. To do so would be to surrender himself to the passivity latent within him, at the cost of extinguishing, perhaps forever, the active principle also latent within him. At the very moment that he luxuriates in his precious sorrow and turns the screw of self torture tighter still, his active principle is reasserting it self, striving to control the uncontrollable obsessions which haunt him. But control them how? Control them in his verse. Control them by making of these passions an intricate mechanism for the production of the effects of passion in another person's soul-transferring from the Self to the Other both the anguish of self torture and the luxury of a sorrow, passive and never ending. 'The Philosophy of Composition' is Edgar Poe's analytical description of how to do this—— how to transfer from himself to me, to you, those symptom; those sufferings those haunted joys."27

The Raven will seem to who ever presently reads it as a poem written under the stimulus of a sudden inspiration, in the moment of a most lively sensibility. And yet the poet has handled his subject with the greatest coolness. He did not feel that sadness radiating there, but has deliberately willed it as the tone most adapted to the manifestations of beauty: that gloomy "nevermore" which returns is every strophe with a retinue of

other mournful words in not the desperate cry that erupts from the breast, but the word wisely chosen for its sonorous vowel and the consonant which satisfactorily lends itself to emphasis and prolongation.

But did he not know that the whole effect of "The Raven" would be lost to the reader who knew its genesis beforehand through "The Philosophy of Composition"? And did it not occur to him that the effect of the other poems would also be destroyed by the suspicion, that they too, were the result of a mere calculation? He was certainly not unaware of these things—and the evidence of this is the "Marginalia" note in which he said, that distinctly to see the mechanism of a work of art is no doubt itself a pleasure but a pleasure which can be enjoyed only in the exact ratio in which the delight willed by the artist is lost. But at the same time he could not resist the temptation of making a display of such an exceptional faculty and of creating an impression with the strange and unexpected. And this blind vanity regarding his own calculating faculties and constructional abilities goes so far as to make him condescend—him the flawless poet, the aesthete who in poetry espies the reflection of a supernal beauty—to putting together the very difficult and unusual acrostics which are hidden among the verses of "To Valentine" and "An Enigma."
Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" telling how he wrote The Raven is valuable for its unorthodox version of the creative process. Instead of a compelling personal experience, Poe set out deliberately, he insists, to achieve an effect, and worked towards it as calculatingly as an engineer works out the construction of a bridge. Although Poe may have rationalized away complexity of the actual process by which 'The Raven' was written and may have underlined the role his "unconscious" and its symbol making, his analysis, has the merits of debunking excessive emphasis on the inspirational passivity of the creative process and directing needed attention to the poet as an intelligent craftsman rather than an enraptured seer.

It is generally agreed today that Poe's achievement in the field of poetry, criticism and fiction are major achievements and this is a unique achievement. He has been acclaimed as a very original, shrewd and avant-garde thinker of his times. His idea that criticism should limit itself to 'a comment upon art' has been the basis of what today is known as "New Criticism" which is a critical theory confined mainly to the lyric poetry.