Absolute Poe: His System of Transcendental Racism

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Transcendental Racism

A haunting image appears on the cover of the 1995 essay collection *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. From a perspective slightly above the subject, we see a grainy, black-and-white figure with vaguely familiar features: disheveled hair, broad forehead, thin mustache, deep-set eyes. The picture is not unlike a still frame taken from a surveillance video, as if Poe had come back from the grave and was captured leaving a convenience store. The hazy image simultaneously suggests Poe's modern presence and historical alterity, a fitting introduction to an essay collection that signaled a shift in Poe studies from abstract, ahistorical universals toward "Poe's syncopated relation to American culture." Subsequent scholarship in this vein has rendered rich interpretation.[1] The problem is that Poe is becoming something of a divided figure, embedded in his era's material discourse but divorced from the metaphysics of his day. It may be possible, however, to bring into focus a more stubbornly historical Poe who not only participates in his era's political, economic, and mass cultural life but also uses historically available ideas to theorize his American world.

This world, as critics have increasingly found, was torn by slavery and race. Through varying degrees of interpretive will, blackness and bondage become powerfully political in a wide array of Poe's poetry, fiction, essays, and reviews. What is striking in these analyses is how often Poe's social proclivities appear to be beyond his control as ideology and unconscious desire determine textual meanings.[2] But what if Poe is a more self-conscious observer of slavery and race whose political vision is mediated by his philosophical beliefs? This is not to suggest that Poe achieves a coherent or commendable understanding

of slavery. Far from it. The terror, disruption, and chaos that mark Poe's treatment of the institution originate from the tensions between his metaphysics and racism. On one hand, Poe maintains distinctions between black and white, slave and master, brutish object and reasoning subject. On the other, he indulges what *Eureka* (1848) calls "the appetite for Unity," the transcendental urge to synthesize dualities in an "absolute oneness."[3]

This essay traces Poe's divergent urges for metaphysical unity and racial difference. It begins with "Metzengerstein" (1832), an exemplary story that offers an early and surprisingly cogent position on the American slavery debate. However, the racist anti-abolitionism evident in "Metzengerstein" and beyond conflicts with transcendentalist concepts Poe borrows from Schelling and Coleridge. Here Enlightenment dualisms threaten to collapse into romantic absolutism as blackness and bondage are figured as dangers immanent in the unwitting white mind. For Poe, the slavery crisis is a crisis of the unconscious, which he dramatizes with a repetition more compelling than compulsive. Poe, that is, seems less an author bedeviled by buried racial fears than one who prejudicially enacts a strategic metaphysics of race.

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The facts of Poe's politics are open to argument but can look something like this: Poe himself never owned a slave and was ambivalent about Southern plantation culture. In New York City, he was loosely affiliated with the literary wing of the Democratic Party, even as he resisted conscription by the nationalists of Young America. But while Poe learned to resent the aristocratic mores he enjoyed as a youth in Virginia, he also expressed reactionary ire against progressive causes in general and abolitionism in particular. Poe lambasted the antislavery movement in critiques of Lowell and Longfellow; his correspondence with proslavery thinkers can imply his concurring beliefs; and he may have condoned as writer or editor the disputed Paulding-Drayton review, a text that celebrates chattel bondage as a positive good. For the most part, Poe's literary practice and criticism support the racist stereotypes of plantation fiction. At the same time, Terence Whalen offers an important caveat. Aspiring to a national reputation and attuned to market forces, Whalen's Poe generally manages to avoid the slavery controversy, displaying instead an "average racism" that a range of readers could support. One might doubt,

however, Poe's willingness and ability to pander consistently to popular tastes, especially given his lifelong penchant for self-destructive behavior. More crucially, a larger question looms: even if Poe eschews explicit discussion of the slavery conflict, to what extent might the crisis have influenced his literary work?[4]

There has been some study of racial ideology in Poe's poetry and poetic theory, although Poe's prose represents his most sustained engagement of slavery and race.[5] *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) and subsequent stories receive much notice, but the focus on Poe's middle and later writings obscures a formative tale. Poe's first published story, "Metzengerstein," describes the horrifying death of a Baron who becomes obsessed with a mystical horse that materializes out of a tapestry. The tale does not seem particularly political, nor are its interests overtly American. In his preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), Poe probably had "Metzengerstein" in mind when he wrote that only one story in the collection favors that "species of pseudo-horror which we are taught to call Germanic" (*PT*, 129). Here Poe associates "Metzengerstein" with E. T. A. Hoffmann's *phantasystück* tradition, a comparison scholars tend to accept if only to watch Poe burlesque such supernaturalism.[6] Yet by this token, Poe's slippery preface itself may be ironic, for despite "Metzengerstein"'s Hungarian setting and tongue-tying Teutonic names, its fantastical terror is not solely Germanic but also intensely American. Published five months after Nat Turner's revolt, "Metzengerstein" stands as Poe's first serious treatment of slavery and race, offered in the form of a cautious—and cautionary—political commentary.[7]

In the story, the families of Berlifitzing and Metzengerstein represent two "contiguous" and "mutually embittered" estates that had "long exercised a rival influence in the affairs of a busy government."[8] This tense situation is analogous to political conditions in the United States as conflict between the North and South spiked in 1831, when South Carolina threatened to nullify Andrew Jackson's tariff on the dangerous grounds that states' rights superseded federal authority. Commentators of the time recognized that the nullification crisis bore heavily on the slavery conflict, which was entering a new and more militant phase.[9] In 1831, David Walker's "Appeal" (1829) and William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* outraged the South. That same year, John Calhoun renounced his ambitions for national office, pursuing instead a sectional course increasingly marked by secessionist rhetoric and

aggressive defenses of slavery. Most dramatically, Nat Turner's revolt stoked the slavery controversy, unifying proslavery forces and engendering harsher slave codes even while convincing many observers that slavery needed to end. In 1831, chattel bondage was seen as a threat to the Union by Americans in both the North and South, including the twenty-two-year-old Poe, who that year crossed the Mason-Dixon line twice before settling near Frederick Douglass in Baltimore to begin a career in prose.[10]

Poe's first production was "Metzengerstein," a story that speaks to American sectionalism by exploiting regional stereotypes. In the antebellum era, hunting and horsemanship were standard features of the Southern cavalier, and by 1831, the South was depicted as a passionate, feudal, failing place.[11] The Berlifitzing house is headed by a count who possesses "so passionate a love of horses, and of hunting, that neither bodily infirmity, great age, nor mental incapacity, prevented his daily participation" ("M," 20). In stories such as "The Man That Was Used Up" (1839), "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), and "The Gold-Bug" (1843), Poe shows both fealty and resentment toward a South (and an adopted father) that was for him an occasional home in which he never felt fully welcome.[12] "Metzengerstein" expresses these turbulent feelings in the "loftily descended" but "infirm" Count Berlifitzing, whose "honorable" but "weaker" estate falls to its neighboring rival ("M," 20).

This rival, the Metzengerstein house, is headed by the young Baron Frederick who, among other immoral acts, purportedly sets fire to the Berlifitzing stables. Poe could be indulging a fantasy of vengeance against his adopted father, John Allan, and authority in general, but it is also at this point that race and slavery irrupt into the tale. As the Baron listens to the crackling stables, he fixates on an ancient tapestry featuring an "unnaturally colored horse" that once belonged to a "Saracen ancestor" of the neighboring Count. Against the backdrop of a Metzengerstein stabbing a fallen Berlifitzing, the horse's eyes glare with a "human expression" and its teeth show through "distended lips" ("M," 22–23). Spiritualist gambits and horrifying teeth are, of course, favorite Poe tropes, but the racial connotations of the "Horse-Shade" ("M," 18) increase when it takes physical form, seemingly emerging from the tapestry under the Baron's monomaniacal gaze. The origins of the beast are unclear, except that it is branded with Berlifitzing's initials, indicating to one servant that the animal belonged

to the "old Count's stud of foreign horses" ("M," 23). The antebellum era linked horses and slaves as branded, bred, and brutish chattel—a fact decried on the masthead of the *Liberator*, which conflated slave and horse auctions—though this linkage stretched back in Southern thought from Thomas Jefferson to William Byrd, who warned as early as 1736 that African slaves require "tort rein, or they will be apt to throw their rider."[13] If, as "Metzengerstein" suggests, the horse represents a slave, then the Baron plays an abolitionist role, for just as Turner's Southampton revolt was blamed on "incendiary" abolitionists, the Baron is an "incendiary" villain implicated in the disastrous end of his neighbor's chattel institution.[14]

Poe's basic position is anti-abolitionist. Count Berlifitzing, decrepit though he is, dies attempting to rescue his horses. Like the loving masters of plantation fiction, he is too fond of his chattel. The tale also broaches what was for many the most troubling prospect of abolition: slavery may be undesirable, but what happens with masterless slaves? This question arises time and again in the American slavery debate, particularly after Turner's revolt when the fear of free blacks made colonization a popular (albeit unworkable) scheme and states passed laws more severely restricting the rights of free persons of color. In 1832, Thomas Dew, an architect of proslavery thought, saw "[e]mancipation without deportation" as the single greatest danger to the South. Dew could only imagine black-white relations in which "[o]ne must rule the other"; and he predicted that any "commingling of races" would inevitably bring about "barbarism."[15]

Like Dew, "Metzengerstein" worries over the control and ownership of chattel. When the Baron first meets the mysterious steed, he immediately asks, "Whose horse?" to which a servant replies, "He is your own property, . . . at least he is claimed by no other owner" ("M," 23). Despite the "suspicious and untractable character" attributed to the brute, the Baron then muses: "[P]erhaps a rider like Frederick of Metzengerstein, may tame even the devil from the stables of Berlifitzing." This line echoes a frequent complaint about abolitionists: Northern reformers foolishly think that they can handle intractable slaves, an optimism born of perfectionist ignorance, which leads to Metzengerstein's death. Obsessed with the horse to the scandalous point that he "disdained the company of his equals," Metzengerstein allows his "perverse attachment" to grow into a "hideous and unnatural fervor" exacerbated by the horse's "peculiar intelligence" and "human-

looking eye" ("M," 27, 28). In 1853 William Gilmore Simms wrote: "The moral of the steed is in the spur of his rider; of the slave, in the eye of his master."[16] Such is not, however, the case in "Metzengerstein" when the Baron is mastered by his semihuman chattel and borne into his own burning palace. As the "ungovernable fire" dies to a "white flame," Poe ends "Metzengerstein": "[A] cloud of smoke settled heavily over the battlements in the distinct colossal figure of— *a horse.*"

Responsibility for this terrible end falls on Baron Metzengerstein as Poe takes up what was becoming a national anti-abolitionist stand.[17] The Baron relishes the destruction of his neighbor and then slyly possesses his chattel, implying—as did some proslavery radicals—that the North practiced its own form of bondage and coveted the labor of free blacks. Deadly to himself and his rivals alike, Metzengerstein prefers the company of a brute, a fact that Poe describes in sexualized language, thus voicing an anti-abolitionist jibe he repeats in subsequent works.[18] Of most importance, the Baron tragically discounts the savagery of the chattel he frees. Just as accounts of the Southampton revolt dwelled on Turner's "spirit of prophecy," Poe's story begins with an "ancient prophecy" predicting the fall of both houses ("M," 19).[19] Like an abolitionist fanatic, however, the Baron ignores all warnings. He fails to tame the devilish brute that survives the fire of Berlifitzing's stables, bringing to pass the darkest fears of anti-abolitionists—that the emancipation of African slaves would destroy both North and South, that blacks would come to rule over whites, and that the United States would go up in flames in the shadow of slaves without masters.

Such is one political subtext of "Metzengerstein" that may not come as a total surprise. The fear of incendiary slave revolt looms over much of antebellum literature, and slave rebellion potentially lurks in a number of Poe texts—from vague indications in "Silence—A Fable" (1835), "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Black Cat" (1843) to *Pym*, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" (1844), and "Hop-Frog" (1849).[20] Like these later works, "Metzengerstein" takes a racist, anti-abolitionist stand at least insofar as Poe dwells on black savagery and the dangers of masterless chattel. Reflecting the anxieties of post-Turner America, "Metzengerstein" fits a familiar Poe profile, even as the story remains distinctive in at least two critical ways. First, "Metzengerstein" shows

that Poe's fiction addresses slavery from the beginning. Poe did not discover the national sin as a literary topic during the writing of *Pym*, nor is his early political commentary limited to lesser satirical pieces such as "Four Beasts in One" (1833). Blackness and bondage are for Poe more than abstracted symbols of evil, as he treats the presence of Africans in America as a national problem.

"Metzengerstein" is also distinctive in that its political argument seems remarkably coherent and specific compared to Poe's later narratives. Racial horrors and slavery tropes run amok in many Poe texts, often collapsing allegorical structures into ideological chaos. "Metzengerstein" reaches its own frantic end, but its political logic is sustained, revealing subtle but recognizable patterns of anti-abolitionism and registering not only racial terror but also a position on civic events. This politicized reading need not entirely conflict with Whalen's account of Poe's career. Even if a savvier, market-driven Poe shied away from the slavery controversy, the partisan and provincial "Metzengerstein" comes at the outset of Poe's professional life—before he knew the publishing world and before he formulated ambitious plans for a national literary magazine.[21] There is no indication that "Metzengerstein" was criticized for its politics, yet Poe's subsequent fiction is more circumspect in that it lacks as discernible an opinion on the slavery conflict. For Whalen, such obscurity is governed by the strictures of political economy. But "Metzengerstein" suggests that Poe is not a passive conduit for racist ideology, nor is his racism, average or otherwise, so easily separated from the question of slavery. There remains another explanation for Poe's tortured treatment of blackness and bondage: Poe struggles to assimilate his politics and metaphysics, an antinomy evident in "Metzengerstein," if only in nascent form.

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To read "Metzengerstein" in light of the slavery crisis is not to say that the story is philosophically flat. Joan Dayan has written on both Poe's metaphysics and his politics, and although these lines of inquiry do not often cross, Dayan links Poe's writings on color and servitude to "the mysteries of identity" and "the riddle of body and mind."[22] Can one ever know one's self? Is the self a stable entity? To what extent does the subject's mind constitute objective reality? Such questions are manifest in Poe's discussions of American race and slavery, just as race and slavery help generate his explorations of subjectivity.

This dialectical relationship, so fundamental to American romanticism before the Civil War, points Poe toward a synthesis in which subject and object, white and black, master and slave become one. "Metzengerstein"'s metaphysics of race broach this troubling prospect as the story exposes the political threat of a horrible absolutism. Here again the tale's ambiguous steed plays a central role, for among its many manifestations, the horse can be a creature of transcendental idealism representing a dangerous blackness hiding in the white mind.

Famously, Kant posits a subjectivity that constitutes objective reality in that the structures of the mind organize, reveal, and—in this sense—make up the phenomenological order. This seems the case when Baron Metzengerstein, "buried in meditation," fixates on the tapestry horse, seemingly bringing it into the natural world ("M," 21):

> The longer he gazed, the more absorbing became the spell—the more impossible did it appear that he could ever withdraw his glance from the fascination of that tapestry. . . . To his extreme horror and astonishment, the head of the gigantic steed had, in the meantime, altered its position. The neck of the animal, before arched, as if in compassion, over the prostrate body of its lord, was now extended, at full length, in the direction of the Baron. ("M," 22–23)

Simply considered, this summoning scene can enact a general transcendentalist claim: reality is not passively perceived by the subject but actively constructed by it. As we shall see, Poe's theory of race relies on this Kantian conviction, particularly as extended by Schelling and disseminated by Coleridge, who together propound two ideas that are of special importance to Poe: absolute identity, a reality concept that synthesizes subject and object, and unconscious production, the means by which subjects unknowingly create the phenomenological world. First, however, some words on history and sources are needed, for Poe's relation to transcendentalism is complicated.

Poe is most often seen as a detractor of transcendental idealism who satirizes the cant of Kant and the croaking of the Concord "Frogpondians."[23] Poe certainly has fun with romantic philosophy, and he feuds with Emerson and his circle. However, some scholars find strong affinities between Poe and transcendentalism, in part because they go directly to Europe without passing through the confines of Concord.[24] Which sources one studies makes a difference when look-

ing for Poe's philosophy, although how Poe got his transcendentalism is difficult to say, especially in 1831—prior to Frederic Hedge's essays on Kant and the stirrings of the Frogpondians, prior to Poe's occasional and at times misinformed direct references to German romanticism. Poe probably lacked the skill and opportunity to read German philosophy in its original. However, by 1831 he was reading Coleridge and may have learned some version of transcendentalism from Carlyle, Cousin, de Quincey, and de Staël.[25] There is also another possible source indicated by "Metzengerstein," for as the story itself suggests by footnoting "D'Israeli," Poe may have taken some philosophical direction from Benjamin Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826).[26]

In Disraeli's novel, Grey meets a German Prince who wars with a bordering estate and obsesses over a painting of a horse that seems to spring into life. Parallels to the plot of "Metzengerstein" are evident enough, but what has not been discussed is another scene in which Grey attends a party where he refers to the German states as the "country of Kant." His host then points to a fellow guest:

> The leader of the Idealists, a pupil of the celebrated Fichte! To gain an idea of his character, know that he out-Herods his master. . . . The first principle of his school is to reject all expressions which incline in the slightest degree to substantiality. . . . Some say that he dreads the contact of all real things, and that he makes it the study of his life to avoid them. Matter is his great enemy.[27]

The joke is that the student of Fichte is gorging himself on beer soup, showing that even committed idealists must live in the material world. Baron Metzengerstein suffers from a similar kind of double consciousness, for though prone to reflective meditation, he is also a "temporal king" whose appetites, like those of Disraeli's idealist, have "out-heroded" Herod. At the same time, the Baron avoids touching the horse to whom he is so passionately attached, and none of his servants can recall having "placed his hand upon the body of the beast" ("M," 21). In one sense, then, the horse is unreal, a phenomenon of the Baron's subjectivity, but in another, the horse is too real, embodying a savage materiality that proves the great enemy of Metzengerstein's mind. Is the horse an objective brute or a subjective nightmare? How does Poe mediate the dialectic of materialism and idealism, a dialectic that Plato's *Phaedrus* compares to being torn apart by two horses?[28]

By eliding potentially determinative evidence with disclaimers and

narrative gaps, "Metzengerstein" refuses to settle the metaphysical status of the steed. This has the familiar Poe effect of collapsing Enlightenment dualisms as the spectral horse-shade seems simultaneously objective and subjective, natural and supernatural. David Leverenz attributes such ambiguity to Poe's "mind-body crossings," though what Poe hopes to accomplish with them remains of much concern.[29] Poe does more, I think, than only gratify the iconoclastic urge to cast the shadow of dark romanticism over Enlightenment order. For Poe, such skepticism is the obverse of a serious transcendentalist effort to imagine the synthesis of subject and object in an absolute truth. In this way, Poe resists Enlightened duality, not with a materialist critique that Jonathan Elmer associates with Adorno and Horkheimer, and not with an African epistemology hinted at by Dayan and Toni Morrison but, rather, with the available logic of a specific type of transcendentalism.[30]

The hungry idealist of *Vivian Grey* is a caricature of Schelling, the pupil of Fichte who during his phase of so-called "identity philosophy" sought to incorporate the material world into his transcendental system. For de Staël, "Schelling refers every thing to nature." Hedge calls him "the ontologist of the Kantian School." More recently, Emil Fackenheim describes Schelling as an idealist "who has been struck, almost physically, by brute facticity."[31] This description is eerily appropriate for Poe, whose writings respond to both material and metaphysical modes of interpretation, and whose tales careen between idealism and a brute facticity often figured as race. It makes sense that Schelling, more than any other German philosopher, had an early influence on Poe.[32] "Loss of Breath" (1832) and "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838) refer to Schelling by name. Poe's resistance to dualistic order in "Metzengerstein" and beyond dramatizes what in "Morella" (1835) is called "*Identity* as urged by Schelling" (*PT*, 235)—that is, identity not only as self but also as an absolute truth that Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) formulates as "the coincidence of an objective with a subjective."[33]

Poe probably learned such absolutism from Coleridge. As early as 1831, Poe knew *Biographia Literaria* (1817), a book that praises Schelling's massive influence and pays homage to the point of plagiarism. Citing Schelling, Coleridge discusses absolute identity: "All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject. . . . During the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the pri-

ority belongs."[34] This is an abiding dilemma for Poe and precisely the challenge of Metzengerstein's steed. Because the horse is both a phenomenon produced by the mind of Frederick Metzengerstein and a brutish, material beast from the stables of Wilhelm Berlifitzing, subjectivity and objectivity are joined in an inseparable union that can represent the absolute identity of Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling.

But whereas Schelling and Coleridge see such synthesis as harmonious, beautiful, and true, for Poe the union of subject and object is a horse of a different color:

> [T]he Baron's perverse attachment to his lately-acquired charger—an attachment which seemed to attain new strength from every fresh example of the animal's ferocious and demon-like propensities—at length became, in the eyes of all reasonable men, a hideous and unnatural fervor. In the glare of noon—at the dead hour of night—in sickness or in health—in calm or in tempest—the young Metzengerstein seemed riveted to the saddle of that colossal horse, whose intractable audacities so well accorded with his own spirit. ("M," 26–27)

Poe cannot celebrate a transcendentalism that synthesizes black and white. Just as the narrator of "William Wilson" (1839) murders himself and the twin whose "absolute identity" nearly "enslaved" him (*PT*, 355–56), "Metzengerstein" recoils from a master-slave pairing by killing both subject and object. Eschewing the ecstatic, lyrical flights that characterize synthesis in Schelling and Coleridge, Poe renders the union of subject and object in an idiom of racial horror as absolute identity becomes an analog for amalgamation and slave revolt.

Even worse, Poe hints that this hideous synthesis originates in Metzengerstein's unwitting mind, a possibility also theorized by transcendentalist thought. The concept of unconscious production was first explored by Fichte, for whom the subjective production of phenomena precedes the subject's knowledge of it. This explains why radical subjectivity is so counterintuitive to the uninitiated. Because our minds do not know that they spontaneously make up reality, only guided philosophical reflection can discover the truth-making process. Absolute identity is thus revealed when unconscious production becomes conscious, when subjectivity finally recognizes that it is indistinguishable from objectivity, a realization that effectively abolishes subject-object dualism.[35]

For Schelling and Coleridge, art is the means for discovering this

absolutism. Or as Schelling writes in *System of Transcendental Idealism*, "[A]rt is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious."[36] Following Schelling, Coleridge posits "a *philosophic* (and inasmuch as it is actualized by an effort of freedom, an *artificial*) *consciousness*, which lies beneath or (as it were) *behind* the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings." By thus extolling the role of art as an aid to freely willed reflection, Schelling and Coleridge conflate metaphysics, psychology, and aesthetics, for the creation and appreciation of beauty bring unconscious production to light, revealing absolute identity through what Coleridge calls art's "synthetic and magical power."[37]

For Poe, however, the unconscious-made-conscious-through-art is finally horrific, not so much because the Kantian and Burkean sublimes can be implicated in race but because a deadly blackness emerges from the unsuspecting white mind.[38] When Metzengerstein first glances at the tapestry horse, he does so "without his consciousness," and he cannot quell the "overwhelming anxiety" that makes it "impossible" to avert his gaze as he "mechanically" stares at the object of art that becomes the "uncontrollable" horse-shade ("M," 22, 29). Here the monomaniacal subject unconsciously produces the object of its demise, creating a self-generated, self-annihilating nightmare that culminates in the Baron's last ride. Schelling calls the unconscious-made-conscious "the holy of holies" that "burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame."[39] "Metzengerstein" ends with the unholy union of white master and black slave, a pairing that perishes in an inferno of unnameable absolutism. "Metzengerstein" can play upon the horror of slave revolt, but absolute identity and unconscious production turn the screw once more. Distinctions of color and servitude become metaphysically untenable when an irrepressible, bestial blackness lives in the white subject, ready to spring into hideous synthesis through an uncontrollable and distinctly transcendental coming-to-consciousness.

This blurring of black and white subjectivity may recall another pupil of Fichte, Hegel, whose dialectic of lord and bondsman frames the celebrated argument that the subject can only know itself through a subordinate or dominant other.[40] Yet as sensitive as Poe is to the

dynamics of power and selfhood, Schelling and Coleridge remain more likely philosophical forerunners than Hegel. Calvin Stowe, Harriet Beecher's husband, suggested as much in 1845 when he reviewed the "*four great pillars of the Modern Transcendentalism*"—Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Stowe writes of Schelling: "It was from him immediately that Coleridge drew, and the transcendentalism of this country probably owes its existence to a great extent to the influence of his writings." Stowe then offers what he believes to be the first American translation of Hegel, adding: "I have never been able, I must frankly confess it, to find out what the man means by any thing which he says."[41] Stowe is right to doubt his expertise, but his confusion is indicative. In antebellum America, particularly during the formation of transcendentalism in the early 1830s, Schelling was more accessible, better understood, and more influential than Hegel, despite an early interest in Hegel by a handful of American thinkers and despite the growing popularity of Hegel that would culminate after the Civil War.[42]

Antebellum philosophical contexts, thematic affinities, and textual allusions all suggest that "Metzengerstein" treats subjectivity in the logic of Schelling and Coleridge. The tale probably errs by pursuing this interest in a third-person voice, for like many precocious works of fiction, "Metzengerstein" tells but does not show its protagonist's state of mind. For this reason, however, the story is instructive—and also powerfully predictive—as a kind of component tasting in which political commentary and transcendental idealism are not formally integrated. Later, Poe's distasteful politics are more carefully blended in first-person texts characterized by racist aspersions and wild transcendental imaginings. Such narratives are often more dramatic and psychologically nuanced than "Metzengerstein," even though slavery and race refuse to be entirely assimilated as transcendental subjectivity unconsciously creates the blackness it fears most.

Critics have shown how *Pym* reveals the social constructedness of race, but the novel also subtly describes its phenomenological production. As Pym drifts from a unified white subjectivity to the subjectivity of a prisoner, of a cannibal, and finally of a fugitive slave, he is repeatedly lost in the depths of his mind, figured by Poe in scenes of drunkenness, insanity, and interment. The generative power of the unconscious becomes terrifyingly clear when a cliff-hanging Pym discovers his "fancies creating their own realities" (*PT*, 1170). Pym at-

tempts to define a more stable subjectivity over and against the jet-black Tsalalians, and he appears to succeed when escaping their island and sailing toward an all-white South Pole. This seems especially true when his Tsalalian captive dies from overexposure to whiteness, suggesting that black people have no place in the "perfect whiteness" at the end of the book (*PT*, 1179). And yet the corpse of the Tsalalian remains in the bottom of the boat. Inassimilable and inescapable, it shows that racial others are fundamental to Pym's subjectivity, which is terrorized by dark bodies it spontaneously creates and thus cannot leave behind. As the novel concludes with Pym's canoe careening toward an unknown absolutism, the presence of blackness makes the looming synthesis an occasion more of horror than joy.

A similar dynamic is at work in "Ligeia." Ligeia is a maven of "transcendentalism" and also a figure of amalgamation, whose physical features conjure images of Africa and Arabia (*PT*, 266). Like Metzengerstein's steed, Ligeia can symbolize the possibilities of absolute identity insofar as she is both a material other and a product of the narrator's mind. Synthesizing subjectivity and objectivity under the narrator's transcendentally influenced eye, Ligeia's struggle to return from the dead models a process of unconscious production when her resurrection as dark phenomenon is dialectically enacted in the natural world and in the narrator's irrepressibly associative mind. In the end, his white subjectivity is subsumed by the gaze of Ligeia, whose "black" eyes are "far larger than the ordinary eyes of [his] own race" (*PT*, 264). Is Ligeia an embodied black figure or the figment of a racist unconscious? The transcendentalism of Schelling and Coleridge suggests that the answer is *yes*.[43]

Even an aggressively satirical piece like "How to Write a Blackwood Article" does not eschew race when trying to "[s]ay something about objectivity and subjectivity" (*PT*, 282). The story's narrator, Psyche Zenobia, is told to adopt "the tone transcendental" and shun "the tone heterogeneous," and to praise the harmony of "Supernal Oneness" while avoiding "Infernal Twoness" (*PT*, 283). Poe associates such absolutism with both "Coleridge" and a "pet baboon" (*PT*, 281), and he further conflates transcendentalism and race mixing in Zenobia's tale, "A Predicament." Not only is the bluestocking Zenobia a reformer in the Frogpondian mode but Poe links her philosophy to amalgamation when her grotesque black servant crashes into her breasts. Poe responds to this bawdy union by decapitating Zenobia,

which she describes in sensational detail as she wonders whether her head or body represents her "proper identity" (*PT*, 295). Faced with an absolute identity entailing the threat of racial unity, Poe retreats to an epistemology in which the division of subject and object is explicitly, violently demarcated. "How to Write a Blackwood Article" is clearly a burlesque, yet Poe's caricature of transcendental writing aptly describes some of his best work. Under the influence of Schelling and Coleridge, Poe desires the supernal truth and beauty of absolute oneness. At the same time, he does not let go of dualistic formulations of slavery and race, making transcendence a philosophically attractive but politically threatening prospect.[44]

Teresa Goddu has shown how Cold War critics took the blackness of classic antebellum texts not as an indication of race but as a metaphysical cipher.[45] The pendulum has swung in the opposite direction as race and slavery now seem everywhere in Poe, though the politics and philosophy of blackness seem to me inextricably tied. In the case of Poe, dark romanticism is appropriately named. Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickinson know how to pit Calvin against Concord. For Poe, race and slavery remain fearsome facts that resist any blithe absolutism. This is not to say that transcendental idealism cannot accommodate racism. Kant maintained a racist taxonomy, as did Coleridge and Emerson, and romanticism—European and American—can be profoundly implicated in racialist thought.[46] This did not prevent almost all transcendentalists from supporting abolitionism, from thus becoming both part of the racism problem and part of the emancipation solution. In Poe, however, the power of blackness is too threatening a concern. Poe retains a racist anti-abolitionism that mars his potentially transcendental plots, pushing his idealism toward a hideous synthesis in which absolute identity and unconscious production undermine the mastery of white subjectivity, an embattled political and philosophical formation after Nat Turner.

■ ■ ■

Poe reportedly once leapt twenty feet in the running broad jump. To move from "Metzengerstein" to the end of Poe's career may require a similar stunt. The preceding discussion schematically offers some sense of the long middle ground. Poe's formal technique matures; his aspirations for a national magazine swell; in 1845 the Longfellow War and Poe's disastrous reading at the Boston Lyceum bring a more per-

sonal, polemical hostility to his views of New England reform. The vagaries of Poe's career make for a tragic and fascinating story. Yet it is hard to index his fictions according to the shifting fortunes of his life, in part because he tends to revisit earlier topics and narrative strategies, prompting some scholars to organize his texts thematically, not chronologically. This makes sense in the matter of slavery and race, for Poe's literary treatment is in many ways consistent. Although the political subtext of "Metzengerstein" appears to me exceptionally cogent, absolute identity and unconscious production when combined with color and servitude continue to cause ungovernable horror, not only in "Ligeia," *Pym*, and "How to Write a Blackwood Article" but also in such texts as "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Black Cat," "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," "The Raven" (1845), and "Hop-Frog." These works need not be explicitly about the American slavery crisis to show unconscious white subjectivities rising toward a terrible, self-generated blackness. Race and transcendental philosophy are frequently entangled in Poe's imagination, though a singular departure may be *Eureka*, his challenging, seldom-loved "Prose Poem" whose rhapsodic cosmology potentially invokes an absolutism free from the anxiety of race (*PT*, 1257). How sustainable such freedom is for Poe is the subject of this final section, which ultimately explores the extent of Poe's political intentions.

In his "Marginalia" of 1849, Poe celebrated his skeptical prowess: "It is laughable to observe how easily any system of Philosophy can be proved false" (*ER*, 1458). Poe, however, immediately betrays a lingering desire for belief: "[I]s it not mournful to perceive the impossibility of even fancying any particular system to be true?" For all his doubting, Poe never abjures the Enlightenment dream of metaphysical coherence, and nowhere is this clearer than in *Eureka*, his best effort to expound a philosophical system. Poe announces at the start of the text: "I design to speak of the *Physical, Metaphysical and Mathematical—of the Material and Spiritual Universe:—of its Essence, its Origin, its Creation, its Present Condition and its Destiny*" (*PT*, 1261). The hubris here may rival that of some university mission statements. But if Poe becomes increasingly unbalanced toward the end of his life, there is no reason to take *Eureka* less seriously than any other Poe text. Indeed, considering Poe's long-standing commitment to speculation, and considering the metaphysical maxims of his "Marginalia"

(1844–49) and "Fifty Suggestions" (1849), his attempt at a major work of philosophy comes as no surprise.

Eureka draws from a dizzying number of thinkers, including Newton, Laplace, Leibniz, Kepler, and Alexander von Humboldt. Much of the text discusses the physical sciences, which Poe's rage for total coherence pushes to metaphysical extremes. In this way, *Eureka* is a work of synthesis, for although the treatise dismisses "Transcendentalists" as canters and "divers for crotchets" (*PT*, 1263), its larger dialectal structure is recognizably transcendental. Poe begins by positing "Material" and "Spiritual" aspects of the universe (*PT*, 1261), and he mocks the division of object and subject that vexes the history of Western thought. Poe's goal is to formulate what he variously calls "*absolute truth*" (*PT*, 1269), "absolute oneness" (*PT*, 1280), and "absolute homogeneity" (*PT*, 1279). He seeks what he calls a "return into unity" (*PT*, 1278), which is reached through the "tranquility of self-inspection" and the "cool exercise of consciousness" (*PT*, 1356). The unity of object and subject in reflection sounds precisely like Schelling and Coleridge, as absolute truth reveals itself in an ecstatic coming to consciousness.[47] This process serves as a climactic synthesis of *Eureka*'s argument. For Poe, "conscious Intelligences" learn "proper identity" through self-knowledge and, in doing so, recur to an "identity with God" in which "myriads of individual Intelligences become blended . . . into One" (*PT*, 1358). Here Poe moves toward absolute identity with an emphasis on conscious reflection, showing that the subject must be reunited with its original, unconscious productions.

What is stunning is how happy this synthesis is: for once, Poe is not shaken but stirred. In the vast majority of his writings, self-inspection is not tranquil, nor is self-consciousness cool, nor is the absolute blending of egos cause for transcendental joy. When the narrator in "Loss of Breath" is lynched, Poe mocks romantic absolutism: "Schelling himself would have been satisfied with my entire loss of self-identity."[48] In *Eureka*, however, there is "*perfection* of plot" (*PT*, 1342), and even evil is "intelligible" and "endurable" (*PT*, 1357). The union of self and other in God is not a violation of the personal mind, for although *Eureka* admits "[t]he pain of the consideration that we shall lose our individual identity," assurance arrives with the conviction that "*each* must become God" (*PT*, 1359). In *Eureka*, absolute oneness is "agglomeration," not amalgamation (*PT*, 1306), and Poe's predicted "revolution" of knowledge is not figured as a revolt (*PT*, 1262). Thus Poe seemingly

frees transcendentalism from the trammels of race, for to come to ecstatic consciousness and realize absolute identity is to leave behind the dualistic vision that *Eureka* calls "mental slavery" (*PT*, 1269).

And yet the very mention of slavery can summon the specter of the national sin. Given the intense racialist fears that appear in so much of Poe's work, *Eureka* and its inset text—supposedly lifted from a "Nubian geographer"—only tenuously banishes political fear from the paradise of absolutism (*PT*, 1263). Unity is a crucial concept in transcendental philosophy, but it also had significant meaning in ethnologic debate. In the antebellum era, monogenesists argued that all races spring from a single origin, a conclusion that was readily adapted to abolitionist ends. For their part, polygenesists and slavery advocates denied the unity of races, often citing the pseudoscientific work of Samuel George Morton. Morton's writings on mummies and skulls form a background for *Pym* and "Some Words with a Mummy" (1845).[49] *Eureka*, however, is dedicated to Alexander von Humboldt, whose influential opus, *Cosmos* (1845), refuted Morton's polygenesist views.[50] Following Humboldt, *Eureka* holds that all matter comes from a "common parentage" (*PT*, 1286), and so if the text speaks to slavery at all, it appears to speak against it, even as Poe forecloses this possibility in a subsequent tale, "Mellonta Tauta" (1849).

Presented as a series of letters from a balloonist in the year 2848, "Mellonta Tauta" quotes copiously from *Eureka* as it mocks the double consciousness of previous eras and celebrates the "absolute truth" recognized in the twenty-ninth century (*PT*, 878). The difference is that "Mellonta Tauta" is an overt political satire that takes "Amriccans" to task for reformist ignorance and government by mob (*PT*, 879). The heavy-handed politics of the story are combatively conservative, sending up such republican practices as voting and the "queerest idea" that "all men are born free and equal" (*PT*, 879). The commentary can be so extravagant as to seem at times capricious, yet Poe's complaint about equality has poignant political relevance. From Thomas Dew, Robert Montgomery Bird, and William Harper in the 1830s to James Henry Hammond, John Calhoun, and George Fitzhugh in the decades that followed, proslavery thinkers repeatedly denied that "all men are born free and equal," mainly because the phrase was a rallying cry in abolitionist discourse.[51] Questions about the freedom and equality of black people dominated antebellum political debate, and in "Mellonta Tauta," Poe's narrator stakes a popular proslavery claim.

Unable or unwilling to keep race and slavery out of *Eureka*'s transcendental speculations, "Mellonta Tauta," like so many Poe texts, cannot reconcile race and absolutism. In an 1847 article, "Bad News for the Transcendental Poets," an author in the *Literary World* crowed: "The transcendental balloon is rapidly suffering collapse."[52] "Mellonta Tauta" ends when the narrator announces that her "balloon has collapsed" (*PT*, 884–85). As it plummets toward the sea, Poe presents a familiar (if sanguinely reported) apocalypse in which transcendentalism yet again cannot bear the burden of antebellum politics. *Eureka*, then, is the exception that proves the rule represented by "Mellonta Tauta": Poe's ambivalence toward transcendentalism constitutes and is constituted by his views on slavery and race. What remains unclear is why Poe continues to tangle metaphysics and politics. Why do his writings so stubbornly dwell on so disruptive an antinomy?

In 1923, D. H. Lawrence hinted at a powerful explanation: "Moralists have always wondered helplessly why Poe's 'morbid' tales need have been written. They need to be written because old things need to die and disintegrate, because the old white psyche has to be gradually broken down before anything else can come to pass." Lawrence recognized that "Poor Poe" subverts white subjectivity, and although he sometimes described Poe as performing this work "consciously," he also attributed this impulse to a primitive, irresistible, and almost pathological "need."[53] Harry Levin and Leslie Fielder saw this need as an unconscious "racial phobia," a view that continues to predominate Poe scholarship in more sophisticated forms.[54] John Carlos Rowe, Dana Nelson, David Leverenz, and J. Gerald Kennedy are among those critics who see Poe as both in and out of control insofar as the vision of his "semiconscious" texts remains obscured by his racism. Even Whalen, who ascribes to Poe a larger amount of intention, does not consistently theorize Poe's conscious relation to political conditions. Whether the method is Marxist or psychoanalytic, whether the agency is ideology or id, for scholars who entertain questions of intention, Poe's literary treatment of slavery and race seems to operate beyond his authorial will.[55]

There is always space for the unconscious, politically or psychoanalytically understood. There is surely some truth to the picture of Poe as a man at the mercy of some hidden perversity. Henry James, no stranger to the dramatic potential of coming to consciousness, associated the vulgar pleasures of Poe with a "primitive stage of reflec-

tion."[56] Perhaps we like Poe best this way. Bodies under the floor-boards, beasts in the jungle, madwomen in the attic—it is gripping to watch a subject in the throes of the unconscious, especially when the unconscious threatens to stun us by degrees. And Poe knows. For him, as for Schelling and Coleridge, the dialectical process of coming to consciousness is a necessary element of art premised on an aesthetic theory based in transcendental subjectivity.

In 1842, a British critic in the *American Eclectic* wrote of German romantics: "They consider, that as Art is a production, a creation of the mind of man, the real way to set about its examination must be the investigation of those laws of the mind from whence it proceeds. . . . Thus it becomes itself a branch of psychology. . . . *They* [the Germans] examine the producing mind; *we* the work produced."[57] Poe's aesthetics often focus on the form of the object of art, a tendency that can align him with high modernists and New Critics. However, as much as any antebellum thinker, Poe follows the Germans in taking an interest in the subjectivity of the artist. As Poe suggests when calling *Biographia Literaria* "an important service to the cause of psychological science," his aesthetics are closely related to his sense of the operations of the mind (*ER*, 188).

Part of Poe's fame as a cryptologist and critic came in 1842 when his review of Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* correctly predicted some features of the ending before the novel was entirely serialized. In playing prognosticator, Poe also pronounced on the unconscious production of literature: "This is clearly the design of Mr. Dickens—although he himself may not at present perceive it. In fact, beautiful as it is, and strikingly original with him, it cannot be questioned that he has been led to it less by artistical knowledge and reflection, than by that intuitive feeling for the forcible and the true" (*ER*, 222–23). Here Poe's theory of artistic production relies not on conscious "knowledge" or "reflection" but on an "intuitive" mental faculty of which the author remains unaware. Such claims undermine the omnipotent intention Poe ascribes to the poet in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), a work that seems especially specious in light of other Poe texts. In "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833), the narrator "unwittingly" paints "DISCOVERY" on a sail, suggesting in both production and product that writing uncovers the unconscious (*PT*, 195). And in an 1836 review, as well as in later critical pieces, Poe further celebrates artistic effects that "arise independently of the author's will" (*ER*, 263).[58]

Thus, unconscious production is a consciously theorized aspect of Poe's thought—both in his metaphysics of race and in his thinking on art. This does not, of course, exclude psychoanalytic or ideological readings of Poe, but it does suggest that Poe can be a remarkably canny subject whose texts are acutely self-aware of the play between the known and unknown mind. Considering the political position presented in "Metzengerstein," and considering Poe's continued attention to the unconscious production of beauty and blackness, texts that may seem haunted by Poe's lurking racial phobias can be taken as complex dramatizations of a psychology of mastery and racism, dramatizations driven by Poe's abiding refusal to integrate the differences of racial others into an absolute oneness. In this way, Poe rises from the couch and moves toward the analyst's chair. The story of many of his stories—and a narrative in the history of Poe criticism—is the gradual coming to consciousness of chattel bondage and race.

The problem is that such self-consciousness fails to raise Poe's moral conscience. How can an author so committed to the issue of race and subjectivity deny the subjectivity of racial others who become, for Poe, literal images of blackness in the white mind? Clearly, theoretical sophistication need not lead to convincing truth-claims or humanist convictions. Clearly, Poe can be placed within a tradition of transcendental racism, even if there is no necessary equivalence between romanticism and egregious racial views. One might also read Poe's philosophy of race as a kind of sublimation or ideological formation, thus reinscribing Poe's psychological system within an unconscious plot. Such claims might invoke some version of the intentional fallacy, although there are more specific, more historical grounds for retaining what Nelson calls "psychopolitical imperatives" as an explanatory factor in the structure and practice of antebellum racism.[59]

Addressing the fear of slave revolt in the post-Turner South, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that the white man "hides it from himself."[60] Douglass, Melville, and Jacobs all notice this white repression of blackness, but the fact that these writers ascribe a "deep" psychology to the slavery crisis suggests that Poe himself had access to similar conclusions. There is always space for consciousness when the evidence interpreted by the analyst is available to the subject of analysis, even if the subject's sense of psychology is not phrased in the same modern idiom. One way to determine authorial intention is to look for patterns of reflection and recognition that indicate an extended look into

the recesses of the mind. If my reading of Poe is right, Poe knows that race operates unconsciously. The difference between Poe and his savvy contemporaries is that he does not follow this insight toward a more progressive politics. A reason for this is that Poe's thinking is so aggressively phenomenological that for him to conclude that the horror of blackness is "only" a mental construction may not serve to subvert that construction as such but, rather, to establish it as the most convincing account of a reality maintained only through fierce denials of intersubjectivity that mark the limits of Poe's truth-claims, psychology, ethics, and art. In the end, the unconscious in Poe combines two implications of the word: the modern sense of the unrecognized mind and the etymological meaning that signals the negation ("un") of shared ("con") knowledge ("science").[61]

As morally suspect as Poe's writings can be, their outcome is often affective. Applying Jonathan Elmer's theory of sensationalism, one might formulate race in Poe's work as an inassimilable and therefore compelling Lacanian "leftover" or "slag."[62] Slavoj Žižek supports such claims in a general discussion of American racism when he calls race an "unfathomable remainder" that simultaneously drives and defies the search for absolute unity. That Žižek makes this point while forging connections between Schelling and Lacan suggests that Poe's appeal to both transcendental and psychoanalytical criticism may not be entirely coincidental or inherently at odds.[63] Most histories of modern American psychology begin with either William James or the arrival of Freudian thought.[64] However, transcendental idealism helped invent the modern unconscious when it located the source of absolute truth beyond the subject's immediate mind. This claim is borne out by the deep psychology of British romanticism, and the philosopher Paul Redding has argued that "Schelling's development of Fichtean ideas . . . gave rise to pre-Freudian ideas about the nature of unconscious mental function."[65] In this sense, Poe can be a stop on the road from Kant to Lacan. Influenced by unconscious production and intensely attentive to psychological states, Poe writes about the fraught relation between the hidden and recognized mind. Which is to say that Poe is less an uncanny predictor of psychoanalysis and more a thinker who participates in a history of subjectivity.

In 1800, Coleridge first used "unconscious" to indicate what the self does not know of itself. In 1822, he coined "subjectivity" to signify the consciousness of one's mind engaged in the act of perception. Cole-

ridge did not invent these concepts, but he brought them to the United States with the help of other romantics who impressed, among others, Poe. In 1831, Carlyle proclaimed: "Unconsciousness is the sign of creation." In 1832, De Quincey coined the related term "subconscious."[66] In that same year, Poe published "Metzengerstein," commencing a prose career that would use romantic theories of the mind to explore the metaphysics of race and art. Poe's thinking is not exactly systematic, coherent, or analytically rigorous. Yet as Stanley Cavell has argued, Poe is perversely attuned to the skeptical potential of romantic philosophy, showing us "the recoil of a demonic reason, irrationally thinking to dominate earth. . . . not to reject the world but rather to establish it."[67] More specifically, Poe's creativity lies in the application of romantic idealism to antebellum culture, particularly the issue of slavery and race that was tearing the United States apart.

The slavery crisis thus helps to explain Poe's anomalous standing in antebellum literature. On the margins of Southern gentility, his racial views are too radically vexed for pastoral plantation fiction. Fearing transcendence, he could not join in the perfectionist projects of Concord. Such skepticism can leave Poe in the familiar company of Hawthorne and Melville, though an important difference is that Poe is a more insistent idealist, returning repeatedly to the troubling prospects of transcendental unity, particularly in *Eureka*'s vigorous, if ultimately tenuous, synthesis. When Hawthorne and Melville harass transcendentalism, they are overly conscious of Concord, and as a result, they tend toward satiric, reactive, and derivative critique. Emerson and his circle would pay some heed to the unconscious production of oneness.[68] Poe, however, pursued romantic absolutism before the founding of the Transcendental Club. He would eventually meet the Frogpondians in polemical, defensive, and not always earnest ways, but this was long after he established an original relation to transatlantic transcendentalism. Poe's sense of absolute truth is not premised on a transparent eye, for his dramatic depictions of absolute identity are occluded by slavery and race, and his thinking is intensely attentive to the productive opacity of the unconscious mind. Poe's terror is of Germany. It is carried through England. And unrelieved from political anxiety, it is shaped by the American slavery crisis as Poe pursues a metaphysic, an aesthetic, and a psychology that for all his sophistication form a conscious and unconscionable system of transcendental racism.

It may be tempting to think of racism as irrational, unconscious, unenlightened, and therefore open to reform through reflection and education. However, to take this too much for granted is to make the mistake of Poe: to maintain a separate, masterful subjectivity by radically distancing others. It is probably easier to think of Poe as culturally, morally, and philosophically distant. It is easy to be swayed by his popular image—wine bottle in one hand, opium pipe in the other, lusting after relatives and shamelessly plagiarizing while muttering racial slurs and dying in the gutter. Poe may be a pathological figure, but the point that his writings make so well is that perversity is never far from reason. Enlightenment thinking, including its resistant relative transcendentalism, certainly can lead to liberating views and progressive political ends. Poe reminds the rational reader that this conclusion is by no means foregone, especially in the antebellum United States where plenty of racists thought hard about race and where the project of emancipation remained as yet unfinished.

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Notes

1   Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman, introduction to *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), xii. Subsequent scholarship includes Jonathan Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995); Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999); and J. Gerald Kennedy, ed., *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

2   For a sense of the diversity of Poe scholarship on race that nonetheless offers a kind of consensus regarding Poe's lack of intention, see J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg, eds., *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

3   Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka*, in *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1280; further references to this collection are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as *PT*.

4   See Terence Whalen, "Average Racism: Poe, Slavery, and the Wages of Literary Nationalism," in *Romancing the Shadow*, ed. Kennedy and Weissberg, 3–40. On Poe's ambivalence about plantation culture, see

David Leverenz, "Poe and Gentry Virginia," in *The American Face*, ed. Rosenheim and Rachman, 210–36. On Poe's relationship with the Young America movement, see Meredith McGill, "Poe, Literary Nationalism, and Authorial Identity," in *The American Face*, ed. Rosenheim and Rachman, 271–304. For Poe and slavery, see Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, 111–46. Here and elsewhere, I rely for biographical information on Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

5   See John Carlos Rowe, *At Emerson's Tomb: The Politics of Classic American Literature* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), 42–62; and Betsy Erkkila, "The Poetics of Whiteness: Poe and the Racial Imaginary," in *Romancing the Shadow*, ed. Kennedy and Weissberg, 41–74.

6   See Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), 138; and G. R. Thompson, *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 39–44.

7   Because "Metzengerstein" came soon after Turner's revolt, specific dates matter. Turner's uprising began 23 August 1831, with coverage in the popular press appearing quickly thereafter. Poe had been writing short fiction in Baltimore from as early as April 1831. On May 28, the *Saturday Courier* of Philadelphia announced the short-story contest for which Poe would submit "Metzengerstein," though details for the contest were not provided until July 9. We do not know when Poe submitted "Metzengerstein," but the deadline for the contest was December 1 and Poe had a history of procrastination. It is thus possible, and in my mind quite likely, that Poe did not finish his "Metzengerstein" manuscript until after he heard of Turner's revolt through various available sources (see Dwight Thomas and David Jackson, eds., *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 1809–1849* [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987], 120–24).

8   "Metzengerstein," in *Edgar Allan Poe: Tales and Sketches, 1831–1842*, vol. 2 of *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), 19; further references to "Metzengerstein" are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as "M."

9   See Richard E. Ellis, *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights, and the Nullification Crisis* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 187–94.

10   For the geographical proximity of Douglass and Poe, see J. Gerald Kennedy, "'Trust No Man': Poe, Douglass, and the Culture of Slavery," in *Romancing the Shadow*, ed. Kennedy and Weissberg, 225–57.

11   See William Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), 51–55.

12   See Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 26–68; and Leverenz, "Poe and Gentry Virginia," 210–36.

13 William Byrd II to John Perceval, 12 July 1736, *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684–1776*, ed. Marion Tinling, 2 vols. (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1977), 2:488. I am grateful to Albert Devlin for pointing out Byrd's letter. See also Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785; reprint, New York: Harper, 1964), 133.

14 "Incendiary Publications," *National Intelligencer*, 15 September 1831; reprinted in Eric Foner, ed., *Nat Turner* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice–Hall, 1971), 87–89.

15 Thomas Roderick Dew, "Abolition of Negro Slavery" (1832), in *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981), 50, 47.

16 William Gilmore Simms, *Egeria: Or, Voices of Thought and Counsel for the Woods and Wayside* (Philadelphia: E. H. Butler, 1853), 15.

17 See Larry Tise, *Pro-Slavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1987).

18 See, for instance, "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (*PT*, 291–92) and Poe's 1845 review of Longfellow in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 762; further references to *Essays and Reviews* will be cited parenthetically as *ER*. It should also be noted that these insults accuse white female abolitionists of sexual desire for black male slaves. In "Metzengerstein," the horse is male, recalling Eric Lott's claim that antebellum racist anxiety is marked by the conflicted attraction and repulsion of white men for black male bodies (*Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993], 53–55, 120–22, 161–68).

19 See *Constitutional Whig*, 29 August 1831; reprinted in Henry Irving Tragle, ed., *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1971), 53.

20 On the fear of slave revolts in antebellum literature, see Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 27–221. On this fear in Poe's "Silence—A Fable," see Joan Dayan, "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves," in *The American Face*, ed. Rosenheim and Rachman, 194–96; in "The Fall of the House of Usher," see David Leverenz, "Spanking the Master: Mind–Body Crossings in Poe's Sensationalism," in *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Kennedy, 112–14; in "The Black Cat," see Lesley Ginsberg, "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat,'" in *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*, ed. Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1998), 99–128; in *Pym*, see Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 31–59; Rowe, *At Emerson's Tomb*, 42–62; and Dana Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638–1867* (New York:

Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 90–108; in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," see Elise Lemire, " 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue': Amalgamation Discourses and the Race Riots of 1838 in Poe's Philadelphia," in *Romancing the Shadow*, ed. Kennedy and Weissberg, 177–204; in "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," see Louis Rubin, *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study of the Literature and Society of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1989), 162–67; and in "Hop-Frog," see Leland S. Person, "Poe's Philosophy of Amalgamation: Reading Racism in the Tales," in *Romancing the Shadow*, ed. Kennedy and Weissberg, 218–20.

21   In *Poe and the Masses*, Whalen argues that Poe's writings were governed by political economy before Poe entered the publishing industry. This may be so, although such claims seem stronger to me when applied to Poe's later career.

22   Joan Dayan, "Poe, Persons, and Property," in *Romancing the Shadow*, ed. Kennedy and Weissberg, 121.

23   Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 265. See also Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance: Dialectic and Identity in Emerson, Dickinson, Poe, and Hawthorne* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), 36–42, 101–5.

24   See Thompson, *Poe's Fiction*; Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), 367–75; and Richard Gravil, *Romantic Dialogues: Anglo-American Continuities, 1776–1862* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 128–38.

25   See Thomas Hansen and Burton Pollin, *The German Face of Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of Literary References in His Works* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995).

26   Poe's reference to Disraeli was probably not added until 1849 (*Tales and Sketches*, ed. Mabbott, 2:17). Poe mentions Disraeli and *Vivian Grey*, both positively and negatively, in multiple reviews of the 1830s.

27   Benjamin Disraeli, *Vivian Grey: A Romance of Youth*, 2 vols. (New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1904), 2:251.

28   See Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. R. Hackforth (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 69.

29   Leverenz, "Spanking the Master." See also Joan Dayan, *Fables of the Mind: An Inquiry into Poe's Fiction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), especially 199.

30   See Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit*, 187–92; Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," 206–7; and Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 31–59. A possible purchase for African influence in "Metzengerstein" is the story's use of metempsychosis (see Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* [Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000], 167–200).

31   Madame de Staël, *Germany* (1810; reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1859), 196; Frederic Henry Hedge, "Coleridge's Literary Character"

(1833), in *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 92; and Emil L. Fackenheim, *The God Within: Kant, Schelling, and Historicity*, ed. John Burbidge (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1996), 51.

32 For Poe's references to Schelling and the availability of Schelling in English, see Hansen and Pollin, *The German Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, 80.

33 F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (1800; reprint, Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1978), 5.

34 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 7*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 16 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), (I):252, (I):255.

35 My sense of unconscious production has been aided by Roger Hausheer, "Fichte and Schelling," in *German Philosophy since Kant*, ed. Anthony O'Hear (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 1–24; Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45–54; and Paul Redding, *The Logic of Affect* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1999), 123–26.

36 Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 231.

37 Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, (I):236, (II):16.

38 See Laura Doyle, "The Racial Sublime," in *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780–1834*, ed. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), 15–39. See also Erkkila, "Poetics of Whiteness," 65–67.

39 Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 231.

40 On Poe and Hegel, see Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, 15–18. Carton doubts that Poe studied Hegel but argues that this "only enhances the significance" of their relationship (15), a position from which I dissent.

41 Calvin Stowe, "The Teutonic Metaphysics, or Modern Transcendentalism," *Biblical Repository and Classical Review*, January 1845, 65, 75, 79.

42 For Hegel in America, see Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720–2000* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 75–94; and William H. Goetzmann, introduction to *The American Hegelians: An Intellectual Episode in the History of Western America*, ed. William H. Goetzmann (New York: Knopf, 1973), 3–11. Poe's only explicit references to Hegel are neither early nor particularly telling: an 1842 review of Rufus Dawes (*ER*, 495) and "Marginalia," June 1849 (*ER*, 1459).

43 Dayan discusses race and "Ligeia" in "Amorous Bondage," 200–207.

44 For a compatible reading of "How to Write a Blackwood Article," see Leverenz, "Spanking the Master," 116–17.

45 See Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), 7–8.

46 For more on Kant's racist taxonomy, see Charles W. Mills, *The Racial*

Contract (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997), 69–72; on Coleridge and racism, see Thomas, *Romanticism and Slavery Narratives*, 89–104; and on Emerson and racism, see Anita Haya Patterson, *From Emerson to King: Democracy, Race, and the Politics of Protest* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 129–38. Recent transatlantic studies of romanticism and race include Thomas, *Romanticism and Slavery Narratives*; and Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

47   On Coleridge and *Eureka*, see Chai, *Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance*, 132; and Gravil, *Romantic Dialogues*, 129–32. Carton associates *Eureka* with transcendentalism but as an ironic subversion of Emerson (*Rhetoric of American Romance*, 36).

48   This line does not appear in the Library of America version of "Loss of Breath" (see *Tales and Sketches*, ed. Mabbott, 2:79).

49   See Jared Gardner, *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature, 1787–1845* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), 125–59; and Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), 206–16.

50   See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 144.

51   See Dew, "Abolition of Negro Slavery," 28; Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee* (New York: Harper, 1836), 187; William Harper, "Memoir on Slavery" (1837), in *Ideology of Slavery*, ed. Faust, 83; James Henry Hammond, "Letter to an English Abolitionist" (1845), in *Ideology of Slavery*, ed. Faust, 176; John Calhoun, *"A Disquisition on Government" and Selections from the "Discourse,"* ed. C. Gordon Post (1853; reprint, New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 44; and George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or The Failure of Free Society* (1854; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1965), 177–79. Abolitionists and proslavery thinkers often misattributed the claim that "all men are born free and equal" to the Declaration of Independence ("all men are created equal"). "All men are born free and equal" is from the Massachusetts state constitution. It is worth noting that in an 1836 review in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe referred to the "iniquities" of Jefferson's progressive tendencies (*ER*, 565).

52   "Bad News for the Transcendental Poets," *Literary World* 20 (February 1847): 53. Based on content, style, and Poe's friendly relationship at the time with the *Literary World*'s editor, Evert Duyckinck, Poe seems a plausible author of this piece.

53   D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1923), 65, 71.

54   Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 121. See also Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960; reprint, New York: Anchor, 1992), 391–400.

55 See John Carlos Rowe, "Edgar Allan Poe's Imperial Fantasy and the American Frontier," in *Romancing the Shadow*, ed. Kennedy and Weissberg, 75–105; Nelson, *The Word in Black and White*, 90–108; Leverenz, "Spanking the Master"; and Kennedy, "'Trust No Man,'" 253. Meredith McGill points out inconsistencies in Whalen's treatment of Poe's "authorial agency" in "Reading Poe, Reading Capitalism," *American Quarterly* 53 (March 2001): 145.

56 Henry James, *French Poets and Novelists* (1878; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1893), 60.

57 "Hegel's Aesthetics: The Philosophy of Art, Particularly in Its Application to Poetry," *American Eclectic: or, Selections from the Periodical Literature of All Foreign Countries* 4 (July 1842): 71.

58 See also Poe's 1836 review of Daniel Defoe (*ER*, 202); and his 5 April 1845 installment in the Longfellow War (*ER*, 759).

59 Nelson, *National Manhood*, 206.

60 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner (1835; reprint, New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 329.

61 For the connotations of *conscience*, see Jean Hagstrum, *Eros and Vision: The Restoration to Romanticism* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1989), 3–28.

62 Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit*, 125.

63 Slavoj Žižek and F. W. J. von Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom: Ages of the World: An Essay by Slavoj Žižek with the Text of Schelling's Die Weltater (second draft, 1813)*, trans. Judith Norman (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997), 27.

64 See, for instance, John Demos, "Oedipus in America: Historical Perspectives on the Reception of Psychoanalysis in the United States," in *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America*, ed. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 63–64. One exception to this interpretation is James Hoopes, *Consciousness in New England: From Puritanism and Ideas to Psychoanalysis and Semiotic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989).

65 Redding, *The Logic of Affect*, 4.

66 All references to first usages are based on the *OED*. See Thomas Carlyle, "Characteristics," in *John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York: P. F. Collier, 1909), 347. For helpful accounts of *subjectivity* and *unconscious*, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), 259–64, 270–73.

67 Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 138.

68 See, for instance, Frederick Henry Hedge's selection and translation of a telling passage from Schelling: "It was long ago perceived that, in Art, not everything is performed with consciousness; that, with the conscious

activity, an unconscious action must combine; and that it is of the perfect unity and mutual interpenetration of the two that the highest in Art is born" (*Prose Writers of Germany* [1840; reprint, Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1847], 512). The passage is from Schelling's "On the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature" (1807).