C H A P T E R I

Average Racism

Poe, Slavery, and the Wages of Literary Nationalism

TERENCE WHALEN

Public opinion consists of the average prejudices of a community.

Coleridge

We would therefore propose . . . that history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization.

Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (1981)

In recent years the political and racial meaning of Poe's work has been the focus of intense critical debate, and undoubtedly the positions generated from this debate will have enduring consequences not only for Poe scholars but also for all those investigating the importance of race in American culture. Elsewhere I have argued that Poe's lifelong struggle with the publishing industry constitutes a kind of deep politics that should matter more than his awkward and infrequent forays into partisan rhetoric (*Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses,* 27–39). Poe, that is to say, should be distinguished from the public-spirited intellectuals of his age, for whereas these intellectuals embraced a wide variety of civic and political causes, Poe's political agenda was conspicuously confined to problems of production, ranging from the poverty of authors to the corruption of publishers to the emergence of

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a vaguely ominous mass audience. To put such a theory to the test, it is necessary to consider what is conventionally seen as the single most important political struggle of antebellum America, namely, the struggle over slavery that divided North from South and that culminated, a dozen years after Poe's death, in a catastrophic civil war. In this chapter I argue that any investigation into Poe's racial views should begin by acknowledging that in the 1830s there were multiple racisms and multiple positions on slavery even in the South. To understand the complex relation between race and literature, moreover, it is also necessary to account for the pressures of literary nationalism and a national literary market because these pressures put constraints on commercial writers in all regions and contributed to the always unfinished formation of what might be called average racism. For Poe and other antebellum writers, average racism was not a sociological measurement of actual beliefs but rather a strategic construction designed to overcome political dissension in the emerging mass audience. In other words, publishers and commercial writers were seeking a form of racism acceptable to white readers who were otherwise divided over the more precise issue of slavery.

Fredric Jameson's admonition about the textual nature of history, cited in the epigraph to this chapter, suggests the general difficulty of unraveling such political intricacies of the past. In the case of Poe and race, this task has been rendered doubly difficult by the texts themselves because most are ambiguous, some are unsigned, and at least one does not even exist. Of all these real and imaginary texts, none is more controversial than the so-called Paulding-Drayton review, an anonymous proslavery essay published in the April 1836 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. On one side of the controversy stand those who attribute the review to Poe and who use it to document his "Southern" attitudes or, more explicitly, his virulent and flagrant racism. Many of these critics share some broad assumptions not only about regionalism and ideology in antebellum America but also about the *aberrance* of discredited doctrines from the past. It is not that they find racism literally unthinkable. Instead, it might be said that for these and other critics, racism is only thinkable as the thought of a Southerner.[1] On the other side of the dispute stand those who attribute the review to Beverley Tucker, law professor at the College of William and Mary and author of the first secessionist novel. The group favoring Tucker's authorship comprises both literary critics who seek to defend Poe from charges of racism and historians who, apparently oblivious to the whole controversy, seek only to clarify Tucker's famous—or infamous—position on slavery and secession. As shall become clear, this ostensibly simple case of attribution raises fundamental questions about the meaning of authorship, ques-

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tions that no interpretive approach can answer without recourse to history itself.

The nature of the controversy is best illustrated by the glaring contradiction between two literary histories recently issued by Columbia University Press. In "Poe and Writers of the Old South," G. R. Thompson disavows Poe's authorship and then argues that an 1849 review of James Russell Lowell is "the only instance of Poe's taking any kind of stance on the issue of slavery" (269). In "Romance and Race," Joan Dayan identifies Poe as the author of the Paulding-Drayton review, calling it "five of the most disturbing pages Poe ever wrote," and relying on it to expose his "ugly" theory that "the enslaved want to be mastered, for they *love*—and this is the crucial term for Poe—to serve, to be subservient" (98).

In different ways, Thompson and Dayan are both wrong. As I shall demonstrate, Thompson is in error because Poe did make several offhanded statements about slavery, and Dayan is wrong because her interpretation is based almost entirely on a review that Poe did not write.[2] To explore all the relevant evidence, I initially reserve judgment about the legitimacy of "author" and "authorial intent," for by holding the fate of these concepts in abeyance, I am free to pose some basic questions: What can one know about Poe's racial views? In what sense are Poe's expressed views properly his own? What, if anything, can be deduced from Poe's silences? And how should an author's "racism" influence the interpretation of a literary text? Although these questions lead to further inquiries into authorship and literary nationalism, my ultimate aim in this chapter is to lay the groundwork for a more historically informed criticism of race, one that surpasses the prevailing rhetoric of praise and denunciation. In doing so I often find myself contending against those who, like myself, stress the social ramifications of Poe's work, but if political criticism is to be more than politics as usual, it must fulfill a special burden of proof when it turns outward to the unconverted and the undecided.

The Paulding-Drayton Review

In April 1836 the *Southern Literary Messenger* published "Slavery," an unsigned essay purporting to review two recent books: *Slavery in the United States,* by James Kirke Paulding, and *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists,* an anonymous work generally attributed to William Drayton. The author of the review devotes only a few laudatory sentences to these works, reserving the bulk of the essay

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to develop an alternative justification for slavery. Instead of treating slavery as a necessary evil, the reviewer defends it as a positively beneficial institution that fulfills God's will by creating a bond of sympathy between the inferior black slave and the superior white master. This bond grows stronger with the master's "habitual use of the word 'my,' used as the language of affectionate appropriation, long before any idea of value mixes with it." In other words, the young master "who is taught to call the little negro 'his,' . . . *because he loves him,* shall love *him because he is his*" (338). As long as "reciprocal obligations" are observed, concludes the reviewer, "society in the South will derive much more of good than of evil from this much abused and partially-considered institution" (339).

After James A. Harrison included the Paulding-Drayton review in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (1902), many literary historians relied on it to document Poe's relation to his social and political surroundings.[3] Later, however, an 1836 letter from Poe to Beverley Tucker raised important questions about the authorship of the review and the validity of interpretations that relied on it. In the letter, dated and postmarked 2 May 1836, Poe refers to "your article on Slavery" and then apologizes for having made some editorial alterations (*Letters,* 1:90–91). First published in 1924 and later reprinted in John W. Ostrom's 1948 edition of Poe's correspondence, the letter seemed to provide conclusive proof that Tucker had written the review and that Harrison had committed a major editorial blunder.

As illustrated by "The Purloined Letter," however, investigators often overlook the most obvious evidence, and many critics continued to attribute the Paulding-Drayton review to Poe long after Ostrom had displayed the letter in plain view. In their anthology *Race and the American Romantics*, for example, Vincent Freimarck and Bernard Rosenthal used the review to prove that Poe was "certainly the most blatant racist among the American Romantics" (3).[4] Later, amid charges that he had perpetuated Harrison's error, Rosenthal defended his choice by claiming that Poe's letter to Tucker must be referring to a still-undiscovered article or pamphlet rather than the Paulding-Drayton review ("Poe, Slavery, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*"). Rosenthal did not provide any definitive proof of Poe's authorship, but he did raise enough doubts to excuse the continued depiction of Poe as a brazen advocate of slavery. In "Romance and Race," Dayan accordingly mentions Rosenthal's "excellent argument for Poe's authorship" and then relies on the Paulding-Drayton review to demonstrate "how much Poe's politics concerning slavery, social status, and property rights owed to the conservative tradition of the Virginia planter aristocracy" (96). Dayan does not explain how this

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planter ideology was assimilated by the child of itinerant actors and foster son of a Scottish-born tobacco merchant; like many other literary critics, she implies that all white Southerners—even transplanted and temporary ones—held identical views on slavery. But if this is the case, the position originally derived from Poe's alleged authorship could be derived—with fewer evidentiary constraints—from Poe's alleged Southernness. John Carlos Rowe has done precisely this, asserting that "Poe was a proslavery Southerner and should be reassessed as such in whatever approach we take to his life and writings" ("Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism," 117).[5]

To demonstrate the error of such generalizations, I shall begin by reconsidering the Paulding-Drayton review. My aim is not to produce a smoking gun, for that already exists in the 2 May 1836 letter from Poe to Tucker. J. V. Ridgely has recently provided more evidence, and yet the authorship of the review is still disputed ("Authorship," 1–3).[6] To overcome the resilience of error, something more is required, namely, an interpretive context that allows the letter to be seen as the smoking gun it most certainly is. So instead of offering a point-by-point refutation of Rosenthal, I shall focus on the ideological and stylistic similarities between the review and works known to be by Tucker. Even if there were no other corroborating evidence, these similarities would be enough to acquit Poe of the accusation, thereby expediting his arraignment on charges still pending.

Nathaniel Beverley Tucker is today remembered as one of several proslavery advocates at the College of William and Mary, but he was in addition a judge, novelist, and active member of the group of Southern intellectuals that Drew Gilpin Faust has dubbed the "Sacred Circle." From 1835 to 1837, Beverley Tucker also performed numerous offices for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, which was published just fifty miles away from Williamsburg in Richmond, Virginia. Aside from contributing lectures, poetry, and numerous book reviews, Tucker assisted the magazine by writing favorable notices, selecting appropriate articles for publication, and even correcting proofs. When the Paulding-Drayton review was published in April 1836, Tucker was also busy writing *The Partisan Leader*, the first secessionist novel in the United States. Because of his standing as law professor, Tucker issued the controversial book under a pseudonym in a vain attempt to conceal his authorship. As Tucker directed the publisher, "Keep dark. I do not wish to be known as the author of these things." In the same letter, Tucker also discussed plans to secure the assistance of Thomas W. White, proprietor of the *Messenger*: "I could, if I would, make White praise it to the skies, but I must not give him any clue to me. He is incapable of secrecy." Given these circum-

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stances, it is certainly possible that Tucker turned some of his background reading for *The Partisan Leader* into a hastily written book review that Poe had to shorten—for either editorial or ideological reasons.[7]

Before examining the most direct evidence, however, it is important to recognize the strong political affinity between the Paulding-Drayton review and Tucker's known works, especially since there is no such affinity between the review and texts by Poe. As shall become clear, Tucker's proslavery writings contain numerous stock arguments and tropes that are duplicated in the Paulding-Drayton review. These include sentimental descriptions of sickbed scenes, the use of animal comparisons to explain human racial diversity, charges of Northern meddling followed by a Southern call to arms, the characterization of slavery as a positive good rather than a necessary evil, the invocation of divine will to justify racial subordination, and (sophistical) resolutions of the conflict between equality and difference.[8]

Significantly, some of the most striking correspondences are the ones between the Paulding-Drayton review and the novel that Tucker was in the midst of composing. For one thing, both maintain the same hardline position. In the review, the author describes "Domestic Slavery" as "the basis of all our institutions" (337), and in the dedication to *The Partisan Leader*, Tucker refers to a "society whose institutions are based on domestic slavery" (v). In addition, both the review and the novel attack the universalizing philosophy that regards human beings "as a unit":

REVIEWER: Such instances prove that in reasoning concerning the moral effect of slavery, he who regards man as a unit, the same under all circumstances, leaves out of view an important consideration. (Review, 339)

TUCKER: If I am put to choose between rejecting the evidence of my own senses . . . or the philosophy which teaches that man is to be considered as a unit, because all of one race, philosophy must go by the board. (*Partisan Leader*, 156)

In both the review and *The Partisan Leader*, there is also an unusual claim about sentiments in the slave "to which the white man is a stranger":

REVIEWER: [W]e shall take leave to speak, as of things *in esse*, of a degree of loyal devotion on the part of the slave to which the white man's heart is a

TUCKER: But [the slave] spoke better than the peasantry of most countries, though he said some things that a white man would not say; perhaps, be

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stranger, and of the master's reciprocal feeling of parental attachment to his humble dependent. . . . (Review, 338)

cause he had some feelings to which the white man is a stranger. (*Partisan Leader,* 71)

The Paulding-Drayton review goes on to emphasize "the moral influences flowing from the relation of master and slave" (338), which is exactly what Tucker argues in his many signed defenses of slavery.[9] In addition, both writers also claim that the master-slave relationship is essentially familial. The Paulding-Drayton review contends that "the relation between the [white] infant and the [black] nurse" arouses familial sentiments that are then cultivated in the relation between the young white master and his black "foster brother" (338). In *The Partisan Leader,* Tucker likewise emphasizes the relation of the young master to his "black nurse" and "foster-brother." According to Tucker, these slaves "are one integral part of the great black family, which, in all its branches, is united by similar ligaments to the great white family" (*Partisan Leader,* 142). There is one further similarity that does not pertain directly to slavery. In the Paulding-Drayton review, the author uses a comet metaphor to illustrate a cyclical theory of history: "The human mind seems to perform, by some invariable laws, a sort of cycle, like those of the heavenly bodies. . . . Fifty years ago, in France, the eccentric comet, 'public sentiment,' was in its opposite node" (337). In *The Partisan Leader,* Tucker makes a similar argument about the cyclical nature of public sentiment, and he even updates the time line to reflect that the novel is set in the future: "The revolution in public sentiment which, commencing sixty years ago, had abolished all the privileges of rank and age . . . had now completed its cycle" (96).

A survey of other works by Tucker reveals further correspondences in style and phrasing. The Paulding-Drayton review contains a short history of "the war against property" in England and France (337); in an essay on the commercial profession, Tucker declares that "a war against property, in all its forms, has been openly proclaimed" ("Nature and Function," 410).[10] The author of the Paulding-Drayton review contends that "men are always passing, with fearful rapidity, between the extremes of fanaticism and irreligion" (337); in an 1835 review for the *Southern Literary Messenger,* Tucker remarks that at the commencement of the Restoration, the English people "wished no more" of Charles II than that he oppose "irreligion to fanaticism."[11] Two other phrases, common in Tucker's writing and uncommon elsewhere, provide additional evidence. The Paulding-Drayton reviewer starts to make a point about the English Revolution and then declines to pursue it because "with that we

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have nothing to do" (337). In his verified writings for the *Messenger*, Tucker repeatedly uses the same phrase in the same manner. In one essay he writes that "we have nothing to do with the origin of any particular *mode* of slavery"; in another he protests, "with the philosophy of this we have nothing to do"; and in a third essay he concludes a brief digression by claiming, "with the wisdom or folly of these feelings we have nothing to do."[12] The other phrase, common in Tucker and uncommon elsewhere, is "the march of mind."[13] In the Paulding-Drayton review, the phrase appears in the first paragraph: "'*Nulla vestigia retrorsum*,' is a saying fearfully applicable to what is called the 'march of mind'" (336). Tucker, likewise doubtful of all theories of human perfectibility, later made extensive use of the expression. To indicate his own skepticism toward progress, he generally put the phrase in quotations or italics:

> How long it shall be before the "*march of mind*," as it is called, in its Juggernaut car, shall pass over us, and crush and obliterate every trace of what our ancestors were, and what we ourselves have been, is hard to say. (review of *A History*, 587)

Tucker wrote this before the publication of the Paulding-Drayton review. Years later, he was still fond of the phrase:

> Where would they now be in the *march of mind*, if, fifty years ago, they could have rooted themselves immovably in the conviction that there were "no secrets in Heaven and earth not dreamed of in their Philosophy." (review of "An Oration, delivered," 44)[14]

Rosenthal's final argument against Tucker's authorship also concerns a matter of style, specifically Tucker's punctuation. Noting that Tucker frequently used colons and semicolons, and that the Paulding-Drayton review contains "not a single colon . . . and only a few semicolons," Rosenthal concludes that the review employs "a mode of punctuation that [Tucker] never used before nor after" (34). Taking into account the customary copyediting practices and the brevity of the review (less than four full pages), such a claim carries little weight. But compare the absence of colons with the presence, again in less than four pages, of these characteristic Tucker phrases: "man as a unit," "feelings to which the white man is a stranger," "fanaticism and irreligion," "the war against property," "with that we have nothing to do," and "the march of mind." The stylistic similarities are so telling that Tucker might as well have signed the review. Combine all of the internal stylistic and ideological evidence with the 1836 letter acknowledging his article "Slavery," and the

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case for Tucker's authorship is incontrovertible. What Poe said about the novel *George Balcombe* must also be said here, for the author of the Paulding-Drayton review "thinks, speaks, and acts, as no person . . . but Judge Beverley Tucker, ever precisely thought, spoke, or acted before" (*CW,* 5:344).

Poe and Slavery Reconsidered

The resilience of the misattribution raises a number of important issues not only about Poe's racism but also about the peculiar function that the concept of racism plays in critical discourse today. As noted previously, some critics tend to identify racism as a collection of proslavery assumptions held primarily by antebellum Southerners.[15] More recently, critics have emphasized the similarities between antebellum texts and current political struggles, but the discourse on race and literature continues to suffer from several limitations. Due in part to the continuing urgency of the issue, many neglect the historical context of race and instead resort to moralizing apologies, blanket denunciations, or full-blown jeremiads. These approaches, however, present fewer difficulties than the pervasive view of racism as a private sin or psychological malady rather than a long-standing, systemic condition perpetuated by powerful political and economic forces. In keeping with this personalizing tendency, most interpretations of Poe's racism share some common assumptions: that he chose his racial attitudes freely or at least knowingly; that his attitudes could be expressed without constraint; and, by extension, that his expressions constitute a "true" record of his thoughts or feelings. These assumptions are open to attack from many theoretical positions, but I would like to proceed with a more basic investigation of the scene of literary creation. Aside from specifying the social determinants of racism, this investigation should help to clarify one of the most neglected issues in all of Poe criticism, namely, the political and economic constraints on his creative freedom.

To understand these constraints, it is necessary to recall Poe's predicament as editor or editorial assistant for the *Southern Literary Messenger.* Since this was also Poe's first full-time editorial job, it cast a powerful shadow over his entire career in the industry of letters. Thomas Willis White, proprietor of the *Messenger,* conceived of his magazine as both a catalyst and a beneficiary of a mass literary market in the South, but he also worked hard to represent the *Messenger* as a periodical with national significance. Although White probably did not expect to gain much revenue from the Northern market, he nevertheless understood the

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benefits of cultivating a national image. For one thing, White depended on the North for exchanges, contributions, and editorial favors, which helps to explain why the parsimonious proprietor mailed so many free copies to the offices of Northern newspapers and magazines. Notices in the Northern press enhanced the *Messenger*'s prestige, and since many Southern readers subscribed to Northern journals, this was also an effective (albeit circuitous) way to reach the target audience. For these reasons, White seldom passed up an opportunity to drop intimations of the *Messenger*'s "national" following. During a steamer ride up the James River, for example, White managed to convince antislavery travel writer J. S. Buckingham that although the *Messenger* was published in Richmond, it was "read extensively in every State in the Union" (Buckingham, 2:545).[16]

This marketing strategy sometimes left White straddling both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. In the *Messenger* prospectus, for example, White first affirms and then denies any sectional bias. On the one hand, he bemoans the lack of Southern periodicals:

> In all the Union, south of Washington, there are but two Literary periodicals! Northward of that city, there are probably at least twenty-five or thirty! Is this contrast justified . . . ? No: for in wealth, talents, and taste, we may justly claim at least an *equality* with our brethren; and a domestic institution exclusively our own, beyond all doubt affords us, if we choose, twice the leisure for reading and writing, which they enjoy.[17]

Immediately after making this oblique and approving reference to slavery, the prospectus disavows all sectional animosity:

> Far from meditating *hostility* to the north, [the editor] has already drawn, and he hopes hereafter to draw, much of his choicest matter thence; and happy indeed will he deem himself, should his pages, by making each region know the other better, contribute in any essential degree to dispel the lowering clouds that now threaten the peace of both, and to brighten and strengthen the sacred ties of fraternal love.

On the surface, these comments seem directed solely toward the North, but sectionalism—not to mention nullification—was also a highly charged issue *within* the South. In other words, White knew that many of his Southern readers were troubled by the growing sectional conflict, and he undoubtedly hoped to mollify these readers with a declaration of na-

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tionalist sentiments. The prospectus accordingly exploits fears of Northern dominance, but at the same time it allows liberal or cosmopolitan readers to identify themselves with the image—if not the reality—of a progressive Southern intelligentsia.

To maintain and expand his share of the Southern market, White therefore had to please an audience that was much less homogeneous than generally assumed, at least in regard to political affairs. The *Messenger*'s status as a literary magazine obviously made this task easier, for one of the preeminent ideological attributes of literature is its ability to present itself as a discourse free of ideology. Not surprisingly, White exploited the ostensible neutrality of literature in the prospectus, claiming that "*Party Politics* and controversial *Theology*, as far as possible, are jealously excluded. They are sometimes so blended with discussions in literature or in moral science, otherwise unobjectionable, as to gain admittance for the sake of the more valuable matter to which they adhere; but whenever that happens, they are *incidental* only; not *primary*." White, however, had so little confidence in his literary judgments that he generally deferred to Poe, and when he could not count on Poe, he begged advice from trusted supporters like Beverley Tucker and Lucian Minor. Perhaps because of his uncertainty about literary quality, White often assumed the role of censor, and he paid special attention to inflammatory political issues, which might give offense and thereby drive off subscribers.[18] As White made clear on several occasions, he feared that any involvement in "the strife of party politics" might "jeopardize the fair prospects of the Messenger" (*Richmond Enquirer,* 22 May 1835).

Such fair prospects were imperiled by the growing controversy over slavery. Insofar as it emphasized the fundamental differences between North and South, the struggle over slavery obviously hindered the emergence of a truly national literary market. But as implied earlier, the slavery question also exposed internal divisions within the *Messenger*'s Southern audience. In such a market, economic and ideological forces became fused, and White accordingly attempted to cultivate an average racism that would appeal to a majority of his subscribers. Average racism, however, was easier said than done. White could safely defend the South from the attacks of Northern "fanatics," but he was less certain about whether he should represent slavery as a positive good or a necessary evil, or whether he should take a position on African colonization, that is, on plans to deport American blacks to the African colony of Liberia.

It might have been prudent to avoid such issues altogether, but this was not always possible. In February 1836, for example, Lucian Minor contributed an article purporting to review recent issues of the *Liberia Herald*. In his review, Minor praises the "unparalleled" success of

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Liberia, where once "a tangled and pathless forest frowned in a silence unbroken save by the roar of wild beasts," but where today English literature thrives, and with it "those comforts, virtues and pleasures which the existence of Literature necessarily implies" (158).[19] For Minor, literature indicates the overall level of social development, and the newspaper in particular serves as "the most expressive sign of all." Even more expressive than the newspaper itself, however, are the people who produce it. "What heightens—indeed what *constitutes* the wonder," Minor continues, is that the editors, printers, and writers "are all *colored people*."

By using the *Liberia Herald* as a method of "*instancing* the literary condition of the settlement," Minor was obviously endorsing the work of the American Colonization Society. Founded in 1816, the Colonization Society enjoyed support in both the North and the South for more than a decade. By the 1830s, however, the project of African colonization had come under attack by those maintaining more extreme positions in the debate over slavery. In 1832, for example, abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and proslavery economist Thomas Dew both denounced colonization as a cruel, unworkable, and prohibitively expensive solution (Tise, 70–74). Minor himself realized that his review might arouse controversy. After praising Liberia effusively, he accordingly disavowed any radical intent: "What we especially had in view, however, when we began this article, was neither rhapsody nor dissertation upon the march of Liberia to prosperity and civilization—unparalleled as that march is, in the annals of civilization—but a notice (a *critical notice*, if the reader please) of the aforesaid newspaper" (158).

The disclaimer was hardly palliative, and this left White in something of a predicament. Since he relied heavily on Minor for articles and editorial advice, he could not simply reject it. But he was also loathe to embroil the *Messenger* in a dispute that might anger his subscribers. Characteristically, White decided to compromise. He ordered Poe to revise or delete the more controversial sections of the review. He also gave Poe the job of informing Minor about these revisions, and Poe dutifully told Minor that "it was thought better upon consideration to omit all passages in 'Liberian Literature' at which offence could, by any possibility, be taken" (*Letters,* 1:83). This incident, it should be noted, suggests another motive behind Poe's "immaterial alterations" of the Paulding-Drayton review. If Poe censored a colonization article to avoid controversy in February, he may have censored Tucker's proslavery article for the same reason in April. In any event, Poe's revision of Minor's article was not entirely successful. In a review of the February *Messenger*, the *Augusta Chronicle* denounced "Liberian Literature" as being "altogether unsuited to our Southern region, and as indicating a dangerous partiality

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for that most pestiferous and abominable parent of the Abolitionists, the *Colonization Society*."[20] The handling of Minor's article nevertheless reveals something of the ideological constraints that the *Messenger* imposed upon even its most valued contributors.

Significantly, the *Messenger* placed similar constraints on proslavery advocates like Beverley Tucker. These constraints are often overlooked because the *Messenger* later became a forum for proslavery opinion, but Poe's political education occurred during 1835 and 1836. "Notes to Blackstone's Commentaries," one of Tucker's first substantial articles on slavery, appeared in the January 1835 *Messenger*. In the "Editorial Remarks" for this issue, the writer—probably James Heath—takes exception to Tucker's general line of argument. Since these remarks represent the *Messenger*'s official position at its commencement, they are worth quoting at length:

> The able author of the "*Note to Blackstone's Commentaries*," is entitled to be heard, even on a subject of such peculiar delicacy. . . . Whilst we entirely concur with him that slavery as a political or social institution is a matter exclusively of our own concern . . . we must be permitted to dissent from the opinion that it is either a moral or political benefit. We regard it on the contrary as a great evil, which society will sooner or later find it not only its interest to remove or mitigate, but will seek its gradual abolition or amelioration, under the influence of those high obligations imposed by an enlightened Christian morality.[21]

White felt obliged to print a more scathing reply to Tucker's article in the next issue. Signed by "A Virginian," the reply begins with a merciless refutation of Tucker's position and concludes by supporting both African colonization and the gradual elimination of slavery.[22] Such incidents demonstrate that White could not prevent the *Messenger* from occasionally becoming "a vehicle of political discussion." Nor could he arrive at an average racism that would satisfy both colonizationists and "positive-good" extremists. He could only attempt to minimize his risks by restricting the number of articles on slavery, by censoring these articles whenever possible, by printing editorial disclaimers, and by encouraging any offended readers to respond with letters rather than canceled subscriptions.

Taken together, the articles by James Heath, Lucian Minor, and Beverley Tucker represent the full range of positions on slavery that could be articulated in the *Messenger* during its early years of operation.[23] During the period of Poe's employment, articles in this Southern magazine did

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not uphold a single, consistent position on slavery; nor was the *Messenger* a forum for abolitionists and fire-eaters alike. Instead, the political spectrum of the magazine was bounded by gradualists or colonizationists at one extreme and positive-good secessionists at the other. White, moreover, only allowed these extremist positions to be defended by a few privileged contributors, and then only grudgingly. This policy, it should be emphasized, arose not from any moral aversion toward slavery but from White's belief that controversial issues were bad for literary business. As indicated earlier, he had no desire "to jeopardize the fair prospects of the Messenger, by involving it in the strife of party politics."[24]

The strictures on "party politics" applied to Poe as well, especially since he was not a privileged contributor but merely a paid assistant to White. It was Poe's job, moreover, to implement and articulate the *Messenger*'s editorial policies, and on one occasion he found himself explaining that "the pages of our Magazine are open, and have ever been, to the discussion of all general questions in Political Law, or Economy—never to questions of mere party" (Poe, "Editorial," 445). Obviously, then, there were implicit and explicit constraints on what Poe could say about slavery. Even if he had been a ranting abolitionist or a rabid secessionist, he would never have been able to express these views in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. White's fear of political controversy called for positions that were less progressive than Minor's and less reactionary than Tucker's, and in fact all of Poe's remarks on slavery for the *Messenger* fall between these two extremes.

In his review of Anne Grant's *Memoirs of an American Lady*, for example, Poe quotes a romantic description of slavery in colonial New York, claiming that these "remarks on slavery . . . will apply with singular accuracy to the present state of things in Virginia."[25] In the quoted passage, Grant maintains that in Albany, "even the dark aspect of slavery was softened with a smile." Rosenthal sees this as being consonant with "the standard pro-slavery argument" ("Poe, Slavery, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*," 30), but as quoted in the *Messenger*, Grant distances herself from the proslavery position: "Let me not be detested as an advocate of slavery, when I say that I think I have never seen people so happy in servitude as the domestics of the Albanians" (*CW,* 5:234). Less important than the remarks themselves, however, is the regional identification of the speaker. Northern apologies for slavery were highly coveted by Southerners, and for a fledgling magazine such as the *Messenger*, these apologies had the added attraction of mitigating—or appearing to mitigate—sectional differences in the national literary market.

In Joseph Holt Ingraham's book *The South-West. By a Yankee*, Poe found another Northerner who was willing to pardon the peculiar insti-

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tution. In an account of his travels through Louisiana and Mississippi, Ingraham pauses on several occasions to excuse, if not defend, Southern slavery. After passing a group of slaves purchased in Virginia and bound for a plantation outside New Orleans, Ingraham remarks that "they all appeared contented and happy, and highly elated at their sweet anticipations." "Say not," Ingraham continues, "that the slavery of the Louisiana negroes is a *bitter* draught" (1:190–91).[26] Such pronouncements inspired the following comment, which remains Poe's most explicit statement on slavery:

> The "Yankee," in travelling Southward, has evidently laid aside the general prejudices of a Yankee—and, viewing the book of Professor Ingraham, as representing, in its very liberal opinions, those of a great majority of well educated Northern gentlemen, we are inclined to believe it will render essential services in the way of smoothing down a vast deal of jealousy and misconception. The traveller from the North has evinced no disposition to look with a jaundiced eye upon the South—to pervert its misfortunes into crimes—or distort its necessities into sins of volition. He has spoken of slavery as he found it—and it is almost needless to say that he found it a very different thing from the paintings he had seen of it in red ochre. He has discovered, in a word, that while the *physical* condition of the slave *is not* what it has been represented, the slave himself is utterly incapable to feel the *moral* galling of his chain.[27]

Poe here follows a double strategy. He obviously seeks to defend the South from Yankee "prejudices," but at the same time he attempts to "smooth down" the growing sectional divide by appealing to the liberal opinions of the "great majority of well educated Northern gentlemen." His position on slavery likewise seems directed toward a racist majority. Without advocating any specific policy, he first concedes the "misfortunes" of slavery and then assures his readers that these misfortunes cause little injury to the slaves themselves. In other words, Poe dodges the slavery question by shifting the argument to "common" ground—only what makes the ground common in this case is racism.

In many ways, Poe's statement accords with the "moderate" *Messenger* position articulated in 1835 by James Heath. Unlike Heath, however, Poe failed to advocate even the gradual elimination of slavery. He also seemed hesitant about taking a position on colonization. As editor of the *Messenger*, Poe frequently discussed other monthly magazines, and in the October 1835 *North American Review*, he stumbled upon a long, favor-

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able review of Ralph Gurley's *Life of Jehudi Ashmun, Late Colonial Agent in Liberia.* After quoting a laudatory account of Ashmun's character, Poe admits that he is "willing to believe" this description, and he also concedes that Ashmun "was a noble martyr in the cause of African colonization." But Poe wonders why the reviewer selected this particular book:

> We doubt, however, if there are not a crowd of books daily issuing unnoticed from the press, of far more general interest, and consequently more worthy the attention of our leading Review than even *The Life of Ashmun.* We shall soon, perhaps, have a Life of some Cuffy the Great, by Solomon Sapient; and then the North American will feel itself bound to devote one half of its pages to that important publication.[28]

"Cuffy," derived from an African word for "Friday," was a common given name among American blacks; in this context it may also allude to Paul Cuffee (1759–1817), a black shipowner, Quaker, and political activist who helped establish a colony of African Americans in Sierra Leone.[29] Poe's remarks up to this point therefore suggest a willingness to belittle any text supportive of African colonization. But then, as if stepping back from the threshold of partisan politics, Poe immediately modifies his position: "In expressing ourselves thus, we mean not the slightest disrespect to either Ashmun or his Biographer. But the *critique* is badly written, and its enthusiasm *outré* and disproportionate."

The rest of Poe's reviews in the *Southern Literary Messenger* have little or nothing to add to these brief statements, indicating that he avoided taking a specific position on slavery and instead attempted to embrace an average racism that would appeal to a majority of subscribers. Despite this evidence, many critics nevertheless accuse Poe of sharing the views of the most extreme proslavery advocates. Kenneth Alan Hovey, for example, contends that Poe's social views "are essentially identical" to those expressed by Beverley Tucker in the Paulding-Drayton review (Hovey, 347). Others identify Poe with the proslavery, anticolonization position of Thomas Dew, political economist and president of the College of William and Mary. Joan Dayan notes that Poe corresponded with Dew and wrote the introduction to his "Address" for the *Southern Literary Messenger* ("Romance and Race," 96).[30] John Carlos Rowe refers to Poe's "undisputed admiration" for Dew ("Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism," 119–20), and Dana Nelson observes that Poe revealed his true sentiments "particularly in his stance on works by the noted Southern defender of slavery, Thomas R. Dew" (91). All of these critics echo

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Bernard Rosenthal's claim that "perhaps the most telling fact about Poe's position on slavery is his record of public admiration for Thomas R. Dew, the man most fully identified with the extreme and articulate slavery apologetics of Poe's day" (30).

Aside from insinuating guilt by association, this position rests on a fundamental misconception of Poe's work and work-related constraints at the *Messenger.* Thomas Dew was an important supporter of the magazine, for in addition to contributing articles directly, he was also in a position to influence many other subscribers and potential subscribers. And since he was president of the College of William and Mary, the *Messenger* could not offend Dew without imperiling the substantial patronage of college faculty, students, and alumni. Even if Poe had wanted to express disapproval of Dew, White would never have permitted it. Moreover, the particular text on which this whole argument rests was originally composed not by Poe but by Dew himself, a fact overlooked by nearly everyone. The text in question is Poe's October 1836 review of Dew's welcoming address to the entering class. In order to write the review, Poe asked Dew for a copy of the address (published in the next issue of the *Messenger*) and for general information about the college. Dew responded with what we would today call a press release, and Poe merely revised it for his review. Dew's letter was reprinted in the standard edition of Poe's works, and it is a simple matter to identify the blatant similarities between Poe's review and Dew's press release. In a 1941 dissertation on the canon of Poe's critical works, which Rosenthal explicitly cites, William Hull in fact demonstrates that the six basic points in Poe's review are all derived, nearly verbatim, from the letter by Dew. I list only a few examples.

> DEW: The numbers at Wm & Mary have rarely been great, & yet she has turned out more useful men, more great statesmen than any other college in the world in proportion to her alumni. (Hull, "A Canon of the Critical Works of Edgar Allan Poe," 159)

> POE: The number has at no time been very great it is true; and yet, in proportion to her alumni, this institution has given to the world more useful men than *any other*—more truly great statesmen. (*CW,* 5:300)

> DEW The scenery here, the hospitable population, the political atmosphere all conspire to give a utilitarian character to the mind of the student. Hence the alumni of this college have always been

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> characterized by *business* minds & great efficiency of character. (Hull, "A Canon," 160)
>
> POE: Perhaps the scenery and recollection of the place, the hospitable population, and political atmosphere, have all conspired to imbue the mind of the student at Williamsburg with a tinge of utilitarianism. Her graduates have always been distinguished by minds well adapted to *business*, and for the greatest efficiency of character. (*CW*, 5:300)
>
> DEW: The high political character of old Va. is due to this college. (Hull, 159)
>
> POE: To William and Mary is especially due the high *political* character of Virginia. (*CW*, 5:300)

Rosenthal quotes this final passage to show that Poe "singled out for praise [Dew's] special achievement," namely, his advocacy of an extreme proslavery position. As indicated earlier, however, Poe singled out nothing—he merely made minor stylistic changes in a press release that the *Messenger* was obliged to publish. Clearly, then, the "guilt by association" strategy is subject to abuse and manipulation. Rosenthal claims that Hull's dissertation "gives meticulous evidence establishing Poe's authorship" of the review in question, but Hull in fact gives meticulous evidence that confounds the very concept of authorship by demonstrating Poe's reliance on a text he could not refuse.[31]

Further arguments about Poe's racism have been based on his alleged review of John L. Carey's *Domestic Slavery*. The problem here concerns not authorship but existence, for the review was never published, and no manuscript copy has ever been located. Rosenthal and Nelson nevertheless contend that the review demonstrates Poe's "proslavery sympathies" (Rosenthal, 30; Nelson, 91). This claim merits special consideration because it is one of the most egregious examples of the guilt-by-association strategy practiced by Rosenthal and theoretically justified by Rowe. Reports about the purported content of the review are based on Poe's June 1840 letter to Joseph E. Snodgrass, editor of the *American Museum* and later of the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*. Snodgrass had sent Poe a copy of Carey's book so that he might review it for Burton's *Gentleman's Magazine*. In a letter to Snodgrass, Poe explained why the review did not appear:

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> Mr. Carey's book on slavery was received by me not very long ago, and in last month's number I wrote, at some length, a criticism upon it, in which I endeavored to do justice to the author, whose talents I highly admire. But this critique, as well as some six or seven others, were refused admittance into the Magazine by Mr. Burton, upon his receiving my letter of resignation. . . . I fancy, moreover, that he has some private pique against Mr. Carey (as he has against every honest man) for not long ago he refused admission to a poetical address of his which I was anxious to publish. (*Letters,* 1:138)

There are several reasons to question the sincerity of this letter. First, Poe was eager to tarnish the reputation of his former employer; as he later told Snodgrass, "Burton . . . is going to the devil with the worst grace in the world, but with a velocity truly astounding" (*Letters,* 1:152). Second, Poe was caught up in a network of puffing and promotion that included both Carey and Snodgrass. In December 1839, Poe (relying on Snodgrass as a go-between) had sent a copy of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* to Carey, who was then editor of the *Baltimore American*; shortly thereafter, Carey responded by publishing a favorable review (Thomas and Jackson, 281). In addition, Poe was at this time cultivating Snodgrass as a supporter of his magazine project. When Snodgrass sent Carey's book to Poe, that is, when Snodgrass acted as a go-between in the other direction, Poe may have felt obliged to return Carey's original favor. Given these circumstances, Poe may have felt that a disparaging review would appear ungrateful to both Carey and Snodgrass—editors whose support Poe still wanted. He would have been strongly inclined to express a favorable opinion of Carey's book, and since the review was not published, this approval—whether feigned or genuine—cost him nothing. Finally, it is entirely possible that Poe never reviewed Carey's book at all. If Poe had written a review, Snodgrass would certainly have been willing to publish it in the *Visiter*; as I indicated later, Snodgrass ultimately went on to publish several reviews of Carey's works. In other words, it is entirely possible that conclusions about Poe's racism are being drawn from a review that never existed, for Poe may have responded to Snodgrass's inquiry with a complete, yet plausible, fabrication.

Disregarding these considerations, Rosenthal nevertheless claims that "even a review *mildly* sympathetic to Carey's views would place one in a position of sympathy with the South's pro-slavery orthodoxy" (30). Aside from its scanty foundation in fact, this argument suffers from two additional weaknesses that are characteristic of regionalist reasoning.

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First, it collapses the differences between a union-loving colonizationist like Carey and a positive-good secessionist like Tucker. As already demonstrated, in the 1830s several orthodoxies were vying for dominance. Carey himself attempts to sort out these contending positions within the South:

> I take it upon myself to say, that the people of the south have manifested no backwardness in relation to the question of domestic slavery. The time was not long ago, when this subject was discussed with freedom throughout the southern states. It was becoming a matter of anxious solicitude; for it concerned them dearly. The process of effectual reformation was going on in its legitimate way; truth was coming to the minds of the reflecting in the light of their own experience, and was operating upon the unforced will. The evil of slavery was generally acknowledged; for I am persuaded that the sentiments which were declared some time ago, by Gov. McDuffie, of South Carolina, were not held then by the intelligent portion of southern people. (Carey, 99)[32]

In the conflicted political environment of Baltimore, Carey concocts a position that mixes racism with a mild form of antislavery activism. On the one hand, he contends that two distinct races cannot peacefully coexist unless "the one be in subjection to the other" (34), and that abolitionists have only caused a hardening of Southern attitudes. On the other hand, he advocates colonization as a "safe and effectual system" capable of "delivering this country from the evil of slavery, with security at once to both races, and with a prospect of final good to the blacks" (112–13). It is therefore unclear what Poe might have said in his attempt to "do justice to the author" of *Domestic Slavery*, if he made the attempt at all.

Second and most important, images of a monolithic South falsify the true political terrain of the region. We have already seen some of the ideological dissension and diversity that characterized the *Messenger* in the 1830s; this diversity was even more pronounced in border states such as Maryland. Joseph Evans Snodgrass, for example, was actually attempting to encourage an antislavery movement within the South. The *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* had been marketed as a family newspaper devoted to art and literature, but by 1843, Snodgrass was publishing articles that defended *and* attacked slavery. In 1845 he used another book by John Carey (*Slavery in Maryland, Briefly Considered*) to solicit controversial reviews, two of which he later published separately as pamphlets. In the first of these (*A Letter on Slavery, Addressed to John L. Carey*), Dr. R. S.

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Steuart describes slavery as a kind of "tutelage" that prepares savages for civilization and that—in due time—should be gradually eliminated. Later that year, however, Snodgrass published *Slavery in Maryland: An Anti-Slavery Review*, which attacks Steuart's gradualist approach on moral and religious grounds. The author of this second pamphlet disputes the benevolence of slavery and further contends that colonization, or any plan to remove blacks from Maryland, would prove both cruel and unworkable. In the concluding section, the author refuses to apologize or temporize:

> It is in vain for the advocates of slavery to throw themselves into the breach that had been made in their bulwarks; their efforts will be powerless to arrest the progress of liberal opinions. . . . Can we allow our liberties to be wrested from us in order to perpetuate an institution that has been a blighting mildew on every land it has ever touched from the creation of the world? With a slow and almost imperceptible progress it has overshadowed the whole land, obscuring the moral vision of the people, and infecting the atmosphere of the mind. . . . [U]nless its progress can be arrested, we shall be reduced to a feeble and degenerate people, crouching among the mighty works erected by our fathers.[33]

Signed by "A Virginian," the pamphlet has been attributed to none other than James E. Heath, novelist, Virginia state auditor, and sometime editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*.

Poe's "associations," then, exposed him to diverse positions on slavery, but even this does not mean that such positions could be freely chosen or freely advocated, especially in the Southern literary market. In his "Anti-Slavery Review," for instance, Heath counsels against establishing a newspaper devoted exclusively to emancipation, for he believes that a general publication with a few articles on slavery would reach more Southern readers:

> [The question] cannot be investigated effectually without some organ of public communication by which information may be diffused and the various plans brought forward, and fully discussed before the people. It, however, appears to me that a newspaper devoted to this especial object, would not effect so much as the introduction of suitable essays into the columns of papers already established. A paper devoted to emancipation would probably have but a limited circulation in the South, and that chiefly among persons already convinced. (4)

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Snodgrass himself used similar arguments to solicit financial contributions from such notable abolitionists as Wendell Phillips, E. G. Loring, and Maria Weston Chapman. In an unpublished 1846 letter to Chapman, Snodgrass discusses the cost of sending his paper to "slave-holders and pro-slavery men in their feelings." According to Snodgrass, he and other progressive Southern editors will succumb to the "cash rule" unless he can convince "the friends of Reform to do their [financial] duty." "We are," he concludes, "too few and too feeble to stand alone as yet."[34] Circumstances proved him right. By discussing plans for the abolition of slavery, Snodgrass damaged both his reputation and the circulation of his paper. According to Dwight Thomas, many residents of Baltimore regarded Snodgrass as "a dangerous radical," and journalist Jane Swisshelm, a dangerous radical herself, remembered Snodgrass as "a prominent Washington correspondent, whose anti-slavery paper had been suppressed in Baltimore by a mob" (D. Thomas, 635).[35]

As Poe learned in New York, pressure could also be exerted in the other direction. In 1845, Poe had become one of the editors of the *Broadway Journal*. For the March 22 issue, he wrote an extremely favorable notice of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, claiming that under his editorship it had enjoyed "a success quite unparalleled in the history of our five dollar Magazines." The *Messenger*'s subscribers, Poe continued, "are almost without exception the *élite*, both as regards wealth and intellectual culture, of the Southern aristocracy, and its corps of contributors are generally men who control the public opinion of the Southerners on *all* topics."[36] Poe's 1845 notice raised doubts about the political neutrality of both the *Messenger* and the *Broadway Journal*. It also aroused the anger of antislavery activists, who were disturbed to see such a notice in a paper that was supposedly friendly to their cause. Writing for the *Liberator*, Robert Carter responded with a full-scale attack. According to Carter, many other reformers had hoped that the *Broadway Journal* would support "the cause of Human Rights" by "properly rebuking evil and evil-doers." Instead, Carter complained, the *Broadway Journal* had entered into an unholy alliance with a Southern magazine whose "principles are of the vilest sort" and whose aims are "to uphold the peculiar institution, to decry the colored race," and "to libel the abolitionists."[37]

Carter was under the mistaken impression that the notice of the *Messenger* had been written by coeditor Charles Briggs, so Poe escaped from the incident relatively unscathed. Briggs's reaction, however, reveals much about the predicament of a magazine attempting to circulate among subscribers with diverse and conflicting views toward slavery. Briggs claimed to be "unqualifiedly opposed to slavery in every shape,"[38] but despite constant prodding from his friend James Russell Lowell, he

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was unwilling to turn the *Broadway Journal* into an abolitionist paper. If the paper were to espouse such a position, openly, reasoned Briggs, it would lose the very readers most in need of reform:

> In the little time that our Journal has been going, we have received considerable countenance from the south and yesterday a postmaster in the interior of North Carolina wrote to solicit an agency. Now we should turn the whole people south of the Potomac from us if in our first number we were to make too strong a demonstration against them; and all my hopes of doing good by stealth would be frustrated.[39]

Briggs, however, had other motives. When Lowell pressed him to take a more daring stand, Briggs invoked financial necessity: "You know that publishers and printers judge of propriety by profit . . . and my publisher and printer took alarm at the outset at my manifest leaning toward certain horrifying because unprofitable doctrines." After Carter's attack appeared in the *Liberator*, Briggs stated the case more bluntly: "I cannot afford to publish a radical reform paper, for I could get no readers if I did."[40] The lesson in political neutrality first given at the *Messenger* was therefore repeated at the *Broadway Journal*, and Poe seems to have learned his lesson well. With the exception of the laudatory notice of the *Messenger*, Poe was as willing as Briggs to measure "propriety by profit."

After this period, Poe made only two conspicuous statements about slavery, and unfortunately the context of these statements has been universally neglected. The references to slavery appear in reviews of Longfellow and Lowell, but in each case Poe made the remarks anonymously or under cover of what we would today call plausible deniability. The first statement occurs in an unsigned review of Longfellow published in the April 1845 *Aristidean*, just one month after the attack of the *Liberator*. Importantly, this review was published in the midst of the so-called Longfellow War, which Poe instigated when he accused the esteemed New England poet of being a self-promoter and a plagiarist. The *Aristidean* review begins by disparaging Longfellow's Boston supporters, a group identified as "the small coterie of abolitionists, transcendentalists, and fanatics in general," or, more pointedly as "the knot of rogues and madmen" (*Essays,* 760). Then commences an attack on Longfellow's latest poetic works. Referring specifically to *Poems on Slavery*, the reviewer accuses Longfellow of pandering to "those negrophilic old ladies of the north" with "a shameless medley of the grossest misrepresentation." Noting how easy it was for a Northern professor to "write verses instructing the southerners how to give up their all with a good

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grace," the reviewer charges that Longfellow has confused slavery in the South with the treatment of slaves in Cuba. Longfellow, the reviewer continues, has "no right to change the locality, and by insinuating a falsehood in lieu of a fact, charge his countrymen with barbarity" (*Essays*, 762, 763).

In an apparent attempt to do "evil by stealth," the anonymous writer turns Briggs's strategy on its head. This review, however, must be used with caution, for it is evidently a collaborative production by Poe and Thomas Dunn English, editor of the *Aristidean*. Most passages seem to come directly from Poe, but there are enough inconsistencies to indicate the work of a second author. In all likelihood, Poe provided a rough draft, which English altered to suit his own design.[41] This arrangement apparently satisfied both parties, for Poe wanted the piece to look as if it had been written by another hand. The Longfellow review contains many third-person references to "Mr. Poe," and in a subsequent notice of the *Aristidean*, Poe with some impudence attempts to maintain this illusion:

> There is a long review or rather running commentary on Longfellow's poems. It is, perhaps, a little coarse, but we are not disposed to call it unjust; although there are in it some opinions which, by implication, are attributed to ourselves individually, and with which we cannot altogether coincide. ("The Aristidean," 285)

It is therefore difficult to decide whether to blame Poe or English for such phrases as "negrophilic old ladies of the north."[42] But two points are clear. First, the defense of the South is presented as a reaction to a Northern attack, specifically an attack by a Boston gentleman who could—without financial risk—turn poetry into a vehicle for political criticism. Second, whether or not Poe "coincided" with the *Aristidean* review, he certainly recognized that it might arouse some outcry, and he accordingly sought to distance himself from any "horrifying because unprofitable doctrines."

Poe repeated this strategy in his 1849 attack on James Russell Lowell's *Fable for Critics*. In a review written expressly for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe denounces Lowell as "one of the most rabid of the Abolition fanatics." Posing as a guardian of Southern sensibility, he attempts to shield prospective readers from Lowell's "prejudices on the topic of slavery." "No Southerner," Poe warns, "who does not wish to be insulted, and at the same time revolted by a bigotry the most obstinately blind and deaf, should ever touch a volume by this author" (*CW*, 5:376).

As with the Longfellow review, Poe intended this to be anonymous.

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On several occasions, the writer refers to "Mr. Poe" in the third person, and in his private correspondence, Poe stresses that he had the review published "editorially" (*Letters,* 2:449). For the first time in years, then, Poe was in a position to write anonymously for a Southern audience. But instead of unleashing a pent-up defense of slavery, Poe uses the opportunity to discuss the perils of fanaticism in general:

> His fanaticism about slavery is a mere local outbreak of the same innate wrong-headedness which, if he owned slaves, would manifest itself in atrocious ill-treatment of them, with murder of any abolitionist who should endeavor to set them free. A fanatic of Mr. L's species, is simply a fanatic for the sake of fanaticism, and *must* be a fanatic in whatever circumstances you place him.

In other words, fanaticism is a national problem that merely expresses itself differently in different regions. But as indicated in the succeeding paragraph, what most disturbs Poe is the power of fanaticism to aggravate the cultural division between North and South, for this effectively deprives Southern writers of access to the national literary market: "It is a fashion among Mr. Lowell's set to affect a belief that there is no such thing as Southern Literature. Northerners—people who have really nothing to speak of as men of letters,—are cited by the dozen. . . . Other writers are barbarians and are satirized accordingly—if mentioned at all" (*CW,* 5:377). Even when writing anonymously, Poe found it easier to denounce abolitionism than to justify slavery, and when he did defend the South, he showed greater concern for Southern writers than for Southern institutions.

There are other stray references to race, ranging from a comment on African American speech in his review of Sedgwick's *The Linwoods* to a matter-of-fact description of a slave uprising in his review of Bird's *Sheppard Lee.*[43] But given the vast bulk of his writings, these references are conspicuously few. Unable and unwilling to bear the risks of political speech, Poe succumbed to the pressures of a national literary market either by falling silent on controversial issues or by searching for an average racism that could take the place of unprofitable doctrines about slavery. There were of course writers who rejected this strategy and profited nevertheless, but as G. R. Thompson has pointed out, Poe generally shied away from the literary sectionalism of such writers as Simms, Longfellow, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.[44] Of Poe's sixty-five tales, only two—"The Gold-Bug" and "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains"—are set in the South, and many of the rest seem to be set nowhere at all. Thompson attributes this antiregional stance to Poe's professionalism,

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but it should be noted that professional calculations are not always honorable or just. For Poe, admission to the national literary market meant turning his back on the momentous political and social struggles of the day, except when such struggles impinged directly on the material interests of a commercial writer. So if there is relatively little cause to denounce Poe for his statements on slavery, there is certainly no reason to praise him for his professional silence. Patriotism may be the *last* refuge of scoundrels, but professionalism is often the first.

Conclusion: The Wages of Nationalism

All of this suggests that Poe, far from being "the most blatant racist among the American romantics," was arguably among the most discreet. Illuminating in this regard is the case of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Following what is now a familiar pattern, the critic Kun Jong Lee has recently attempted to "unmask" Emerson's racism by assembling an extremely partial and incriminating selection of his journal entries.[45] In 1822, for example, Emerson reported that he saw "a hundred large lipped, low-browed black men who, except in the mere matter of languages, did not exceed the sagacity of the elephant." Emerson also described blacks as being "preAdamite" and marked for extinction: "It is plain that so inferior a race must perish shortly." In 1848, Emerson even wrote that "it is better to hold the negro race an inch under water than an inch over" (K. J. Lee, 334).[46] These journal entries are more blatantly racist than anything in Poe's private correspondence or anonymous reviews. And yet, such a collection of quotations should not be taken as proof that Emerson was more "racist" than Poe. The kind of selective citation used to denounce Emerson and even Lydia Maria Child as racists, I would argue, crosses the boundary from political criticism into sheer character assassination. Critical approaches based on character assassination, or on any ahistorical diagnosis of racism, may possess some marginal pedagogical and heuristic value, but these approaches also project current stalemates into both the past and the future. In other words, the fervent hunt for some blatant racist utterance reveals less about antebellum literature than about the contemporary practice of endlessly unmasking racism as a scandal, as an unsurpassable and perversely cathartic spectacle.

To those in search of spectacle, Poe's reticence is especially frustrating because, unlike Emerson, he left no incriminating private manuscripts. Curiously, Poe's most virulent pronouncements on race are contained in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a book more or less

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consciously written for a national audience. The book was published by the New York firm of Harper and Brothers in 1838. Two years prior to publication, James Kirke Paulding had quietly urged Poe to "lower himself a little to the ordinary comprehension of the generality of readers." In another letter, Harper and Brothers advised Poe that "readers in this country have a decided and strong preference for works (especially fiction) in which a single and connected story occupies the whole volume."[47] In response to this advice about the national literary market, Poe composed what would be his only novel; at the end of this book, Poe describes the black natives of Tsalal as "the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men upon the face of the globe" (*CW,* 1:201). Modern critics have pointed to the political implications of this description, but in the rush to denounce Poe's racism, the peculiar formal and historical determinants of *Pym* have been obscured. First, Poe clearly borrowed from widely circulated travel narratives of Africa and the South Seas, many of which contain similar denunciations of the ignorance and backwardness of "barbarous" non-Western peoples, including the dark-skinned aborigines of Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania. Second, the natives on Tsalal take on an allegorical quality because of their extreme blackness, a blackness that includes not only the eyes and teeth of the natives but also much of the natural environment. As the fictitious "editor" emphasizes, "Nothing *white* was to be found at Tsalal, and nothing otherwise in the subsequent voyage to the region beyond" (*CW,* 1:208). Third, there is no obvious link between this racist representation and a specific position on slavery, especially since abolitionists and colonizationists were themselves prone to accept and repeat racist stereotypes.[48]

These points are crucial to understanding why Poe, whose personal and editorial writings seem relatively muted on the issue of slavery, should make what now appears as his most blatant statement in the most public—and the most national—forum he could find. At the *Messenger,* Poe had learned to avoid controversial political issues, especially those likely to elicit complaints from Southern readers. When composing a novel for a New York publisher and a national audience, Poe would have paid even closer attention to divisive issues, and if *Pym* had contained "horrifying because unprofitable doctrines," the Brothers Harper undoubtedly would have objected. The lurid description of Tsalal therefore demonstrates the difference between a racist representation—especially one conforming to the orders of average racism—and a statement calling for a specific action on slavery. But this is only part of the story. As suggested at the start of this chapter, average racism arose less from an essential American bigotry than from the historically specific conjunc-

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tion of an emerging national culture and an emerging national market. In this regard the example of Poe is particularly revealing, for his attempt to construct or exploit an average racism was in many ways a deliberate strategy designed to unify sections divided by slavery. Antebellum nationalism, far from being a simple expression of solidarity, should instead be seen as a product of the growing antagonism between North and South, and Poe's literary nationalism should likewise be understood as an attempt to escape from the realm of unprofitable political strife into the more lucrative *neutral territory* of mass culture.

Once again, then, the concept of average racism helps to explain Poe's writing. As suggested earlier, average racism was not a simple set of beliefs and practices but rather an ongoing attempt to invoke—without specifying too precisely—the imaginary foundation for political consensus. And the best way to protect this consensus was to keep it out of play, insulated from the contentious fray of what was called "partisan politics." Lest we judge antebellum America too harshly, we should also acknowledge the possibility that modern orthodoxies about race suffer from similar shortcomings. I think it is possible, for example, to imagine a future that would question our sacred image of diversity, namely, the posed multiracial group that pervades television commercials and college recruiting brochures. It is possible, in other words, to imagine a future where our image of racial diversity would be derided as the "master mix" that inadvertently circumscribed both the breadth of individual difference (by treating members of a racial group as interchangeable) and the scope of social progress (by assuming that the mere existence of a multiracial group solved all problems and conflicts). As illustrated by *Moby-Dick* and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a multiracial crew does not guarantee a successful voyage. The canoe at the end of Poe's narrative, it should be recalled, carries the white Pym, the black Nu-Nu, and the mixed Peters. Needless to say, it is not clear what we should make of this crew or of the death of Nu-Nu, since for Poe even death is an ambiguous condition. But if Poe is making a statement about slavery, he seems wary of being labeled a *partisan*.

Poe's wariness toward slavery is further demonstrated by "A Predicament" and "The Gold-Bug," the only tales containing extensive depictions of African Americans. In "A Predicament," the companion piece to "How to Write a Blackwood Article," Poe parodies the affection between a black servant and white mistress in order to disparage both characters. But although the description of the servant relies heavily on racist stereotypes, Poe eludes the slavery controversy by setting the tale in the North (first Philadelphia and then Scotland). "The Gold-Bug" presents more problems because it is expressly set in South Carolina. Once again

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there is something vaguely comical about the master-servant relationship, although in this case there is no question of improper affections, at least not on the part of Legrand. The black servant Jupiter, however, seems to embody "the staunch loyalty and heart-felt devotion" celebrated by Beverley Tucker (*Partisan Leader,* 142). Aside from his extreme devotion to Legrand, Jupiter's speech is apparently intended to represent a black dialect influenced by Gullah, a creole spoken by blacks on the coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia.[49] Indeed, in his review of Sedgwick's *The Linwoods*, Poe objects to "the discrepancy between the words and the character of the speaker," particularly in cases where the character is black. After quoting a rousing speech by an African American character named Rose, Poe asks, "Who would suppose this graceful eloquence . . . to proceed from the mouth of a negro woman?" (*CW,* 5:64). Poe evidently sought to correct this alleged discrepancy in "The Gold-Bug," and in his unsigned review of himself, he in fact singles out the "accurate" depiction of Jupiter:

> The characters are well-drawn. The reflective qualities and steady purpose, founded on a laboriously obtained conviction of Legrand, is most faithfully depicted. The negro is a perfect picture. He is drawn accurately—no feature overshaded, or distorted. Most of such delineations are caricatures. (*Essays,* 869)

In what sense is Jupiter a "perfect picture"? Presumably, Poe is referring to his dialect, his superstition, and perhaps his inability to tell right from left. In addition, Jupiter is "obstinate" and physically strong—at one point he even considers beating Legrand with a stick to cure his gold fever. But as indicated already, Jupiter's most important trait is his loyalty to Legrand. Significantly, this loyalty determines the narrator's response to Legrand's apparent madness: "Could I have depended, indeed, upon Jupiter's aid, I would have had no hesitation in attempting to get the lunatic home by force; but I was too well assured of the old negro's disposition, to hope that he would assist me, under any circumstances, in a personal contest with his master" (*CW,* 3:822).

Taken in isolation, such behavior seems derived from plantation narratives, and some critics have accordingly described Jupiter as a "black slave."[50] But as Poe carefully specifies at the beginning of the story, Jupiter is actually free:

> [Legrand] was usually accompanied by an old negro, called Jupiter, who had been manumitted before the reverses of the family, but who could be induced, by neither threats nor promises, to aban-

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> don what he considered his right of attendance upon the footsteps of his young "Massa Will." (*CW,* 3:807)

Recognizing the political divisions in the national audience, Poe shrewdly tries to have it both ways. On the one hand, he exploits conventions about the intimate, loyal bonds between white masters and black servants. On the other hand, he attempts to evade any outcry over such a portrayal by making Jupiter free, and although Legrand is referred to as "master" on several occasions, never once in the entire story does Poe use the word *slave.* In other words, Poe capitalizes on the average racism of his audience while neutralizing the sectional conflict over slavery. Through a crucial yet subtle change in Jupiter's legal status, Poe attempted to create a sanitized South that could circulate freely in the national literary market.

At the end of his life, Poe made one last statement about blackness that underscores how ideological and economic forces combined to determine the *salability* of racism. In a 26 June 1849 letter to George Eveleth, Poe discusses *Eureka* (recently published) and his still unfulfilled plans for the *Stylus.* In the course of the letter, Poe also mentions the review in which he chastises Lowell for being an "Abolition fanatic" and for treating writers outside of Boston—especially Southern writers—as "barbarians" (*CW,* 5:377). This induced Poe to recall a "Monk" Lewis anecdote, which he must have read about years earlier.[51] Lewis's play *The Castle Spectre* was first performed in 1797; though popular, it was criticized for its fantastic elements, including the presence of black servants in a Welsh castle. In the published version of the play, Lewis justified his audacity:

> That *Osmond* is attended by *Negroes* is an anachronism, I allow; but . . . I by no means repent the introduction of my *Africans*: I thought it would give a pleasing variety to the characters and dresses, if I made my servants black; and could I have produced the same effect by making my heroine blue, blue I should have made her. (Lewis, 101–2)

In Poe's version, there are some revealing distortions:

> Monk Lewis once was asked how he came, in one of his acted plays, to introduce *black* banditti, when, in the country where the scene was laid, black people were quite unknown. His answer was: "I introduced them because I truly anticipated that blacks would have more *effect* on my audience than whites—and if I had taken it

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> into my head that, by making them sky-blue, the *effect* would have been greater, why sky-blue they should have been." To apply this idea to "The Stylus"—I am awaiting the *best opportunity* for its issue. (*Letters,* 2:449–50)

How should we account for Poe's revisionary memory? Do the changes constitute a sort of racist slip that reveals his true sentiments? Or do the changes reflect an appreciation of Lewis's willingness to exploit the shock value, or salability, of racial difference? The letter, after all, discusses plans to arouse interest in a new magazine project, and although Poe's claim about deliberately postponing the *Stylus* is dubious, he did place great emphasis on the conscious and sometimes manipulative creation of a specific *effect*—not only within a literary text but also within an entire literary market. The distortions or slips in his recollection could therefore be attributed to an ongoing negotiation between racist ideologies and the pressures of a mass publishing industry. As a commercial writer, Poe had to produce a text that could transcend competing ideologies of racial difference—one might call them dueling racisms—to achieve a uniform literary effect among a divided national audience.[52] Unlike "horrifying because unprofitable doctrines" about slavery per se, however, representations of racial difference—whether sentimental or sensational—remained viable in all segments of the American market. For this reason, racism exerted an economic influence over both literary and commercial calculations, and it also encouraged the kind of distortions manifested in the misquotation of Monk Lewis. Poe accordingly omits the blue heroine, substitutes a single "effect" for a "pleasing variety," and, in his most revealing distortion, transforms the black "servants" into "black banditti." Not incidentally, the transformation of servants into bandits precisely duplicates the events in *Pym*, where seemingly friendly natives turn into murderous black savages.

Poe's calculating approach to the mass literary market complicates the political meaning of *Pym* and his other fictional writings. Based on what we know of these calculations, it is misguided to conceive of his racism as an attitude or sentiment somehow separable from the constraints and pressures of the prevailing modes of production, especially in a nation that suffered antagonistic modes to coexist until the advent of civil war. By extension, it is misguided to conceive of literary creation as occurring in some fantastic realm of freedom apart from the ideological and material forces that sustain a social formation. If nothing else, the recognition of these forces makes it possible to move beyond interpretations that are informed by hindsight but not by history. For example, the paucity of comments about race in Poe's private correspondence, along

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with the offhanded disparagement of abolitionist poets in his anonymous critical reviews, should cast doubt on interpretations of the final chapters of *Pym* as divine retribution for "the known offense of slavery" (Dayan, "Romance and Race," 109). I must also question Dayan's claim that "Poe remained haunted, as did Jefferson, by the terrible disjunction between the ideology of slavery . . . and the concrete realities of mutilation, torture, and violation" (102). If anything, Poe seems to have conjured up the haunting portrait of blackness as a means of appealing to multiple segments of the white literary audience. And as soon as the audience is described in these terms, it becomes clear that his racist representations have less to do with black-white relations than with the way white people relate to each other.

The way white people relate to each other: this is what haunts Poe, this is what motivates his fantasies of a neutral culture, and this, to an extent seldom acknowledged, is what burdens the current critical discourse on race. What matters about Poe is not so much his reticence on slavery, nor even his use of racist stereotypes—which are as infrequent as they are offhanded. Instead, the case of Poe matters because both his utterances and his silences were part of a coherent strategy to expel politics from the literary commodity. This is why attempts to read politics back into Poe's work have proven so vexing. To make this task easier, critics still turn to the Paulding-Drayton review as the smoking gun that will convict Poe once and for all. When this does not succeed, blame is sometimes placed on conspiratorial Poe scholars, who are seen as withholding or covering up incriminating evidence.[53] This chapter is not designed to comfort the vexed, but I do hope that I have demonstrated two things. First, although Poe left behind a clear trail of what might be called circumstantial racism, he avoided—by habit and design—the kind of political speech practiced by fire-breathing secessionists like Beverley Tucker and by antislavery moralists like James E. Heath (both of whom Poe knew during his connection with the *Southern Literary Messenger*). From this follows the second point, namely, that the "depoliticized" Poe is only partly the work of his interpreters. Observing the dictates of the "cash rule," Poe sometimes played to the average racism of the national audience, but more frequently he avoided altogether those "horrifying because unprofitable doctrines" about slavery. In other words, Poe's work was not simply depoliticized by modern critics; it was in many ways depoliticized from the start. This, I would suggest, must be the basis for all future political criticism of Poe. Significantly, the acknowledgment of Poe's apolitical predicament would not preemptively exclude the ideological interpretations of Poe that I have been disputing throughout this chapter. Although there may be flaws in the evidence and assumptions

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of critics such as Rosenthal, Nelson, and Rowe, the case of Poe nevertheless demonstrates the importance of race in determining what literature *is*—the form and meaning of its sentences, the form and meaning of its silences.

Taken in context, the example of Poe reveals the error of viewing racism as a private demon to be exorcised through simple denunciation, or as a Southern disease to be eradicated through a liberal dose of enlightenment. All too frequently, such views lead to the creation of an interpretive framework that merely diagnoses texts as being racism-positive or racism-negative. When the texts themselves resist such a diagnosis, critics sometimes resort to ad hominem arguments that resolve textual ambiguity by invoking the alleged beliefs of the alleged author. Given the divergent political agendas of such writers as Tucker, Emerson, and even Lydia Maria Child, it is at least necessary to consider the motives and pressures determining their respective representations of race. And given the peculiar circumstances surrounding Poe, it is also worthwhile to recall that the relation between literature and politics is itself historically determined—so much so that a strategy originally designed to avoid controversy now provokes it. To resolve the current tangle of error and simplification, it is necessary to step back from the purity of ahistorical criticism and to delve into the complexities of a painful and uncompleted past. In the case of Poe and other antebellum writers, such an approach reveals a world of Orwellian complicity far beyond the explanatory reach of praise and denunciation. In that world—and perhaps in our own—all racisms are equal, but some racisms are more equal than others.

Notes

1. I am turning a phrase from Stephen Greenblatt, who writes, "I am not arguing that atheism was literally unthinkable in the late sixteenth century but rather that it was almost always thinkable only as the thought of another" (22).

2. Neither Thompson nor Dayan, I hasten to add, is completely culpable for these mistakes. Thompson was making a quick point with a bit of hyperbole, and Dayan was basing her arguments on a persuasive but flawed article by Bernard Rosenthal, "Poe, Slavery, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*: A Reexamination." In addition, both writers were prevented from qualifying or justifying their arguments in footnotes. For complete texts, see G. R. Thompson, "Poe and the Writers of the Old South," and Joan Dayan, "Romance and Race."

3. Arthur Hobson Quinn, for example, sees the review as proof that Poe did take an interest in contemporary politics and that his "knowledge of the actual conditions [of slavery] was much more accurate than that of Emerson or Whittier" (*Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, 249). In his influential piece "Poe

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as Social Critic," Ernest Marchand gives a less tolerant account of Poe's complicity with the Old South. Drawing heavily from the Drayton-Paulding essay, Marchand argues that Poe "brings to the defense of the South's peculiar institutions the same rationalizations that issued from a thousand Southern pulpits every Sunday, and from a thousand Southern presses every day of the week for more than twenty years" (37). F. O. Mathiesson also relied on the Paulding-Drayton review for the chapter on Poe in the *Literary History of the United States,* 321–27. 3rd. ed., ed. Robert E. Spiller et al., New York: Macmillan, 1963.

4. Rosenthal selected and introduced the material on Poe.

5. Many critics dubious of the Paulding-Drayton review espouse similar positions. See, for example, Kenneth Alan Hovey, "Critical Provincialism: Poe's Poetic Principle in Antebellum Context," 347, 353 n. 40; and A. Robert Lee, "'Impudent and Ingenious Fiction': Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket,*" 128. For further speculations on Poe's racial fears, see Louis D. Rubin Jr., *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South.*

6. Ridgely's argument is summarized in *CW,* 5:153-54.

7. This conjunction of factors explains many inconsistencies noted by Rosenthal. On Poe's possible ideological motives for altering the review, see the account of Lucian Minor's "Liberian Literature," later in this chapter. For Tucker's comments on *The Partisan Leader,* see Tucker to Duff Green, 20 April 1836, Duff Green Papers, Library of Congress. Typescript in Noma Lee Goodwin, "The Published Works of Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, 1784–1851," unpublished M.A. Thesis, Duke University, 1947, 212–15.

8. For sickbed scenes, compare "Slavery" (338) and "Blackstone" (230); on animal metaphors, compare "Slavery" (338) and *The Partisan Leader* (156); on Northern meddling and Southern defense, see "Slavery" (339) and "Blackstone" (228); on slavery as a positive good, see "Slavery" (339) and "Blackstone" (227); for appeals to divine will, see "Slavery" (338) and "Effect" (330, 333); on the paradox of equality and difference, see "Slavery" (338) and "Effect" (330).

9. See, for example, Tucker's "An Essay on the Moral and Political Effect of the Relation between the Caucasian Master and the African Slave," 332.

10. Tucker makes similar claims in "The Present State of Europe." There, he notes that "first and last, property is the real object of controversy in strife between the orders of society" (285); and that "property, then, of old, as now, was at the bottom of all the revolutionary movements of England" (286).

11. Tucker, review of "An Oration on the Life and Character of Gilbert Motier de Lafayette," by John Quincy Adams and rev. of "Eulogy on La Fayette," by Edward Everett, 309.

12. All these writings appear in the *Messenger*: "Note to Blackstone's Commentaries . . ." 228; "Bulwer's New Play," 92; "A Discourse on the Genius of the Federative System of the United States," 768.

13. For more about this connection, along with some good observations on the larger issues, see J. V. Ridgely in "The Authorship of the 'Paulding-Drayton Review,'" 2.

14. See also Tucker's "The Present State of Europe," 294, 279, 286.

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15. For a fine analysis of this and other matters, see Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation,* 73–93.

16. For further information on the *Messenger*, see David K. Jackson, *Poe and the "Southern Literary Messenger."*

17. This version of the prospectus appeared on the cover of the December 1838 *Messenger.*

18. For White's desire to maintain full editorial control, see his 2 March 1835 letter to Lucian Minor, in David K. Jackson, "Some Unpublished Letters of T. W. White to Lucian Minor," 227. For White's wariness about political writing, see, in addition to the material below, White's letter to Minor, 31 March 1840: "If I was to insert my personal, and at last my political, friends' addresses, I should raise at once a hornet's nest about my head and ears, that I should not soon get clear of." Reprinted in Jackson, Continuation of "Some Unpublished Letters of T. W. White to Lucian Minor," 48.

19. It is worth noting, in this context, that Lucian Minor had several (Southern) relatives who opposed slavery. His grandfather, Major John Minor of Topping Castle, had introduced a bill for the emancipation of slaves in the Virginia legislature shortly after the Revolution. And Lucian's cousin Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford denounced both slavery and secession. Between 1832 and 1866, she kept a journal called "Notes Illustrative of the Wrongs of Slavery." See L. Minor Blackford, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory,* 5, 46, 263 n. 2.

20. 6 March 1836. Cited in Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, 193. Poe called the *Chronicle* reviewer a "scoundrel," and in a personal correspondence he assured Minor that his article on Liberian writing had been "lauded by all men of sense" (*Letters,* 1:88).

21. *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (January 1835): 254.

22. "I had supposed before, that no gentleman of any intelligence could be found within the four corners of our state, who would seriously undertake to maintain that our domestic slavery, which is obviously the mere creature of our own positive law, is so right and proper in itself, that we are under no obligation whatever to do any thing to remove, or lessen it, as soon as we can. I had thought, indeed, that it was a point conceded on all hands, that, wrong in its origin and principle, it was to be justified, or rather excused, only by the stern necessity which had imposed it upon us without our consent, and which still prevented us from throwing it off at once. . . . And, at any rate, I had imagined that all of us were fully satisfied, by this time, that [slavery] was an evil of such injurious influence upon our moral, political, and civil interests, that we owed it to ourselves as well as to our subjects, to reduce, and remove it, as soon, and as fast as possible. . . . In all this, however, it seems, I was reckoning without my host, the author of the article before me, who has come forward, at this late hour, to assert the absolute rectitude and utility of the system. . . ." (A Virginian, "Remarks on a Note," 266).

23. In the 1840s and especially in the 1850s, the *Messenger* published many more articles defending the South against Northern "fanaticism." A change in editorial policy is signaled in the opening article of volume 5; see "To Our Friends and Subscribers," *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (January 1839): 1–2.

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24. *Richmond Enquirer*, 22 May 1835.

25. Poe, review of *Memoirs of an American Lady* by Anne Grant, *CW,* 5:234. The review originally appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* 2 (July 1836): 511.

26. Like Grant, Ingraham apologizes for slavery without advocating it: "Do not mistake me: I am no advocate for slavery; but neither am I a believer in that wild Garrisonian theory, which, like a Magician's wand, is at once to dissolve every link that binds the slave to his master, and demolish at one blow a system that has existed, still gaining in extent and stability, for centuries" (2:33).

27. Poe, review of Joseph H. Ingraham's *The South-West. By a Yankee*, *CW,* 5:93. The review was originally published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* 2 (January 1836): 122.

28. Poe, review of the *North American Review*, *CW* 5:68. The commentary originally appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* 2 (December 1835): 59.

29. "Cuffies" is the common transliteration of the African name; it was a common practice to name children after days of the week. See Peter Wood, *Black Majority*; Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom* 301 n. 26; and David DeCamp, "African Day-Names." My thanks to Ted Pearson and Kathy Brown for this information.

30. Dayan insinuates that Poe is guilty by association. She does not, of course, insinuate that Poe was an abolitionist because he corresponded with Lowell and Longfellow, or because he favorably reviewed the work of Lydia Maria Child. In addition, Dayan erroneously identifies Dew as author of *Vindication of Perpetual Slavery*. Dew actually wrote an essay called "Abolition of Negro Slavery" (1832); this was later expanded and published by Thomas W. White as the *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831–1832* (1832) and subsequently reprinted many times, most notably in a collection called *The Pro-slavery Argument* (1852).

31. Rosenthal continues the guilt-by-association argument when he identifies Poe with the brief extract of Dew's address that appeared in the October 1836 *Messenger*. Rosenthal fails to mention that Poe breaks off the extract in midsentence and thereby avoids printing a more explicit statement on slavery. In the three sentences following the extract (not quoted by Poe), Dew calls upon students to defend the slave South:

> I hope—yes, I know, that at this moment a worthier and a nobler impulse actuates every one of you. And you must recollect too, that you are generally members of that portion of our confederacy whose domestic institutions have been called in question by the meddling spirit of the age. You are slaveholders, or the sons of slaveholders, and as such your duties and responsibilities are greatly increased. ("An Address," 765)

32. George McDuffie had declared in 1835 that slavery was "the cornerstone of our republican edifice" (Tise, 100).

33. A Virginian [James E. Heath], *Slavery in Maryland: An Anti-slavery Review,* 20–21.

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34. Letter to Maria Weston Chapman, 25 November 1846 (134). See also letter to Chapman, 17 March 1846 (31). Some of the money donated by Chapman was used to pay for *Slavery in Maryland: An Anti-slavery Review.*

35. See also 896–99; Jane Swisshelm, *Half a Century,* 132. Significantly, Snodgrass persisted in his antislavery activism into the next decade. In 1852, for example, he ran as an elector at large (Maryland) for the ill-fated Free Soil Presidential ticket of John P. Hale and George W. Julian. See the "Free Democratic" handbill, 370.

36. *Broadway Journal* 1 (22 March 1845): 183.

37. R. C. (Robert Carter), "The Broadway Journal."

38. Briggs to Lowell, 22 January 1845 (quoted in Weidman, 106).

39. Briggs to Lowell, 22 January 1845 (quoted in Weidman, 107). The line about doing "good by stealth" comes from Alexander Pope, *Imitations of Horace,* "Epilogue to the Satires," Dialogue I, l. 135.

40. Briggs to Lowell, 19 March 1845 and 10 April 1845 (quoted in Weidman, 108, 110).

41. For a more conservative estimate of Poe's contribution to the review, see Thomas and Jackson, 529.

42. Silverman speculates that English may be the author of the phrase because he spoke derogatorily of blacks on other occasions (254, 491). To my ear, however, the alliterative slur sounds like the work of Poe, and the rest of the review seems perfectly consistent with Poe's other critical writings.

43. Poe's review of *The Linwoods* appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (December 1835): 57–59; reprinted in *CW,* 5:62–64. His review of Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee* appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* 2 (September 1836): 662–67; reprinted in *CW,* 5:282–86.

44. Thompson argues that Poe lacked the "regionalist sentiment" of other Southern writers ("Poe and the Writers of the Old South," 268–69). Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was of course a phenomenal success, but a Boston publisher, accepting the logic of political and regional neutrality, turned it down because "it would not sell in the South" (Charvat, 301).

45. Lee disputes Philip Nicoloff's characterization of Emerson as "a relatively mild racist" (Nicoloff, *Emerson on Race and History,* 124; quoted in K. Lee, 334).

46. In Emerson's defense, it should be noted that many of these statements appear to be fragmentary or even experimental. In addition, Lee sometimes quotes Emerson totally out of context, as with an entry concerning the fate of blacks to "serve & be sold & terminated" (K. Lee, 334). The rest of the passage—omitted by Lee—argues for the opposite position:

> But if the black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new & coming civilization, for the sake of that element no wrong nor strength nor circumstance can hurt him, he will survive & play his part. So now it seems to me that the arrival of such men as Toussaint if he is pure blood, or of Douglas [*sic*] if he is pure blood, outweighs all the En-

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> glish & American humanity. . . . Here is the Anti-Slave. Here is Man; & if you have man, black or white is an insignificance. Why at night all men are black. (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* 9:125)

In my view Lee also unfairly belittles the antislavery efforts of Lydia Maria Child (343 n. 7). This condemnation of Child makes use of the evidence, though not the complete argument, of George M. Frederickson (*The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny,* 37).

47. The advice about Poe "lowering himself" comes from Paulding to T. W. White, 3 March 1836. Harper and Brothers June 1836 letter to Poe is reproduced in A. H. Quinn, 250–51.

48. Consider, for example, the comments of black historian and novelist William Wells Brown:

> History shows that of all races, the African was best adapted to be the "hewers of wood, and drawers of water." Sympathetic in his nature, thoughtless in his feelings, both alimentativeness and amativeness large, the negro is better adapted to follow than to lead. His wants easily supplied, generous to a fault, large fund of humor, brimful of music, he has ever been found the best and most accommodating of servants. (179)

Brown is also the author of the important antislavery novel *Clotel* (1853).

49. On Jupiter's use of Gullah, see Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era,* 5–23.

50. See, for example, Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark,* 58.

51. Poe may have known that his mother, Eliza Poe, played the part of Angela in *The Castle Spectre* on 18 August 1810 in Richmond. See J. H. Whitty, "Memoir," in *The Complete Poems of Edgar Allan Poe,* xx.

52. Though readers do not respond uniformly in reality, the assumption of a uniform or at least average response necessarily informs most attempts to appeal to the widest possible audience. Wordsworth effectively acknowledged that as a dramatist, Monk Lewis was more adept than he was at anticipating the average response. After seeing a performance of *The Castle Spectre,* Wordsworth equivocally noted that the play "fitted the taste of the audience like a glove" (quoted in Peck, 75).

53. John Carlos Rowe, for example, accuses Poe critics of repressing "the subtle complicity of literary Modernism with racist ideology," and Dana Nelson complains of "the recent trend to sweep Poe's politics under the rug" (Rowe, "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism," 136; Nelson, 91). Curiously, Rowe himself is one of the critics Nelson accuses of depoliticizing Poe, although she bases her argument on *Through the Custom House,* published ten years before "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism."

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CHAPTER 2

The Poetics of Whiteness

Poe and the Racial Imaginary

BETSY ERKKILA

I am not a spook like those who haunted
Edgar Allan Poe.
Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man*

In his now classic study *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Walter Benjamin observes: "In *l'art pour l'art* the poet for the first time faces language the way the buyer faces the commodity on the open market. He has lost his familiarity with the process of its production to a particularly high degree" (105). In this chapter, I want to look at the concept of the aesthetic as a production within rather than outside of history. Focusing in particular on the poetry and poetics of Edgar Allan Poe, I want to connect what Poe called the "poem written solely for the poem's sake" (*Works,* 14:272) and the emergence of aestheticism more generally with the social, political, and specifically racial struggles of his time and ours. I want to suggest the relation between the emergence of the aesthetic as a distinct mode of organizing and isolating the subjective experience of beauty in art and the simultaneous emergence among scientists and philosophers of notions of racial difference and racial purity grounded in an Enlightenment metaphysics of whiteness. Rather than begin with the theories of racial difference that frame Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), I would like to begin closer to home with Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787).

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Skin Aesthetics

Written while the American Revolution was still being fought, *Notes on the State of Virginia* was central to the early national formation of American culture and society: it is one of the first works to define an American sublime; it is the locus classicus of the myth of the virtuous American republic; it defends the American continent and its native inhabitants against the degenerative theories of Count Buffon; it advances it "as a suspicion only" that blacks "are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind" (143); it argues that to preserve the "dignity and beauty" of "human nature," blacks must be colonized elsewhere, "beyond the reach of mixture" (143); and, under the pressure of the contradiction between the revolutionary rhetoric of American liberty and the historical reality of black enslavement, it is spooked, over and over again, by the fear of black insurrection and the specter of the "extirpation"of the white "masters" (163).

Jefferson's racial hierarchies and his social fears translate into and shape his judgment of beauty and art. His phobia about the black body, "that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race," leads him to assert skin color, the difference of white from black, as "the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races" (138). Even blacks prefer the "superior beauty" of whites "as uniformly" as "the Oran-ootan" prefers "black women over those of his own species" (138). This erotically charged skin aesthetics becomes the ground for a series of artistic judgments in which black painting, sculpture, music, and writing are consistently excluded, along with the passions and the body, from the realm of true beauty and true art.

In one of the earliest instances of the politics of white canon formation, Jefferson writes:

> Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately [*sic*]; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism. The heroes of the Dunciad are to her, as Hercules to the author of that poem. (140)

In Jefferson's skin aesthetics beauty and the imagination are, like his ideal American republic, by definition white. And yet, whiteness needs blackness to establish its own cultural precedence. To solicit our admiration

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for white poetry and white art, Jefferson must simultaneously cast out from the realm of the aesthetic a black body capable of no more than animal creation. Here, as in Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* and other eighteenth-century writings on aestheticism, the social subordination of blacks to whites develops in tandem with the cultural valorization of aesthetic beauty. Jefferson's aesthetic hierarchies are driven by the social logic of slavery: If "Phillis Whately" was in fact Phillis Wheatley the revolutionary poet, if her poetry was worthy of comparison with the poetry of Alexander Pope, if blacks were as capable of imaginative creation as whites, then the justification of black enslavement and the "enlightened" social ground of white America would begin to erode, as it subsequently did, under the pressure of its own contradictions.

What is racially marked in Jeffersonian aesthetics becomes less so in the nineteenth century. Gesturing toward "a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime, / Out of SPACE—out of TIME," the poetic theory and practice of Edgar Allan Poe would appear to be completely removed from the devastating cruelty of black enslavement and the sordid reality of whips, rape, blood, violence, and the torture of black bodies. And yet Poe was raised in the South and spent the formative years of his life there. He was brought up in a slaveholding family in Richmond, Virginia: "You suffer me to be subjected to the whims & caprice, not only of your white family, but the complete authority of the blacks," Poe complained to his foster father, John Allan, in 1827 (*Letters,* 1:8). In at least one instance, Poe appears to have sold a slave, "a negro man named Edwin aged twenty one years . . . to serve until he shall arrive at the age of thirty years no longer."[1] As in Jefferson's writings, the presence and labor of blacks in the social landscape, a simultaneous identification with and revulsion against the figure of the slave, the specter of slave insurrection, fear of a reversal of the master-slave relation, and an apocalyptic vision of the domination of blacks appear to energize and propel Poe's aestheticization of whiteness, his attempt to create forms of white beauty, white art, white writing, and white culture against and beyond time, history, the body, the black, the other.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Poe's Southern roots, the mainstream of American criticism has tended to treat him as an exotic alien, a strange and otherwordly purveyor of pure poetry, fractured psyches, and un-American gloom. To Vernon Parrington, in *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927), Poe was an "aesthete and a craftsman" who "lies quite outside the main current of American thought" (2:57, 56). The primarily linguistic emphasis of modernist and postmodernist critics, from T. S. Eliot and Paul Valéry to John Irwin and Jacques Lacan, has also

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tended to locate Poe's writings outside of time and history. This ahistorical and un-American face of Edgar Allan Poe has been vigorously challenged in the last few years, most notably by Toni Morrison's extended meditation on what she calls "a real or fabricated Africanist presence" in white American writing in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (6). Commenting on the "shrouded human figure" whose skin "was of the perfect whiteness of snow" at the end of Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), Morrison asserts uncategorically: "No early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe" (33).[2]

But while Morrison and others have offered a useful corrective to the erasure of race in past approaches to Poe, there is a tendency among recent critics to reduce Poe to his proslavery sentiments and American literature to American Africanism. "It was this Africanism," writes Morrison, "deployed as rawness and savagery, that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity" (44). This exclusive focus on the shaping presence of "American Africanism" in the constitution of American national identity seems much too simple. For one thing, there were other races, cultures, and nationalities that vied for geopolitical space and presence in writing and naming America. Moreover, blackness and Africanism cannot be separated from a whole complex of personal and cultural phobias and fetishes around the body, nature, women, race, the Orient, and the democratic masses that haunt and spook the American imaginary. To reverse the hierarchical relation of white to black by claiming black precedence risks reinstating the exclusions of the white literary tradition; it also isolates blackness and Africanism from the complicated network of religious, cultural, historical, economic, and ultimately transnational relations in which they were involved. Morrison's focus on the shaping presence of Africanism in creating a distinctively American literature keeps both "American" and "African American" neatly contained within a nationalist and exceptionalist frame and thus tends to erase the crosscurrents of international exchange, economic as well as cultural, imperial as well as textual, in which the figure of Edgar Allan Poe and the writing of the United States more generally have played a commanding role.

While there has been a renewed interest in the historical and racial contexts of Poe's work, critics have also tended to focus almost exclusively on Poe's prose rather than his poetry. Thus, for example, in his important work on Poe and the masses, Terry Whalen turns to Poe's tales as a "privileged" site of his social and economic analysis ("Horrid Laws," 398). Given the constitutive role that Poe's notions of supernal Beauty, art for art's sake, pure poetry and poetic craft have played, both

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nationally and internationally, in the emergence of nineteenth-century aestheticism, New Critical formalism, postmodern texuality, and the ongoing struggle to claim or reclaim the social being of language and literature, it is important that we not repeat Poe's own ahistorical gestures in seeking to grant poetry a special status outside history and beyond the reach of cultural analysis.

Tamerlane*, the Orient, and American Indian Policy*

The ways in which Poe's work intersects with a complex network of international relations is particularly evident in his first two volumes of poems, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827) and *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* (1829). In these volumes the shaping presence is not Africanism but Orientalism. Published during the years when Andrew Jackson came to power bearing a public rhetoric (if not reality) of democracy and the common man and a nationalist vision of westward expansion and progress, Poe's early volumes of poetry, which were printed and circulated in limited editions, suggest his aristocratic refusal, as gentleman and poet, to write for the masses or the market. Both volumes assert the integrity of private, subjective, and ultimately poetic desire against the debased imperatives of the public sphere. In the preface to *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, Poe writes that in his title poem "he has endeavoured to expose the folly of even *risking* the best feelings of the heart at the shrine of Ambition" (Mabbott, 1:22). Traditionally, "Tamerlane," like much of Poe's poetry, has been interpreted as personal lyric inscription: "Poe took little from historic and dramatic sources," writes Thomas Mabbott, "his poem is largely a personal allegory, based on his unhappy love for his Richmond sweetheart, Sarah Elmira Royster" (Mabbott, 1:24). But while Poe appropriates the fourteenth-century Mohammedan ruler for the expression of his own "agony of desire" as both lover and poet, "Tamerlane" cannot be separated from the broader politics, at once national and global, of imperial conquest.

Like "Al Aaraaf" and other Poe poems and tales, "Tamerlane" participates in and is shaped by the Orientalism of Byron's *Giaour*, Thomas Moore's *Lala Rookh*, and Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem, et de Jérusalem à Paris*, all of which were themselves engaged in what Edward Said calls the "Orientalist" struggle of Britain and France to extend their empire and their dominion to the Near and Far East in the nineteenth century.[3] Although the United States had not yet emerged as a power in the Orient, it is simply not true to say, as Said does, that the United States did not emerge as a major power in the struggle for empire until after

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World War II. From the time of the First Continental Congress in the Revolutionary period to the Monroe Doctrine, the Indian "removal" policy, the Mexican War, and the politics of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century, the United States struggled to extend its territories and its empire in North as well as South America.[4]

Like James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), which prophesies the doom of the Indian at the same time that it celebrates the eventual triumph of American empire over the British and the French in North America, Poe's *Tamerlane* provides an early cultural instance of the ways American writers participated in the broader politics of imperial struggle in the nineteenth century. Written at a time when Poe had himself enlisted in the United States Army, "Tamerlane" is on the most fundamental level a poem about the lust for empire. "I was ambitious," Tamerlane asserts: "A cottager, I mark'd a throne / Of half the world as all my own" (Mabbott, 1:57). In a note to the 1827 version of the poem, Poe further observes: "The conquests of Tamerlane far exceeded those of Zinghis Khan. He boasted to have two thirds of the world at his command" (Mabbott, 1:37). Although the narrative sets Tamerlane's desire for woman, love, and beauty against his "unearthly pride" and ambition for fame, conquest, and "the crush / Of empires" (Mabbott, 1:55) in a manner that suggests Poe's own historical resistance to the Jacksonian rhetoric of Western conquest and imperial advance, as in other writings by Poe, the poem also participates in the structures of knowledge, the Orientalist relation of West to East, white to other, that would frame Jackson's Indian removal policy in the 1830s and, more broadly, that had framed and would continue to frame the Western strife for empire in the Orient and elsewhere.[5]

As a signifier of the Orient, Tamerlane is a split figure, an embodiment at once of white desire and white fear. Tamerlane is, on the one hand, a "kingly" figure, whose love for a woman is represented as a version of white pastoral, a utopian scene of purity, beauty, and light. Within this "holy grove," Tamerlane remembers:

> I wandered of the idol, Love,
> Who daily scents his snowy wings
> With incense of burnt offerings
> From the most unpolluted things,
> Whose pleasant bowers are yet so riven
> Above with trellic'd rays from Heaven
> No mote may shun—no tiniest fly—
> The light-ning of his eagle eye—
> (Mabbott, 1:61)

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On the other hand, as an embodiment of the passionate excess of the desert—"where the grand— / The wild—the terrible conspire / With their own breath to fan his fire" (Mabbott, 1:58)—Tamerlane is also ruled by Eblis, the Mohammedan prince of evil spirits and darkness, who creeps into the "unpolluted" bower of love in the form of Ambition:

> I do believe that Eblis hath
> A snare in every human path—
> . . . .
> [Else how] was it that Ambition crept,
> Unseen, amid the revels there,
> Till growing bold, he laughed and leapt
> In the tangles of Love's very hair?
> (Mabbott, 1:60–61)

Taken over by Ambition, Tamerlane becomes, in this concluding passage of the poem, the Oriental as fiery figure of passion and excess who pollutes and destroys the "holy grove" of "snowy" whiteness signified by woman, beauty, and love. As a topos of pure woman, pure beauty, and pure love, Poe's "holy grove" suggests the ways his aestheticization of whiteness becomes bound up with a deep cultural fear of mixture with and pollution by the racial other. In the concluding image of Eblis tangled in the "very hair" of pure love, Orientalism intersects with Africanism and a whole complex of white cultural fears about mixture with and violation by the dark other, whether black, red, or Mohammedan.

In Poe's early poems, the Orientalist story of "Tamerlane" is dispersed and refigured in a symbolic dialectics of East versus West. In "Sonnet—To Science," which serves as an introduction to "Al Aaraaf" in *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* (1829), the Orient becomes the emblem of an exotic otherworld of the imagination that is opposed to the Western world of time, change, and history, signified by the "peering eyes" and "dull realities" of reason and science. As in "Romance," in which the "idle" and dreamy world of romance, "lyre and rhyme," signified by the "painted paroquet," is set against the "eternal Condor years" and "tumult" of the present, in "Sonnet—To Science" the poet rejects Western history and progress in favor of a timeless and Orientalized world of mythological creatures and "jewelled skies" where he can pursue "[t]he summer dream beneath the tamarind tree" (Mabbott, 1:91).

In "Al Aaraaf," the Orient is both figure and locus of poetry itself. Poe explains his use of the title "Al Aaraaf," which is drawn from the Koran, in a note to the poem: "With the Arabians there is a medium be-

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tween Heaven and Hell, where men suffer no punishment, but yet do not attain that tranquil and even happiness which they suppose to be characteristic of heavenly enjoyment" (Mabbott, 1:111–12). According to George Sale, the English translator of the Koran, the term *al Araf* derives from "the verb, *arafa,* which signifies to *distinguish* between things, or to *part* them" (94). Poe was not so much interested in the Koran or the religious beliefs of the Arabs as he was in "the Arabians" as figures of romantic *apartness* and otherworldliness. Located in a distant star, beyond the reach of earthly "dross" and the passions of the body, Al Aaraaf represents the otherworldly space of beauty and pure poetry, a place of purely aesthetic experience where flowers speak "in odors" and language is closer to "silence" than to our "world of words" (Mabbott, 1:102, 104). As Poe writes of the spirit world of "Al Aaraaf" in the opening of the poem:

> O! nothing earthly save the ray
> (Thrown back from flowers) of Beauty's eye,
> . . . .
> O! nothing earthly save the thrill
> Of melody in woodland rill—
> . . . .
> Oh, nothing of the dross of ours—
> Yet all the beauty—all the flowers
> That list our Love, and deck our bowers—
> Adorn yon world afar, afar—
> The wandering star.
>
> (Mabbott, 1:99–100)

Within the Orientalist frame of "Al Aaraaf," Poe conducts what is, in effect, his most radical experiment in pure aestheticism, his attempt to invent a language of pure musicality, rhythm, spirit, and sound. He also anticipates in figurative and poetic form the "Idea of Beauty" and the idea of poetry as a realm of purely aesthetic experience apart from both bodily passion and intellectual knowledge that he would begin to articulate in his prose introduction to *Poems of Edgar A. Poe* (1831). In "Al Aaraaf" as in his 1831 poem "Israfel," it is finally because Poe's "Arabians" lack bodies and historical being that they can be consigned to the realm of pure aestheticism.

A few months earlier, in an address to Congress on 6 December 1830, Jackson announced the near completion of the Indian removal policy, which was initiated by Jefferson, supported by James Monroe and John Adams, and passed by Congress in 1830:

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> It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government . . . in relation to *the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements* is approaching to a happy consummation. . . . To follow to the tomb the last of his race and to tread on the graves of extinct nations excites melancholy reflections. But true philanthropy reconciles the mind to these vicissitudes as it does to *the extinction of one generation to make room for another.* . . . What good man would prefer a country covered with forest and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms . . . ? (quoted in Blum et al., 232; emphasis added)

For all Poe's efforts to locate poetry and "the Arabians" in a world elsewhere, they are part of a social formation that includes U.S. Indian policy, the literary and pictorial convention of the dying Indian from Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) to Tompkins H. Matteson's painting *The Last of the Race* (1847), and a more global imperial movement that requires that the wandering tribes of the East die off in order to, as Jackson says, "make room for" the advance of "white" civilization. Whether it is a site of pure love, pure passion, or pure poetry, the Orient has no contemporary reality in Poe's early poems: it is not so much a place as it is a space for the imaginative figuration of white fear and white desire. As in Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* and Jackson's "melancholy" reflection on the Indian as "the last of his race," Poe's Orientals are figures of the past and myth with no historical presence or agency in the ongoing struggles of the present and the future.

Poe Spooks

"I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe," says the protagonist in the opening of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man.* Drawing on Ellison's pun on the double meaning of "spook" as the ghostly specters that haunt Poe's writings and the vernacular meaning of spook as a black person, in this section I want to examine the ways Orientalism intersects with Africanism and a whole series of social subordinations—of black to white, female to male, nature to spirit, body to mind, democratic mob to genteel aristocrat—in the formation of Poe's poetics of whiteness. More specifically, I want to argue that Poe's poetics of whiteness is, in effect, shaped and spooked by the historical presence of enslaved and laboring black bodies in the social landscape of America. Whereas Poe's Arabs existed as distant and bodiless figures of the past and myth,

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blacks had an immediate corporeal presence not only in the plantation economy of the South but also in the periodic acts of violent resistance, the ongoing fear of slave insurrection, and the state of public and private crisis, North as well as South, provoked by the institution of slavery in America.[6] Like Poe's *Mob*, "a giant in stature—insolent, rapacious, filthy" and "a foreigner, by the by" ("Mellonta Tauta," Mabbott, 3:1300), blacks were a part of the democratic and specifically racial history that his poetics of whiteness was formed against.[7]

Poems by Edgar A. Poe (1831), which was sold by subscription to West Point cadets and dedicated "To the U.S. Corps of Cadets," is introduced by a "Letter to Mr. ——— ———" in which Poe seeks for the first time in prose to articulate his theory of poetry as a realm of purely imaginative activity: "A poem," he asserts, "is opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having for its object an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only insofar as this object is attained" ("Letter to B——," 503). Written at a time when Poe was being disinherited from his expectations as Southern gentleman by his foster father, John Allan, Poe's "Letter," which is dated West Point, 1831, seeks to defend poetry and the poet as part of a cultural elite—a kind of aristocracy of the mind—against both the masses and his own diminished status as the son of actors. Against "the world's good opinion," as it is represented by the masses and the market, Poe sets what he calls "the Andes of the mind," a hierarchy of critical judgment and good taste that rises "ascendingly" from the fools on the bottom to "a few gifted individuals" and "the master spirit," the poet, who stands at the top ("Letter to B——," 501).

The dialectical relation between the "master spirit" of the poet and the body of the dark other in Poe's poetics is suggested by the oppositional structure of his "Letter." As in Poe's poetic dreamlands, poetry is defined against all that is corporeal, animal, dark, earthly: "Think of all that is airy and fairy-like," Poe writes, "and then of all that is hideous and unwieldy; think of his huge bulk, the Elephant! and then—and then think of the Tempest—the Midsummer Night's Dream—Prospero—Oberon—and Titania!" ("Letter to B——," 503). In Poe's Shakespearean definition of the purely imaginative space of poetry, the aesthetic becomes a line that marks the boundary between light and dark, Prospero and Caliban, civilization and its others. And yet, in the very process of marking this boundary, Poe simultaneously produces the fantasies of mixture and seepage, doubling and impurity, that are the obsessive subject of his work.

While *Poems* is still framed by an Orientalist structure, with "Romance" at the beginning, "Al Aaraaf" and "Tamerlane" at the end, and a

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new poem, "Israfel," added, in this volume Poe begins to accentuate three motifs that would become increasingly central to his poetry and poetics: the idealized figure of woman as emblem of pure beauty, pure love, and pure poetry in "To Helen"; fantasies of female violation by figures of darkness and dissolution in "Irene" (later "The Sleeper") and "A Paean" (later "Lenore"); and the specter of dark apocalypse in "The Doomed City" (later "The City of Sin" and "The City in the Sea"). I want to suggest that the increasing emphasis on these racially inflected motifs in Poe's 1831 *Poems*—which was published the same year that William Lloyd Garrison began publishing *The Liberator,* a weekly newspaper dedicated to the immediate abolition of slavery and universal enfranchisement of blacks—represents, at least in part, a response to the growing state of crisis provoked by the "hideous" presence of enslaved and potentially unruly black bodies within the virtuous and putatively white body of the American republic. During this "new post-1830 era in proslavery ideology," writes Drew Faust, "the slavery controversy not only became a matter of survival for the southern way of life; it served for Americans generally as a means of reassessing the profoundest assumptions on which their world was built."[8]

In "To Helen," Poe presents the ideal woman who is at the center of his aesthetics of whiteness. Associated with artifice, stasis, light, soul, distance, and "statue-like" perfection, Helen is not a flesh-and-blood woman but a dead woman—light, bright, white, and dead:

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

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

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

(Mabbott, 1:165–66)

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With its varied metrics, intricate patterns of rhyme and alliteration, and exquisite use of language, phrase, and image, "To Helen" is, in the words of Mabbott, "often regarded as the finest of Poe's lyrics" (Mabbott, 1:163). But what gets written out of critical assessments of the poem is that Helen, as a metonymic figure of ideal woman, beauty, and art, is also a representative of the Western ideal of whiteness as signified by the classical culture of Greece and Rome. This meaning is more evident in the 1831 version of the poem, in which the poet is brought home

> To the beauty of *fair* Greece
> And the grandeur of old Rome
> (Mabbott, 1:166; emphasis added)

Although critics continue to speculate about which woman inspired Poe's poem, Helen lacks any particular historical embodiment. With her "hyacinth hair," "classic face," and "Naiad airs," she is a representative of all women as white woman. As a perfect emblem of the Western ideal of white beauty, white value, and white art, Helen is the prototype of the impossibly pure, fair-haired, and blue-eyed maidens who begin to proliferate in Poe's poems and tales of the 1830s and 1840s.

In a specifically American context, "To Helen" marks an increasing fetishization of whiteness and purity—of woman, of beauty, of culture, of skin color, of blood—that comes in response to the growing historical fear of mixture, violation, and encroaching darkness. And yet, for Poe, as for the proslavery apologists, the ideal of white womanhood—of what W. J. Cash has called "the South's Palladium . . . Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds" (86)—breeds fantasies of defilement, mixture, and reversal that appear to undermine the sexual and racial taxonomies he seeks to enforce.[9] What is socially forbidden and excluded returns as an obsessive set of imaginative representations—the ghosts and spooks and black phantasms that haunt Poe's work.

Whereas Helen is located in a "Holy-Land" beyond the reach of bodily mixture and mortality, in "The Sleeper" (originally "Irene"), the "lady bright," as a figure of "All beauty," is exposed to the ghostly hauntings of darkness and night:

> Oh, lady bright! can it be right—
> This window open to the night?
> The wanton airs, from the tree-top,
> Laughingly through the lattice drop—
> The bodiless airs, a wizard rout,
> Flit through thy chamber in and out,

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And wave the curtain canopy
So fitfully—so fearfully—
Above the closed and fringéd lid
'Neath which thy slumb'ring soul lies hid,
That o'er the floor and down the wall,
Like ghosts the shadows rise and fall!
Oh, lady dear, hast thou no fear?
(Mabbott, 1:187)

Like the threat of violation by worms ("Soft may the worms about her creep!") and the "Triumphant" figure of the "black / And wingéd pannels" of the family vault "fluttering back" to engulf the female corpse at the end of the poem (Mabbott, 1:188), the "wanton airs," "wizard rout," and ghostly "shadows" of night are associated with bodily dissolution and the earthly processes of time, change, mortality, and death. Along with the terrorization of women and the specter of bodily dissolution, the fear of mixture, penetration, violation, and domination by harrowing figures of blackness and death is at the very sources of the mechanics of horror in Poe's work and, not surprisingly, at the symbolic center of the American cultural imaginary in the mid–nineteenth century.[10]

In "Lenore" (originally "A Paean"), the poet needs to kill off the "fair and debonair" heroine with "her yellow hair" in order to save woman, beauty, and the ideal of whiteness from the "fiends" of "damnéd Earth." The aristocratic lover, Guy de Vere, sings the death of his young bride as a "flight" away from earth into a "golden" world of "high estate," without history, without bodies, without blacks:

"Avaunt!—avaunt! to friends from fiends the indignant ghost is riven—
From Hell unto a high estate within the utmost Heaven—
From moan and groan to a golden throne beside the King of Heaven:—
Let *no* bell toll, then, lest her soul, amid its hallowed mirth
Should catch the note as it doth float up from the damnéd Earth!"
(Mabbott, 1:337)

Poe's fantasy of a spirit world beyond the reach of color or mixture is underscored in the 1831 version of the poem, in which the heroine's soul is lifted to the "untainted mirth" of angels in heaven. More explicitly than other dead-woman poems, "Lenore" suggests the relation between aesthetics and social desire in Poe's work: between the poet's desire for a

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pure white space of beauty and pleasure, signified by the death of woman, and the aristocratic desire for an alternative social order, signified by the "high estate" and "untainted mirth" of "utmost Heaven."

Like other Southern writers, Poe associated the ideal of fair womanhood with the social ideals—and health—of Southern culture. "The glory of the Ancient Dominion is in a fainting—is in a dying condition," he wrote in 1835, in a comment that suggests the relation between the dying women of his poems and the failing plantation economy of the South. Virginia had become "a type for 'the things that *have been*'" (*Works,* 8:119). Although critics have tended to read Poe's lyrics as forms of merely personal or perverse psychology, the tone of mournfulness in his poetry and its thematics of disintegration might also be read as a melancholic response to the loss of a whole way of Southern life, grounded in what Poe called "the laws of *gradation,*" under the pressure of democratic and specifically Northern industrial transformation. This elegiac tone is particularly evident in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" (1841), in which the poets as "master-minds" set themselves against Enlightenment reason, science, knowledge, and "the progress of civilization":

> [T]hese men, the poets, pondered piningly, yet not unwisely upon the ancient days . . . holy, august, and blissful days, when blue rivers ran undammed, between hills unhewn, into far forest solitudes, primaeval, odorous, and unexplored. . . . Meantime *huge smoking cities arose, innumerable.* Green leaves shrank before the hot breath of furnaces. *The fair face of Nature was deformed as with the ravages of some loathsome disease.* (Mabbott, 2:609–10; emphasis added)

Whereas in the poem "The Valley of Unrest" (originally "The Valley Nis") the poet's mournfulness about "the ancient days" is associated more generally with an "unquiet" landscape of "restlessness" and "perennial tears"—"Nothing there is motionless" (Mabbott, 1:195–96)—in "The City in the Sea" (originally "The Doomed City"), as in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," this melancholia is associated more specifically with the city, "the ravages" of the "fair face of Nature," and a hellish vision of modern apocalypse.

Drawn originally from a passage in an early version of "Al Aaraaf" describing the fallen city of Gomorrah, the landscape of death in "The City in the Sea" is represented in Orientalist images of "shrines and palaces and towers" and "Babylon-like walls":

> Lo! Death has reared himself a throne
> In a strange city lying alone

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Far down within the dim West,
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best
Have gone to their eternal rest.
There shrines and palaces and towers
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)
Resemble nothing that is ours.
Around, by lifting winds forgot,
Resignedly beneath the sky
The melancholy waters lie.

(Mabbott, 1:201)

Critics have usually identified the city with the legendary ruined cities of the Dead Sea, but Poe's reference to "a strange city" in "the dim West" also suggests the spiritual destiny of America as "a city upon a hill" (Winthrop, 49) and Enlightenment notions of the advance of civilization westward, which Poe associated with the rise of industry, the city, republican government, "omni-prevalent Democracy," and the emancipation of slaves (Mabbott, 2:610). Although the city lacks specific historical reference, here, as elsewhere in Poe's writings, the association of figures of blackness ("the long night-time of that town") with the vision of apocalyptic doom that closes the poem ("Down, down, that town shall settle hence. / Hell, rising from a thousand thrones") registers a widespread—and still prevalent—cultural fear of the fall of the West that will come as a result of some sort of catastrophic uprising of the dark other, associated with blackness, the satanic, the Orient, the city, and death. In 1845, Poe underscored the prophetic dimension of his poem when he published it under the title "A City in the Sea: A Prophecy." Unlike the apocalyptic warnings proliferated in other mid-century works, including most notably "the wrath of Almighty God" that closes Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 (629), Poe's prophecy is grounded not in fear of punishment *for* the contradiction of slavery in the American republic but rather in his fear that the logic of the American republic—founded on "the queerest idea conceivable . . . that all men are born free and equal" ("Mellonta Tauta," Mabbott, 3:1299)—would lead to the emancipation of slaves or, even worse, as Jefferson had predicted, to the extirpation of the white masters.

Nat Turner, Slave Insurrection, and Pure Poetry

Only a few months after Poe published "The Doomed City" in his 1831 *Poems*, his fear of some sort of apocalyptic uprising of blacks assumed

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palpable bodily form when, in August 1831, Nat Turner led the bloodiest slave insurrection in United States history in Southampton County, Virginia. "Whilst not one note of preparation was heard to warn the devoted inhabitants of woe and death," wrote Thomas R. Gray of Turner's revolt, "a gloomy fanatic was revolving in the recesses of his own dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind, schemes of indiscriminate massacre to the whites—schemes too fearfully executed as far as his fiendish band proceeded in their desolating march" (Gray, 4). The insurrection, which resulted in the death of sixty whites, the torture and execution of scores of innocent blacks, and a widespread hysteria about the possibility of further uprisings, led to a tightening of slave laws and an increasingly vigorous defense of the institution and culture of slavery throughout the South. Emancipation would lead to the South's "relapse into darkness, thick and full of horrors," wrote the proslavery apologist Thomas Dew in his influential defense of the institution of slavery following the debates about the future of slavery in the Virginia legislature in 1831–32 (Dew, "Abolition of Negro Slavery," 57).

It was into this heightened atmosphere of panic about the possibility of bloody slave insurrection and hysteria about the security and survival of the institutions and culture of the Old South that Poe entered when he returned to Richmond, where he would serve as editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* between 1835 and 1837.[11] In a much-disputed review of two proslavery books, *Slavery in the United States* by J. K. Paulding and *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* by William Drayton, which appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* under Poe's editorship in April 1836, the reviewer asserts the relation between the logic of progressive history, as signified by the French Revolution and the rights of man, and the specter of black emancipation, violent or otherwise.[12] Commenting on the irreligious fanaticism of the French Revolution, he warns: "[I]t should be remembered now, that in that war against property, the first object of attack was property in slaves; that in that war on behalf of the alleged right of man to be discharged from all control of law, the first triumph achieved was in the emancipation of slaves" (*Works,* 8:269). Alluding to the violent slave insurrection in San Domingo (Haiti), where blacks rose up, killed their white masters, and, in the name of liberty and individual rights, set up as an independent black nation in 1804, the reviewer calls attention to the "awful" significance of progressive history for the South: "The recent events in the West Indies, and the parallel movement here, give awful importance to these thoughts in our minds" (*Works,* 8:269). The South is haunted by "despair," "apprehensions," foreboding "superstitions," and "vague and undefined fears" in response to these "awful" events (*Works,*

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8:269), which appear to include the San Domingo slave insurrection, the "triumph" of Haiti against the French empire in 1804, Nat Turner's insurrection in 1831, the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies in 1834, the rise of the abolition movement in the 1830s in the United States, and the attack on "Domestic Slavery," which is "the basis of all our institutions" (*Works,* 8:269). Whether this review was written by Poe, as some believe, or by his friend Beverley Tucker, as a defense of "all our institutions" and "all our rights" written from the collective point of view of the South—and presumably reflecting the views of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and its editor—it shares Poe's own grim vision of democratic history as a triumph of blacks, blood, and dark apocalypse.

Haunted by similarly "vague and undefined fears" in response to "recent events in the West Indies, and the parallel movement here," Poe's poetry and tales of the 1830s and 1840s continue to be spooked by the terrifying logic of progressive history, the fear of black emancipation, the specter of blood violence, the ongoing atttack on the institution of slavery, an apocalyptic vision of the triumph of "blackness," and a flight away from history into fantasies of whiteness and purity: pure white woman, pure white beauty, pure white art, pure white poetics. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) makes explicit the phobia about the dark other, the fear of black insurrection, and the flight into an otherworldly space of pure whiteness that remain just beneath the surface in several of Poe's poems. Influenced by the specter of blood violence in both San Domingo and the American South, the "massacre" of whites by the natives of the all-black island of Tsalal leads Pym to assert: "In truth, from everything I could see of these wretches, they appeared to be the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, blood thirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men on the face of the globe" (*CW,* 1:201). Referred to interchangeably as savages, barbarians, desperadoes, and "warriors of the black skin" (*CW,* 1:186), the natives of Tsalal suggest the ways antiblack feeling intersects with a more generalized phobia about the racial other—Indian, Mexican, African, or other—in the American cultural imaginary.[13] Here as elsewhere in Poe's poems and tales, the narrative underscores the ways the terror of what Pym calls "the blackness of darkness" (*CW,* 1:175) drives the imaginative leap toward an otherworld of pure whiteness: Faced with the prospect of "brute rage," "inevitable butchery," and "overwhelming destruction" in the concluding passages of the story, the protagonists rush into the milky white embrace of a "shrouded human figure": "And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow" (*CW,* 1:206). But while the ending appears to promise entrance into a utopian world of "perfect whiteness," as the multiple and conflicted readings of *Pym*'s conclusion sug-

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gest, the precise nature of this "shrouded human figure" is at best ambiguous: Is it biblical apocalypse or metaphysical sign, utopian dream or perfect terror, pure race or pure hoax? It might be the "White Goddess," or mother, but it might also be the ghost of the all-black Nu-Nu returned from the dead.[14]

As in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* Poe's seemingly stable taxonomies of black and white would continue to be spooked by fantasies of mixture, seepage, revenge, and reversal. In "The Haunted Palace," which was initially published in April 1839 and incorporated a few months later into his story "The Fall of the House of Usher," the poet's dream of "perfect whiteness" is corroded by the "encrimsoned" spectacle of invasion and dark apocalypse that closes the poem. Associated with "the monarch Thought's dominion," the palace is, in its unsullied form, an emblem of white mind: it is fair, yellow, golden, pallid, luminous, wise, harmonious, beautiful, and, in the original version of the poem, "Snow-white" (Mabbott, 1:315, 317). The poem enacts the compulsive dream-turned-bad of mid-nineteenth-century American fantasy—the fall of white mind to the dark and "hideous throng":

> But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
> Assailed the monarch's high estate.
> . . . .
> And travellers, now, within that valley,
> Through the encrimsoned windows see
> Vast forms that move fantastically
> To a discordant melody,
> While, like a ghastly rapid river,
> Through the pale door
> A hideous throng rush out forever
> And laugh—but smile no more.
> (Mabbott, 1:316–17)

By the palace, Poe wrote Rufus Griswold in 1841, he meant "to imply a mind haunted by phantoms—a disordered brain" (*Letters,* 2:161). Whether "The Haunted Palace" is an allegory of individual mind or the haunted mind of America or the West, the "phantoms" that haunt it conjoin a terror of the dark other and the democratic mob with the specter of insurrection and blood violence and a more generalized fear of madness, dissolution, and the fall of Western civilization. In fact, the connection between Poe's "Haunted Palace" and the threat posed by the "hideous throng" of Negroes and lower classes in the American city was made quite explicitly by one of Poe's contemporaries, Henry B. Hirst,

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who parodied Poe in "The Ruined Tavern," a poem about a brawl in a Philadelphia tavern frequented by "tough Negroes," which includes the lines: "Never negro shook a shinbone / In a dance-house half so fair."[15]

Against this apocalyptic vision of the blackness and blood of progressive history—a vision that gets powerfully enacted in the story of the collapse of "the last of the ancient race of the Ushers" into "a black and lurid tarn" in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Mabbott, 2:404, 398)—Poe seeks to define poetry as a separate and purer realm, grounded in an ethos of social subordination, of men over women, imagination over body, and white over black. The "sentiment of Poesy" is, he wrote in a review of 1836, linked with the sentiment of reverence and the hierarchical "relations of human society—the relations of father and child, of master and slave, of the ruler and the ruled" (*CW,* 5:165). In other words, the "sense of the beautiful, of the sublime, and of the mystical" is "akin" to the slave's reverence for the white master: to aspire to Beauty is to aspire to God and thus affirm the "primal" subordination of slave to master (*CW,* 5:166). As in later modernist manifestos, including Ezra Pound's *Patria Mia* (1912) and the Southern Agrarians' *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), in Poe's "Colloquy of Monos and Una" (1841), aesthetic judgment and the poet's craft become forms of social salvation: "taste alone could have led us gently back to Beauty, to Nature, and to Life" and thus "purify" the "Art-scarred surface of the Earth" from the ravages of Enlightenment "knowledge," "progress," "universal equality," and "omni-prevalent Democracy" (Mabbott, 2:610, 611–12).[16]

In his essays and reviews of the 1830s and 1840s, Poe is on a kind of rescue mission to save both poetry and criticism from the "daily puerilities" of public opinion and the popular press (*CW,* 5:164), as well as from the black facts and blood violence of American history. The social and specifically racial shaping of Poe's aesthetics is particularly evident in his reviews of Longfellow and other abolitionist poets of New England. As Kenneth Hovey has argued, "Poe attacked Longfellow and the poets of the Northeast unsparingly for their double error of didacticism and progressivism." "Fearing the advancing truth of what he called 'fanatic[ism] for the sake of fanaticism,' he advocated a beauty no truth could invade, the 'poem written solely for the poem's sake'" (350, 349).

In an 1845 review of Longfellow's *Poems on Slavery* (1842), Poe cites the following lines from "The Warning" as an instance of "absolute truth":

> There is a poor, blind Sampson in this land,
> Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel,
> Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand,

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And shake the pillars of the common weal,
Till the vast temple of our Liberties,
A shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish lies.
(*Aristidean,* 133)

Poe blames Northern abolitionist poets for the "grim" prospect of blood violence against the white masters: "One thing is certain:—if this prophecy be *not* fulfilled, it will be through no lack of incendiary doggrel on the part of Professor LONGFELLOW and his friends" (*Aristidean,* 133).[17] At a time when there was an increasing emphasis on the social power of the word, especially the black word, in bringing about an end to the historical contradiction of slavery in the American republic, Poe seeks to strip poetry of its moral imperative, its "truth" claims, and its historical power by establishing "the radical and chasmal difference between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation" (Poe, "*Ballads,*" 248). And yet, for all Poe's emphasis on the formalist and proto-modernist values of "pure beauty" and unity of poetic effect—as opposed to "instruction" or "truth"—as the sole legitimate province of poetry (Poe, "*Ballads,*" 250), his aestheticism cannot be separated from his political judgment that Longfellow, like James Russell Lowell, is part of a Boston "junto" "of abolitionists, transcendentalists and fanatics" whose writings are "intended for the especial use of those negrophilic old ladies of the north" (*Aristidean,* 130, 131). It is, he writes, "very comfortable" for the professor "to sit at ease in his library chair, and write verses instructing the southerners how to give up their all with good grace, and abusing them if they will not" (*Aristidean,* 132). Poe's attack on the didacticism of Longfellow, Lowell, and others was not only a defense of pure poetry and the sanctity of art: it was also a defense of whiteness, slavery, and a whole way of Southern life against the increasing threat of Northern and particularly black defilement.

The Croak of the Raven and the Poetic Principle

"The croak of the raven is conveniently supposed to be purely lyric," wrote Hervey Allen in 1927 of the contemporary lack of concern with "what Mr. Poe had to say of democracy, science, and unimaginative literature" (xi). While recent critics have turned with renewed attention to the historical and specifically Southern contexts of Poe's writing, there is still a tendency to pass over Poe's poems as sources of "purely lyric" expression. And yet, as I have been trying to suggest, whether they are read as forms of aesthetic resistance or as perverse symbolic enactments that

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