Light and Dark in the Art of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

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Introduction

The focus of this paper is to explore the sources of the light and dark in Poe's work. To shape his art Poe drew, not only on the inner promptings of his own heart and mind, but on the currents and enthusiasms of his day, such as phrenology, mesmerism, alchemy, astronomy, and I will argue, Swedenborgianism. Edward Hungerford finds extensive use of the 'science' of phrenology in Poe's stories and critical essays.[1] Poe himself left no doubt of his use of mesmerism in his art, given his story entitled 'Mesmeric Revelations' published in 1844. Randall A. Clack makes a case for Poe's awareness and use of an alchemical system of symbols in many of his poems and stories.[2] It should also be noted that Poe was well versed in the science of his day, due in part to the many book reviews he wrote.[3]

The above discussion is not exhaustive either with regard to currents that Poe chose to employ in his art or regarding the scholarly discussion of them. Given the large body of Poe's work, one might find other currents and enthusiasms in his corpus. One that is mentioned from time to time by Poe scholars, that to my knowledge has not yet been explored is the possible influence of Emanuel Swedenborg's (1699-1772) works on Poe's art. I am unaware of any attempt to explore his influence on or relationship to Poe and his work.

In exploring the possible influence of Swedenborg's thought on Poe, if it does indeed exist, I would simply like to add it to the mix of mid-nineteenth century currents that he drew on in the creation of his

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[1] Edward Hungerford, 'Poe and Phrenology,' in *American Literature,* Volume 2, Issue 3 (Nov., 1930), pp209-231.

[2] Randall A. Clack, 'Strange Alchemy of Brain: Poe and Alchemy' in Eric W. Carlson *A Companion to Poe Studies*, (London, 1996) pp367-389.

[3] For two different interpretations of Poe's scientific awareness see Barbara Cantalupo, 'Eureka: Poe's Novel Universe' in Eric W. Carlson, *op cit,* pp322-366 and the forward by Sir Patrick Moore to the 2002 Hesperus Press version of *Eureka,* London.

art. How privileged a position it may hold remains to be seen. In order to make my case I would like to briefly discuss Emanuel Swedenborg and his thought, and then detail what is known about Poe and Swedenborg's works.[1] After developing this background, it would be useful to see what it tells us about Poe and his art. First, it may help illuminate the shifting nature of 'the dark' in Poe's art from gothic horror to psychological terror; and second it may clarify his vision of 'the light' as found in his religiously informed tales and his cosmological works.

Emanuel Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg was an eighteenth century Swedish scientist, civil servant, and philosopher who, in mid-life, claimed he was called by God to reveal the secrets of heaven and hell, and to publish them. When he died in 1772, he had published eighteen different theological works. Some of the titles of these works are *Heavenly Secrets* (1749-1756), *Heaven and Hell* (1758), *The Last Judgment* (1758), *Earths in the Universe* (1758), *Divine Love and Wisdom* (1763), *Apocalypse Revealed* (1766), *Love in Marriage* (1768), and *True Christian Religion* (1771). Although Swedenborg never attempted to establish a church based on his writings, others did. In 1787, a church was founded in London, England. Books of his writings were brought to the United States in 1784 and were sent in 1788 to Botany Bay. A church organization was established in the United States in 1817 and a congregation in Australia in 1837. Although church membership has never been particularly high, interest in his works has been notable, particularly in the United States, England and Europe.

Readers of his writings in nineteenth century America include important literary, cultural and political figures. These included the essayist and public intellectual Ralph Waldo Emerson, the poet Walt

[1] In the original version of this paper I also had a section on 'Poe and Swedenborgians.' In it I provided detailed accounts of the relationships between George Bush (1796-1859), Thomas Holly Chivers (1809-1858), and Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910) and Poe. Each of these men had intimate knowledge of Swedenborg's writngs and Bush and Davis were also involved in mesmerism. These sections have been cut in this version of the paper to meet the length criterion.

Whitman, President Abraham Lincoln, the founder of Mormonism Joseph Smith, the sculptor Hiram Powers, and the landscape artist George Inness.[1]

Swedenborg's Teachings

While, of course, not all of these people were attracted to exactly the same concepts and ideas found in Swedenborg's revelatory writings, nonetheless each found something that resonated with their worldview. Some were attracted to his new understanding of human nature, some to his view of the dynamic and interactive nature of spirituality, and others to his discussion of the correspondence between the nature and spirit.

According to Swedenborg, the spiritual world is the world of causes and the natural world is the world of effects. These worlds are intimately connected to each other, despite the fact that they appear independent. With few exceptions human beings cannot see into the spiritual world, nor can spirits see into the natural world. But what happens in one world does affect the other. Every individual lives in both worlds simultaneously. Spirits connect themselves with people in this world, and all people have what Swedenborg calls associate spirits. These associate spirits are balanced between good and evil spirits, maintaining the spiritual freedom of every individual in the natural world.

The spiritual world is the world of life, while natural world is realm of death. Spirit is living, while nature is dead. Human beings are born natural with a capacity to become spiritual. Human beings are born with an evil heredity, but are endowed by the Divine, by God with freedom to choose good. Evil is defined as the love of self and the world, and good is defined as the love of God and the neighbour. Evil people use the things of the world and others to enhance and enrich themselves. Good people use the things of the world and themselves to

[1] In England, among others, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her husband Robert were readers of Swedenborg as was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In Australia Alfred Deakin was a reader.

enhanced and enrich the lives of others. Evil people are self-focused, and good people are other-focused.

Every individual has a soul, a mind, and a body. The soul is from God, the body is from the world and the mind is formed and shaped by what the individual loves. The mind operates according to spiritual principles, and the body operates according to natural principles. Time and space are natural qualities, while state and extension are spiritual qualities. The soul animates the body and the mind. The body clothes the spirit in this world, and the mind acquires a spiritual body after death in the spiritual world.

People in this world can dissemble and act contrary to what they love, but in the spiritual world what a person loves creates his or her external world. There we are precisely what we love; the mind of each spirit shapes his or her environment. It appears to be as substantial as the natural world, but it is continually changing to reflect the changes of state of the individual. In the spiritual world our inner world and our outer world correspond and make one. Loving heavenly things creates a delightful, heavenly world; and desiring evil things creates a dark, destructive world. Good loves make a heaven, while evil loves create a hell. No one in Swedenborg's afterlife is cast into hell or elected into heaven. Every individual after death chooses which society he or she loves or is most compatible with.

In Swedenborg's theology every person truly and freely fashions his or her eternal home while here on earth. In that sense every person is an artist, and that may be one reason why Swedenborg has appealed to so many poets, novelists, sculptors, and painters. In addition his concept of correspondences opened up the natural world to a more interior, spiritual interpretation. It was a key that unlocked nature, and unlocked the mind. Nature could be read more deeply, and the mind became the locus of human action.

Poe and Swedenborg's works

In his collected works Poe makes one specific mention of Swedenborg and his work *Heaven and Hell.* This mention occurs in his tale 'The Fall of the House of Usher' written and published in 1839. It is listed with other books that the narrator and Usher had read. I quote:

> Our books, the books which, for years, had formed no small portion of the mental existence of the invalid, were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of phantasm. We pored together over such works as the 'Ververt et Chartruse' of Gresset; the 'Belphegor' of Machiavelli, the 'Heaven and Hell' of Swedenborg; the 'Subterranean Voyage of Nicholas Klimm' by Holberg; the 'Chiromancy' of Robert Flud, of Jean D'Indagine and of De la Chambre; the 'Journey of Blue Distance' of Tieck; and the 'City of the Sun' of Campanella.[1]

According to Edward H. Davidson in his *Poe: A Critical Study*, Poe not only mentions Swdenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, he had read it. Davidson writes:

> In 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839) we have an early exposition, and one of the best, of this psychic drama, a summary of Poe's ideas and methods of investigating the self in disintegration. The story was a study of the tripartite division and identity of the self. It was, to go even further, an attempted demonstration of the theory that spirit is extended through and animating all matter, a theory confirmed by the books which Poe, and Usher, had read: Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*, and Robert Flud's *Chiromancy*, to name only a few listed in the narrative, all of which consider the material world as a manifestation of the spiritual. From the opening sentence of the story we have the point-for-point identification of the external world with the human constitution.[2]

'The Fall of the House of Usher' is the most popular of Poe's short stories and its publication brought, 'positive critical attention to Poe as

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe: 'The Fall of the House of Usher' in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, with an introduction and explanatory notes by Arthur Hobson Quinn, texts established, with bibliographic notes by Edward H. O'Neill, (New York, 1992) p271.

[2] Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study*, (Cambridge, MA, 1957) p196.

a serious writer'.[1] As a result the respectable publisher, Lea and Blanchard, decided to publish a collection of Poe's short stories. In the discussion of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' that follows, Sova states that 'The story departs from the usual gothic fare in its emphasis upon introspection rather than action and incident. . . The effect produced is not one of physical terror but of the psychological, which requires the reader to enter Roderick's mind and to join him in fearing the onslaught of insanity'.[2]

If Davidson is to be believed, in this section we have established the fact Poe had read *Heaven and Hell*, prior to writing 'The Fall of the House of Usher.' It is important to now turn to 'The Fall of the House of Usher' in order to address the question of whether there is any additional evidence of Poe's reading Swedenborg in the work itself, other than the citation or in any subsequent works that he produced.

Signs of Swedenborg in the Works of Poe

If Davidson is right and Poe read Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, it would appear that he read it in 1839. Is it possible that this work by Swedenborg could have stimulated Poe's shift from Gothic horror to psychic terror? To answer that question first, we need to explore the structure of dread in Poe's earlier tales to see if they do, indeed, have a different form than it does in 'The Fall of the House of Usher.' And second, we need to examine some of Swedenborg's specific teachings found in *Heaven and Hell*. Do they resonate with the psychology of Poe's protagonists and do they colour Poe's images?

'Ligeia'

Perhaps the best tale to use to explore 'the before' is 'Ligeia.' The story was first published in September of 1838 in the *Baltimore American Museum*, about a year before 'The Fall of the House of Usher.' 'Ligeia' makes a good test case, because it is one of Poe's most

[1] Dawn B. Sova, *Edgar Allan Poe A to Z.* (New York, 2001) p86.
[2] Sova, *op cit*, p87.

critically acclaimed works and is also one of his personal favourites.[1] Like many of Poe's tales, 'Ligeia' combines three themes common to many of Poe's stories: a mysterious and beautiful woman, a grieving, unstable narrator, and a horrific resurrection. The narrator marries the pale, raven-haired beauty with brilliant black eyes and long jetty lashes. Ligeia is identified with the epigraph that prefaces the story, 'And the will therein lieth, which dieth not'.[2] Ligeia's will gave her an intensity of thought and action, which resulted in her immense learning. She guided her husband, the narrator, through the chaotic world of metaphysics leading him on toward the goal of wisdom. She illuminated the mysteries of transcendentalism, to him, as he groped at it like a child benighted. But, in time, her eyes shone less brightly, and she read less frequently the books which contained the secrets of the world. 'Ligeia grew ill. . . I saw that she must die, I struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azurel. And the struggles of the passionate wife were, to my astonishment even more energetic than my own.'[3] Ligeia wrestled with the Shadow in her wild longing for the life that was fleeing so rapidly away. 'It is this wild longing, it is this vehemence of desire for life, but for life, that I have no power to portray, no utterance capable of expressing'.[4]

Here it is interesting to note that in the first edition of this story, the poem, 'The Conqueror Worm' that soon follows the narrator's failed powers of expression in the version of 'Ligeia' found in *The Complete Tales* was, in fact, not included. Thus in the 1838 version of the story, the tale moves quickly to her death. Poe writes, 'She died: and I, crushed into the very dust with sorrow, could no longer endure the lonely desolation of my dwelling in the dim decaying city by the Rhine'.[5]

The narrator, then, after months of aimless wandering, buys an abbey in the remote wilds of England. Poe writes,

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[1] *Ibid,* p133.
[2] Poe, *op cit,* p224.
[3] *Ibid,* p226.
[4] *Loc cit.*
[5] *Ibid,* p228.

> The gloomy and dreary grandeur of the building, the almost savage aspects of the domain, the many melancholy and time-honoured memories connected with both, had much in unison with the feelings of utter abandonment which had driven me into that remote and unsocial region of the country.[1]

Here, in this setting, the narrator takes another bride, the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine. Addicted to opium, the narrator, within days begins to loath his bride 'with a hatred belonging more to demon that to man.'[2] Rowena, too, falls sick, and as the narrator rushes to revive her with a goblet of wine, He sees 'three or four large droplets of ruby coloured fluid fall into the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room.' But he cannot be sure because after all 'it could have been the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour'.[3]

Rowena dies, and while the narrator gazes upon her body, he hears and sees strange things. Poe writes, 'Colour had flushed up within the cheeks. Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficient energetic expression I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat'.[4]

Rowena seems to come to life, but doubt begins to arise in the brain of the narrator:

> there was a mad disorder in my thoughts, a tumult unappeasable. Could it indeed be the living Rowena who confronted me? Could it, indeed be Rowena at *all. . . but had she grown taller since her malady*? What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought?[5]

At this point the narrator rushes toward the body, and reaches her feet and is astonished to see

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[1] *Loc cit.*
[2] *Loc cit.*
[3] *Ibid,* p231.
[4] *Ibid,* p232.
[5] *Ibid,* p233.

> huge masses of dishevelled hair; it was blacker than the raven wings of the midnight! And now slowly opened the eyes of the figure which stood before me. 'Here then at least' I shrieked aloud, 'can I never, can I never be mistaken, these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes, of my lost love, of the Lady, of the Lady Ligeia.'[1]

It is not only Poe who liked this story, but the critics as well. As documented in Sova, the British critic and playwright George Bernard Shaw said,

> The story of the Lady Ligeia is not merely one of the wonders of literature: it is unparalleled and unapproached. There is really nothing to be said about it: we others simply take off our hats and let Mr. Poe go first.[2]

While the story may work intellectually, and visually or externally, it is flat emotionally. We observe, just as the narrator observes, he tells and we see, but he does not show us the madness, he tells it to us, he describes it, he does not demonstrate it. The painting is voluptuous but its passion is distant from the reader.

'The Fall of the House of Usher'

It is otherwise in 'The Fall of the House of Usher.' Here we move inside the mind of the narrator. The pictures he paints give rise to sensations and feelings in the reader, because they belong to the narrator. We identify with the narrator in this tale, we sense what he senses, we feel what he feels because we are privy to the various thoughts and speculations of his mind. In this story we are inside looking out, in 'Ligeia' we are outside looking in.[3]

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[1] *Ibid,* p233.

[2] Sova, *op cit,* p133.

[3] It might be useful to point out that the use of alchemical symbols used in this story aptly discussed in Randall A. Clack's article 'Strange Alchemy of Brain: Poe and Alchemy' in *A Companion to Poe Studies*, edited by Eric C. Carlson, (Westport & London, 1996) pp367-390.

'The Fall of the House of Usher' begins with the narrator approaching the House of Usher on horseback. A scene, similar to the abbey in 'Ligeia' is described, but the introspection of the narrator in 'The Fall' transforms it, and the reader is intimately drawn into the setting. Poe writes:

> at length [I] found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was, but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me, upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain, upon the bleak walls, upon the vacant eye-like windows, upon a few rank sedges, upon a few white trunks of decayed trees, with an utter depression of soul, which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium, the bitter lapse into every-day life, the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart, an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it, I paused to think, what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?[1]

There can be little doubt that we see the mind of the narrator in action. In this tale, the focus is placed on the narrator's perceptions and reflections. While, it would be possible to go through the entire tale of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' to amplify the point, I believe this paragraph shows, as the story unfolds, Roderick Usher through the mind of the narrator.

However, another key feature of this story is the fact that the exterior house mirrors the psycho-emotional or spiritual state of its occupants. As the narrator says,

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[1] Poe, *op cit*, pp262-263.

> Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principle feature seem to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation . . . Beyond, this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely discovered fissure, which extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zig-zag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.[1]

After the dreaded events of the future, came to pass that Roderick had so deeply feared, his twin sister's living death, and then his own in one embrace, the fall of the house corresponds to and mirrors the death of its lineage. The fleeing narrator glances back and describes the scene,

> While, I gazed, the fissure rapidly widened – there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind – the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight – my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder – there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters-and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher'.[2]

The destruction of the house of Usher is apocalyptic, the walls rushing asunder, the tumultuous shouting, the voice of a thousand waters. The fall is total, for with the fall are destroyed body, mind and soul. Meyers, writes that 'Usher identifies with his rotting house, he is passionately absorbed in it, and believes that its very stones have human feelings'.[3] He continues:

> The House of Usher is brought down by psychological as well as architectural stress; and the deeper significance of the story is

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[1] *Ibid* pp264-265.
[2] Poe, *op cit*, pp276-277.
[3] Jeffrey Meyers, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*, (New York, 2000) p112.

> hidden below the dazzling surface . . . D. H. Lawrence was the first to perceive that the story portrayed the unconscious impulses of the characters; that Poe 'was an adventurer into the vaults and cellars and horrible underground passages of the human soul.[1]

Davidson elaborates on this idea:

> As so frequently happens in Poe's writing, inner moods and ideas are consistently externalised; the city itself, the labyrinthian streets, the noise, and garish colours-these are the pictorial and frenzied manifestations of states of mind which would presuppose that the world is a mirrored chiaroscuro of the human psyche . . . for him 'the invisible spheres' were not 'formed in fright.' Evil or good is each man's right and his willing; each one saves or damns himself. But the ultimate reason why man chooses or will one or the other is far beyond anyone's knowing; the sinner is compulsively driven by some motive to be malignant, by some maggot in the brain which he cannot anticipate or understand but the penalty of which he is more than willing to suffer. The need to do evil Poe placed in the idea of 'perversity,' man's tendency to act 'for the reason that he should not.[2]

Drawing on Davidson, who observed that man's perversity was Poe's rationale for man's moral system, Poe seemed content to place the faculty in man alone and not in nature or in God. What can be found in Swedenborg's teachings in *Heaven and Hell* that could be a source for or echo Poe's vision and the understanding of him by his critics.[3] One example is found in number 90,

> Since a human being is both a heaven and an earth in lest form in the image of the greatest (see n. 57 above), there is a spiritual world and a natural world within us. The deeper elements, which belong

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[1] *Loc cit.*

[2] Davidson, *op cit*, pp192-193.

[3] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, trans. George Dole (West Chester PA,1979). There are many other numbers that could be used to show the similarity between Poe and Swedenborg

> to our minds and relate to our intelligence and willing, constitute our spiritual world, while the outer elements which belong to our bodies and relate our senses and actions, constitute our natural world. Anything that occurs in our natural world (that is, in our bodies and their senses and actions) because of something in our spiritual world (that is, because of our minds and their intelligence and willing) is called something that corresponds.

George Dole, the translator of *Heaven and Hell*, has written a book based on it entitled *Freedom and Evil: A Pilgrim's Guide to Hell.* There are several passages from his book that illuminate some of the themes in Poe that resonate with Swedenborg's teachings briefly outlined above,

> If resentment is inherently ugly, if brutality is inherently bestial, then to the mind that enjoys resentment or bestiality grotesque features can look handsome. If home is where the heart is, if money can't buy happiness, then to the mind that treasures opulence, its spiritual hovels will look like palaces and its spiritual poverty like treasures of gold or jewels.[1]

In discussing what hell might look like, Dole writes:

> The houses would be rugged, with shuttered windows and heavy doors . . .There would certainly be many houses lying in ruins, causalities of the latest insurrection . . . There would be no beauty to the aridity of the landscape - it would be simply bleak, colourless, and harsh.[2]

Dole adds to all this by saying that we are creating our hell, moment by moment, as our whims change so our worlds change. It is quite simply a world were our wishes come true. He goes on to say, 'of course it is not quite that simple because we are not alone. Everyone in our world is a creator, as well, which means that there are cosmic conflicts, vast

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[1] George F. Dole, *Freedom and Evil: A Pilgrim's Guide to Hell*, (West Chester, PA, 2001) p120.
[2] *Ibid*, pp134-135.

sky-sweeping battles in which the odds are against us. Occasionally we may prevail and our illusions may invade the mind of our opponents; but more often we find ourselves to be the martyrs'.[1]

He concludes by telling us that,

> Again and again we are reminded that the 'other world' is as close to us as our own thoughts and feelings. It is the realm of our unseen motivations. It is the geography of our own relationships, the space in which we move closer to each other in mutual understanding and affections or farther from each other in mutual misunderstanding and suspicion, regardless of our location in this physical world.[2]

The highest usefulness of Swedenborg's pictures of hell is not to terrify us with fears about the future but to alert us to threats to our souls in the present. What does our egocentricity look like when the masks are stripped off? Are we the handsome, dramatic devils of *Paradise Lost*, or the small minded, venomous, deformed creatures who flee from the light lest our actual bestiality be exposed to view? There is really no point in deceiving ourselves.[3] It would appear to me that Poe draws on the correspondence between mind and body found in the teachings of Swedenborg and the psychological and creative qualities with which our inner spirits are endowed to make and shape their own world. 'The Fall of the House of Usher' is a story that takes place in a hellish landscape where the external world is in the image of the spirit of Roderick's mind. The terror is the terror of a world where the all the nuances of mind are found depicted socially and architecturally. It is so frightening because there is no mask, the inner and outer world merge and make one. Most of the time, we live in a world of masks and disguises and we often prefer it to one in which the inner reality defines everything.

The Light

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[1] *Ibid*, p142.
[2] *Ibid*, p146.
[3] *Loc cit.*

Poe did not only draw on Swedenborg in his depiction of the dark, but he also draws on it in his depiction of the light. His series on the question of the Universe addresses questions that Swedenborg addressed. The first in this series is 'The Island of the Fay,' (1841), the second is 'Mesmeric Revelation,' (1844), and the third is 'Eureka' (1848).

The most clearly 'Swedenborgian' of these is 'Mesmeric Revelation.' And it is here that Poe reveals, the 'faith' that is his own. In this story, the Poe scholar, Arthur Hobson Quinn, tells us that Poe

> was ahead of his time, as usual, in his conception of the relations between God and man . . . In this story, he rejected the idea of the absorption of the individual in God. This would be 'an action of God returning upon itself, a purposeless and futile action. Man is a creature. Creatures are thoughts of God. It is the nature of thought to be irrevocable'[1]

In another discussion of 'Mesmeric Revelation,' presented later in his critical biography of Poe, Quinn tells us that this story is 'an expression of Poe's certainty of man's free will and the persistence of his individuality after death'.[2] While God is perfect matter, according to Poe, complexity and substantiality are necessary because pain is reality and is necessary to happiness. That is, because as Poe says, 'All things are either good or bad by comparison. *Positive* pleasure is a mere idea. To be happy at any one point we must have suffered at the same'.[3] So Poe concludes that 'The pain of the primitive life of Earth is the sole basis of the bliss of the ultimate life of Heaven'.[4]

The tale 'Mesmeric Revelation' permitted Poe to explore and share radical ideas that, when presented as religion, might have disturbed people, but when clothed as fiction could lead to Van Kirk's

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[1] Arthur Hobson Quinn: *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography,* (Baltimore and London, [1941] 1998) pp391-392.
[2] *Ibid,* pp419.
[3] *Ibid,* p419.
[4] *Loc cit.*

experience, when at the end he wore a 'bright smile irradiating all his features'.[1]

This work was written by Poe when his wife was still alive. It contains an optimism that perhaps left him at her death, even though he expressed the idea that her death made life easier to bear. It may have been easier to bear precisely because there was no more zig-zag between hope and despair. After her death perhaps he found only desolation. On the other hand, however, this is not to say that no similarities between Swedenborg Cosmology and Poe's Cosmogony are found in 'Eureka'. George Bush certainly alludes to them in his review of the book.

One other thing needs to be said about Poe and his possible Swedenborgian elements, and that is that so many writers that themselves were touched by Swedenborg found Poe congenial both stylistically and substantively. The American poet Walt Whitman and the French author Charles Baudelaire are two such examples and there are others.

In conclusion, I trust my paper has opened the door to now consider Swedenborg as one possible source among many for the magic and mystery, and the light and dark, in the art of Edgar Allan Poe.

[1] Poe, *op cit*, p550.