UNIQUE COLOR SYMBOLOGY IN

POE'S TALES OF TERROR

By

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Bachelor of Arts

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Tahlequah, Oklahoma

1970

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 1978

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PREFACE

Previous studies have understood and interpreted Poe's color use in psychological or traditional terms. Poe, however, was a conscientious craftsman whose every word, as he himself said, contributed to the total effect of each of his tales. His color use is, therefore, unique in each tale, as each story differs from the others in content and effect. This paper, therefore, seeks to establish Poe's artistry and underscore the significant role color symbolism, specifically, and pictorialism, more generally, contribute to the effectiveness of his Tales of Terror.

I want to thank Dr. Mary Rohrberger for inspiring me to pursue this topic and offering helpful advice during its developmental stages. I am also appreciative of the counsel and encouragement of Dr. Jennifer Kidney and the suggestions of Dr. Clinton Keeler.

I am especially indebted to Ms. Barbara Priboth for helping me type the first draft, Ms. Charlene Fries for typing the final copy, and to Ms. Anita Evans for translating Lotte Menz from the German.

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Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe admonished skillful literary artists, in his "Review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales," to compose in such a way as to create a single effect in each tale: "In the whole of the composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design."[1] His maxim has been quoted to the point of cliché, but its elaboration in the succeeding sentence has been relatively ignored: "And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted. . ." (XI, p. 108). Poe's marriage of the process of literary creation with that of pictorial composition may, in the context of his criticism, seem a merely fortuitous figure of speech. However, the connection of pictorialism to his writings, as Nina Baym[2] and Sharon Furrow have noted,[3] is more fundamental than has yet been recognized. One clear manifestation of this link can be detected in Poe's use of colors.

Recent scholars have been inclined to take Poe's accounts of methodical creation quite literally, but such credibility has not always been granted him. Psychological inquiries of the early 1900s capitalized on Poe's aberrant personality. Out of the vogue of this era come two color studies listed by Sigmund Skard in his 1946 survey, "The Use of Color in Literature."[4] Both are biased toward the psychoanalytical interpretation of color in Poe's works. Die sinnlichen Elemente bei E. A. Poe und ihr Eifluss auf Technik und Stil des Dichters (1915), a book by Lotte Menz contains a chapter on Optics which (according to Skard) "traces drug

addiction in the color visions of Poe."[5] Some other studies have joined Poe and Coleridge in this context.[6] But it is to Wilson O. Clough's study entitled "The Use of Color Words by Edgar Allen [sic] Poe" that Skard refers in his evaluative statement: "The most interesting phenomenon of the whole period is perhaps the peculiar 'school' linked to the names of E. A. Poe and Baudelaire who are closely related in their use of color. A series of new and traditional features is welded by them into a mystical personal color style which has a general Romantic character but grips the reader with a magic charm of its own."[7] Skard's comments are pertinent to Poe, alone, but not to Baudelaire. Skard has apparently been overreliant in this matter.

Another source, Edgar Allen Poe: A Bibliography of Criticism, 1827-1967, gives Benjamin Mather Woodbridge as a contributor to color research. "The Supernatural in Hawthorne and Poe," however, does nothing more than equate color use with "passion and maddened horror" in one of its concluding sentences.[8] And although Harry Levin has dealt with the subject of Poe's color use in The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, his contemporary study is based on Clough's.

Wilson O. Clough's article, therefore, has functioned as the definitive criticism on the topic of Poe's color use since 1930. To accept Clough as an authority, however, is unwarranted. Clough, no doubt, recognized the need for a color study of Poe's work; his research methods unfortunately place him in the school of psychological literary interpretation initiated by the German psychologist, Karl Groos.[9]

The Groos analysts sought to obtain empirical evidence of a writer's color preferences, and, therefore, psychological state, by reducing his color use to statistical information which could be grouped and

analyzed. Groos methods, however, were short-lived and unpopular. According to Skard, "The critics found in Groos exactly that identification of impression and expression and that mechanical standardization against which the new schools were warning most energetically. In consequence, a number of remarks reflected a general suspicion of color research as such."[10] Perhaps suspicion of color research combined with anti-German World War II sentiments explain the neglect of this topic from 1930 to 1967. At any rate, Clough's conclusions are not representative of Poe's methodology, nor do they exhaust the subject. "The Use of Color Words" is, indeed, a pioneer venture, but its erroneous color tabulations and biased direction disqualify it as an authoritative source. Because of the entrenched position of the latter, however, a more detailed account of its deficiencies must be presented before new criteria for judging Poe's color use can be established.

Refutation of Clough

At the outset, Clough had difficulty discerning Poe's color intent because Poe's stories contain many synesthetic words. Clough, consequently, settled upon Roget's Thesaurus as an arbiter, "despite its admitted limitations."[11] His analysis and tabulation through consultation of Roget produced ten colors: red and brown, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, purple, white and gray, black, and variegated. The first problem is, therefore, one of definition. Black, white, and gray are not "colors." They are values, gradations of light and shade that model objects in "chiaroscoro," a popular word of the time with which Poe was familiar.[12] Harry Levin has pointed out, "To be strict, as he [Poe] now and then liked to be, black and white were not really colors at all; and

if white was rather a synthesis of all colors, black was 'the no-color.'"[13] Color, in its Goethean sense, is synonymous with hue. Poe knew this, but sometimes used the terms "hue" and "color" loosely in contexts which would suggest blackness or whiteness, so the distinction is not a rigid one.

If, on strict grounds, however, the two columns "White and Gray" and "Black" were removed from Clough's list of colors, red would become the color Clough designates as that frequently used. Reds, illogically, have been lumped with browns, muddy blends of primary and secondary colors. Such a grouping makes the actual prevalence of red questionable. In addition prophyry has been counted as a variegated color, although it means deep red or purple,[14] and purples have been divided from violets even though they denote the same hue. For these reasons, Clough's tables which itemize the number of times a color is used (Table I), the frequency with which a color occurs (Table II), and the percentage of each color in a given group of stories (Table III) are confused; any conclusion drawn from such information is bound to be specious.

Critics who have based their studies on his findings have, perhaps, been subtly misled. Haldeen Braddy, for instance, remarks: "The three colors which dominate his art, red, black, and white, bespeak respectively three aspects of Poe's decadence of the moribund: escaping life blood, dark rot, and deathly pallor."[15] Whatever the truth of her statement, she may be ill-advised in the use of the term "color" and perhaps in citing dominance. Clough's statement that the "customary color associations with Poe's work" are "those of pallid figures against a black background, across which are shot occasional streamers of crimson and

red" (p. 605), is true in a sense and much quoted by critics; some of his other conclusions, however, should not be.

Clough said he would draw no conclusions, yet he has drawn them. His intent was supposedly limited: "It is not, however, within the scope of this paper to do more than call attention to variations in the color tabulation, facts still of dubious significance one way or the other, and to suggest that there may be here some material of interest to the student of Poe's psychology" (p. 605). But Clough, nevertheless, suggests that black, white, gray, and red were Poe's favorite colors. Further, Clough attempts to influence the research of future critics by his direction to students of "Poe's psychology."

Clough's assumption that personal preferences and Spenglerian (otherwise known as traditional) color associations were the basis for Poe's color selections prompted him to correlate Poe's liking for individual colors with the frequency of their use. This interpretation of the data could be plausible only if one credits the premise: that Poe's selection of colors and color values were subjective and subconscious. The notion, however, is opposed to the conscious artistry and aesthetic purpose Poe espoused.

Also counter to Clough's interpretation is one of Clough's own sources, Fred Lewis Pattee, who indicated that Poe's color use was unlike that of his contemporaries who were writing in the same gothic romance genre. "Everywhere it is the work of an artist who plans and proportions and who shapes all to the culmination. Such a craftsman naturally will be out of sympathy with those about him, with the crude color-splashing and overdone effects and straggling proportions of the lady's book fiction everywhere so popular."[16]

Hawthorne and Melville, those great American gothic contemporaries whom Levin in his Power of Blackness has yoked with Poe, used carefully planned black, white, and color symbology, but their uses were more reliant upon traditional associations of the colors and color values external to their works. This reliance is evident in Levin's discussion of particular works.

"For Hawthorne," Levin says, "black and white more or less conventionally symbolize theological and moral values, for Poe, whose symbols claim to be actualities, they are charged with basic associations which are psychological and social."[17] Levin understands Hawthorne's opposition of the reveler's "orgiastic color-scheme" in "The Maypole of Merry Mount" with the gloomy attire of the Puritans as "a balance between love and death."[18] Similarly, he notes that the color scheme of The Scarlet Letter is arresting because the flaming red A is set off against the usual background of somber blacks and puritan grays,"[19] an obvious sexual symbol. Levin also calls Hawthorne's "endless interplay between black and white" a manifestation of the felix culpa and, therefore, a resolution of the conflict between good and evil.[20] His explications, then, clearly indicate that a color symbology outside Hawthorne's works has been invoked.

In Melville's Moby Dick, Levin offers the same sort of symbology but in reverse to illustrate the ambiguity of appearances. "The basic premise of the Manicheans, that the devil may be no less powerful than God, is entertained as a working hypothesis; while the problem of which side is good and which is evil, though presented in terms of black and white, is by no means oversimplified."[21] Further, "The admixture of bloods, the fraternization of races, the demonstration that blackness

and whiteness are not antithetical but complementary," Levin explains, merely works against archetypal color meanings; Moby Dick depends on the reader's knowledge of traditional color symbols.[22]

Although the colors and color values in Poe's stories may sometimes operate as common symbols, his usages have a primary artistic and individual meaning, intrareferentially, within the context of his tales. Poe's colors and noncolors, unlike Hawthorne's and Melville's, do not symbolize moral or theological concepts or even psychological and social ones as Levin says--they are chosen mainly to operate interreferentially as internal symbol or for effect. And because color words are vividly sensate terms, Poe has carefully controlled them; he has applied them sparingly or lavishly as the individual stories demand. This usage is fully in accord with his own philosophy: "Every work of art should contain within itself all that is requisite for its own comprehension" (XI, p. 78).

New Criteria for Judging Poe's Color Usage

That Poe knew something of the graphic arts may be deduced from his interest in the picturesque landscapes of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa, his criticisms and prose sketches of paintings for The Southern Literary Messenger, and his attraction to all the arts expressed through his tales. More specifically, Poe once studied lithography, "and seems to have fancied himself as an art critic."[23] Whether he knew firsthand of the philosophic color theory of Aristotle, or of the scientific color research of Newton and the mystical-artistic ones of Goethe is a moot point. Newton and Goethe's disparate theories, nonetheless, were part of the nineteenth century cultural milieu and it is evident that Poe

imbibed at least a layman's understanding of them. His predisposition to science and pseudo-science might also have interested him further, but that is speculation.

The connection between artistic color theory and physical color theory is tortuous. The heterogeneous history of color includes philosophic, scientific, and mystical interpretations. So, in order to clarify how color theory reached its harmonious culmination in Goethe's color wheel, a brief summary of the theories is offered here.

Aristotle's treatise, "Sense and the Sensible," maintains that color is produced by a pollution inherent in objects which degrades pure colorless sunlight when it falls upon them. Aristotle observed that "sunlight passing through or reflecting from an object is always reduced in intensity or darkened. Since by this operation colors may be produced, he viewed color as the phenomenon arising out of the transition from brightness to darkness."[24] This view was widely held until Newton's time.

Then Aristotle's theory was challenged in 1704 by Newton's _Opticks: A Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections, and Colours of Light_. The book, which contained mathematical data derived from Newton's experiments with the prism, no doubt would have enlisted Poe's scientific curiosity. Poe has even mentioned the cut glass device which separates and bends the rays of the sun into a spectrum of colors ranging from red (rays least bent), through orange, yellow, green, and blue to violet (rays most bent) in his horror tale, "The Sphinx." After the narrator has described the monster, he adds: "Extending forward, parallel with the probiscus, and on each side of it, was a gigantic staff, thirty or forty feet in length, formed seemingly of pure crystal, and in shape a perfect

prism--it reflected in the most gorgeous manner the rays of the declining sun" (VI, pp. 240-41). The description of light penetrating the thick mist of the abyss to form a rainbow in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" betrays a rudimentary knowledge of Newton's color theory.

Aside from this, there is a curious bit of information given in a footnote of "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade," labeled "Common Experiments in Natural Philosophy," that is very Newtonian in aspect and substance: "If two red rays from two luminous points be admitted into a dark chamber so as to fall on a white surface, and differ in their length by 0.0000258 of an inch, their intensity is doubled. So also if the difference in length by any whole-number multiple of that fraction. A multiple by 2/¼, 3/¼, &c., gives the result of total darkness. In violet rays similar effects arise when the difference in length is 0.000157 of an inch; and with all other rays the results are the same--the difference varying with a uniform increase from the violet to red" (VI, p. 99).

Newton's theory has successfully eclipsed Aristotle's when in 1810 Goethe published his _Farbenlehre_ (_Theory of Colors_), an explanation of color more akin to Aristotle's than to the new physics. Goethe's was a subjective and mystical theory which

> caused a great stir among the many readers of Goethe's masterpieces of fiction. "According to Helmholtz (_Physiological Optics_, Chapter 19, "The Simple Colours"): 'The great sensation produced in Germany by Goethe's Farbenlehre was partly due to the fact that most people, not being accustomed to the accuracy of scientific investigation, are naturally more

> disposed to follow a clear artistic presentation of the subject than mathematical and physical abstractions. Moreover, Hegel's natural philosophy used Goethe's theory of colour for its own purposes. Like Goethe, Hegel wanted to see in natural phenomena the direct expression of certain ideas or of certain steps of logical thought.'"[25]

Poe could read some German but probably had access to translations. If he did read the Theory of Colour, he may have noted Part IV, "Effect of Colour with Reference to Moral Associations," which assigns symbolic value to color. Even if he did not, it is likely that he knew of Goethe's more scientific triumph, the color wheel.

The color wheel is a six-pointed star within a circle which charts the relationships of colors to each other (see Appendix, p. 46). It shows how all colors are made from the three primaries: red, yellow, and blue. The primaries are schematically represented as forming three points of the star in a triangular configuration. The secondaries, green, orange, and purple, each created from the mixtures of two primaries, are placed between them on the other three star points. Those colors next to each other on the wheel are considered to be adjacent, and those opposite, complementary.

The relationships of colors to each other and the products of their mixtures, which Goethe observed, are empirical. Poe might, for that calculating reason, have incorporated them into his tales of effect in patterns. The evidence, of course, would be within the tales.

Unique Color Symbology in Poe's Tales of Terror

Regardless of his erroneous methods, Clough has rendered some

valuable service. He has furnished a point of departure, some insights, and statistics. His grouping of the tales is a mixed blessing.

Initially Clough selected fifty-four tales of the seventy listed by Patee in Development of the American Short Story. Sixteen were omitted on the grounds that they were either unimportant or not strictly tales at all. Clough subdivided the remainder by categories: I Humor, II Ratiocination, III Landscape, and IV Tales of Horror; colors were then tabulated. Although the division of tales is convenient, Clough's tables do not take into account Poe's intent to create effects or symbols within individual tales.

In the humor tales Poe used color to elicit humor; in the tales of ratiocination, color takes on formal adjectival restrictions; in the landscape tales, color intensifies pleasant scenes and acts metaphorically. It is in the horror tales, however, that color as symbol is most pronounced although it is used for horror-heightening effect as well. Clough had observed all Poe's uses of color but either excused them as isolated or interpreted them to accord with Poe's psychological states.

Of the first group, he notes, "In his humorous tales he [Poe] occasionally joins incongruous colors apparently for the humorous effect, and words appear which are not used in other groups, such as 'pink,' 'pea-green,' and, very rarely 'indigo'" (p. 607).

The second group, Clough has rightly remarked, contains very few color words; those few, moreover, are primarily elements of description, carefully circumscribed to avoid connotative meaning. He said: "Color in general is used least frequently in the tales of ratiocination as might be expected where descriptive detail is selected less for vividness than for its circumstantial usefulness for the detective mind" (p. 607).

After this insight, however, Clough still attempted to fit Poe's works into his psychological schema. His question indicates his bias. "What psychological importance, if any, may be attached to the fact that Poe's last decade is characterized by an increase in tales of ratiocination . . . and a decrease of color vocabulary all around, especially in his most characteristic field of crime and horror?" (606) Clough recognized an answer in Joseph Wood Krutch's belief that Poe was trying to prove that he was not insane by the logic of his tales. This is also the reason postulated for Poe's shying away from subjective color words.

Of the landscape studies, Clough remarked: "How little Poe, in contrast with Keats and Shelley, uses the greens and the blues!" Here the critic made a dubious comparison of the deliberate Poe with Keats, whose poems were based on the theory that poetry is primarily a creation of the unconscious mind and Shelley, who wrote sensuously. Clough discovered a mysterious predominance of green only in the landscapes, a dearth of blue in both poetry and prose, and lack of violet, purple, and orange all around--"though more naturally so" (p. 606). The implication is that Poe's neglect of the more cheerful blues and greens is a reflection of his morbid mental state. Clough noticed, however, a different purpose in the landscape tales. "Taken by themselves, they would hardly be recognized by the average reader as Poe's work. The first in the list, 'The Island of the Fay,' is not entirely typical of the group; but 'The Landscape Garden' seems to have started Poe experimenting in a vein rather remote from his more frequent interest in the grotesque and arabesque" (p. 602). Clough wondered at the experimental tales "with their striking drop in blacks (if the first of the five be omitted from the calculation). This increase in landscape colors, too, is associated

with the drop in the frequency of all colors in his later tales. . ." (p. 606).

The paradox unresolved and in the face of contradiction, Clough doggedly maintained the decreasing use of color. He said that Poe's colors are more generally distributed in his humor and landscape studies. He then supplied the information: "In this same last six years appeared five of the twelve tales classified as humorous; and all of the landscape studies in the last eight years" (p. 606). It is the abundance of ratiocination tales that tips the scales in favor of decreasing color count. A better interpretation of the data would be that Poe uses color consciously and sparingly to achieve the effects appropriate to particular types of stories.

This treatment can be best illustrated in what Clough considers Poe's most characteristic works, the "tales of crime and horror." His list of thirty-one tales (subdivided into Group A--written before 1844, and B--written thereafter) is the greatest number in any category. For the purpose of individual color analysis, this group may be broken down differently according to color use within the tales.

Ten of the tales contain either few or no color words at all. On Clough's list these are "King Pest" (8), "The Man of the Crowd" (20), "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (36), "The Premature Burial" (38), "The Oblong Box" (39), "The Imp of the Perverse" (45), "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" (46), "The Facts in the Case of Mr. [sic] Valdemar" (47), "The Sphinx" (48), "Hop Frog" (52). Poe chose to restrict color in these stories to enhance their individual effects. In "Metzengerstein" (1), "Ms Found in a Bottle" (4), "Berenice" (6), "The Fall of the House of Usher" (17), "William Wilson" (18), "The Pit and

the Pendulum" (30), "The Black Cat" (33), and "Thou Art the Man" (41), Poe strategically placed bold colors only in certain scenes, usually in the closing ones, to evoke a more visual emphasis on horror. Within the remainder of the tales, color has been emphasized both through repetition of the color name and through overt association of a color with some abstract concept. Poe's knowledge of color relationships sometimes comes into play in the creation of such symbols.

Poe's studied lack of color words, his strategic placement of them, and his emphasis on them through repetition or connotation could be demonstrated in all the tales, but such a demonstration would be unnecessarily prolix. The discussion, therefore, will be limited to a few tales with each type of color use.

One tale which is illustrative of Poe's color use in a negative sense is "The Imp of the Perverse." It contains no color words and no suggestion of color. The tone is abstract and mental rather than sensual. It is a dialogue in which the color of things would have no significance. All the horror is in the cold plotting of a murder. The same sort of theme is the basis of "The Tell-Tale Heart," with one significant difference. The madman's hatred of the old man's pale blue "vulture eye" is the ostensible cause of the murder in the latter tale. But since vultures are not known to have blue eyes, the blueness of that eye is, perhaps, symbolic.

Very much like the tales of ratiocination, "The Man of the Crowd" consists of a few closely circumscribed references which are meant to be only descriptive. One would expect a tale which deals so greatly in description to contain more color, but the crowd, with their respective "flushed faces," "pantaloons of black or brown," "swarthiness of

complexion, a filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of lip," depict a colorless rather than a colorful impression. They are only "paint-begrimed," "pale" with red eyes, or "filthy" nondescripts walking the ebony streets, and the man of the crowd is one of them. Color would be too distinguishing a feature in that night world.

"Hop Frog" would seem to be a particularly colorless tale if the reader looks for color words in it. The story, however, can be said to convey some unmistakably bold colors. Hop Frog himself, like Fortunato and other Poe fools, wears motley, a suit of many colors. He dresses the king and his counselors in tar and flax, black and yellow. The wine that causes Hop Frog's rage is probably purple, like the king's rage. Trippetta is "pale as a corpse" and the flames are "vivid," suggestions of white and red. Masqueraders are also understood to don colorful dress. The story is rife with color, but Poe has found color words necessary in only two places: in describing the king's purple rage and the charred remains of his counselors. "The eight corpses swung in their chains, a fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass" (p. 228). In this climactic passage "blackened" is necessary to underline the visual repulsiveness of the scene. Poe has, in this story, apparently seen no need to waste words when synesthetic terms can carry the same impressions.

Another group of stories may be loosely classified as those which entertain the use of color for the sake of vivid sensual effect as a harbinger and/or description of horror at a climactic scene within the tale. Of these, "The Fall of the House of Usher," "William Wilson," and "The Black Cat" are most popular.

"The House of Usher" begins on a gray note (as Clough observed) without necessitating much use of the actual word gray. The narrator moves from the gray outdoors to the black interior of the house which gleems feebly with encrimsoned light.

Most of the color references thereafter are symbolic ones until the end of the tale. The internal poem of "The Fall of the House of Usher" contains many color words. Phrases like "the greenest of our valleys," "Banners yellow, glorious, golden," "pearl and ruby," and the name Prophyrogene, meaning "born in the purple," help to establish the welfare of the ruler in the poem. The blackness suggested by "robes of sorrow" and "mourn" reduces the monarch's estate to a pale door and red lit windows as the lines recall "the glory that blushed and bloomed is but a dim-remembered story." The loss of color thus represents the loss of spiritual life or the king's loss of a grasp on reality.

Other curious color references in this story are made in the titles of Roderick Usher's favorite books. These books, the narrator says, are in "strict keeping with this character of phantasm" and formed a large part of the "mental existence of the invalid." Two books are <u>Ververt et Chartreuse</u> (<u>Green and Yellow-Green</u>) and <u>Journey into the Blue Distance of Tiek</u>. Color here could signal the life of the imagination which has been substituted for actual life in the external world.

In the final scene, Lady Madeline appears with blood on her white robes and the narrator, as he is escaping, looks back at a full blood-red moon. These reds are climactic and are used to heighten the drama and terror.

The tone of "William Wilson" is also one of pervading grayness broken only by descriptions of the counterparts' clothing. At one

confrontation, they wear "white kerseymere morning frocks" and, at their duel, "Spanish cloak[s] of blue velvet, begirt around the waist with crimson belt[s]" (III, p. 324); they wear black silk masks. The blue and red of the costumes both heightens the sense of reality and symbolizes the threat of death, partly because of the very vividness with which the colors come out of the gray story in the final bloody scene.

"The Black Cat" is a story of total black and white except for the touches of red at the end. In that scene, the cat is perched on the head of the wife's decaying corpse. "Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder. . ." (V, p. 155). The combination of the black of the cat with its white gallows markings and red eyes and mouth may have some symbolic meaning. Nonetheless, the red is also a fine visual stroke for heightening the horror at the tale's end.

Poe's symbolic uses of color words as such occur in the remaining tales on Clough's list. Of these the most significant by order of importance are: "Silence" (11), _The Narrative of Arthur Gordan_ [sic] _Pym_ (10), "Morella" (7), "A Descent into the Maelstrom" (22), "The Oval Portrait" (26), "Ligeia" (13), "The Assignation" (5), "Eleanora" [sic] (25), and "The Masque of the Red Death" (27). The color words in these stories, through their symbolic import, carry an integral part of the action of each tale.

In "Silence" Poe created a landscape obviously colored to evoke revulsion. "The waters of the river have a saffron and sickly hue" and "palpitate forever and forever beneath the red eye of the sun." The rain turns to blood after it has fallen and the moon is also crimson. The gray of the rock is important for its colorless adjective has been

repeated three times in succession. The letters upon it spell "desolation" and later are changed to "silence." The denotative meaning of the yellow and red water and the red luminaries is mysterious, but the connotative meaning is unmistakable. The colors here are used consciously to carry the sickening and deathfilled message of the story. Gray is representative of silence and desolation.

A story containing a great deal of red, white, and black is Poe's long The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. The purposiveness of the color symbolism in this tale has not been ignored. Pascal Covici, Jr. dissusses white, red, and black iconography in his article, "Toward a Reading of Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym."[26] Sidney Kaplan in his "Introduction to The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" makes a case for Poe's racism and interprets the tale as a damnation of the black race.[27] L. Moffitt Cecil in his "Poe's Tsalal and the Virginia Springs" traces the purple river of Pym to an actual geographic source,[28] whereas Marie Bonaparte understands the river as a blood symbol.[29] Whiteness in Pym as well as in "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "Berenice" has been associated with an anti-religious concept of the universe by Edward Stone in "The Devil is White."[30] J. V. Ridgely speculates that Poe means to say a race of white people reached the Southern Pole ("The End of Pym and the Ending of Poe"),[31] and Cordelia Candelaria, "On the Whiteness at Tsalal: A Note on Arthur Gordon Pym," associates Poe's white with freezing death.[32]

The present color study would direct the elimination of those theories which go beyond the story to interpret it. A different reading, perhaps, is possible in view of the theory of evolution advocated by Poe:

> . . . We thus reach the proposition that _the importance of the development of the terrestrial vitality proceeds equably with the terrestrial condensation_.
>
> Now this is in precise accordance with what we know of the succession of animals on the Earth. As it has proceeded in its condensation, superior and still superior races have appeared. Is it impossible that the successive geological revolutions which have attended, at least, if not immediately caused, these successive elevations of vitalic character --is it improbable that these revolutions have themselves been produced by the successive variations in the solar influence on the Earth? Were this idea tenable, we should not be unwarranted in the fancy that the discharge of yet a new planet, interior to Mercury, may give rise to yet a new modification of the terrestrial surface--a modification from which may spring a race both materially and spiritually superior to Man (XVI, p. 259).

If the large snow-white being at the end of _Pym_ is one of these "materially and spiritually" superior sorts which has evolved in the tropical clime of the South Pole, then Pym's subsequent return to his home and the silence of Peters on the subject is warranted. Support for this theory can be traced in the evolution of the white animals which must parallel their humanoid counterparts. If the spiritually inferior black men on the black island are so totally black as to have black teeth, one would suppose that the inhabitants of the extreme Southern Pole would resemble the white animals with red eyes, teeth, and nails. The ghoulishness of their appearance would, no doubt, excite

the fear of the black men, but the beings' actual goodness must be conceded by contrast with the black men as well as by the fact that Pym and Peters, five missing chapters later, are back in the United States unharmed.

Just as black, white, red, and purple are symbolic in Pym, red, blue, and purple have a symbolic value in "Morella." Near the time of Morella's death, "the crimson spot settled steadily upon the cheek, and the blue veins upon the pale forehead became prominent" (II, p. 29). Later when the narrator christens Morella's child with her mother's name he says, "What demon urged me to breathe that sound, which, in its very recollection was wont to make ebb the purple blood in torrents from the temples to the heart?" (II, p. 33) Here Poe uses a very poetic if not anatomically correct description of the blue blood of the temples mixing with the red blood of the cheeks to make the purple blood of death. The ambiguity of this sentence makes it unclear whose blood is flowing--Morella's in the child or the narrator's. Morella's name, however, causes the child's features to be overspread with the "hues of death" as she falls back on the black slabs of the ancestral vault. A reader may assume "hues of death" mean white, a pale corpse, but Poe says "hues"; perhaps he means the red and blue which equals purple.

"A Descent into the Maelstrom" begins with the black water and the black shining rock. The harrowing experience has turned the narrator's hair from jetty black to white. This contrast may suggest a change in the narrator's attitude toward life. It is only in the whirlpool that color is described, and the colors from the sky are signs of hope and the foreshadowing of survival through their vivid affirmation of the strength and grandeur of life.

During the descent, the narrator sees a copper-colored cloud and a circular rift of deep bright blue sky and a flood of golden glory from the moon which illuminates the thick mist, "over which there hung a magnificent rainbow, like that narrow and tottering bridge which the mussulmen say is the only pathway between Time and Eternity" (II, p. 243). Thereafter, he figures out a means of escape. (The natural colored light in the rainbow must have impressed Poe because he loved to portray the phenomenon in his stories or to create it artificially with the aid of stained glass and fiery censers.)

"The Oval Portrait" contains very little color--some black draperies, gilded picture frames, and a portrait painted with "tints." Tints, however, are colors, and in this context they symbolize life.

In this story, the artist's creation is not a child to him as other artists have traditionally called their works. The fabrication to which he is so devoted is a "bride" and rival to his living spouse: "And evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter. He, passionate, studious, austere, and having already a bride in his Art; she a maiden of rarest beauty, and not more lovely than full of glee: loving and cherishing all things: hating only the pallet and brushes and other untoward instruments which deprived her of the countenance of her lover. It was thus a terrible thing for this lady to hear the painter speak of his desire to portray even his young bride" (IV, pp. 247-48). In other words, the artist would try to make both brides into one--to join the rivals. This, however, was not possible.

Instead, he became so passionately engrossed in the art that he neglected the flesh and blood wife: "And he was a passionate, and wild and moody man, who became lost in reveries; so that he _would_ not see

the light which fell so ghastlily in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride, who pined visibly to all but him. . . . And he *would* not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sate beside him" (IV, p. 248). He stubbornly took the young girl's tints to give to the artifice. He imposed her life on the lifeless object to make it seem living.

In the end, the girl died of her own frail condition or he killed her with inattention or maybe there is another meaning. "And when many weeks had passed, and but little remained to do, save one brush upon the mouth and one tint upon the eye, the spirit of the lady again flickered up as the flame within the socket of the lamp. And then the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and, for one moment, the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next, while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast and crying with a loud voice, 'This is indeed *Life* itself!' turned suddenly to regard his beloved:--*She* was dead" (IV, p. 249)! The subject of the story is, then, essentially the sacrifice of the earthly woman to the poetic soul of the artist who converts the real to the ideal. He facilitates the triumph of Art over Life and casts himself in the role of creator-destroyer.

Like "The Oval Portrait," Poe's "Ligeia" also embodies the motif of the artist as creator-destroyer. Although Poe uses few actual color words, again, in "Ligeia" he transfers the "tints" of life from the earthly woman, Rowena, to the dream woman, who incarnates the artist's soul.

The Lady Ligeia herself is a carefully restricted study in black and white which admits no gray. In whiteness her skin contends with

"purest ivory" and her teeth glance back with a "brilliancy almost startling." In contrast, her tresses, praised as "hyacinthine," imply the blue-blackness of the raven's wing. Of her eyes, the narrator says: "The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows . . . had the same tint" (II, p. 251).

In order to maintain a rigid black/white scheme, Poe goes so far as to refer to Ligeia's mouth as "the color which spoke" rather than to suggest any hue. Perhaps it is to obviate the skeletal starkness of this portrait and to underscore the beauty of Ligeia that he has described the delicate modelling of the features and infused the whole with light. The light, however, usually works in conjunction with value either by association or suggestion. Although adjectives such as "brilliant," "radiant," "lustrous," and "glossy" abound, the metaphoric "marble hand" and "raven black" hair or "pale fingers of a waxen hue" describe the material's texture as well as its glow or sheen.

Nowhere, except in the mention of "blue veins upon the lofty forehead [which] swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion" (II, p. 255), does the narrator attribute color to Ligeia and this hue is a sign of impending death. The next sentence begins: "I saw that she must die."

In Ligeia's poem, however, there is a note of polychromatic color in the term "motley" which describes the tragedy "Man." Polychromatic color here seems to represent man's life as a foolish drama, but it also could entail Poe's thinking about earthly life as multi-colored affair. The only other color, "blood-red," modifies the gory Conqueror Worm, although "Condor wings" and "funeral pall" are hints of black.

Ligeia's successor is fair-haired and blue-eyed. That is all the information given about her besides her name. Rowena is characterized by her coloring alone, ostensibly because her husband does not care for her in contrast with Ligeia and because he is too absorbed in relating how he decorated the bridal chamber.

The first half of the story is devoted to a description of Ligeia and the second half to a description of the chamber. The room has an immense sheet of leaden tinted glass on its southern face, a ceiling of gloomy-looking oak, some ottomans and golden candelabra of Eastern figure, a bridal couch of solid ebony with a pall-like canopy above, a gigantic black granite Egyptian sarcophagus, and the chief fantasy--a massive cloth of gold tapestry spotted with jetty black arabesque figures. All this black and gold surrounds the focal point of the room: "From out the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting, depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metal, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out of them, as if endued with serpent vitality, a continual succession of parti-colored fires" (II, pp. 259-60).

Because the narrator says, "I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labor and orders had taken a coloring from my dreams" (II, p. 258), one may assume that his dreams are gold, black, and parti-colored, the latter an illuminating succession of colors, one color after another. The narrator, of course, dreams about Ligeia: "Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug) I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered

recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathways she had abandoned--ah, could it be forever?--upon the earth" (II, p. 261).

His object, then, is to conjure up the spirit of Ligeia and thus reverse the sentence of the Conqueror Worm. His decoration of the bridal chamber would seem to prepare for the reenactment of such a drama, and colored light is the vital element which produces Ligeia in the chamber. The narrator first sees her shadow under the light of the censer: "But, as I stepped beneath the light of the censer, two circumstances of a startling nature attracted my attention. I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed lightly by my person; and I saw that there lay upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich lustre thrown from the censer, a shadow--a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect--such as might be fancied for the shadow of a shade" (II, p. 263).

Some time later, as he is helping Rowena to drink some wine, the narrator sees or dreams that he sees "fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of brilliant ruby-colored fluid" (II, p. 263). Maybe in his opium-induced condition he had poisoned Rowena or perhaps Ligeia had dripped her blood, her essence, in Rowena's goblet. Whatever the cause, Rowena takes a turn for the worse. The ruby-red drops act as the harbinger of change; for Rowena they convey death, for Ligeia, life.

Four nights later, the narrator, who is sitting up with the body, is drawn to the bedside by a faint noise. He observes a "tinge of color" flushed up into the cheeks, and "along the sunken small veins of the eyelids" (II, p. 265). The color in the body is a life sign. "In a short

period it was certain, however, that a relapse had taken place; the color disappeared from both eyelid and cheek, leaving a wanness even more than that of marble" (II, p. 265). This "flickering up of the spirit," as in "The Oval Portrait," occurs again and again throughout the night and each time the color flies, the body takes on a more "livid hue," as of one who had been in the tomb for many days. One could imagine either ashen or bluish discoloration as well as whiteness in the term "livid." Hues of death are, nonetheless, opposed to life hues.

The final time the corpse stirs, "the hues of life flushed up" with more energy into the countenance. Then she walks to the "middle of the apartment," presumably again beneath the changing light of the censer. "And the cheeks--there were the roses as in her noon of life--" (II, p. 268). Is this the reincarnated Ligeia or the product of an opium-induced dream? Perhaps, as in "The Oval Portrait," the narrator-artist gives substance to Ligeia by stealing the colors of life from Rowena. If so, one can see Ligeia as Art, as a manifestation of the artist's poetic soul and imagination--the perfect dream woman--and Rowena as merely the woman he married "in a moment of mental alienation" (II, p. 259). This is the magic that Poe uses to produce Ligeia by spontaneous generation from a black and gold chamber, a dead woman, and a colorful and fiery censer.

The same sort of conjuring takes place in "The Assignation." The protagonist of this tale, like the narrator of "Ligeia," was once a decorator, but, unlike him, "That sublimation has now palled on his soul" (II, pp. 123-24). He has also, like the opium addict, been a dreamer, but now he seeks the "land of real dreams" in death. There is no rivalry, as in the preceding stories, between an actual woman and a

dream woman. The story concerns only the spiritual loosing of poetic souls from their earthly selves--the attainment of an ideal.

The goddess-like Marchessa Aphrodite, as her name implies, represents love and beauty. Understandably, she is described as an <u>objet d' art</u>. The Marchessa has "silvery" feet which gleam in the black mirror of marble beneath her. A shower of diamonds covers the classical head whose curls are "like those of a young hyacinth" (reminiscent of Ligeia). "A snowy-white and gauze-like drapery seemed to be nearly the sole covering to her delicate form; but . . . no motion in the statue-like form itself, stirred even the folds of that raiment of very vapors which hung around it as the heavy marble hangs around Niobe" (II, p. 111).

Unlike Niobe, however, the Marchessa does not appear to grieve the loss of her child who has fallen in the Venetian canal. She stands fixedly gazing on the prison of the Old Republic until her child is saved. Only then does she come to life for an instant. The deliverer, her lover, elicits the change, the red of passion and death: "Yes! tears are gathering in those eyes--and see! the entire woman thrills throughout the soul, and the statue has started into life. The pallor of the marble countenance, the swelling of the marble bosom, the very purity of the marble feet, we behold suddenly flushed over with a tide of ungovernable crimson; and a slight shudder quivers about her delicate frame, as a gentle air at Napoli about the rich silver lilies in the grass" (II, p. 113). Indeed, that which was Art, that which was never living, comes to life, like Pygmalion's Galatea, because of love. The name, Aphrodite, suggests this allusion since she was the goddess who brought the mythical statue to life. Marchessa Aphrodite says only,

"Thou has't conquered--one hour after sunrise--we shall meet--so let it be" (II, p. 114).

The first half of the story takes place on the piazza in front of the Ducal Palace. The scene is in pitchy darkness until a "thousand flambeau" turn the gloom into preternatural day. All description, including the narrator's description of himself, before the Marchessa's fatal blush is in black and white. The second half of the story which describes the protagonist's chamber is boldly colorful.

The protagonist himself, however, is as black and white as his lady. He, too, is compared to a statue: "With the mouth and chin of a deity--singular, wild, full, liquid eyes, whose shadows varied from pure hazel to intense brilliant jet--and a profusion of curling, black hair, from which a forehead of unusual breadth gleamed forth at intervals all light and ivory--his were features than which I have seen none more classically regular, except, perhaps, the marble ones of the Emperor Commodius" (II, p. 115). The narrator repeats the comparison later in the story, when the protagonist's form causes him to remember some lines from Chapman's Bussy D' Ambois: "'He is up / There like a Roman statue! He will stand / Till Death hath made him marble'" (II, p. 119)!

The narrator of this tale is invited to the protagonist's chamber which has never been seen by anyone else save the decorator and his valet. The host says he has "guarded against any such profanation" (II, p. 117). Among the embellishments of his "imperial precincts" are paintings, sculptures, draperies, and strange convolute censers "reeking of perfume" and sending out "emerald and violet" tongues of fire. The window panes are crimson-tinted, the curtains are like molten silver, the carpet "rich liquid-looking cloth of Chili gold." In the last pages of

the story the host reveals his reason for decorating his secret apartment so voluptuously. It is his material representation of heaven.

> Let us pour out an offering to yon solemn sun which these gaudy lamps and censers are so eager to subdue! . . . To dream, he continued . . . as he held up to the rich light of a censer one of the magnificent vases--"To dream has been the business of my life. If I have therefore framed for myself, as you see, a bower of dreams. . . . Like these arabesque censers, my spirit is writhing in fire and the delirium of this scene is fashioning me for the wilder visions of that land of real dreams whither I am now rapidly departing" (II, pp. 123-24).

"Eleonora" has much in common with "The Oval Portrait," "Ligeia," and "The Assignation." In this case, the protagonist has two consecutive lovers (not brides), but they are not rivals. A reverse plot formula, for Poe, also allows the narrator to abandon a place of seclusion in order to enter the external world. All color images are relegated to Eleonora, but she and her surroundings represent an art which the narrator has not planned. He is not a decorator or an artist of any kind; he is a lover. As such, he elicits changes in Eleonora's heart and her surroundings, but he has played no active part in this mysterious process, nor does he try to impose Eleonora's colors or life upon Ermengarde. In fact, from the first writing of "Eleonora" one can see that a merging of the two has been intended. In _The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation_, Marie Bonaparte's argument is convincing: "Ermengarde was 'fair-haired' which, as in

Rowena's case, in Poe's mind stood for infidelity, as did also her blue eyes. In the second suppressed passage we quote, Poe ultimately endows her with Eleonora's 'auburn' hair. Ligeia's black, and Rowena's fair hair, merge into a single colour, while that of Eleonora and Ermengarde are modified towards one colour, until both finally emerge with 'auburn' hair. The two women have the same hair, the same slender figure, the same swift alternations of laughter and tears and the same unique soul."[33] This story, then, would seem to concern the successful combination of the dream woman and the real.

The first part takes place in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass. Herein live the narrator, his aunt, and his girl cousin. It is, perhaps, significant that he gives a matriarchal genealogy for Eleonora: "The sole daughter of the only sister of my mother long departed" (IV, p. 237). This sentence not only identifies the cousins as being of one blood but also tends to set them up as counterparts because he is the only son of his mother and they both lack fathers. He speaks of the "fiery souls" of their mutual forefathers, perhaps suggesting that she is an extension of him--his creative imagination or poetic soul which Poe has formerly portrayed as feminine.

Eleonora and the colorful landscape are also intimately linked. The "narrow and deep River of Silence is brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora" (IV, p. 237). The ebony and silver bark of the fantastic trees was "smoother than all save the cheeks of Eleonora" (IV, p. 238). The murmur that swelled out of the bosom of the river was "sweeter than all save the voice of Eleonora" (IV, p. 239). The changes in this landscape also directly reflect the changes in her heart. During the first fifteen years of her life (the narrator is five years older), the valley

was carpeted with "soft green grass, thick, short, perfectly even, and vanilla perfumed, but so besprinkled throughout with the yellow buttercup, the white daisy, the purple violet, and the ruby-red asphodel, that its exceeding beauty spoke to our hearts, in loud tones, of the love and of the glory of God" (IV, p. 238). The ebony and silver trees had huge brilliant green leaves and reminded one of giant serpents when the winds blew. (These are the counterparts of the convoluted censers and those which had writhing serpentine fire.) It would be unnecessary to give the color of the flowers if colors were not important because the traditional strains of buttercups are yellow, daisies are white, violets are purple, and asphodels are (not red as in the story) white.[34]

One day a change in Eleonora and the landscape occurs simultaneously because the lovers have looked too deeply into the River of Silence. The reflection of "our images within" draws Eros from the wave. The situation is reminiscent of the Narcissus myth in which the dreamer falls in love with his own poetic soul. Eleonora becomes an Echo. In contrast with the Narcissus tale, however, Eleonora, not her lover, experiences metamorphosis into multi-colored flowers.

When the passions and fancies which distinguished their race were enkindled, the landscape rearranged its flora and fauna accordingly. "Strange brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flowers had been known before. The tints of the green carpet deepened; and when one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up, in place of them ten by ten of the ruby-red asphodel. And life arose in our paths; for the tall flamingo hitherto unseen, with all gay and glowing birds, flaunted his scarlet plumage before us" (IV, p. 239). Gold and silver fish "haunt" the river and a cloud "all gorgeous in

crimson and gold" settles over the valley making it a "magic prison-house of grandeur and glory" (IV, p. 239). The color scheme is simply red birds, clouds, and flowers in a dark green valley with added touches of gold and silver. The juxtaposition of complementary colors is quite overpowering and the predominant red, the color of passion, becomes the harbinger of death. One sentence reveals the extent to which the landscape and Eleonora's heart are one: "No guile disguised the fervor of love which animated her heart, and she examined with me its inmost recesses as we walked together in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass, and discoursed of the mighty changes which had lately taken place therein" (IV, p. 240). The word therein would refer to Eleonora's heart, but because of the preceding descriptions of scenery it alludes also to the changes that have taken place in the valley.

Eleonora's passion causes her to contemplate "the last sad change which must befall humanity" (IV, p. 240). This knowledge of mortality then causes her death. Thereafter, a third change comes upon the valley.

> The star-shaped flowers shrank into the stems of the trees, and appeared no more. The tints of the green carpet faded; and, one by one, the ruby-red asphodels withered away; and there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten, dark eye-like violets that writhed uneasily and were ever encumbered with dew. And Life departed from our paths; for the tall flamingo flaunted no longer his scarlet plumage before us, but flew sadly from the vale into the hills, with all the gay glowing birds that had arrived in his company. And the golden and silver fish swam down through the gorge at the lower end of

> our domain and bedecked the sweet river never again. . . .
> And the lulling melody that had been softer than the wind-harp of AEolus and more divine than all save the voice of Eleonora, it died little by little away, in murmurs growing lower and lower, until the stream returned, at length, utterly, into the solemnity of its original silence. And then, lastly the voluminous cloud uprose, and, abandoning tops of the mountains to the dimness of old, fell back into the regions of Hesper, and took away all its manifold golden and gorgeous glories from the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass (IV, p. 242).

The purple violets in this passage are death-flowers. Their anthropomorphic features, the "eye-like" structures and their writhings, would make them seem to forebode ill to the restless and watchful spirit of Eleonora. They have no jurisdiction, however, in the colorless outside world. The curse the narrator has invoked upon himself is not acted upon when he marries a daughter of Earth. Eleonora, like a true poetic soul, continues to inspire him after her demise. He, of course, still loves her in a detached way in the external world through his earthly woman.

Haldeen Braddy comments on Poe's lavishly colored tales: "Except for 'Eleonora' and 'The Masque of the Red Death,' his tales are nowhere redolent of flavors, odors, and nowhere drenched in colors."[35] No story, however, has received the critical attention to color significance that "The Masque of the Red Death" has. Like the interpreters of Pym,

however, critics of "Masque" attribute the colors both to external sources and to internal and contextual symbolism.

Harry Levin and Una Pope-Hennessy imply that Poe got his idea for the seven rooms from his reading. Levin compares the decor to that of Victor Hugo's arch-romantic spectacle, Hernani.[36] "The apartments," according to Una Pope-Hennessy "are reminiscent of the seven colored palaces of the Princes de Serandip whose adventures Poe may have come across as a boy."[37] If either of these were the source, the color scheme which Poe describes in "Masque" would have no other meaning than as a bizarre stage set and would justify Joseph Wood Krutch's estimation of the story as "merely the most perfect description of that fantastic decor which [Poe] had again and again imagined."[38]

Other critics have concluded that the meaning of the colors is subjective and therefore forever unknown to anyone but Poe. Edd Winfield Parks comments: "The color symbolism in 'The Masque of the Red Death' and in other stories rather indicates, although evasively, that Poe in his youth may have seen people as colors, or associated certain colors with certain individuals."[39] Also speculating on the personal nature of Poe's décor, N. Brillion Fagin says, "He worked in certain colors because they represented for him certain desired effects."[40]

David Halliburton maintains that the color sequence is important only as a gradation from one extreme to another.

> Most authors conceive of houses, Bachelard suggests, as verticalities linking an up with a down. But Prospero's dwelling stretches out horizontally. Instead of a space for descent, the author provides a space for walking, dancing, for

> listening to music. He presents it, furthermore, in a series of gradations, from blue through purple to green to orange to white to violet to black. That we have to do with gradations rather than with an uncoordinated sequence can be seen from the climactic nature of the seventh and black apartment that quickly takes dominion. Nothing ever really happens in the other rooms which exist in order to bring the black apartment into perspective; in addition, the black apartment gets by far the fullest treatment, and it is within its precincts that the critical scene transpires. The arrangement of the series is so managed, finally, that the visitor also enjoys the highly favored property of the "novel effect" (IV, p. 251). All of this conspires to make the last apartment, with its black draperies and its blood-colored windows, the ultimate existential space.[41]

Marie Bonaparte, in Freudian terms, explains that the seven rooms represent the body of the mother in the Oedipal myth.[42] Lorine Pruette extends Bonaparte's interpretation by commenting on the color scheme of the seventh chamber. Pruette cites its black draperies and scarlet panes as "a supreme example of the sex motif."[43]

Another symbolic interpretation is that the rooms stand for different mental states. Richard Wilbur contends that the colored rooms are manifestations induced by the hypnagogic state. He explains this state as "a condition of semi-consciousness in which the closed eye beholds a continuous procession of vivid and constantly changing forms. These forms sometimes have color, and are often abstract in character."[44]

Also positing a mental state, Nina Baym says the room symbol ". . . fits the requirements of a story about the artistic imagination, since a room must be decorated, furnished, according to artistic ideas. Thus the room can stand for the perceiving self, or for the preconceptions which enclose the self, and for poetic imagination, or the poetic images created by the self." She also says, "The actual destroyer is the imagination."[45]

The most currently accepted theory has been suggested by Walter Blair. He understands the seven rooms to be parallel in color connotations to the seven ages of man.[46] In the mainstream of this chronological interpretation are Louis Broussard,[47] Joseph Roppolo,[48] and H. H. Bell, Jr.[49] Bell, however, says the rooms represent Prospero's life span.

The Blair theory may be further substantiated by a new perspective on the color symbolism. Poe has used his knowledge of colors and color mixtures to tell the story allegorically through their associative meanings.

In the story, Prince Prospero is associated with the blue room. Poe uses repetition, just as he did with the gray rock in "Silence," to make this color relationship: "It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. . . . It was in the blue room where stood the prince" (IV, pp. 256-57. Blue is, thus, a symbol for health, well-being, and life through its connection with Prospero. Blue is in opposition to the red of the Red Death. The antithesis is simple--east/west, life/death, Prospero/Red Death, blue/red. The other principle character of the drama is Time who affects the changes which will eventually favor death in the struggle. Its color

is yellow--the gold of the ornaments of every room and the brazen lungs of the clock. The seven rooms, in their mixtures of the three primaries represent the seven ages of man and tell the story allegorically in their hues.

The purple room, a mixture of red and blue, can be interpreted as the period in a youth's life when he first considers his mortality. In the green room, a mixture of blue and yellow, one would expect a fertile and regenerative time when thoughts of death are farthest from troubling a person. The blue of life is combined with the yellow of age to denote maturity. Yellow when mixed with a commensurate amount of red gives orange. Orange represents the ripeness of middle age when the prospect of future life becomes tinctured with the prospect of death. White is the equal mixture of all colors. A spinning color wheel will look white. It stands for the confusion of the elderly years. Then comes violet, the counterpart of purple at the western end of the suite. Although one would expect a lighter or darker shade or a redder or bluer one, violet is not necessarily different in hue from purple. The names of the colors are probably more significant, purple being associated with strength and grandeur and violet with death. It must represent the knowledge that life is slipping away--death is imminent.

After the red overpowers the blue, we encounter death--a red light in a black room. Red, of course, is the act of expiration. The end of life is the end of color; black is the absence of color.

As has been demonstrated, Poe's artistry was, to a great extent, the product of his deliberation. Subjective matters like color preferences, fear of insanity, or drug addiction simply do not explain the careful selection, restriction, and placement of color terms in his

works. Poe, indeed, exercised a professional integrity which may be observed in minute matters such as the choice of color words. Whether his knowledge of color relationships and color mixtures was drawn from the realm of science, pseudo-science, or personal observation, his effective use of color is the result of his unique treatment of it in each tale. One need not go outside any tale for its interpretation; colors help tell the story. Poe painted his literary pictures as units entire and self-explanatory--each word fitting into the "one pre-established design."

NOTES

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, Edgar Allan Poe's Works, James A. Harrison, ed., (New York: AMS Press, 1965), XI, 108. All subsequent references will be taken from this edition. Volume and page numbers will be included in the text.

[2] "The Function of Poe's Pictorialism," South Atlantic Quarterly, 65 (1966), pp. 46-54.

[3] "Psyche and Setting: Poe's Picturesque Landscapes," Criticism, 15 (1973), pp. 16-27.

[4] Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 90, pp. 163-241.

[5] Skard, p. 172f.

[6] Henry Marvin Belden, "Observation and Imagination in Coleridge and Poe: A Contrast," Papers, Essays, and Stories by His Former Students in Honor of the Nineteenth Birthday of Charles Fredrick Johnson (Hardford: Trinity College, 1928).

[7] Skard, pp. 200-01.

[8] Colorado College Publications, Language Series II (November 1911), p. 154.

[9] Skard, p. 171.

[10] Skard, p. 171.

[11] Wilson O. Clough, "The Use of Color Words by Edgar Allen [sic] Poe," PMLA, 45 (June 1930), p. 603. All subsequent page numbers will be included in the text.

[12] Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe (New York: Knopf, 1958), p. 31.

[13] Levin, p. 29.

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[18] Levin, p. 54.

[19] Levin, p. 74.

[20] Levin, p. 95.

[21] Levin, p. 95.

[22] Levin, p. 123.

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[34] O.E.D.

[35] Braddy, p. 36.

[36] Levin, p. 149.

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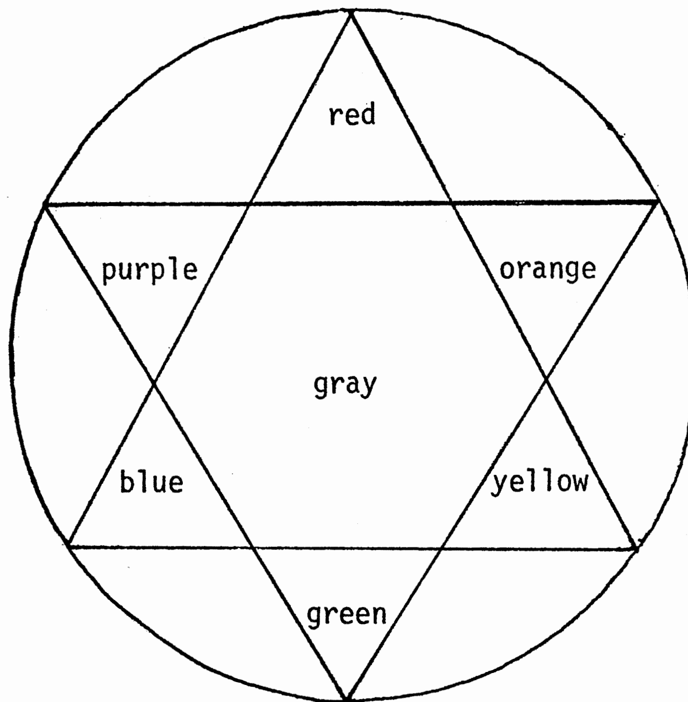
APPENDIX

ILLUSTRATION OF GOETHE'S COLOR WHEEL



VITA 2

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