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INTRODUCTION

SOME REMARKS ON POE AND HIS CRITICS

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In presenting this issue of *UMSE* devoted entirely to "our cousin, Mr. Poe," the University of Mississippi is motivated by several important reasons: (1) Edgar Allan Poe is an American author of major stature; indeed, he is an artist of world significance; (2) Poe was a Southerner, bred if not born in Virginia, and an heir of the Cavalier tradition fathered by his fellow adopted Virginian, Captain John Smith; (3) Poe's writings are not only beloved by millions of ordinary readers all over the world but are of increasing interest to modern scholars and critics; and (4) after languishing for almost a century since Poe's death, the criticism of his writings began to accelerate until today it has reached a genuinely sophisticated level; therefore, *UMSE* would like to make a significant contribution of its own in this respect.

In the history of modern literature one can cite other cases than Poe's in which writers of unusual genius and originality, whose works display variety, subtlety, complexity, learning, imagination, and thought, have had to wait a considerable time for posterity to comprehend them. Poe's case, however, had its own particular peculiarities: (1) A Southerner with Cavalier attitudes, Poe invaded the North long before General Lee. There he was considered an alien and sometimes bore the brunt of a developing sectional hatred which in a dozen years would mean war; (2) Never hesitant to utter his own opinions, which were often caustically expressed, he frequently criticized prominent members of the Northern literary establishment, such as Professor Longfellow, and he defended Southern writers against their Northern critics. Further, he expressed openly his dislike of Northern abolitionists, an action which alienated the originally friendly Lowell and other New Englanders; (3) He made enemies of influential Northern literary men who proved unprincipled in their treatment of him—Lewis Gaylord Clark, Hiram Fuller, Thomas Dunn English, and Rufus W. Griswold, his literary executor. No one did more harm to

Poe's posthumous reputation than Griswold, a liar and a forger; (4) Poe's literary style proved difficult to many readers. It is complicated and obscured by a variety of ambiguous attitudes on the part of the author: the grotesque often competes with the arabesque; the humorous is sometimes mixed with the serious; indeed, Poe is often, as he himself indicated, half-serious and half-funny in the same piece. Poe's wit and irony are pervasive, often presented in an obvious manner but just as frequently presented with unusual subtlety; at times a piece amounts to a hoax. Poe can entertain ideas for purely literary effect without believing in them at all but adopting an ambiguous stance; he can also present ideas in which he passionately believes—sometimes frankly but other times with pretended facetiousness. He can be realistic, symbolic, or allegorical. He is given to the use of foreign languages and even resorts to cryptograms. He indulges in farce, burlesque, satire, parody and self-parody, dreams, nightmares, hallucinations, and apocalyptic visions. He liberally uses biblical, classical, Enlightenment, and modern references, and altogether his work bears considerable learning. To understand exactly what Poe means is not easy; and (5) the most influential commentators in the U. S. were for nearly a century after Poe's death dominated by the Puritan tradition of New England. Not until after Arthur Hobson Quinn proved what a contemptuous liar and forger Griswold had been, did new minds awake to the fact that Poe was not simply the American author who said "Boo!" but a genuine and original artist, underneath whose Gothic trappings and comic travesties lurk serious purposes and challenging ideas. The progress made in Poe studies and Poe criticism over the last forty or so years is indeed astonishing in the light of Poe's reputation during the previous ninety or more years. A new Poe has emerged whom scholars and critics of fifty or sixty years ago would hardly recognize.

To see how the situation developed as it did, we have to return to the year 1849—the year Poe died. When Griswold learned of Poe's death, he addressed a letter to the *New York Tribune*, signed "Ludwig," in which he noticed the passing of the American author whose writings many of his contemporaries greatly admired. Instead of lamenting the loss to literature of so skilled and so powerful an author, Griswold concentrated on condemning the personal character of Poe. Although a number of Poe's friends sprang immediately to the poet's defense, Griswold had gotten in the first blow, and it was a telling one. At the same time, as Poe's literary executor, Griswold followed the paradoxical course of attempting to promote Poe's writing by editing

and publishing them—obviously because it profited him to do so. Yet so obsessive was his hatred of Poe that he committed forgeries and recorded lies in Poe's correspondence to put Poe's personal character in a bad light and to enhance his own. Hence the admirers of Poe the artist were driven to devote their main attention to defending, justifying, and understanding Poe the man rather than in trying to comprehend him as an artist and attempting to penetrate the deeper meanings of his works. This situation applies principally to the U. S., for in France the quality of Poe's art was appreciated by Alphonse Borghers and E. D. Forgues in terms of translation and critical comment as early as 1845-6; and in the 1850's Poe found his most ardent champion in the great poet Charles Baudelaire, who translated much of Poe's prose; later his poetry was translated by another French admirer, the great symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Indeed, Poe's general European reputation and his reputation in Russia have always been high.

What might be called the pioneer phase of Poe studies in the U. S., therefore, involved the defense of Poe's character as a man, the study of his life and literary career, the development of Poe bibliography, and the collection and editing of texts, while criticism languished. What little criticism took place was trivial and superficial if not erroneous altogether. As was natural, Griswold's work led the field with his *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe, With a Memoir by Rufus Wilmot Griswold and Notices of his Life and Genius by N. P. Willis and J. R. Lowell* [4 vols. (New York, 1850-1856)]. Finally, Poe found more sympathetic treatment at the hands of William Fearing Gill, Eugene Lemoine Didier, and an English enthusiast, John Henry Ingram, who edited a four-volume edition of Poe's *Works* (1874-75) and produced *Edgar Allan Poe, His Life, Letters, and Opinions* (in 2 vols.) in 1880. Although defective, Ingram's work was the most important done by this time. Collections by Stoddard, and by Stedman and Woodberry, appeared between 1884 and 1895. Woodberry, not very sympathetic to Poe, issued his *Life* in the American Men of Letters series in 1885, which he revised and expanded into two volumes in 1909. This pioneer phase was brought to a close by a Mississippi-born philologist and professor of Teutonic languages at the University of Virginia, James A. Harrison, who climaxed his own career with capturing the Virginia Edition of *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (17 vols.) issued in 1902 [This edition included the life and letters of Poe in Vols. One and Seventeen]. This was the most complete edition

of Poe's writings ever to appear, and, despite defects, it became the standard or "definitive" edition for students and has remained so down to the present (It is, however, being supplanted by the Harvard Edition begun by the late Thomas Ollive Mabbott, who died in 1968, leaving his work uncompleted. His widow, a scholar in her own right, and the notable scholar Burton R. Pollin have been carrying on Mabbott's work; but the edition is not yet complete). Harrison, the son of a prosperous Virginia planter, was born at Pass Christian, Mississippi, in 1848. Reared mostly in New Orleans, he attended the University of Pennsylvania and later studied in Germany. He was successively a professor of languages at Randolph-Macon, Washington and Lee, and the University of Virginia; he ended his career as Lecturer on Anglo-Saxon Poetry at the Johns Hopkins University, and died in 1911.

Although Harrison performed a great service as an editor of Poe, his biography was not satisfactory; hence efforts on the part of others—notably Mary E. Phillips (1926) and Hervey Allen (1934)—to produce a more satisfactory life of Poe than the biographies of Woodberry or Harrison. But Phillips's, though informative, was poorly written and organized; and Allen's, though well written and vivid, was too romantic to suit scholarly tastes. It remained, therefore, for a great scholar and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Arthur Hobson Quinn, to produce in 1941 the best biography of Poe thus far. Drawing on new materials, sympathetic yet discriminating regarding his subject, and a stickler for facts, Quinn exposed for the first time the full extent of Griswold's forgeries. He presented Poe as a human being with frailties as well as a hard-working journalist and writer of genius struggling to succeed under difficult circumstances, some of which he created for himself. On the other hand, Quinn's critical powers were weak, and his analyses and interpretations of the poems and tales never escaped the superficial. Nevertheless, his fine scholarship enabled him to suggest new sources for many of them. His biography became the standard or "definitive" account of Poe's life and times, and it remains so at present. At the same time, during the period 1902 to 1941, Quinn was not the only fine scholar of Poe to appear; others of similar stature also emerged who were to advance the cause of Poe studies—notably, Margaret Alterton, Killis Campbell, Thomas Ollive Mabbott, James S. Wilson, and Floyd Stovall. Campbell's *The Mind of Poe* (1933), for instance, became a key study for many years and is still useful.

Excepting Wilson and Stovall, however, none of these scholars

proved to be very strong critics. Deeper and more acute commentaries during this period came mostly from critics who were not scholars. English artist-critic D. H. Lawrence must be credited as the first to see really deeply into Poe's art.

His 1923 essay, included in his *Studies in Classical American Literature*, characterizes Poe as "an adventurer into vaults and cellars and horrible underground passages of the human soul." Poe's main theme, he maintained, was the exploration of the process of psychic disintegration. Lawrence particularly uncovered the conflict in Poe's lovers that existed between the intellect and the flesh. In 1925 American artist-critic William Carlos Williams included an eulogistic essay on Poe in his *In the American Grain*. Williams emphasized Poe's Americanism. He saw Poe "in no sense the bizarre, isolate writer, the curious literary figure. On the contrary," said Williams, "in him American literature is anchored, in him alone, on solid ground." In the 1930's James S. Wilson and Walter F. Taylor noticed Poe's humorous stories, and Ernest Marchand called attention to Poe's social criticism. In 1941 some of Harrison's mistakes in attribution were pointed out by David K. Jackson.

Another demonstration of admiration for Poe was the founding (in 1922) and development during these years of The Edgar Allan Poe Society, in Baltimore. The late John C. French was influential in this group, and more recently Richard H. Hart—who collaborated with A. H. Quinn in making available through publication documents in the Enoch Pratt Free Library—and Alexander G. Rose III have ably captained activities of this group. Since 1977 Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV has been in charge of selecting speakers for the annual lecture, delivered the first Sunday of October each year, and a series of distinguished publications has resulted from the combined efforts of all. A particular debt of gratitude is owed by the series authors to Mrs. Averil Jordan Kadis, of the Pratt Library, whose expert editing has added substance to the publications.

But if Poe had his enthusiastic investigators and admiring critics during this phase, he also had his detractors in the persons of Ivor Winters, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, the English novelist Aldous Huxley, and T. S. Eliot (near the end of his career, however, Eliot completely reversed himself). Nevertheless, with the event of Quinn's fine biography, the study and appreciation of Poe's art was well advanced. By the end of the 1940's Henry W. Wells had viewed Poe as an innovative and great poet; Darrel Abel had presented a new

look at "The Fall of the House of Usher"; and Allen Tate had concluded that Poe was responsible for initiating the main theme adopted by modern literature—"the dissociation of personality."

The 1950's began with the English artist-critic W. H. Auden calling attention to the importance of *Pym* and *Eureka*. By the end of the decade three important books had appeared: Edward H. Davidson's *Poe, a Critical Study* (1957), Patrick F. Quinn's *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (1957), and Harry Levin's *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (1958). An important literary history that included a just estimate of Poe was Jay B. Hubbell's *The South in American Literature* (1954). William Whipple's 1956 essay called attention to Poe's political satire in several serio-comic tales. Artist-critic Richard Wilbur, in his introduction to the Laurel Poetry Series *Poe* (1959), argued that the metronomic regularity and music-like sonority of Poe's poetry result from its "supra-emotional nature" and are features that tend to produce an hypnotic effect. In short, as a poet Poe aimed to cast a spell on his reader. In the same year in his Library of Congress lecture, "The House of Poe," he concluded that the main theme of Poe's writings consisted of a retreat into a "hypnagogic state" and suggested that *Eureka* was the key to Poe's works. With this work of the fifties Poe criticism was on its way to higher planes.

Further advances were made in the 1960's. James Gargano came out with fresh views of "The Black Cat," "To Helen," Poe's narrators, and the "Tell-Tale Heart." Kaplan and Bezanson, in separate essays, illuminated *Pym*. Charles O'Donnell and John F. Lynen, the former in a 1962 essay in *PMLA* and the latter in a grand book, *The Design of the Present* (1969), argued the importance of *Eureka*. In a 1962 essay Stephen Mooney vindicated Poe's comic tales. In 1963 Richard P. Benton provided a new way of looking at Poe in his study of "The Assigination." Joseph Roppolo in 1963 and Kermit Vanderbilt in 1968 greatly illuminated "The Masque of the Red Death." In his little book, *Edgar Allan Poe* (1965), Geoffrey Rans summed up neatly Poe's efforts as a poet and prose writer. Edd Winfield Parks's *Edgar Allan Poe as Literary Critic* (1964) emphasized the effect of Poe's editorial experience on his criticism, and Robert D. Jacobs's *Poe: Journalist & Critic* (1969) also treated this effect and other topics. Sidney P. Moss's *Poe's Literary Battles: The Critic in the Context of His Literary Milieu* (1963) pictured Poe as a Southern "magazinish" fighting the literary cliques of New York and New England. Joseph J. Moldenhauer, Jr. produced an important study in a 1968 essay in *PMLA*, linking Poe's

aesthetics, psychology, and ethics. Finally, an important event in this decade was the founding in 1968, at Washington State University, of a learned publication devoted entirely to Poe, *The Poe Newsletter* (later *Poe Studies*), under the able editorship of G. R. Thompson. In 1969 Floyd Stovall published a collection of essays covering forty years of Poe study in his *Edgar Allan Poe the Poet: Essays Old and New on the Man and His Work*. Thus by the conclusion of the sixties Poe criticism had come of age.

The 1970's were also unusually productive. The founding of the Poe Studies Association in 1972 marked an important advance in interest in Poe. Such renowned Poe scholars as Robert Jacobs, John Carl Miller, Maureen Cobb Mabbott, and Richard Wilbur have shared their insights with this group. The editor of the present volume served as Vice President and Program Chairman for six years, during the presidencies of Eric W. Carlson and J. Lasley Dameron, and is currently completing his fourth year and second term as President. The organization produces a semi-annual *Newsletter*, disseminating current information on its subject, holds annual meetings during MLA conventions (it is an Allied Organization with MLA), and tries to provide solid programs of interest to a wide audience for the fascinating figure of Edgar Allan Poe.

Three important books appeared in the seventies: Burton R. Pollin's *Discoveries in Poe* (1970) disclosed the results of comprehensive investigation into Poe's sources; G. R. Thompson's *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (1973) attempted to reconcile the comic and Gothic faces of Poe and revealed recurring patterns of ironic structures and tension in the Gothic tales, the novel *Pym*, and the essay *Eureka*; and David Ketterer's *The Rationale of Deception in Poe* (1979) depicted Poe's lifelong search for unity in terms of a developmental progression from reason (deception) opposed to imagination (invention) to a fusion of the two and the achieving of valid intuition and truth. In a chapter of a previous book on science fiction, Ketterer laid down the thesis that Poe inaugurated a visionary tradition of that mode for different purposes than those normally employed by writers of modern science fiction; unlike a Wells or a Bradbury Poe yearned to escape conventional reality rather than to speculate on "What if—?" In 1972 Alexander Hammond began the challenging project of reconstructing the eleven-story version of Poe's 1833 Folio Club collection (the collection was broken up and the stories were printed separately) and had made considerable progress by 1975. In that year Thomas

Hubert suggested that certain decidedly "Southern traits" could be noted in Poe's fiction, and Eric Mottram produced a study of *Pym* that related the novel to the American social imagination. Between 1971 and 1978 Barton Levi St. Armand, resorting to alchemical lore and Jungian psychology, produced several amazing studies of "The Gold-Bug," "Usher," and *Pym*. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (the present Editor of *UMSE*, President of the Poe Studies Association, and indefatigable Poe scholar and critic) began in 1971 to turn out his close studies of Poe's revisions and subtleties of language. His examinations of such tales as "Berenice," "MS. Found in a Bottle," and "Tarr and Fether" led him to new insights and new conclusions. His monograph *The Very Spirit of Cordiality* (1978)—a printing of his lecture before the Poe Society of Baltimore—proved an ingenious as well as a delightful study of the literary uses of alcohol and alcoholism in Poe's tales. In 1975 Kent Ljungquist began a series of important studies of Poe's aesthetics showing how the author developed the idea that material knowledge could be transcended by a process of aesthetic experience. In 1975, also, J. Gerald Kennedy offered the unusual thesis that among Poe's detective stories "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Oblong Box" were attempts on his part to discover a sense of order which he could oppose to his vision of a "nightmarish universe."

The preceding survey of the changing fortunes of Edgar Allan Poe in his native land from the time of his death to the present should at least broadly suggest how Poe scholarship and criticism eventually smashed the still popular image of Poe as a drug-crazed or drunken wastrel and began to consider him not only as a masterly poet and story-teller but also as a thinker and visionary who could be witty as well as serious. The idea of this "new Poe" also brings us to the essays collected in this present issue of *UMSE* that the University of Mississippi and Editor Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV now offer to the public.

This symposium is a varied collection of essays written by a goodly number of the best known scholars and critics in the Poe field today together with others whose authors are not so well known. The essays themselves fall generally into four categories: biography (5), sources (2), influence (1) and criticism, mainly psychological or analytic (6), or 14 essays altogether.

Of the biographical essays, Neda M. Westlake recalls her days as a student in the classroom of Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn. She portrays this renowned scholar and biographer of Poe as an ardent and enthusiastic teacher who delighted and inspired his students.

Maureen Cobb Mabbott, widow of the great Poe scholar, Thomas Ollive Mabbott, displays her scholarship by furnishing the background of Poe's oral delivery of "The Raven." She also discusses the poem's first printing in Vandenhoff's textbook on elocution and reveals how her husband discovered this publication. W. T. Bandy sets forth the facts concerning the part F. H. Duffee played in the strained relationship that developed between Poe and William J. Duane, Jr. Dwight Thomas gives the chronology of Poe's relationship with William E. Burton and the *Gentleman's Magazine* for which Poe worked during 1839-40. John E. Reilly discusses Sarah Helen Whitman's fascination with Poe, her poems which are related to him, and her defense of his reputation in her book *Edgar Poe and His Critics*, which appeared in 1860.

Among the source studies, Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet describe the parallel they see between Poe's characterization of Egaeus in "Berenice" and the Cadmus myth of separation, loneliness, and the pulling of the dragon's teeth, which, they suggest, Poe probably learned from his reading of Bryant's *Ancient Mythology*. Kent Ljungquist continues his fine studies of Poe's aesthetics by demonstrating his familiarity with current theories of the picturesque and the sublime and the impact of such attitudes in his "Autography" and "Usher."

The single study of influence concerns the impact of Poe's art on China and Chinese writers, primarily during the twentieth century. Donald Stauffer and Shen Ning survey Poe's fortunes among critics and imaginative writers and show that his image in China is a positive one, his writings having been imitated with admiration (Since this essay provides knowledge of influence of which Western scholars are unfamiliar, it can serve as a companion piece together with the recently published essay concerning Poe's status in contemporary Japan authored by James Roy King).

In terms of psychological criticism, the sensitive poet and critic Richard Wilbur takes a Longinian approach and discusses Poe's powers of evocation, particularly by the linking of erotic imagery and language to certain "inhibitory ideas," thus achieving a tension that Wilbur says results from Poe's "rebellious imagination." Wilbur analyzes the suggestive properties of the poems "Israfel" and "Annabel Lee" and the tale "The Masque of the Red Death." He also manages to link "The Red Death" to the poems "Tamerlane," "The Haunted Palace" and "Sonnet—To Science" and to the tales "William Wilson,"

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“The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and the Dupin detective stories. He sees Poe’s “rebellious imagination” responsible for conjuring up the good and evil sides of human nature and putting it at war with itself. Finally, he suggests that what some readers perceive as inconsistencies or absurdities in Poe are actually deliberate calculations to make the reader aware of the passage of a character from one psychic state to another. In his essay on “Usher,” James Gargano sees the tale as a product of Poe’s “apocalyptic vision” since, in Gargano’s view, the tale is actually a “vision of the destruction of the world” dramatized in terms of specifics by being referenced to Roderick Usher’s particular personality and circumstances. According to Gargano, Poe deliberately limited the unnamed narrator’s understanding of the situation so that he would be obliged to recount what happens “full of wonder and alarm.” Gargano points to a similar technique being employed by Poe in the colloquy “The Conversation of Eros and Charmion,” both it and “Usher” suggesting the kind of destruction depicted in the Book of Revelation. In another psychological criticism, David H. Hirsch denies that the Gothic “Metzengerstein” is a tale told for comic effect as has been argued by others—notably G. R. Thompson, who has characterized it a “satiric hoax”—but rather a serious effort to portray the subconscious life of a man and the ideas of metempsychosis. According to Hirsch, young Metzengerstein enters into a hypnagogic state in which the actualities of the flaming stables of Berlifitzing and the figures of the weird tapestry that appear to him to be alive fuse in Platonic terms, as evidenced by the shadow on the tapestry. The Baron withdraws more and more from society and human contact until at last he is borne out of the world into the heavenly sphere, riding a supernatural horse.

As to analytic criticism, Ashby Bland Crowder indulges in some “feminist criticism” by analyzing Poe’s attitude toward women writers—as opposed to his attitude toward their male counterparts—by surveying his reviews of books of women. As a result, he denies the charge (levelled most stringently by Richard Cary) that Poe waived his normal strict objectivity and high standards when criticizing contemporaneous women. He affirms: “There seems to be no significant difference between Poe’s application of critical standards to male and female authors.” He concedes, however, that Poe did perhaps overpraise certain literary ladies. Dennis W. Eddings presents an analysis of Poe’s language and subtle wordplay in the Dupin tales and notes additional elements obviously designed by Poe to hoax the

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unsophisticated reader. In this analysis, Eddings follows the previous work done by Benton, Thompson, Pollin, and Fisher. In his analysis here, Fisher surveys the books published about Poe and by Poe during the 1970's and analyzes the critical approaches taken by the critics or editors. He finds that the mainstream of Poe criticism during this decade has remained traditional in assessing Poe's use of sources but that in the latter half of the decade particularly more attention has gone into interpreting Poe's art instead of focusing upon parallels between his and other texts. Fisher concludes by suggesting that we need more critical studies of book length developing such themes as Poe's comic impulse, his Gothicism, and his views of perfectibility. He also presents an interesting speculation: that a comparative study of Poe's poems with those that appeared in the popular magazines of his day might prompt some new conclusions regarding the quality of his work.

Where Poe scholarship and criticism will have arrived by the end of the 1980's remains to be seen. The re-examination of Poe that has flowered during the past fifteen years is directly the result of the early work of Lawrence, Tate, Wilbur, Davidson, Patrick Quinn, and Levin, followed by that of Whipple, Mooney, Gargano, Benton, Rans, and Thompson. Many others have now carried on this spade work by planting shrubs and flowers to make a Garden of Poe. As for the future of Poe criticism, one direction at least seems clear. A number of Americans have felt the influence of the French structuralists and post-structuralists and are following the leads of Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michael Foucault, Jean Ricardou, Maurice Mourier, and particularly Jacques Derrida, the so-called "deconstructionist." This kind of criticism is becoming fashionable in the American universities and replacing the myth criticism of Frye, the existentialist criticism of Sartre, and the phenomenological criticism of Poulet. It is, unfortunately, a rosy path with thorns, since without rational and common-sense controls and careful scholarship it tends to become more about itself than about the work it supposedly concerns. At any rate, there are needful things to do: We badly need a scholarly, interestingly written, up-dated biography of Poe. We need a good variorum, annotated, cheap paper-back edition of *Eureka* so as to make this important Poe masterpiece available to students as has been done for *Pym* (It would seem the man to do this would be Roland W. Nelson, who prepared a "definitive edition" of *Eureka* in 1975 for his doctoral dissertation at Bowling Green University). We need a study of Poe's

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attitude toward science and scientific method. We need a study of Poe's political attitude. We need a study of the influence of the Enlightenment on Poe, especially by such French thinkers as Pascal, d'Alembert, Laplace, Condorcet, Fontenelle, Descartes, and Comte. We need a study of the real relationship of the classical and the romantic tendencies of Poe. So much to be done; so little time to do it.