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POE'S "METZENGERSTEIN" AS A TALE  
OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

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Of the five Poe tales published by the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier* in 1832, four deal explicitly with the body-soul dualism.<sup>1</sup> Three of the four ("The Duke de L'Omelette"; "A Decided Loss," later retitled "Loss of Breath"; and "The Bargain Lost," later retitled "Bon Bon") treat the subject light-heartedly, even comically. But a fourth tale, "Metzengerstein," foreshadows such later serious Gothic tales as "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher." As in the later tales, the action of "Metzengerstein" takes place in a "Germanic" setting and involves "castles," familial disintegration, and a more or less consistently rational speaker narrating events so bizarre that at times the description reaches a feverish pitch. With notable economy, the opening paragraph sets the tone and states the central motif of the tale:

Horror and fatality have been stalking abroad in all ages. Why then give a date to this story I have to tell? Let it suffice to say, that at the period of which I speak, there existed in the interior of Hungary, a settled although hidden belief in the doctrines of the Metempsychosis. Of the doctrines themselves—that is, of their falsity, or of their probability—I say nothing. I assert, however, that much of our incredulity (as La Bruyere says of all our unhappiness) "vient de ne pouvoir être seuls."<sup>2</sup>

It seems reasonable to conclude from this opening that Poe is announcing his intention to use the "fictive imagination" to speculate on "the doctrines of Metempsychosis."

Marie Bonaparte, however, finds in this tale, as she does in so many Poe tales, evidence of Freudian neurosis. In her view:

the actual theme of the tale is one of incest: a tale of "mounting" the mother and of the "dangers" attendant on that "chase." ...Thus, on the tapestry, the father (Berlifitzing), bestrides the mother (the horse), and the son (Metzengerstein) unhorses him and puts him to death in order to *seize the mother for himself*, as the story soon shows. This is the classical Oedipus situation, as it must have worked itself out, very early, in the precocious soul of the little Edgar.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Bonaparte focuses exclusively on Poe's overflowing subconscious, G. R. Thompson finds the tale almost supernaturally crafty. He argues that the tale is wholly parodic, and that the "erudition" of the narrator not only mocks such pretense in the tale of horror, it also underscores the obtuse character of the narrator..."<sup>4</sup> More consistent with our usual understanding of Poe is Benjamin F. Fisher's placement of "Metzengerstein" into its proper cultural and editorial context. Fisher proposes that the tale "was written with no comic intention, but that it was an early venture of Poe's into Gothic fiction and followed in the sober path of numberless predecessors. Comparing the text first published with Poe's final version will, I believe, show that he refined away crudities, in an attempt to cull out extremes and to produce a more effective Gothic story, rather than to exaggerate the Gothic elements for humorous effect."<sup>5</sup>

Although agreeing with Fisher that Poe did not write this tale for comic effect, I would like to widen the context beyond the purely contemporary Gothic conventions of Poe's day. One need not deny Bonaparte's general description of Poe's neurosis, nor the importance of the powerful image of horse and rider to question her contention that "the actual theme" of this tale is "incest." If we permit Poe his explicitly stated *donnée* of "the doctrines of Metempsychosis," the broader context of the tale moves into the foreground. The motif of "the doctrines of metempsychosis" is underlined by the narrator's obliteration of chronological time ("Why then give a date to this story I have to tell?"). The measured time of mortal flesh is eclipsed in favor of unmeasurable eternity, a time scheme more congenial to the existence of the immortal soul. The diction of the first sentence—"Horror and fatality have been stalking abroad in all ages"—not only obscures sequential worldly time, but depicts the encounter with eternity as one that takes place in fear and trembling.

A recent student of "the doctrines of Metempsychosis" has listed three basic "beliefs concerning the soul" that are presupposed by Metempsychosis. These are that the soul is separable from the body; the soul can enter non-human forms of animate (sometimes inanimate) matter; the soul is individual.<sup>6</sup> It is not clear just how seriously Poe takes the doctrine. The narrator maintains an appropriate skepticism ("of the doctrines themselves—that is, of their falsity or probability—I say nothing"). Whatever Poe intended, serious or not, the doctrine of transmigration of souls itself has a long and impres

sive history, going back at least as far as Pythagoras. More significantly, the concept of the soul inhabiting different bodies is given utterance in the works of the most powerful and influential mind in all of Western thought—Plato.

Carried on by such successors to Plato as Proclus, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, the concept could have reached Poe from three sources. The first is the writings of the Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century, whose works Poe was fond of alluding to or pretending to quote from. The second source from which Poe might have picked up the set of ideas that he refers to as "Metempsychosis" is Thomas Taylor the Platonist, who translated into English and brought to light the works not only of Plato himself but of the Greek Neoplatonists. Finally, Poe's thinking about Metempsychosis could have been stimulated by his reading of current periodicals.<sup>6a</sup>

As a poet, however, Poe developed and probed the notion of the transmigration of souls not through logic and argumentation, but through metaphor. In this tale there is one image that dominates the action completely and that has inevitably had the strongest impact on commentators. This is the image in which the work culminates, the image of a rider who, having lost control of the horse he is riding, is carried to his destruction much to his own horror and the horror of those who witness the scene.

It is not surprising that this image should have had so pronounced an effect on the critics, because the story is as much about the relationship between the Baron Metzengerstein and the mysterious horse as it is about the feud between the two families. Moreover, the image of horse and rider is at the center of the meaning of the story. It becomes the symbol in which the motif of Metempsychosis is embodied.<sup>7</sup>

The image of the horse enters the story soon after the death of the young Baron's father. Immediately after succeeding to his father's estates and title, "...for the space of three days, the behavior of the heir out-heroded Herod .... On the night of the fourth day, the stables of the castle Berlifitzing were discovered to be on fire..." (p. 95). Three days after the death of the father, the stables of the arch enemy are purged by fire. While the fire blazes,

the young nobleman himself sat apparently buried in meditation, in a vast and desolate upper apartment of the family palace of Metzengerstein. The rich although faded tapestry hangings which swung gloomily upon the walls, represented the shadowy

and majestic forms of a thousand illustrious ancestors (p. 188).

The gloomy tapestries are, perhaps, all too familiar to readers of Gothic fiction. What catches the imagination here, however, is that while the arch enemy's stables are being purged by fire, the Baron sits contemplating works of art. This kind of "psychotic" detachment, this eerie disjunction between stimulus and response, is common among Poe's heroes. But the detachment here, as elsewhere in Poe, is not gratuitous, testifying, as it does, to a growing rift taking place within Metzengerstein's psyche between the world of spirit and the world of matter. The works of art that have caught Metzengerstein's attention bring him in contact with an unknown and evanescent past; as he watches them, they begin to possess Metzengerstein's imagination completely:

*Here, rich-ermined priests, and pontifical dignitaries, familiarly seated with the autocrat and the sovereign, put a veto on the wishes of a temporal king, or restrained with the fiat of papal supremacy the rebellious sceptre of the Arch-enemy. There, the dark, tall statues of the Princes Metzengerstein—their muscular war-coursers plunging over the carcasses of fallen foes—startled the steadiest nerves with their vigorous expression; and here, again, the voluptuous and swan-like figures of the dames of days gone by, floated away in the mazes of an unreal dance to the strains of imaginary melody (p. 188).*

Two modes of "reality" come flowing into Metzengerstein's mind through two sensual channels, the ears and the eyes. Visually, the protagonist perceives the work of art that preserves in stasis a "platonian" world of "shadowy and majestic forms." But these forms instead of reflecting ideal beauty reflect the world of the grotesque, a world of violence, horror, and disharmony. And yet, the passage ends on what is almost a note of Keatsian lyricism: "the swan-like figures of the dames of days gone by, [floating] away in the mazes of an unreal dance to the strains of imaginary melody." As a matter of fact, the passage sounds like a parody of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in which "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/ Are sweeter," and in which the speaker implores the "soft pipes" (either those pictured on the urn or "pipes" of the imagination) to play "Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,/ Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone." What happens in Poe's tale is that the "sensual ear" listens to the tumult of destruction while the sensual eye is becoming "spiritualized" by being absorbed into the work of art.

Soon the struggle between the sensual ear and the inner eye becomes more intense:

But as the Baron listened, or affected to listen, to the gradually increasing uproar in the stables of Berlifitzing—or perhaps pondered upon some more novel, some more decided act of audacity—his eyes became unwittingly rivetted to the figure of an enormous, and unnaturally colored horse, represented in the tapestry as belonging to a Saracen ancestor of the family of his rival. The horse itself, in the foreground of the design, stood motionless and statue-like—while farther back, its discomfited rider perished by the dagger of a Metzengerstein (pp. 188-189).

The action taking place here is quite complex. The "historic" past is preserved in the work of art. As Metzengerstein gazes at the work of art he becomes absorbed into its reality (for example, the statement "farther back, its discomfited rider" indicates that he accepts the perspectives of the painting as "real" perspectives). There is also a counter-action, for through the operation of the work of art on the mind, the past is not only preserved but is made present. In addition, the action that is taking place in the "world of nature" (the burning of Berlifitzing's stables) is cognate to the action of the work of art. In both instances the Berlifitzings are being discomfited, and Metzengerstein's mind is a bridge spanning the two self-reflecting worlds: art and nature, past and present.

At this point, Metzengerstein begins to enter what Richard Wilbur has recently reminded us is the "hypnagogic state," a condition in which the mind finds itself somewhere between sleep and dream:

It was with difficulty that [Metzengerstein] reconciled his dreamy and incoherent feelings with the certainty of being awake. The longer he gazed the more absorbing became the spell—the more impossible did it appear that he could ever withdraw his glance from the fascination of that tapestry (p. 189).

Then, for a moment, the world becomes too much. He withdraws his gaze momentarily to concentrate his attention on the glare caused by the burning stables. When he looks at the tapestry again,

To his extreme horror and astonishment, the head of the gigantic steed had, in the meantime, altered its position. The neck of the animal, before arched, as if in compassion, over the prostrate body of its lord, was now extended, at full length, in the direction of the Baron. The eyes, before invisible, now wore an energetic and

human expression, while they gleamed with a fiery and unusual red; and the distended lips of the apparently enraged horse left in full view his gigantic and disgusting teeth (p. 189).

Perhaps a supernatural event has taken place. For the reader who prefers to believe otherwise it is possible to explain what has happened as an illusory experience brought on by Metzengerstein's overwrought state. What can be said unequivocally, though, is that in the middle-ground of Metzengerstein's mind a fusion has taken place between the "glare of ruddy light thrown full by the flaming stables" and the figures depicted on the tapestry. Not only has the tapestry itself come alive for the protagonist but the horse depicted in it has taken on human qualities. One more fusion, however, is yet to take place:

Stupefied with terror, the young nobleman tottered to the door. As he threw it open, a flash of red light, streaming far into the chamber, flung his shadow with a clear outline against the quivering tapestry; and he shuddered to perceive that shadow—as he staggered awhile upon the threshold—assuming the exact position, and precisely filling up the countour, of the relentless and triumphant murderer of the Saracen Berlifitzing (pp. 189-199).

It is common knowledge that among primitive people the shadow is considered a visible manifestation of the soul. What happens, here, then, is that the light from the burning Berlifitzing stables, in an image reminiscent of Plato's cave, projects the shadow of the living Metzengerstein onto the image of the ancestor which has been preserved in the painting. Metzengerstein now enters the painting not only through imagination but literally. By the same token, as Metzengerstein's shadow (or soul) is projected into the work of art so one of the images in the work of art is ejected into the world of empirical reality, because it is at this moment that the mysterious horse resembling the horse in the tapestry, is caught, "like Pegasus stung by the gadfly, flying, all smoking and foaming with rage, from the burning stables of the Castle Berlifitzing."

From this point on, the Baron withdraws from human society, his sole activity being to ride the horse, until, in the climactic scene of the tale, Metzengerstein, the horse, and the Chateau Metzengerstein all go up in flames, as did the stables of Berlifitzing previously:

Up the long avenue of aged oaks which led from the forest to the main entrance of the Chateau Metzengerstein, a steed, bearing

## "METZENGERSTEIN"

an unbonneted and disordered rider, was seen leaping with an impetuosity which outstripped the very Demon of the Tempest, and extorted from every stupefied beholder the ejaculation—"horrible."

The career of the horseman was indisputably, on his own part, uncontrollable. The agony of his countenance, the convulsive struggle of his frame, gave evidence of superhuman exertion: but no sound, save a solitary shriek, escaped from his lacerated lips, which were bitten through and through in the intensity of terror. One instant, and the clattering of hoofs resounded sharply and shrilly above the roaring of the flames and the shrieking of the winds—another, and clearing at a single plunge the gate-way and the moat, the steed bounded far up the tottering staircases of the palace, and, with its rider, disappeared amid the whirlwind of chaotic fire (pp. 195-196).

Marie Bonaparte, as we have noted, interpreted this culminating image as a projection out of Poe's personal neurotic obsession, a thinly disguised expression of his desire to couple with his mother and subdue his father (the horse serving as both the desired mother and the hated father). Oddly, she does not examine the traditional and archetypal nature of Poe's image, even though the image has a long and fascinating history. Without attempting to trace that history, I would like to call attention to a number of suggestive parallels.

The first of these is Plato's *Phaedrus*, which is, among its other features, a treatise on the soul and on Love. In this dialogue, described by B. Jowett as "one of the most beautiful of the Platonic Dialogues,"<sup>8</sup> Plato uses an image similar to the one that dominates Poe's story. He presents the soul as a chariot drawn by two horses opposite to each other in every way. One of these is mild, docile, beautiful, and characterized by harmony of form. The other is ugly, deformed, and rebellious. While the rebellious horse remains unbroken, the chariot is paralyzed. And therefore the charioteer must subdue the rebellious horse. Once he does so, harmony is achieved and the soul can ascend unhampered and achieve communion with the good. Jowett explains the figure by asserting that "there is no difficulty in seeing that the charioteer represents the reason, or that the black horse is the symbol of the sensual or concupiscent element of human nature. The white horse also represents rational impulse..." I give the concluding lines of this extended metaphor uttered by Socrates, as Poe might have known them, in the Thomas Taylor translation of 1804:

But the charioteer [one aspect of reason according to Jowett]...



falling down as it were from the goal [of ideal beauty,] pulls back the reins with still greater violence from the teeth of the injurious horse, represses his reviling tongue and bloody jaws, fixes his legs and hips on the ground, and thus torments him for his behaviour. But when the vicious horse has often endured a punishment of this kind, he is at length rendered humble and submissive, and follows the providential directions of the charioteer....<sup>9</sup>

Plato's image is not much less violent than Poe's, but whereas in the former it is reason that triumphs by bringing the rebellious steed to heel, in the latter just the opposite seems to happen. The steed is uncontrollable. Norman O. Brown has pointed out that Plato's metaphor of the soul as a chariot pulled by two horses appears in slightly different form in Freud's *The Ego and the Id*,<sup>10</sup> in which Freud describes those two functions of mind as follows:

The functional importance of the ego is manifested in the fact that normally control over the approaches to motility devolves upon it. Thus in its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Poe seems to fall somewhere between Plato and Freud, not only chronologically but ideologically as well. Plato uses his extended metaphor to portray the relationship between the soul and beauty. For him the tremendous energies involved in the struggle that takes place among the horses and the charioteer are emblematic of the struggle between the ideal and the carnal within the individual himself. But for Freud, soul is not a factor; rather, he is concerned with the way in which human energies are deployed so as to assure effective management of the physical mechanism.<sup>12</sup> Poe's stated subject is the transmigration of souls, a Platonic and Neoplatonic idea, but the focal image of the story, which conveys what Poe referred to as the "undercurrent of meaning," is an image of "psychic conflict" and unmanageable suppressed energy.

Allen Tate has called Poe a "transitional figure," and that is precisely what he is here. The forcefulness of Poe's image lies in the way in which it dramatizes the eclipse of reason. Plato's charioteer humbles the concupiscent steed. Freud humbles him too, so to speak,

by presenting the image of horse and rider in a fully rational and non-explosive context. But Poe presents the unadulterate terror of man's vulnerability to forces within himself that he can neither understand nor control and that therefore constantly threaten to destroy him.

Emerson's use of Plato's figure about a decade after Poe had used it provides a revealing note of contrast. Describing the poet as "the man of Beauty," Emerson announces with customary affirmative gusto:

It is a secret which every intellectual man quickly learns, that beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect he is capable of a new energy (as of an intellect doubled on itself), by abandonment to the nature of things; that beside his privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power on which he can draw, by unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him... As the traveller who has lost his way throws his reins on his horse's neck and trusts to the instinct of the animal to find his road, so must we do with the divine animal who carries us through this world.<sup>13</sup>

Norman Foerster has an illuminating comment on this passage: "Using a symbol significantly different from Plato's charioteer and horses," he writes, "Emerson pictures the poet as a lost traveler who throws up the reins and trusts to the horse's instinct to guide him aright. The Platonic charioteer has abdicated, and there is but one horse, half black and half white, half celestial and half earthly, and there is no saying which half is leading the way, or whither it is carrying him! This apparent preference of abandon to control may be found in conceptual language at the end of the essay on inspiration...."<sup>14</sup>

Emerson was able to prefer "abandon to control" because he felt that the energies forcing their way through consciousness would be the energies of the immortal soul, of the "ethereal tides," and that these energies would consequently be constructive and creative. He talks about "unlocking human doors... at all risks" but he does not dwell on the risks. Poe, on the contrary, seems to have been aware of the risks if of nothing else, and the energies that he perceives come from below, not from above. Emerson's horse is the "divine animal"; Poe's is demonic.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the story Poe links the transmigrating soul with

potentially explosive and disruptive psychic energies. In Freud's use of the figure of horse and rider he says that the rider is often obliged to guide the horse where it wants to go, and that the ego often finds itself in the same predicament—it, too, is sometimes compelled by the id to act in a way that the id demands. Here Freud's insight is anticipated by Poe, though Poe never stated the matter in discursive, or (if one prefers) scientific terms. In Poe's metaphor, the id as sublimated energy gains control of the body or the ego. The conscious mind is dragged to destruction ("The career of the horseman was indisputably, on his own part, uncontrollable. The agony of his countenance, the convulsive struggle of his frame, gave evidence of superhuman exertion.") by those forces.<sup>16</sup>

The onlooking servants see the momentary ascendancy and instant destruction of a "lord of misrule." The ego, "an unbonneted and disordered rider," has been overthrown. This conflict between id and ego is reminiscent of the Romantic poets' concern with the conflict between Dionysus and Apollo, between inspiration and form. Expli-cating Wordsworth's famous dictum that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," M. H. Abrams points out that the "suggestion, underlined by the word 'spontaneous,' is that the dynamics of overflow are inherent in the poet and, perhaps, not within his deliberate control."<sup>17</sup> Poe's image of horse and rider is a metaphorical statement of the danger of uncontrolled overflow. If Emerson saw the ethereal tides flowing through the artist who was willing to take the risk and unlock his human doors, Poe saw the doors opening on the pit of madness and Nothingness.

But Poe's tale of immortality and the transmigration of souls, of wild, uncontrolled passions, inverts the attitude of the British Romantics toward the immortal soul and human passion. For Coleridge and other Romantics, as Abrams has observed, the "modifying action of passion" is to animate the inanimate, to transfer "... the life of the observer to the things he observes...."<sup>18</sup> The soul for Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, as for the Neoplatonists translated by Thomas Taylor, is that which has the power to infuse life into the mechanical universe of eighteenth-century philosophy. Poe reverses this conventional Romantic posture. For him, the modifying action of passion is to de-animate the animate, and the influx of soul, far from restoring Nature to organic unity, seems to be precisely what alienates man from Nature.<sup>19</sup>

Bearing this in mind, one sees immediately how perfectly right it

was of that Romantic worshipper of the organic life-force, D. H. Lawrence, to be so deeply repelled by what he perceived to be the "mechanical quality" that pervaded Poe's style. "He never sees anything in terms of life," Lawrence complained of Poe, "almost always in terms of matter, jewels, marble, etc.—or in terms of force, scientific. And his cadences are all managed mechanically. This is what is called 'having a style'."<sup>20</sup> What irritated Lawrence, one might guess, was not simply the fact that Poe's style was "mechanical," but that it was most mechanical at the very moments when, according to Lawrence's understanding of the universe, it should have been "organic." But it is Poe's absolute refusal to accept the "organic" view of life adhered to by so many Romantic writers that brings him so uncannily close to the modern sensibility.<sup>21</sup>

Emerson, who is often credited with being the liberator of American poetry, expanded and "Americanized" the worldview of the British Romantics. He felt quite comfortable with (though he modified) Coleridgean organicism and Wordsworthian Neoplatonism. "Our being," he once said, "is descending to us we know not whence." Or, again, he described Revelation by saying that "we distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term *Revelation*. These are always attended by the emotion of the sublime. For this communication is an influx of the Divine mind into our mind." Such utterances, which are not terribly far from the Wordsworthian vision, inspire our deepest admiration for Emerson the seer.

When Poe writes about the soul, however, he does not inspire the same kind of admiration. In fact, when Poe writes about immortality and the soul he frequently inspires ridicule and hostility rather than admiration. One clear reason for the critical hostility elicited by Poe's presentation of man's encounter with the eternal is that he presents the encounter, not as a sublime revelation but as a supreme instance of terror. But to some extent the ridicule and hostility are owing to Poe's own vacillation between skepticism and belief. The very fact that respected critics can dismiss "the doctrines of Metempsychosis" in "Metzengerstein," or read the story as a "hoax" is testimony to authorial uncertainties that creep into Poe's work. Moreover, Poe often undermines himself. "The Philosophy of Composition," for example, amounts to a denial by Poe of his own vision of immortality and terror. The essay implies that the writer of "The Raven" did not himself experience terror in confronting the universe, but that he merely used terrifying devices to achieve "aesthetic" effects, which is

to say that terror is related only to art and not to life. No one who has read Poe carefully is likely to believe that.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See David H. Hirsch, *PoeS*, 10 (1977), 36, where Poe's variations on the body-soul split in the four tales are described. Also, Alexander Hammond's discussions of these pieces as "Folio Club Tales" in *PoeS*, 5 & 8 (1972 and 1975); and *Poe at Work: Seven Textual Studies*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore, 1978); and Fisher's *The Very Spirit of Cordiality: The Literary Uses of Alcohol and Alcoholism in the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> *H*, 2:185. Page numbers in text refer to this edition.

<sup>3</sup> *The Life and Works of Edgar Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (London, 1949), p. 278. Bonaparte also allows that "the horse, to Poe's unconscious, might have stood for the hated enemy, (the father), who drags to death his slayer, (the son)" (p. 281). This more traditional interpretation of the "horse" symbolism is followed by David Rein, *Edgar A. Poe: The Inner Pattern* (New York, 1960), p. 14: "While no doubt, in a general way, the horse represented a hostile power, one may hazard a guess and say that the creature, with its human characteristics, including its 'human-looking eye,' represented a real person, and specifically John Allan."

<sup>4</sup> *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison, WI, 1973), p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> "Poe's 'Metzengerstein': Not a Hoax," *AL*, 42 (1971), 487.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Strainge Long, *A Study of the Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Greece from Pythagoras to Plato* (Princeton, 1948), p. 2. Saul Bellow speculates on the doctrines in his novel *Humboldt's Gift*.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Allen, *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* (New York, 1969); Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* (New York, 1956); Sidney P. Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles* (Carbondale, Ill., 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Here I must disagree with Franz H. Link and Kuno Schumann, who find, in Link's words, that "the motif of the transmigration of souls, introduced as a leading thought, does not assume profound significance": *Edgar Allan Poe: Ein Dichter zwischen Romantik und Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, Bonn, 1968), p. 208. For the horse as a "symbol" of immortality, see Susan and Stuart Levine, "Poe's Use of Jacob Bryant in 'Metzengerstein'." *PoeS*, 9 (1976), 53.

<sup>8</sup> B. Jowett, tr. *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York and London, 1892), 1: 404, 410.

<sup>9</sup> *The Works of Plato*, tr. Floyer Sydenham and Thomas Taylor (London, 1804), 3:337. Poe's debt to Plato remains shadowy and relatively unexplored, but Richard Wilbur's analyses of Poe suggest, without trying to establish, a substantial influence, and R. P. Benton has demonstrated a direct Platonic influence in "Platonic Allegory in Poe's 'Eleonora,'" *NCF*, 22 (1967), 293-297. Compare Psalm 32:9— "Be not like a horse or a mule,

"METZENGERSTEIN"

without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle..."

<sup>10</sup> *Life Against Death* (New York, 1961), p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> *The Ego and the Id*, tr. and ed. James Strachey (New York, 1962), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> As Norman O. Brown puts it, "sublimation is the use made of bodily energy by a soul which sets itself apart from the body..." Page 157.

<sup>13</sup> "The Poet," *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Cambridge, MA., 1957), p. 233.

<sup>14</sup> Milton Konvitz and Stephen Whicher, eds., *Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), pp. 115-116.

<sup>15</sup> See Grace P. Smith, "Poe's 'Metzengerstein,'" *MLN*, 48 (1933), 356-359: "Clearly the animal is a demon-horse..." See also, C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, for discussions of the chthonic horse.

<sup>16</sup> According to N. O. Brown, the soul is the ego. "Sexual energy," he writes, "is bodily energy, and the desexualized is disembodied energy, or energy made soulful" (p. 158). None of these terms has, as yet, a precise fixed meaning. In each use of horse and rider cited here the constant is a notion of some kind of struggle, between a residue of chaos or a reservoir of potentially explosive energy on the one hand and an inevitable (Brown feels it is not inevitable) repressive force on the other. To use everyday language, it seems that Plato, Poe and Freud view the contest as one in which disruptive and destructive elements must be inhibited and controlled. Emerson, Brown (and more recently Theodore Roszak) see the struggle as one in which primal life energies are being stifled by repressive forces.

<sup>17</sup> *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York, 1958), p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> For other discussions of Poe on immortality and the soul, see Eric W. Carlson, *Poe on the Soul of Man* (Baltimore, MD., 1973); Lou Ann Kriegisch, " 'Ulalume'—A Platonic Profanation of Beauty and Love," *PoeS*, 9 (1973), 29-31; Barton Levi St. Armand, "The 'Mysteries' of Edgar Poe: The Quest for a Monomyth in Gothic Literature," G. R. Thompson, ed., *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism* (Pullman, WA., 1974), pp. 65-93.

<sup>20</sup> *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Garden City, 1953), p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> See Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, MA., 1957), Chapter VIII, and especially pp. 227-232; 236-240.