

# EDGAR ALLAN POE'S LANDSCAPE AT ARNHEIM AS A MODEL FOR THE SURREALIST GARDEN

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*In his short story "The Domain of Arnheim," Edgar Allan Poe declares landscape architecture to be the premier art, the most ambitious means of converting natural capabilities to paradisiacal realities through the artificial. The story itself is a highly coded puzzle that diversifies the idea of chiaroscuro through the device of an anonymous narrator. Is Poe's text a cipher, as he suggests? Does it demand various short-circuits and hidden passageways? What are its sources and its intentions? The authors will study the mirror design Poe contrived for Arnheim as he did for other spaces — a ratio between sense and idea. Our purpose is to consider fully the claim that Poe is a precursor of Surrealism. Like another famous proto-Surrealist, Raymond Roussel, Poe relied on the literary tradition of the death narrative, the defective narrator, chiaroscuro, and "impossible travel" employing optics and metonymies. Roussel's garden (*Locus Solus*, 1929), like Poe's, was also presented as the work of an enlightened rationalist with infinite resources. Each author saw his Surrealist garden as a "thinking machine." Each created a narrative that seemed to project a fictional scene but held open the possibility that gardens could work like texts but, more provocatively, that the text could be the garden itself.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The most compelling cases for a natural relationship between Surrealism and the landscape surely is to be found in two "proto-Surrealists," the French prodigy Raymond Roussel (1877-1933) and the American inventor of detective fiction, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). Roussel, after all, took Lautréamont's dark interiors outdoors in his fantastic pedagogical garden of the eccentric scientist, Martial Canterel, in *Locus Solus* (1914). Poe belonged, as the French film director François Truffaut wrote in 1967, to the family of "artists of anxiety," which included Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Hitchcock. After Poe's decisive break with New England literary traditions — a break compensated by his lionization by the French — American literature would maintain a line of the uncanny, a "Mulholland Drive" snaking through every "normal" suburb and "picturesque" park. Just how did Poe, however, establish his role as a poet-laureate of the Surreal landscape? The answer lies in the way Poe, like Roussel, employed methods of automated construction.

Surrealism is remarkably consistent and rule-driven, and these proto-Surrealists could be said to have set the pace. Roussel revealed his techniques, collected under the term, the *procédé*, in his famous work, *How I Wrote Certain of my Books* (1935). These included the strategic separation of alternative meanings of *double entendres*, travel through tiny optical pathways, and pun-fed metonymies (Ford, 2000, pp. 1-26). Poe, less confessional, was no less inventive. His early interest in ciphers and codes led to consummate skill in arranging mirror texts whose strategically chosen centers allowed meaning to ladder across between the two wings — "chiasmus" (Cudworth, 1850). Surrealism's court painter, René Magritte, acknowledged this trick by placing a copy of Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) on the sill beneath the uncooperative mirror in "Not to Be Reproduced," 1937 (Figure 1). The mirror design of *Pym* employs a pivotal thirteenth chapter to divide the book's twenty-four chapters by the death of his brother Augustus, whose name's Latin etymology traces back to the sciences of divination (Poe was an excellent Latin scholar).

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**Figure 1 René Magritte, “Not to be reproduced” (1937).** Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.



Chiasmus has been documented not just for *Pym* but for more prominent projects, such as “The Purloined Letter,” where, as the Poe scholar Richard Kopley (2010) has shown, a center is indicated by the exchange of the scandalous letter for the reward, a passage that emphasizes *hands* and *signs*. Symmetrically aligned phrases match up to produce new meanings, often with direct reference to the “handedness” of the story, as in the reference to the game of “odds and evens” (also known as “Morra,” a game where hands are cast with fingers indicating numbers to combine in odd or even counts, like “rock, paper, scissors”). The opposed “left” and “right” wings of the butterflyed text corresponds to the case of ciphers where each letter of the alphabet is assigned another, and the message visible to all as a puzzle contains a hidden twin. Generally, Poe exploits this as an opposition of sense to idea, reconnected through mechanisms of geometry, topology, topography, and of course counting.

Although Roussel has been included with Poe in many lists, the connections seem to be trian-

gular rather than direct. Poe was popularized in France by Charles Baudelaire and Stephane Mallarmé. Some have claimed that Jules Verne drew much of his inspiration directly from Poe. Roussel so revered Verne that he could not bear to loan a convalescing family friend his copy of one of Verne's novels. If there was no direct line of influence, there were certainly coincidences in the preference for "automatic" devices used on two levels: (1) to generate situations in the text that left the reader to create new meanings and (2) to produce characters, objects, and themes within the texts themselves, either as literal *automata* or as defective instruments of description or exposition, which the reader had to look past in order to see the truths lying in the distance.

The automatic devices could be summed up by a single term borrowed from painting: *chiaroscuro* ("dark-light"). Originally *chiaroscuro* was simply the shading and shadowing of figures to make them appear more three-dimensional. In the Renaissance, it was the practice of drawing in white chalk on a dark medium, which made figures appear as shadowy filigree. However, the main idea of *chiaroscuro* is the frame-inside-the frame, where the processes of observation and representation are included, as a part of the representation. In the "frontal" version, the scene is placed within a frame shown as a part of the scene: a window, door, or portal. In an "oblique" variation, the spectator is placed to the side of a process of observation, able to take in both the observer and observed as well as the device or method that connects them. For example, a narrator who tells the story of a character knows the end of the story as he narrates the beginning, but may conceal some key detail to save it for later on, as an element of surprise.

The visual practice of *chiaroscuro* was popular in Poe's day, and its seeming application of one of the possible meanings of Horace's dictum, *ut pictura poesis* ("paintings should be like poems") was used to create allegorical scenes such as Thomas Cole's "The Voyage of Life." Poe very probably saw at least a reproduction of one painting of this series, "Youth," 1840, which depicted a possible model for the castle he describes at the end of the "Arnheim" story — "a mass of semi-Gothic, semi-Saracenic architecture, sustaining itself as if by miracle in mid-air; glittering in the red sunlight with a hundred oriels, minarets, and pinnacles; and seeming the phantom handiwork, conjointly, of the Sylphs, of the Fairies, of the Genii, and of the Gnomes." Turning the tube of perspectival space into a temporal sequence redefined the role of the point of view and vanishing point in terms of narrative; just so, the motion of the point-of-view device, a narrator traveling in a canoe in the case of "Arnheim," allowed for another kind of chiasmus, this time a hinge combining space and time in a "paradisiacal" way that the reader was left to assemble.

Poe's methods of "automating" his writing process puts on hold questions about Poe's landscape influences. He may have read Andrew Jackson Downing's *Treatise on Landscape Gardening* (1841), although it is more probable that he read a review. However, Poe's preference for the artificial over the natural style — which might be mistaken for a matter of taste in the national debate over the "formal" artificial and the "picturesque" natural styles — should be read in a more complex way. "Artificial" for Poe meant the process of correcting conditions found in nature, which would have been perfect had it not been for "geological" faulting and human intervention. It lay to the artist to find the means to apply *poesis* strategically, to places deemed "capable" of perfection. Thus, the choice of the wealthy Ellison was made carefully: an isolated site where topography, vegetation, climate, and waterways could be pushed further to create a paradise on earth. This story of a garden was a mirror of Poe's own method of taking one text, fully readable, and creating *inside it* its own mirror of perfection, without any forced symbols, allegories, or authorial intentions — only the action of the attentive reader.

This technique imposed an austere style and other extreme conditions on Poe's texts, but this was principally what had attracted the Surrealists. According to the scholar Robert Belton (1987), "Berenice," the story of a woman who wastes away and is prematurely buried, was a sensation for André Breton and Max Ernst. Poe seemed to anticipate the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's idea of the "subject in pieces," a metonym where a body part (the heart in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the teeth of "Berenice") retained life after the host had died, or at least was buried. Poe's economy of circulating metonymies backward and forward in his stories ("metalepsis" and "analepsis"), in fact, seemed to prefigure substantial portions of Lacan's theory of the "language of the unconscious." Poe's unconscious was this "metonymy-economy," to put it glibly perhaps, in the sense that he created spaces with temporalized narrative elements (automations of the point-of-view function) that were structured as coded ciphers to allow the reader to combine and resonate the meanings of the work himself/herself (Hum-

phries, 1985, p. 59).

This strategy seems to follow directly what Ernst Jentsch used to describe as the primary effects of “the uncanny” (*die Unheimlich*). In his famous 1908 essay, Jentsch summarized the uncanny as a “criss-cross” effect of the relation between life and death. The uncanny condition was created by (1) a live person possessed or ruled by a small kernel of the dead — a haunting spirit, an omen, or a curse; or, (2) a dead thing or fragment that, though separated from its body, its source of life, went on living. To abbreviate these as AD and DA, we could say that it rests with the author to create connections between the two conditions, so that metonymy effectively constructs a circuit between these extreme poles of the uncanny, AD $\rightleftharpoons$ DA. This transaction is clear in such stories as “The Tell-Tale Heart,” where the sclerotic eye of the old man (AD) is the ominous, maddening agent symmetrical with the beating heart of the murdered corpse (DA). Like Roussel’s separated pun-twins, *les lettres de blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard/pillard* (“the white letters chalked on the cushions of the old billiard table” versus “the letters sent by the white man about the hordes of the old pillager”), one meaning must “play dead” (*le mort* = “the dummy”) inside the other until the tables have turned. As an added benefit, the isolated incidences of AD, such as the sclerotic eye, and DA, the multiple prematurely buried corpses that populate Poe’s stories, provide characters and props.

Jentsch’s formula AD/DA influenced Sigmund Freud’s own condensation of the uncanny (1919): (1) themes of stolen identity (doubles, portraits that sapped the souls of their subjects, “nobodies,” wrong names, etc.) and (2) optics (the evil eye, telescopic or microscopic perception, a breakdown in the system of dimensions, etc.). The parallel is not at first clear. Stolen identity themes, such as the portrait that steals the soul of its subject, is the transaction between Ad, the subject, and the Da, the painting that becomes life-like. In the optical uncanny, the visible scene “out there” contains subjective element, an envious or panoptical eye, whose location is always unknown. This gaze, a major element in both Jean-Paul Sartre’s and Jacques Lacan’s theories of perception, mandates a constant, a perennial coupling of the “subjective object” (externality, space) and the observing “objectivized” subject that is always coupled, always reciprocal.

Freud’s prime example of the E. T. A. Hoffman tale, “The Sandman” (1816) involved optics and identity both as structural devices and object themes. Poe’s landscape fiction, “The Domain of Arnheim,” does not seem at first to involve obvious optics or identity issues, until the work is examined in terms of its techniques of chiaroscuro and point of view. At this level, the whole landscape turns “optical,” in the same way that Cole’s allegorical paintings convert the view into dramatic negotiations of light and shadow. No less does the issue of identity become central as the narrator’s defective point of view becomes a key to its counterpart, the vanishing point, “brought forward” through devices of walls, gates, and, finally, castles floating in space.

Chiasmus, ciphers, and the references to both systems of the uncanny layer Poe’s texts with multiple possibilities. As Jefferson Humphries (1985) has suggested in the case of Baudelaire’s notorious misreading of Poe’s poems, Poe’s practice of over-determination means that a given signifier may have multiple meanings is equal to the condition where the signifier has no meanings — making anything a critic might say or fail to say about a Poe text eventually true! The subjective objective (DA) suggests the objective subject (AD). And, even in cases where critics such as Gerhard Hoffman (1979) notice only one, “mood-invested space” (*gestimmter Raum*), the polar companion, the spatially-dimensionally determined subject, lies close at hand. This is to say: over-determination is not just a matter of layering possibilities on top of each other in a story. Rather, it is the regulated way that the narrative, chiastically split into “odd” and “even” parts — even in its internal polarity of the subjective object and objective subject — sets itself up as a cipher to add an echo to intercept each element as it proceeds in a linear way from the origin to the end of the work.

True to the mirror metaphor, elements function simultaneously in the “diachronic” flow of the story’s temporality and the “synchronic” relationship with the future or past element that is its “twin.” This is a double accomplishment. First, any attempt to displace the work as an allegorical or mimetic representation of some external reality (a “projective” thesis) is doomed by the chiasmic undermining of the representational unity of art form. The situation is much like an Escher drawing, where a hand is shown extending past the drawing to draw its own cuff. The Möbius-band effect created by self-reference is the uncanny experience that occurs when the imaginary traveler on such a surface real-

izes that there are *simultaneously and concretely* both two and one surfaces. The second accomplishment of over-determination is the transfer of the “site of meaning creation” from the work to the spectator-reader. Since it is no longer the case that the work occupies the position of a passageway or viewpoint to some reality lying beyond, and projected on to, the surface of representation, the reader realizes his/her position as the *actual point of view* at which the work will be seen — fully and perfectly, without any disadvantage of historical distance, incomplete knowledge, inattentiveness, or cultural misunderstanding.

This last point will be difficult to accept for most “representationalists,” who see the work of art as a bridge to an inevitably inaccessible subjective experience of the private author. But, even though Poe never literally stated that he intended this kind of transfer of “meaning effect” from the text to the reader, it is possible to demonstrate that it is present, and that it works. And, it is specifically the case of the landscape garden — which Poe extolled as the highest order of artistic expression — that offers us the best opportunity to effect just such a demonstration.

## 2 THE DOMAIN OF ARNHEIM

Jeffrey Hess (1970, p. 178) describes the birth of Poe’s first and main story about the landscape garden: “Poe’s ‘Landscape-Garden’ first appeared in *The Ladies’ Companion* in October 1842; with only minor changes it reappeared in Poe’s own *Broadway Journal* in September 1845; and then a partially revised and greatly lengthened version was published as ‘The Domain of Arnheim’ in *The Columbian Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine* in March 1847. In the first sketch Poe tells the story of a phenomenally wealthy young man named Ellison who, by applying his immense wealth and artistic genius to the creation of a magnificent landscape garden, finds ‘exemption from the ordinary cares of Humanity, with a far greater amount of positive happiness than ever glowed in the rapt day-dreams of De Stael’.” Poe, perennially broke but believing himself to be one of the few men on the planet with the ability to use a large sum of money, must have felt the sting of irony in writing of Ellison’s opportunity. With no obstacles to action, one could take art, ambitiously, to the largest conceivable staging-place: the earth itself!

The infinite wealth and clear head of Ellison reminds us of the later Surrealist gardener, Roussel’s Martial Canterel, whose *Locus Solus* more resembled a menagerie more than a garden. As each “exhibit” comes into the reader’s view the uncanny apparatus of objective subjectivity clicks in. Roussel uses the chiaroscuro frame to fringe each uncanny instance with complex word games and rebus-like imagery. Like Renaissance puzzle gardens — the *Giardino dei Mostri* at Bomarzo comes to mind — a *mons delectus* is arranged to end with a conception of a temple that overlays the design experienced as a labyrinth. There are no answers to the puzzles; rather the visitor is put in the position that affords a “reverse-angle shot,” revealing that the riddles contained their own answers, that the labyrinth had in fact been a temple in disguise.

The literature of the day was unanimous in generally endorsing the view that something like Poe proposed could be done. Jacobs (1960, p. 406) writes: “Many influential British writers on the subject, Thomas Whately, Archibald Alison, Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, Humphrey Repton, J.C. Loudon and the American, Andrew Jackson Downing, whatever their disagreements as to the method of improvement, were unanimous in stating that gardening was an art and that the landscape architect could achieve success only through the application of recognized aesthetic principles.” Poe, in fact, began a dream-projection of what one with taste could do with infinite resources at his disposal, but his methods of developing the text show that he did not end there. Like Roussel, the unnamed narrator who floats through Ellison’s constructed heaven creates a screen, where the direction of optics is reversed. Unlike a frame that projects the eye outward and beyond the plane of representation, images are called to appear at the screen. They float forward to meet the observer’s eye, which has been freed of rough-and-tumble foot travel, thanks to a canal that provides access to the Domain.

What is Poe’s plan? If we stop to notice the stanza of poetry by Giles Fletcher that Poe quotes at the start of the story, we might not stop. It seems a pleasant enough conceit comparing the garden to a beautiful woman. The poem’s provenance, however, is interesting. Although Poe likely encountered it in the 1841 issue of the journal *Arcturus*, which does not mention the title of the poem by Giles

Fletcher (1588?-1623), "Christ's Victorie and Triumph, in Heaven, and Earth, over, and after Death," Poe may have had access to the full poem and title from other sources. Not only is the title suggestive (it would make a good introduction to any death narrative) but the context of the stanza makes the allusion to a woman's beauty ambiguous. Christ is actually rebuking the beautiful woman for presenting a false image, for creating a "fool's paradise" instead of the one established through spiritual perfection (Hess, 1970, p. 189, citing Fletcher, 1908):

He her charmes dispersed into winde,  
And her of insolence admonished,  
And all her optique glasses shattered.

Or, it is possible that Poe, knowing the title and context, was aware of the potentials of over-determination. Key terms have been underlined:

1           The garden like a lady fair was cut,  
2           That lay as if she slumbered in delight,  
3           And to the open skies her eyes did shut.  
4           The azure fields of Heaven were 'sembled right  
5           In a large round set with the flowers of light.  
6           The flowers de luce and the round sparks of dew  
7           That hung upon their azure leaves did shew  
8           Like twinkling stars that sparkle in the evening blue.

Each line of the poem presents a pair of terms of two types. The first type are positional and presentational: "cut," "lay," "shut," "sembled," "set," "round," "hung," "shew." The second type are optical, relating to effects of light: "open skies," "azure fields," "flowers of light," "flowers *de luce*," "round sparks," "azure leaves," "twinkling." "Delight" could be read as "de-light," the English form of *de luce*. This word-play would have attracted Poe's cryptological imagination, and he would have seen that it was easy to find the chiasmus in the paired terms. There are two positions, "open" and "shut" (third line). "Cut" refers to the open, chiasmic shape; "like," "sembled," and "hung" refer to the process of closing or combining the two sides. The poem's eight lines are divided into two four-line sections. The last of the first, line 4, presents an optical term first and a positional term second; the first of the last half, line 6, reverses this order. Line 3, the "tell" giving away the design of open and shut, pairs two positional terms; line 6 pairs two optical terms. Line 7 pairs two positional terms. Line 8 pairs two optical terms. Lines 1 and 2 combine contrasting optical and positional terms.

This may seem like irrelevant tedium to the non-poetic mind, but Poe was surely able to read such patterns with ease. Reverend Warren Cudworth, writing for the *Lowell Weekly Journal* (1850) noted that

The most profound and skilful cryptographer who ever lived was undoubtedly Edgar A. Poe, Esq. It was a favorite theory of his, that human ingenuity could not concoct a cipher, which human ingenuity could not resolve. The facility with which he would unravel the most dark and perplexing ciphers, was really supernatural. Out of a most confused medley of letters, figures and cabalistic characters, in any of the seven different languages, the English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Greek, his superhuman power of analysis would almost at once evolve sense, order and beauty; and of the hundreds of cryptographs which he received while editor of one of our popular periodicals, he never failed to solve one unless it was illegitimate, that is, unless its author put it together not intending to have it make sense.

As to the question of whether Poe actually exercised his "supernatural facility" in this case is a moot point. The poem is placed as the prow of a ship divided clearly into two parts, whose theoretical positions precede its visual encounters. Near the midpoint of "The Domain of Arnheim," Ellison posits two contrasting goals for landscape design: pleasure to the eye, and a show of order. But, what is the true midpoint? In statistics as well as architecture, there are several kinds of "middles" — mean, median, mode; harmonic, geometric, arithmetic. Perhaps Poe employed some and not others; perhaps he employed all six. Much depends on the way the text is counted. There are 5,814 words in a modern publication of the story. This may not be a completely accurate number, but the sentence that falls

halfway using this method is suggestive of the negational aspects of chiasmus: “Rule applies but to the merits of denial — to the excellencies which refrain” (Poe, 1850, p. 609). The thematic shift between the “positional” theory and the “optical” description of the garden comes slightly later, but is also suggestive: “I despair of conveying to the reader any distinct conception of the marvels which my friend did actually accomplish. I wish to describe, but am disheartened by the difficulty of description, and hesitate between detail and generality. Perhaps the better course will be to unite the two in their extremes” (Poe, 1850, p. 611). Again, the contrast between concept and appearance, the antagonism that cuts the woman in two but reunites the parts again, through devices of the frame.

### 3 RESTRICTED INGRESS AND EGRESS: THE KATABASIS THEME

Roussel created optical narratives where the reader is taken into and through an image reproduced on the label of a bottle of water. The scale violation results in a vast expansion of visibility: the incredibly small details of impossibly distant objects can be examined microscopically, absurdly. The screen of the image has worked like a magic tunnel — not unlike the “screen of text” that Poe treats in the same way, as a portal to a “fourth-dimensional” earthly paradise. The entry is, as Ellison has designed, a waterway whose narrow passage with multiple twists (“the stream took a thousand turns”) duplicates the function of a labyrinth. The boat, though moving, is held within “an enchanted circle.” Poe describes the reflection of the boat as an actual, inverted boat, matched to the first as if the phantom image was supporting its companion (Poe, 1850, p. 612). Later the visitor descends into a canoe that has been metonymized, dematerialized: “stained with arabesque devices in vivid scarlet, both within and without. The poop and beak of this boat arise high above the water, with sharp points, so that the general form is that of an irregular crescent” (Poe, 1850, p. 614).

The water-journey imagery throughout suggests a death-narrative, the thoughts of someone in the last minutes of life, or the experience of the Underworld, such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The chiasmic structure of the whole story, which pairs a “theoretical” half with a dream-like “imaginary” half, is repeated in the visit to Arnheim, where chiasmus is materialized as the landscape itself: a narrow defile between two steep mountain sides, converging on a terminal gate, a door of burnished gold, that opens on to a vast amphitheatre surrounded by purple mountains — the Elysium of Arnheim — surmounted by a castle possibly drawn from Cole’s “Youth” — “a mass of semi-Gothic, semi-Saracenic architecture, sustaining itself by miracle in mid-air; glittering in the red sunlight with a hundred oriels, minarets, and pinnacles; and seeming the phantom handiwork, conjointly, of the Sylphs, of the Fairies, of the Genii, and of the Gnomes” (Poe, 1850, p. 615).

This chiasmus is a structure of ideas as well as the template for the narrative and style-guide for the physical landscape. Throughout, optics is paired with ideas of arrangement. The point of view, initiated by the half of the story devoted to the journey through Arnheim, ends with a description of the castle as a vanishing point. Linearity of the first part, where sequence and arrangement are key to the presentation of esthetic arguments, is followed by the journey where sequential progression is constantly interspersed with the geometry of circles and optics of light and dark. Chiaroscuro, a combination of opposites and model for relating the perspectival components, point of view and vanishing point turns out itself to be chiasmic in its use of the (metonymical) frame as a representational (metaphoric) element.

The theoretical background for these combinations of death narrative, chiasmus, and chiaroscuro come from Ellison himself (Poe, 1850, pp. 610-611) :

“A poet, having very unusual pecuniary resources, might, while retaining the necessary idea of art, or culture, or, as our author expresses it, of interest, so imbue his designs at once with extent and novelty of beauty, as to convey the sentiment of spiritual interference. It will be seen that, in bringing about such result, he secures all the advantages of interest or *design*, while relieving his work of the harshness or technicality of the worldly art. In the most rugged of wildernesses — in the most savage of the scenes of pure nature — there is apparent the *art* of a creator; yet this art is apparent to reflection only; in no respect has it the obvious force of a feeling. Now let us suppose this sense of the Almighty design to be *one step depressed* — to be brought into something like harmony or consistency with the sense of human art — to form an

intermedium between the two: — let us imagine, for example, a landscape whose combined vastness and definitiveness — whose united beauty, magnificence, and *strangeness*, shall convey the idea of care, or culture, or superintendence, on the part of beings superior, yet akin to humanity — then the sentiment of *interest* is preserved, while the art interwoven is made to assume the air of an intermediate or secondary nature — a nature which is not God, nor an emanation from God, but which still is nature in the sense of the handiwork of the angels that hover between man and God.”

**Figure 2 Aeneas at the gates of Daedalus at Cumae.** Drawing by author from *The Aeneid Master, Aeneas and the Cumaen Sibyl*, 1530. Enamel plaque on copper. The Keir Collection of Medieval Works of Art.



“Spiritual interference” is invited by Poe’s practice of automatic writing. This is not the technique of writing while in a trance, as allegedly the Irish poet W.B. Yeats’ wife did for the composition of “The Second Coming” in 1919. Rather, Poe seems to have used the cipher-structure of the Greek letter *lambda*,  $\Lambda$ , whose left arm has the coded letters and right arm the translated characters that reveal the “optically corrected” message. The left as a linear sequence of characters in puzzle form, and the right as the visually recognized meanings, is possibly the cipher key by which Poe combines the first, theoretical half of “The Domain of Arnheim” to the second, “visual” half, the journey through the garden. This repeats the logic of the stanza quoted from Giles Fletcher’s poem, *Christ’s Victorie*, emphasizing at the same time the theme of that poem, which is the creation of a (duplicate, dummy) paradise on earth.

Using the point in the story where the narrator despairs of conveying “any distinct conception” as a mean rather than a median (the median occurs at the interesting words “Rule applies but to the



merits of denial — to the excellencies which refrain”), combining the corresponding locations on the butterflyed text yields some provocative results. “The preparations for his subsequently conceived deathful condition” (word location 2258 out of 5814 total words) is echoed by “The visitor, shooting suddenly into this bay from out the gloom of the ravine” (mirror word location 4806). The theme of the negative creation is taken up by the coupling of “he neglected to become either (poet or musician)” with “phantom handiwork, conjointly, of the Sylphs, of the Fairies, of the Genii, and of the Gnomes.”

Some pairs produced by this combinatorial technique reveal precedents for the death narrative. The “gigantic gate or rather door” at the 5537 mark combines with “endless combining of forms of novel beauty; the elements to enter into combination” at 1527. This takes us back to the opening of Book VI of *The Aeneid*, where the hero is permitted to visit his father in Hades. He stops at the entrance of the underworld and is held spellbound by the golden gates designed by Daedalus in tribute to the Sibyl at Cumae — gates whose images retell the story of the Cretan labyrinth he had himself designed, but in images tiled to form a puzzle (Figure 2). This is a spot in the story like that described by Poe as a spot in the landscape: one with “capabilities.” It is also a theme of the *katabasis*, the descent into the underworld which can be a place, a place described in a text, and/or the text itself, opened to “spiritual interference” by the insertion of a cipher device, the hinge of the chiasmus whose rebus-like images presage to what is to come and offer a key to its logic, “word as image.”

There is no use to claim that Poe actually divided his text in this way. Whether or not he did, the results are interesting, and occur in the reader’s mind without any careful calculation of lines or words. The two parts of the story divide theory and practice in an obvious way, and the linear arguments of the former are echoed in the pairing of meandered motions and rounded visions of the latter. We don’t need to know much more about the “intermedium” of creation and (angelic) rule than to have Ellison explain that “We have then the primitive arrangement of the earth’s surface adapted to his blissful estate, as not existent but designed. The disturbances were the preparations for his subsequently conceived deathful condition” (Poe, 1850, p. 608). Death, ciphers, descents, optics, and the blurring of the lines between subjectivity and objectivity — this is the *Poe-tic* uncanny, the esthetic forerunner of the Surreal.

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